

★ ★ Welcome to Crofter

100

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT!

To commemorate the achievement of 100 issues of this unique publication, we invited two previous editors to offer their thoughts. We start here with Jim Hunter, followed by John Toal on page 3. Both throw down challenges to the SCF and the agencies we work with.

In addition to reflecting on our origins we are, as always, looking ahead – at energy generation and conservation; the importance of

genetics in breeding cattle; opportunities for young crofters and new entrants; the shape of the new CAP; croft registration; crofters and computers; and the rest.

We have a tribute to one of crofting's best-known characters, the late Allan MacRae of Assynt. We also remember Ivan MacDonald from Uist, a talented young crofter full of promise. Both are sadly lost to us and we salute them.

In addition you will find all the usual features inside *Crofter 100*.

Will the new SRDP be more crofting friendly?

SCF RESPONDED TO the recent SRDP consultation by saying that crofting, whilst widely recognised as very important in Scottish rural development, was supported by the current SRDP quite appallingly.

There has been a lot of work carried out by crofting interests to try to identify why and to suggest ways of reversing this in the new SRDP. The result of these deliberations is the suggestion of a Crofting Support Scheme (CSS), which has widespread support.

But having seen crofting fare so poorly in the current SRDP, it would not be unfair to predict that the CSS would not satisfy all requirements (in measures and money) to keep crofters crofting; and crofters would therefore be likely to need to apply to wider SRDP measures also. In this scenario there have been concerns about duplication, but that is perhaps a bit of a red herring; if the appropriate measure exists within the CSS there would be no need for the crofter to seek support elsewhere, surely?

The suggestion that the CSS should extend to other small-holdings in the crofting counties that deliver the same desired outcomes is understood. However, there are valid reasons why this should not be the case. Crofting is a regulated system of tenure – regulated by specific legislation related only to crofting. It imposes burdens upon crofts

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Still lots for a crofters union to be doing

WHEN PUTTING TOGETHER the first issue of *The Crofter*, a title borrowed from a Highland Land League publication of the 1880s, I wouldn't have bet much money on there being a hundredth issue.

In the course of the late night or early morning sessions that were a feature of my regular visits to the Lewis home of the late Angus Macleod, the Scottish Crofters Union's founding father, one of our recurring topics was how long the then new organisation, in which Angus had invested so much entirely unpaid effort, might last.

The Land League, Angus would say, had been founded in 1883 and had done a great job in winning crofters the security of tenure and other basic rights embodied in the Crofters Act of 1886. But by the early 1890s the Land League was falling apart. As for the Federation of Crofters Unions, set up in the early 1960s to successfully oppose

Crofters Commission plans for wholesale croft amalgamations, it too achieved its key objective – but then, just like the Land League before it, began to fade away.

What both these organisations lacked, or so Angus concluded years before the SCU got off the ground, was a subscription base sufficient to support paid staff. Volunteers were all very well, but you couldn't rely on them. Worse, you couldn't give them orders. But once you had employees working for you forty hours a week – though at the end of forty hours, in Angus's opinion, you'd barely started – well, then you might just have a fighting chance of having set up something that would stay the course.

And so it's proved. There have been a couple of name changes (which I regret) along the way. But crofters still have an organisation with the capacity to argue crofting's case in a

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Message from the chair...



WELCOME TO the 100th issue of *The Crofter*.

I confess I don't remember the first issue of *The Crofter*. But of course it did happen a long time ago.

I used to boast – as did many others – of being present at the formal inauguration of the Scottish Crofters Union (SCU) at Inverness in November 1985. After that meeting, I introduced myself as a lawyer to Jim Hunter, who had just been unveiled as the first director (chief executive) of the fledgling organisation.

And soon after that I was to meet Fiona Mandeville at the SCU office in Skye and to work with her to provide a legal advisory service for members, thereby bringing myself into contact with many crofters and their multifarious problems. But somehow I seem to have missed the first issue of *The Crofter*.

It is not surprising that the centenary year of the 1886 Act was nominally used for the launch of SCU, taking full advantage

of the publicity surrounding that anniversary. Less foreseeable for Fiona and myself was that someday I would chair the board and, whilst still editing *The Crofter*, Fiona would be my vice chair. As such we were both present when, to mark our silver jubilee, life membership of the Federation was awarded to Professor Hunter in 2012 at our international conference held at Strathpeffer. As Jim commented that evening, 25 years was indeed a major milestone – as most previous crofters' organisations had failed to survive for more than a few years.

Why should the SCU be such a success? In 1985 the SCU was to insist that the determination of crofting policy was primarily a matter for crofters. Further, we would make a much wider impact by seriously getting to grips with a wide range of crofting policy issues. That included scrutinising any proposed legal reforms and pursuing the interests of crofters and crofting, wherever that may require us to go. The goal was to become "part of the furniture".

It is a measure of that success that the firm foundation laid in these early years by Jim and Fiona (and those who followed their lead) has meant that arguing for a coherent crofting policy is now seen primarily a matter for active crofters and those who support them.

By 1985, the improvements in the crofter's lot brought about by the 1976 reforms were at last being generally appreciated. By

talking to crofters, I became conscious that there was a reluctance to acknowledge or be seen to vindicate these changes.

Many crofters were to take advantage of their enhanced status whilst others remained justifiably wary of any modification of their rights. Meanwhile there was often undisguised animosity from landowners and factors.

The belated publication of text-books on crofting law, in 1990 by D J MacCuish and in 2000 by Sir Crispin Agnew, along with the formation in 1994 of the Crofting Law Group, meant that a complicated legal code was at last being made more accessible. Although it has long been regarded as over-complicated, crofting law has gone on to show itself capable of fresh intricacies whilst continuing to resist attempts at simplification.

The Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 – itself a consolidation – has recently been altered by the Crofting Reform etc Act 2007 and the Crofting Reform Act 2010. The passing of these two reform acts, interspersed by a committee of inquiry on crofting led by Professor Mark Shucksmith and, this year, supplemented by an amendment act, has given crofters and their advisers a lot to think about.

The Crofting Law Group is getting to grips with a much-altered system in which most of these recent changes have

taken place, other than the mandatory aspects of the crofting register. But crofters will soon no longer be able to resist identifying their lands, to the general benefit of crofting.

This change of emphasis from crofters to crofting was to have us become the Scottish Crofting Foundation "rooted in our community", then the Scottish Crofting Federation "rooted in our communities", presaging the demand that the Schucksmith report of 2008 was later to identify – that it was crofting itself that deserved to be protected.

The reform acts have provided us with some ingredients for the future of crofting, such as the possibility of creating new crofts, whilst overcoming absenteeism and the neglect and misuse of croft land.

Crofters must learn of these changes. Meanwhile SCF is once again able to provide a legal advisory service for members.

Crofting, adapted to modern circumstances, has much to offer. We believe crofting is a proven way of providing land and environmental management and it has the potential to contribute to an even greater extent to the wellbeing of our communities and to their economic development than it does at present.

By being a member of the Federation you will have the opportunity to participate.

Please do so.

Derek Flynn

Honorary life membership for Norman

Our man in Brussels

AT THE SCF board meeting in June, colleagues unanimously agreed to award honorary life membership to Norman Leask, in recognition of all his efforts for the organisation. The presentation will be made when SCF chair Derek Flynn and chief

executive Patrick Krause are next in Shetland.

Norman said it is the greatest honour he could receive, but in typical manner asked that his existing SCF membership be transferred to his wife Evelyn so that they keep paying their sub.



Will the new SRDP be more crofting friendly?

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that small-holdings do not have. It is widely perceived that this regulation delivers public goods, so crofters should be recognised and given additional support for it. In addition, most small-holdings – by virtue of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2007, which itself indicates the Scottish Government's desire to create more crofts – can become registered crofts and should therefore benefit from support measures only available to registered crofts. Should they not be able to convert to croft status or, having done so, not be eligible for CSS then it is the legislation that needs to be addressed, not the support scheme.

We hope that the new SRDP will deliver for crofting, this time.

Still lots for a crofters union to be doing

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Jim and Fiona with early members of the SCU Skye area committee.



Founding father Angus MacLeod and his wife Annie when Angus received his MBE

way that no Crofters Commission (answerable to its Scottish Government paymasters and not crofters) ever can.

And there's no shortage of issues for the Scottish Crofting Federation (why not a final name change back to SCU?) to take up. One is the increasingly convoluted state of crofting law. Back in 1886, crofting law was straightforward. Ever since, government after government has added layer after layer of mind-numbing complexity. Hence the recent need for yet another bill to make it possible for the Crofters Commission to sanction owner-occupied croft decrofting – rendered impossible, or so the Commission argued, by the bill before the last one.

To my mind, the very existence of a concept so riddled with intricacy and contradiction as 'owner-occupied croft decrofting', is a sure sign that crofting law, as currently constituted, has parted company with real life and is of value only to the sort of people who might otherwise be left to argue happily about the number of angels that can dance on the head of a pin.

Which is why I've agreed to speak at Crofting Law Group get-together in Edinburgh at the end of September – my theme being that, if crofters are to be served properly and



productively by crofting law, then the only way forward is to scrap existing legislation in its entirety and start again with a clean sheet.

I'll maybe see some of you there.

Jim Hunter compiled the 1984 feasibility study that paved the way for the SCU, served as part-time secretary to the Crofters Union steering group during 1984-85 and, in January 1986, took up his post as the SCU's first director.

Campaigning, informing and historical significance

The Crofter is a significant and important element of the SCF's representative role within crofting, writes former editor John Toal.

IT HAS BEEN a constant throughout the existence of the organisation, which itself has changed names on a number of occasions. I had the privilege of editing an estimated one tenth of the 100 editions.

I was involved with the SCU from the outset and helped to establish an effective branch and area network in Lochaber along with crofting stalwarts Ronnie Campbell, the late Sandy Kennedy and the late Iain MacPhail. On joining the small SCU headquarters team in 1992, I took over editing *The Crofter* from former SCU director Jim Hunter.

On occasion features could have historical significance. It was to do a feature on the Assynt crofters' campaign for ownership of the North Lochinver Estate that I happened to be in Assynt in 1993 on the very day the news broke that their bid was successful. I was sitting in Bill Ritchie's house as he took the phone call delivering the news. That added a whole new dimension to interviews with the members of that outstanding steering group – Bill Ritchie, John MacKenzie and Allan MacRae.

Some 20 year on it remains a nostalgic memory, perhaps

more poignant by the recent loss of the brilliant crofting spokesman that was Allan MacRae. From its formation onwards Allan gave outstanding service to the Assynt Crofters Trust and a distinctive voice to crofting in the north west.

