

If centralising abattoirs has failed, it's time to go back to local provision

IT'S NOT SO VERY LONG AGO that every small town in Scotland had its slaughterhouse and most livestock and mixed farms had their own slaughtering facilities for supplying the local market and home consumption.

Scotland has followed a policy, as with the UK, to centralise meat processing, with fewer and larger plants scattered over Scotland. But that model appears to be failing, with abattoirs closing or planned large-scale plants not even being opened. The time has come to re-assess the situation.

The number of abattoirs in the UK has been gradually declining for many years, from 1,900 in 1972 to 290 in 2007. In March 2012 the Food Standard Agency listed 32 licensed red meat abattoirs in Scotland plus two micro on-farm facilities. Having few, large-scale slaughterhouses hasn't been satisfactory for the smaller producer in particular, for many reasons. Here are three for starters.

First, having slaughtering facilities spread widely across rural areas means that the transport times for animals are unreasonably long. For example the Skye and Lochalsh area has been without an abattoir for over twenty years, resulting in animals being transported for up to three and a half hours to Dingwall or a two hour ferry crossing to Lochmaddy.

Second, fewer abattoirs means less competition – which results in a consequent attitude towards service. Some companies scorn the small producer and offer a poor

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Equity in area payments for common graziers?

It's CAP reform time again, comments Gwyn Jones.

AS ALWAYS crofters have a lot to fight for and seldom have the winds of change been so strong – a real challenge and opportunity for SCF. The main change in this reform is in the direct payments – today's single payment, to be renamed the basic payment – which will move to a uniform regional payment rate. I was going to say "rather like LFA", but "as LFA is meant to be" would be more appropriate in a Scottish context.

For the first time ever, the basic payment rate will be formally complemented by new payments in the LFA – now also to be renamed Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC). Since even in the department the mood seems to be that linking rates of support to claims or activity twelve years

ago is nonsense, this should be good news for marginal areas. The crofters' case is a good one.

There is one fly in the ointment which is potentially a big problem for some claimants. It's an issue which is very difficult to solve and which, perhaps for that reason, perhaps for others, is receiving almost no attention. The affected producers are those who are shareholders on common grazings where not all the shares are used for claiming direct payments.

These claimants in effect manage the whole area of the grazings and would be judged on the agricultural and environmental condition of the whole area, but are only paid on the basis of their shareholdings plus any shares temporarily reallocated to them by subletting or by the grazings committee. This

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Crofting – the next generation

Our next project.

For now we are calling it Crofting – the Next Generation.

The age profile of crofters and their communities is a real concern. As SCF is constantly emphasising, for crofting and crofting communities to survive and prosper there needs to be a strategy to attract and retain new, younger crofters.

In most of the crofting areas the inflated price of crofts (tenancy or owner-occupation), driven

by demand for building plots, puts them out of reach of young, aspiring crofters, except where there is the opportunity of family assignation.

SCF's innovative new project will focus on ways to attract and retain new, younger crofters through access to land, affordable housing, support networks and sustainable income streams.

A summary of the achievements of the SCF's Crofting Resources Programme, which recently reached its conclusion, can be found on page 5.

Message from the chair...



THIS HAS BEEN a season for adjustment.

After five years as chief executive of the Crofters Commission, the retiral of Nick Reiter feels like the loss of a friend. Certainly he has been a friend to crofting during a period when crofting has been preparing for change.

Following the creation of the new Crofting Commission in April and the delay in finding the correct procedure, we are pleased that

Susan Walker has been appointed convenor from amongst the new commissioners. Susan is known to us as an active crofter; but more than that, she is an activist, previously lauded for being the co-author (with Iain MacKinnon) of The State of Crofting in Camuscross in August 2009. This remarkable and timely piece of work focused on the problems of her own crofting township and informed the Scottish Parliament during the later stages of the law reform process. Indeed one suspects that it could have been the reason for the duty to report now on the statute book. SCF members should be sure to read the Camuscross report to understand where Susan is coming from, in more ways than one.

In the face of reports of active crofting being in decline, parts of the Sleat peninsula in the south of Skye seem to be bucking the trend. Susan has been part of that and, as

a director of the Camuscross and Duisdale initiative, she understands well the need for action. So, with its enhanced powers and duties and with its new leader, we are already seeing the Commission tackle absenteeism and dealing with the neglect and misuse of crofts.

It was heartening to find at the September Crofting Law Group conference in Portree that SCF's activity towards community mapping was held in such high regard. It is a pity that our efforts are not being properly funded. We learnt that the national Crofting Register will open on time on 30 November and how it will collect map-based information on every croft and every common grazing. But we at SCF have been hoping for more. When crofters set out to map their land it can be the starting point for community asset-planning, working towards a brighter future. We are encouraging

crofting communities to recognise the multiple benefits that can be had from sitting down together.

I am pleased that our own future is now more secure. There are now four new members on the SCF board, namely Roddy MacDonald from South Uist, Iain Keith from Caithness, David Smith from Shetland and Finlay Matheson from Strathcarron. They bring with them an enormous amount of knowledge and experience and I look forward to working with them. Fiona Mandeville (vice-chair), Paddy Zakaria and Norman Leask make up the remainder of what I believe to be a strong team.

The real strength of our organisation is in its members. The board is keen to encourage area and branch activities and will respond positively to any invitation to travel to meet and to hear how we can help those who have joined our cause.

Derek Flynn

United front needed on EID



THE SCF HAS RENEWED its call to sort out the impracticability and injustice of individual electronic identification of sheep (EID).

Returning from Brussels where he took part in a series of meetings discussing EID, SCF parliamentary spokesman Norman Leask said "EID was a hot topic at the sheep and goat meat advisory group I was attending. It was the main topic again at the German shepherds' meeting, who are taking the European Commission to the court of human rights in Strasbourg, over EID. This is not something that will just go away".

"I was also part of the delegation meeting with DG Agri, organised by Alyn Smith MEP, presenting findings of a survey of Shetland sheep producers. The Commission require evidence before they will revisit the EID legislation so thank you to all Shetland crofters who participated."

The two main areas that SCF is pressing for change to the legislation are:

1. that animals six months after entering a flock are considered part of that flock and no longer require special recording; and
2. that animals only require EID when they leave the jurisdiction of the keeper at birth.

Norman continued: "Both these positions are accepted as not harming traceability so they would be possible if we can gather the evidence to persuade the European Commission to re-visit this ill-conceived legislation. A united front and lots of evidence is required and only the crofters and the sheep farmers who are being severely penalised can supply this".

Equity in area payments for common graziers?

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has been the case since area payments were introduced, but for SPS it matters little, since the payment rate is individually calculated on a historic basis. But with a uniform payment rate it really makes a difference.

On average about a third of all the forage on grazings which are used in part to support SPS claims is not declared. That means that the claiming producers, though managing the whole grazings, would get a third less than they would otherwise receive. That's the average, but there are many cases which are much worse. I found one where 95% of the grazings is unclaimed by the sole active grazier.

What is the solution? What indeed! It is an extremely intractable problem and I am struggling with it myself.

The first challenge is to get people to think it is a problem and one worth tackling. That means civil servants of course. I heard one say words to the effect, "Why would I pay a crofter more for something he is willing to do for half as much?" But also politicians and, sadly, crofters themselves.

What possible answers suggest themselves? To me the obvious ones are:

- make the grazings committee eligible for the national reserve;
- for each committee to submit an application on the basis of all the unused shares in the first year;
- for the regulations to be amended if necessary to ensure that any shareholders subsequently submitting a new claim receive the appropriate number of entitlements from the committee.

The main objection to this seemingly simple solution (though one which needs all grazings to be regulated and have committees in office) is based on the active farmer rules in the new draft EU regulations, including, ironically, the

so-called Scottish clause inserted to prevent large unfarmed estates from putting in claims.

It would not seem to be beyond the wit of man for the regulations to be amended, either with a specific derogation for common grazings or with a more general 'at the discretion of member states' wording. But that requires political will, and I see little sign of it and not many shouting for it either. Which baffles me, frankly.

What alternatives might there be? Civil servants in the department seem to think one is keeping the national reserve open each year, not just in 2014. But while this would mean that new claims from previously inactive shareholders are possible, it does nothing to address the bigger problem for the existing claimants in the interim.

What else might be possible? Agri-environment is out, because the lost payment is for the cost of meeting the minimum activity, not for going beyond it.

Perhaps the next best solution might be the new ANC payments (replacing LFASS). They have the benefit of being claimed every year, so the amount claimed can vary as long as something is claimed for the first five years after the initial claim.

It would be possible, perhaps, to have a special ANC rate, equal to the sum of basic payment and normal ANC rates for that parish, and specific interpretations of the activity rules for common grazings committee applicants.

These are just my ideas. It is essential that the real experts get their heads round the issue. So far they have at best been coming up with additional problems – now it's time for some solutions.

Gwyn Jones, EFNCP
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Steady as she goes

Parting words from Crofting Commission chief executive Nick Reiter

WHEN I WAS appointed to the Crofters Commission in 2007, I was told that it had gone through a lot of changes and now needed a period of "steady as she goes" consolidation. It did not take long for me to realise that the changes had only just begun.

As I take retirement some five years later, we have two new Crofting Acts in operation; a new, mostly elected Crofting Commission; a new statutory plan, hopefully approved by the new minister by the time you read this; even a new HQ location. I would say to my successor, whomever that will be, that what is needed now is a period of "steady as she goes" consolidation – but I know that would be a gross misrepresentation.

However, there have been some constants. The very real commitment to the wellbeing of crofting among the staff and commissioners here has been unwavering and it's fair to say that at times we have all felt frustrated that we cannot do more. But the Commission was and remains first and foremost a regulator.

That's why a strong, effective representative and lobbying organisation is so essential. It may seem odd for a government agency to stress that. Of course there have been differences of views between the Commission and the SCF – which incidentally changed its name during my five years – not even that was a constant. But far more often we have agreed on the needs of crofting in the 21st century; and there is I believe an improved understanding of our different roles. On a personal level I have always found all the representatives of the SCF courteous, helpful and enthusiastic and I'd like to express my gratitude for that.

It's tempting for a departing chief executive to leave some parting words of deep wisdom and insight. I have none to offer. But one thing is clear to me: crofting continues to punch above its weight politically and socially. That is evidence that it is valued not just by the people actively involved in it, but by Scotland as a whole. The Crofting Commission, the SCF, other representative bodies and the media all have their part to play. But that enviable position has been hard won mostly by crofters themselves and I firmly believe it is mostly in their hands that it remains.

Land Reform Review Group

THE Land Reform Review Group is an independent group set up by the Scottish Government to develop innovative and radical proposals that will contribute to Scotland's future success.

The relationship between the land and the people of Scotland is fundamental. The structure of land ownership is a defining factor in that relationship: it can facilitate and promote development, but it can also hinder it.

In recent years, various approaches to land reform, not least community ownership, have contributed positively to a more successful Scotland by assisting in the reduction of barriers to sustainable development, by strengthening communities and by giving them a greater stake in their future.

The Land Reform Review Group has been appointed by Scottish ministers to identify how land reform will:

- enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land;

- assist with the acquisition and management of land (and also land assets) by communities, to make stronger, more resilient and independent communities which have an even greater stake in their development;
- generate, support, promote, and deliver new relationships between land, people, economy and environment in Scotland.

