

Crofting law reform

THE LAW Society of Scotland (LSS) rural affairs sub-committee has selected four crofting law matters which are being considered in detail as part of a project for 2020.

Stakeholders identified these matters as ones which would merit reform. The project focuses on the legal aspects, with a view to suggesting specific improvements to existing legislation and influencing legislative change. LSS is not undertaking a full review of the law relating to crofting.

The consultation sought the views of interested stakeholders on the identified aspects of the law of crofting. LSS invited views and experiences of the following matters and any suggestions for legal changes:

- croft succession – in particular, circumstances where there is no transfer of a tenant's interest within two years of the date of death;
- the legal status and definition of owner-occupier crofter – for example, it is believed that there are around 1000 individuals who own and physically occupy crofts (some pre-1955 Act crofts) but who do not meet the legal definition of owner-occupier crofter;
- reviewing and updating the statutory conditions of tenure – in particular, opportunities for modernisation of the conditions, for example condition 11;
- definition of the crofting community – particularly in light of the comments of the Scottish Land Court in *Eunson v Crofting Commission (SLC/10-14/15)*.

The consultation closed on 30th March. We will report on the findings of the review in a future issue of *The Crofter*.



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What is crofting development?

MANY WILL remember that, as part of the 2010 crofting legislation reform, the overseeing of crofting development was taken away from the Crofters Commission (as it was then) and given to Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The wording of the handover, whether deliberate or accidental, was such that HIE can correctly claim that their remit is community development. Crofting communities are included in this. The net result is that no one agency has the specific task of overseeing crofting development.

The functions, powers and duties which were under the remit of the Crofters Commission were the general functions (i) of developing crofting and (ii) of promoting the interests of crofters, and the particular powers and duties of:

- improvement of land and livestock;
- planting of trees;
- supply of agricultural equipment and requisites;
- marketing of agricultural produce;
- experimental work on crofting methods;
- provision of demonstration crofts;
- the needs of the crofting communities for public services of all kinds;
- provision of social amenities and the need for industries to provide supplementary occupations for crofters or work for their families;
- and to make such recommendations as they may think fit on any of the matters aforesaid.

None of this being done or overseen by any single agency. Most is not done at all.

Following enactment of the Crofting Reform 2010 Act, the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Crofting spent many hours discussing

crofting development. This was such a big topic that a sub-group was to be formed. At the time there was a Crofting Law Stakeholders Group convened by Scottish Government and it was felt that a Crofting Development Stakeholders Group running in parallel would be logical. This was put to the minister under whose portfolio crofting fell and a group was set up in 2015 which was called the Crofting Stakeholders Forum.

An initial review of the top priorities for crofting resulted in five agreed recommendations being sent to the minister in October 2015:

- **Simplify crofting legislation** – give this group the task of developing the bones of a new act;
- **New entrants** – make crofts available;
- **Increase affordable housing** – through a meaningful grant and loan system, do more to help new entrants/crofters get access to affordable housing in rural and island communities;
- **Development of crofting** – create a funded lead body on crofting development;
- **Financial incentives** – ensure current and future P1 and P2 policies have a positive impact on crofting.

The development of common grazings was later added to this list as a discrete priority.

These priorities were corroborated at the Future of Crofting conference held in Inverness in December 2015 and sent to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee of the Scottish Parliament to be taken forward into the next session.

Stakeholders and Scottish Government officials in the Crofting Stakeholders Forum

...Continued on page 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- **Crofters' Diversity Pays!**
- **Sea eagle scheme**
- **On the croft**
- **Gaining Ground**
- **Croft produce & croft tourism**
- **Muirburn**

... and much more

Message from the chair...

Yvonne White



TO SAY we are living through strange times is perhaps a bit of an understatement.

We started the year with devastating fires in Australia, floods and gales in the British Isles and then the corona virus; and a plague of locusts devastating crops in some parts of Africa.

And the UK has left the EU with economic and social effects still uncertain.

In this time of uncertainty, what is certain? Especially when an influential advisor to the treasury is of the view that agriculture and fisheries are unimportant in a future UK and we should be modelling ourselves along the lines of Singapore, which has no agriculture. That is a very crowded island about the size of Skye. This may be a deliberate leak to scare people, so when crumbs are handed out to the agriculture sector there is relief that it is not as bad as feared.

Perhaps the treasury advisor is no expert either. The UK food sector contributes £111 billion annually to the economy and accounts for 13% of national employment – and is the UK's biggest manufacturing sector. We do know that the UK government sees the reduction of import tariffs on food stuffs as a huge Brexit bonus. So we could have a free trade policy on food imports which would devastate lamb and beef export and home markets, which SCF members are reliant on.

There is an increasing threat that without EU food standards protection there will be a significant reduction in our existing food safety, production and environmental standards. Food imports such as USA chlorinated chicken and beef from Africa aren't available in the UK, due to stringent animal welfare regulations and EU import tariffs, which act as an import barrier. This is likely to change now the UK is out of the EU. Crofters may be producing lamb and beef to EU standards, in competition in our home markets with cheap unregulated imports.

If the UK does not agree a deal with the EU, (remember hard Brexit) one will have to place

tariffs on the other. Whether there is a deal with the EU or not, we will end up with World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms for non-EU goods and possibly EU trade. Agricultural support will no longer be ring fenced, as it is currently under EU terms. It will need to compete for funding with other areas like health and schools, so strong justification will be needed for future agriculture support.

The Scottish Government's idea at present appears to be to keep things as stable as possible for the next few years. Changing trade terms as a result of Brexit is not within the Scottish Government's gift.

A key WTO aim is to ensure equal market access amongst its members, by limiting domestic agricultural support – which is seen as trade distorting. The WTO currently has 164 members, between them responsible for 95% of world trade. The WTO creates international trade rules and oversees how members put the rules into practice. For example, WTO agreements place limits on tariffs and cap agricultural subsidies at a percentage of the member country's total agricultural production. The EU, however, negotiated a generous, bespoke, larger subsidy cap and agricultural terms at the WTO. UK is a member of WTO, but will now be removed from EU/WTO terms.

So where does that leave crofting with regards to future support, given WTO does not like trade-distorting headage-based sheep and beef schemes? Support is allowed under WTO terms, as long as the support has minimal or no trade-distortion effects. Thus direct payments to producers which are not linked to agricultural production are allowed, along with payments under environmental programmes and under regional assistance programmes, including general and product-specific pest and disease control measures. It looks like a key direction for crofting in future support will be in delivering environmental public goods and helping maintain

population in rural crofting areas. Crofting already does this, so is well placed to build upon it.

WTO agricultural support terms are much more complicated. Detailed negotiations need to take place and agreement needs to be reached between WTO and UK if any preferential support treatment will be allowed. The principle of non-trade-distorted agricultural support is a main driver of WTO. We have gone from a UK government promise that it is nonsense that we will not have a deal with the EU to there is a 50/50 chance of no EU deal. So who knows what will happen?

New trade terms and weather changes brought about by climate change will affect our import and export abilities, with some currently imported foods maybe becoming unavailable or too expensive. We import some 50% of our food, so we need to become more robust in increasing home-produced food. With the correct support, crofting is ideally placed to play a significant role in food supply and help maintain the levels of food quality and security we have come to rely upon and expect.

We need appropriately targeted support to deliver local flexible slaughtering facilities; local supply chains focused on small-scale producers; and help to build strong local support for local food production. We also require, along with many other areas, adequate levels of professional input throughout the supply chain – vets, abattoir operators, sheep shearers etc. In all these areas SCF continues to lobby the Scottish government and MPs in the best interests of its members.

Uncertainty over future trade markets, coupled with extreme weather conditions, increases feed costs to keep cattle and sheep in good condition – and leads to negative mental health effects. It is worth noting that RSABI can be a good source of support in times of need. The RSABI service is available to those previously and currently involved in farming and crofting. It provides a range of support and the service is confidential. The support includes welfare benefits, business reviews, debt signposting and counselling services as well as financial help. RSABI can be contacted on 0300 111 4166 from 7am to 11pm 365 days of the year and even offers a call-out service for the lonely and vulnerable.

Increasingly, studies show what we already know from experience – the generally positive effects of working the land and with animals on our outlook and mental health. It is great to see Gaining Ground, the SCF and Highland and Moray Leader initiative, being so successful in its aim of providing opportunities on crofts for people to access land-based activities, to get the benefits of nature that crofting brings. It is also a means of diversification for crofters, as it provides a lot of public value. You will find more information on page five.

To end on another positive note, research on the resilience of beef and sheep production in the uplands of Northern England and Scotland, in the face of uncertain environments and policy landscapes, can be found at www.upland-resilience.org. An interesting fact was that Orkney has the highest density of cattle in Europe. So Orkney is Scotland's equivalent of the Argentine's cattle ranches.

The findings of this study, along with many others, will be used to help make robust and helpful policy decisions regarding the future of our hill/upland areas.

Crofting at the summit



The Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) met in Ness, Isle of Lewis, on 16th March, writes Commission CEO Bill Barron, and convener Rod Mackenzie and I had the opportunity to speak to the meeting about crofting.

CONVENTION meetings, which take place every six months, are like summit meetings for the crofting counties. Led and chaired by deputy first minister John Swinney, COHI is a forum where Scottish Government ministers meet with the leaders of Highland and Island local authorities and other bodies such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the University of the Highlands and Islands and the Crofting Commission.

In recent years COHI has discussed investment, education and skills, jobs, broadband, transport and housing. But at its meeting last October, COHI decided to focus on two issues which are arguably even more fundamental: how to reverse population decline from our remote communities; and how to respond to the climate and biodiversity emergency.

