



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

National Development Plan for Crofting



Contents

Ministerial Foreword	3
Executive Summary	5
The Crofting Commission's Role in the Development of Crofting	10
Crofting Register	24
Economic and Community Development	26
Skills Development	30
Local Food Networks and Agri-Tourism	33
Land, Environment and Biodiversity	38
Additional Carbon Income for New Woodlands and Peatland Restoration	56
Wildlife	59
Housing	64
Signposting	74
Scotland's Farm Advisory Service	76
Broadband Infrastructure	79
Crofting Legislation	81
Financial Investments	83
Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS)	89
Future CAGS	93
Cattle Improvement Scheme	95
Highlands and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme	97
Conclusion and Delivery	98
Summary of Actions	99



Ministerial Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the National Development Plan for Crofting. Crofting has a special place in the cultural heritage of Scotland and lies at the heart of many rural and island communities. Without crofting much of rural Scotland would not be the place that we have all come to know and love.



We know the unique role that crofting plays in the sustainability of many rural and island communities, and I want to thank crofters and their families for all that they do, and for their commitment to the crofting way of life. We now need to realise the potential for croft land to address the climate change and biodiversity challenges and to support thriving rural communities.

We know that the future holds many challenges for all of rural Scotland, and crofting is no exception, but it can also offer solutions to some of those challenges. This National Development Plan seeks to set out how crofting can help address many of the issues facing rural and island life in Scotland.

I recognise government's responsibility to support crofting to adapt and thrive. Land is a key asset, and we need to optimise its use to produce food more sustainably, to cut emissions and enhance our environment. Accordingly, we need full occupancy and use of crofts and effective management of all common grazings. These are two issues that always get raised when I speak with crofters, and, if resolved, would contribute significantly to securing a more prosperous future for crofting.

The Crofting Commission is critical to the wellbeing of crofting. We need to keep people on the land and continue to invest in them to live productive and sustainable lives within strong and resilient communities. That is why the Plan focuses on what the Crofting Commission, with the support of others, will be expected to achieve in regard to occupancy and the use of common grazings.

It is clear to me that people working the land is key to driving crofting forward. In the past two years alone we have seen over 830 new entrants into crofting, with 44% of these new entrants being women, and 32% being aged 40 or under. We have made a lot of progress but there is more still to do.

In July 2020, I announced additional funding for the Crofting Commission to enable it to expand its development activities, and to establish four permanent Crofting Commission jobs in the Western Isles. Furthermore, in February 2021, I announced an increase in the Crofting Commission's core budget. This represents a commitment by the Scottish Government to the future of crofting and to the delivery of this Plan.





Crofting has survived through the ages by keeping the best of its traditions while also adapting to new circumstances. We need that to continue and to encourage modern approaches to crofting, with diversification into agri-tourism, woodland regeneration and creation, local food networks, and the restoration of our degraded peatlands. Enabling innovative methods of working the land, and utilising our landscape and natural environment, will make crofting more productive, as well as ensuring that it plays its part towards our response to the climate emergency. We also need more grazing committees in office and for them to work together for the common good in these areas.

The last year has been incredibly difficult for us all. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on every one of us, and on every aspect of our lives. Nevertheless, throughout this crisis crofters and farmers have continued to feed our nation with world class produce, supporting both local and national food networks. Their vital role in rural and island communities is recognised and valued.

The crofting community is a community that supports its members through the sharing of knowledge, information and good ideas. A community of people who can demonstrate a shared adaptability with which to embrace change, and face confidently, the future challenges and opportunities that diversification and growth in crofting will bring. Crofting is fundamentally linked to our values, of who we are as a nation and who we want to be in the future, and that involves keeping people on the land and supporting them to live productive and sustainable lives. This National Development Plan sets out the ways in which crofting can achieve this, and can secure a vibrant and resilient future for a unique way of Scottish life.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the members of the Stakeholder Forum for their tireless work and commitment to crofting, and without whom this Plan would not have been possible.