The review group is chaired by Dr Alison Elliot. Its vice-chairs are Dr Sarah Skerratt and Professor James Hunter.

Give Feedback

To allow the Land Reform Review Group to explore and analyse evidence and to enable the group to identify key themes for further exploration, responses are invited by 11 January 2013.

Electronic responses should be emailed to landreformreview@scotland.gsi.gov.uk and hard copies should be sent to:

Dave Thomson
Land Reform Review, E1 Spur Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD

Looking to the future with the Crofting Commission convenor

IT SEEMED LIKE a long wait but at the end of September minister for the environment and climate change, Paul Wheelhouse, announced the appointment of the first convenor of The Crofting Commission.

Based on Skye, Susan Walker has been an active crofter for thirty years and is honoured to be leading the organisation at a time of accelerating change. Susan commented: "We have a formidable team of commissioners and we have a real opportunity to help shape the future of the Commission and crofting. We work as a team because by doing so we bring a wealth of talents, knowledge and understanding of the different crofting counties."

"I am delighted that on 2nd November commissioners voted to appoint a vice-convenor, with Colin Kennedy of Coll winning the vote. Colin has an unusually deep understanding of both practical and legal crofting issues which is very valuable. At the same meeting, we also appointed Murdo MacLennan from the Western Isles as our Gaelic spokesman, an important role, with almost 50% of all crofts in the Gaelic-speaking areas of the Western Isles.

"Crofting is unique, something we all cherish and, while respecting the past, our focus is on using the regulatory system to help build a sustainable future for crofting, in which the benefits can be seen far beyond the crofting counties."



"The first nine months in the life of the new Commission have been a whirlwind of activity, centred on regulatory decision-making, building contacts with other organisations and the preparation of a plan, which will guide us through the coming years and expresses our aspirations and ambitions for crofting. The plan sets out how we will make decisions in line with the legislation and explains the benefits when crofting is consistently and fairly regulated in line with government policies."

"One of the provisions in the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act, passed in 2010, which we know is causing concern, is the new statutory duty placed on the Crofting Commission to seek certain information from individual crofters every year and from grazing committees every five years. We are aware that this is generating disquiet among grazing committees and clerks."

"I would like to reassure everyone that we will be consulting you to devise a method for reporting. To this end, we are working with others, such as grazing committees, assessors and the SCF to devise a reporting form."

"Through this consultation process we can devise a form which everyone will feel comfortable with but which will also allow crofting communities to report problems to us where they choose to do so. This will encourage grazing committees and individuals to move towards greater self-regulation, by allowing them to make their own assessments of the state of their croft or of crofting in their townships and think carefully about the impact this has on their community."

"With this approach, there is an opportunity for us to work together to gather the information we need to enable us to raise the profile of crofting with ministers and the Scottish Parliament and to present a clear picture of the state of crofting: its value and contribution to life in Scotland and the threats and problems it faces."

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Support for croft housing under threat

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT for croft housing has been around for a long time.

From the 1920s onwards, the Board of Agriculture for Scotland subsidised the construction of the typical two-up, two-down, storm-windowed croft houses that sit solidly and harmoniously in the crofting landscape. These usually were built with thick stone walls, but could be of poured concrete in areas where aggregates were plentiful.

Other designs also attracted assistance, such as the single-storey dwellings with stone gables and timber-frame construction clad with corrugated iron, intended to be built quickly in areas of land resettlement such as at Portnalong and Fiscavaig in Skye. Following World War II, crofters were encouraged to build very substantial, state-of-the-art homes. These bungalows can still be seen throughout the Highlands and Islands with their hipped roofs and tall chimney stacks. They have three bedrooms (two with fireplaces!) and a bathroom, and were being built at a time when very many crofters still lived in blackhouses.

From the 1960s onwards, the Department of Agriculture developed seven styles of bungalow which crofters could build with the assistance of the Crofter Building Grant and Loan Scheme (CBGLS). The thirty years that followed brought about a huge leap forward in the quality of rural housing in the crofting counties. The houses were bright and spacious with three or four bedrooms and a very large, convertible loft space.

This generous accommodation allowed for large families, elderly relatives, or bed and breakfast businesses. By today's standards they were not energy efficient, with large, single-glazed, steel-framed windows, and deep, uninsulated sub-floor voids,

which must have had their effect on fuel bills.

In 1986, when CBGLS was in its heyday, the Scottish Crofters Union commissioned



Mark Shucksmith to research its economic effects. The research revealed that the grant and loan covered, on average, 82 per cent of total building costs. At that time the cost to the public purse over forty years of a council house in the Western Isles was £41,713. The cost for a new croft house of similar size was £12,289; therefore the scheme was excellent value for public money. It also provided a stream of work for small contractors in the crofting areas, retaining income and skilled workers in the local community.

Then the rot set in. CBGLS lost its value relative to inflation and, in 2004, the loan was abolished. It was argued that commercial mortgages could be had more cheaply, but the credit crunch soon proved the folly of that. Commercial loans almost invariably led to the house site being decrofted, and assistance for access roads and water supplies was removed also. The grant was increased to its current level but, by 2008, was reckoned only to cover 14 per cent of the average cost of a very modest house in the islands and remote mainland areas. It does, however, remain a very valued support for young crofters and new entrants starting out.

When administration of the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) was devolved to an office in Tiree, we looked forward to a service more responsive to crofters' needs. Very sadly, this has not proved to be the case. SCF now receives regular complaints of CHGS applications being refused, sometimes on the grounds of the croft not being a viable unit. Many of these refusals are reversed on appeal, but who, we wonder, is determining what constitutes a viable unit? We know of many very small crofts that are highly productive and large ones that produce very little. Which would be deemed to be the viable unit?

We need to hear from the Scottish Government how it views the future of CHGS. What criteria do the administrators of the scheme use to determine eligibility? Who is handling appeals? Why, when the budget is underspent, is refusal seemingly the default position?

We all know that what crofting needs above all is young people. If we are to attract these people they will need affordable housing. Surely now is the worst possible time to be killing off croft housing support after ninety years of progressive intervention?

Cross-party group on crofting

THE SCF is the secretariat for the cross-party group on crofting held in the Scottish Parliament every six weeks. We instigated the group at the outset of the Scottish Parliament to keep crofting to the fore with MSPs.

The group meetings are a forum for those involved in crofting to present issues to MSPs and to gain support. It is chaired by Jamie McGrigor MSP and has vice-chairs Rhoda Grant MSP and Jean Urquhart MSP. The cross party group may send letters to cabinet secretaries or ministers urging action on certain issues. As the name implies, MSPs from all parties attend which gives weight to any communications that come from the group.

Recent meetings have had presentations and discussions on direct payments and common grazings, crofting in education, protection of native Scottish seeds, planning on crofting land, SRDP agri-environment schemes and common grazings, the crofting register, crofts being valued for care home charges, as well as regular updates on CAP reform and implementation of the 2010 Crofting Act. These have, usually, resulted in letters to appropriate cabinet secretaries and ministers.

Paul Wheelhouse, minister for environment – who has the remit for crofting – attended the meeting in September.

There have also been several working groups set up out of discussions – including one on a sub-programme within the SRDP to specifically support crofting and one on CAP support to common grazings. The working group on a crofting sub-programme will be meeting as this issue of *The Crofter* goes to press so will be reported on in the next issue.



Patrick Krause, Norman Leask and John MacKintosh at the Scottish Parliament.

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If centralising abattoirs has failed, it's time to go back to local provision

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service with the arrogance of being the only place local producers can reasonably go.

After our call for evidence to our members, examples of mistreatment of crofters at Highland abattoirs and butcheries and stories of unfair, and possibly illegal, practices have begun to stream in. Evidence is beginning to stack 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 and poor service.

Third, we are seeing a growing movement of consumers who want to know where their food comes from. More small producers are selling direct to customers and need to be able to provide total traceability. The SCF's Scottish Crofting Produce mark allows the customer to know exactly who produced meat bearing the mark. This of course necessitates that abattoirs have a strict tracking regime in the plant and can guarantee that the producer gets the carcasses back from the animals he/she put in. This is proving to be woefully inadequate, with producers knowing that they are not getting their animals back and abattoirs refusing to give any assurances.

Decentralisation and localisation have been identified as central to sustainable food systems and Scotland has to make up its mind whether to continue to follow a failing centralised model or to follow the European trend. The Austrian government took a decision many years ago to support its small-scale food producers. With a population of about 8.5 million, it has 3,800 abattoirs – some 2,300 of which are on-farm facilities. In stark contrast, Scotland, with a population of around 5.5 million, has 32 licensed abattoirs, only two of which are on-farm.

The tide is turning though. With Scottish Government help, the SCF has commissioned SAC consultants to carry out a feasibility study on the possibility of a community-run small-scale meat processing facility in the Skye and Lochalsh area. If this proves workable it could be a model for other areas. As cabinet secretary for rural affairs Richard Lochhead said when announcing a government grant to help with provision of a small-scale abattoir in Dalbeattie. "As well as savings on haulage costs, there will also be environmental benefits thanks to the reduction in food miles. Local abattoirs play an important part in the food chain and this grant clearly demonstrates our commitment that animals should be slaughtered as close to where they are reared as possible. This investment will provide an excellent boost for Scotland's red meat sector as well as consumers in Dumfries and Galloway."

A rural assembly for Scotland

AN INITIATIVE TO SET UP a Scottish rural parliament has been launched and two exploratory workshops have already taken place.

The following article is taken from the background briefing to the workshops.

The name has been changed to Scottish rural assembly, as it was felt at the second workshop that this would be a more suitable title should the initiative go ahead. If you have any thoughts on the idea of a rural assembly please write in.

The creation of a rural assembly for Scotland is a unique opportunity to enable a stronger, more coherent voice for Scotland's rural communities. It is inspired by the success of rural parliaments in other European nations.

A successful Scottish rural assembly must be firmly rooted in Scotland's rural communities, developed by and for the people who live and work in rural Scotland.

It is supported by the Scottish Government to enable more effective engagement with Scotland's rural communities.

A rural assembly or rural parliament is not a formal part of government, nor is it a parliament in the sense of a legislative or decision-making body. It is a bottom-up process of involvement and debate between the people of rural Scotland and policy makers to enable better understanding, improved policy and action to address rural issues.

A process takes place over a two-year period, culminating in a high profile event – the rural assembly – which brings together all sectors of rural society to highlight rural issues and to discuss rural priorities with each other and with government.

It is focused on achieving practical and

policy-based outcomes relevant to the challenges and opportunities facing rural people. These outcomes are monitored and further developed in the period between rural assemblies.

Scottish rural assembly should be:

- open to and inclusive of all who live and work in rural Scotland;
- led by rural communities in co-operation with government;
- a forum for those who live and work in rural Scotland to discuss and debate issues of common concern and to share good practice, knowledge and inspiration;
- an opportunity to celebrate and showcase the richness, diversity and success of Scotland's rural communities;
- identifying and promoting changes in policy and practice that will benefit Scotland's rural communities and achieving a coherent and influential rural voice;
- part of a continuing process of engagement between Scotland's rural communities.

Why do we need it?