We were proud to remind COHI members of the huge and irreplaceable contribution crofters have made to both issues in the past. Compared to other rural parts of the Highlands and Islands, there is a far greater settled population in the areas that fought and struggled to retain a crofting community in the 19th century and to take advantage of land settlement opportunities in the 1920s. Equally, it would be hard



to overstate the contribution that crofting's low-intensity agriculture has made to the environmental health of the Highlands and Islands. The unique machair habitat, the managed uplands of the common grazings and the well-tended inbye all result from crofting activity over generations. All have helped to sustain the rich biodiversity that surrounds us.

But what of the future? The pressures of globalisation and industrialisation are now putting intense pressure on remote land-based communities and on the environment, and the current trends are undeniably adverse. These are of course worldwide challenges, but Scottish ministers rightly want Scotland to show leadership – and that will mean a new focus on the thousands of hectares of land on

common grazings and crofts.

Every crofter knows that more could be done on common grazings. There is much more scope for peatland restoration and the improvement of better-quality land for sustainable and extensive livestock grazing; and there could be more small-scale renewable energy projects and development of new woodlands on appropriate sites.

It's important that crofting communities and crofting landlords are able to take forward these kinds of activities, and the incentives to do so are key. For common grazings, it's also vital to have an active grazings committee in office, able to coordinate the interests of shareholders, apply for funding, and liaise with other parties to get schemes off the ground. Recently

the Commission has worked hard to reverse the decline in numbers of grazings committees, and I am delighted that there are now dozens more in office than a year or two ago.

Every crofter also knows the need for more younger people and families to gain entry to crofting communities, and that this can be hard because of the costs involved. Every year hundreds of crofts change hands through assignation, sale, succession or letting, but we may need to look again at how to make it easier for younger people of limited means to gain entry to crofting.

If you have new ideas on any of this feel free to write to me at the Crofting Commission or email bill.barron@crofting.gov.scot

Cross Party Group on Crofting

SCF HAS organised the Cross-Party Group on Crofting (CPGoC) in the Scottish Parliament for 20 years. It is a very powerful forum for informing MSPs of crofting issues and garnering their support for pressing the Scottish Government to act.

The CPGoC meets regularly in Edinburgh or Inverness and is co-convened by Rhoda Grant MSP, Alasdair Allan MSP and Edward Mountain MSP. There is always a robust meeting with regular attendance from MSPs, representatives of organisations and individuals. Meetings are held in Inverness to

give crofters a better chance of coming. If you wish to be at one please let SCF HQ know.

Standing items on the agenda are crofting support; crofting administration; crofting development; and crofting legislation reform. We also have a regular topical theme and invite a guest speaker to present this.

At the meeting in January, David Barnes, Scottish Government deputy director of EU exit strategy and negotiations, gave an outlook for the coming year. In March the focus was on crofting development with speakers from Scottish Government, Crofting Commission, Farm Advisory Service and SCF.





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Leading the way

A RECENT Guardian article criticised UK's intensive farming and highlighted rewilding.

The article focused on the contrasts between the UK's over-subsidised, hedge-stripped hectares producing intensive, chemically protected crops with the likes of Glenfeshie, where the Danish millionaire Povlsen family has greatly reduced the deer population and planted millions of native trees.

Sporting estates don't provide many families with incomes in remote rural areas. Povlsen's company Wildland Ltd is developing a number of high-end holiday accommodations across their three Highland estates. But holiday lets in remote rural areas don't provide many jobs either.

Contrast this with the many crofting-community-owned estates in the west highlands and islands, where economic opportunities have been created and fragile communities stabilised.

A recent planning application by Melness Crofters Estate for the Sutherland Space Hub is being opposed by Povlsen. It's estimated that the hub would provide 61 well-paid jobs and HIE foresees a further 250 good jobs if the development goes ahead.

The Strathly South Wind Farm was granted planning permission at a public inquiry despite Wildland Ltd opposition. So there is hope.

Welcoming a recent Scottish Government funding announcement to support agriculture's

contribution to meeting climate change ambitions, SCF suggested crofting led the way.

"A new Agricultural Transformation Programme to support environmentally beneficial changes is not before time," said SCF's chair, Yvonne White. "Crofting takes place on some of Scotland's most ecologically fragile areas and primary carbon sinks – the peatlands. We would like to see crofters being supported to manage these areas.

"Crofting is well ahead on environmentally sustainable practices with its mainly-extensive grazing system. Most of Scotland's high-nature-value areas are under crofting tenure, so we must be doing something right. The reinstatement of an easily accessible crofting forestry grant scheme, including low-density woodland cover for grazing, would see tree-planting on croft land burgeon. Peatlands, which crofters also manage, are even more relevant to carbon sequestration and climate change. Studies have shown that careful mixed grazing is very beneficial to carbon storage and increasing biodiversity."

Crofting has always worked with nature to produce high-quality food and manage the environment sustainably. Leading the way in low-carbon agriculture, crofters can do even more to help reach the Scottish Government's ambitious net-zero targets.

Embracing innovation and traditional methods will play a role in achieving this.

2020 priorities

CAMPAIGN priorities were set by the SCF board and council at their meeting in January.

"As the only organisation dedicated to campaigning for crofters and fighting for the future of crofting," said SCF chair Yvonne White, "this year is going to be busy with many fronts to cover on behalf of crofters. Leaving Europe will bring many challenges with regards to trade of meat and croft produce, and agricultural support – especially the support of the less favoured areas, which is due to be reviewed this year. It is absolutely imperative that crofters join together under one banner to protect our rights."

Yvonne added, "We had some significant wins in the past year, not least our campaign that got the convergence funding more fairly distributed. The benefit to crofters of this increased share of the rebate will pay for their subscription of SCF many times over. And there is the distribution of the second tranche yet to fight for.

"The climate emergency is going to dominate all we do and crofters have an important part to play, having a very sound record in good management of our environment. Most high nature value areas in Scotland are under crofting tenure – for example machair, known for its incredible biodiversity, and peatlands, which are the best ecosystem for sequestering carbon. And of course crofting produce is the finest quality and eco-friendly.

"The National Development Plan for Crofting will be finalised in the next year and there is much at stake in this for crofters. Also, whilst crofting law reform has been put on hold for now, it is important that we keep a watching brief."

As always, many things that effect crofting are discussed in stakeholder meetings and are therefore open to competition from other sector representatives. It is essential that crofting is represented by the organisation set up by crofters, run by crofters, for crofters.

What is crofting development?



The Future of Crofting conference

...Continued from page 1

devoted many hours working up strategies to deliver the priorities. The group discussed the development priority and clarified that it is important to recognise that crofting development is a broad area which is inextricably linked with all of the other priority areas. It also recognised that crofting development should be acknowledged as related to:

- existing crofters, crofting activity, land resource under crofting tenure and communities; and to
- the potential for expansion of the crofting system to new areas and communities, in the traditional crofting counties and throughout Scotland.

The 2019-20 Programme for

Government (PfG), published in September, says: "We will publish the Crofting National Development Plan to set the long-term strategic direction for crofting; and continue to support new entrants to crofting, including for woodland crofts. We will also work with the Crofting Commission and HIE to enhance the sustainability of crofting communities.

"The Crofting Commission will take forward key development priorities such as improving croft occupancy levels, supporting township development and creating opportunities for new entrants."

We are already in April, with less than a year in which this government can fulfil these promises.

What now?

Gaining even more Ground



Chris Smith talks about insurance



Sarah Asher shares her experience

During the Gaining Ground project we have been meeting a variety of crofters and stakeholders to find out how you can be supported on your social crofting journey, writes SCF training manager Lucy Beattie.

BACK IN the summer at Glachbeg, focus groups highlighted that a lot of people who were interested in social crofting simply didn't know where to start when it comes to planning, preparation and paperwork. In late February an open meeting held at Inverness was attended by 20 participants focusing on compliance, legal duties, risk assessment and insurance.

One workshop looked at risk assessments, policies and procedures for social crofting enterprises, led by Sarah Asher from Darach Croft

Another covered finding the right insurance for social crofting, led by Chris Smith and Carolyn Oddy from Jelf Clark Thomson insurance brokers.

Despite the seemingly dry nature of the workshops, discussion led by Sarah Asher



focused on practical advice gathered from her social work experience and background in nursing. Sarah presented her story relating to the start up of Darach Croft in Strontian, which offers social crofting placements and opportunities. Her take-home advice, "Write your policies and share with those who visit

for their input and feedback; review after six months and see if changes are needed."

Chris Smith, an experienced agricultural insurance broker, talked through the things to consider when getting insurance, whether you have employees or volunteers attending the croft.

With some attendees already providing social crofting activities and others looking to start very soon, a lively lunchtime discussion took place. Attendees came from Applecross, Sheildaig, Forres, Keith, Findhorn, Ullapool and Inverness.

The output from this project will be the social crofting hub, social.crofting.org, where there will be factsheets, case studies and links to inform those interested. The Gaining Ground project meeting finale will be Sunday 3rd May in Morayshire, venue TBC. Save the date and follow the website for further details as they are announced.

This project has been kindly funded by LEADER as a co-operation between Moray and Highland.

Croft House Grant Scheme

AN ADDITIONAL £601,212 has been awarded to support crofters in some of Scotland's most remote and marginal communities.

The Croft House Grant helps crofters to upgrade housing or build new homes and allows them to achieve the full potential of crofts while generating economic activity. The grant also aims to retain and attract people to rural communities.

Since 2007, more than £20.9 million has

been awarded to support over 990 individuals and families.

Confirming recently that 20 crofters will benefit from this latest funding, rural economy secretary Fergus Ewing said: "Crofting makes a very important contribution to the long-term sustainability of remote and rural communities. If this way of life is to be preserved, we need to ensure the continued availability of good quality housing to help attract and retain more people to these areas.

"I have seen first-hand the impact the Croft House Grant has had on individuals and families across rural Scotland, which is why I am delighted that more than £600,000 of additional funding is going to support a further 20 successful applicants and their families. This funding will make a real difference. I am determined to continue to help people in crofting areas, which the Croft House Grant has a proven track record of doing."

