

Shaping the future of crofting

Minister urges crofters to use their votes

CROFTING is part of the fabric of many communities in rural Scotland. This unique form of land tenure has helped to create strong communities over the centuries, providing a place to live and land to work.

A historic opportunity now exists for crofters themselves to shape the future of crofting.

Until now, all commissioners have been appointed by ministers. A case was successfully made for greater democracy, accountability and transparency and now, for the first time, elections are being held to select six commissioners who will form a majority on the board of the Crofting Commission.

Commissioners, together with myself and other Scottish ministers, will have an important role in ensuring that crofting plays its part in creating a Scotland of opportunity, through ensuring that our croft land is occupied and put to purposeful use.

If you share my passion for crofting and believe in the contribution it can make to Scotland's future, I want to encourage you to use this opportunity to vote and have a say as to who you want representing the real interests of crofting in each area.

The deadline for returning ballot papers is 16:00 on 15th March, with the count taking place on 16th March. Don't miss your chance to stand up for crofting and to make your vote matter.

*Stewart Stevenson
Minister for Environment*

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Strong interest in commissioner posts

WE GO TO PRESS at a historic moment for crofting.

For the first time since the establishment in 1886 of crofting in its modern sense – as a secure and regulated form of land tenure – crofters have the opportunity to elect the majority of their regulatory body in the new Crofting Commission. This is an outcome that the Scottish Crofting Federation has campaigned for over many years.

We already know the names of four out of the nine commissioners. Susan Walker, William Swann and Sandy Cross are the appointees of the Scottish Ministers; and Arnie Pirie is returned unopposed in the Orkney and Caithness constituency. Congratulations to them.

The five remaining constituencies will be contested by no fewer than twenty eight candidates, confounding those who predicted an apathetic response.

Candidates' personal statements can be

read elsewhere in this issue. What we all need to do now is vote. A good turnout in the ballot will ensure that our representatives on the commission have not only the authority, but also the popular backing, to act in the best interests of crofting. The ballot will be postal and papers must be received by the returning officer by 15th March. The election will be by the alternative voting system and the voting age is reduced to 16. Good. If 16 year olds can take on the responsibility of a croft they can certainly handle the responsibility of a vote.

There is some disquiet over the distribution of the electoral constituencies. The roughly 9,500 crofts in the west Highlands and Western Isles will elect just two commissioners, while the 5,000 in the rest of the crofting counties will elect four. Having established the principle of elections, we must press for these anomalies to

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Crofters Commissioners, assessors and staff

© David Balharry, Crofters Commission

Input to CAP reform

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION released its proposals for the future of the CAP in October last year.

Now, after a round of public meetings to explain the proposals, the Scottish government is seeking individual responses to the proposals through its new on-line consultation. The consultation can be accessed on the www.scotland.gov.uk website and for the first time is an opportunity for individuals to respond by ticking boxes rather than writing pages of text.

The consultation describes each of the proposals and asks readers whether they agree or disagree with them. Many of the questions deal with very relevant issues for crofting. The very first question asks if a minimum level of agricultural activity should be required for future payments and a further question asks if recipients of fewer than 5,000 euros should be exempt from activity requirements. These questions go right to the heart of concerns about croft abandonment and dwindling levels of

activity and offer those concerned an opportunity to give their opinion in a positive manner.

A significant move towards support for small units is the small farmers scheme, which could prove useful to crofters if the rate of payment and conditions attached are attractive enough and if the Scottish Government would reduce the level at which they start to pay support. At present they will not pay below three hectares. European rules allow payments to start at one hectare, which we believe should be the Scottish threshold as well.

The consultation covers further relevant parts of the proposal including the key subject of provision for new entrants and young farmers. The current proposal for dealing with new entrants may prove to be inadequately funded and is currently focused on the under 40s; you can agree or disagree.

The three greening proposals are set out and as you can see that this is a one-size-fits-all attempt

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Message from the chair...

Derek Flynn



ELEANOR ARTHUR presided at the autumn meeting of the SCF board, after the 2011 annual gathering in Skye, with her usual dignity and good humour.

But at the next meeting, in January, we learnt that ill health

since then has compelled Eleanor to retire before her time in the chair was complete. As vice-chair, I shall stand in for her until the AGM in June, but her presence will be sorely missed.

I was lucky to have spent time with Eleanor last winter in her beloved Shetland, accompanying her to meetings with crofters on the islands of Whalsay and Unst before heading back to Lerwick town hall for an area meeting. She conducted that meeting as though she was amongst friends, which of course she was. We look forward to her returning to full health and enthusiasm for her busy life.

We are lucky to have an energetic board at this time, each director active on SCF's behalf in an area of their own interest. My own background in crofting law has

been called on to try to explain the recent changes. More specifically, I have been encouraging crofting communities to face the requirement to map their crofts collectively and to avoid a more costly piecemeal approach later. Meanwhile we are informed that progress is being made towards having all common grazings mapped and this should provide an opportunity for all shareholders to act in unison.

Before its demise, the Crofters Commission held its final assessors conference in Inverness with the focus on common grazings. That focus was timely. By representing SCF, I have been learning that the raising of livestock on open pastures is widely practiced throughout Europe, but in multifarious forms. In September I

travelled to Portugal to talk about crofters' grazings and in March, Angus McHattie and I shall be in Paris doing the same. It's tough, but someone has to do it.

Norman Leask regularly travels to Brussels to speak on our behalf. He is another Shetlander who has had to travel the extra miles to participate and to whom we owe so much.

Much requires to be done and if you are interested in getting involved, speak to any member of the board. Meanwhile we are to hold our 2012 annual gathering at Strathpeffer as part of a Let's Liberate Diversity event at which we will celebrate crofters' seeds and breeds as part of the European trope.

This is a celebration that Eleanor would have enjoyed. We all wish her a speedy recovery.



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European perspective

A report from our parliamentary spokesman, Norman Leask

FROM A European perspective the next six months will be crucial for crofting.

EID for cattle seems to be a foregone conclusion. It may help markets and slaughter houses, however traceability will be no better. It will just give another reason to have a claw-back on our support. I keep on fighting for Scotland to accept the voluntary derogation.

EID for sheep We continue to shout at the pitch of our voices because if we do not get an eighth derogation to allow member states not to require EID to be compulsory until sheep leave the

croft of birth, sheep in the crofting counties will continue to decline until tipping point is reached where the infrastructure for sheep farmers will collapse. The cabinet secretary's recent announcement to help, while welcome, is just like re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, without the aforementioned derogation.

CAP reform takes up a great deal of time. The posturing of the different pressure groups will shortly finish, so to this end we must trust that our best efforts will have the desired effects. After all, the minister promised that this government would make crofting an asset to Scotland for generations to come. I am joining others to continue to set

the European Congress of Via Campesina's position on CAP reform at a meeting in Portugal later this month. I trust some consensus will follow.

I look forward to seeing you at our conference in Strathpeffer in March. I hope that as many of you will attend as possible, as we are truly fortunate to have so many of our European friends attending.

www.shepherdnet.eu

This web site is up and running now so hopefully any governmental terminological inexactitudes about how happy people are in other countries will not be allowed to flourish like they did with the sheep EID. Please use as a forum.



Norman presenting a paper to the UK Food Group in London in November.

CROFTING COMMISSION ELECTIONS

Candidate statements

WARD 1 – SHETLAND

MARJORIE
WILLIAMSON

I live on and work the croft in Burra Isle that I was brought up on. I worked with my parents rearing sheep and now with my husband. We have tried many ways, traditional and new, to support our family crofts and I am well aware of the practical difficulties and the burden of administration. We worked with local crofters and business in equipment partnerships, the supply chain and providing a sales outlet for local products. None of it is easy.

I have been an assessor for over three years and have found the work interesting, seeing what affects other parts of crofting Scotland, the similarities and the differences to our own position in Shetland.

I am well acquainted with the effects of central government's decisions on our life and livelihoods as I hold a part-time position on the board of NHS Shetland and also served on the board of HIE Shetland. This has given me experience in interpreting legislation and guidelines.

Finding the best way forward for our Shetland perspective is going to become more and more important. I have an unwavering commitment to Shetland and a life-long passion to promote Shetland industries, in particular agriculture.

PETER DODGE
BSC HONS (AGRIC)

I am a crofter in Cunningsburgh and, with my wife, traditionally manage two crofts at Aith. We maintain a breeding herd of cattle, several hill flocks of Shetland sheep and attempt to be self sufficient in winter fodder, growing seven crops on our limited arable land.

I arrived in Shetland in 1980 as a DAFS lands officer. After nine years of crofting regulatory work I was to be transferred to Glasgow. At that time my wife inherited the family crofts and we decided to bring up our family on the land which their antecedents had occupied for hundreds of years.

Although my teenage development was in a dairy farming environment in south west Scotland, my childhood upbringing in a Sutherland crofting community provided an excellent education for future life. I have maintained an active involvement in the Shetland branch of the SCF for over twenty years as branch president, then on national council.

Democratisation of the commission ought to be beneficial for our development. With the change to Crofting Commission, any potential change in remit should be managed by commissioners well versed in crofting law but equally importantly by their being active crofters

DAVID SMITH



I work on a voluntary basis with the SCF and have recently been appointed part-time parliamentary assistant to Jean Urquhart MSP. My role with SCF is primarily focused on policy development, including regular contact with MSPs and Scottish Government officials. I was instrumental in instigating the Highlands and Islands agricultural support group, working to deliver the best deal for crofters from the CAP negotiations.

We are entering an important phase in crofting history with many challenges: implementing the new Crofting Reform Act, mapping crofts and our new regulatory body, the Crofting Commission. This will prove to be a very positive period with opportunities developing in the renewable energy sector and community buy-outs with potential to transform the future of crofting.

For crofting to flourish we need to make the industry attractive to young people. Regulation must encourage rather than stifle their ambitions and must be tailored and implemented in a fair and effective manner. People with fresh ideas and energy must be allowed to pursue opportunities. My experience can be valuable in developing and delivering regulatory policies which are reasonable, transparent, and fair to all parties.

KATHLEEN
SINCLAIR

Crofting has played an important role throughout my life, having been born and brought up on our family croft in Shetland where we still have sheep and cattle. I have been a grazings clerk for the last 13 years and have been president of the Cunningsburgh and districts agricultural society for the last six years.

My passion for crofting has provided me with real hands-on experience and an in-depth understanding of the practicalities and challenges involved. I have a good knowledge of the immense rules and regulations impacting on the industry. I am a very approachable individual – as illustrated by my two-year term as chair of the local NFUS branch, where I always took the time to listen to members' views and research information if necessary. I understand the importance of putting personal feelings aside and working towards common goals to benefit all parties.

We need an active and vibrant crofting industry and the Crofting Commission will have a particularly important role to play in enabling this. If successful in being elected to the Crofting Commission I know that I will be able to make a valuable and professional contribution.

Elections to the new Crofting Commission

CHANGES are once again afoot in the world of crofting regulation as more of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 is brought in to force on 1 April.

These changes are part of the second commencement order (www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2011/334/contents/made). A third and final commencement order will follow, to commence the Crofting Register provisions.

Much of what is to be implemented on 1st April concerns the Crofters Commission itself.

The Shucksmith report (the report which followed the Crofting Reform Act 2007 and shaped the 2010 Act) recommended

that the Crofters Commission be abolished, but the Scottish Government did not go to those lengths. Instead, the commission is to be renamed the Crofting Commission and a majority of its members are to be elected.

The intention of the government is that the former will symbolise the change in focus from the rights and needs of the individual crofter to those of the wider crofting and non-crofting community, and that the latter measure will increase democratic accountability.

Commissioners

There are to be three appointed and six elected members of the Crofting Commission. The three members appointed by

the minister were named on 5 January 2012 as William Swann, Sandy Cross and Susan Walker.

One elected commissioner will be elected from each of six constituencies. These are featured on following pages. Nominations closed on 26 January.

Voting

The electoral roll closed on 19 January and was based on the information held on the Crofters Commission's register of crofts. There is one vote per croft and only one vote per crofter, even if the crofter has multiple crofts.

The election itself will take place by postal ballot. Papers will be issued on 27 February and the count itself will take place in Inverness at the Highland Council

HQ on Friday 16 March.

Further Information

Much information, including links to the candidates' statements, description of the role of a commissioner, constituency maps, details of local meetings being hosted by the Commission, and the elections' regulations themselves, can be found on the Crofters Commission's web site www.crofterscommission.org.uk/crofting-elections.asp

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CROFTING COMMISSION ELECTIONS

WARD 4 – WESTERN ISLES

NEIL MACLENNAN



Born and brought up on Barra, the life skills I acquired through crofting are rarely so available today. Crofting is a heritage activity which needs to be preserved, nurtured and developed against the increasing pressures threatening and inhibiting active participation. Most crofters have to support their activities with one or more forms of employment for sustainable income. Crofters' dedication needs recognition and support.