Coverage of significant events was also important, such as the annual SCU conference. Allan MacRae was himself one of the speakers at the 1993 conference in Stornoway, as well as Prince Charles. The prince's endorsement of crofting's environmental credential was important – as

the SCU, with others, had done ground-breaking work on raising awareness of this aspect and seeking proper recognition within the support framework.

Other fundamentals of crofting support structure received specific attention and the importance of support for crofter housing was a perennial feature. A Review of Support for Crofter Housing for the SCU and Scottish Homes was published in 1994, following up previous work by Mark Shucksmith. Mark Shucksmith was again involved as joint author with Di Alexander.

The SCU contribution was

in kind, through my services. Ironically, one of this report's recommendations was that the scheme should be operated by the Crofters Commission, on the basis that crofting services should be properly integrated within an organisation with specific crofting responsibilities.

There was also the wider current argument that greater concentration should be given by the Commission to its development function. That did happen, but by the time of looking at the reform of crofting in the 21st century it was adjudged that crofting regulatory and development responsibilities did not sit comfortably under the one roof.

Interestingly, the committee of inquiry into crofting, led by Mark Shucksmith, concluded that crofting required its own specific development organisation. It certainly did not appear to envisage a rather dispersed approach without any apparent strategic direction.

Who administers standard supports or schemes is not the issue, but how crofting is enabled to develop in a coherent framework is of major importance. As before, perhaps that is what the crofting representative organisation has to give attention to. And it has an effective medium for raising awareness in *The Crofter*.

John Toal



John Toal and the late Allan MacRae at Northbeef

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The shape of the CAP (so far)

JUNE SAW a final agreement reached between the European Council, Parliament and Commission on the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the EU (due to come into force in 2015).

After a long and complex period of negotiations, it is still not easy to distinguish the final shape of the policy. Furthermore, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which sets the CAP budget and some of the financial mechanisms within the CAP, has yet to be signed off by the European Parliament.

Some aspects of the CAP that will affect crofting include:

Definition of permanent pasture This has been defined as land used to grow grasses or other herbaceous forage, which has not been included in the crop rotation for five years or longer, but with the important derogation that member states can include land which can be grazed and which forms part of established local practices where herbaceous forage is traditionally not predominant.

Active farmer test Member states can set up minimum activity requirements to prevent "slipper farmers" from receiving payments.

Flexibility between pillars Parliament and council agree on a 15% maximum transfer from Pillar I (Direct Payments) to Pillar II (Rural Development). The possibility of transferring money from Pillar II to Pillar I is under discussion.

Basic payment system Member states may grant entitlements to those who can prove that they were actively farming in 2013 – so new entrants can access entitlements on the same basis as established farmers in 2015.

Internal convergence Member states will have to ensure that the lowest payments per hectare are at least 60% of the national or regional average by 2020.

National reserve Member states can top up artificially low value entitlements, as well as grant new entitlements, to new entrants up to the national or regional average. The National Reserve can be financed through a top slice

of direct payments in years after the first year, allowing Scotland to adequately finance entitlements to new entrants.

Crop diversification Farmers with less than 10 hectares of arable land will be exempt. Farmers with between 10 and 30 hectares will have to grow two crops, and over 30 hectares three; but there is an exemption from this measure when more than 75% of the agricultural area of a farm is grassland.

Permanent pasture Member states must ensure that permanent grasslands in NATURA 2000 areas, and further sensitive soils which they identify, must not be converted or ploughed.

Young farmer payment This will be a mandatory top-up scheme, consisting of up to 2% of the national envelope, to assist farmers and crofters under 40 years of age.

Areas of natural constraint The new eight biophysical criteria will be introduced as the basis for the new LFA scheme in 2018 at the latest.

Crofting Commission blueprint for action

IT HAS BEEN a very busy first year for the Crofting Commission.

At the end of June came the welcome news that minister for the environment and climate change, Paul Wheelhouse, had approved the Commission's policy plan.

For convener Susan Walker, approval of the plan marks the end of one period and an exciting beginning. "This is our blueprint for action for the rest of our term in office. It explains our understanding of the intention of the crofting legislation and how our regulatory decisions should always have regard for not just the needs of crofters, but the sustainable development of crofting for the future. It also explains why effective regulation of the crofting system has such a significant role to play in important issues like retaining population in some of our most remote communities."

The policy plan stems from provisions in the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, which charged the new Crofting Commission with the task of developing the plan. This can be found on the Commission's website at www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk. It sets out to tenant and owner-occupier crofters, landlords, the Scottish Land Court and organisations and agencies involved in crofting, such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise, how the Commission will make decisions on regulatory cases, in line with the legislation and the reason why consistent regulation of crofting is so important.

As Susan Walker explains, "The Commission is required to balance the interests of crofters and crofting communities with those of landlords and the wider rural community, particularly having regard to population retention. This is why, as a regulator, the legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament has placed such an emphasis on the requirement of tenants and owner-occupier crofters to comply with their duties, such as the duty to reside on or within 32km of the croft. We also want to see other regulatory means, such as succession

and assignation, used to increase access to crofts for new entrants, to secure a future for crofting."

With the approval of the plan comes a clear desire on the part of commissioners to review and modernise procedures, in line with the 2010 Act and the policy direction signalled in the plan. A series of working groups have been set up to look at everything from new grazings regulations to a full review of policy and procedures. A total of twelve groups have been set up, most led by a commissioner; the aim being to make substantial progress by the end of September.

As part of this initiative, the Commission has embraced the opportunity afforded by the new legislation to co-opt experts from outside the organisation onto working groups, with Derek Flynn, retired crofting lawyer and SCF chair, joining the group reviewing policy and procedures.

As Derek explains, "The new commissioners have discovered they have much to do to fulfil their statutory role. Their invitation to me to be part of a review group was irresistible. It

will help to give me a fuller understanding of the Crofting Commission's part in the contemporary crofting world."

SCF has welcomed the plan and looks forward to working with the Commission towards active crofting communities.

On 31st July royal assent was granted to the Crofting (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2013 which allows the Commission to accept applications to decroft land from owner-occupier crofters.

The act brings provisions for owner-occupier crofters in line with those for tenant crofters, which accords with the original intention of parliament when passing the 2010 Crofting Reform Act. The full text of the act can be viewed on the Scottish Parliament website.

The Commission has contacted all those people with applications which were being held in abeyance until this issue was resolved. If they wish to go ahead, no new application is necessary and the organisation can now consider new applications from owner-occupier crofters.



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Tribute: Allan MacRae

ALLAN WILLIAM MACRAE was born on 13 September 1939, the youngest of the family of four sons of the late John (known locally as Johnnie Glenn) and his wife Cora.

Johnnie and Cora were justifiably proud that their family were evidently endowed with talents above the ordinary in terms of intellectual ability but, in the case of Allan in particular, this was accompanied by the practical and manual skills necessarily possessed by many West Highlanders. Although of average height in manhood, Allan was clearly a man of no mean strength and physique, having been declared the best newcomer at the Ben Nevis race in 1966; a feat of physical endurance that he ultimately succeeded in winning. He also figured prominently amongst early finishers on other occasions.

Having completed his education at Lochinver Primary School and Golspie Tech, he began his working life in the employment of a number of contractors engaged in the early 60s in the construction of large hydroelectric projects throughout the Highlands. He was also involved in a number of road construction contracts. Returning to his native soil he took on small construction, fencing and drainage contracts that were undertaken in tandem with his passion for crofting. His skill and knowledge of animal husbandry, and of cattle in particular, was recognised when he was chosen as the chairman of the North West Cattle Producers' Association; a role that he held for many years. His adaptability and breadth of practical skill was further demonstrated by his acquisition of the fishing trawler the Fulmar, which he operated for a while with two other crew members. Perhaps his most outstanding rural skill was that of dry stone building. There are such structures built by Allan in our community that will be testament to that rare ability for many future generations.

It was, however, the campaign in 1992 to gain control of the land of our fathers, then recently sold to a foreign national by the former absentee landowner, which unexpectedly brought him to national prominence. As the result of a bizarre sequence of

events we suddenly became aware that Scandinavian Property Services Ltd had gone into liquidation and, for the purpose of a further sale process, the estate was to be broken up into seven separate lots. The potential effect of this was that grazings and in-bye land in individual townships was at risk of being sold to separate bidders; something that would have had a disastrous effect on the administration of crofting in Assynt.

Allan MacRae was chair of the local branch of the Crofters' Union with Bill Ritchie as its secretary. Incidentally, Allan held the post of chairman of this branch from the day it was set up until his death, and he also chaired the North West Sutherland Area Committee and represented it on the union council. An emergency meeting of members was hastily convened to consider how best to oppose the London-based liquidator's agenda. At that meeting a steering group was elected for the purpose, with Allan as its chair and a representative was appointed for each of the affected townships.

At the beginning there was no premeditated master plan to attempt to buy the asset of the estate; simply an attempt to resist by recourse to crofting law what was being proposed by the liquidator. Very quickly the audacious proposal was put forward at a subsequent meeting that we try to raise the funds by public appeal to compete for purchase of the asset of the estate on the open market – and the rest is history.

It is widely acknowledged that in the six months from June 1992 the crofters of Assynt changed for ever the pattern of land ownership in the Scottish Highlands and this was due in no small measure to the passionate and articulate contribution to the debate made by Allan MacRae.

As one of those whose forebears had been cleared from good grazing land to the harsh, rock-strewn terrain of the Atlantic coast of Assynt a couple of centuries earlier, he and his colleagues who led the media campaign generated support throughout the UK and abroad. Every contributor to our appeal for financial support,



Allan chairing the Assynt Crofters steering group

large or small, received in return a windscreen sticker with the words 'I support the Assynt Crofters'. We still have on file the letters received at that time from all over the world. One, from a descendent of the Highland diaspora in New Zealand, wrote of his delight in seeing in a supermarket car park a vehicle standing near to his own and both displaying their support for the crofters of Assynt by means of their windscreen stickers.

The contrasting iconic images of a despondent Allan with his dog when we received the news that our second bid had been rejected by the liquidator and, subsequently, a jubilant Allan over the final success of our campaign, will live on for generations in the history of land reform in Scotland.

It was a source of regret to Allan, as well as to those of us who were closely involved with him in our campaign, that the pattern of land tenure remoulded

at that time in Assynt has largely been side-lined by our political masters on the basis of perceived political correctness. Yet the esteem in which Allan was held was evident from the fact that the church in Lochinver was filled to overflowing at his funeral on 3rd July. The presence there of many individuals from the legal, academic and political sectors, having a major role in the land reform agenda, was testament to the lasting legacy left by Allan MacRae.

The entire community is deeply shocked and greatly saddened by his passing. The board of Assynt Crofters' Trust along with the staff and membership of the Scottish Crofting Federation extends to his two surviving brothers, John and Harry, his niece Carol Anne and all other members of the MacRae family their sincere condolences in the certain knowledge that Allan's memory will live on.