ON THE CROFT

Donald's hortiblog

THE WINTER of 2019/20 in the northwest will go down as one of the wettest and windiest in recent memory. I'm thinking of 1988 and 1993, but thankfully we've avoided the extremes and awful events of 2005.

Inevitably, this means a late start for the crofting horticulturist. Our usual early seed sowings have largely failed, not so much lacking warmth, but light.

Furthermore, at the time of writing at the end of February, one of our polytunnels remains uncovered despite our best intentions to do it in the autumn. The preparation is all done. It just needs a still day and a modicum of sun to warm the cover as it is stretched over the structure.

When we finally get started, we all need to remember crop rotation, the ancient practice that is so essential to maintain soil fertility and health – and to avoid pest and disease buildup.

This is often difficult to achieve in protected cropping environments, where a fairly intensive regime tends to be used in order to repay investment in infrastructure. I usually advise against putting up one huge polytunnel (a lot more vulnerable to wind damage) and instead to go for two or three smaller structures, enabling a much longer



Early crop of Red Duke of York in polytunnel, Lewis

crop rotation.

In outdoor cropping, a longer rotation is possible. The aim is to avoid repeated cropping for as long as we can.

When breaking new ground, potatoes are the crop of tradition. They don't need a particularly fine soil and, when lifted, a lot of perennial weeds can be removed at the same time.

Follow with a nitrogen-fixing crop, peas or beans, which, with liming if necessary, will get the ground ready for a high-nutrient-demanding crop, such as the

cabbage or onion family.

Next could come carrots, parsnips or beets, which do much better without the application of fresh manure.

On a croft, fallowing and grazing should be possible as part of the rotation, perhaps combined with green manure crops to build fertility and improve soil structure. Larger-scale units could go for an arable silage break, such as oats undersown with clover. The soil-enhancement benefit of oats, well known by earlier generations of crofters, is again being recognised

by organic growers and even in the mainstream industry.

Finally, a wee hint. National horticultural suppliers impose huge delivery charges to the Highlands and Islands, even for products that can easily be sent by post. Things like ground cover fabric, heavy duty polythene and water pipe can be purchased from local builders merchants, free of delivery charge and often at a cheaper price.

Rotation of crops is covered in detail in Chapter 4 of SCF's Horticulture: a Handbook for Crofters.

Natural restoration

SCF council member John Bannister MBE reflects on unused croft land.

MANY IN-BYE crofts are not fully utilised or put to any other purposeful use.

In strict legal terms this contravenes section 5(c) of the 93 Act, which says: "(c) must cultivate the croft; or put it to another purposeful use, so that every part of the croft... is cultivated, or put to another purposeful use." In my view, other purposes are equally valid – preserving our crofting landscape, encouraging ecological diversity, shelter, soil retention, water absorption, air quality, flora and fauna (including micro-fauna), offsetting society's carbon trajectory.

Natural restoration does not mean doing nothing, ignoring or effectively abandoning parts of a croft. A strategic approach is needed.

Would natural restoration qualify as another purposeful use on a part of the in-bye which, without intervention, is unlikely ever to be used for its original purpose? Parts inaccessible for day-to-day use would fall into this category – too small for a formal forestry scheme or to qualify for other

environmental grants, but with enough soil depth to allow random planting of native trees – creating shelter belts or maximising the species mix of vegetation, to enhance the natural habitat and create an appearance of a connected landscape.

All this is possible but, to be considered legitimate as another purposeful use, it must show planned and managed activity by the occupying crofter. It could include planting native trees, avoiding the wide, spontaneous glut of other vegetative species. A diverse mix of native broadleaf trees could provide mother trees of the future, species such as aspen, alder, ash, cherry, crab, oak, wych elm.

Bushes could include elder, fuchsia, hazel, holly, hawthorn, juniper, willow, wild rose etc. All are hugely beneficial to wildlife and our treasured landscape. They satisfy the global need for increased vegetative growth to offset our carbon footprint, to plant many more trees in our open unused spaces.

Specialist tree nurseries may be able to provide relatively small quantities of trees and bushes. A group of neighbouring crofters could buy



Must show planned and managed activity

quantities of trees between them and divvy the order on, say, an annual basis. This would enable planting small quantities on each croft over time and provide a diversity of species over a much wider area – more attractive in terms of time and energy and more affordable without the need to search for grants.

ON THE CROFT

Apocaileaps crodh?

NACH ANN air crodh a tha an droch ainm an-dràsta. Prògraman telebhisean a tha fàgail orra gur iad as coireach airson a' mhòr chuid de bhlàthachadh sa ghnàth-shìde agus aithrisean gu bheil dòighean fada nas èifeachdaiche a bhith toradh biadh do mhac an duine. Tha a-nis daoine a' sguir a ghabhail bainne nam bò agus a' tionndadh gu "bainne" bho lusan; cluinidh sinn moladh nach eil feòil dhearg math dhut co-dhiù, agus mar sin air adhart.

Cha b' uilear dhuinn sùil nas dlùithe a thoirt air na tagartasan seo ge-tà. Sa chiad àite, blàthachadh na cruinne; Tha crodh a' brùchdadh metan a tha 25 tursan nas làidire na CO2 don adhar. Mar sin tha cuid a' cumail a-mach gu bheil droch bhuaidh aig crodh air a' ghnàth-shìde. Ach, chan eil a' chùis cho simplidh sin, tha beatha ghoirid aig metan, falbhaidh a' mhòr-chuid dheth an ceann dusan bliadhna

seach CO2 a mhaireas ceudan de bhliadhnaichean. Mar sin, fhad 's nach eil an àireamh de chrodh ag àrdachadh chan èirich meud a' mhetan san adhar – bhiodh e a' briseadh sìos aig an aon astar 's a tha e ga chruthachadh.

'S e feurach a tha stòradh an tomhas as motha de charbon san t-saoghal an-dràsta, agus 's e feur a bhios a' cumail an talamh fallainn. Bheir an talamh fo fheur a-staigh CO2, agus sin gu sònraichte nuair a bhios ionaltradh a' dol air adhart aig an ìre cheart. Nis chan eil an stamag aig daoine comasach air feur a chnàmh, 's mar sin tha e dèanamh ciall a bhith cumail bheathaichean a bhios a' cnàmh an cir – as urrainn feur a bhriseadh sìos – agus am measg iad sin tha crodh. Gu dearbh 's e feur agus lusan eile den t-seòrsa sin am biadh as freagarraiche do chrodh; chan eil e ceart a bhith gam biadhadh le cus stuth eile leithid grain. Bu chòir grain a bhith ga chumail do dhaoine.



Ma bhios sinn gu bhith a' geàrradh eimisean CO2, feumaidh sinn geàrradh sìos an astair a bhios biadh a' siubhal mun ruig e na truinnsearan againn. Mar sin mun sioft sinn bho bhainne nam bò gu "bainne" nan lus, cha bu mhiste sinn cnuasachadh air cò às a tha soya no almain a' tighinn. Dh'fhaoidte gu bheil stuth mar sin bho thaobh eile an t-saoghail a' dèanamh barrachd cron air an talamh againn na bhios a' bhò bhochd.

Cattle seem to have a bad name these days, they're blamed for contributing to global warming and being inefficient at producing food for human consumption. However we should look to the latest research to understand that methane is not as damaging as some maintain and that ground bearing a rich crop of sensibly grazed grass can both store carbon and be productive.

Gabhan Mac a'Phearsain

Best practice control of sheep scab through improved disease diagnosis

SHEEP SCAB is a highly contagious disease of sheep caused by the ectoparasitic mite *Psoroptes ovis*.

The disease is endemic in the UK and notifiable in Scotland. Scab represents a significant economic and welfare issue for the livestock industry in Scotland with costs associated with treatment, control and reductions in performance of around £9 million per annum.

Diagnosis of scab was historically through observation of clinical signs – itching, pruritus, wool loss and detection of mites in skin scrapings. Early stages of infestation are difficult to diagnose and sub-clinical animals can be a major factor in disease spread.

Scientists at Moredun Research Institute have developed a blood test, which can detect even sub-clinical cases. Available through Biobest Ltd, this is a significant improvement in disease control, critical in any future control/eradication programmes. For the test to have maximum impact, it needs to be applied correctly and incorporated into wider biosecurity protocols.

This requires communication of key messages on correct use of the test to stakeholder groups, including crofters and farmers, vets and suitably qualified persons. One example is the importance of testing multiple individuals from a flock when using the test to determine flock-level disease

status. Randomly testing at least 12 sheep greatly improves the chances of disease detection, regardless of flock size. However, reports from Biobest Ltd indicate that many clients still test individuals or low numbers of sheep. Using the test in this way reduces the ability to detect disease, resulting in mistaken all-clears.

The test can also be used to target treatments, promoting responsible use of medicines and reducing over-use of endectocides, thus slowing development of resistance.

We worked with a professional animator, Selina Wagner (Bibina Animations) to develop a series of five cartoons to disseminate best practice advice promoting use of the test. Each cartoon covers an aspect of best practice use of the sheep scab blood test. The individual cartoons are linked together through a poster, which introduces the characters within each cartoon.

The cartoon series is deployable as either printed material or as digital copy through web-links and social media platforms. PDF files of the cartoons are freely available and can be downloaded from the Moredun website: <https://www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/sheep-scab>

For more information, contact Dr Stewart Burgess: stewart.burgess@moredun.ac.uk



ON THE CROFT

Harbro Country Stores

ANDREW JONES has been at Coull Farm, Islay for over 10 years. His father was the farm manager previously, and had lived here for more than 40 years.