Changes in crofting law need to be carefully managed to enhance crofting in all areas, to encourage more interest, active participation and opportunity. The Commission has been a benign toothless organisation uninterested in controversial decisions and passing the buck elsewhere. It is time to stand firm and be decisive, offering fair and supportive guidance to those who need it.

Time to handle issues with respectful consideration whilst ensuring the crofting community is not disengaged from what has helped to sustain it for so many decades. Rural communities need to be able to provide opportunities for young families to become actively involved, improving the strength and sustainability of the local community.

MURDO MACLENNAN



I have been an active crofter for twenty five years with stock in Aignis, Swordale and Scarp. A number of crofters, including assessors, are supporting my candidacy – indicating confidence in my conduct as commissioner for the Western Isles for the last six years.

I have brought the operational decision-making process closer to crofting communities in the islands, securing a Commission office in Stornoway. I represent the Commission at the cross-party group on crofting in the Scottish Parliament, bringing a specific Western Isles view.

I want to see more decentralisation of administration with Crofting Commission staff throughout the islands, creating quality civil service posts, hopefully for young crofters, and encouraging more Gaelic.

Next year will be critical for the financial stability of crofting with reforms to the CAP and I am in discussions with parliamentarians on the impact of present proposals on Western Isles crofters. The new Crofting Commission must influence the Scottish Government to raise the financial assistance for crofter housing, raise the thresholds for the agriculture grants scheme and implement a new croft entry scheme.

MALCOLM MACDONALD



Malcolm Macdonald is an active crofter of over 40 years experience. Brought up as a traditional crofter's son, he works both cattle and sheep on the family croft in Bernera, Lewis and is passionate about advancing crofting to help develop and support rural communities.

He has held office as a village grazings clerk within his locality for a number of terms and would wish to be a listening ear and a voice for crofting from the working grassroots level.

As a technologist Malcolm would like to bring to the commission some innovation and fresh ideas towards regenerating the crofting experience for the future.

Having been brought up in a rural community and received a traditional family upbringing on the croft, Malcolm has a passion towards rural development and would contribute a wealth of crofting tradition.

RODDY MACDONALD (POKER)



I have recently retired after working for CnE's economic development department for 34 years. My duties included all aspects of development, including crofting. I was involved in setting up the SCU and the IDP for the Western Isles, including the construction of the two livestock markets in the Uists. Slaughtering facilities, environmental schemes, CAP reforms and greylag goose problems throughout the islands were also covered.

I am an active crofter with a small sheep flock, involved in communal crofting activities such as gathering, shearing and dipping throughout South Uist. I assist with the management of the livestock auction market in Lochboisdale. I have been involved in township matters and served as a Crofters Commission assessor, so I have a detailed knowledge of crofting at grass roots and a more strategic level.

My previous employment made me aware of the problems of depopulation, employment opportunities etc, and those affecting crofting – vacant crofts, unused land, reduction in stock numbers, underuse of common grazings, absenteeism, young entrants and availability of crofts. My experience and knowledge may help in finding solutions to some of these issues.

DONALD MANFORD *is standing in this ward but did not submit a personal statement. We have, however, received the following from him.*

Elected commissioners have a duty to safeguard the future of crofters and of all crofting communities. Crofting provides strength and continuity to these islands and these elections are extremely important not only for crofters but for the wider community.

The strength I bring will be my ability to draw on the crofter's experience of regulation and present this to the board. With over 40% of townships out of office, we must work with townships to get them back into office and to face the many challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that the next few years will bring.

I am a crofter born and bred. I have been on grazings committees, represented crofting across a range of forums and actively supported the Crofters Federation. My involvement with the Comhairle has given me a wide knowledge of crofting the length and breadth of the Western Isles and an awareness of the issues facing all crofters.

If elected I will represent the interests of crofters and work to ensure that the new Crofting Commission will deliver for crofters and crofting communities.

DONALD MACRURY



I am a young Lewis crofter who values the culture and environment of the Western Isles and am committed to work that supports our economy and culture.

In 2006 I became tenant of the family croft at Borge and have grown the flock there to 130 breeding blackface ewes. I seasonally fatten piglets and cows for direct sale. I run a successful electrical business and last year, with my brother Scott, I set up Island Crofter Ltd which supports the crofting community by providing agricultural supplies, services and produce.

I am SCF Lewis area representative and I am particularly interested in working with the SCF to support young crofters into crofting. If crofting is to have future good health it is important to bring young people in. A well-run commission can regulate crofting so that people can live and work in crofting communities and more young people have the opportunity to become crofters.

I am committed to the future success of crofting. I believe that a healthy crofting sector will help the islands to prosper and that a well-run Crofting Commission has an important role to play in meeting this goal.

look online at www.crofting.org

CROFTING COMMISSION ELECTIONS

WARD 3 – EAST HIGHLANDS

DONNIE ROSS

I was born on Manse Road Croft, Kingussie. I have been a shepherd all my life except for two years national service, most of which I spent in the royal army veterinary corps in North Africa as a dog trainer corporal instructor.

I was forty years shepherding here at Dunachton and have worked with and neighboured with crofters all my life. I have been a registered crofter for at least the last twenty-five years and spend a lot of my time now highlighting sheep clearances and anything I see as detrimental to crofting or the hill or country way of life.

I have five of a family all employed in farming, crofting or estate work, with my daughter lately transferring to the SSPCA.

I have been a community councillor for Kincaig for upwards of twenty years.

WILLIAM WAUGH

Educated at Tain and Golspie then North College of Agriculture, Aberdeen, I returned to run the mixed farm where I gained a sound knowledge in livestock – cattle and sheep and also rotational cropping.

After farming I became a classification officer with the meat and livestock commission where I assessed carcasses for conformation and fat content. Crofters and farmers were encouraged to see the results of their stock on the hook. I was able to build a good rapport with them, individually motivating them with help, advice and encouragement for a better return. I was involved in inspections for SAI Global – premium sheep and goat health schemes covering markets and shows for Caithness to Aberdeen. I am chairman of the Sutherland riding club, chairing regular meetings for the past seven years.

I feel I would be well suited to this job as the above experiences prove. I have good organisational and time management skills; I am self motivated and can work alone or in a team.



PETER HUMPHRIES

is standing in this ward but did not submit a personal statement. We have, however, received the following from him.

I first took the tenancy of Davidson Croft when I was fourteen and as most of you know crofting hardly affords you a living, but is a way of life rather than a profit-making venture. If, speaking as a crofter, I can further improve the system and help regenerate some or all of the currently redundant and abandoned crofts then that can only be a good thing.

Although I am not as politically minded as my late father Ken Humphreys, who wrote a weekly column about life on an upland farm in the Ross-shire Journal, the older I get more often than not I find myself shouting at the TV or radio or some article I have read.

As crofters we are going through a time of change. For the first time we will be voted to the position of commissioner by fellow crofters, not appointed by some quango. There are greater powers to get abandoned and unproductive crofts back into useful agriculture or other production.



MARINA DENNIS

I inherited my family croft near Nethy Bridge in 1985. I have been crofting most of my life and I am active with cropping, running a herd of native cattle and involved in two common grazings.

I know the assessors and many crofters of the east Highlands well, having been a commissioner there for nine years. I chaired hearings, formulated policy and dealt with regulatory casework all over the Highlands and Islands. I am a member of the Department of Agriculture's appeals panel, dealing with EU agricultural subsidies where an independent view is important.

I am a director of the SCF and during the passage of the 2010 Crofting Bill I chaired the SCF's working group and gave evidence to parliament. I am also a director of the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution where directors are responsible for the management and distribution of significant sums of money.

I have a wealth of experience in dealing with practical crofting and the regulating of crofting and feel I could offer independence, integrity and good judgement to the board of the new Crofting Commission.



WARD 5 – WEST HIGHLANDS

IAN G MACDONALD (IG)

IG has been involved in crofting since he was a toddler. For 30 years he has been the active tenant of a croft in Skye's Braes district, grazings clerk and for five years an area assessor. He has a flock of blackface sheep on the croft, which has been in his family since 1811. The township and the wider crofting community are also shareholders in two woodland projects which he manages.

After early retirement as depute head teacher of the local secondary school, IG became a director of the Isle of Skye Renewables Co-op and encourages young people to take advantage of all the environmental and cultural assets which make the west Highlands an ideal place to raise a family and to preserve a unique and fulfilling way of life.

The new Crofting Commission, for the first time, gives crofters the opportunity to take a hand in shaping their own destiny. IG's experience as an honorary sheriff will allow him to take a fair and objective view in the regulatory functions of the commission and ensure that the views of individual, active, crofters provide a balance with the general needs of crofting in the 21st century.



RUSSELL SMITH

I am an active crofter in Sutherland where we inherited the family croft in 1998 and increased sheep numbers by 50%, introduced poultry, a polytunnel and a caravan site to go with the self-catering cottage we renovated a few years before. I previously worked as a statistician and business consultant and have done consultancy work with voluntary and other bodies in the Highlands. I bring business skills and experience to defining and carrying out the regulation of crofting.

I have been a member of the SCF, branch secretary and chair of Caithness and East Sutherland area as well as working for the SCF as a rural projects consultant.

Over the years crofting has been successful in retaining population in remote areas by providing a part-time income along with a base to take on other work. The role of the Crofting Commission is regulation, but there is discretion about how the rules are applied. This can be done in a sympathetic manner so that the needs of crofters are not lost in the drive to maintain crofting.

I can fulfil this role to keep crofting fairly and sensibly regulated.



RODNEY MINTON

I live on and work the croft at Durnamuck in the parish of Lochbroom which my father took tenancy of in 1958. I passionately believe in traditional crofting which, above all, entails a focus on small-scale agricultural activity with proper use of in-bye land and common grazings. Tradition does not imply being stuck in the 19th century. Crofting develops with the times but the central focus on agriculture must be retained. The decline of traditional crofting and the consequent misuse of croft land has a serious financial and environmental impact.

It will be difficult, but not impossible, to reverse the situation and there is now, given the role of elected commissioners, an opportunity for crofters to seek greater influence and to make their voices heard.

So please use your vote and support an active working crofter – crofting is currently my sole occupation and I would see this opportunity to represent the crofters of the West Highlands as an important and intrinsic part of my work that I am sure would go beyond just the required four days a month.

Ward 5 West Highlands continues on next page

CROFTING COMMISSION ELECTIONS

WARD 5 – WEST HIGHLANDS contd

SANDY MURRAY



I am from Halladale and have been crofting all my working life. We run sheep and cattle, along with a Christmas tree enterprise and a tourist diversification project – a 14 bed bunkhouse with laser combat and clay pigeon shooting activities. I have several forestry blocks within my apportionments and we are now looking at opportunities for renewable energy.

I worked part time as a crofting development officer for 14 years with CASE and three years with the Crofters Commission covering Caithness, Sutherland and part of Wester Ross; first managing the north west development programme and then the croft entrant scheme. For 25 years I have been an assessor, a grazing clerk for 28 years, chairman of North Sutherland community forestry trust for 12 years and a member of the crofting law group. I sit on the NFUS crofting committee and am a past-chair of the Caithness NFUS branch.

With my own practical knowledge and the experience that I have gained through my working career I believe that I have the ability, time and enthusiasm to serve this large west Highland constituency, taking the Crofting Commission forward for the benefit of crofters.

KENNETH MACLEOD



I was born and brought up in the crofting township of Strath Kanaird in Wester Ross. As a family of six we contributed to the running of the croft as we grew up. Our croft was traditional – cheviot sheep, some blackfaces, cows for milk for the family, horses before the grey Fergusons took over, cultivating the croft with oats, potatoes, turnips and hay for fodder or silage. Fuel was by cutting peats. Our family croft is now run by my elder brother.

Since 1981 I have had a legal practice in Inverness with an office in Ullapool. My caseload is varied but always has crofting problems; I concentrate on crofting law and have had many land court cases including the full court. I have also conducted Crofters Commission hearings. When the Scottish Crofters Union was established I was its first legal adviser.

I am a Highland councillor for an urban seat but I know the constituency very well; my legal practice takes me into most of the area.

I admit to being the author of the book *Lochbroom through the Centuries* – the history of my native parish.

JOHN LAING



I am a crofter from Harlosh, in Skye. I keep a hundred Cheviot sheep on my own and neighbouring crofts. I have been a highland councillor for the past nine years, representing Skye, and I am chairman of the roads and transport committee covering the Highlands.

The experience I have gained over the past nine years representing a remote, rural crofting community has equipped me with the knowledge, understanding and skills to be a commissioner.

I have been involved in discussions about the future of crofting for many years and believe that crofters should be directly involved in the regulation of crofting and developing crofting policies and strategies that will be best for crofters. At last we have a real opportunity to be directly involved in the future direction of crofting through electing our own commissioners.