JM & AM

Crofting register plans

Crofter 99 explained the background to the crofting register and the process for registering a croft. In this article Rhona Elrick of RoS explains the mapping requirements.

THE CROFTING REGISTER is based on a map of Scotland on which the boundaries of crofts, common grazings and land held runrig are added as and when these areas are registered.

As part of the registration application for a croft, the applicant (typically the crofter) must provide a plan showing the boundaries of the croft.

A suitable plan of the croft may already exist. If not, we can provide an extract of the Ordnance Survey (OS) map (for £16 plus VAT) on which crofters can draw the boundaries of their croft. We would emphasise that there is no legal requirement to engage a surveyor or other professional to prepare the plan. Indeed our guidance is designed to enable crofters to prepare the plan if they wish to do so. To aid that, we have set out guidance on the preparation of plans. Of the crofts registered to date some of the plans have been prepared by crofters and in other cases they have chosen to have plans drawn up by professionals.

The plan should clearly mark all the boundaries that make up the croft. The OS map will show certain physical features

(walls and fences etc) and the crofter needs to take this into account when preparing the plan. In particular, if the feature the OS has shown is not where the legal boundary of the croft is, then the plan that is being prepared should clearly mark the legal boundary and not simply the fenced boundary. (Some crofters have explained that on occasion fences will be erected within their croft legal boundary.)

It would also help to note the measurements of boundaries and also provide a description of what the boundary is (such as the centre of a wall). We can then make mention of those measurements and features on the crofting schedule plan.

Our preference, and the stated preference of the SCF, is for communities to work together to map and register their crofts. Scottish Government has set aside funds till end November 2013 to reduce the cost of registration where communities opt to work together. For our part we at RoS are committed to offering such support as is reasonable to assist communities through the registration process.

Detailed guidance can be accessed at www.ros.gov.uk/croftingregister/guidance. For more information on the crofting register, please contact us at crofting@ros.gov.uk or 0845 607 0164.



Crofting register workshops hosted by Registers of Scotland

Registers of Scotland will be hosting a series of free events for crofters in the run-up to the end of the crofting register discounted entry period of November 30th 2013.

The workshops will provide:

An overview of the crofting register.

What is involved in registering your croft – a practical guide.

A question and answer session with Registers of Scotland specialists.

Workshops will take place in the following locations on the following dates:

**County Hotel, Stornoway:
16th September**

**Harris Hotel, Tarbert, Harris:
17th September**

**Bosville Hotel, Portree, Skye:
23rd September**

**Castlebay Community School, Barra:
2nd October**

**Ayre Hotel, Kirkwall, Orkney:
15th October**

**Shetland Hotel, Lerwick:
17th October**

**Kyle Hotel, Kyle of Lochalsh:
28th October**

**The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool:
30th October**

**Rogart Village Hall, Rogart
(Large Hall):
31st October**

**Dark Island Hotel, near Balivanich:
11th November**

**Venue TBC – near Lochboisdale:
12th November**

**Venue TBC – Oban:
20th November**

The evening workshops will run from 5.30-8pm in all venues and refreshments will be provided.

For updates on venues still to be confirmed, please visit the events page at www.ros.gov.uk.

HUNGRY FOR RIGHTS

Gaelic tradition and alternative food systems

SCF'S NEW EU-funded project Hungry for Rights aims to strengthen groups working towards alternatives in food systems.

Alternative means that food is considered more than just a commodity for trading. Food has social and economic value (food security and nutrition, food poverty alleviation, community building and job creation), cultural meaning (for example Struan cake) and ecological aspects as well (environment, biodiversity, water management). By taking these into consideration, alternative organisation forms emerge: more local food, more small-scale production, shorter food chains.

The comparison with land is interesting. Fiona MacKenzie in her book *Places of Possibility* shows the relevance and importance of *dùthchas*, reinstated in recent decades as community right-to-buy. *Dùthchas* – an entitlement to land, more a sense of belonging than ownership, both inherited right and an evolving responsibility to the land.

SCF researcher Iain MacKinnon considers similar Gaelic concepts related to food production.

Joint or co-operative working practices are sometimes described in Gaelic as *nàbachd* or *cobhair*. While *cobhair* refers to a more enduring and perhaps semi-formal set of social relations and expectations, *nàbachd* is simply the habit of neighbourliness.

As such it is, perhaps, best understood through an example. A few years ago I was working with an older crofter and his younger neighbour in an area of the west Highlands which had suffered serious population loss for most of the 20th century, but which in recent years has seen that dramatically reversed. The older crofter was a Gàidheal; the younger man was an incomer who was being grafted into the community.

We had noticed that the council were felling and chipping trees which were overhanging the main road a mile or so from the crofters' township and the older man had gone so far as to obtain permission from the owner of the land on which the trees were growing to take some of the chippings. We planned to use them as mulch. After the initial observation of the chipped wood and the obtaining of permission, the process of sharing the workload and distributing the 'harvest' proceeded in a spontaneous and organic way.

We used the younger crofter's truck and trailer to gather the chippings and when we got back to the township we began to unload the older crofter's portion first. He was standing in the trailer shovelling off the chippings, while myself and the younger crofter were doing the same at ground level. The older crofter suddenly straightened in the

trailer and exclaimed: "*Nàbachd!* It means neighbourliness. It's what we used to do here."

"The observer at a sheep-shearing, a potato-planting, or a harvesting will be conscious of how near the surface is this desire and joy in co-operation...The impingement of another culture and the fact that Gaeldom has in some measure joined the complexity of life in the neighbouring countryside of Britain have tended perforce to disrupt this elementary co-operation...and the breaking down of such simple co-operation is one of the causes of the breakdown of life in the townships." (Fraser Darling 1950: 282)

A fundamentally co-operative attitude is deeply rooted in the culture and, traditionally, was maintained by a system of customary expectations within Gàidheal society.

The contemporary relevance lies in their values and examples of alternative ways of doing work and business, which do not exclude individual rights. MacKenzie points out that in the collective ethos behind working the *feannagan*, there was place for individual rights to produce. The comparison with new emerging forms of business – presented as alternative food systems – is a reminder that the need to operate within strict ecological limits often resulted in a culture of cooperation and communality.



Working together – gathering sheep on Harris

© D. Mason

HUNGRY FOR RIGHTS

The REAL project

ONE ASPECT of the Hungry for Rights project is to detail projects initiating alternative food systems in Scotland.

One of these is the REAL project – Real Education, Active Lives – a farming social enterprise at Inverness High School.

The project was born from frustration within the city's business community that schooling did not prepare young people for the world of work and from concerns within the school that their curriculum lacked creativity and flexibility.

The project's promoters chose to develop a range of social enterprises, the first being REAL Organics, which operates an organic farm at the school. The school went into partnership with a commercial organic grower and began to sell at local markets. Eventually the initial project split into two parts, REAL Organics, which concentrated on production, and REAL Foods, which concentrated on retail.

By 2009 the organic farm was operating three polytunnels on a plot of around one acre. In their first years they produced mainly root vegetables and brassicas. However, in response to small returns from these crops the farm also moved onto higher-value produce.

The farm's first produce in 2006 was sold through the school and at the Inverness Farmers Market. In the years that followed the range of retail outlets increased, including one at the Eastgate Shopping Centre.

By setting up a local production and distribution system the project sought to reduce the energy footprint of food consumed in Inverness. The project also made use of local organic inputs. For fertiliser the pupils grew their own comfrey and took seaweed from the Beaulie Firth just a few miles from the school.

In 2010 the REAL Project was scaled back to ensure its financial integrity. However, the farm continues to grow and has also achieved broader social aims, with the school introducing courses in rural skills and community involvement as well as initiating an eco-schools project and work on pupil leadership.

Further information on the project can be found in the report Inverness High School – the REAL story, available on the Inverness High School website at: www.inverness-highland.sch.uk/The_Real_Story_Inverness_High.pdf.



Inside Linclate community greenhouse



Farmers' markets – one way of re-localising agricultural systems



Impressive vegetable diversity at the North Uist agricultural show

ON THE CROFT

The value of traditional genetics

Jamie Robertson and Cecil Pirie consider the basic premises of breeding quality kye.

INTEREST IN BEEF from traditional breeds has received a boost from a variety of sources, from retailers wanting production of arable-based beef units to hoteliers who wish to supply top-quality products to their customers.

This has created a demand for certain types of traditional cattle across the UK which the market will fill. With market pressure and the promise of premium prices, there could be an expansion in cow numbers of a certain type. This can be a great opportunity for Scottish kye, but the obvious pitfalls should be avoided.

The characteristics of hill kye that mattered in the past will matter in the future. Good legs, straight back, compact well-

formed udder, good mothering ability and the ability to forage well and milk off the back. These traits are not specific to one particular breed but they are essential components of a low-input, extensive cow type that we know can produce consistently under variable conditions.

What are the threats to any increase in numbers of cows suitable to crofts and Scottish uplands? The most obvious is that genetics may be introduced that are attractive in the short-term. Larger body size may promise larger calves, but maintenance costs will be higher forever, and we always have the sire genetics available to influence calf type.

There will also be pressure to buy or use heifers and cows of any type, on the premise that the original cow types will be hard to find and expensive. Introduction

of new genetics is not a bad thing, but cow type should remain clear. The market does not want 101 varieties of a food product – we know it likes consistency of product whether at the mart, finisher unit, processor or plate.

Where do we find more suitable heifers and cows? The first place to look is at home, from the remaining herd. Two sources of loss can and should be curtailed. The first is the rate of failure of heifer calves to make second lactation. The second is the culling rate and inefficiencies associated with late breeding.

Every calf born needs to be treated like gold dust if we want life-long performance. Colostrum in the first three hours; protection of the dam; dry, draught-free housing; fresh air; and good hygiene are all basic requirements. Every calf born of the desired type of cow is needed,

to be available for breeding.

Which leads to the second point. If a heifer or cow fails to hold to service and breed at the right time for our schedules, do we send them down the road or do we question our own contribution to this apparent failure? When a population is low in number it is essential that we make our own contribution well. We can and should set targets; and there is a need to get heifers and cows in the right condition at the right time to maximise breeding efficiency. Required body condition at breeding is not too fat, on a rising level of feeding and in good overall health.

We want to make the best of what we already have. There is complete certainty that new genetics will be introduced, but we should nurture the best of what we already have – Scottish kye.



Cows and calves from one of Cecil's farms. These cows are grazing at 1,000ft above sea level and the calving didn't begin until 16th March. The photos were taken on 2nd July.



Neosporosis – a major cause of abortion in cattle

NEOSPOROSIS, CAUSED by a parasite called *Neospora caninum*, is a major cause of abortion in cattle.