In 2018, Andrew made the decision to switch all his feed to Harbro. After discussions with Fiona Shaw, store manager at Harbro Lochgilphead, he decided to exclusively switch to Harbro for a year initially. Within a few months, Andrew knew he'd be sticking with Harbro. Of course the feed itself was quality, but in addition he quickly built up a relationship of trust with Fiona and in her advice.

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anything she can't answer, she'll speak with them before coming back to me – I never feel like I'm talking to a salesperson. She always gives me different suggestions for feed and it's up to me to decide what to go for."

One of the main products Andrew has had success with is Harbro's 3-step sheep nutrition system. "We feed Vitality pre- and post lambing and that has certainly meant stronger lambs for us – they're up and on their feet much faster than in previous years. We had very little shepherding to do, we only had to get into the fields where there were triplets."

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ON THE CROFT

Common grazings dilemmas



The Grazings Dilemmas meeting in Uist

THE FARM ADVISORY SERVICE (FAS) held a roadshow this winter, Common Grazing Dilemmas, in Roybridge, Skye and Uist.

Teams at SAC Portree and SAC Balivanich brain-stormed common issues facing committees, collaborating with artist Chris Tyler to present them as cartoons. The Crofting Commission grazings team worked alongside Arthur MacDonald and SAC to consider these dilemmas.

Each group choose a dilemma out of a selection of 14. Arthur MacDonald led the groups through a discussion on the background and causes of the dilemmas and what the grazing committee should be considering, with various options they could take.

All the dilemmas can be found at <https://www.fas.scot/discussion-groups/common-grazings>.

Dilemma – What is the correct process for changing grazing regulations?

If it is a considerable time since regulations were reviewed, the committee should ensure all shareholders have a copy. Many date from 1997. The committee should assess their activities in recent years and develop proposals for removing and adding any elements which would benefit the running of the grazing.

The Commission's new template for grazing regulations should be used to create an amended set for submission to the Crofting Commission. A copy of the new proposed regulation should be made available to shareholders prior to forwarding to the Commission.

When an amended regulation is approved by the Crofting Commission, a copy should be issued to each shareholder. The operational date of the new regulation will normally be fixed by the Commission.

Sheep stock clubs

Although not the focus of these meetings, FAS has extensive guidance on its website for sheep stock clubs, also at www.fas.scot/discussion-groups/common-grazings/sheep-stock-clubs. This covers many aspects of sheep stock clubs including finances, legal structures, liability and succession.

Common grazings are a vital resource and make up approximately 6% of Scotland's land mass. It is important that they are successfully managed by committees in office. Lots of support is available through FAS for common grazings, aside from events like Common Grazings Dilemmas. This includes the subsidised SAC crofter subscription; mentoring: www.fas.scot/news/full-marks-for-mentoring; or through integrated land management plans: www.fas.scot/integrated-land-management-plans-ilmps.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact your local SAC office.

*Janette Sutherland
SAC Portree*



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ON THE CROFT



Sea Eagle Management Scheme

Cheryl McIntyre, SCF member and secretary of the North Talisker sheep stock club, reports

CROFTERS AND land managers had a chance to ask questions and feed back their experience of managing sheep amongst the ever-increasing numbers and threat of white-tailed eagles resident on Skye, at a recent FAS meeting in Portree.

Speakers were Rae Mackenzie and Andrew Kent from SNH and call-off contractors Justin Grant and Lewis Pate, who offered advice specific to Skye.

Two stakeholder groups in Scotland cover Lochaber and Argyll, and Skye and Lochalsh. Get in touch or join your local group to feed back your experiences. The SCF office can provide contact details.

The National Sea Eagle Stakeholder Group, which informs the Sea Eagle Management Scheme, has representation from RPID, SCF, NFUS, RSPB, Forest and Land Scotland,

Scottish Raptor Study Group, SRUC and SNH.

There will now be one contract start date for the new scheme, streamlining it from numerous contracts starting ad-hoc throughout the year. The deadline for submitting applications to the next round is 31st August, for the January 2021 start date.

If you think your croft and wee flock aren't worth the time to apply, know that there is a minimum payment of £500 pa for crofters who have had issues with sea eagle predation. For larger operations, especially sheep stock clubs, a potentially higher limit of £5000 annually is subject to initial discussions with call-off contractors and SNH; and the submission of a detailed application.

To mitigate the effects of sea eagle predation on lambs and sheep, the money covers costs for extra shepherding alongside standard measures. Another change to the scheme is the possibility of a 60% contribution from SNH towards the actual costs of capital items like sheds, lambing polytunnels and liming fields, where CAGS

cannot support such costs, up to a maximum level of £10,000.

Justin and Lewis are very approachable and will come to your holding to offer specialist advice on completion of an expression of interest form. Lewis also has asked for assistance in his research into eagle injuries on sheep and lambs. If you have a freshly killed animal with suspected raptor wound markings, he would be pleased to come and recover the carcass in situ, ideally prior to decomposition.

Whatever your views, sea eagles are here to stay. The management scheme, which SNH admits does not have all the answers, is at least recognition that there is a predation issue. The scheme, support measures and adaptive management of eagle populations will only be helpful if crofters and farmers give feedback.

Scheme documents are available on the SNH website at www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-wildlife/sea-eagle-management-scheme.



Gathering at Talisker

ON THE CROFT

Upland agroforestry?

The benefits of trees as shelter for livestock are well known – reduced lamb mortality (meaning fewer cast ewes), earlier grass growth, reduced disease, improved maternal bonding, etc, writes Woodland Trust's Eleanor Garty.

IN THE uplands this usually relies on small patches of birch woodland, or purpose-planted shelterbelts. Is this agroforestry? The term conjures up widely-spaced trees in pasture, or rows of apple trees between alleys of grain. But agroforestry is any system that combines agriculture with trees. That wee shelterbelt next to the lambing park is agroforestry, and so is the old birch wood where the sheep hide when it's snowing.

Much of our existing woodland has taken a battering from domestic and wild grazing. Unless it's given a chance to regenerate, it won't be there to provide shelter in the longer term. Planting new woodland is part of the solution. But there is a 20-year wait until the gate can be opened to livestock and, even then, grazing needs to be at low intensity, or on a rotational basis.

Shelterbelts from which stock is permanently excluded offer more rapid results, but they only protect the land on their windward side. On



On Deeside a small 4m x 4m stock fenced enclosure with trees in tubes deters deer. This is one of over a thousand copses planted along the river corridor.

© Dee District Salmon Fishery Board.

A fisheries initiative on Deeside established 4m x 4m enclosures using stock fencing, with trees individually guarded by 1.2m shelters. The resulting 'hedgehog effect' deters deer. Where feasible, an offset electric wire could be added. Where deer pressure is high, deer fencing may be necessary for individual copses, or to enclose an area planted with stock-fenced copses.

None of this comes cheap!

No funding is currently available for small copses through the Forestry Grant Scheme. There is an agroforestry option, but it is geared towards lowland conditions. The Croft Woodland Project has supported pilots, notably at Lynbreck Croft

in the Cairngorms, where 10x10m enclosures have been planted with willow and alder. These will provide shelter, improve soil nutrition and produce 'tree hay' (see Lynbreck's tree hay vlog on Youtube).

Without mainstream funding, these trials won't snowball across the Highlands. The interest is there, the benefits are real, the Scottish Government is committed to tackling the climate emergency. There should be an open door for upland agroforestry – let's push!

hill ground they can be hard to site and fence effectively, not to mention the visual impact of 'stripes' in the landscape.

Are there other ways of doing agroforestry in the uplands? Widely-spaced trees are not compatible with windy sites. In these conditions, trees need to huddle together to thrive. One approach is planting small, dense copses. These can be sited for maximum impact or easiest fencing and animals can shelter on any side.





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Muirburn and wildfires



Letter to the editor

Dear editor

It is now all but impossible to fully comply with muirburn legislation, resulting in almost total abandonment of controlled muirburn and extremely large areas of long rank heather.

The only way to prevent wildfires is to eliminate the fuel source by cutting the heather or proper regular muirburn of small areas at a time. Burning into the wind results in a low, controllable burn that will stop at a drain or even a sheep track. Wildfires will burn in the direction of the wind, resulting in massive flames that can jump a river.

In the 1950s and 1960s we had abundant, diverse flora and fauna, from generations of small-scale regular muirburn and grazing to appropriate stocking levels. Those rare plants that are going to take five years to recover have already survived and benefited from muirburn for generations. We have lost so much flora and fauna since then, because of environmentalist interference.

Scheduled regular muirburn is burning 150-200 mm (6" to 8") heather. Current heather

depths can be around 800 mm. Consider the difference in the mass of heather (ie fuel) to burn. The heather stalks in rank heather will be much thicker, so the biomass will be many times greater.

In the past crofters would often set muirburn fires while working at the peats in May or June. The longer heather and old grasses would burn until stopped naturally by previous muirburn, leaving fresh growth that benefitted livestock and wildlife. If a ground-nesting bird's nest was regrettably burnt, the birds would nest somewhere nearby within their normal range. If not, there were still plenty to propagate the species.

Crofters are now afraid to carry out any muirburn due to totally inappropriate laws and procedures. Consequently there are no natural firebreaks. What should be muirburn becomes an uncontrollable fire that burns an excessive area. Wildfires are inevitable if the fuel source is uncontrolled. Ignition will occur whether natural or deliberate.

You cannot freeze the landscape. If not

properly managed, it will continue to grow, mainly to rank long heather, whin and poisonous bracken. A dynamic landscape has to accommodate humans, flora and fauna. Conservation is sensitive continuation of traditional practices that have preserved the diversity of the northern highlands for eons. When SSSIs were being proposed, a "scientist" gave a presentation in Skerry on his work designating SSSI sites. I asked what gave Sutherland such great importance. He confessed he was a graduate given political instruction to designate so many thousand acres of our ground as SSSI; and that he was really just drawing lines on maps to satisfy the instruction.