I want commissioners not only to regulate for crofters but to provide leadership and work with our partners to explore new opportunities for crofters, particularly in renewable energy on the croft, common grazings and offshore, along with the other traditional activities that we need to ensure that crofters and crofting can enjoy a rewarding and successful future.

YVONNE WHITE



My mother's family have crofted and been shepherds in North Skye for many generations. I and my husband run the family croft at Kingsburgh on Skye, where we have Highland cattle and cheviot sheep. Kingsburgh township has a sheep stock club.

I am a member of the SCF, Kingsburgh common grazings committee and a director of Kingsburgh forest trust (a community-owned forest). For 25 years I held various senior management roles at the BBC, within the rights, business and legal affairs division.

Crofters must have adequate support and representation to continue production of quality livestock and produce. Young and new entrants to crofting must be encouraged. We need to retain the wide and invaluable skills base of crofters and keep people actively employed on the land. It is important that we pass onto to future generations a viable and vibrant crofting culture.

My lifelong involvement, commitment and interest in crofting, combined with expertise gained in past employment, provides the necessary skills for me to successfully represent and deliver in this role on behalf of the crofters in the West Highlands.

FINLAY MATHESON

The move to Crofting Commission heralds significant change in focus from crofters' individual rights to responsibilities in the wider community. We traditionalists may not like it; we have to deal with it. In this spirit, I offer my candidacy.

My family comes from crofts on Lochalsh and Shieldaig. I have been a crofter at Strathcarron, Wester Ross since 1976. I keep eight cows and 250 blackface ewes. I was project officer for the rural enterprise programme for three years; croft entrant scheme project officer 12 years, HIE business adviser 12 years; former consultant on Badrallach crofting township development scheme; community councillor, township clerk, Crofters Commission assessor.

Crofting governance will be fraught in adjusting to new legislation. The new commission may be no less a target for disaffection than the Crofters Commission was. The problems of marginal crofting agriculture are part of my daily experience; I recognise the pressures for change and the aspirations of new crofters. I seek to maintain the value of crofting adapting to the 21st century and to help promote the lights in the glen.

We will embrace the new Crofting Commission and enable it to our advantage

JONATHAN HEDGES



The basic rules haven't changed since 1886; work the land, live on or near your croft and pay your rent. But life in the Highlands has changed, and we need to look to the future. Crofting is about activity; living and working in a community, and this should be encouraged at every opportunity.

The grants scheme needs to be relevant. Fences are generally in the right place so why can we not get grants for repairing existing fences? Getting money to build a shed is fantastic; but it would be easier to get the grant to help pay the bill, not having to pay the whole bill and then get the grant!

Croft entrants scheme, croft house loan scheme both helped to support crofters and could encourage them in the future.

If elected I would work to support active crofters and encourage the legislation to support this.

Your vote is important. Don't forget to return your ballot paper before 15th March.

CROFTING COMMISSION ELECTIONS

WARD 6 – SOUTH WEST HIGHLANDS

ROBIN CURRIE



For nine years I was commissioner for Lochaber and Argyll. I visited most parts of my area on crofting duties, took part in many commission hearings to resolve issues, attended agricultural shows, attended assessors meetings and had an excellent record of attending the full Crofters Commission board meetings in Inverness to represent the crofters and crofting in my area.

I am proud of the fact that I assisted over 30 new crofts being created in Argyll over the last few years. I was for some years the project officer for the croft entrant scheme in Lochaber and Argyll and during that time assisted many young entrants throughout the area.

The new Crofting Commission's main remit will be the regulating of crofting. No longer will the commission be involved in crofting development, the bull scheme or croft housing. It is very important for our area to have an experienced person on the Crofting Commission who knows about the new crofting act, the policies and procedures.

I have vast experience in this and that knowledge can only be of benefit to Lochaber and Argyll. I have a proud record of action and promise you more.

COLIN KENNEDY



Born into crofting, it is my desire to represent fellow crofters in the new Crofting Commission and give Argyll the voice it has been lacking in the past.

I have substantial knowledge of crofting and crofting legislation, from constant engagement with the Crofters Commission regarding what I consider poor administration and reluctance to take difficult decisions. I will try to ensure all applicants are treated in a fair and equitable manner, while mindful of the right to a fair hearing.

I am passionate about crofting and crofters. I believe both require a strong voice, someone who can understand and engage with crofters, put them at ease at hearings etc, yet able to go to the top table and make representation in the strongest possible terms, backed by authoritative understanding of the issues. This is something I sincerely guarantee to all should I be elected.

As a crofter with livestock, fishing lobsters since a boy, holiday cottages to let and with a 50KW wind turbine up and generating power, I have unrivalled practical experience of the main issues facing crofters daily.

BILLY NEILSON

I am an active crofter, producing primarily on croft 2 Bonawe, Taynuilt, food for the household with a stock of Luing cattle and Ble-de-maine sheep. I am the current area assessor and the grazing clerk. I was part of the consultation committee appointed by government to the 2010 Crofting Reform Bill reference group, putting amendments forward to the government.

I am also the vice-chair for the Lorn branch of the NFUS; sit on various sub-committees, the regional board for Argyll and the Islands and also the crofting committee.

I am a self-employed agricultural contractor, farm manager at Bonawe Home farm and SFQC on-farm assessor for QMS assurance schemes. Within SFQC, market assessments are part of my remit. I am also on the standards-setting board for the QMS auction market scheme.

With the new act and the renaming as Crofting Commission, the emphasis will be on regulation. The opportunity to see regulation properly and fairly executed, which should then result in increased availability of crofts for new and young crofters to enter into vibrant crofting world, would be my aim and vision.

MICHAEL FOXLEY



For almost forty years I have combined working as a GP with working my family croft at Achaphubuil. We have Highland cows, a small flock of cross cheviots and a hill flock of blackface ewes. As a councillor I worked closely with counterparts on ferries, fish farming, marine SACs, etc. As depute and then leader of Highland Council, I regularly travel throughout Argyll and Bute for positive meetings on shared issues.

LFASS support must be directed at crofters and hill farmers who are most disadvantaged. I oppose de-crofting of whole crofts unless circumstances are exceptional.

The administrative burden of the grant support system must be reduced. Young entrants are needed and younger members of crofting families require encouragement and financial support. Abattoirs must be retained. Crofting must be supported and developed otherwise rural communities and their landscapes will deteriorate. Significant effort and investment is required in roads, ferries, RET, education, housing and health services. Opportunities in renewable energy can be developed on crofts and grazings.

If elected, I will use all my experience and energy to work with crofters and the commission to keep crofting alive, well and progressive.

DONNIE CAMPBELL



I am the tenant of the family croft in Tiree. The croft carries 100 ewes and 15 suckler cows. I am a past chairman of the Tiree branch of the Crofters Union, the goose management committee and was the founding chair of the body which built and runs Tiree mart.

I have a thorough practical knowledge of crofting law. I have also represented Tiree and Coll as councillor, served on the regional board of SEPA and the board of west of Scotland water authority. I work part-time for Scottish Power Renewables and as a tutor in law at Strathclyde University.

The new commission will work very differently. It must regulate crofting within the law but must also regulate in the interests of ordinary crofters running family crofts – not others. Crofting is not the same everywhere; many crofters in our area have different challenges and opportunities to crofters elsewhere. It must use its powers wisely but confidently and gain respect of all.

If elected I will bring my experience and skills to the role, to create a better, more responsive commission and keep in close touch with crofters in Argyll and Lochaber.

WARD 2 – ORKNEY AND CAITHNESS

ARNIE PIRIE was validly nominated for Ward 2. As he was the only candidate nominated for the ward, no poll will take place. On the day of election, he will be declared to be elected to represent the crofters in the Orkney and Caithness constituency.



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CAP reform

Continued from page 1

to solve some very real problems in other parts of Europe. The consultation gives you the opportunity to think about how this would work on your croft and respond accordingly. The greening concept is unlikely to go away but are the proposed measures going to deliver environmental benefits on crofts?

A voluntary option exists within the proposal to make additional payments to producers in areas of natural constraint. These payments will not be in addition to the LFA budget in pillar 2 and any money used for these would be subtracted from it. However this option could be used to deliver support to more defined and smaller regions than the wider LFA, with constraints such as those of a mountainous or island nature. The consultation seeks your opinion on the use of this option.

The bottom line in all of this is the rate of the basic payment which is almost impossible to predict at this point. However, there will be significant changes as the commission seeks to average out all payments within regions by 2019. Therefore the definition of the regions Scotland may be divided into is highly significant. The processes of reaching the same entitlement value for all producers within a region will inevitably move money from the more active to the less active. The larger the regions, the more geographic the movement of money will be. The consultation asks you about the principal of regionalisation; the horse trading about where these regions are will come later.

The base year of 2011 and the ability to set minimum levels of activity are seen as key measures to prevent slipper farmers and to protect the tenanted sector.

SCF has a seat on the government stakeholder group and will monitor the process throughout the reforms seeking to safeguard the interests of the crofting sector.

Strong interest in commissioner posts

Continued from page 1

be corrected for the future.

What will the Crofting Commission do that the Crofters Commission did not? According to research conducted for the Shucksmith Inquiry, which was the largest consultation of crofters since the Napier Commission, nine out of ten of us want to see more effective regulation – and regulation will be the sole remit of the new commission. The 2010 Crofting Reform Act restates the duty of crofters, owner-occupiers as well as tenants, to reside on or near their crofts and to cultivate, or make other purposeful use of the land. In certain areas, neglect and speculation stand in the way of productive use and community sustainability.

Crofters are aging but there is no clear route for young, keen, would-be crofters to get a foothold on the land. We expect the new commission to square that circle, or at least to move firmly in that direction. In doing so they will need to exercise sensitivity and discretion, but there must be no doubting the direction of travel.

The government requires the commission to produce a strategic plan within six months of the election. We look forward to that document. Currently the Crofters Commission's interim plan sets out policy priorities in a clear and concise way. What a pity we could not have had the benefit of such guidance years ago.

It is to be hoped also that the new commission will make full use of its panel of assessors. This group of highly committed, enthusiastic and experienced volunteers is keen to be involved.

They could and should be the eyes and ears of the commission on the ground. We look forward also to the appointment of the convenor. Scottish Ministers retain this power, but may delegate it to the commissioners. In the new spirit of democracy, let us hope for the latter.

We wish the new Crofting Commission, not forgetting its many excellent staff, every success and look forward to a productive and cordial working relationship. After all, we're all looking towards the same sound future for crofting.

Angus MacNeil MP



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CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Using seaweed in spring cultivation

IT'S THAT TIME of year again, so we spent the Saturday afternoons of January gathering seaweed from our local black-sand beach in the north of Skye.

It was a bracing experience. The storm force north-westerlies had ensured a plentiful harvest of both bladder wrack and kelp, as well as a truly appalling load of marine litter.

Seaweed has fertilised our soils since pre-history. It is particularly vital in cultivation of the machair, supplying bulk and moisture-holding capability to the very light, sandy soil. Here the seaweed, predominantly kelp, is spread in winter and partly rotted before being incorporated by shallow ploughing.

The mineral-rich, volcanic soil here in north Skye is also potentially very fertile but generally needs the addition of a lot of organic matter. I have heard it described as a hungry soil. Seaweed provides the conditions that encourage the microbial and invertebrate

life that every soil needs in order to produce decent root development and a healthy crop. In terms of nitrogen, phosphate and potassium levels, seaweed is similar to farmyard manure, but has the added advantage of containing a wide variety of trace elements. What's more, it doesn't carry weed seeds, unlike animal manure – and it's free.

There is considerable debate about the best way to use seaweed. The machair system described above involves spreading the seaweed in winter and leaving it on the surface to partially decompose. Some people advocate composting the weed until it rots completely, mixed with coarse plant material such as bracken. In our experience, the best method is to gather it in winter and apply it fresh, either dug or ploughed in or spread over the land as a mulch. Seaweed should not be gathered or stored once the weather warms up, as that

risks introducing root-damaging pests such as millipedes or sciarid fly, which will thrive in the warm, moist conditions. For the same reason, seaweed should never be stored inside a polytunnel where the environment will encourage such creatures to incubate. Any supplies not used by about the end of April should be well composted and turned a couple of times before use to get rid of potentially damaging organisms.

We have never had any problems with using seaweed fresh, but if you are concerned about the salt content, it can be left in a pile for a few days to let the rain wash through it. The woody stems of kelp are best composted rather than freshly dug in. Seaweed, or any other fresh manure, should not be applied where carrots, turnips, beetroot or parsnips are to be grown as it will tend to produce forked roots. There are those that say that seaweed produces wet potatoes. We have not had this

problem, but if it is a concern, the seaweed can be applied to alternate drills, so that it is not in close contact with the tubers.

In certain areas, seaweed gathering is governed by the township regulations, so if in doubt, check with the grazings clerk.