There are few opportunities for the collective interests of rural communities to be raised, debated and communicated to government.

The lack of such a mechanism often results in issues being addressed sectorally or geographically, with no clear process for gaining a comprehensive, grass-roots view of rural issues. Evidence from other parts of Europe has revealed the benefits to rural areas of their rural parliaments in achieving this.

All rural communities face similar challenges and opportunities and the rural assembly will provide the opportunity for communities across Scotland to come together for mutual benefit.



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Future CAP milestones

THE EC IS AIMING for the new Direct Payments (DP) and Rural Development (RD) regimes to begin on 1 Jan 2014. Most observers, however, expect the timetable to slip and think January 2015 is a more realistic start date. The new RD programme may start even later.

Member states have been pressing the EC to set out plans to avoid any funding gap, especially for RD, if the start of the new CAP regime is delayed. There has been some progress and discussions are on-going.

Possible timeline:

European budget (including CAP budget) agreed – spring 2013

Main CAP reform regulations finalised – summer 2013

Commission tables proposed implementing regulations – summer 2013

Negotiation phase/Scottish Government consults stakeholders – autumn/winter 2013
EU and national implementing rules adopted – spring 2014

Scottish Government finalises new IT payment systems and trains staff
New CAP regime begins January 2015

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Crofting law seminar

Martin Minton, Inksters Solicitors, reports

THE THEME of Crofting Law Group's annual crofting law conference, this year held on the Isle of Skye, was the new map-based crofting register.

Sheriff Roddy John Macleod's comments at the start of the day neatly summarised the potential issues ahead. Deputy chairman of the Scottish Land Court and a native of Skye who is from a crofting background, he pointed out that the mapping exercise that is about to commence could bring to a head disputes that had been hidden or dormant for some time.



After the seminar a group of delegates visited Ben Aketil wind farm, built on croft land.

The Crofting Register

Registers of Scotland explain the new requirements

THE NEW Crofting Register commenced on 30 November 2012.

In time it will provide a definitive record of the extent of, and interests in, land within crofting tenure in Scotland. Not only will the register show crofts, it will also include common grazings and land held runrig. The register derives from the crofting reforms introduced by the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. That act brought about a clear demarcation between the regulation of crofting, which is the responsibility of the Crofting Commission, and the registration of crofts which now falls to the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland.

Like the Land Register, the Crofting Register is map-based. It will show defined extents of crofts, common grazings and land held runrig against the backdrop of the Ordnance Survey map. In addition to showing the boundaries of such land against the OS map, the register will also contain information on the tenant or owner-occupier crofter on the land as well as the landlord and/or the landowner of the registered land. The register is free to view online and can be accessed direct on www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register or via a link on either the Registers of Scotland www.ros.gov.uk or the Crofting Commission web-site www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk.

Registration is voluntary for the first year after commencement. The Scottish Government is keen to encourage groups of crofters to work together to submit applications for croft registration and has set aside £100,000 to

fund a 20% reduction in registration fees where registration is applied for more than one croft from the same crofting township at the same time.

After the first year, a number of trigger events requiring first registration of croft land, or amendment to croft land already entered on the Crofting Register, will come into force. These trigger events are set out in sections 4 and 5 of the 2010 Act and mainly relate to actions requiring a regulatory application to the Crofting Commission for approval to change some aspect of the croft land (such as an application to assign or divide a croft). Any regulatory application after the first year must be accompanied by an application to register or update the croft land in the Crofting Register. The application for registration will, in the first instance, be made to the Crofting Commission who, if satisfied that basic information required for registration has been met, will forward the application to RoS. The person responsible for submitting a registration application is set out in Schedule 2 to the 2010 Act.

There is often limited documentary evidence supporting the extent of and interests in a croft, common grazings or land held runrig. The 2010 Act therefore provides for a nine-month challenge period following the initial registration. Challenges are made not to RoS, but to the Scottish Land Court and the register may be amended to reflect a successful challenge.

Guidance on the application forms, fees, and criteria for submitting plans will be available on the RoS website prior to commencement.

For further information contact Hugh Welsh – 0141 306 1513 or hugh.welsh@ros.gov.uk

SCF calls for more support for crofting community mapping

AT THE Crofting Law Group conference SCF chair Derek Flyn was invited to address delegates on crofting community mapping which the Federation is promoting as being more accurate, efficient and likely to result in fewer disputes.

He said that when the process is explained to crofting communities, they are keen to be involved, not only because of costs saved but because the exercise provides an opportunity for gathering information that can go on to be used for community development.

So far, steps have been taken by SCF to encourage crofting townships to map their own boundaries and to consider how best to use the assets of their community in the future. These include:

- hosting a crofting community mapping working group, which includes landowners (through Scottish Land and Estates) and meetings have been held with Registers of Scotland and with the Crofting Commission;
- providing rules of procedure for crofting community mapping, which were approved by the SCF board as long ago as 31st August 2011;
- producing helpful notes on the sources of boundaries;
- preparation of a community mapping pack for aspiring townships with clear guidance on producing a robust community map.

Despite lack of funding, Derek reported that we have made good progress with a small number of townships. An innovative

pilot project on community asset-mapping has been undertaken which will not only assist crofters to comply with the new legal requirements on croft mapping but will provide townships with a development toolkit.

Whilst SCF continues to seek support and funding for community based mapping projects, we have encouraged some townships to find local funding, such as from an adjacent wind farm community benefit scheme. With the assistance of Registers of Scotland, we have been able to supply several crofting townships with base maps to enable community mapping to proceed; and we hosted an on-croft meeting with RoS officials to demonstrate some of the issues which arise with mapping croft boundaries. At a meeting of the cross-party group on crofting at Holyrood, Russell Smith gave an update on the community mapping project and on the pilot in Badrallach.

Derek raised the concern that many crofters do not have the information required to register their land and that it is difficult for them to obtain this information. He said, "It would be wholly unreasonable for any application for first registration to be refused or blocked by the Crofting Commission because the applicant has not completed the form when he has had no access to the information sought about neighbouring land."

Nonetheless, SCF considers that the Crofting Register will be a valuable aid to safeguard the future of crofting.



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SAC Consulting provides leading edge, independent and impartial advice throughout the crofting and rural communities.

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- Horticultural advice
- Studies and development of renewable energy projects
- Enterprise planning
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- Croft maps.

Contact your local SAC Office

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MEMBERSHIP FEATURE

Meet the new SCF directors

Finlay J Matheson



The SCF is a different animal to the union I joined on its inauguration in 1986. There's been scepticism since about its survival. It has come a long way.

I have attended two board meetings, initially as an observer. I am learning about this different organisation and coming to terms with changes. From union,

through foundation, the federation became an integral part of the Scottish agricultural community scene. Media until recently consulted the NFU and farmers; now it is farmers, crofters and their organisations. That is to the credit of those contributors to these crofting movements.

The croft I tenant at Strathcarron, Wester Ross was assigned me by a late cousin. We maintain its cattle stock and, since 1978, I am the sole owner of the former club's stock of blackface ewes, utilising common grazings.

From 1990-1993 I worked on the Rural Enterprise Programme in Wester Ross under the late Mike Burnett. Subsequently, I became a business adviser with Ross and Cromarty Enterprise and project officer with the Croft Entrant Scheme. Now down to six cows and a reduced flock, I am dedicated to perfecting a route to retirement.

In 1978 I became a community councillor. I still sit on various community committees. I was a Crofters Commission assessor and am now an assessor with the Crofting Commission.

It's early days for me on the SCF board. I anticipate learning more about the modern organisation and putting in my tuppenceworth.

Iain Keith



After being born half a century ago, I was brought up on the family croft at Gartymore Helmsdale, which makes me one of that rare breed, the indigenous crofter.

I then moved a bit further north to become an apprentice with the UKAEA at Dounreay. Meeting my future wife here, I have stayed in Reay ever since. Between us and our two daughters we manage, just about, our croft on which we run Aberdeen Angus cattle, pedigree Shetland cows,

Cheviot and Shetland ewes. On the croft we have undertaken LMOs, farm woodland, SRDP and RSS activities.

In the past I have been a member of the local community council, chairman of the Caithness branch of the Crofters Union and I am a UNITE representative in my day job.

Roddy MacDonald



I am from Lochboisdale in South Uist. I took early retirement from Comhairle nan Eilean just over a year ago after working for the Economic Development department for 34 years.

During my time with the Comhairle I was involved in many aspects of crofting development including the Integrated Development Programme for the Western

Isles, construction of the two livestock markets in the Uists, slaughtering facilities, environmental schemes, CAP reforms, greylag goose problems as well as the setting up of The Scottish Crofters Union in the eighties.

I am an active crofter with a small sheep flock and take part in communal crofting activities in the area. I also assist with the management and running of the livestock auction market at Lochboisdale.

My previous involvement in the Federation of Crofters Unions and then with the Scottish Crofters Union has made me aware of the problems which affect crofting as well as the importance of a strong membership organisation to represent crofters locally, nationally and within the EC.

I hope that my past experience and knowledge will help the Scottish Crofting Federation to provide such a service to the membership in the future.

David Smith



I live with my wife and family in the South Mainland of Shetland.

My croft land is a combination of tenanted and short-term lease and extends to just over 50 hectares. I produce Suffolk cross lambs for the store market and have an SRDP introduction of cattle scheme which means I also have a couple of Shetland cows. I produce

silage and attempt to grow some barley for winter feed. Within the last few weeks I have begun the installation of a wind turbine which will hopefully produce an income as well generate electricity for the croft.

I have been a crofter all my adult life. I also spent many years running my own business. When my son was born, nearly ten years ago, I was lucky enough to be able to become a stay-at-home crofter dad. After the last Scottish elections I started working as a part-time constituency assistant to Jean Urquhart MSP and recently I accepted a part-time role working for Scottish Water.

I have a particular interest in the policy work which the Federation undertakes and I believe this must underpin everything which we, as an organisation, should be doing to benefit our members.

How you can help us

Members have a vital role in the SCF.

We pride ourselves on being a member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting. As members you should be willing to get involved, contribute your views, tell others of the benefits of membership and express your opinion on our activities – to help us achieve our mission to safeguard and promote the rights and livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities.

By doing any of these things, you will help the organisation to be better and stronger and so have a stronger voice for you and your communities. Membership of the SCF is an investment in the future of crofting.

How can you help us?

- encourage non-members to join;
- help promote the organisation and our activities;
- volunteer to organise local meetings, or help those doing this;
- attend local meetings;
- stand for election as an official and ensure your opinions are heard;
- become a crofting mentor.

Of course you do not need to do all of these all of the time, but the more involvement as a member that you have, the better the organisation will be.

To help you recruit new members we have introduced a new incentive. Any member introducing a new member will be entitled to

a 20% discount on their following year's subscription. Please contact HQ for more details about the new incentive.

Enclosed in this edition of *The Crofter* you will also find a small poster which we are encouraging members to put up in public places. This could be the local shop, mart, village notice board and even the local surgery – anywhere that will help promote the organisation, our activities and get the message out about the work that we are doing.

By representing the SCF in these ways you are helping the organisation have a stronger voice for crofting. If there is anything else that you feel you can contribute to our work we would be very happy to hear from you.