Infected cattle are three to seven times more likely to abort compared to uninfected cattle. The disease is challenging to control due to its complex lifecycle and the lack of effective treatments or vaccines.

Neospora was first identified in dogs. If dogs eat infected meat the parasite can infect and multiply within gut cells and parasite eggs (oocysts) will be excreted in their faeces. Their immune system usually controls the infection within a few weeks and shedding of oocysts will cease. In subsequent infections, only insignificant numbers of oocysts are produced. Therefore, shedding is often seen in puppies, after their first exposure to the parasite. Oocysts can stay infective in the environment for many months and infect many host species including cattle.

Neospora can infect cattle by two main

routes: dog to cattle and dam to calf during pregnancy. Dog-to-cattle transmission occurs when cattle ingest *Neospora* oocysts in contaminated feed, water or from pasture. Dam-to-calf transmission can occur by two separate routes: 1) when parasites from a previous infection are reactivated during pregnancy; and 2) if dams are newly infected with *Neospora* during pregnancy. In both cases, unborn calves become infected in utero. If they survive then they are born congenitally infected but may appear healthy. Infected cows can transmit *Neospora* to their offspring in subsequent pregnancies. This transmission route is very effective and *Neospora* may persist within a herd for many generations.

Diagnosis of neosporosis is usually confirmed by pathological examination of abortion cases. Blood testing may provide further supporting evidence when suspecting neosporosis in cattle. However, current blood tests can result in false negatives. Moredun

is working on a highly-sensitive test to allow accurate diagnosis of *Neospora*.

Currently there are no effective vaccines or treatments against neosporosis, with control options limited to management practices. The best strategies are to avoid importing the parasite onto the property. To minimise the spread of the disease, dogs should be kept away from pregnant cattle, calving areas and from cattle feed and water. Other approaches focus on breeding out *Neospora* infection from herds by choosing replacement stock from uninfected dams.

Moredun is conducting research to develop a vaccine to prevent *Neospora* associated abortions.

If you would like a free factsheet on Neospora or are interested in becoming a member of Moredun, please contact The Moredun Communication Team on 0131 4455111 or visit www.moredun.org.uk.

ON THE CROFT

Is your common grazing maximising CCAGS?

THE CROFTING Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme (CCAGS) has recently changed. This article highlights situations where CCAGS could potentially be used more efficiently by a common grazing committee.

Common grazings can draw up to £125,000 in CCAGS grants in any two-year period. Co-operation within a crofting township could decrease capital costs for several crofting businesses. CCAGS grant regulations require a grazing committee or constable registered with the Crofting Commission.

Grazings regulations specify that you have to notify shareholders of any proposed improvement and the proposed allocation of expenditure. For fixed equipment like a shed, agreement about who is going to contribute should be decided – and then only the contributors can use the new equipment. Only the participant's successors or transferee of their grazing share will have the rights and responsibilities of being part of the improvement scheme.

Quite frequently common grazings members invest together for one larger animal handling facility, rather than all crofts having their own smaller systems. This principle could be used to reduce many other capital investments, for example sheds; instead of a township with five crofters wanting to build a shed each and applying separately, if they pooled their resources and built one larger shed they could still save money (see table below).

	five crofters in township build a shed each	five crofters build one larger township shed
CCAGS contribution	£9,250	£27,750
each crofter's contribution	£9,250	£5,550
total cost	£18,500	£55,000

On top of the reduced initial capital cost, with some planning a township shed could be used to make further efficiencies. For example full artic loads of hay could be bought and stored when prices are lower. The load could then be divided up by the needs of individual crofters who purchase an agreed number of bales. Tonne bags of concentrates would be bought in – cheaper than buying in smaller bags. Individual crofters reseed under CCAGS could get a cheaper price if they co-ordinated their applications and ordered full artic loads of lime and fertiliser. The bulk order could be stored on a hard-core area with covers beside the shed. Bulk ordering of lime between several people could also enable maintenance dressings of lime, to address pH issues, with a reseed programme.

Once you have begun to think laterally, other diversification opportunities become possible. If you are installing electricity into your township shed, why not see if small-scale renewables with associated Feed-In-Tariffs (FITs) are now feasible?

Are inbye parks on the common grazing in need of rejuvenation? Many common grazings have bull and horse parks which have lost condition and often become rushy. This is likely due to poor drainage and low pH. In this case, CCAGS could be used to drain the inbye parks. If the grassland swards are in a tired condition, a soil sample should be taken to your local office. CCAGS can be used for re-seeding, either surface or full, of inbye parks within common grazings.

- If the feeding value of the park is improved, the following production benefits are possible:
- Tighter calving period if cows are on good grazing during the first service.
- Higher daily live weight gains for breeding hoggs if wintered on improved grassland, with knock-on effects for lifetime breeding success.
- More flexibility if sheep need to be kept at hand, for example waiting for contract shearers/scanners.

If any of the above has prompted you to consider new opportunities within your township but you need further direction, why not consider a government-supported Whole Farm Review? If this article has prompted you to apply for CCAGS, seek advice from your local SAC office.

Janette Sutherland, Farm and Rural Business Services, SAC



What is a crofter?

I'M DONALD MACSWEEN, from Ness in the north of Lewis.

I have officially been a crofter for eight years, since receiving my croft as a 21st birthday present – probably the best present I could have received. My family have always been crofters and many of my first memories involve sheep; from lambing to home kill, we were introduced to all aspects from an early age.

Today, I'm often asked to describe what being a crofter is all about and it's not an easy thing to define at all. There is the old adage "a croft is a piece of land surrounded by legislation", but where does that leave the crofter? I often find myself describing crofting as a mind-set, rather than a job.

Times may have changed, but I don't think the crofting mentality has; traditionally you would have the crofter/weaver or the crofter/fisherman, but today you have the

crofter/architect or crofter/joiner. If you get the work/life balance right, I think it can provide you with one of the most satisfying ways of life available in this country. I have worked on this balance myself for several years. It is so tempting to throw yourself either into full-time employment or have a stab at full-time crofting, but the sweet spot is somewhere in the middle.

I have worked in several different posts in the past few years, many in media but also time spent with the RSPB (counting corncrakes) and the local council. The one job that has remained constant has been the crofting – but I think all the other roles compliment it.

I like to think that I can show other young people that they don't have to give up their dreams of being whatever they want to be and have crofting as a second-rate lifestyle. The opposite is true, in my experience. Crofting can be your release from the day-to-day monotony of office work, or from the unpredictability of other types of employment. Life on the croft has given me some of the most exciting days of my life and provided a level of continuity at the same time.

In a time when more and more of us have to show a spirit of enterprise and be multi-skilled, crofting is ideally situated to fit in this modern, yet traditional world. I still don't know how to define a crofter, but I know there is still a place for us in the 21st century.



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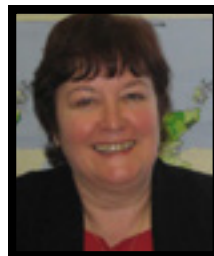
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ON THE CROFT

Bleoghainn; na crois no na buannachd?

Seo sinn ma-tà aig àireamh 100 den Crofter.

SEANN MUN àm a thòisich an iris a' fhuair sinn fhìn a' chiad mhart, tè cros Gearnsaigh a thug dhuinn im agus bainne fad iomadh bliadhna. Bha bleoghainn a' dol a mach à fasan sna sgìrean croitearachd, eadhon 30 bliadhna air ais, agus cha robh e na chuideachadh gun tàinig lagh a-staigh ann an 1983 an aghaidh reic bainne nach robh pasteuriste. Chuir sin casg air mòran chroitearan a bha reic bainne gu taighean-òsta no nàbaidhean. Chuir an lagh as do thri treudan beaga de chrodh-bainne a b' aithne dhomh anns an leth-ìochdrach de Mhuile, a bha a' reic bainne math do dhaoine ionadail.

Bha pris an inneil a dhèanadh pasteurisadh dìreach ro àrd. An-diugh ge-tà gheibhear a leithid a dh'inneal, co-dhiù fear beag, air nas lugha na mìle nòt agus mar sin dh'fhaidte gum b'fhiach e sùil eile a thoirt air crodh bainne.

Tha fhios agam gu bheil beatha air atharrachadh agus gu bheil mòran chroitearan nach eil ag iarraidh a bhith ceangailte ri bleoghainn dà thuras sa latha, ach do chuid, dh'fhadadh bainne cur ris an teachd a-steach gu ìre nach biodh cho beag. Cha robh mi fhìn riamh a' reic bainne, ach bha mi daonnan a' bleoghainn mart don teaghlach. 'S e an obair as motha na lùib, a bhith falbh ga h-iarraidh, chan e a' bhleoghainn fhèin. Mar sin, bhithinn a' cumail an laogh air a' mhart gus nach feumainn a bleoghainn h-uile madainn is oidhche. Mura robh ùine agam an toirt a-staigh bha an laogh ga deoghal.

Chan eil an dòigh seo idir freagarrach ge-tà ma tha thu a' reic bainne agus feumach air uiread sònraichte gach latha. Dh'fheumadh tu na mairt a thoirt a-staigh gach oidhche agus sin far a bheil co-obrachadh na bhuannachd. Tha co-obrachadh fhathast a' tachairt an taobh an ear na Roinn Eòrpa; mar eisimpleir ann an Romania, tha gach baile a' fastadh aon duine gach samhradh gus na beothaichean a thoirt don ionaltradh gach madainn agus an toirt dhachaidh gach oidhche. Bheireadh e ùine a leithid sin de cho-obrachadh a chur air bhonn, ach bha e tachairt aig aon àm sa Ghaidhealtachd agus dh'fhadadh e tachairt a rithist nam biodh tairbhe sa ghnothach.

Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain



Ena Macdonald milking



© Martin Benson

Rent a hen

Lochboisdale Amenity Trust on South Uist has launched an innovative project to restore the island's egg industry, which once produced thousands of eggs a day.

The trust has secured £32,576 from the Big Lottery Fund for its Rent-a-Hen scheme. Islanders will be encouraged to keep hens to provide eggs for sale to a new egg packing station at Daliburgh. Graded eggs will then be sold on around the islands and possibly further afield, reversing the trend of recent years when most eggs were brought in from the mainland.

Hen keepers will be offered feed and hen houses at discounted prices and will be able to keep some eggs for their own use at home.

With funding from Village SOS, the Big Lottery Fund, the trust has set up Lochboisdale Packing Station Ltd as part of the development of local income through micro business.

Anyone interested in keeping hens for egg production should contact:
lochboisdalepackingstation@gmail.com, tel 01878 700 155.

CROFTING ON THE INTERNET

New crofting enterprise website



ACCORDING TO marketing experts, the key trend in promoting products or holidays is authenticity.