Michael MacKay
Clerk, Bettyhill Common Grazings
Chair, Fastley Common Grazings
Consultant in the energy industry

*A full report is available
 from bhlaranblackford@btinternet.com*

ON THE CROFT



Promoting croft produce and tourism

SCF director Russell Smith outlines the opportunities of maximising the attraction of croft-grown produce.

THE SCOTTISH Crofting mark was introduced over ten years ago by SCF to help crofters add value to their produce.

Crofting has a good story to tell about its tradition, culture and image. If we can differentiate our products from other Scottish produce then we can either sell more of it or sell it at a higher price.

Advertising for Scotch Lamb is all about Cheviot sheep roaming the clean, open, natural hillsides of the Highlands. That grabs people's attention and they are willing to buy into that life. Authenticity is the buzzword and crofting has that in abundance.

Market research SCF commissioned in 2011 showed that for meat, fruit, vegetables and crafts,

people were much more likely to buy produce from a croft than produce branded as merely Scottish. The Scottish Crofting mark is designed to let our members build on this positive image by differentiating their goods. The items must be produced on the croft to a high welfare standard (for meat) and use materials from the croft as far as possible (for crafts).

Tourism and holiday accommodation on the croft were added to the mark as many crofters see this as valuable extra income. Again we are building on the same characteristics to add value. Crofting has the fresh air, natural environment and scenery. The mark guarantees a (hopefully) knowledgeable owner on hand to explain the history of crofting, the life going on around and where to go and what to see in the area.

Members of the mark can use the branding

developed by SCF and the website projects the businesses to the public. The website is being redesigned to project a modern image. Membership of the mark is now free to SCF members provided the basic standards laid down are adhered to. SCF will display produce at the various shows we attend over the summer, the two biggest being the Royal Highland Show and the Black Isle Show.

What we would like to do now is to involve more members of the mark in developing the brand. The recent survey threw up some interesting ideas on how to take the brand forward. We are on the right side of history in our grass-fed, free-range, high-welfare cattle and sheep.

Crofting has a great image and we should use this so that we can preserve it for future generations. If you want to be a part, get in touch with HQ.

Rosie's ecocroft

ROSIE AND Nigel Burgess have lived on Mull for 40 years and have been working the croft since 1990.

Rosie is the fourth generation of her family to work land on the Ross of Mull. The croft comprises 22 hectares of rough grazing land supports a small flock of Jacob sheep and chickens. It has been managed under the Rural Stewardship Scheme – increasing the diversity of wild flowers, woodland and wildlife. Guests are welcome to explore the croft and occasionally join in activities.

Rosie started the small market garden in a sheltered valley in 2006, growing veg and fruit

without pesticides or herbicides, using primarily seaweed, compost, animal and green manures to build fertility. This now supports a healthy population of wildlife as well as humans. The Slow Food movement there is actually very slow food – three to six months from seed to the table!

They sell seasonal vegetables, fruit, preserves, eggs and meat from the croft, alongside other organic and eco-products from a small farm shop called The Crofters' Kitchen. Any unsold excess gets turned into soups, ready meals and baking.

Rosie and Nigel built the first self-catering

cottage in 2008. It has been a major source of income and is usually full from April to October, with many guests returning year after year. They believe that over 50% guests choose the cottages because of the shop and access to the croft, giving many visitors a new outlook and understanding of crofting.

Visitors may see it all through rose-tinted specs between the gentler months of April to October, but as it coincides with the principle growing season that's fine with crofters!

www.ecocroft.co.uk

ON THE CROFT

Croft tourism, then and now



The "iron horse" on the croft at Waterloo



Cottage by the sea



Children on a croft holiday

Fiona Mandeville considers the changes in croft tourism over the years.

BACK IN the early 1960s an old aunt assigned us her tenancy and we took up residence on our croft on the shores of Broadford Bay in a tiny touring caravan which my father had made.

Our old garage then become home for a few years while he built the house. Lighting was by tilley lamps and water was heated in buckets on a two-burner gas stove. Baths were in an old tin bath in the kitchen.

My parents' dream was to build and run a guest house, but the budget was very limited. Over four years, making each concrete block individually in a mould, the house took shape. Friends helped and Angus and I no doubt hindered. We fed the hens, goats and calves.

Eventually the six-bedroom house was ready. We moved out to a caravan in the season. I was dishwasher, laundry-maid, housemaid and reluctant waitress. Mum made dinner every night for a minimum of twelve guests plus family and friends, often catering for more than twenty every day. The pots and frying pan had to be very large.

Pancakes, oatcakes and shortbread were

baked late at night on the Rayburn. Cream was skimmed off basins of milk using a clam shell drilled with rows of holes, butter churned and crowdie simmered. Buttermilk was great for scones and pancakes. Carrageen from the shore and jam from fruit bushes in the garden. Nothing was wasted and scraps were saved for the animals. The deep freeze was filled with our own meat.

Families came and stayed for a week and loved to get involved on the croft – lifting peats, turning hay and feeding calves. The cows were milked by hand; but eventually we acquired an old milking machine. Everything was second-hand.

Croft tourism has evolved since then. Now guests expect en-suite facilities and eat out in local restaurants. Having grown up in a guest house, I don't have tourists in my home. They have a lovely wee cottage at the bottom of my garden by the shore, restored from a ruin without any grants.

Nowadays you can pay £120 to spend a day on a croft experience, mucking out and clearing drains for the fun of it. You can pay a similar sum to sleep in a tent. Pods, shepherds' huts (aka sheds) and even horse boxes abound. The more bizarre and expensive the accommodation, the

more popular it seems.

It's all about capturing the experience to boast about on social media. If you don't share photographs of yourself in front of the view or the holiday shed, it didn't happen.

The length of stay has reduced to maybe three nights, while tourists zoom around the Isle of Skye visiting Tripadvisor hotspots, causing chaos on single-track roads, erosion on the moors and demands on rescue services as they flock in unsuitable footwear to the Fairy Pools and Old Man of Storr. You need considerably more than two days on the Isle of Skye to really experience the island.

But cynicism aside, rural areas rely on tourism. Providers have it much easier now with emails, websites and, of course, Airbnb. We can provide good and authentic experiences on our crofts, showing where our food comes from; how crofting provides quality meat and other produce; protects the environment; the importance of local culture; and sustains remote communities.

And on SCF's Croft Holidays website pages, you have a chance to promote your croft holiday provision, at no cost.



Jacob fleece is great for spinning and knitting



The Crofters' Kitchen Shop - a good year for veg



Veg and fruit gardens

The complete all-rounder

THE NORTH Country Cheviot (Northie) is a versatile sheep that has consistently demonstrated its ability to thrive on any type of land and is now increasing in popularity in all corners of the UK.

Rams are proven as superb, both maternal and terminal sire. Ewes, bred pure or out to cross, should provide an excellent return.

Northies are fortunate in the distinct types of both hill and park, renowned for their maternal ability and able to produce an impressive return crop straight from the field. No doubt this has assisted in the increasing use of the Northie for breeding Cheviot mules and North Country Cheviot cross-breeding ewes, in addition to the use of the exceptional pure ewe, hill or park type suited to all types of land.

In recent years the Northie has witnessed increasing demand from farmers who wish to finish store lambs, hitting the desired weight without being too fat – and, of course, avoiding the additional expense

of high feed inputs.

This has led to an increasing interest in the sale ring and direct to abattoirs, who recognise the improvement North Country Cheviot base females have made on producing easily fleshed lambs, consistently reaching the magic 21 kg.

With markets demanding more uniform lambs, North Country Cheviot rams are sought after for crossing onto traditional hill breeds, adding not only to lamb growth rates but also producing females with increased fleece value.

The popularity of the breed continues to grow – a testament to its proven track record of producing what the market demands – quality without compromise.

The Northie is the complete all-rounder, a native breed which thrives in all parts of the UK and one which has truly withstood the test of time.

For pure or cross breeding – on mountain, hill or lowland, it is worth considering the North Country Cheviot.

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Shetland group



John A Abernethy

Monitor farms bring Shetland community together

THE ABILITY to draw on the support of industry experts and the Shetland Islands farming and crofting community has been the main benefit of the three-year monitor farm programme.

The farm on Shetland is one of nine monitor farms established in Scotland as part of a joint initiative by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) and AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds, with funding from the Scottish Government. The aim of the monitor farm programme is to help improve the productivity, profitability and sustainability of Scottish crofting and farming businesses.

Local crofter John A Abernethy, a regular attendee of the Shetland monitor farm meetings, told crofters and farmers attending the final meeting on 8th February at Bigton hall that the technical support available through the monitor farm network has enabled him to make major

changes to his crofting business.

John tenants a total of six crofts, with two main units plus several hill parks consisting of 115.56 ha of permanent grassland and 199.45 ha of rough grazing. Up until now he has been cutting just over 11 ha of grassland as big-bale silage for winter fodder.

John explained how, through the monitor farm programme, he identified that the large size of his cross ewes, averaging around 75 kg, weren't achieving the weaning percentages expected, despite achieving good scanning percentages of 146%. These ewes were also expensive to keep, being dependent on large amounts of high-quality silage to keep them in good condition.

John commented: "The expertise we have been able to tap into through the programme has given us the confidence to go ahead and try

new things." In 2019 he decided to change his system entirely, selling off his cross ewes and switching to Shetland ewes. In the autumn of 2019 he bought smaller hill ewes, at an average of 35 kg.

Without the cross ewes there is a much-reduced demand for winter fodder and John is aiming to reduce the silage area from 11.1 ha down to 2 ha. This will cut his winter fodder from around 200 bales in an average year, to around 50 bales in future. This, combined with rotational grazing introduced in 2018 through advice gained from the monitor farm programme, will reduce his winter fodder costs from around £8,000 down to around £2,000.

