

A CHARTER FOR CROFTING

“It’s about the people – making sure they can live here”



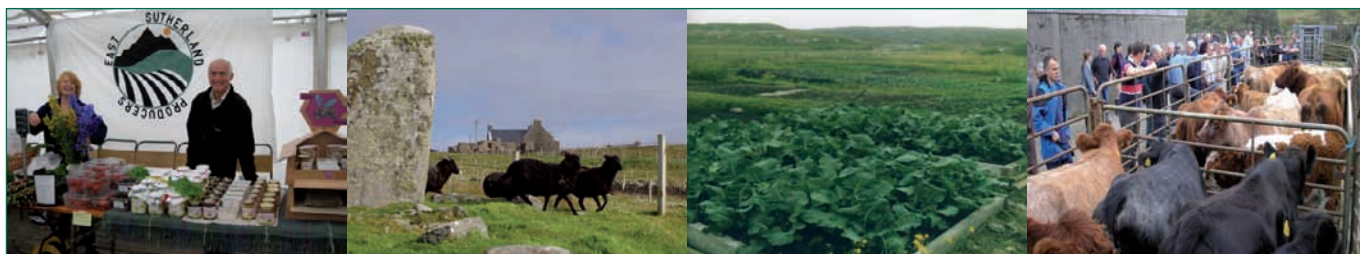
Crofting households account for around 30,000 people in the Highland and Islands – around 30% of households on the mainland and 65% of those on the islands. Over three quarters of a million hectares of land are under crofters’ stewardship. Crofting is the glue that binds rural communities across the Highlands and Islands. As well as an important part of our cultural heritage, it is an important part of our future, supporting a unique way of life, a diverse and rich environment, and a rural population in some of the most fragile areas of the Highlands and Islands.

Sources of information for this charter include

- SCF Strontian conference workshops
- SCF Lerwick conference
- Reports from crofting consultancy studies
- SCF branch and area meetings
- Parliamentary Environment and Rural Development Committee report on the draft
- Crofting Reform Bill

We believe that crofting needs:

- **Environmentally sound and economically viable crofting land use**
- **A well-regulated, well-supported crofting system**
- **Access to economic opportunities and services**
- **A strong local food economy**



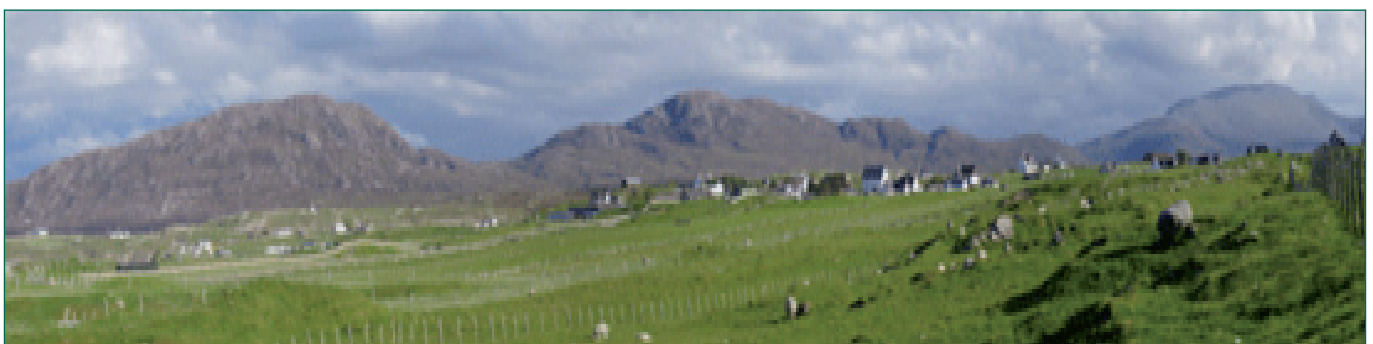
The Scottish Crofting Foundation calls on national and local government to take action to ensure the health of crofting for the future

Support and facilitate crofting land use activity

Crofting land use meets many of the objectives of national and European policy, managing an extraordinary landscape and environment, providing high quality local food and healthy, extensively-reared livestock to high welfare standards. The peopled, managed landscape of crofting areas plays a huge role in attracting visitors to the area. Crofting agriculture and land use is at the heart of rural communities throughout the Highlands and Islands. Yet massive inequalities in the system of farm support leave crofting disadvantaged; supported to a fraction of the extent of units on better ground. A flood of regulation and bureaucracy threatens to swamp small part-time enterprises in remote areas.