MEMBERSHIP FEATURE

Crofting Resources Programme concludes

THE PROGRAMME was about helping crofters make the most of their resources of land and people.

This was delivered by working with townships, crofting producer groups and individual crofters. Five new producer groups were formed with our assistance. Nineteen groups were helped with development projects, fifteen with training, and seven with SRDP applications. Twenty four townships were advised on development and access to support schemes. One provided the pilot study for the crofting community mapping project. Sixty-one individual new producers were assisted, and this led to the setting up of SCF's crofter mentoring scheme (see article elsewhere in this issue). We ran 25 training and information events as part of the programme, attended by a total of 399 crofters. Our SRDP advice helped approximately one hundred crofters to access support.

We made a major effort during the programme to promote Scottish Crofting Produce by raising the media profile, offering tastings at agricultural shows and developing a new product, The Crofters' Mutton Pie. The intention was to recruit more of our members into the scheme, but the result has been very disappointing. There are a number of reasons for this. One is the general economic situation which has made it difficult for producers to achieve a premium price for local produce. Another is that store livestock prices have been relatively buoyant, making it

more attractive to sell lambs and calves as store rather than move up the production chain to direct marketing. This effort will, however, continue. We have set up a trading company, Scottish Crofting Enterprise Ltd which is intended as a web-based marketing tool for members' produce and ancillary businesses, such as tourism and crafts.

We became more than ever conscious of the need for abattoir facilities in the islands and remote mainland areas to improve animal welfare, traceability and economic opportunities. This is particularly the case in the Skye and Lochalsh area and a spin-off from the programme has been a study, currently being done by SAC with SRDP funding, into options for small-scale slaughter facilities.

Another output of the programme was the *Taking Stock* study of crofters' stock clubs. This was seen as particularly important given the loss of stock from the hills and disuse of common grazings. The well-proven stock club model has succeeded in going against this trend. The report on the study can be found at www.crofting.org/uploads/consultations/stockclubs.pdf.

Our publication *Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters* was produced as part of the programme and has proved very popular. This 175-page book can be obtained from SCF head office. We also produced a printed version of *Managing Small Woodlands in the Highlands and Islands*, a guide for crofters and small landholders.

During the course of the programme we attended sixteen agricultural shows and trade events and the programme also funded one quarter of *The Crofter* journal. The Crofting Resources Programme was funded by the Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation.

Conclusions from the programme

Store livestock remains and will continue to be the largest output from crofts, the reason being that crofters are very good at it. Well-established marketing routes and infrastructure are in place for store livestock sales, whereas direct marketing requires long-term investment and commitment by individual businesses. We hope that our horticulture handbook and abattoir project will be valuable resources for the versatile and diverse crofting communities of the future.

The township assets strand of the programme, while successful, again highlighted the need for an integrated programme of development for the vast and underused land resource that exists in crofting, especially our common grazings.

At the end of any project on a crofting theme, one invariably arrives at the conclusion that, for the system and the land and communities it embraces to prosper, the absolute priority is to attract and retain new, younger crofters, hence our proposed follow-on project, *Crofting – the Next Generation*, as introduced on the front page of this issue.



MEMBERSHIP FEATURE

Putting it in perspective If you have a problem...

MEMBERSHIP of the SCF for an individual costs 90 pence a week – just £47 a year.

That modest investment brings you many benefits and enables the Federation to promote and protect the interests of crofters.

No other organisation has this single, specific purpose. The SCF is the only member-led organisation dedicated to the promotion of crofting and the largest association of small-scale food producers in the UK.

What does the SCF really do for crofters? Read on and you'll find out the extent of the work done by a few committed people on your behalf.

In addition to our work at national, UK and EU government levels to keep crofting to the forefront, as reported in various articles throughout *The Crofter*, and innovative projects to enhance crofting incomes, your subscription brings you help when you need it –

- advice and advocacy;
- a listening ear and pointers towards solutions when you have tried all other avenues;
- representations on your behalf when you have been refused that grant you were depending on;
- training and mentoring;
- the opportunity to market your croft produce through the SCF Crofting Mark;
- a discount scheme
- the SCF Croft Holidays scheme which helps promote your tourism business
- a network of contacts to share experiences and resources;
- local branches and individuals who provide a catalyst for community events and development;
- a developing young crofters network;

• Crofting Connections, which works with schools across the Highlands and Islands to educate our children about crofting;

• advice and assistance with community mapping and how to deal with the taxing process of entering crofts on the new Crofting Register;

• information on diversification and developing your croft business;

• a crofters insurance package developed for us by the NFU Mutual Insurance Society which covers all your croft and home insurance needs in a tailored package;

• local events and problem solving;

• spreading good ideas and information through *The Crofter*, by email and updates to members;

• a register of interest in crofts which puts members looking for a croft in touch with those who wish to dispose of a holding;

• crofters who wish to pass on their crofts are also able to use this service;

• useful publications such as the recent *Horticulture Handbook for Crofters* and *Managing Small Woodlands in the Highlands and Islands*.

All of this and much more is achieved on your behalf by a small team of staff working from the SCF's HQ in Kyle of Lochalsh, supported by a community of volunteers across the Highlands and Islands, headed by the SCF board.

All of this costs you only 90p a week. The same cost as the *Sornway Gazette*. Less than the cost of one loaf of bread a week, not much more than a pint of milk a week and about the same as two bottles of malt whisky a year. Where else can you find such excellent value for money?

IF NO ONE ELSE can help and if you can find them, maybe you can hire the A-Team.

But if your problem is about crofting then it might be better to phone the SCF team. And we are easy to find!

The mentoring scheme was reported in the last edition of *The Crofter*. This is really just formalising what has been done on an ad hoc basis for years as a service to members. The SCF has established a network of experienced crofters who have agreed to be available to members who want to discuss a particular topic. This may just involve a telephone call or an exchange of emails but could mean a visit to your croft for a more in depth site investigation. It is a way for people to access the cumulative experience of our membership and may be especially relevant if there is no-one in your area you can discuss it with.

If you are a member then you can phone HQ (01599 530005) and tell them what you want advice on. HQ will then put you in touch with someone who is experienced in that

subject and who – if possible – is geographically close to you. Topics covered in the past are: starting a market garden, keeping poultry and what sort of tourist businesses would work in a given location. But you could also ask about native cattle, shearing courses, keeping bees, planting woodland or almost anything.

The mentoring scheme focuses on skills and is about helping members develop their business. SCF will also advise members on case work dealing with crofting regulation, legal matters and grant schemes but only on the basis of layperson's advice. The mentoring scheme and casework are not a substitute for proper legal or veterinary advice: advice is given in good faith to the best of our ability by people who have been there and done that.

If this takes up a lot of time or travel then the mentor may ask for their expenses to be reimbursed; but generally one or two conversations may provide that bit of encouragement and reassurance that will get you moving on the new venture that you always meant to get going with.



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SCF membership categories

YOUR MEMBERSHIP is an investment in the future of crofting, and your support will strengthen the voice of crofters, crofting communities and the crofting way of life.

Did you know that we have four different membership categories? Whether you are an individual, couple or company we have something suitable for you.

Individual membership

An individual membership is available to all crofters and non-crofters alike and this is what the majority of our members have. Take a look at the list of membership benefits to make sure you are getting the most from your subscription.

Joint membership

A joint membership is available to two members who stay at the same residence. Both members

will receive the same benefits as an individual member but the second member will receive a 50% discount on his or her annual membership.

Associate membership

This is available for organisations, charities and now also grazings committees.

Associate membership of the SCF demonstrates your commitment to sustainable agriculture and that you are in sympathy with the SCF's work. It will help you raise your own profile, enhance your reputation and strengthen the awareness of your organisation. We can also help develop communications between organisations and strengthen networks. You receive four copies of *The Crofter* and promotion on our website, as well as receiving discounted corporate rates to our gatherings, training days and seminars.

If you would like more information about our associate membership please get in touch with HQ. As an associate member you will still have access to our vast network of experience and knowledge and you can enjoy the discount scheme offered by various suppliers in the crofting areas.

Life membership

The final category, life membership, is for anyone who wishes to support the organisation in the long term. If you are interested in this type of support please contact HQ for more information.

Honorary life membership has also been awarded to a number of outstanding members who have contributed greatly to the organisation over many years in recognition of their continued volunteering and support.

MEMBERSHIP FEATURE

Membership case work

OCCASIONALLY we outline anonymous examples of case work in *The Crofter*, where members have requested assistance.

Recently more and more members are asking for help in all sorts of matters from assignments to zealous landlords or neighbours (often not good ones!)

What can we do to help?

Get in touch with HQ. Simple enquiries might be answerable straight away over the phone. For slightly more complex cases you may be asked to put the issue in writing and state how you hope the SCF can help. This will help staff to assess how we can assist. Your case will be dealt with sympathetically. Your branch or area representative may also be able to assist, or another local member who may have been in a similar situation. We now have a list of mentors who can help with more practical issues. The HQ team should be able to help you locate the best person.

Please bear in mind however, that as much as we do try to help, SCF staff and volunteers are not qualified to give legal advice, so in some cases we may be not be able to give the necessary advice and will recommend contacting an accredited crofting lawyer, for which we can provide a contacts list.

New legal advice service

A new legal advisory scheme for members is being developed. Details will be announced in due course.

Predator debate

There is a keen debate over predator attacks on stock, such as lamb losses due to increasing populations of sea eagles.

In the last issue of *The Crofter* we invited members to email or post us details of incidents which would help us make a case to take to government. To date we have only received a few responses – not enough to make a convincing argument.

If this is something that affects you we need to hear from you **IN WRITING.**

Are you considering moving out of crofting?

If you have a croft you no longer use and wish to make it available to someone else, please get in touch with SCF HQ. We can help you find the right person to take it over.

Inroads to crofting through the register of interest

SINCE THE REGISTER of interest was created we have been inundated with calls, emails and letters from people who want to get their foot in the door to crofting.

If you are not aware of our register of interest already, it is a service available to members who are looking for a croft. The active register will ensure that you are informed about any crofts that become available in your chosen area(s). We are also tracking the number of enquiries that we have received. This will be used as evidence of the demand for crofts and will hopefully lead to the creation of more crofts as outlined in the SCF's strategy proposal in 2011.

Those on the register range from people who have been actively crofting land that is not their own to potential new entrants who

have heard about our register while attending our training courses, on-line or through the Crofting Commission.

We are informed about available crofts in different ways – from landlords, estate agents and the Crofting Commission. We then give this information to people on our register so they can assess the suitability of the croft for their needs and make direct contact with the appropriate person.

We also give advice to people on the register on the process of getting a croft, planning and decrofting a house site, if necessary, as well as providing sign-posting to information about available grants and other services available to people who are just starting out in crofting.

If you would like more information about the register of interest please contact Karen at HQ.



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Dear Sirs

We would like to thank you for writing about our case in the last issue of *The Crofter* in the article Help for our members.

James and I were more than grateful for the help the Crofting Federation gave us with our appeal. The letter written for our appeal by Donald Murdie provided us with hope and confidence which made us keep pushing our case to the Croft House Grant Scheme, even after our appeal was rejected! We were shown great support by him in emails which often provided light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

It had been suggested to us by CHGS officials that if we simply obtained more land then we would be given the grant, as our croft would be more viable. However

this was not an option for us. The one hectare that we have (be it small) has not been obtained easily! After we further broke down our business plans into cold hard figures and provided CHGS with letters of support from prospective customers we were finally awarded the grant. It was a great day for us and we both felt a huge sense of relief.