Donald Murdie



Are ewe prepared for lambing?

LAMBING IS the most important time of the shepherd's year.

The sheep's too. So it's important to be prepared. Preparations include managing and feeding the sheep properly, scanning and removing yell (dry) ewes, getting the lambing facilities ready and gathering necessary supplies.

Preparing the ewes

Feeding and management during late gestation can determine success of the lambing season and sheep enterprise.

Approximately 70 percent of foetal growth occurs during the last four to six weeks of pregnancy. Most of the ewe's udder growth is occurring during this period. Rumen volume is restricted by the unborn lambs and the ewe's appetite drops by approximately 30%. The energy concentration of the diet therefore needs to be increased as lambing approaches. The primary result is the need for increased feed, particularly a more nutrient-dense diet.

Extra nutrition will prevent the occurrence of pregnancy toxæmia (ketosis). It will ensure the birth of strong, healthy lambs that aren't too big and aren't too small. Birth weight is highly correlated to lamb survival.

Feeding in late pregnancy

Ewe condition should be carefully monitored and handling should be restricted in the latter stages of pregnancy. As scanning

takes place in the majority of areas in February, using this activity to also check ewe condition, litter size and age will allow you to gauge the nutrients required for the expected level of production.

Correct ewe feeding throughout pregnancy has a huge influence on the lamb viability at birth. Inadequate nutrition may result in conditions such as pregnancy toxæmia and sudden changes in diet should be avoided, particularly in the final three weeks. Although most problems relate to thin ewes, over-fat ewes provide similar difficulties. Fat ewes are more prone to pregnancy toxæmia and prolapses of the uterus. Overfeeding can result in oversized fetuses that the female cannot deliver on her own. Remember it costs extra money to make ewes fat.

Energy is the most important component of the diet. Supplementary feeding should

complement the forage offered and should rise gradually. The level of concentrate feeding would normally start at 0.2 kg/ewe and rise gradually over eight weeks leading up to lambing. If more than 0.45 kg/day (1lb) is offered, then the feed should be split into two equal parts with at least six hours allowed between feeds.

The following practical points can help reduce dietary problems:

- Always have sufficient trough room for concentrates so that all animals can feed at the same time to avoid bullying.
- Where home mixes are used, replacing 20% of the barley with sugar-beet pulp makes diets less likely to cause acidosis.
- When supplementing low-quality diets with home mixes, make at least 30% of the diet a concentrate of high-quality fibre type eg sugar-beet pulp and distillery by-products.
- Ensure animals receive

adequate supplementary minerals and vitamins.

Vaccinations and parasites

Pregnant ewes should be vaccinated for clostridial four to six weeks prior to lambing. Vaccinated females will pass antibodies in their colostrum to their newborn lambs. Ewes that have never been vaccinated or whose vaccination status is unknown will require two vaccinations during late gestation, four weeks apart. Ewes should not be vaccinated within two weeks of lambing. This is not enough time to get antibodies in the colostrum.

Pregnant and lactating ewes suffer a temporary loss in immunity to intestinal worms as a result of the hormonal changes that are occurring around the time of lambing. It is the primary source of parasite infection for the new lamb crop whose immune systems are still naive. De-worming with an effective anthelmintic will help the ewe expel the worms and reduce the exposure of newborn lambs to infective worm larvae.

Lambing supplies

It is important to be prepared and a range (but not exhaustive list) of useful supplies to have in the barn or lambing box may be OB lubricant, nylon rope or snare, heat lamp or warming box, colostrum supplement, lamb milk replacer, calcium, docking and castrating equipment.



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CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Crofting communities mapping project

A MEETING of the crofting community mapping steering group took place in December in Edinburgh, attended by representatives of SCF, the land tenure branch of the Scottish Government, Registers of Scotland and Scottish Land and Estates (the landowners' federation).

It was explained that SCF were already proceeding with pilot studies to identify the problems that may arise when crofters try to produce maps showing the boundaries of their lands.

The SCF board some time ago approved rules of procedure for crofting community mapping. These rules were discussed

and explained and they are now available to interested parties on the SCF web-site.

It is intended that the rules of procedure will be accompanied by guidance notes and all present were asked to consider what information they wanted to be provided to communities wishing to map their lands.

The opportunity was also taken to discuss the possibility of community asset mapping but it was felt that this was not a principal function of the steering group. Nevertheless, SCF hopes that this project will enable crofting communities to work together to produce work of lasting worth.

Community mapping

IN LATE JANUARY, crofters in Badrallach township in Wester Ross gathered at the local camp-site to map the in-by as part of the community mapping process being piloted by the SCF.

The aim of the process is to bring everyone together to agree and record boundaries as input to the crofting register being prepared by the Registers of Scotland. The community mapping process is designed to meet the requirements of the register in a quicker and more cost-effective way than the government's proposed trigger point system.

In addition, it will bring the community together and allow them to develop maps to capture historical information and to plan future developments for the township.



Carbon-neutral lamb

SHETLAND Livestock Marketing Group (SLMG) have been investigating the concept of carbon-neutral lamb to tie environmental measures with production and marketing of produce.

SLMG's sales and marketing of Shetland lamb is meeting severe competitive pressures which, combined with increasing production, processing and transport costs means Shetland lamb is becoming ever more marginal. Sheep production overall has declined by 27% between 1997 and 2007 – a similar rate to other crofting areas.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE)'s hills and islands report acknowledged the difficulties faced in areas such as Shetland and concluded that a new approach based on an explicit policy of community viability is required that integrates social, economic and environmental measures for rural areas.

A strategy needs to balance carbon objectives, conservation and biodiversity requirements with maintaining economic viability of agriculture. Native Shetland sheep grazing natural pastures and moorland, with no artificial inputs, offer a unique opportunity to break into a new market segment – carbon-neutral production. Emissions and carbon used in production would be offset through carbon capture in the peatlands, resulting in a wholly sustainable production method.

Native sheep have existed

for millennia in Shetland without supplementary feeding and with minimal interference. Few breeds of modern livestock can produce crops of lambs off unimproved pastures. Crucial to the proposal is to determine stocking rates that ensure sustainable grazing levels. Flocks must have access to sufficient natural nutrition throughout the year and grazings must be assessed ecologically to arrive at a grazing regime which ensures environmental sustainability. This is central to any claims of carbon capture in peatlands. Improving carbon sequestration permits a benign system of food production and is capable of exceeding existing levels of carbon offsetting. The strategy will help meet government CO₂ mitigation targets and future market requirements.

RSE's recommendation 22 states: "The area covered by peatlands has declined and their effectiveness as bio-diversity hotspots and carbon stores reduced due to a combination of ditching, large-scale drainage and peat extraction for commercial and domestic uses, burning, grazing and conifer planting in the mires and at their edges. Available evidence estimates that all Scottish peatlands, most in the hills and islands, capture about 4.8 million tonnes of carbon per annum at a rate of 24 tonnes of carbon per ha per annum. Blanket bogs are estimated to store in total around one billion tonnes of carbon. It is estimated that there is more carbon in British

peat bogs (most of which are in Scotland) than in the whole of French and British forests. The most appropriate restoration management is to re-wet drained areas by blocking drains."

SLMG recognise that a great deal of research, data collection and analysis would be needed as part of this proposal to provide credible results that allow reliable calculation of carbon use. As a rough guide –

Land area of the Shetland isles	147,710 Ha
Rough estimate of growing peat lands 1/3rd of total area	49236 Ha
Total carbon sequestered annually by these peat lands	11,816 tonnes
Lambs slaughtered on the island plus exported from Shetland (2006)	95,514
Average final carcass weight (most finished on mainland)	15kg
Total carcass weight produced	1,432,000 Kg
CO ₂ (equivalent) produced per Kg of lamb delivered (Lincoln Univ, NZ figure)	2.849 Kg
Total of CO ₂ produced from Shetland's lamb crop	4,079 tonnes
Total carbon sequestered	7,737 tonnes

These figures indicate that it should be possible to make carbon-neutral claims for native Shetland hill lamb. But whilst SLMG hope that this strategy will work for Shetland, its success is likely to depend on the future CAP and whether the Scottish Government actually commits to climate change mitigation measures when faced with the ambitions of the renewable energy industry.

The concept of carbon-neutral lamb could be an opportunity for crofters to be rewarded for mitigating climate change and maintaining a unique environment. Meantime we are discovering that significant rewards from renewable energy remain frustratingly beyond our grasp.

Sue White



Shetland sheep

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Sheep EID

THE IMPLEMENTATION of the sheep electronic identification (EID) regulation continues to cause significant anxiety amongst crofters and hill farmers.

In December SCF's Norman Leask joined a Scottish Government focus group of stakeholders and officials to discuss possible future changes to the regulation, presenting the following paper.

Proposals for change to regulations (EC) NO 21/2004

1) Short-term relief using amendments to existing legislation.

- Producers should only be required to electronically identify individual animals when they leave the holding of birth.
- Remove the requirement to double tag breeding sheep. Replace with a single EID tag.
- Remove requirements to record individual tag numbers of dead animals.
- Replace requirements for the holding register with an annual inventory.

These measures would relieve the burden of record keeping and resultant inspection from breeding flocks and enable limited resources of SG inspectors to be focused on movements. Sheep welfare would be improved by removing the need for double tagging, cutting out and replacing tags. Breeding sheep would not need to carry the heavier EID tags until they leave the holding of birth.

These measures would not help those purchasing breeding stock. If this trade is to be protected, suitable risk-based measures would need to be found which do not require bought-in breeding stock to be individually identified for their entire breeding life on the farm. For example, after a certain time period after purchase (related to disease cycles for FMD) bought-in sheep can be identified with either flock tag of new holding or flock tag of new holding in a different colour for purchased animals.

2) Future replacement of regulation (EC) No 21/2004

The decision making on sheep traceability has been too remote from communities affected by it. Legislation detailed technology which was not developed or fit for purpose (reading large numbers of sheep at speed and high-accuracy cost-effectively without adversely affecting sheep welfare). Any regulation which is overly prescriptive in detailing the use of technology will outdate rapidly. There has been no simple mechanism for modifying this regulation once it is in place.

The commission and parliament should lay out what a sheep traceability system should achieve. Individual member states can apply what system they choose as long as traceability is maintained. Traceability rules for live movements between member states can be governed by the commission.

A Scottish solution would need honest debate amongst all interested parties, including technical firms from the EID pilot and tag companies, co-ordination with systems from other countries within the UK.

Information needed

- Assessment of cost-effectiveness of old paper based SAMU system against new combined EID pilot and SAMU system. What degree of extra traceability has been gained at what cost – scanners, extra labour at CCPs, cost of tags/scanners on farm, additional cost of farmers' time, inspection costs?
- New technology available now or what may become available in the future. (high frequency systems?)
- Each new system needs to be assessed against the original paper-based system in terms of cost and traceability and also whether any electronic system is likely to be able to replace the paper system and so begin to reduce costs and administrative burdens.
- Systems must be disease and risk-focused: ie concentrate on requirements for FMD without making additional recording requirements.

A new system should remove the requirement to record individual sheep numbers and move entirely away from an audit of individual sheep numbers on farm. It should provide a workable solution for purchased breeding stock; a workable solution for tracing mixed batches; be reliable in remote locations; be cost-effective and welfare-friendly.



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Bovine EID

FOLLOWING the introduction of a sheep electronic identification system (EID), it is now on the cards that a bovine EID system will also be introduced.

A meeting to discuss technical issues was recently held at the Scottish Government. This summary of the meeting was provided by the government facilitator.

There was discussion on low frequency (LF) and ultra high frequency (UHF) technologies. LF is currently the standard for sheep. Whatever technology is chosen must be fit for purpose. The European Commission has said that in order to harmonise cross-border trade, technology will be standardised and the standard for sheep EID is currently LF which has an ISO standard. The commission has not ruled out

looking at other technologies and will consider any evidence-based research given to them.

A working group has been set up at EU level which industry has been invited to attend.

The commission indicated to the group on 26 October that they hope to set the standard for bovine EID in 2012. Whilst LF technology is established, many on the group see it as old and not fit for purpose and want a standard which will future-proof the system adopted. UHF is EPC global standard and is adopted by the food industry for its compatibility throughout the food chain. It was agreed that on-going work would continue with SAC on LF and UHF technologies, with ScotEID to continue work on UHF but to consider a dual LF/UHF hybrid tag within the research.



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Campaign for fair and appropriate abattoirs grows

AFTER OUR CALL for evidence in a recent edition of *The Crofter*, examples of poor service experienced by crofters at Highland abattoirs and stories of unfair, and possibly illegal, practices have begun to stream in.

Evidence is stacking up which suggests systemic problems with the conduct of Highland slaughterhouses and cutting rooms – particularly towards smaller producers. Claims have been made of missing meat and missing carcasses, of carcasses being switched, of lack of proper hanging time, as well as allegations of poor

hygiene practices.