Executive Summary

There are over 750,000 hectares of land in crofting tenure in Scotland, with approximately 33,000 people living in crofting households. More than 550,000 hectares is made up of common grazing land. All of this represents a massive opportunity in terms of dealing with the key challenges we face with respect to tackling climate change and combating the loss of biodiversity.

Crofting means different things to different people. Whether a family is new into crofting or whether it has been crofting for over a 100 years, different considerations come to the fore as do other factors such as the geographical location. Crofting in Shetland can be quite different from crofting in the Uists or crofting in Gairloch. Stories will be as varied as crofting itself. Crofting is far more than just a form of land tenure, and to class it as such would be missing how and why it has endured for such a long time. For many crofters and their families, crofting is a way of life. For others it forms the sole basis for generating subsistence, and for others still it forms a foundation upon which family units can live and work on different occupations to supplement income from crofting. In many cases rural and remote rural communities would not exist if it was not for crofting.

A croft is an agricultural land holding that is either held in tenancy or owned by the crofter (owner-occupier), and which may come with a share in a common grazing. A croft may have buildings and a house associated with it, or it may simply be bare-land. Although crofts range in size from 0.5 hectares to more than 50 hectares, the average size is approximately 5 hectares.

The traditional crofting counties are Argyll, Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland, Caithness, Orkney and Zetland (Shetland). However, since February 2010, the Scottish Ministers designated parts of Highland, Moray, Argyll and Bute, and North Ayrshire as areas within which new crofts can be created, thus extending the traditional crofting counties¹.

The system of crofting is regulated by the Crofting Commission, having replaced the former Crofters Commission on 1 April 2012. To this day the Commission has responsibility for maintaining an up-to-date Register of Crofts, recording the status of the croft, its extent, and the identity of the crofter and the owner. This register should not be confused with the Crofting Register, which is maintained by Registers of Scotland.

As at 2020, there were 21,186 crofts recorded on the Crofting Commission's Register of Crofts, 15,137 are tenanted and 6,049 are owned². Approximately 770,000 hectares of land across the crofting counties falls under crofting tenure, whether as in-bye croft land or common grazing land.

- 1 Moray and Nairn, Kingarth, North Bute and Rothesay, Arran (including Holy Island and Pladda), Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae.
- 2 Figures taken from the Crofting Commission's Annual Report and Accounts, 2019/20.



The Plan

The National Development Plan for Crofting (“the Plan”) highlights the core elements necessary to ensure that crofting remains at the heart of our rural and remote rural communities, as well as delivering policy priorities for climate change mitigation and biodiversity.

The Plan draws on the work undertaken by the Crofting Stakeholder Forum and its six priority papers on the following topics:

- Crofting Development
- New Entrants
- Common Grazings
- Housing
- Financial Incentives
- Simplify Crofting Legislation

The Plan also takes into account the crofter responses to the following:

- Stability and Simplicity Consultation
- Crofting Legislation and Future Priorities for Crofting Consultation
- Economic Condition of Crofting Report Survey Results

In addition, the Plan considers how climate change and the loss of biodiversity will affect crofting, and how crofting activities can be undertaken in a way that further contributes to the enhancement of the environment, iconic landscapes and biodiversity.

One of our top priorities is to establish an increase in the active use of croft land. We need to establish greater occupancy of crofts, attract new entrants, and encourage new common grazings committees into office (**chapter 1**). Achieving this priority will help to maintain and strengthen the sustainability of our rural crofting communities.

There are approximately 550,000 hectares³ of common grazing land, and active grazings committees are the best way to ensure that this land is used effectively. Although low density high nature livestock grazing is still the principal activity undertaken by crofters on many common grazings, recent changes to crofting legislation have also encouraged woodland creation (**chapter 6**) and wider diversification, including renewable energy schemes. The need for peatland restoration and preservation is another important consideration given the large amount of peatlands found on some common grazings, particularly in the Western Isles and parts of Sutherland and Caithness (**chapter 6**). We will explore the extent to which these can be progressed in crofting areas.