We have to thank Donald Murdie and also Billy Neilson, who showed enthusiasm for our plans and kept us focused at a time when we were close to giving up.

We have now managed to decroft our house site and are hopefully going to get a self-build mortgage sorted out very soon.

THANK YOU

James, Hilary and Connie

MEMBERSHIP FEATURE

News from SCF's Tiree branch

Alex MacArthur, branch secretary, reports on recent activities

IN COMPARISON to mainland Scotland Tiree basked in sunshine and dry weather this summer, with crofters remarking on the good ground condition and the crop of excellent silage.

Were it not for the damage inflicted by wild geese, the yield would have been much higher. Many have now ceased to plant potatoes for this reason. In March this year 7500 geese were counted on Tiree, on an island approximately 12 miles long by 3 miles wide. 40 years ago the winter population was around 120 birds. The branch has kept in regular contact with RSPB, SNH and others in an effort to see a reduction in the numbers.

RSPB Scotland responded that it shared our concern and actively sought and obtained funding to continue the island's goose management scheme. Nevertheless, the presence of birds saw three of four crofters' planning applications for wind turbines unable to proceed.

SNH also responded to crofters' complaints on damage caused by ravens and hooded crows to wrapped silage bales. Among a number of suggestions was that bales should be stored on their ends and a large eye painted on the top.

The branch received an assurance that the Croft House Grant Scheme administrative office on the island is not to close. This followed speculation in a Highland newspaper that the office was to move to Oban. Members felt that such a proposal would result in six good superannuated posts leaving the island. One member said we had lobbied long and hard with the Scottish Government to have the

office established on Tiree and if need be we must put up a fight to retain it.

SCF HQ had been contacted in relation to the delay by government in consolidating the 1993 and 2010 Crofting Acts. Crofters felt they would need to engage the services of a lawyer in many instances in order to decipher the contents of both in tandem; whereas if all the information was absorbed in the one document it would be a lot easier to follow.

RET withdrawal on HGVs continues to be a big issue. In a letter from Transport Scotland's policy officer Colin Grieve, the UK Government is blamed for the cuts imposed on the Scottish Government's budget. The letter goes on to state that Edinburgh is to give an extra £2.5M next year to support commercial vehicles using the Tiree, Coll and Western Isles routes.

Scottish Power Renewables (SPR), led on Tiree by former SCU branch chairman Donnie Campbell, is to build a massive offshore wind farm 5km off the west coast of Tiree. The project will have a generating capacity of 1.800MW, delivered through up to 500 turbines which could annually provide power to the equivalent of over one million homes.

Crofters were concerned that an overland power cable from the wind farm would involve digging through fields and disturbing underground stone drains. Members felt that SPR should, as a token of goodwill, resurface all the island's roads – 60 miles in all. SPR said they will consider the branch's suggestion.

In the interim SPR have set up a RESET fund, which is an initiative to better enable people with Tiree connections to gain skills from employment in the renewable energy industry. It is hoped crofters' families will be able to avail themselves of this worthwhile scheme.



Baling on Alex's croft, mid August. Note geese at right of picture.

Help us keep you informed

We invite members who have not already done so to give us their email addresses to add to our contacts list.

Simply sending an email to hq@crofting.org, with your membership number, enables us to add you to our contacts list so that we can send relevant news updates as they occur. Many members already benefit from this service.

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Winter meetings programme

AS WE WENT TO PRINT two branch and area meetings had taken place in November. We hope that everyone in the vicinity managed to attend.

The Lochcarron and Applecross branch hosted an evening in the local community hall to hear about SCF's community mapping pilot, which took place in Badrallach; and also the new crofting register.

Eilidh Ross was the guest speaker at the Inverness and East Highland Area meeting in Inverness. She gave an update on crofting legislation in 2012, covered succession, access and the right to buy as well as participating in a question and answer session along with Patrick Krause and Derek Flynn.

A number of other meetings are in the process of being arranged, including the Lochaber area meeting mid-January and a meeting in Lismore also mid-January. Please be sure to check the insert page for more information as well as our website and Facebook page.

More roots and branches

READERS MAY RECALL the article on the above in the last issue outlining the proposal to restructure our branches and areas. This is a brief update on progress and to refer members to the loose page insert with this issue, showing the proposed geographical spread of both branches and areas throughout the newly enlarged crofting areas.

The philosophy behind what is now proposed is to create fewer but larger branches to maximise the important role our volunteer supporters provide for the SCF. We believe that the present number of so many small branches will, over time, have a tendency to diminish and undervalue the efforts made by local representatives.

It is the view of the membership working group that, before this begins to happen, the Federation must find enough dedicated members to help lead these newly-created branches and become, as it were, the SCF's eyes and ears at grass roots level. Local contacts are vital to the function of this organisation.

Without relevant local information on a whole host of current crofting topics, our representatives are effectively hamstrung and lack the necessary authority to make a written case or speak at the many face-to-face consultation opportunities we have with government, EU and numerous agencies.

The paper insert with this issue is intended to show you the working group's proposals and we ask members to study this in the light of their own situation and against their own post-code sector and tell us if we have got this right or wholly wrong. Please call or preferably email HQ with your views. This way we can revisit, review and adjust, if necessary, before the proposals are finally set down. Your help in this exercise will be most appreciated.

John Bannister
Company secretary

MEMBERSHIP FEATURE

SCF helps with new crofts on Rum

Vikki Trefler, development officer on the island, explains

THREE NEW CROFTS were created on the Isle of Rum as part of the handover of land and assets from Scottish Natural Heritage to the Rum Community in 2009 and 2010.

Crofting was seen as a good way of attracting new people to the island and enabling some of our current residents to enter the crofting way of life. It was hoped that the Croft House Grant Scheme would help create new housing in a community with big aspirations for growth but little in the way of accommodation for those wishing to join us in our journey.

The Isle of Rum Community Trust employs a local development officer supported by the Highlands and Islands Enterprise community account management programme and it was at a CAM event in the autumn of 2011 that I heard about the Scottish Crofting Federation. Neither I nor any of the trust directors had any experience of crofting and all of us found crofting

legislation frankly confusing – a small piece of land surrounded by legislation seemed a very apt description. All we wanted was to make some land available to people who would then be able to access grants and make a wee bit of a living from the land.

The SCF offered a beacon of light in a murky ocean of confusion! We became associate members and they offered advice and even came over to the island to help us interview our prospective crofters. They gave us hope that the apparently impossible ground we'd been given for crofts was not in fact as bad as we thought. Donald bounded gleefully across what we'd assumed was a useless piece of boggy land, exclaiming "This is fine ground for a croft, better than some I've seen!"

We love reading *The Crofter* and it's reassuring to have the wealth of knowledge and experience provided by the SCF behind us. All three of our crofts are now let, and we're even considering creating a woodland croft – we'll no doubt be back on the phone for help with that in due course!

HAVE YOUR SAY

Bordans, Clashnessie, Assynt

Dear editor

Owner-occupiers of crofts (unless only interested in making house sites, as raised in your June column) will be interested to hear about the Land Court's recent decision in case SLC 121/11, in response to the Crofters Commission series of questions of 17 February 2011, especially where the decision confirms a break in future between owner-occupied crofts and grazing shares. That is, shares are not pertinent of such crofts, able to travel automatically with them when crofts change hands.

In this situation it seems ironical that at a time when the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 has brought owner-occupancy substantially into line with tenancy in respect of residence requirements and a burden of croft care, the assignment of shares will continue to be scrutinised by local opinion, which can be highly hostile to applications for the benefit of individuals who are not in favour with the incumbent grazings committee.

This has one interesting implication that is not addressed in the Crofting Commission's draft plan, where it aspires to increase the number of individuals willing and able to be involved with grazings committees (paragraph 32). It may be helpful to remind the Commission that for this to take effect, the eager, new individuals who are being sought have to become share-holders in the first place, so that they can at least attend election meetings and either volunteer to join the committee or nominate someone else.

In short, the aspect of existing legislation which specifies the interests of the community as a criterion for assignments can be positively poisonous in this connection.

On top of this, the Commission has been operating a procedure that I have not found in any of the Crofting Acts, to offer its own hearings even before an intervention – that is, a decision by the Commission to sustain objections to an application for assignment under Crofting Reform etc Act 2007 Section 3 (the section that revises the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 by adding a Section 58A (6)).

And notwithstanding that since 2007 the Commission has had a formal monopoly of consent, it has certainly listened to landlord representations to a degree verging on abdication, where the land-owner has been under effective control by grazing committees. A group of Crofters Commissioners were only shocked, in 2011, when it appeared to them that on one such estate, administration was more centralised and remote from the grass-roots even than this.

Also of interest is whether in certain townships the Commission's recent steps towards registering common grazings – in the first stage, confirmation of boundaries – will result in error being enshrined over the boundaries between grazings and contiguous crofts, to the detriment of crofters who, as non-shareholders, were left out of the consultation conducted by their grazing clerk.

Roger Kershaw



New croft on Rum



Coming soon to a croft on Rum?



find us online at www.crofting.org

ON THE CROFT

Seven steps to bring abandoned croft-land back into production

Janette Sutherland from SAC Portree advises

MANY PEOPLE are keen to bring abandoned or little-used croft land back into use.

The work required will depend on intended use. If you are a new entrant to crofting and have decided to take on an abandoned croft, here are some general practical steps to help get you started. Financial assistance may be available through CCAGS and is outlined below.

1. Work out what is on the ground at present

It is important that you walk the ground and take note of what is already there and its condition. For example:

Are there any existing improvements including stone dykes, fences, handling facilities or agricultural buildings? If so, do they require any repairs or replacement?



Active crofting in action. Do you need to consider drainage and reseeded to regenerate fields to achieve this?



Fences important for livestock management



Good drains are vital.

Does the croft have important habitats that should be protected both for their agricultural benefits or environmental importance? For example, woodland can offer excellent shelter for livestock and provide habitat for birds.

Are there habitats that could earn an income under an agri-environment scheme, such as species rich meadows or wetlands? It is important you check if your croft is in an area of environmental designation. Check on: <http://gateway.snh.gov.uk/sitelink>.

2. Boundaries

It is your responsibility to ensure your croft is stock-proof both to other crofts, common grazings and apportionments. Neighbours are jointly responsible for some boundaries and you will need to ask your neighbours or grazing clerk for more information. Good fencing is the key to happy neighbours and support is available under CCAGS (operation 7). When fencing boundaries could you plant a shelter-belt to provide long-term shelter on your croft?

3. Drainage

The first step is to assess all drains/open ditches and check they are running well and clear them if required. If you have wet areas or patches of standing water, this will require further investigation to either fix an existing drainage scheme or consider putting in a new one. Help is available with the cost of drainage works through CCAGS (operation 4). Livestock, especially cattle, crossing ditches can often lead to erosion of ditch walls and diffuse pollution, so consider fencing off ditches wherever practical.