John added: "Communication and discussion at the Shetland monitor farm meetings has encouraged all participants to be much more open about their business."

Crofters' concerns on new QMS membership conditions

SCF MEMBERS feel the new QMS conditions are not appropriate to crofting, as they will result in increased financial and administrative burdens.

Under the new ruling, QMS-registered crofts and farms must receive at least one annual veterinary visit and a relevant written animal health plan must be in place for all livestock, signed off annually by the vet. There are over 10,000 QMS members in Scotland.

Our members feel that these requirements are unnecessary and uneconomic for crofting. Crofters pride themselves on their stock's high health. Vets visit crofts annually for BVD and high-health cattle scheme testing. And, of course, crofters will call out a vet when necessary when lambing and calving, or for health problems. But most do their own lambing, calving, inoculating and dosing.

The QMS record book gets more onerous annually to fill in, with many sections not relevant to crofting but to commercially intensively reared animals. At a time of huge economic uncertainty for sheep and cattle keepers, small-scale operators will find the additional costs problematic.

SCF chair Yvonne White spoke to QMS CEO Alan Clarke, receiving the following assurances.

Standards are revised every two years and the new terms are a result of the latest review. QMS looks at what other quality regulators are doing in UK and elsewhere. The new terms were introduced to try to address the very



negative press faced by the meat industry, especially from vegans and vegetarians. They are trying to ensure consumer confidence in a high-value Scottish product. QMS knew there would be difficulty in remote areas, hence the new rule will not be implemented in 2020 but will be from March 2021.

Workshops, with a focus on remote and islands areas, will explain the reasons for new rule, how it will work and listen to crofters' concerns. QMS will liaise with SCF on this.

A simple health plan template has been developed. The vet will not need to visit physically.

Yvonne also discussed how hill lamb was probably the most unadulterated natural local food source, but hugely under-valued by the domestic market. Querying the added value of QMS on lamb through the mart, she was told there is no premium in QMS on lamb (though it can be argued that it helps consumer confidence) but there is a big premium on beef.

CROFTERS' DIVERSITY PAYS!

The beginning of a rye-volution



The rye nursery in winter sunshine on the author's croft

SCF member Adam Veitch reports

IN THE last edition we reported on the Lochaber rye nursery site, ending up with a small bag of clean, dry, summer-grown cereal rye.

In November, the CDP! project started testing rye-based grain products. Two Lochaber-based micro-bakeries took to the mill to work the grain into a sourdough culture and an array of sourdough breads. The bread emerged as dark, Nordic-style tinned rye loaves. The Uist-grown Hebridean rye was compared to our Lochaber nursery-grown rye, as well as grain from further

afield such as Norway and Sweden. It compared favourably, but with some noticeable differences in taste, smell and colour.

The nursery area has now been sown with six trial plots of winter rye, which symbolically stand upright but dormant in soil – no longer part of the EU – grain from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Scotland and Germany. These were sourced during the 2019 European Diversity Cereal Festival, thanks largely to SCF membership of the Let's Liberate Diversity! project.

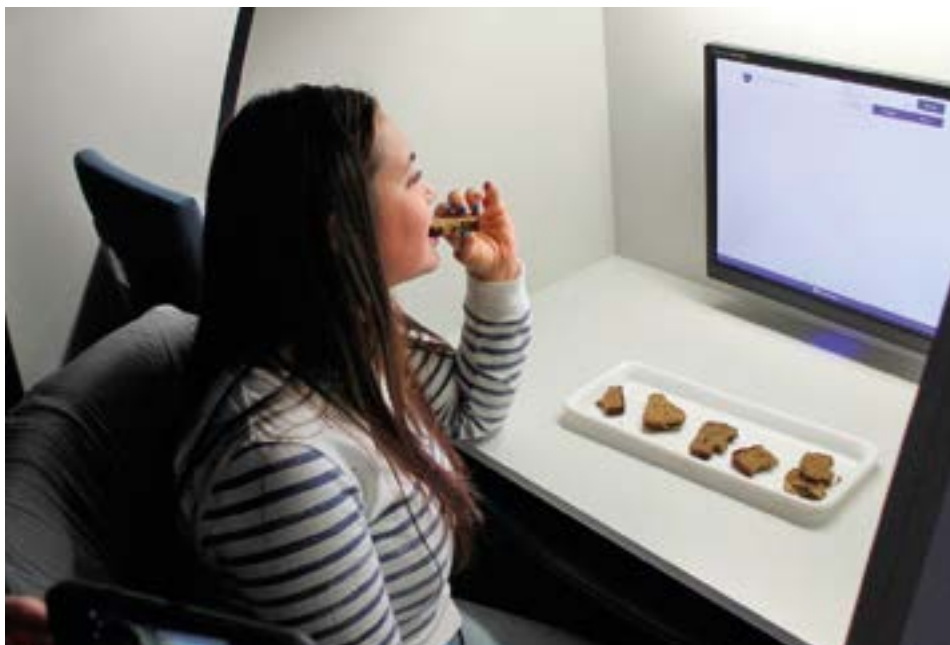
The winter rye looks healthy and has had a few cold snaps this season, so grain vernalisation should have begun. Winter cereal rye is not yet

common in the Highlands and Islands. Hebridean rye on Uist, for example, is sown as a spring crop, but winter cereals are very common elsewhere. It should yield swifter, greater and, more importantly perhaps for the Highlands, provide a larger weather window for harvest.

We await the warm growth of spring with curiosity as the rye-volution continues outwith the CDP! project, which officially ends in April. Our long-term aim remains to kick-start grain growing on crofts in the Highlands. This year we will learn more with the winter rye harvest and we are going to start exploring solutions to widespread access to small-scale grain machinery.



Hebridean rye bread produced by Doughies bakery and Grain of Truth bakery



MSc Gastronomy student taking part in sensory testing at Queen Margaret University in collaboration with The Scottish Centre for Food Development and Innovation.

CROFTERS' DIVERSITY PAYS!



Researcher David McVey and Patrick Jones, head brewer and owner of Pilot Brewery in Leith, Edinburgh



Sensory testing at Queen Margaret University

An underutilised Scottish landrace cereal

David McVey reports

IN NOVEMBER 2019 the CDP! project began sensory taste testing on Hebridean rye bread as part of its investigation into the potential development of new Scottish rye products – a pivotal point in the project and a rare opportunity to examine the flavour and textural components of a cereal grown for centuries in the crofting counties as animal feed.

Its uniqueness lies not only in its biocultural importance but in the fact that Hebridean rye (*Seagal* in Gaelic) has received little to no examination into its potential as a human food ingredient. The first loaf out of the oven represented the collaborative efforts of a team

examining how value can be added to this low-value crofting asset.

The evaluation took place at Darachbeg croft in Lochaber, now the location of a rye nursery growing Hebridean rye along with other landrace and heritage rye varieties from around Europe. In the words of CDP! project partner and local crofter Adam Veitch, it's the beginning of a 'rye-volution'.

The first stage in the examination of Hebridean rye as an ingredient involved descriptive sensory evaluation, a crucial phase in the construction of new food and drink products. Maintaining quality and standard is vital to the success of new products in Scotland's competitive food and drink industry and presents the biggest challenge to future product design and development.

Testing involved the Scottish Centre for

Food Innovation and Development along with MSc gastronomy students at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, to examine consumer acceptability of the new prototype Hebridean rye bread. Pilot Brewery in Leith is exploring the potential of Hebridean rye for innovative craft brewing with a beer style highlighting the sensory characteristics of the grain, while Stewarts Brewery in Loanhead has created an unmaltered rye beer for the first time.

CDP! also plans to explore labelling and branding possibilities of new Hebridean rye products, communicating the story and provenance of this very special grain grown by Scotland's crofters.

The technical and lay reports from this research will be available on the SCF website from May.

Shetland kale pilot seeds sale for SCF members

THE Crofters' Diversity Pays! project jumped hurdles in the process of registration as a conservation variety.

This included technical inspection of kales on Shetland by SASA staff, as reported in the August *Crofter*; getting the emerging Shetland kale growers seed network licensed as a seed merchant; and more. Partnership with SASA has proven instrumental in taking each step towards this milestone.

Shetland kale is a dual-purpose crop suitable for crofting areas other

than Shetland. Beside its robustness, it has good levels of club root resistance. As winter feed for livestock it is a good source of vitamins and minerals. For human consumption it is a traditional ingredient of reisted mutton and any kale broth.

As part of the pilot seed sales, readers of *The Crofter* can order a seed pack at a price of £2.50 (without postage) by email to shetlandkale@gmail.com. All proceeds go to Shetland seed producing crofters, contributing to preserving the kale.



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MEMBERS PAGE

The importance of an organisation run by and fighting for crofters – and of being a member



A chance for members to participate

*SCF speaks on behalf of crofters and upholds their interests...
A strong membership means a strong voice for crofting.*

"Without the SCF crofting would look completely different, if it still existed at all."

SCF IS the only organisation dedicated to the representation of crofters, making strong political representation, helping to shape policies for the benefit of future generations of crofters and our communities. SCF speaks on behalf of crofters and upholds their interests at numerous policy meetings, a few examples of which are:

- Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Crofting
- National Sea Eagle Forum and local sea eagle groups
- National Goose Forum and local goose management groups
- National Deer Forum and local deer management groups
- Crofting Commission liaison
- Scottish Government Crofting Stakeholder Forum (crofting development)
- Scottish Government Agriculture and Rural Development Stakeholders Group
- Farm Advisory Service Stakeholder Group
- Rural Mental Health Forum

Crofters' interests are also represented in the many consultation responses and calls for evidence before UK and Scottish parliamentary committees. If you have an issue that would like raised at any of these meetings, please get in touch.

Some of our successful campaigns:

- SCF fought relentlessly to get a better deal on LFASS and to introduce a new scheme

for the fragile areas – a review will take place this year.