Raising livestock remains an integral aspect of crofting, and one that brings with it many benefits. Our vision for common grazings is to underpin high nature value livestock production, peatland and habitat restoration, and to work with crofters, grazings committees and other stakeholders to promote collaborative efforts and deliver these priorities.

3 Crofting Commission Annual Report 2019-2020



It is important that we take forward the vision and objectives for sustainable land use, which are set out in Scotland's Land Use Strategy. This vision requires a number of organisations to work in partnership, such as the Crofting Commission, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NatureScot, Forestry Scotland, Scottish Crofting Federation, National Farmers' Union of Scotland, Woodland Trust Scotland, and Scottish Land and Estates.

Partnership working extends beyond the amelioration of the physical condition of common grazings. By taking action to ensure that future support mechanisms complement one another, we can optimise crofting development opportunities for crofters and crofting communities. This is why the Scottish Government has provided additional funding to the Crofting Commission. It is also essential that the wide range of information, support and advice available to crofters is easily sourced and accessed. Help can be found in the courses provided by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (**chapter 3**), and also in the support provided by the Farm Advisory Service (**chapter 11**). In addition, the signposting portal (to be provided by the Crofting Commission) (**chapter 10**), digital skills development (**chapter 4**), and local food networks (**chapter 5**), to name but a few, contribute to the package of support made available. There is also the great support provided to crofters through membership organisations.

It is also important to maintain appropriate levels of government investment in croft businesses. Each year through a range of support schemes, the Scottish Government invests over £40m in croft businesses. The Scottish Government will continue to provide the necessary support to encourage investment in infrastructure and equipment by crofters. It will also ensure that existing grant and other support mechanisms remain relevant and encourage innovation.

The Scottish Government has set out its approach for future rural policy until 2024, based upon four principles: stability, simplicity, sustainability and security. During the period 2021-2024, simplifications and improvements will be made to existing schemes, such as the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (**chapter 15**). However, we also need to devise and trial new approaches to support crofters and farmers (**chapter 14**).

The Scottish Government is committed to working with crofters to ensure that future support will be invested in active croft businesses and the management of constituted common grazings.

It is important that ambition is maintained and momentum is increased to deploy key elements, such as sustainable food production, forestry, peatland restoration, renewable energy production, broadband, and investment to re-people if we are to be successful in sustaining the viability of our rural and remote rural communities.



The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 sets targets to reduce Scotland's emissions of greenhouse gases to net zero by 2045. Crofting activities can help address climate change through actions such as the appropriate management of arable land, grassland and woodland; renewable energy development and peatland restoration and management; and woodland regeneration and creation. Furthermore, through low intensity, high nature value agricultural practice, crofting can help support biodiversity.

It has long been recognised that biodiversity loss and the impact of climate change are closely connected, two aspects of an urgent environmental crisis that will affect everyone, including crofters and crofting. However, as highlighted in Scotland's Land Use Strategy, our land has the ability to make a significant contribution in providing the solutions to these challenges. With 10% of Scotland's land in crofting tenure, including many areas rich in biodiversity and with great potential for carbon sequestration, it is vital that crofting plays its part in the response and in helping to achieve net zero emissions.

The Scottish Government's 2018 'Economic Condition of Crofting' report, identified that raising livestock and growing crops remain the most popular of crofting activities. The Scottish Government contends that these great crofting traditions need not sit apart from the likes of woodland creation. They could in fact converge, with traditional crofting activities benefiting from an increase in tree planting (**chapter 6**).

There is also an increasing need to restore our peat bogs and keep them healthy. Crofting areas include large areas of peatlands or peaty soils, which act as important stores of carbon and support biodiversity (**chapter 6**). The Scottish Government will continue to support the restoration of degraded peatland, and explore the need to provide additional support for the maintenance of healthy peatland.