It is the SCF's intention to gather this evidence and use it to argue in favour of government support for local, community-run abattoir facilities. These will cut down the cost and time of taking animals great distances for slaughter, reduce the carbon footprint of local meat, increase traceability and eliminate the risk of further unfair treatment at the hands of the unscrupulous or careless.

We would welcome further accounts of problems with the conduct of Highland slaughterhouses. Please send your abattoir stories to hq@crofting.org – or write or phone SCF HQ (details on back cover).

CROFTING RESOURCES PROGRAMME

Call for crofting support programme

THE CALL for a comprehensive, stand-alone crofting support programme to be a key element of Scotland's future rural development policies was heard at a one-day conference held in Wester Ross in December.

The conference, which focussed on the key issue of how agricultural support in Scotland can be reformed to promote biodiversity and traditional crofting practices, was designed to influence the current decision-making process on the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. The CAP is being reformed with the intention of channelling funds toward those farmers who are actively using the land.

The well-attended event, held in Plockton, was co-hosted by the SCF, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and Skye and Lochalsh Environment Forum.

In his presentation, Iain Turnbull, NTS property manager at Balmacara, described how the trust has implemented a funding system to assist traditional crofting practices that help to maintain biodiversity. He demonstrated how support models can be simple, flexible and effective. A trial project, set up in 2006 on three crofting townships of the Balmacara estate, offered funding to crofters to cover the basic production costs of planting various crops, including potatoes, turnips and cereals and also offered a premium for cutting hay rather than silage with further assistance if hay cutting took place after 1st August.

Mr Turnbull said that key to making the process successful was building a relationship of trust with the crofters – a claim that appeared to be borne out by the fact that while 15 crofters had joined the scheme in 2006, this number had climbed by more than one-third to 24 in 2011. The average payment to crofters was between £520 and £620 each year with the total budget rising from £9,300 in 2006 to £13,840 in 2011.

SCF's Patrick Krause, said: "Iain described how one year, because of a sick cow which needed to be kept on the in-bye land, a crofter had been unable to grow hay on a piece of ground that had been allocated for hay that year. In consequence, the anticipated



© Martin Benson

payment for that area was withheld. The crofter continued with, and was paid for, the rest of the agri-ecology programme as usual.

"That kind of flexibility is presently unimaginable from government-led schemes which talk the language of claw-back and fines. One of the key aspects that emerged from the meeting was the importance of creating a stand-alone support programme for crofting in the new Scotland Rural Development Programme that is flexible, effective, easy to access and appropriate to crofting. This is something that a reformed SRDP can do because it has the flexibility necessary to utilise the different measures that are applicable to crofting and put them together into one coherent, beneficial package.

"I'm very encouraged by the fact that the idea of a crofting-specific programme seemed to be raised by all of the speakers in one way or another and was then raised again from the floor. There seems to be a good deal of interest in creating a specific crofting agroecology

support programme."

After the conference, Iain Turnbull said: "The issue of agricultural support is absolutely key to the future well-being of crofting and of rural communities in the Highlands and Islands and it is one that we, both in crofting areas and as a Scottish and British polity, have the chance to influence now. I hope that today's event will have played a part in moving the Scottish Government towards agricultural support policies that contribute to a healthy future for crofting agriculture, culture and society."

The event heard speakers with a wide range of expertise, from active crofters Alastair Nicolson from Borge and John William Gillies from Raasay and agricultural consultant Alan Boulton, to contributions by representatives of SNH, the head of the Scottish Government's CAP reform and crop policy team and Rob Gibson, convenor of the Scottish Parliament's rural affairs, climate change and environment committee.



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Managing geese

A new guidance leaflet is available from SNH offices.

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LET'S LIBERATE DIVERSITY

Bere and small oat at west African seed workshop

Maria Scholten reports

WHAT IS THE POINT of pushing peasants to purchase expensive hybrid seeds that cannot be reproduced – when peasant villages rely on local materials and local varieties, recycle everything, do not have electricity or running water, where fields are worked by hand and transport is by donkey and horse carts?

Most farmers in western Africa are small-scale with peanuts and mango as cash crops and many local grains such as sorghum, millet and maize grown for local consumption.

The importance of preserving these local grains was highlighted in the food crises of recent years. Access to food, not quantity of food, was and is at stake. And the key to access to food is seed. Locally-produced seed is cheap, accessible on time, cheap in use (no fertiliser or other inputs required for a yield) and reliable – because the local varieties are adapted to the harsh local conditions. This may sound familiar to crofters growing their own bere or small oat seed.

There are several trends working against the use of local seeds in west Africa: legislation outlawing farmers' seeds; a trend towards privatisation of seeds by large companies; increasing pressure to use genetically modified seeds; international aid programs pushing 'improved seeds' which require high inputs (fertiliser, pesticides) and often underperform under local conditions or in dry years; a lack of peasant-oriented plant breeding. All of these have been met with increasing criticism and resistance from peasants in western Africa.

Peasant organisations of six west African countries (Senegal, Mali, Togo, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina-Faso, Benin) came together in Djimini village in south east Senegal for the third sub-regional fair for the promotion of peasant seeds.

The event, in November, was organised by the association of Senegalese peasant seed producers. Banners showed texts such as "Let us seed our local varieties to keep our peasant autonomy". Seed policy and organic agriculture were discussed, plans made for further action and seeds exchanged.

At the end of four days a sub-regional west African seed network was established in

impressive unanimity. The aim of this regional network is to share information and to seek further funding.

On the seed exchange fair there were seeds from many local rice varieties, sorghum, millet, beans, sesame, courgette, maize, melon, pimento, melon and herbs. Most varieties had excellent information about type, growing requirements, expected yield etc.

Two newly-built seed stores could be visited in the village, made from loam and straw, like the village houses all built from local materials and thatched with local grasses.

SCF took part in the fair as part of an exchange programme in the EU Farmers Seed project. Peasant organisations from Hungary, Romania, France and Italy were also represented. The SCF display consisted of small oat and bere seed, a slideshow photo album about local corn, tweed and organic wool, crofters' tartan, porridge oats and oatcakes in different shapes. Crofters' local corn varieties were explained – local corn's resilience and hardiness; low-input agriculture; independent island seed production; lack of interest from the breeding industry and agricultural research to develop better varieties for marginal areas.

Most visitors had never seen oats and bere and the flat breads (oatcakes) were in great demand.

The political astuteness and resilience of the peasants was most impressive, as was the work undertaken – collecting threatened varieties; building seed stores; displays and exchange of seed; knowledge and networking.

Keeping local seeds is a way to preserve small farmers' autonomy. Looking at the fair from a crofting perspective, it made perfect sense.



Women farmers' organisation



Oatcakes were in big demand



Traditional village farmhouse



Seed store built from local materials



SCF stand

TRAINING FEATURE

Entry level crofting induction course

NOVEMBER 2011 saw the first incarnation of a two-day intensive version of the entry level induction course, hosted by Inverness youth hostel.

A full group of 20 participants attended, consisting of people from Orkney to Wales and in various stages of their crofting endeavour. A report from the course is included below.

The success of the first course and demand for this format has ensured that another two intensive courses will be held this spring, one in Inverness on 2nd and 3rd March and the other in Ullapool on 20th and 21st April.

We also ran more autumn courses in 2011 than has previously been the case and over 120 people received course certificates from seven courses.

The course continues to be popular with both newcomers to crofting and some very experienced crofters seeking updates and refreshers on new legislation and support schemes. It is intended that a further six courses will run this winter and spring, including in Ullapool and on Mull, areas that have never held a course before.

Course locations are partly determined by demand, so if you would like to attend a course in your area please get in touch.

Residential course

In November 2011 for the first time the SCF entry level crofting course was held on a residential basis over two days in Inverness.

The eight in-depth sessions ranged from crofting present and past; animal health and welfare;

business and finance and the European dimension. The latter made us aware how fortunate crofters are to have common grazing rights, unlike their counterparts in many European countries.

The course was fully subscribed and it was great to interact and share experiences with such an enthusiastic and interesting group of aspiring, new entrants and existing crofters. The course was structured in such a way that whatever your skill level, whether a complete beginner or otherwise, there was much to be learned. The speakers were also of a suitable high calibre.

For myself the course was highly informative and interesting. It provided an opportunity to refresh and update knowledge/skills; reinforced the importance of sustainability; and made me realise how privileged we are to be crofters, with all the responsibility that that entails. Perhaps more than that, the course provided the motivation and confidence to consider areas of diversification such as horticulture.

Finally, although involved in crofting since a young child (my family view being that child labour was perfectly acceptable), the inescapable fact of change makes it essential to keep abreast of developments with regard to legislation, animal welfare and the ever-growing mountain of paperwork. This course certainly helps with all that.

Course report kindly provided by Yvonne White from Skye

Practical training courses

Attendance at the entry level course inspires and encourages many participants to seek further training and the programme of practical courses arranged for this spring reflects requests submitted throughout the crofting counties. A list of courses arranged at the time of printing is provided and recent additions can be found on the website or from Su Cooper, training manager.

Training award

The first phase of the training programme runs until the end of May and a prize will be offered to participants who attended the greatest number of courses to that point.

There will be two prizes of £50 Harbro gift vouchers, one overall award and another for a young crofter (under 40). There is currently a tie. Three people attended four days of training.

Upcoming practical courses

- 7th March**
Lambing, Strathspey, £30
- 10th March**
Intro to keeping pigs, Strathcarron, £40
- 13th March**
Lambing, Lairg, £30
- 14th March**
Introduction to cattle care, Skye, £40
- 16th March**
Keeping hens, Stornoway, £30
- 16th and 17th March**
Dry stone walling, Benbecula, £50
- 16th and 17th March**
Dry stone walling, Ullapool, £50
- 22nd and 23rd March**
Dry stone walling, Broadford, £50
- 23rd and 24th March**
Dry stone walling, Lairg, £50
- 23rd March (afternoon)**
Keeping hens, Strathcarron, £20
- 24th March (morning)**
Keeping hens, near Muir of Ord, £20
- 20th and 21st April**
Induction course, Ullapool, £60

For more information contact Su Cooper, training@crofting.org



Business skills support for female crofters

FEMALE entrepreneurs are urged to take full advantage of a business skills for rural business women programme, which will help them increase their business and leadership skills and give them a competitive advantage in the business world.

Business Skills for Rural Business Women 2010-2012, a project managed by Lantra sector skills council, offers rural business women a great opportunity to benefit from the Scottish Government's skills' development scheme, under the Scottish Rural Development Programme's funding, to build on their skills, ideas and ambitions to run and develop rural businesses.

The project recognises and highlights the place of rural

business women as entrepreneurs in the Scottish rural economy, providing them with the skills to participate within industry groups and trade associations such as SCF to become rural business ambassadors. The programme provides a series of training and development sessions for business experts to share top business tips and for participants to interact, network and learn. The programme features a series of seminars on finance, sales and marketing, knowledge transfer, networking, diversification and succession planning.

Ishbel Crawford, Lantra regional partnership manager said: "Our research shows that only 26% of the Scottish land-based workforce is female, so

there are great opportunities for female crofters to engage with this project and start to build on existing skills, ideas and ambitions to run and develop rural businesses.

"Subsidised places on the programme are still available to women with links to the agriculture or forestry industries. They may already be running a business or may have aspirations to set up a business. Whichever, the project offers a great opportunity to benefit from the Scottish Government funding. The programme will support them to build on existing skills, ideas and ambitions to run and develop rural businesses."

In the first year, 2010 to 2011, Lantra helped 75 women from

across five remote rural areas of Scotland: Argyll and Bute, Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Perth and Kinross and Forth Valley. Lantra manages the project in partnership with the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, the Scottish Tenant Farmers' Association and Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies.

Lantra has been delivering this programme in many areas of Scotland and is now recruiting candidates in the Highland Region, Moray and Shetland. If you, or anyone you know might be interested in joining the programme, please visit www.lantra.co.uk/rural-business-women or call 01738 55 33 11.

TRAINING FEATURE

Ardnamurchan success More training options coming up

Pat Glenday manages West Highland College UHI's learning centre in West Ardnamurchan. Here she comments on a recent SCF training course.

WEST Ardnamurchan is a remote area with a permanent population of less than 200, so you can imagine my surprise when 24 people signed up for SCF's entry level crofting induction course, which we ran here in Kilchoan in the autumn. In fact I had so many enquiries that I am now in the process of setting up a second course due to start in a few weeks' time.

So, just what is it about this isolated spot that saw more than 10% of the local population sign up for that course? I've only lived here for a few years but it seems to me that this community has some special qualities: most of the crofts are still actively worked; there are several young families living locally who are keen to find crofting tenancies and to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to work the land; and there is a strong community spirit, evident not just in shared crofting activities, but in every aspect of local life. Living out here often feels like living on an island. We are connected to the rest of civilisation by a very long and winding single-track road with a ferry at the end, so when there is a chance to do something locally, like training, people make sure they take advantage of it.