This means that the product or experience captures an image or lifestyle that the consumer wants to be part of. And for some this includes crofting, which means we can sell our goods or service more easily or at a premium price.

Research carried out by SCF in 2011 showed that 44% of Scottish consumers were more likely to buy meat labelled as produced on a croft as opposed to equivalent meat labelled as Scottish (31% of UK consumers). Only 2% would be less likely to buy croft-produced meat. The results are similar for crafts, fruit and veg and holidays.

So it makes sense to brand your produce as "croft" and SCF, the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting, is well positioned to certify and run a scheme which adds value to your products and services.

We have developed a new website which looks clean, stylish and modern and which allow members of the Scottish Crofting Produce Mark and Croft Tourism Scheme to promote their businesses. It will replace the produce and holiday pages in the SCF website and will highlight goods and services for sale in a much more effective manner.

Now we need to transfer over existing members to the new

website and add in new members, so HQ will be contacting you shortly. Or you can get in touch with Sarah at HQ if you want to be part of this initiative. We will need to know what products you are promoting, your contact details, a description plus two or three photos of your lambs, holiday cottage, knitwear or whatever. The rules for the schemes are straightforward and are available from HQ. The cost for new members of the scheme will be £20 and for renewal of existing members only £10.

Members will have their produce or services advertised on the new website, which will itself be launched with a press release and promotions at shows and elsewhere – for example, we had a display on croft tourism at the Royal Highland Show last year. As members, you will be able to display the SCP logo which tells customers that you are authentic. You will have access to advice and mentoring from experienced practitioners with things like joint marketing, an on-line forum and regular get-togethers if that is what members want. The timing couldn't be better for selling autumn lamb or for getting a few extra bookings for your holiday cottage for the difficult-to-sell weeks in October or November.

We look forward to welcoming old and new members to the crofting mark.



www.scottishcroftingenterprise.co.uk
(coming soon)



© Martin Benson

Make use of the internet

SCF member and web designer Eb Pybus describes how to get your croft business on-line.

WITH broadband services across the Highlands and Islands improving, the internet is becoming an increasingly useful tool for crofters.

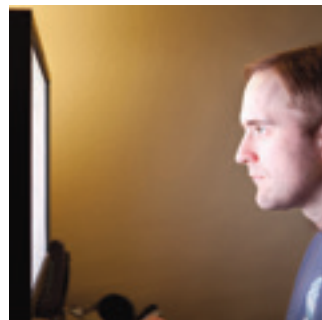
You can sell your produce on ebay, promote your croft holiday accommodation and take bookings, saving on postage and time. You can book your own holiday and friends and family can keep up with your news by reading your blog hosted by Google's blogger. A huge number of websites offer these services, and numerous others.

However, it can be advantageous to have your own website, giving you more control over your on-line presence.

The visuals are often the first thing people think about when planning their website, but there are other things to consider: what the site is for; how people will use it; how people will find it; and the site's content. A well-designed website will take all these aspects into consideration.

The first thing you need is a domain name, for example www.mycroft.com. The domain name is a pointer; it can redirect web browsers to your ebay shop, booking site or blog. Or it can point to your own website. These can be registered online through a variety of sites. Prices vary. Skycrofts.co.uk could be yours for £4.99 per year, whereas popular domains are sometimes auctioned for hundreds or even thousands of pounds.

Shop around, as different sites can charge vastly different prices. Once you've registered a domain it can become a valuable part of your business; your domain name is an asset that can be sold. Make sure you keep the domain name up-to-date or someone else can register it.



© Daniel Giles

For your own website you'll need a host – computer space which holds the files that make up your site. The cost of the hosting depends on what you need; secure hosting for a busy online shop will cost more than a simple site with only a couple of pages. Consider customer service and reliability as well as price and other features.

Once you have a domain name and host you can start building a website.

There are hundreds of packages available to help you build your website, with a variety of costs. Some are free, but sometimes have adverts that you have no control over, or only allow limited features with the free version. It is possible to set up a site for very little. For example Wordpress.com offers free software that you can install on your web host and have a very usable website up and running in a few minutes.

Many websites are built from scratch using computer languages such as HTML, CSS or PHP. If you have an aptitude for using computers it won't take long to learn the basics of any of these languages. There are numerous free tutorials online.

If you feel this is beyond you there are always people not far away who can help.

Red Roof Webdesign
redroofwebdesign.co.uk

CROFTING ON THE INTERNET

21st century training in a digital age

SCF training partner Lucy Beattie outlines some of the digital challenges faced by crofters.

THERE IS NO better way to learn than "sitting next to Nelly". Most folk born and brought up on a croft learn by observation from early childhood, be it gathering sheep from the hill at clipping; or lambing and calving; or building a drystone dyke. These are very transferable and tangible skills.

What all occupiers of land and keepers of livestock face now is the inevitable intrusion of the digital age into farming. This is a skill that is not passed on from generation to generation. With leaps and bounds happening in technology, things change exponentially – and can be quite frightening to some. It is unavoidable, whether you keep two or 200 cattle, a pet sheep or a flock of breeding ewes.

All too often today people involved in small-scale agriculture and food production find themselves overstretched, with little time to actually work the land, let alone cope with the added stresses of 21st century life when it comes to land management. Requirements for traceability, cross-compliance and record keeping can just become too onerous and take on a life of their own.

A crofter in Sutherland remarked that when moving her cattle from Achiltibuie to Lochinver, the time taken to fill out passports and post out the corresponding movement cards took almost as long as it did to get the beasts in the trailer and from the one location to another.

The British Cattle Movement Service provides a computerised movement reporting service via CTS Online. Once you have registered and used it a few times, it becomes a very simple and fail-safe method of dealing with cattle movement reporting. When reporting cattle births there is no room for error on selecting a passport number and this often saves time and avoids a wrongly completed document being returned, or worse still a movement standstill on your holding. To register a birth on-line can take all of two minutes, rather than ten to fill out a passport application by hand.

EID tagging rules for sheep have been controversial, but perhaps this is technology we can embrace in our daily lives and use to its full advantage.

How many times have keepers of sheep marked a cull ewe and sent her to the hill to fatten prior to sale and then found upon gathering the mark has faded and it is then not immediately apparent which sheep is to be sold? Most handheld EID readers now possess the ability to enter cull ewe EID data and this can be flagged up at a

later stage in the form of a list. Readings can also be used to populate data into medicine books via a computer or even an app on a mobile phone. This can guard against any inaccuracy in medicine records and ensure best practice for the purposes of cross-compliance. The technology is expensive, but it is getting cheaper every

day and readers can be jointly purchased by townships or neighbouring livestock keepers.

IACS returns can become the bane of people's lives and often arrive at a time when most people are lambing, which can add to the stress of the job. Making the transition from paper returns to on-line can be confusing; and even registering to submit on-line can take time as you have to wait for a Government Gateway ID number through the post. However, once you have completed on-line, the next year your field data will be saved as well as the name you have for a particular field. This can make the application much easier, when you can immediately see at first glance the name you use for the field rather than its faceless FID number which appears on the paper forms. IACS on-line will also tell you if you have made a mistake in tallying numbers, which can often save a long car journey to the department to get it checked before 15th May.

Not all readers of *The Crofter* may have embraced the digital age, those who possess neither a computer nor a broadband connection.

This is something the government wants to tackle head-on, although it is expected that full UK coverage will not be complete until at least 2016. www.getonlineathome.org aims to promote and provide discounted computers from £99 for a desktop PC to households that currently do not have a computer. Although most agricultural aid schemes can be applied for in paper format, some cannot, such as the SRDP. Applicants who do not have a computer are faced with either having to employ an agent to submit an application on their behalf or find a computer to use, for example at a public library.

The SCF can offer help and training for those who have never used technology or computers for IACS returns, cattle movements, EID recording; even for those who may have started to use computers and want to maximise the amount of time saved on paperwork, by expanding their use of technology.

We would like to hear from any of our members about their experiences of technology in crofting, training needs and ideas.

Write to us at HQ or email training@crofting.org.



ENERGY AND CONSERVATION

Alternative architecture through crofting

Chartered architect and SCF member Neil Ferguson summarises his presentation to the SCF AGM.

IT IS APPROPRIATE in this summary, in this 100th issue of *The Crofter*, to look back to 1985 when it all began and note that the concerns relating to the affordability, appropriateness and buildability of the croft house and other buildings was as real then as it is today.

So much so that in October 1986 the policy statement and report, *Croft Housing – the Way Forward*, saw the affordability issue making the case for the existence of our founding organisation. These aspects were also emphasised in our April 2008 submission of evidence to the Scottish Government.

During the presentation it was advocated that to this we must add local distinctiveness – a very clear sense of place and context – a rich source of local skills and innovation in design and construction techniques.

In 1986 the average capital cost of a croft house was at least £40k, but it was considered that this figure should now be £90k (75m² core area @ £1200/m²) along with a variable element of self build. The risks of self build had to be realistically set against the level and variety of skills available, rental and temporary loan costs where construction takes longer than anticipated and the cost of managing construction trades when unable to continue with self build for health or other personal reasons.

It was proposed that in addition to a £35k mortgage and personal funds, the foundation should advocate for increased intervention through CHGS at £50k, plus a £12k low carbon grant in line with national policy. As it is recognised that the Scottish Government's zero carbon target relies on active energy generation, it was also proposed that the domestic loans for renewables be increased to £18.5k which would allow a small element of energy harvesting.

Continued local construction skills enhancement through agencies such as UHI and FCS, an extension of the Skills for the 21st Century training scheme and Crofting Connections are essential if we are to increase the work we do ourselves directly, or by skills bartering to reduce the reliance on big mortgages through work done by others.

The north Atlantic connection, broch, wheelhouse and Bostadh pictish house all influenced the local distinctiveness that characterised our built heritage. Such aspects diminished with the advent of DAFS crofter housing type plans and the standard kit house highlighted in the Council's 1978 Western Isles rural housing study. The presentation sought to re-introduce adaptability of built form to suit local context by utilising the inherent flexibility of new virtual technologies when communicating proposals and describing construction.

It was highlighted, when discussing examples of innovative architecture, that difficulties exist where the planning authority is over prescriptive in the application of its design guidance. The result was to shy away from significant adaptations to the standard form of building when the pressure was on to start construction. It was noted that Scottish planning policy sets out a move away from over-prescription with the introduction of regional design panels for consideration of innovative design approaches and the advocacy of on-line design forums to inform and engage.

A SCF on-line design forum is one of many ideas raised that will be discussed by our board members.



Architect and SCF member Andrew Squire's house

One low energy house

SCF member Andrew Squire shares his vision of an energy-efficient house.

IN THE UK around half of our total energy consumption is in the home.