4. Access

Many croft access tracks were made when all croft work was carried out by hand or with very small tractors. Do you need to consider improving access tracks onto the croft for modern tractors or ATVs? CCAGS grant is available for this (operation 10).

5. Soil sampling

All crofting agriculture, whether it is livestock or horticulture, is dependent on well-managed soil. Sampling your soil to find out the current pH, phosphorus and potassium status is essential to plan a programme for managing and enhancing the agricultural yields from the ground. Consult your local SAC office for suggestions of specific tests for certain vegetable crops etc. CCAGS funding is available for grassland improvement and restoration works (operation 3). If the ground has not been worked for a long time you should apply for an environmental impact assessment before starting any reseeded works.

6. Liming

If your soils have low pH and require lime, consider working in collaboration with neighbours to share bringing in a load of lime and the hire of equipment to spread it. This can save significant amounts of money.

7. Buildings

Buildings are the biggest capital item on most crofts; therefore they should be carefully planned. It is well worth visiting other crofters'

sheds to find out what works well and what they would change. Of ever-growing importance is to ensure that the building's location and design does not produce excessive amounts of diffuse pollution. If you have a field midden from livestock bedding you should ensure that it is 10m from any ditches or watercourses and 50m from any springs or boreholes.

When planning animal livestock buildings make sure you consider animal welfare. Poor ventilation can increase pneumonia risk. Also remember human health and safety in relation to pen design; even the quietest animals can become agitated when injured and your safety should be paramount.

Taking on abandoned croft land is a major project. However your local SAC office is there to advise and help at every step of the process.



Crofts with incorporated shelter from trees.



Active grassland management

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

Ready for winter?

The Scottish Government has published a document called Safer Scotland – Getting Ready for Winter and a health and safety information note. Both can be obtained from the local SGRPD office. Local SAC offices are also handing out the health and safety note.



Action to protect ash trees

A CONTROL strategy for Scotland's ash trees threatened with Chalara, the die-back disease, has been implemented.

Forestry Commission Scotland will:

- provide advice on management of mature infected ash trees;
- identify resistant mature ash which could be used to develop new resistant strains to restock woodlands;
- investigate woodland management techniques to help slow down the spread of the disease and lessen its impact;
- identify isolated locations protected from windborne spread of spores to use as a refuge for ash;
- develop a feasible and affordable approach to dealing with infected young ash on newly-planted sites;
- continue to survey surrounding infected sites.

The next phase will involve working closely with all of the land managers in Scotland – and the public – to monitor the disease, report it wherever it is found and deal with it and identify resistant mature trees.

With the disease now present in the wider environment,

eradication – which would involve the wholesale destruction of mature ash trees and woodlands and widespread damage to the wider ecosystem – is not a realistic option.

Mature infected ash can survive for ten or twenty years and some trees may have a genetic resistance to the disease – a resistance that could be propagated in new strains of Chalara-resistant ash that can be used to help restock Scottish woodlands.

There is no need to take immediate remedial action because the Chalara infection is only transmitted in the summer months. Individuals can greatly assist efforts to slow the spread of the disease if they take simple precautions and ensure they do not carry leaves or other plant matter on their boots or equipment.

The disease has a widely dispersed range across the country and has been found in several new planting sites as well as in mature trees at two sites. As we went to press, Carrbridge was the nearest infected area to crofting locations.

For more information on Chalara, how to spot symptoms and who to report concerns to, visit www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara.

Liver fluke – be on your guard this year!

Dr Philip Skuce from Moredun Research Institute provides some timely advice

LIVER FLUKE is a highly pathogenic flatworm parasite of sheep and cattle and the potential losses caused can be very high.

Livestock become infected by ingesting liver fluke cysts, shed by infected mud snails, while grazing on pasture.

Liver fluke is very much affected by temperature and rainfall as it spends much of its life-cycle outside the host. As a result of the very wet summer most of the UK has experienced this year, the industry-led SCOPS (Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep) initiative has launched a liver fluke alert (see www.scops.org.uk for details) to raise awareness and to provide advice as we enter peak fluke season, from October onwards.

Treatment of liver fluke infections

Liver fluke control still relies heavily on the use of flukicidal drugs. There are a variety of products on the market. Some are available as straight flukicides, others in combination with wormers – see www.noahcompendium.co.uk and www.scops.org.uk for details. It is important to remember that not all products kill all stages of fluke. It is therefore vital to ensure the correct product is used at the correct time so that the liver fluke stages most likely to be present in stock at that moment are killed.

Triclabendazole is still the drug of choice for treating acute fluke infections because it has the broadest kill range, from young immature fluke to adult. However, there are now confirmed cases of TCBZ-resistant fluke in the UK so alternative products may need to be considered.

Triclabendazole- (unless there is confirmed/suspected resistance), closantel- or nitroxylin-based products would be good options for autumn-winter treatments as the fluke present are likely to be young/immature. In late spring/summer, flukicides that kill adult stages would be preferred, with the intention of stopping the adult fluke from laying eggs and contaminating pasture but also to help take the pressure off the aforementioned products.



Adult fluke escaping from the bile duct of a sheep at post mortem.

Further Advice
When devising a control strategy it is important to consider your croft's fluke history and the implications of regional weather patterns. Detection and early diagnosis of fluke, either by post-mortem examination, abattoir returns, or from faecal egg counts, is vital to help minimize losses. Management options such as fencing and drainage should also be considered, where practicable, to help reduce exposure of stock to potential snail habitats.

In all cases, it is advisable to follow best practice when treating animals and where possible, ascertain how well any treatment has worked by conducting a post-drench efficacy test.

And finally, quarantine treatment and suitable pasture management are considered best practice advice to prevent bringing fluke onto your property with bought-in stock.

Dr Philip Skuce is a principal research scientist at Moredun Research Institute, near Edinburgh. If you would more information about controlling liver fluke in sheep, including a free 12 page newsheet, please contact The Moredun Foundation on 0131 445 5111 or log onto their website www.moredun.org.uk.



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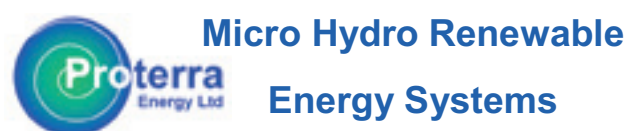
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ON THE CROFT

Shetland lamb repeats success in Great Taste awards

FOR THE SECOND year running Briggs' Shetland Lamb has been awarded a gold two star award. Over 8,000 food products were judged in 2012 and a gold two star award puts Shetland seaweed lamb in the top 10 per cent.

Commenting on his award, Richard Briggs said: "This is a great boost for native shetland lamb. For this particular entry I must give credit to my friend and mentor Agnes Leask from whose flock the entry was sourced. I would also like to thank the Shetland Livestock

Marketing Group, who run the abattoir in Shetland. Without this facility I would not have a business."

Briggs' Shetland Lamb sells lambs straight off the pasture where they were raised. The quality of the meat can be attributed to the natural environment and traditional croft husbandry of native breed of sheep in Shetland. The French have a word for this, terrior.

Native Shetland Lamb is available for delivery to Shetland and UK mainland postcodes from www.briggs-shetlandlamb.co.uk.



Richard and Agnes working sheep at Cott

Dates for your diary

KEEP YOUR FARMING calendar up to date with our guide below, put together in partnership with Scotland's Environmental and Rural Services.

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.

Census forms for the annual December survey of main agricultural holdings were issued on 23 November. The deadline for completion and return is 17 December.

Forms for the annual survey of tenanted land have also now been issued, with a deadline for completion and return of 11 January.

The annual sheep and goat inventory form is posted out to keepers in December. The stock present on each of the holdings

farmed (as at 1 January 2013) must be entered on the inventory form and returned in the pre-paid envelope no later than 1 February 2013. Completion of the annual inventory is a legal requirement.

Any sheep or goat keepers who did not receive an inventory form should contact their local SGRPID area office and request a blank form for completion.

On 31 January 2013 the Scottish Government will publish the 2012 Farm Income Estimate, including 2012 Total Income From Farming (TIFF) estimates and results of Farm Business Income (FBI) from the 2011/12 Farm Accounts Survey.

Further to last year's announcement payment information can also now be viewed online for the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme and Land Managers Options.

For more information on SEARS visit www.sears.scotland.gov.uk

Back a non-GMO blight- beating potato

A NORTH WALES potato breeder is raising backing on the internet for a promising line of non-GM blight-resistant potatoes.

The Sárvari Research Trust's rugged Sárpo line already has nationally-listed varieties, but the costs of testing for a further listing is daunting. "Plant breeders are paying, paying, paying," Sárvari Trust's David Shaw explained, "even though a commercial launch is still years away. Wheat or barley breeders can get hundreds of seeds when multiplying, but with potatoes, you get back six or seven useable seed potatoes for every tuber you plant."

The current Sárpo lines are successfully grown in North Wales. They are deep-rooting, have high yields and do not need refrigerated storage.

By the end of October, more than £5,000 had been pledged online. Unlike biotech development projects, there are no government handouts.

According to GMWatch*, the John Innes Centre has secured £1.7 million in public funding for a GM potato project, even

though there are already non-GM alternatives out in the field. Literally. What is more, they do not depend on chemical sprays to keep blight at bay.

Given the loading of crop treatments used on intensive crops, Shaw describes industrial potatoes as a "dirty crop." He explains that the modern potato varieties found in supermarkets owe their visual appeal to high chemical inputs.

"Blight is still evolving," he warns, adding that fresh varieties are needed for low-input holdings where chemical treatments add to the expense of growing a staple crop.

Visit the website at <http://sarvari-trust.org/>

Top up the crowd-funding at <https://www.buzzbnk.org/ProjectDetails.aspx?projectId=84>

*<http://www.gmwatch.org/latest-listing/51-2012/14196-non-gm-blight-resistant-spuds-in-danger>

Peter Crosskey, UK web
correspondent
The Agricultural and Rural
Convention

Driving forward woodland crofts

THREE community-based organisations have joined forces in a new push to promote and develop woodland crofts.

The SCF, the Community Woodlands Association and the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust plan a number of measures over the coming months.

These include a woodland crofts register of interest, to match up those who wish to obtain a woodland croft with those who have them to offer – or plan to develop them. The expectation is that the evidence provided by the register will help stimulate the creation of new woodland crofts.

A dedicated website for woodland crofts – www.woodlandcrofts.org – will cover not just the legalities and practicalities of woodland crofts but also the philosophy: why small-scale, holistic management of woodland under crofting tenure can be an answer

to many of the pressing rural problems of the 21st century.

Three knowledge-share events took place over the autumn as we went to press, each hosted by one of the project partners and highlighting a particular woodland crofts theme. The next issue of *The Crofter* will report on these.



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

Mary's memories

THESE TWO little books by Mary Keith, subtitled *Nursing in Jura 1963-1993* and *Living and crofting at Keils, Jura*, present an entertaining reminder of life in a west-coast island crofting community in the second half of the last century.

The author was a key figure in Jura during her thirty years as district nurse and midwife, a period in which the NHS was changing, as was the island itself. When Mary first started nursing there were 31 children from babies to school age. After eleven years that number had declined to just a few. Mary herself had to travel to Glasgow to give birth by boat, bus, then train. When the seas were rough a lifeboat was used.