Legislation, particularly as it relates to health and safety, animal welfare and environmental protection, means that it is no longer okay to work on the land without any kind of training and certification. "Ticket" courses such as animal transport, chainsaw (maintenance and crosscutting) and vermin control are now an essential requirement for anyone who wants to work a croft. But, and this is a big but, these courses are very expensive and if you have to spend time and money travelling to central Scotland to do them, the cost can become prohibitive. That's where I think SCF can really make a difference to the more remote crofting communities.

The induction course is a great introduction to the subject, but it's only a start, or a refresher for those who have been

crofting for many years. There needs to be something more focused to follow on, which is where both ticket courses and more specialised training come in. So I'm pleased to be able to say that SCF and the college are now working together to draw up a programme of subsidised follow-on courses for Ardnamurchan. There will be access to help with fees for those on lower incomes and no need to travel too far.

If you live in the Ardnamurchan area and you want to do the forthcoming entry level crofting induction course, contact me on pat.glenday@whc.uhi.ac.uk – and if you've already done it, look out for details of the follow-on courses in the local press or your email inbox.

Please get in touch if you would like to be added to my mailing list.

The course at Kilchoan learning centre was one of eight held all over the Highlands and Islands this winter, from Uist to Shetland, with a total of 135 participants.

Su Cooper, who manages the SCF's training programme, said she was delighted with how this year's courses had gone. "This is the thirteenth year of this course and the feedback, again, has been excellent," she said. "Participants have said that the speakers have such a wide range of knowledge and experiences that it is of interest to crofters of all levels of expertise.

"For new and aspiring crofters there is a great deal of information that will help them on the crofting path, such as learning where to get help, and some of the services offered by the Scottish Agricultural College and the Scottish Government. But there are more experienced

crofters who also find aspects of this information a useful refresher, and who will also be able to hear complementary experiences to their own.

"This course allows the participants to set up their own support networks between each other, and also feeds into the new skills training courses that we introduced last year, such as in lambing, small-scale horticulture and tractor maintenance. The livestock, land management and horticulture courses seem to have been really appealing to people."

Another six of the introductory courses started early in the new year.

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause said: "The numbers on this year's courses, the positive responses from participants and the feedback we've been getting from tutors has been phenomenal. Given the historical background of an area which became well-known a quarter of a century ago for depopulation, the popularity of the training in Kilchoan is particularly heartening. It is great to think of lights returning to some of the townships of Ardnamurchan and it is entirely fitting that the Scottish Crofting Federation, crofters' own representative organisation, should be leading the way by providing local properly-accredited and well-appreciated training and support for the next generation of crofters."



SCF chair Derek Flynn with course graduates in Inverness

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CROFTING CONNECTIONS

Snapshot of a crofting year in a small school

Urafirth Primary School, a Shetland school with only 11 primary pupils and 11 nursery pupils, is now into its third year as a Crofting Connections school. Pupils and staff are looking forward to the year ahead and have enjoyed reflecting on the crofting year gone by.

Head teacher Wilma Missenden reports

Some highlights of our year have been:



1 A community day in March where family and friends of the school helped prepare the school minicroft for planting of a variety of crops, including our rare breeds supplied by Crofting Connections.



2 Spring planting in the minicroft – even the three-year-olds got involved, using a dibber to help plant their tatties!



3 As spring looks forward to summer it's hard work inside and out. Inside the mini-croft: Looking after our crops as they grow. Round the perimeter of the minicroft: keeping out those pesky rabbits, by attaching chicken-wire to the wooden fence!



4 Keeping on top of things in the polytunnel – comparing and contrasting yield and quality of crops grown in the polytunnel with those grown in the minicroft



5 We tried our hand at incubating some chicken eggs and managed to hatch 11 out of 14! This newly-hatched chick (and her brothers and sisters) now lives with the head teacher and has started to lay eggs of her own.



6 As summer arrived we cast and raised peats on a local crofter's peat bank using traditional tools such as the tushker.



7 We visited a working croft where we discovered the usefulness of "tang" as a natural fertiliser – handy if your croft is by the sea, but also hard work!



8 After another local crofter taught us about rearing sheep, we went on the find out what happens to the fleeces at the woolbrokers, including separating off the various qualities and colours of wool, weighing and pricing.



9 Harvesting of our croft in the autumn.



10 Using our crops to make bannocks and oatcakes with the help of a local crofting granny.

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Youth movements

IN NOVEMBER last year two youth representatives from the SCF were invited to attend a political training session in Strasbourg organised by the youth of European Coordination Via Campesina (yECVC).

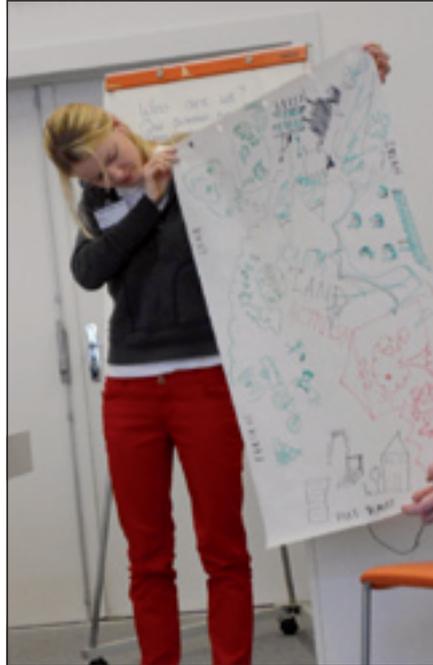
European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) gathers 27 organisations from around 20 countries in Europe. Member organisations are farmer groups, agricultural workers' organisations and rural movements throughout Europe. The main areas of ECVC's work are largely based within the overarching framework of food sovereignty:

- agricultural policy, trade, production;
- peasant rights, agricultural workers, migrants, women and youth;
- models of production;
- access to land;
- many other wide topics such as training and fundraising.

The youth of ECVC look in particular at the problems faced by young people as well as feeding information and ideas into the wider ECVC network.

SCF membership administrator Karen MacRae and SCF member Susan Pettie attended on behalf of the SCF, the only UK member of ECVC. The week-long event was held at the European youth centre of the Council of Europe, a purpose-built centre for the implementation of the Council of Europe's youth policy and programme. The venue was very suitable for the meeting as it offered flexibility in the working space, and the Youth Council of Europe funded the entire training session. To find out more information about the Council of Europe and the youth centres visit www.coe.int.

The purpose of the training session was to continue to develop the youth network, involve new people and also to strengthen the common work of yECVC. It was an opportunity to share our aspirations, hope and struggles with other young people. The main objective was to look at young people's lack of political experience



SCF's Karen MacRae displays some group work



and to acquire the tools that would allow us to analyse and explain our involvement with agriculture and its struggles.

Over the week we covered a number of topics and were involved in many peer discussions as well as receiving training and participating in farm visits. Each evening there were a number of activities – sharing our cultures, watching movies and discussions.

The first day started with an introduction to ECVC for new members of the group and was an opportunity to meet everyone. In the afternoon we received training on facilitation skills, a good setup for the week. The facilitation training was very informative, giving a different perspective on how to organise meetings, ensuring group participation rather than more traditional methodologies. We looked at group agreements, facilitation skills and how to work with different groups.

Food sovereignty was covered on the second day and we also looked at the Nyeleni movement which a number of the group were already involved in, www.nyelenieurope.net. The Common Agricultural Policy was the big topic of the afternoon, looking at how it affects us all and what the new changes could mean for the youth of Europe. Karen was involved in later discussions about the CAP and would be really interested to hear young crofters' views on CAP and the current reforms.

Gender issues were considered the following day. This was an interesting discussion for us, as it has big influence in a lot of the work ECVC does, but it does not seem to feature much in discussions within crofting. Agro-ecology was another topic which the group received training on and discussed issues in access to land.

Overall the whole week was very informative and intensive. It was very encouraging and empowering to see so many young people involved in political work. If you would like more information about the work of ECVC or would like to get involved with these discussions please contact Karen at HQ.



ON THE CROFT

Dog days

Marina Dennis recalls some characters

MOST CROFTERS and farmers have had clever collies in their time.

In fact, the collie is the one breed most often described as intelligent. I have had just one intelligent collie that I often referred to as Mrs Einstein because she was effortlessly brilliant at whatever she was doing. But then I have had ordinary collies and currently I have a daft but delightful collie. I can remember quite a few deranged collies on farms you would only visit with a stick, wearing a pair of wellies to protect your ankles and a flexible foot to boot!

Pip, my collie, is loving and loyal, always with me, endlessly patient while I work outside and ridiculously ecstatic when I mention walkies. But on a cold, dull January afternoon she had a flash of instinctive brilliance which had me reconsider her mental capabilities. I collected eight eggs and put six in an egg box leaving two on the ground beside it while I chased some stravaiging hens from under the feet of the cattle at the feed ring and housed them safely in the henhouse. Pip was about as usual.

On going to pick up the eggs there was just the box of six eggs and no sign of the extra two eggs. No broken shells or runny yolk either on the ground or dripping from Pip's mouth. Puzzled, I looked at the ground and at Pip who had her usual vacant expression. Examining the ground forensically I noticed it had been slightly disturbed, with some loose dead grass lying about. Checking Pip again I noticed some tiny traces of earth on her nose. She had carefully and cleverly buried the eggs, which were undamaged. I picked them up and pointing at the ground I said to her "Where are the eggs, Pip?" In a panic she started digging frenziedly and I could almost hear her thinking, "But I left them here, where have they gone?"

Another connection with collies that I love to reminisce about concerns an old Shetland friend, Bobby Tulloch, who had marvellous stories about growing up on a croft on the island of Yell. Bobby's grandfather had a clever collie called Dook because he loved to swim in the sea, the lochs or the voe beside the croft. One warm summer's day all the family except the peerie boys were working on hay above the croft. The boys, two brothers, also had a very important job. A net had been set in the mouth of the voe to catch just whatever cam about at high tide.

But the problem was that the seals also knew about the net and the easy pickings to be had. Each of the boys was equipped with

a scaring device to frighten off the seals; a large biscuit tin and a stick. So when the seals approached the net the boys banged the tin and generally created a disturbance to scare them off. Dook splashed along the tide line enjoying all the watery activity. But the boys, away from the watchful eyes of their elders, grew tired of endlessly banging the biscuit tin and decided to enlist Dook, who they knew loved to swim.

So they sent the granddad's collie to chase the seals. Dook set off towards the net and the seals, finally seeing a genuine threat, headed for the open sea followed by Dook. The seals dived but Dook swam further and further out into the open sea. The boys shouted frantically to the dog but to no avail. They knew the granddad would be furious and heartbroken. All the shouting for the dog alarmed the haymakers and they came down to the voe thinking one of the boys was in trouble. Dook could still be seen swimming out to sea about half a mile off shore. The granddad gave a piercing whistle, and the dog turned and came back none the worse for its dook. The peerie boys were severely chastised for being so idle.

Here is another story I read about a swimming dog which always makes me cry. In 1779 a family of MacDonalds from the west coast had decided to emigrate to Nova Scotia because of the starvation and oppression in their own Jacobite land. The father was called Calum Ruadh and it was with a heavy heart he and his family waited on the small boat to take them out to the big boat, which would take them away from their native soil for ever.

The collie, which had worked with them for years on their croft, had been left in the care of neighbours and ran about in a frenzy sensing something was wrong and becoming very agitated. When the family began to wade out to the smaller boat which would take them to the waiting ship she swam after them, her head cutting a V through the water and her anxious eyes on the departing family she considered as her own. As they were rowed towards the anchored ship she continued to swim in spite of shouted Gaelic threats telling her to go back.

Further and further from land she swam until Calum Ruadh could stand it no longer and, reaching over the side, he lifted her soaked, chilled and trembling body into the boat. As she wriggled wetly against his chest and licked his face excitedly, he said to her in Gaelic – "Little dog, you have been with us all these years and we will not forsake you now. You will come with us to Nova Scotia."

Crofter's wife column

IT'S BEEN SAID BEFORE, I know, but surely the number one, fundamental crofting element that we all share is indeed that natural and habitual obsession with the weather we have.

Whatever time of year, whatever jobs need doing the weather always has to be taken into account – and afterwards either duly credited for helping us out (with good lambing or haymaking for example) or cursed and savaged for its destructive abilities.

Now, having spent a fair few of this publication's column inches banging on about how I love the winter, I realise that I now run the risk of being labelled a hypocrite... but, boy-so, what a run of weather we've endured here this past few months! I can't recall when we last had a day without rain – let alone two sunny days in a row – and I have spent long moments wondering how much more we, the animals and even the ground can take. When was the ground last dry?