- CAGS – a dedicated scheme for crofting agriculture has been retained under SCF pressure against Scottish Government and industry plans.
- Croft House Grant Scheme – targeted in the Crofting Development Plan to be wound up but SCF got a grant retained, increased and vastly improved.
- Scrutiny of the goose problem by Scottish Parliament.
- Bull scheme – was due to be closed due to State Aid Rules. SCF got the evidence from Europe and the government had to reverse the decision.
- Home-kill was illegal until, under intense pressure from SCF, the Food Standards Agency relented and home-kill became legal again.
- A Beef Calf Scheme which paid more on the first ten calves – won by SCF against industry opposition; now lost by Scottish Government in favour of SUSSS and SSBSS.
- Raasay crofters' shooting rights – our input helped to reverse the Scottish Government sale and the crofters get the rights back.
- Numerous other instances of where crofting would have suffered were it not for SCF political representation.

As leaving the EU and development of a UK and Scottish rural support system unfolds, it will be crucial that the voice of crofters is heard in the negotiations. A strong membership means a strong voice for crofting.

Benefits for individuals:

As well as the benefits to your business from dedicated political representation, you get:

- *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;
- a free dedicated legal helpline through crofting specialists Inksters;
- access to the SCF crofting information and member support service;
- advocacy in individual cases needing representation;
- discounted training opportunities;
- free promotion of your croft tourism business on the SCF website;
- market your croft produce with our unique Scottish Crofting Produce Mark – also free;
- a wide network of contacts for sharing experiences and sourcing information;
- assistance and guidance for those wanting to enter crofting or just starting out;
- SCF annual gathering and events;
- the credibility of being a member of the UK's largest association of small-scale food producers.

Please encourage your friends and neighbours who are not SCF members to join us. Use the information here to explain why.

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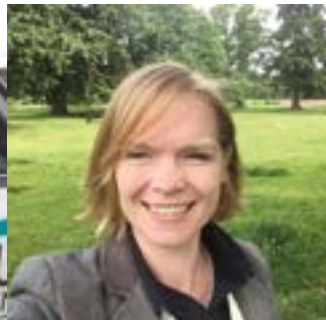
1 Multi-pack bale of Hay is equal to Approx 2 4x4 round bales of Hay,
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Alasdair Allan MSP/BPA

If anybody would like to meet with Alasdair Allan, Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Western Isles, he can be contacted using the following details:

Ma tha duine sam bith ag iarraidh coinneachadh ri Alasdair Allan, Ball-Pàrlamaid na h-Alba airson nan Eilean Siar faodaidh sibh a cleachdadh na seòlaidhean a leanas:

Address/Seòladh:
20 Kenneth Street
Stornoway
Isle of Lewis
HS1 2DR

Telephone/Àireamh-Fòn:
01851 700357

E-Mail/Post-Dealain:
alasdair.allan.msp@parliament.scot



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MEMBERS PAGE

Agricultural shows, sales and farmers markets

THE FOLLOWING is a list of events notified to SCF for 2020. It is not definitive.

If any member knows of others anywhere in the Highland and Islands, not listed here, please let HQ know where and when, so it can be circulated among members.

Events marked * are shows where SCF expects to have a stand. As always, SCF would like to be seen at most shows and welcomes volunteers to man the stand. Offers of help are most welcome. Call us at HQ.

April 11th	sale of plant, machinery and equipment, Thainstone
May 23rd	sale of plant, machinery and equipment, Thainstone
June 3rd	NSA Scotsheep, Over Finlarg, Tealing, Dundee
June 18-21st*	Royal Highland Show, Ingliston
June 27th	sale of plant, machinery and equipment, Thainstone
July	Tiree Agricultural Show, Crossapol, Isle of Tiree (tbc)
July 17-18th	Caithness Show, Thurso
July 25th	Sutherland Show, Durnoch
July 31st	Sanday Agricultural Show, Orkney
August 1st	Nairn Show, Auldearn
August 1st	Black Isle Show, Muir of Ord
August (date tbc)	Dunvegan Show, Isle of Skye
August 2-3rd	Turriff Show, The Haughs, Bridge of Turriff
August 3rd*	Isle of Skye Show, King Edward V Park, Portree
August 5th	South Ronaldsay and Burray (Hope) Agricultural Show
August 5th	Isle of Arran Show, Lamlash
August 6th	West Mainland (Dounby) Show, Dounby, Orkney
August	Hope Show, Orkney (tbc)
August 8th	Mid-Argyll Show, Lochgilphead
August 10th	Orkney County Show, Bignold Park
August 13th	Islay Show, Bridgend
August 15th	sale of plant, machinery and equipment, Thainstone
August 24th	Lochaber Show, Torlundy
August	Sunart and District Show, Strontian (tbc)
August (date tbc)	Isle of Bute Show, Rothesay
September 19th	sale of plant, machinery and equipment, Thainstone
November 14th	sale of plant, machinery and equipment, Thainstone

Shear brilliance



SCF council member Beth Rose highlights the benefits of networking through SCF.

HAVE SEEN the quote: “In a world of algorithms, hashtags and followers, know the true importance of human connection.” No better place than through people in the SCF.

When we got our croft, I had no background in agriculture. We started with cattle before progressing to sheep. And there was a stumbling block. I had a fascination with shearing but no experience. Cue SCF. I signed up to the shearing course.

The following year I did the same. I picked a different venue so that my two-years-on-the-trot malarkey wouldn’t be noticed. Wrong – James, Gwen and co were there again – which was fine. However, both times were using electric shears; and I struggled. Trying to prop a sheep upright was not easy and made them look like couch potatoes with no clear runs.

The other problem I hit was the cost of electric shears, being uneconomic for our sheep numbers. I tried battery-operated ones but hated them. So I started asking around about hand shearing. I got several stories of people hand shearing, on tables or similar practices, but no one knew of anyone I could speak with.

Walking past the SCF tent at the Royal Highland Show, I decided that if anyone knew of somebody, it would be SCF. Patrick gave me a name; and it was someone nearby. I promptly sent an email. Vivian replied and said she was more than happy to show me.

I met Viv and off we went. And it was brilliant. A she-shear, I-shear combo; lots of pictures to remind me of the process. My back didn’t kill from bending over and I managed more sheep than I had before.

Crofting can be an isolated activity, with the challenge of gaining experience and improving our practice. However, we should never underestimate how willing others may be in sharing their knowledge – from looking at a livestock handling set up, dealing with a particular situation, or knowing what people have changed over time.

These are not classroom sessions; nor are they signing up to a formal mentorship agreement. All I had was a certain task I wanted to learn and was able to; all because of the social connections of the SCF and not being afraid to ask.



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Images by Lorne Gill/SNH and Mark Hamblin /2020VISION



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**Peatland
ACTION**

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MEMBERS PAGE

SCF legal helpline

Martin Minton of Inksters Solicitors outlines how the service has assisted SCF members.

INKSTERS HAS received a varied range of enquiries from members looking for advice or guidance in matters of crofting law since we started providing the helpline service in 2013.

It is clear that crofters are often already well informed on crofting legislation, but they look for guidance on how those rules translate in practical terms in their own circumstances.

One common enquiry is how a tenant goes about purchasing the croft from the landlord. Crofters find it useful to know the procedure and resulting costs, including having to meet the landlord's expenses.

There are also plenty of pro-active crofters who want to address the issue of croft succession. A common question relates to ensuring the will adequately takes into account their crofting status, ensuring the next generation has the opportunity to take over the croft.

Boundary disputes of course arise. Interestingly, that is not as prevalent an issue as we might have

expected when the helpline started, but often arises as a result of croft registration. We advise crofters of the procedure.

Straying livestock and damage to property caused by livestock is also an issue where we have given advice on more than one occasion.

While we receive calls from tenants who have encountered difficulties with their landlord, we have also advised landlord members on disputes with tenants and the most appropriate routes to resolve them. It is perhaps a positive sign of progress that calls involving disputes between

tenant and landlord are in the minority – although there are no doubt many more contentious crofting law issues across the crofting counties that we don't receive calls about.

We have received a number of common grazing enquiries, from shareholders, clerks and committee members. In light of the well-publicised difficulties between the Crofting Commission and grazing committees in the Western Isles, committees are keen to know they are doing the right

thing when it comes to their administration and management of funds.

No two calls are ever the same, and callers range from new entrants (and those who are not yet crofters but aspire to be one) to crofters who have been on their land for decades.

As well as guiding members, it is useful – and important – for us to understand the range of issues affecting crofting and crofters today.

The SCF legal helpline is available to paid-up members on 01599 230300.

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Spreading the cost

In the last edition of The Crofter, chief executive Patrick Krause wrote of the necessary increase in subscriptions in the new year, making the individual member's subscription £68.50.

This will be implemented on 1st May. We appreciate that a one-off payment can be difficult, so we are offering existing members the opportunity to switch to quarterly direct debit payments to spread the cost of the subscription. This would mean that an individual membership would be paid in four instalments of only £17.12.

If you currently pay by Direct Debit, cheque, Paypal or bank transfer and would be interested in switching to a quarterly direct debit payment, please email hq@crofting.org or give us a call on 01599 530005.



Letter from Cape Breton

Margrit Gahlinger, who described her visit to the Western Isles in our last issue, follows up below.

Dear crofters

I received the copies of your magazine with my article in it and the brochures with great pleasure. It was an honour to be able to share my thoughts.

Joanne and Christy proudly shared their copies with their families. A neighbour told me how much he enjoyed reading the article. Someone had put it on Facebook! It's the grapevine here.

I sent a copy to the Highland Village Museum here on the island.

They have recreated the life of the Gaelic settlers. I believe they should be most in touch with your organisation – the last real vestige of the old society, a kindred spirit. In fact they should be trading visits with crofters!