Typically half of that is for space heating and a quarter for hot water. Meanwhile, in just the last 10 years, electricity costs have risen by 50%, oil costs by 100%, and neither show any signs of slowing down.

Our carbon footprint is another concern. The average carbon emission per person in the UK (12.5 tonnes CO₂e pa), though 35% less than the average in the US, is 10 times greater than the average in India and 100 times greater than that of most people in Africa.

In principle, renewable energy sources such as hydro power, wind power and photovoltaics can provide "free" clean(ish) energy and may be the only option if mains electricity is unavailable. In reality they can also be costly to set up – and not feasible in many locations.

With all this in mind, when my wife and I began planning a low-impact, low-cost house in a township in Lochaber, our strategy was to go back to first principles to minimise the energy we would need.

We made the house circular. Not only does this reduce heat loss by minimising wind resistance, but a circle has the smallest perimeter of any shape

to enclose a given floor area, so offers the least amount of external wall through which heat may escape.

We arranged the layout for maximum solar gain, except in high summer, when the house is shaded by tree foliage, and positioned the house to be sheltered from the prevailing wind. We invested in very high insulation standards: 250mm sheep's wool in floor and roof, straw bales on the inside of the walls and triple-glazed windows.

We fitted a heat-recovery ventilation system which circulates warmed air throughout the house before recovering over 90% of the warmth to add to the incoming fresh air. We will have DIY solar collectors on the roof to pre-heat the hot water and are looking into seasonal solar pre-heating of the fresh air intake.

We will also have a glazed porch at the back door to act as a thermal buffer and sunspace.

And last but not least, we remembered how our grandparents lived. By including, for example, an insulated but unheated pantry (with a root cellar) we created both a low-energy space for keeping food cool and a place where our small fridge and freezer work much less hard to do their job.

ENERGY AND CONSERVATION

CARES loan scheme for renewable energy projects

Melanie Macrae of Community Energy Scotland outlines a new renewables scheme.

RURAL businesses interested in developing renewable energy are being encouraged to consider an application to the Scottish Government CARES loan programme.

The Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) provides loans to community groups and rural businesses (including agricultural businesses) for all pre-development costs associated with a renewable energy project. Eligible technology includes wind, hydro and other forms of revenue-generating renewable energy.

CARES supports the Scottish Government's renewable energy policy. The government aims to have the equivalent of 100% of Scotland's electricity demand coming from renewables by 2020. It has also set a target for 500MW to come from community and

locally-owned renewable energy by the same year.

As an alternative to agreeing a lease or ground rent with a developer, rural businesses are encouraged to consider independently developing their sites using support from CARES. This approach can yield significantly higher returns.

One of the key advantages of CARES over commercial loans is the scheme's write-off facility. Loans are written off if the project does not progress to an operational stage, for example if planning permission is refused, finance cannot be secured or the project is no longer viable. This factor significantly reduces the applicant's financial risk in the project as the loan can cover up to 95% of all pre-development costs.

Rural business can apply for up to £150,000 from CARES, which is released in stages as required by the project. An interest rate of 10% applies from drawdown to repayment of the loan. If the project is successful

and becomes operational, the loan is designed to be repaid at financial close, ie when capital finance is secured. The scheme is compatible and complementary with the UK Government Feed in Tariff (FiT) subsidy payments which would ensure an income on top of the export tariff for 20 years.

One of the important aspects of the CARES scheme is the focus

on community involvement. Rural businesses are encouraged to co-operate with the local community at an early stage to ensure support and participation in the project. An increased level of community benefit is also provided from CARES projects.

For more information or to register your interest contact CARES@est.org.uk



CARES development officer for the north east, Jamie Wilkinson along with CARES Loan recipient Donald Boyd of the Huntly Development Trust

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Lagavulin
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Storm pods – the new croft diversification

The storm pod is a fibreglass-shelled accommodation unit that has been constructed and developed to be placed under ground or on the surface to blend in with its environment, providing an appealing look for its owner.

The pod provides an excellent opportunity for crofters to earn a steady second income that will provide year on year returns. The storm pod would make an ideal accommodation unit for tourists, as they are in the same class as caravans and meet the three caravan rule.

The pods provide luxury accommodation at affordable prices which means a steady stream. Within a two year period the pod will have been paid off in most circumstances, that's how popular these units are. The company Storm-pods is based on Islay and is already renting out one pod there, enjoying a £1000 return each month just for 60% occupancy.

In 2014 Scotland welcomes the world to join in the exciting Year of Homecoming which will bring tourists from far and wide, so why not get organised for the influx and make sure that the tourists visiting your area are coming home to a pod on your croft?

"Scotland has the most beautiful countryside and we hope that our pods can be incorporated into the landscape with minimal impact. The pods can't rust, don't rot and are recyclable at the end of their life," says managing director Gus Newman.

The pods come in three styles: Lagavulin and Laphroaig sleep up to four, each with a different layout; and Ardbeg, the new addition to the range, will sleep up to six. The pod can go anywhere you want and can be moved. They arrive in one piece and require no assembly.

The pods look beautiful inside and out. Every nook has been used efficiently. The internal space is basic but perfectly practical. The size of the model means very low running costs; the double-insulated walls ensure the heat stays in the pod; and the fact they are half buried helps hold in the heat or protect against the outside weather.

All in all, it's a good investment and a perfect addition to your croft business.

Get in touch with Gus on 01496 300 129 and have a look at www.storm-pods.co.uk.

MEMBERS' PAGES

Membership subscription rates go up at last!

MEMBERS WILL have noticed, no doubt, that subscription rates have not been increasing with inflation.

This of course means that the value of the income from subscriptions is worth less than it was – as the cost of everything has increased. You will be heartened to see though, that rather than the benefits of membership decreasing, we have, through hard work and determination, managed to increase what you

get for your subscription. See alongside: What do I get as a member of SCF?

Subs last went up three years ago, so now it has to be £51 to keep up with inflation. Yes, still less than a pound a week! No other similar organisation does so much for its members for so little. It's not even a full tank of fuel.

The increase will take place from 1st December 2013 and will help us to do even more for you in 2014.



What do you get as a member of SCF?

As a member of the only organisation dedicated to promoting crofting you get:

• **Strong political representation to help shape crofting policies for the benefit of future generations of crofters and our rural communities.**

• **Four issues a year of *The Crofter* – a magazine full of useful resources and information for crofters.**

• **Monthly e-newsletters, keeping you up-to-date with the latest news and policy developments.**

• **Access to the SCF crofting advice service.**

• **A free dedicated legal helpline through crofting law specialists Inksters Solicitors.**

• **Discounted training opportunities.**

• **The opportunity to promote your croft tourism business on the Scottish Crofting Enterprise website.**

• **Free host membership of the WWOOF croft volunteers scheme for a year.**

• **The opportunity to brand and market your croft produce with our unique Scottish Crofting Produce Mark.**

• **A wide network of contacts for sharing experiences and sourcing information.**

• **A skills mentoring service.**

• **Community mediation service.**

• **Assistance and guidance for those wanting to enter crofting.**

• **Discounted attendance at the SCF Annual Gathering.**

SCF structure

AT THE END of last year HQ consulted members via *The Crofter* on a proposal for an updated structure.

There were also discussions with many members during local meetings. Thank you to all who gave their views. The responses have now been collated and a proposal is outlined below. The aim of this restructure proposal is to facilitate the best possible communication paths within the SCF network to ensure our democracy and to ensure participation of members.

It has widely been agreed that there is no longer a need for a two-tier structure. Making this fundamental change will remove a layer of bureaucracy, allowing individuals and groups of members to communicate directly with HQ and our working groups.

Where existing groups meet as branches or areas there will be

no need to dissolve these groups. Where there are no active branch or area groups, these can be formed if there is interest. Groups can be of any size, defined by the groups themselves; eg Lewis may be a single group and the Isle of Lismore may be a single group. The group may opt for a formal structure with office bearers and a bank account, or may be less formal, choosing to simply have a nominated local contact who is the link with HQ.

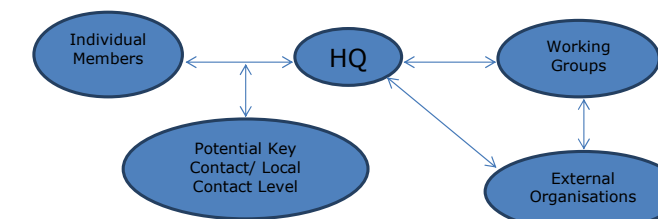
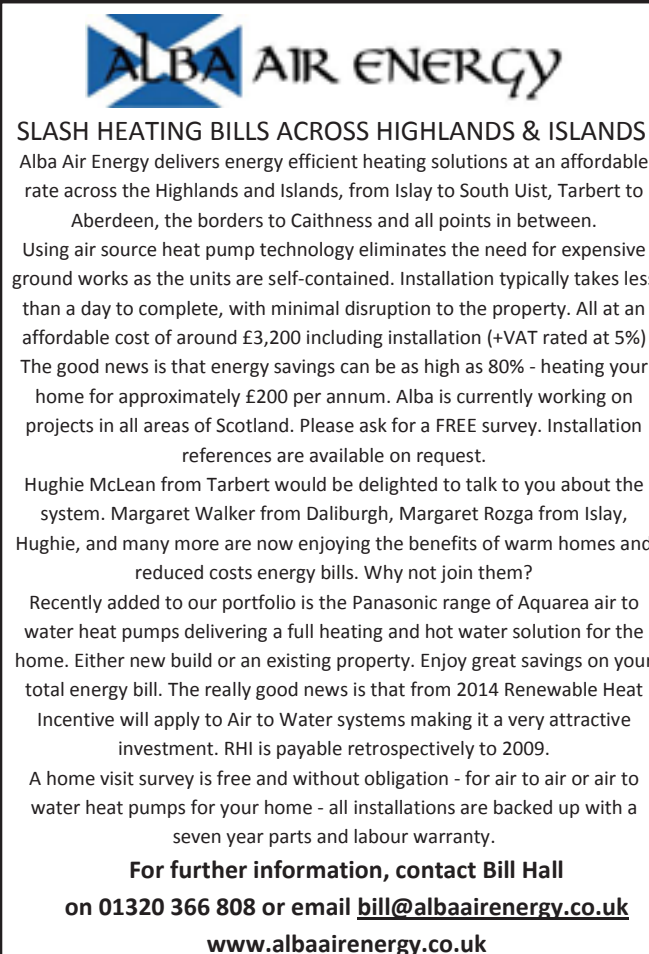
Members will be kept informed directly from HQ and via the key contact for the area. If there is an issue that HQ would like to consult members on, this will be done in a number of ways to ensure that all members have the opportunity to contribute. The methods will include consultation in *The Crofter* and through the monthly e-newsletter. In some cases we will also use the internet, radio

and press articles. Members can respond individually or feed into local groups, which may choose to hold a meeting on the topic or the local contact may consult informally with members by phone or in person.