Vibrant, viable crofting land use needs:

- an agricultural policy which is appropriate to crofting areas and small-scale enterprises, recognising High Nature Value systems which deliver public benefit as well as quality primary products and healthy local food
- a move away from the purely historic basis of Single Farm Payment and a threshold set on Common Agricultural Policy subsidy per household, above which payments become degressive. The surplus thus generated could be used to create entitlements for new entrants and for land used for horticulture
- a reformed Less Favoured Area classification and policy to ensure that the measure achieves its objectives and provides a level playing field for mountain, island and remote mainland areas. The UK is one of the few countries in Europe not making use of the mountain area classification
- all modulation to be match-funded by the Treasury, with a franchise on the first €10000 of receipts
- flexible, well-funded and locally appropriate agri-environment and rural development measures, offering continuity for those already managing land under agri-environment measures
- the eradication of major animal and plant diseases within the Highlands and Islands, allowing the area to benefit from the market advantage of recognised good health status
- support for afforestation and woodland management which is relevant to marginal areas, provides timber of economic use and recognises additional costs in island and remote mainland sites
- the development of small-scale and collaborative local timber processing
- the reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy
- derogation, where possible, for small enterprises in remote areas
- rules on animal transport, traceability, water management and food processing which are sensible, proportionate and flexible with costs kept to a minimum
- no penalties for genuine mistakes and clerical errors in support schemes
- an overhaul of the subsidy appeals mechanisms



Ensure the crofting system is well-regulated, well-supported and continues to maintain vibrant crofting communities

Crofting is an important and valuable part of life in the Highlands and Islands; underpinning the rural economy, retaining an active land-managing rural population, protecting and retaining a distinctive cultural heritage and generating significant public goods. Crofting has been a proven model of sustainability, when regulated, and provides a productive and diverse socio-economic structure to maintain population.

A well-regulated, well-supported crofting system needs:

- effective, rigorous and fair regulation of tenanted and owner-occupied croft land by the Crofters Commission, working from an authoritative map-based register
- the same consistent policy direction to be provided to the Crofters Commission and the Scottish Land Court
- the development of new legislation for crofting based on the findings of the Shucksmith enquiry
- the creation of new crofts both in and outside the crofting counties, on forested and on pastoral land
- access for young people to crofting, studying and working opportunities in their own communities
- the Crofting Community Agricultural Grants Scheme to be well-funded, practical and easy to access
- a renewed bull hire scheme based on good quality, high-health status stock and realistic and affordable hire costs
- the Crofting Community Development Scheme approach to be continued and only subsumed under Land Management Contracts if the measure is supported by local facilitators
- support for building and renovating crofter housing. This should take fair account of costs and encourage the use of innovative and eco-friendly technology. Support should specifically recognise the cost of providing roads and services to allow building on the most appropriate site. Parity is required in housing support mechanisms to ensure crofters are not disadvantaged relative to the Rural Home Ownership Grant Scheme.
- supportive planning and crofting policy to encourage the housing required in communities to be sited on poorer land and common grazings and away from the best inbye land
- encouragement for community ownership and the development of crofting estates
- recognition of the distinct Gaelic and Nordic cultures of crofting areas. Language, music, rural skills and traditions should be fostered, with the importance of passing on rural skills and local culture and traditions formally recognised in the school curriculum



Ensure access to economic opportunities and services to keep people in remote, rural areas

Crofting is generally a part-time occupation providing part of a household income. Other economic and employment opportunities are also vital in ensuring the sustainability of remote rural communities. Raw materials and produce coming into a community is money going out of that community. Efforts must be made to enhance the self-sufficiency and sustainability of crofting areas.

An economically robust crofting community with sufficient service provision needs:

- high quality jobs created using the natural resources of the Highlands and Islands
- efforts targeted at ensuring that the Highlands and Islands are at the forefront of developing large and small scale renewable energy initiatives and community scale timber production
- development funding through the Highlands and Islands Enterprise network which supports local service industries (eg plumbers, joiners) and small businesses
- effective and affordable transport links
- relocation of public sector jobs in small teams to rural communities
- the increasing use and development of information and communication technology to ensure remote areas are able to participate fully in business, debate and governance
- further development of high-quality and special interest tourism in rural areas
- innovative solutions to ensure equality of access to public services for dispersed communities and remote rural areas. These public services include, but are not limited to, health, schools, post offices and public transport
- “first world” provision of building development infrastructure, especially water, sewerage, roads and electricity connection
- encouragement to install household and township-scale renewable energy sources combined with measures promoting energy efficiency

Encourage and promote local food and development of niche products

Crofting is in a strong position to benefit from increased public interest in where and how food is produced. The extensive systems of crofting agriculture and the clean environment provide excellent marketing advantages. Local food initiatives and product marketing are underway to support the growth of this sector. Production is generally on a small scale and collaboration and further expansion of direct selling capacity is needed to meet market demand.

A strong local food economy needs:

- the continuing development of local food initiatives
- public procurement opportunities for local producers
- action to address inequalities in the supply chain, especially the dominance of supermarkets
- promotion and encouragement of niche and high-end branding and marketing
- investment in and development of croft-scale horticulture

Can YOU help deliver for crofting?

For more information on any of these issues or for further copies of this charter please contact the Scottish Crofting Foundation on hq@crofting.org or 01599 566365