And the wind! I don't suppose for one minute that I'm alone in finding myself resignedly sinking into a state of gloominess as another bout of wind begins to agitate the trees. I also must confess to having spent more than one day avoiding crossing the front door at all – not good for our already-poor intake of vitamin D which, I recently read, is so low in Scots due to the lack of sunshine that there are calls to have it added to our food in a bid to curb the soaring rate of MS in our country.

But whatever the weather, we're stuck with it; at least until it changes to something else! Where before radio weather reports were met in crofting kitchens with cries of, "Quiet!" with an almost religious reverence befalling the room, we now have homes where computers provide up-to-date in-depth forecasts at the touch of a button. I know a number of households where the weather page is open all day long and checked as frequently as a certain crofter's wife checks the scones baking in her new-fangled oven!

And do you know what? No matter the advances we make in both predicting the weather and broadcasting it, we'll never manage to manipulate or harness those elements to help us in any way! On a dark, wet, windy day in late January, when even the dog would prefer to stay indoors, that's a sobering thought.

Anyway, hopefully by the time you read this there will be a touch of spring in the air, a wee bit of sunshine and blue skies, some new growth and colour on the ground and early lambs noisily thriving in the fields and on the hills.

As we are expecting the arrival of more than just lambs this spring I will be taking a break from the next issue of *The Crofter*, but will check in again in the summer. May the sun shine on your springtime activities!



ON THE CROFT

Dates for your diary – March 2012

KEEP YOUR farming calendar up to date with our 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, licences etc. The list is not exhaustive, and some dates may change. Keep in touch with your local department for the latest information.

- 15 March 2012 - the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) pack 2012, which includes the Single Application Form (SAF) 2012, will be posted out to producers who submitted a paper SAF 2011 on 15 March 2012. On the same day customers will be able to submit their SAF 2012 online on Rural Payments Online (RPO).

- Additionally, last year customers were informed that if they submitted their SAF 2011 online they would not be sent a paper IACS pack in 2012. About 10,500 customers submitted their SAF 2011 online and the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate will shortly be writing to those

customers to tell them about the deadlines for submitting their SAF 2012 and remind them they will not be getting a paper pack.

- Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency has announced changes to its management structure in Scotland taking effect from 1 February which affect some senior veterinary management positions, as a consequence of the merger of the former veterinary laboratories agency, animal health and parts of Defra's food and farming group. There are no changes to front-line roles in the field or laboratories or supporting functions, but the existing divisional veterinary manager role will disappear and in its place will be a single operations director for Scotland and two senior veterinary posts, known as veterinary leads.

You can find information about Scotland: National Rural Network regional events at http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/events/regional_events

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

Controlling chlamydial abortion in sheep

AS LAMBING time approaches sheep keepers are urged to look out for Chlamydial abortion, the most commonly diagnosed infectious cause of abortion in sheep in the UK.

Chlamydial (enzootic) abortion is caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia abortus*. The first indication is often a stillborn lamb two to three weeks prior to the expected lambing date, but infection can result in full-term stillborn or weakly lambs and it is not uncommon for an affected ewe to produce a dead lamb with one or more live lambs.

Susceptible ewes exposed to infected placentas or aborted lambs early in pregnancy may lose their lambs, but the infection may remain silent and cause abortion in the subsequent pregnancy. Ewe lambs born to infected ewes may be infected and can abort in their first pregnancy. Ewes which have aborted due to *C. abortus* become immune, however, and

will not usually abort again due to this cause.

The key to diagnosing *C. abortus* infection is to submit aborted lambs with their placentas to the local veterinary lab for investigation. Your own vet may also advise submitting blood samples from ewes that have recently aborted.

You can control the introduction of the disease into your flock by either obtaining replacement ewes from EAE-free accredited sources or by keeping a closed flock.

The infection status of a flock is established by carrying out a blood test on a proportion of the sheep. Seek veterinary advice on how to set this up. If a flock is clear of infection then replacements should be obtained from a safe source. This can be achieved by entering the flock into the premium health scheme (SAC veterinary services).

There are two commercially-available vaccines to control chlamydial abortion in the UK, Enzovax® (MSD Animal Health)

Scottish smallholder and grower festival

THE TOWN OF Forfar, in the county of Angus, will host the first Scottish smallholder and grower festival on Sunday 30th September 2012.

Forfar market will provide the venue for the inaugural event, which will be opened by Tim Tyne, well-known smallholder, writer and author of *The Sheep Book for Smallholders*.

The event is being organised by The Accidental Smallholder Ltd, whose director Rosemary Champion has been a smallholder herself for over ten years. Since 2003, she and her husband Dan have been offering help and support to smallholders through their successful and popular website www.accidentalsmallholder.net and by running short courses for those taking their first steps in smallholding.

Inspired by a similar event in Wales, Rosemary felt that there was nothing in Scotland aiming to meet the needs of crofters, smallholders, those growing fruit and vegetables on a small scale and those simply interested in a more sustainable lifestyle.

"After visiting the Welsh smallholder show twice, I floated the idea of a Scottish equivalent on the website and the reaction

was very encouraging," says Rosemary, "so I'm hoping that we'll get a good turnout".

Although plans are still in development, there will be a show for sheep, goats and pigs. Pig shows are making a comeback in Scotland after an absence of around thirty years and are sure to prove popular with smallholders. The show schedule will include young handlers in the pig section and more unusual classes like best horns and wool on the hoof in the sheep section. The festival will also host the only Scottish qualifier for the Rare Breed Survival Trust's young shepherd of the year competition.

As well as a food hall, there will be a range of trade stands showcasing equipment, machinery and products of interest to those working small acreages. "We're not looking at £50,000 four-wheel-drive tractors here," Rosemary notes, "more two-wheeled or horse-drawn."

There will be a series of seminars and demonstrations on subjects as diverse as using green manures and trimming goats' hooves.

More details can be found on the festival's website www.scottishsmallholdersshow.co.uk



and CEVAC Chlamydia® (CEVA Animal Health Ltd)

Active outbreaks of chlamydial abortion may be treated with long-acting oxytetracycline (20 mg per kg body weight) given at 95 to 105 days of pregnancy. A second injection two weeks later should reduce losses further. However, some ewes will still abort and many may still excrete infectious organisms at lambing time.

Chlamydia abortus poses a significant risk to the pregnant woman and her unborn child. Pregnant women should avoid involvement with lambing ewes and should not handle contaminated clothing from those working with lambing ewes or new-born lambs.

Immuno-suppressed or immuno-compromised individuals must also avoid contact with potential sources of infection at lambing time.

Dr Nick Wheelhouse is a senior research scientist working on chlamydial abortion in sheep at the Moredun Research Institute near Edinburgh. Moredun runs a membership scheme which aims to keep farmers and their vets up to date with the latest developments in animal health research. If you would like a free 12-page newsheet on controlling chlamydial abortion or are interested in becoming a member of Moredun, please contact Maggie Bennett at The Moredun Foundation, phone 0131 445 5111 or visit www.moredun.org.uk

SCF annual gathering

THIS MARCH the SCF annual gathering will be held in conjunction with the seventh edition of Let's Liberate Diversity. The theme is Celebrating Crofters' Seeds

and Breeds and this will be an incredible opportunity for crofters and others interested in crofting to meet with like-minded small farmers from across Europe. If you are

interested in attending all or any of the events you can find out more and register on our website www.liberate-diversity-scotland2012.org.

Cross-party group

THE SCOTTISH Parliament has cross-party groups on a range of topic areas, giving representative groups and interested citizens a chance to discuss pressing issues with a range of MSPs.

There is a cross-party group on crofting (CPGoC) with SCF as secretariat. Minutes of the meetings are on the Scottish Parliament website.

During CPGoC meetings, SCF highlighted that there is a conspicuous lack of representation for crofting on some very important strategic advisory groups of relevance to crofting.

For example, as there are probably more, there was a lack of representation for crofting on the rural land use study, the woodland expansion advisory group (WEAG) and currently on the 2020 climate group. Membership of these bodies is only available by invitation from Richard Lochhead MSP, cabinet secretary for rural affairs and the environment. After strong urging by SCF, our representative now participates in the WEAG by kind invitation of their chair.

As you will be aware, around 770,000 hectares of land – 25 per cent of the Highlands and Islands' total agricultural resource and around one-eighth of the total Scottish agricultural resource – are under crofting tenure. It is utterly remiss of the cabinet secretary to neglect to have full representation for crofting on all groups advising on Scottish land-related policy.

The minister with responsibility for crofting, Stewart Stephenson, has pledged to turn crofting from "a failing system" into a Scottish success story. How does he intend to achieve this when crofting is not even represented on advisory groups tasked with the forming of national policy on land use?

This leads us to believe that, as currently constituted, there is a considerable credibility gap in the advisory groups on land management in Scotland, a gap that can only be filled by the inclusion of someone who understands the complex rights and responsibilities of communities in crofting tenure and who can properly represent the crofting interest.

Such expertise exists within the SCF, the Crofters Commission and among crofting lawyers. The CPGoC has brought this matter to the attention of the cabinet secretary and would be happy to advise him if he decides in future to appoint someone to represent the one-eighth of the Scottish land resource that is not, at present, properly represented in his advisory groups.

Friday 9th March		
Noon	Registration and lunch	
1.00 pm	Welcome	Derek Flynn Scottish Crofting Federation chair
1.05 pm	Welcome to Scotland	Dave Thomson MSP
1.15 pm	Let's Liberate Diversity	Csilla Kiss
1.20 pm	Welcome by organisers	ECLLD group member
A Celebration of Crofting Culture – Seeds and Breeds		
1.30 pm	Introduction to crofting culture	Dr Margaret Bennett Ethnographer and crofting connections patron
1.40 pm	Traditional Gaelic language songs relating to crofting practice	The children of the crofting counties with a video backdrop of traditional and modern crofting practices
1.50 pm	Crofting past	Dr Annie Tindley Glasgow Caledonia University
2.10 pm	From Shetland kail to Shetland duck – running a heritage croft	Mary Isbister Shetland crofter
2.30 pm	Poster exhibition, networking and coffee break	
3.30 pm	International Round Table Agricultural diversity is the diversity of seeds and breeds. Worldwide, this is under threat in the following ways: • breeding of livestock in the livestock industry; • the patenting of plants and animals; • seed laws making farm-saved seed illegal. Farmer seed networks will explain actions to oppose these threats. These short talks will be followed by questions and discussion.	
6.00 pm	Close	
7.00 pm	Drinks reception hosted by Derek Flynn, Scottish Crofting Federation chair	
7.30 pm	Traditional Highland dinner accompanied by traditional Highland music	
Saturday 10th March		
9.30 am	Workshops will include marketing of native breeds, alternative veterinary medicine and ancient wheat bread making, amongst others.	
11.00 am	Coffee and networking break	
11.30 am	Workshops will include marketing of native breeds, alternative veterinary medicine and ancient wheat bread making, amongst others.	
1.00 pm till 5.00 pm	Crofters' fair and lunch	
	Seed swap	Crofting bakery and cookery
	Artisan seed producers	Harris tweed weaving demonstration
	Crofting produce tasting	Knitting demonstration
	Regional organisation stands	Rare breed products
7.00 pm	Dinner	
8.30 pm	Ceilidh – traditional Scottish dance	
Sunday 11th March		
9.30 am	Plenary session	
11.00 am	Coffee and networking break	
11.30 am	International round table Discussions on campaigning	
1.00 pm	Close	

The event is being organised by the European Coordination of Let's Liberate Diversity in conjunction with the Scottish Crofting Federation, Heritage Seed Library/Garden Organic, Practical Action and other members of the UK food group.

The event has been made possible thanks to funding from the European Union, Farmers Seed Project.



Develop a successful and thriving business with Tourism Intelligence Scotland



IF YOU'VE DIVERSIFIED into the tourism sector – or are thinking about it – Tourism Intelligence Scotland (TIS) will provide you with much of the knowledge and many of the tools needed to help build a dynamic and successful business.

A groundbreaking initiative developed by the industry in association with Scottish Enterprise, HIE and VisitScotland, TIS offers tourism businesses the opportunity to access, share and understand a range of useful insights and provides a raft of practical hints and tips on how to use this intelligence to get ahead, stay competitive and prosper.

By registering with TIS you'll

have access to a fantastic range of free resources including:

- the fully interactive TIS website www.tourism-intelligence.co.uk which contains a comprehensive and searchable library of the latest research and insights summarised in plain, easy-to-understand English;
- downloadable guides on topics such as golf, walking, knowing our markets, adventure travel, food and drink experience, mountain biking and, most recently, sailing. A hard copy of each new guide is also posted to registrants.
- regular "ear-to-the-ground" eblasts, full of topical information and links to the latest resources;

• video clips of others in the tourism industry sharing their experiences and expertise;

• case studies providing an opportunity to learn from other businesses;

• practical tools such as "listening to our visitors" to help you grow your business through customer feedback and "how to shine online" – a new resource featuring practical guides, hints, tips, ideas and case studies on making the most of the latest technology including social media;

• a regularly-updated news section on the website, keeping businesses up to date with the latest developments;

• a round-up of innovative tourism ideas from across the globe.