Local groups can meet as they choose, inviting SCF staff and directors or others to speak on matters of interest. HQ may also wish to call local meetings to gather information and to provide a service to members. This will be organised by HQ with the assistance of any local contact or group.

The current area representatives council will be replaced by an advisory council consisting of members who have been involved in the organisation for some time, past office-bearers for example. Local contacts or the advisory council would not need to meet with the board on a formal basis but rather at the annual gathering and AGM, at which policy issues are discussed.

Suggested communication flow chart from above scenario:

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Hughie McLean from Tarbert would be delighted to talk to you about the system. Margaret Walker from Daliburgh, Margaret Rozga from Islay, Hughie, and many more are now enjoying the benefits of warm homes and reduced costs energy bills. Why not join them?

Recently added to our portfolio is the Panasonic range of Aquarea air to water heat pumps delivering a full heating and hot water solution for the home. Either new build or an existing property. Enjoy great savings on your total energy bill. The really good news is that from 2014 Renewable Heat Incentive will apply to Air to Water systems making it a very attractive investment. RHI is payable retrospectively to 2009.

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on 01320 366 808 or email bill@albaairenergy.co.uk
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Simon Fraser is accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in Crofting Law.

MEMBERS' PAGES

New entrants group update

A NEW ENTRANTS scheme was launched in May this year for the distribution of £2 million pledged by the cabinet secretary, Richard Lochhead.

This was intended as an interim measure to help those who are not currently in receipt of single farm payments. The new entrants advisory panel, on which SCF's Karen MacRae sits, had been asked to advise how the money would be best spent and ensure that it is allocated fairly.

Applications to the scheme closed officially at the end of July. In total there were 969 expressions of interest, of which 815 went on to put an application in to the scheme. The group were tasked with looking at the finer details of how the money could be distributed.

Some of the key criteria that the panel recommended include: agricultural activity, either

livestock or growing crops and a basic payment to ensure that everyone receives a reasonable amount, with a top-up based on area. The panel have also requested the £2 million to be made available in one lump sum rather than over two years as initially proposed.

These details will be put to the cabinet secretary and then the allocation of funds will be crunched through the necessary systems. It is expected that the payment will be made in October.

Karen would be interested to know if you have applied for this scheme and have heard whether you have been successful or unsuccessful in your application. Also, if there are any other topics that you believe need to be brought up through this group please do let her know by emailing karen@crofting.org or phoning HQ.

A year under SCF spotlight

A GOOD VENUE, a bright day, good company, tea, coffee and biscuits; what more could anyone wish for?

A good turn-out of the SCF's board and our members who gathered for that annual event that we all look forward to – not exactly a ceilidh, though that sounded like a good idea at the time.

No! We are here talking about the annual general meeting 2013.

You may say that's not particularly exciting and it's true in the sense that there were no surprises or fireworks to liven up the proceedings. But some issues should give us all cause for concern.

The first is the SCF's fiscal management – finances to you and me. Here Patrick Krause, chief executive, presented the financial statement for the year ended (2012). He summarised by saying that turnover was good but overall funding is the perennial problem. Patrick went on to say that the SCF subscription rate had not been increased for three years and suggested it ought to go up in line with current inflation.

A member from the audience asked if there isn't a danger that we could lose some members if we did this? Patrick replied that subs have been frozen for three years now and by any measure are still excellent value for a member's money. This means, however, that subscription income is worth less in real terms each year.

Another member from the audience contended that without raising subs, SCF is going to do less and less each year and so become less attractive to join or retain its members. However, risks aside, it was eventually agreed by a show of hands that subs should go up by inflation, at least keeping their value, and SCF can continue, as always, to give good value for its members' money.

The meeting closed on a cheerful, somewhat optimistic note with the usual thanks being given to members, our directors and officers for taking time to attend.

Can't wait for next year's AGM.

John Bannister
Company secretary

Details of SCF key contacts and working groups in the next issue

CONGRATULATIONS
to RD MacLeod of Portree who won the £50 Voucher for Animal Health Highland in our training needs prize draw survey at the Black Isle Show.

FREE offer worth £30 for SCF members

Further to our recent articles on volunteering exchanges and crofting holidays through World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms UK (WWOOF UK), we've now arranged a partnership deal exclusive to SCF members.

You will be able to get FREE WWOOF membership as a host – worth £30 – for one year. Through WWOOF you can get willing hands to help around the croft and, in return, the volunteer gets meaningful experience of crofting.

To find out if you are eligible to be a host visit www.wwof.org.uk/information_for_potential_hosts or get in touch with SCF HQ.

In a nutshell, you simply need to be growing food and/or keeping animals in a sustainable way, have an organic mind-set (you do not have to be registered organic) and be willing to share your space with your volunteer.

Members' legal helpline

Eilidh Ross of Inksters Solicitors reports.

ALMOST FIVE months have passed since this joint venture with the Scottish Crofting Federation. We reported in the last edition of *The Crofter* that the helpline had been very busy and this continues to be the case, with crofters from all over the crofting counties calling to speak to either myself or Brian Inkster.

The helpline is intended to be the first port of call for crofters who have a question about crofting law. Members of the SCF who need legal guidance simply call **01599 230 300**, and their call is either transferred immediately to Brian or myself, or else our receptionist takes their details and one of us returns the call within 24 hours or so.

The helpline offers approximately 15 minutes of free advice to SCF members; our experience so far has

demonstrated that the duration of most calls is between 7-12 minutes. A few calls are very brief; a few are longer than 15 minutes, but we think that a ballpark time of 15 minutes is just about right.

The types of questions vary widely. Croft boundary issues; registration on the new crofting register; hydro projects; and the formalities for erecting an agricultural building on a croft. Three issues which many crofters are concerned about are (1) liability for future care home fees; (2) fencing of crofts and control of stock; and (3) croft landlords granting servitudes to third parties over tenanted croft land. These matters are, quite rightly, of much concern to crofters. All of them are, to some extent, products of the time in which we live.

We have also been consulted about a crofter's rights in a common grazing, matrimonial occupancy rights in respect of

a croft house, shooting leases, landlord's claw back and other croft purchase conditions, and nominee croft purchase/sale.

All of us at Inksters feel that the helpline has been a success and we look forward to helping more crofters by answering their legal questions.

It is worth mentioning that so far there has been only one person who has tried to use the helpline (a benefit of SCF membership) without becoming a member of the SCF first; proof, if we needed it, that crofters are an honest lot!

SCF members (and prospective members) may also wish to note that in addition to the 15 minutes of legal advice offered by the helpline, they will also benefit from a 10% discount off our fees if Inksters are instructed formally to act on their behalf in respect of any business (not just the business which has been discussed on the helpline).



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At the shows

Black Isle Show



L-R: Eilidh Ross (Inksters), SCF chair Derek Flynn, Rob Gibson MSP (convenor of the rural affairs parliamentary committee), Crofting Commission convenor Susan Walker



Busy SCF stand



SCF board member Finlay Matheson and Eilidh draw the winner of the training needs survey prize, RD MacLeod

Dunvegan Show



Cattle champion Willie Nicolson, Glen Conon, with Belted Galloway cow and calf



Cheviot sheep judging



New SCF Skye and Lochalsh chair Yvonne White at SCF stand



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A great day out

STRATHNAIRN FARMERS Association's vintage rally display takes place on 28th September at Daviot estate, six miles south of Inverness

This is the seventh year that the rally will be held on Daviot estate, courtesy of Dereck and Roz Mackenzie. A special feature this year will be the smiddy, with a working blacksmith demonstrating his craft.

In addition to seeing a 1923 binder and an 1890 Macdonald of Portsoy reaper in action, along with tractors and machinery which were common on crofts and farms in days gone by, you will also get the opportunity to see sheep being sheared and the wool being spun – and lots more.

A corn stack will be threshed along with

working demonstrations of old farming methods; there will be a display of static agricultural machinery; horses ploughing; plus a heritage marquee displaying photographs of farming life in years gone by – including the history of the famous blacksmith, Kenneth Mackenzie from Evanton.

A forest harvester will be there for big and small kids to try, plus arts and crafts stalls and highland dancing and piping with the Inver Ross accordion and fiddle group.

The day will evoke fond memories for the old and be educational for the younger set: a great day out amidst the fine scenery of Strathnairn.

Remember, you don't need to have a tractor to be there.



SCF member Iain MacQueen, Balloan, Farr on his Vintage Massey Ferguson 35



STRATHNAIRN FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Working Vintage Rally & Display
A great family day down on the farm

Saturday 28th September
at Daviot Estate near Inverness
10.00am – 4.00pm

For an Entry Form Phone 07900 916603
or email: info@daviotvintage.co.uk
www.daviotvintage.co.uk



SCF's John MacLeod with his David Brown and binder

go online at
www.crofting.org

Young Farmers

Young Farmers has provided a social network for young people in rural Scotland for over 75 years and is now looking at extending the network throughout the Highlands and Islands. Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC) north region chairman Stuart Jamieson describes his experiences as a young farmer.

I'VE BEEN A MEMBER of young farmers since the age of 14, 12 years now, and during that time I have taken part in many competitions, social events and travelled across the world. The international travel opportunities have given me my best moment in SAYFC. In 2011 I was lucky enough to go on a study tour to Texas organised by the SAYFC agri-affairs group. A group of 15 members from across Scotland visited farming operations and had a few social visits over two weeks and it was without doubt an amazing and unforgettable experience!

I've developed quite a range of skills as a member of SAYFC; the main one is confidence. People who know me today would hardly

recognise the quiet wee boy 12 years ago before I joined SAYFC! Being a member has helped shape me into the person I am today and I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity.

People assume activities are all agriculturally related but this is far from the truth. We still do activities such as stock judging and sheep shearing, but we also have sporting activities, performing arts, speech-making and arts and crafts. As well as all the YF activities we are also encouraged to get involved in our local community.

If you would like to see a new club form in your area contact our Highland regional event manager Fiona Gibson by emailing fiona@sayfc.org. Work has already started on a new club in the Skye area, so watch the local press for more details. Keep up to date with what's happening on our website, facebook and twitter.

Anyone aged between 14 and 30 can become a YF member and remember 'It's not just for those that wear wellies!'

www.sayfc.org.



Ivan MacDonald

THE FUTURE of crofting in North Uist has suffered a drastic loss with the tragic death of young Ivan MacDonald.

Ivan was born on 14th November 1979 and died on 9th June 2013. Ivan was a very bright lad, both academically and practically. He achieved a first class honours degree in rural business management at the Scottish Agricultural College in Aberdeen and won the best student of the year for his thesis, *Optimum feeding of the ewe in North Uist*.