Mary Keith's modest recounting of her sometimes hair-raising adventures and achievements around the island and trips to the mainland, plus the pictures she paints of local characters and their foibles, makes a fascinating

read. As district nurse, Mary was on call 24 hours a day, every day of the week. In addition to midwife services, she provided the "last offices".

Mary's crofting recollections in the second book start in the days before electricity, phones or many cars on Jura. Some homes had no running water inside.

Every day she hand milked four cows, before



the advent of a small milking machine. There is an amusing tale of Mary's mother having to wear Mary's coat before one cow would let her milk down to the unaccustomed milkmaid.

The eternal cycle of the crofting year is detailed, with neighbours helping each other at lambing, planting and lifting tatties, peat cutting, hay making – first with a horse-drawn cutter which was later converted to be pulled behind a tractor.

The book ends with a collection of humorous sayings of local character Donald Black.

Even those who do not know the Isle of Jura will find much to love in these books. They will make an ideal Christmas stocking present for anyone interested in the Highlands and Islands and crofting, and are available for £6 each directly from Mary Keith at:

Braigh Bhaille
6, Keills, Craighouse
Isle of Jura Tel: 01496 820 214

Crofting Connections: the Kenyan connection

Pam Rodway reports

HUGHIE DONALDSON, Karen MacRae and Maria Scholten represented SCF at Salone del Gusto/Terra Madre this October.

The spectacular global exhibition showcased some of the world's best foods saved by Slow Food through the Ark of Taste and the Presidia.

The highlight of the SCF stand was a display and tasting of four Ark of Taste products with crofting roots – beremeal bannocks, Shetland reestit mutton, Shetland cabbage and Shetland black tatties.

We were delighted to renew our contact with Samuel Muhunyu, leader of the Kenyan delegation and head of NECOFA (Network for Ecological Farming in Africa), who had met Norman Leask and Neil MacLeod at Terra Madre 2008. Samuel was looking for a project with which to link the NECOFA school gardens initiative, so we told him about Crofting Connections. In November 2010, Samuel visited Crofting Connections schools in the Highlands and Orkney and attended the Crofting Connections reception in the Scottish Parliament.

The school gardens in Kenya initiative aims to encourage positive attitudes to food, agriculture and the environment and a greater understanding of the connection of all three among the nation's youth. It teaches sustainable agriculture and food nutrition as the basis for creating stable livelihoods in

communities across Kenya. The gardens also act as demonstration and seed multiplication centres for the entire community, thus contributing towards food security and biodiversity conservation. The project was initiated by NECOFA in collaboration with the Slow Food central rift convivium and the Slow Food foundation for biodiversity in 2005.

In Kenya agriculture contributes about 40% to GDP and provides employment to over 70% of the national workforce. However, it is not given sufficient emphasis in school curriculum; and over 50% of the youth leaving schools without continuing in further education end up in rural areas unprepared for a career as small-scale farmers. Students are encouraged to replicate the school garden activities at home, bringing benefits of increased food security to the entire community.



Kenyan head teacher Amos Gachuki and project leader Samuel Muhunyu enjoying crofting hospitality at Terra Madre 2012

Both Crofting Connections and the NECOFA school gardens initiative work with schools in remote rural areas, where agriculture and horticulture, including small-scale subsistence farming and crofting, account for a large part of the local economy. The two projects have several aims in common.

The schools partnership will enable pupils in both projects to link their local community involvement with wider global issues, including the challenges of climate change and to generate international understanding. Schools have already started to make links with each other online and we hope to arrange exchange teacher visits, starting in 2013.

So, at Terra Madre 2012, Hughie Donaldson and I met with members of the Kenyan delegation – Samuel Muhunyu, Jane Karanja, Kenyan school gardens project coordinator, Maasai chief Samuel Sekeu from Baringo, Agnes Salim from the remote Mau forest community and Amos Gachuki, one of the head teachers, to discuss the next steps. We enjoyed the Shetland Ark of Taste products, with Hibernator Ale from Black Isle Brewery, reaching across the world in a gesture of hospitality to ensure that a new generation of young people can face the challenges of the 21st century in rural communities.

Ark of Taste – www.slowfood.org.uk/ark_areas/ark-scotland
Salone del Gusto/Terra Madre see <http://salonedelgustoterramadre.slowfood.com>
NECOFA Kenya – <http://necofakenya.wordpress.com/about>



Terra Madre 2012 - Shetland reestit mutton, Shetland cabbage and beremeal bannocks from the Ark of Taste

Sguaban arbhair

BHON A CHAIDH dealbh de sguaban arbhair a chur ri taobh an artagail mu dheireadh agam, bha mi smaointinn gun sgrìobhainn air arbhair an turas seo!

Nach e rud samhlaichail a tha san arbhar? Mar a thuir an sean fhacal: 'S e an t-ullachadh a ni buileachadh, à treabhadh thig na sguaban, à sguaban thig na h-adagan, à adagan na cruachan. Sin prìomh obair an àiteachais, siol a chur airson arbhar a bhuain san fhoghar. Tha mi an-diugh a' faireachdainn fortanach gu bheil cuimhne agam air an obair sin fhaicinn san dòigh tradaiseanta, arbhair ga bhuain le binder no eadhon le speal, no le inneal-geàrraidh corragach nuair a bha thu am feum na sguaban a cheangail le bann de sràbhan.

Bha thu an uair sin a' cur sia no uaireannan ochd sguaban suas an aghaidh a chèile nan adag, agus nuair a bha mise ga dhèanamh ann an Eilean Idhe comhla ri fear Jimmy Beaton bhitheamaid a' cur bann eile

mun cuairt air an rud air fad. Bha e mar sin rudeigin seasmhach an aghaidh na gaoithe, agus ghabhadh a chur ann an toitean (huts) nuair a bha e gu ìre mhòr air tiormachadh. Sheasadh an arbhar mar sin gus am biodh e uile gu lèir tioram agus a ghabhadh cruachan a dhèanadh dheth a bhiodh dìonach an aghaidh stoirmean a gheamhraidh.

'S fhada bho bha daoine a' bleith an t-sil airson min, agus mar sin chan fhaca mise arbhar ga bhualadh ach a mhàin le muilnean mòra agus na h-innealan buana "combine" a chì thu sna h-achaidhean eòrna an taobh an ear Alba. A rèir Osgood MacCoinnich, a' sgrìobhadh aig toiseach na ficheadamh linn, bha an cleachdadh air dol à bith ann an Geàrrloch – "s gann gu bheil bolla mine ga bhleith air croit sam bith an-diugh agus tha na muilnean a' tuiteam as a chèile".

'S gann gu bheil siol coirce no eòrna ga chur idir sa Ghaidhealtachd an-diugh gun

luaidh air a bhleith. Chì sinn ge-tà corra chroitear a' cur agus a' buain le taic-airgid bho na sgeimichean àrainneachd, ach sin gus na h-eòin leithid nan gealagan buachair a bhrosnachadh. An àite sgeime àrainneachd, nach biodh e na bu fhreagarraich sgeime taic-airgid

cultarach a bhith ann gus na cleachdanan tradaiseanta ath-bheothachadh? An uair sin an dèidh bualaidh is bleith, ghabhadh aran-coirce agus aran eòrna dèanamh. Beò shlàinte do chroitearan a bharrachd air na h-eòin!

Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain



New shoots essential to sustainable development

RECLAIM THE STREETS youth activists in urban areas campaign for collective ownership of public spaces. Across Europe, Reclaim the Fields is emerging as a constellation of young people and collective projects willing to go back to the land and reassume control over food production.

At the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) youth meeting in Strasbourg last November a presenter explained a proposal that eliminated all youth unemployment with a swift and thorough transformation of EU agriculture policy to support food sovereignty. So what is getting in the way of young people's desires to achieve sensible policy outcomes? **Access, cost, graft, return and perception!**

In January 2010 ECVC published its vision for the CAP post 2013: *Towards a Common Agriculture and Food Policy 2013*, within a food sovereignty framework including three broad areas for redesigning agriculture: 1) Ensure access to food for all people; 2) Respond to the challenge of employment; and 3) Reduce global warming and save

biodiversity. The third priority in the proposed reform of the CAP is about supporting young and first-time farmers with access to land.

Meanwhile the European Parliament published a paper this September looking at EU measures to encourage and support new entrants. There is an acknowledgement that current support structures have not worked and new thinking is needed. Facilitating a young rural ecology that retains young people in rural areas must go beyond short-term schemes or a focus on land. There needs to be real distribution of decision-making, a diversifying of stereotypes, as well as strategic and infrastructure development.

The Fife diet food manifesto for Scotland brings the ECVC struggles to life – connecting our food production to climate change; environmental issues to health and well-being; and underpinning it with shared values. Point 2, the right to grow, is a call for making vacant land available for food production a focus in policies – what then of good croft land going to housing? Point 14 is farm apprenticeships; point 15 is school farms; both areas addressed

through SCF with the Skills Development Scheme, Crofting Resources Programme and Crofting Connections. Point 16 proposes a farm corps gap year for young people not in education, employment or training; and point 13 – new food indicators – includes the idea of progress marked by the number of new farmers.

To that end we must increase targeted, responsive, support to young people who have a desire to make a life and a living in rural areas. This of course includes opening up access to land – SCF's 10,000 new crofts by 2020 strategy is a fine start – and affordable homes, as well as trailing an ever increasing diversity of agri-ecology. But it also means listening to young people, urban and rural, about the desires they have to be part of a new food economy.

*Susan Garde Pettie
Fhaoilinn Croft
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Maasai chief Samuel Sekeu, project coordinator Jane Karanja and project leader Samuel Muhunyu enjoying crofting hospitality at Terra Madre 2012

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Rewarding help on the croft

Christine Martin describes the benefits of using wwoofers on her family croft in Breakish, Isle of Skye.

WE HAVE FRIENDS who take in wwoofers on the east coast and when we were talking to them about the amount of work we had to do on our croft they told us how helpful it was to have wwoofers.

The wwoof philosophy of sharing skills and lifestyles is very important. This made it work well for us and is what the wwoof organisation promotes for hosts and participants. Wwoof does not discriminate between those who are farming organically for sale and those who are farming ecologically for self sufficiency.

In addition to our music publishing business, on our croft we have two cows with followers, five beehives and hens. We have an extensive vegetable and fruit garden with two polytunnels and two greenhouses as well as outside beds and we sell vegetables in the summer. Sometimes we also have a pig to rear for meat and we also fatten up a stirk every second year for our own beef. We also have trees that need thinning and brashing and wood to chop from the thinned trees. We have fences to mend and peats to cut as well as buildings to maintain.

We duly signed up as wwoof hosts for a £30 fee. The participants also pay £20 to join. Wwoofers expect good food and accommodation and they tend to eat a lot as they are young and expend a lot of energy on your croft! But for this they will work between four and six hours a day for five days a week free.

Our first wwoofer had a chainsaw licence. He brashed and thinned all our trees and then tidied up and chopped our logs for our 2010 winter wood supply. During the spring/summer of 2010 we had another seven wwoofers to stay at different times. This year, 2012, we had 15 wwoofers.