Over 400 businesses are also joining in the discussions at TIS's new LinkedIn network. Have your say on the hot tourism topics of the day by joining the network and sharing your thoughts. Plus you can also keep up with the latest news and ideas as they happen by following TIS on Twitter (@tourismintell).

Reaping all these benefits is easy and free. Simply register at www.tourism-intelligence.co.uk for unlimited access to the full range of resources, information and ideas – available whenever you want and wherever you are.

The Oxford Real Farming Conference

EVERY YEAR a farming conference is held in Oxford, attended by ministers, businessmen and representatives of agri-industry, to discuss how to continue to profit from food as a commodity and how to move more of the flow of public money into fewer pockets.

In response, a fringe conference is held over the road at which those interested in feeding the world sustainably gather. The rest of this article was the opening statement of that conference.

Agriculture needed serious re-thinking even before the present crises – financial, political, environmental and humanitarian. Now almost everyone can see that the re-thinking is urgent. The Oxford real farming conferences are designed to help this re-thinking – and to encourage farmers to take the lead, because hands-on farmers understand farming best and yet they are routinely sidelined when it comes to making policy.

The task is threefold:

1: We must design agriculture to feed people without wrecking the rest of the world – what has been called enlightened agriculture or real farming. It doesn't do to treat farming as a business like any other, to maximize wealth and make rich people richer.

2: We must ensure that farming has its own momentum and continuity to thrive whatever may happen to governments. The job of farming is to serve humanity and look after the Earth, but to do this it has to achieve quasi-autonomy, the status that's enjoyed for example by medicine.

3: To achieve all this we must rescue agriculture. Small mixed farms, biologically unimpeachable, wildlife-friendly, humane and serving their communities well have been replaced by ultra-commercial monocultures. Animals have been deformed and rammed into factories. Tens of thousands of farmers have been thrown out of work and the houses where they and their workers used to live have been sold off as holiday-homes. The most fertile land is on sale to the highest bidders, to do with as they will. The world's finest network of agricultural research stations and experimental husbandry farms have mostly been shut down or privatised. Science, conceived as the disinterested search for truth, has become the hand-maiden of commerce.

We should not have allowed this to happen and we cannot allow it to continue. But to achieve the necessary changes we must work with those farmers who still retain a sense of what farming ought to be and with scientists, however sidelined, who can see what has gone wrong and what needs to be done. Science needs rescuing too.

A sea-change is needed and we won't bring this about in two days. But we will certainly help the momentum – and, with luck, we should trigger some new and practical initiatives that really could make a difference.

SCF actively supports the campaign for real farming and gave a short opening talk on crofting as an example of a working sustainable system at the Oxford real farming conference.

New crofts

THE 2007 Crofting Reform Act allowed the creation of new crofts on land not currently within crofting.

Previously it was only possible to create new crofts by, for example, apportionment of common grazing land and/or by subdivision. It was anticipated that creating crofts would go some way towards meeting the demand from new entrants and could be a way of stabilising population in some of the most remote and fragile areas.

We also expected that the growing number of community landlords would be in the forefront of croft creation and that there would be rapid uptake of the opportunities presented by the woodland crofts concept.

What has actually happened? The Crofters Commission's annual reports from 2007 to 2011 reveal that only fourteen new crofts have been created during that period, all of them in 2010-11. Within the same time scale, thirty five whole-unit decroftings have been permitted, nineteen of them in 2010-11.

The picture is not as bleak as it first appears. There are advanced plans for woodland crofts in Mull and in south Argyll and a few new crofts are in the offing on community-owned land on Rum and Gigha. But why has croft creation not happened yet to any great extent?

Legislation allows only landowners to apply to create crofts, with the exception of those small landholding tenants defined by the 1911 Act, and they must agree compensation to be paid to the landlord. New crofts can be created without the right to buy, but private landlords are unlikely to create crofts for the public

good – and those they do create are likely to be sold on the open market. Owner-occupiers of non-croft holdings can apply to convert to crofts, which if successful will bring them within the scope of crofting regulation and give them access to CCAGS.

Tenants of holdings, other than the 1911 smallholders referred to above, face an uphill struggle to convert to crofting tenancy. We are only aware of one case where this has been attempted, although we are happy to be proved wrong.

First the agreement of the landlord in principle is required. The landlord will no doubt seek compensation. In the case we have heard of the compensation asked for amounted to no less than eighty per cent of the market value and the tenant was expected to pay for two independent valuations.

This demand proved unacceptable, as it took no account of the rent paid by the tenant and her family antecedents or their stewardship of the land over several generations. If any other agricultural tenants have attempted to convert to crofting we would be very pleased to hear about it.

The Acorn Co-op in Kintyre, covered in the last *Crofter*, is an innovative route to creating new crofts. The idea is that a group of people purchase an area of land and divide it into crofts. We look forward to hearing how that approach works out, but our clear conclusion is that community-owned estates have the capacity to create crofts right now.

What are they waiting for?

Withdrawal of RET for hauliers

Open letter to Keith Brown MSP, minister for housing and transport.

Dear Minister

The Western Isles has more than one-third of all the registered crofts in Scotland, which makes it an area of vital importance for the future wellbeing of crofting. Your colleague in the Scottish Government, Stewart Stevenson, has pledged to turn crofting from "a failing system" into a Scottish success story.

The SCF cannot understand how the anticipated dramatic increase in haulage charges following removal of the RET scheme for hauliers to the Western Isles will contribute to meeting this pledge. There is real fear among the islands' crofting communities that removing the RET scheme and replacing it with an inadequate discount scheme may cause chronic economic and social harm.

The savings proposed by the change are modest: only £1.5 million by your own figures. Yet you also acknowledge that since RET was introduced business travel to the islands has increased by 25 per cent. A representative of the Barratlantic fish processing company, which makes extensive use of the haulier RET concession, has reported an increase in economic activity of more than 20 per cent since the scheme began.

Your government's report last year on the effects of the pilot scheme acknowledges these substantial economic benefits that RET has already brought. The report adds that if the scheme is retained, further benefits are likely to emerge. It noted that business decisions, in particular decisions to increase employment, will tend to be "deferred until there is certainty that lower fares will become permanent".

The government report adds: "The early indication of increased employment and greater business confidence may be expected to increase over the medium term beyond the time horizon of the pilot."

After introducing an exceptionally enlightened policy in RET your government now seems prepared to sweep the rug from under island

communities' feet. It seems to us that your current reform proposals for RET are based on narrow and illogical economic thinking and contradict the government's stated aspirations for crofting and island life.

If your government implements these proposals, the extra cost to hauliers will be millions and much of the extra economic activity that RET has brought will wither away. Hauliers will either go out of business or impose their extra costs on their clients so that the economic pain is distributed throughout the islands. In places where livelihood is still marginal, that extra economic hardship may be enough to force businesses to close and people to leave.

The increased costs will be especially hard on crofters and fishermen. For crofters, after years of poor prices, the recovery this year in stock prices is welcome but fragile, but much of the gain is already swallowed up by rising costs. Our fear is that the significant extra haulage costs that the government is seeking to impose will sweep away any profit that remains for the crofter. Crofting will again become unviable and crofters will find it impossible to fulfil the obligations of the 2010 Crofting Act. You place them in an intolerable situation.

Having fought long and hard alongside other island voices to win an RET scheme for the Scottish islands, the SCF is extremely disappointed to discover that these modifications to the scheme will have a particularly adverse effect on our already hard-pressed members who must rely on haulage by sea to reach markets and maintain what livelihood is available to them.

We are joining our voice with hauliers, Western Isles businesses and community representatives to express the concern that hard won economic relief for the islands will be swept away if the RET is removed from commercial vehicles. We implore you to think again.

In order to prevent further decline of livestock, the SCF is pressing for a much-better-targeted discount scheme for those moving animals and feedstuff.

Patrick Krause, SCF

Crofting questions answered...

Crofting legal expert joins Harper Macleod law firm

A LEADING crofting solicitor has joined Harper Macleod law firm to help Scottish crofters and landowners with the ownership and management of their properties. Associate Nick Kemp has assisted clients of all sizes, from individual crofters and small estates to entire island communities.

Nick commented: "Crofting is an area which is increasingly in the spotlight due to the opportunities arising from renewable energy in Scotland. Crofters are entering new territories and have to make decisions that can have a huge impact on their lives. There is a substantial amount of legislation to adhere to the occupancy and management of croft land and

this is where I can help make the process less stressful."

Should you have any queries in relation to purchases and sales, decrofting and resumption applications, or assignments of croft tenancies, Nick can be contacted at nick.kemp@harpermacleod.co.uk or 01463 795 012.

Nick has seven years' experience in crofting law and is also a notary public. He joins a team of 20 real estate specialists at Harper Macleod.

You can find out more about crofting and renewables at Harper Macleod's Scottish Highland renewable energy conference on 26th April at the Drumossie Hotel, Inverness. Visit www.harpermacleod.co.uk/events for more details. Nick Kemp can answer your questions at the conference.

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Another new face at SCF HQ

MY NAME is Sarah Macrae and I've recently joined the SCF team as the administrative assistant in the head office in Kyle. I'm nineteen and 'in the prime of my youth' or so an SCF member informed me on the phone the other day! I still live at home looking after my Dad in the back of beyond near Killilan in lovely Glen Elchaig.



I was brought up along with my three other siblings, a heap of sheep, a handful of cows, far too many dogs and everything else in between, in the wee village of Nostie, by Dornie. My father Farquhar (aka 'Fachy Doc'), was a tenant farmer on Conchra Farm on Loch Long-side at that stage. We had a lovely childhood and as soon as we were able to walk, or probably before then, Mum would send us out with Dad to get some

fresh air – or for her to get some peace is a more likely story.

I recall many an evening spent out feeding the cows – or the moos as we called them then, all four of us and Dad cooped up in the old Zetor. And I'm sure you can all imagine the chaos my Mum had to endure at lambing time, having to put up with countless pet lambs

sprachling about the place and look after the four of us bairns at the same time! It was a very fresh-air-filled childhood one way or another and I wouldn't have had it any other way.

Tha Gàidhlig gu leòr agam cuideachd agus tha mi cinnteach gum bi mòran chothroman agam a bhith ga cur gu feum san obair a tha seo. Feumaidh mi aiteachadh ged-tà gu bheil mi beagan "meirgeach" a-nis. Carson nach cuir sibh fòn thugam gus beagan "practise" a thoirt dhomh!

I'm enjoying my job so far but I'm still trying to get used to everything. I'll apologise now if I ever seem a little hesitant when dealing with your questions and queries. It's certainly a bit of a change from my last job where I was a shortbread-selling, kilt-wearing shop-assistant!

Area AGMs

MEMBERS will have received a letter with this issue of *The Crofter* showing the date of your area's AGM and any guest speakers to come and listen to on the night.

SCF AGMs are scheduled to take place between now and the end of summer. Please take note of the date for your area and remember to put it in your diary. If there is no information about your area's meeting please get in touch with your area representative. If you are not sure who your area rep is then please contact HQ and we can let you know, or check the list on page 26.

If you would like to help arrange your AGM, contact HQ and we can help you plan the meeting and assist in arranging a guest speaker. Office staff and directors are always pleased to be of assistance and attend meetings if required so please get in touch.

Crofters welcome delegation from Pakistan

THE SCF recently welcomed a delegation representing a highland area of Pakistan whose people are rebuilding their lives after suffering from the devastating floods and political violence in recent years.

In summer 2010 the Swat valley, a region in northern Pakistan whose climate and environment has been likened to that of Switzerland and which had been one of the most popular tourist locations in Pakistan, was devastated by floods unprecedented in the history of Pakistan. This killed many hundreds of people and destroyed thousands of homes. Prior to this the Taliban established power in the valley, enforcing Sharia law. When the Pakistani army entered the area more than two million people fled their homes to avoid the fighting.

SCF researcher Iain MacKinnon said: "We learned from our visitors that the Swat valley is an area that contains many rural communities

and small farms with their own distinct culture and land-based traditions."

"They have endured a great deal in recent years so it was very inspiring to hear response to such adversity and the beautiful homes they are building, which are rising from the flood. That they are doing so themselves using traditional materials available locally – such as bamboo and lime plaster – suggests that they are a capable and resilient people with a strong sense of community and of responsibility to each other and to their homeland."

Iain added: "We found strong resonances between the Swat Valley and crofting areas in the Highlands, even to the extent of antagonism between landlords and the tenants who work the land. We were told that their small farmers do not have a representative group to stand for them. So, who knows, perhaps the SCF could be a model for such an organisation."



Pakistani visitors Azra Meadows and Naeem Shah with Morag MacKenzie

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