He was a brilliant piper and was pipe major for the Uist pipe band. He also taught piping in the schools. With his qualifications he could have got a well-paid 9 till 5 job; but Ivan's passion and ambition was to croft. The future of crofting is in the hands of the young and in Ivan's strong hands the future seemed very secure.

About two years ago the crofting business was handed to him from his father and he built his own house and worked extremely hard managing large numbers of cattle and sheep. Most of the sheep grazed on Eavel, the highest peak on North Uist. Ivan was the vice chair of

the North Uist branch of the SCF and he and I used to have long telephone conversations concerning crofting policies.

When we had meetings in Benbecula I could always depend on Ivan for a lift as I hated driving over the causeway during winter evenings. At meetings he always spoke his wise mind in front of any audience. Ivan had a lovely nature, very tolerant, kind and obliging. He was always ready to help others and he did that with great pleasure. His parents have always been highly thought of, his father an excellent crofter and his mother a school teacher. He leaves behind a brother and two sisters.

This is a small community and when we heard of Ivan's death it was a dreadful shock; there seemed to be a strange silence throughout the whole island. Sad emotion was on everyone's face and young lads wept openly. None of us can even imagine the pain his family have.

However they have wonderful memories and they are patient and wise and are to be admired for the dignity and courage with which they bore their loss.

Ena Macdonald



Concerns over Torridon croft house planning refusal

THE SCF recently voiced concern over refusal by the Highland Council and Scottish Government to grant planning consent for a Torridon crofter to live on her croft.

SCF vice-chair Fiona Mandeville said "It has very worrying implications for crofting, and the vibrancy of crofting communities, that a crofter is being refused permission to live on the croft that she works. The decision appears to have been heavily influenced by the objections submitted by holiday home owners in the area, people who don't themselves stay and work in the community yet feel they have the right to dictate on where a crofter can or cannot live."

SCF member Elaine Holmes' hopes of living on her working croft in Schiehallion, Torridon, were extinguished when her appeal to the Scottish Government reporter to overturn a Highland Council decision was refused. The Highland Council planning committee, who refused to give planning consent, was split on a 7-7 vote and the decision was made on the casting vote of committee chairwoman. The committee received nine objections to the application, but Miss Holmes claims that only three of the objectors play an active role in the community.

The decision was made on the grounds that the application was in breach of a council policy on landscape and that the application would be eroding its wider landscape setting. In reaching this conclusion, the planners have gone against the advice of SNH, the relevant landscape authority, who did not object to the proposal. The council policy also acknowledges the need for landscape considerations to be balanced by the need

to retain population and services in fragile communities. SNH found the right balance. The council and the planning system didn't and it is to the community's detriment.

Fiona concluded: "The planning system seems to have badly failed this woman, her community and the principles by which crofting is sustained – use of land and retention of people. We would be interested to hear from other crofters with similar stories."

As we went to press, SCF had written Scottish Government minister for local government and planning, Derek MacKay, asking him to consider calling in the Torridon decision to examine it in the light of the government's rural development policies and in the context of the expert opinion provided by SNH on the critical landscape factor by which the principle planning reporter upheld Highland Council's decision.

The reporter concluded his recommendations by saying: "I recognise that Torridon is a fragile community...There appear to be few obvious opportunities for development within the village. While the appeal proposal would help to maintain Torridon's population and services, I consider that its adverse impacts on settlement pattern and landscape setting make it contrary to policy 36."

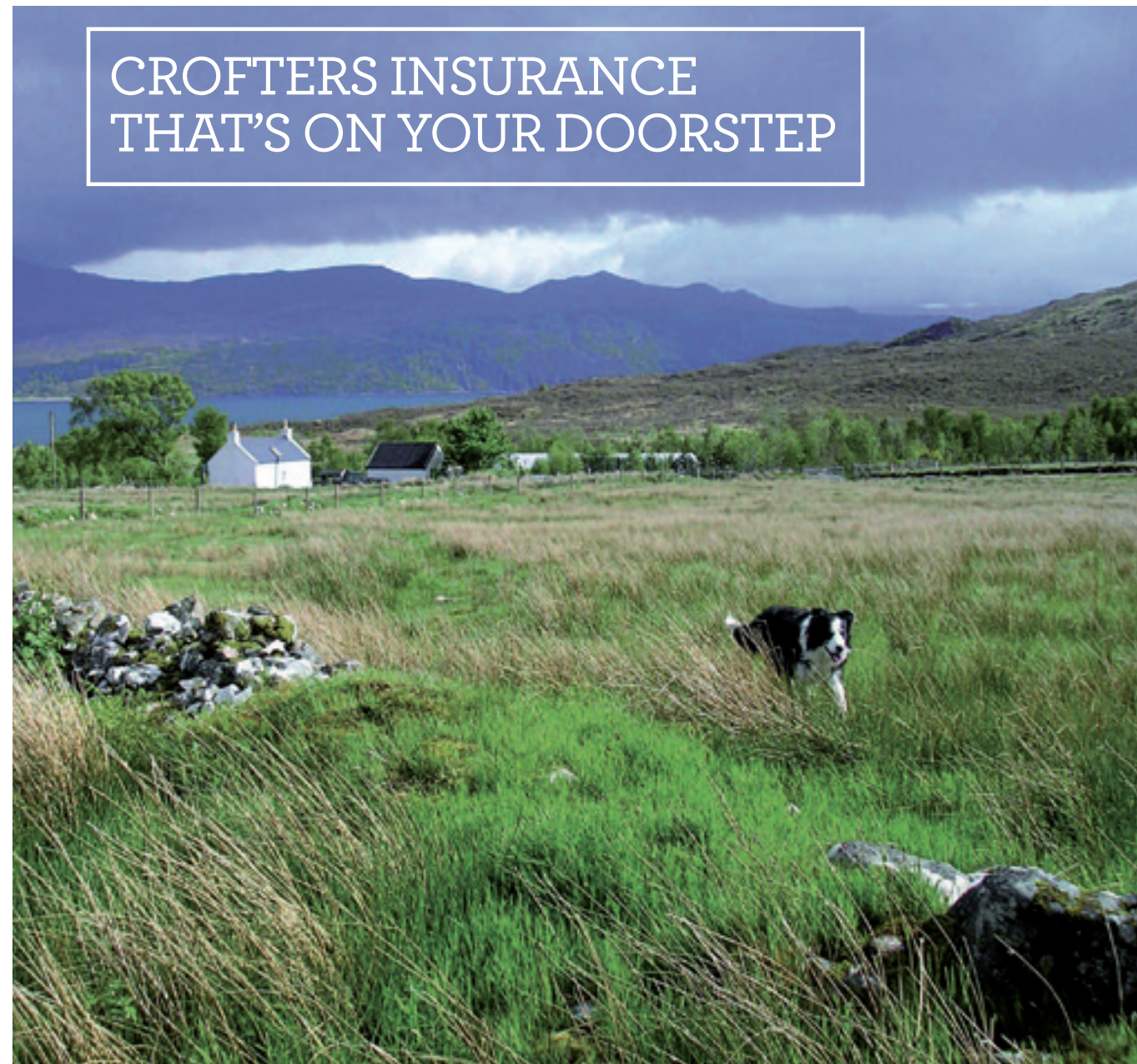
The SCF letter to the planning minister states: "It seems to us that with these words Scotland's planning system is demonstrating that it regards Torridon's dramatic appearance as more important than its people. Quite apart from the question of the crofting interest – which in our experience the Directorate of Planning

and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) routinely ignores – these words are indicative of a general lack of understanding amongst urban-based planners of the needs of Scotland's most remote and fragile rural communities; and of broader government policy.

"The DPEA's decision in the Torridon case undermines the credibility of a key pledge on rural development, made this year by the Scottish Government – to enable development in all rural areas which supports prosperous and sustainable communities whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality. Given SNH's advice, approval of Ms Holmes' house would have been in perfect accord with this policy. It would also have met the government's commitment to support more opportunities for small-scale housing development".

The letter concludes: "In light of the government's policy objectives, and taking full account of local need and expert opinion, the SCF requests that you revisit the DPEA's decision on the Torridon case. Approval of the modest, single-storey dwelling-house could help to restore the credibility of the Scottish Government's commitments to the well-being of rural Scotland. It will provide a fillip and new life-blood for a hard-pressed and fragile community. It should also act as a platform for debate on how the urban-based Highland Council can learn to deal fairly and wisely with the development needs of the vast majority of the area for which they are responsible."

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Common grazings... utilising potential

SCF annual gathering 2013

AN EVENT exploring ways to develop opportunities offered to crofters and the wider community through action to improve, protect and manage common grazings, crofting's greatest land resource.

Thursday 19th and Friday 20th September,
Stornoway Town Hall, Isle of Lewis

Our annual gathering has speakers on subjects relevant to this important theme such as: • funding support under CAP for the use of grazings • management structures for appropriate enterprises on common grazings • looking at how common grazings in other parts of the UK are used • diversification of income sources • community assets and ownership • energy generation and managing common grazings as peatlands.

We are also very pleased to announce that we have the minister for environment and climate control Paul Wheelhouse MSP opening the conference.

We are holding the conference itself over two days, running from the middle of Thursday 19th to the middle of Friday 20th. This will allow for ferry timetables and mean that only one overnight is required.

We can offer the full package of the

conference and workshops, the dinner (an event in itself!), accommodation and refreshments for the highly subsidised rate to SCF members of only £90. We are asking corporate and business delegates to pay the full rate of £250.

Participants coming from community

bodies can get help in meeting costs from HIE – please contact Pam Noble in the Community Assets Team on 01520 722024

Don't let cost stop you from coming; local authorities have said that they can consider helping individuals or groups with travel costs. Please contact your local ward manager.



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See page 19
for membership benefits

SCF goose petition

IN JULY SCF raised an on-line petition in the Scottish Parliament urging the Scottish Government to review its policy on wild geese.

"Everyone seems to be aware of the terrible threat of escalating wild goose numbers," said SCF director Roddy MacDonald, "yet there is an apparent lack of government action – in fact they are considering reducing the budget to control this pest. We have raised this petition to show the strength of feeling and get some meaningful action before it is too late."

The petition called on the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; to reassess its

decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes, and to assign additional resources to crop protection and adaptive management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

Ena MacDonald, an SCF representative in the Uists and a long-term campaigner on the goose problem said: "It is estimated that over 10,000 greylag geese reside here. The government says it supports crofting and wants to help young crofters, but does nothing about geese forcing crofting out. We just cannot compete against these geese anymore."

As we went to press the petition had well over 200 signatures. It closed on 1st September. Thanks to all who expressed their support.



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visit www.crofting.org for full contact details

Company Number SC 218658 Charity Number SC 031919

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Crofter 100

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