I also sent a copy to the Newfoundland Federation of Agriculture. The last three months have been relentless for wind, the Newfoundland ferry crossings delayed again and again. Those trucks on the ferries, carrying all those supplies, first have to cross from the mainland over a two-lane, two-kilometre causeway at the bottom of our island to be able to reach North Sydney where they meet the ferry. The causeway is as vulnerable as the ocean passage with wind and snow storms.

Newfoundland should start growing more of its own food. Our days of taking food for granted are limited, but few understand that yet. Whatever the causes of global warming, nothing can stand between us and today's weather.

Small farm organisations everywhere face the same challenges. Among them, lack of appreciation by the public and our governments of the critical role they play in our survival. SCF needs your own government's support first and foremost. That will only happen if the government understands the full value of the federation's work. Networking can make you, and our farming organisations, more visible.

I look out at the Atlantic Ocean and watch the waves coming directly out of the north, as they never used to, sometimes 20 feet or more during storms. Perhaps you are facing some of the same stormy weather. And your survival depends as much as ours on ferries and causeways.



Bay St Lawrence

I talked to a lad of 17, entering his last year of high school in Florida. I said: "If you really believed that dark times lie ahead would you demand to be taught practical means of facing them?" He was quiet for a moment and then he said: "We don't believe it's really going to be that bad."

For the rest of society it's business as usual. Across the country we're focused on new construction, new projects, the excitement these bring, as well as hope. Rural economic development on our island means tourism. The push is for year-round tourism. At the same time farmers' markets are struggling to pay their managers. Most of the \$37 million devoted to agriculture by the province last year was designated for large farms aiming at global markets. Climate change is having a good laugh at our expense.

I will keep passing on the crofting story wherever I can. In the meantime my energy and focus are on helping my village and area survive. Our population, as the rest of the island, is dwindling and aging. I came here 42 years ago when there were still sheep on the hills, most had a backyard garden and cod was the backbone of the fishery. Not anymore.

I'll end with a thousand blessings on all of you. So few, so unique, carrying the true essence of survival.

On museums

Some wise thoughts on museums, offered by Margrit Gahlinger.

THAT THE future looks dark few would argue. Our youth are starting to demand that we do something about it.

I live in a remote fishing village on Cape Breton Island. There is a museum of local artifacts near here. The way of life that accompanied those artifacts is fading fast, but vividly remembered by the old people in the area. The coming of electricity to the area 30 years earlier, in the early 1950s, changed life dramatically. What to do with all those old tools, no longer needed, once so precious? Show them off! Visitors delight in seeing how life once was.

What is the benefit to the local community? To young people with their smart phones? Museums can't come close to supporting themselves. We build them and then we maintain them. Is this a good use of our tax money, already stretched to the hilt?

Museums are doing only half their job. Why preserve artifacts if we don't preserve the skill of using them?

Today most of our food supply comes across a two lane causeway at the bottom of the island, connecting us to the mainland. Returning home after one Christmas we passed a line of trucks, perhaps 40 or so with their precious cargos, waiting hours for the winds to die down enough



to pass the treacherous two-kilometre stretch.

We take a lot for granted, especially food. Never in the history of the human race has any society ever taken food for granted. We raise our children like birds in a gilded cage, food delivered in neat packages, plant and meat.

We are experiencing stormier, more unpredictable weather. Should roads become impassable for more than a few hours, electricity down for more than the three days or so most generators serve, we would be in a desperate state.

Our museums must take their place at the front of the line for survival. They are our most significant insurance policy, against a time when money might not work so well: services on the other side of a storm or a broken road or bridge, or fire, or landslide, or a causeway.

How can museums keep the flame of the old knowledge and skills alive?

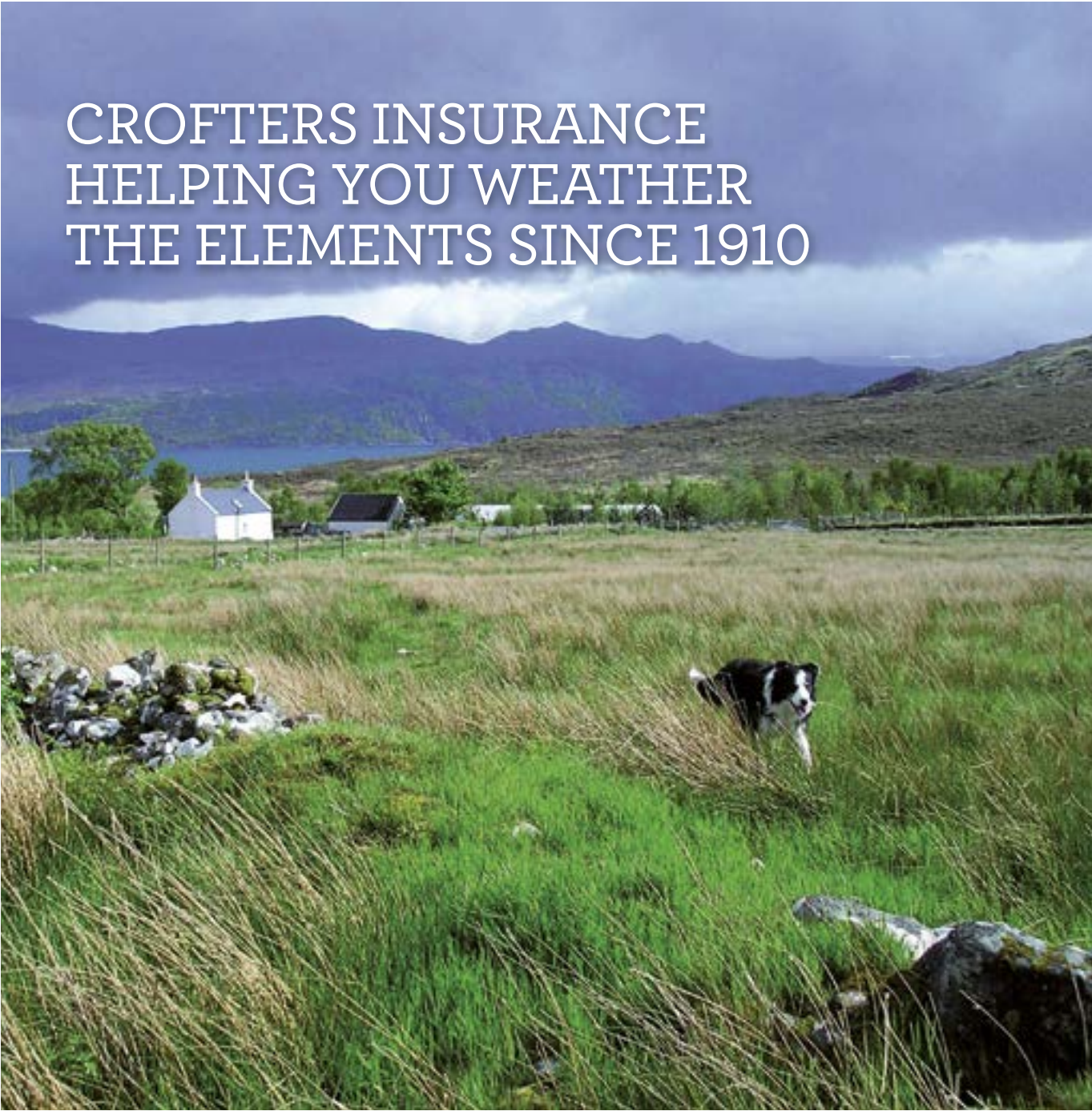
By making winters their busy months. Weekly visits from the old people, teaching old skills and ways. From the school children, learning and doing. Springs and summers would involve outside work, documenting old fields and

meadows, woodlots, looking for heritage plants, all ages and abilities helping.

Perhaps most importantly, the creation of local seed banks.

The story of human survival is the story of food. No society has ever survived without land. That is why it was held sacred. Now only a few remote tribes still see it that way.

Our museums hold the last of the old society. Perhaps it's time to boost that insurance policy.



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NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The SCF's AGM will be held at the Spectrum Centre, Margaret Street, Inverness, at 2.00pm on Friday 17th July 2020, to consider, and if approved, pass the following resolutions:

- 1 To receive the company's accounts and the directors' and auditors' reports for the year ended 30th November 2019. A summary of the accounts will be available at the meeting and full or summary accounts will be provided prior to the meeting or on request to the registered office.
- 2 To re-appoint director Donald MacKinnon under Article 10.6, whose term as director ends as of the date of this meeting, to serve until AGM 2023, the anniversary of his re-appointment and the maximum period allowed under Article 10.11.
- 3 To appoint accountants/auditors proposed by the directors, or to re-appoint Ritsons, Chartered Accountants, of 27 Huntly Street, Inverness, as independent examiners of the company accounts and to authorise the directors to pay their remuneration.

By order of SCF's board of directors

Company Secretary: Fiona Mandeville

Date of notice: 1st April 2020



SCF AGM

SCF 100 Club

HAVE YOU joined the SCF 100 Club yet?

Open to members, friends and families, the cost is £10 per entry. You can have as many entries as you like. Entry is renewed annually and payment can be made by direct debit, PayPal or bank transfer.

The SCF 100 Club is a 50/50 draw, with half of the receipts paid out in first, second and third prizes and the remaining half retained by

SCF for the development of SCF services and benefits to members.

The annual draw will take place at the AGM in Inverness in July.

There is an application form and freepost envelope enclosed with this edition of *The Crofter*. If you would like more copies of the SCF 100 Club form please call 01599 530005 or email hq@crofting.org.

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Company Number SC 218658
Charity Number SC 031919

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Scottish Crofting Produce
Highlands and Islands Croft Origin
Tòraidh Croftearachd na h-Alba
As a' choit ann a' Ghàidhealtachd 's na h-Eileanan