The wwoof handbook has a profile of our interests and lifestyle. We have found our working guests very compatible, interesting and hardworking young people from many countries, who are using wwoof as a way to travel and experience life in other European countries. Sometimes we speak to them on the phone first, though these days visits are usually arranged by email. We have not taken on all those who requested to come,

as it depends on the work we need done. We include them in our family activities so that they have had a real sample of life on a croft on Skye.

Most want to learn and will work alongside you but we have had a few who have been very skilled and saved us a lot of money. One was a trained fitter. He was interested in mending and servicing any machinery on the croft and in building jobs. He rebuilt a greenhouse we had been given in a dismantled state. In no time he had the whole 16ft x12ft greenhouse up and ready to use for autumn planting.

If you feel you need help on the croft, then being a wwoof host could be for you. They are short of hosts on the west coast and we can really recommend them. Apart from all the help we received, we met interesting young people and learned a lot about other cultures.

If you'd like to know more about our experiences, please contact SCF HQ, who can email you some extra information I have put together.

www.wwoof.org.uk



WWOOF UK

World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms



WWOOF is a network connecting farmers, growers and smallholders with volunteers who want to learn about low-impact, self-sufficient and organic living first-hand.

- Volunteers help hosts in return for food, accommodation, knowledge and hands-on experience

- Hosts get to meet like-minded people from around the world and gain valuable extra help on the land

For more information and to join as a host or volunteer visit
www.wwoof.org.uk



A wwoofer's experience

Gav and Laura Copland describe their wwoofing adventures.

To someone who lives and works in the Highlands or on the Western Isles, it's not hard to explain what drove us to leave our jobs and come wwoofing up north; every crofter we've stayed with and worked for has known exactly why we came here.

When we tried to explain to folk back home most of them would roll their eyes and make some crass comment about "the good life", but they have not seen the Highlands yet. They haven't begun to understand the quiet dignity of the men and women we've met, who work their crofts where the mountain touches the ocean. Many work land their families have worked but many, as we hope to be, have been more recent additions to the story of crofting. Work being the operative word here, mind. The crofting we have experienced has definitely not been an antiquated oddity – neither a part of the heritage industry nor an unproductive lifestyle choice.

The jobs we had been doing in our old lives no longer felt quite enough for us, but it seemed the only way my wife and I could have stayed at home and worked on the land would have been to apply for the tenancy of one of the 200-acres-plus estate farms. The days of long-term tenancy farming seem to be drawing to a close though, and

many of the neighbouring farms of the farm where I worked were facing a yearly battle to meet their rents and an insecure future, despite the recent rallying in the lamb and wool markets.

We weren't sure where our future lay, but by chance I heard about the SCF's introduction to crofting course in March 2012 and signed up to it. It was a superb weekend, where I learnt a terrific amount about traditional and modern aspects of crofting and met some really inspirational people – some already crofting and some in a position similar to our own.

We didn't look back after that, and planned a year of wwoofing on crofts in the Highlands and Western Isles, which began in August. Our criteria for choosing our hosts were fairly simple. We wanted a good geographical spread so we could see as many of the crofting counties as possible. We wanted to find a good mix of small-scale pastoral and arable activities to learn from; to visit active crofting communities – and we wanted to stay with families to see how crofters balanced the demands of the land, their children and often other employment.

Our travels so far have taken us to Rum, to Lewis and to Skye and up and down the coast of Sutherland. We have stayed with some fantastic people and made many friends – including not a few pet lambs,

assorted dogs, Geordie neighbours and an opera-loving cat. We've worked alongside hosts who have really gone the extra mile for us – teaching us, amongst other things, butchery, dry-stane dyking, how to fence when the water table is only a foot below the surface, a smattering of Gaelic and important lessons about the history of the places we've stayed.

On our days off we've walked in the Cuillins on Skye, had moving visits to the remains of villages demolished by the clearances, sat in wonder amidst the frenetic Gaelic chatter at Stornoway lamb sales and helped round up the Department Bull.

Most of all though, we've been enthused and encouraged at every step to join the crofting community. We don't yet know where we'll settle. I think we've left every village we've stayed in a little bit in love with it, but I have no doubt that our future lies in the crofting tradition, amongst the men and women of mountain, glen and ocean.

If we stay on a croft near you, do come and say hello!

Stop press: The Isle of Rum Community Trust have offered us the tenancy of a croft on Rum! I didn't think our wwoofing adventures would be coming to a close so quickly, but we're very excited to be able to crack on with our own croft now.



Insurance for crofters

In today's highly litigious society, even crofters need insurance to protect themselves from potentially ruinous claims.

NFU Mutual's Tim Price looks at the risks. It can sometimes come as a surprise to crofters that their most important insurance consideration is not protection for their livestock or buildings, but liability insurance to cover the risk of being held liable for injuries to people, or damage to their property.

Today's compensation culture means that many injuries or damages, which would once have been accepted as 'bad luck' but no-one's responsibility, nowadays can lead to claims for thousands – or even millions – of pounds in damages. And, without insurance protection this sort of claim and its associated legal costs could lead to bankruptcy. A wide range of incidents involving crofting can lead to expensive liability claims. Straying livestock have been known to cause serious road accidents which have led to compensation claims running into millions of pounds, while a few head of cattle trampling a neighbour's prized garden can easily bring in a bill for several thousand pounds. Another risk is of stock straying and getting into neighbour's fields and damaging crops, injuring their livestock, or servicing stock with expensive

consequences for carefully planned breeding programmes.

Potential problems

Injuries caused to members of the public by man-made features such as barbed wire, farm machinery or a stile in ill-repair can also be held to be the crofter's responsibility. It's up to you to ensure that paths are safe to walk on, that unfriendly livestock are nowhere near areas with public access and that passers-by are kept away from potentially hazardous activities such as tree felling, machinery movements or spraying.

Employers' Liability

While the risks of claims from a member of the public are widely known, crofters are not aware that anyone 'helping out' can be viewed in law as an employee in the event of an accident – whether they are paid or not. In fact, every business in the UK is required by law to put in place Employers' Liability insurance for its full-time and casual workers – whether or not they have a formal contract of employment.

This means Employers' Liability insurance must be held by every business which has a regular employee or uses casual or seasonal labour. This is an important issue for small businesses to

consider because courts may rule that anyone undertaking work under your direction is, at that time, an employee. Genuine contractors, who are carrying out work for you in the course of their business will not usually need to be regarded as employees – but should have their own liability insurance in place.

Liability claims can be very expensive – particularly if one or more people are seriously injured and require ongoing care following an accident. For this reason even a small business would be wise to have both employers liability / public and product liability insurance.

For information on NFU Mutual's business, home, and vehicle insurance or its life, pensions, and investments contact the Isle of Skye NFU Mutual branch on 01478 611936. Your enquiry may result in a call from an NFU Mutual Financial Consultant, who advises on NFU Mutual products and services and in special circumstances those of other providers.



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Agent of The National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited.

The deer code

IF YOU OWN OR MANAGE land where there are deer, or manage wild deer on someone else's land, the deer code applies to you.

The code applies to all species of deer in all habitats.

The deer code applies to any crofter who shoots deer on land they own or manage – for example, marauding deer on farmland and crops.

Responsibilities come with the right to shoot, control and manage deer. These include:

- deer welfare;
- to consider your neighbours' responsibilities;
- to collaborate with your neighbours to develop a joint plan.

The extent to which the deer code applies to you depends on the number of deer and what they are doing, how frequently and when. The code is there to give you guidance and support.

It supports the voluntary approach to sustainable deer management by setting out:

- how to work together;
- an overview of everyone's responsibilities to deer and their management;
- actions which must, should and could be followed;
- where to find further practical guidance and advice;
- how and when SNH can become involved in deer management, including regulation.

This deer code came into effect on 1st January 2012. It is a statutory code, which means it's not an offence to breach the code. However your application of the deer code will be taken into account if regulation becomes necessary.



The code sets out what those with deer on their land must, should and could do.

"Musts" set out the legal obligations. Everyone is responsible, irrespective of the scale of their involvement, to be familiar and comply with these. An example of a "must" is that to shoot deer out of season you must apply for an out-of-season authorisation. "Shoulds" set out what needs to be done to avoid the risk of regulation – for example, work with others to reduce road safety risks. "Coulds" set out good practice in deer management – for example, promoting venison to local schools.

Actions relevant to crofters include: 'Take account of other economic activities when managing wild deer' and 'Take account of the impacts of your management activities on welfare of deer'. All of these actions have been taken from Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-wildlife/managing-deer/wdna/.

Wild deer best practice guides: the deer code points to relevant guides for detailed practical and technical advice. www.bestpracticeguides.org.uk.

For further information on the deer code: www.snh.gov.uk/deercode or contact deercode@snh.gov.uk.

For details on authorisations: www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/species-licensing/deer/authorisations, or contact wildlifeops@snh.gov.uk.

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The ideal Christmas present

Horticulture – a handbook for crofters

WRITTENBY experienced growers, three of them practicing crofters, the handbook presents all the information required by new and experienced growers. Beautifully illustrated, the book comes in a convenient loose-leaf style in a ring binder with space for you to add your own pages of notes, cropping plans etc.

The handbook provides a guide for growers in the challenging conditions of the islands and the

northern and western seaboard of the mainland, as well as central highland areas with their high altitudes and long, bitter winters. Taking into account soil and climatic conditions across the entire crofting area, the book advises on appropriate sowing and planting times.

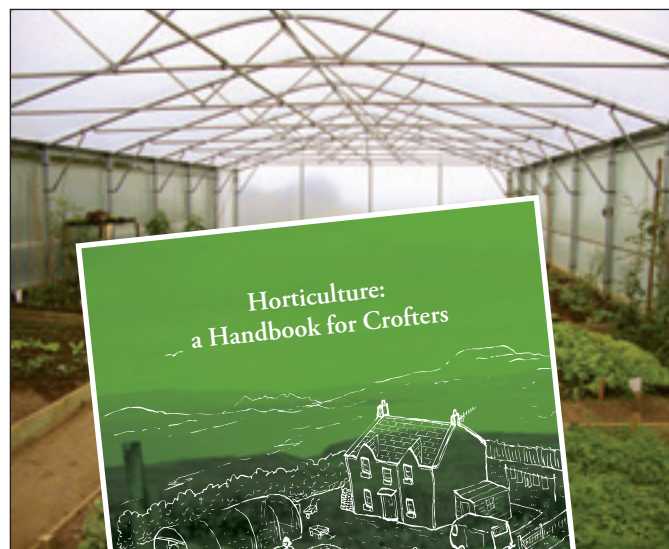
Building and maintaining soil fertility and methods to control pests and diseases are all covered, favouring low-input and sustainable, if not actually organic, methods. Machinery is discussed; polytunnels and other structures for protected growing; marketing and adding value;

availability of grant schemes; and forming groups for mutual support. There is guidance on specific crops and case studies on established growers.

"We hope to prove beyond doubt the case for crofting horticulture and help to bring about a step change in local food production," one of the authors states. "In the economic and environmental circumstances we face, the sustainability of island and remote mainland communities will more and more depend on self-sufficiency in goods and services, especially food."

Available to SCF members for £10 and non-members for £15, plus postage if necessary. Please contact SCF HQ to order your copy.

Horticulture – a handbook for crofters forms a major part of the SCF's Crofting Resources Programme, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Scottish Government, The European Union and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.



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