In addition, the Scottish Government continues to recognise the importance of providing sufficient housing for crofters, and their families, in or near to the crofts they work, allowing crofters to achieve the full potential of their crofts, whilst generating economic activity and sustaining rural communities. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting people to remain on, and bring people back to, the land, re-peopling our rural and remote rural communities, and sustaining our fragile Highland and Island communities.

Since 2007, the Scottish Government has approved over £22.1 million in Croft House Grants for croft housing, helping to build and improve over 1,030 homes for crofters and their families (**chapter 9**).

In late 2019, the work on crofting legislation had to be suspended. However, there remains a commitment to ensure that future crofting law reform will focus on removing barriers to crofting development, whilst preserving a crofter's security of tenure and right to work the land (**chapter 13**).

Please see **page 99** to view a summary of all the Actions.



Development Of Crofting

Following implementation of the Crofting Reform Act 2010, the Crofting Commission (Commission) replaced the former Crofters Commission and became primarily a regulatory body with promotional and reorganisation functions.

The Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993 sets out the functions, powers and duties of the Commission. In addition to the main function of regulating crofting, the Commission has a number of powers including: reorganising crofting in any area where there is a need to do so, promoting the interests of crofting, and collaborating in the carrying out of any measures for the economic development and social improvement of the crofting counties.

At the same time, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) delivered community development by targeting initiatives at macro community level, rather than focusing on crofting activity alone. Whilst HIE's economic and community development work continues to add value, there were calls from stakeholder groups and individual crofters to put a specific crofting development support mechanism in place. In 2018, the Crofting Stakeholder Forum produced a paper on crofting development, detailing the reasons why the Commission should take on this role.

It is considered by the Scottish Government that the Commission, with its access to all relevant crofting data and annual census information, and its established relationship with crofters through its regulatory and promotional work, is ideally placed to take forward crofting development.



The Crofting Commission will expand its current capacity, going beyond the delivery of regulatory functions to further enhance its role in crofting development activity.



The Crofting Commission's Role In The Development Of Crofting

In July 2020, the Scottish Government announced an increase in funding for the Commission to enable it to expand its activities of promoting and developing crofting and, as part of this, to establish four permanent Commission jobs in the Western Isles. Furthermore, in 2021, the Scottish Government announced an increase in the Crofting Commission's core budget. This demonstrates the long-term commitment by the Scottish Government and the Commission to the future role of crofting in rural life.

The Commission is using part of this funding to expand its Residency and Land Use team and to establish new development posts in Stornoway and Benbecula. The overall aim of the latter posts is to support the strengthening and diversification of crofting in the Western Isles as well as across the Highlands and Islands as a whole. The new officers will liaise with crofting communities to encourage croft occupancy, croft use and management of common grazings. They will work closely with local assessors and will liaise with landlords and townships to encourage opportunities for new entrants and diversification of crofting activities, including initiatives to help combat climate change.

This role will help build local relations and create a greater understanding of the Commission's role within the crofting community, enabling the Commission to develop new and better ways of working with key crofting communities. It is anticipated that this blueprint may be replicated in other crofting areas in the future. Other posts in the Western Isles will be similar to existing Commission posts in Inverness, and will represent the first step towards a greater spread of administrative or regulatory posts across the crofting counties.

In 2022, the Commission will review the benefits and the practical implications of locating development, regulatory and administrative posts in the Western Isles, with a view to establishing whether it is desirable to identify remote posts in other parts of the crofting counties.



The Scottish Government, in partnership with the Commission, will create new Commission jobs. The first stage, in 2020/21, will see two additional development posts in the Western Isles, additional residency and land use officers in the Western Isles and Inverness, and an administrative assistant in the Western Isles.



Common Grazings

For many years there has been a decline in the use of common grazing land for livestock grazing. The Scottish Government and the Commission, in agreement with the Stakeholder Forum, regard the shared management and beneficial use of common grazing to be essential for the sustainability and development of crofting.

Since 2018, the Commission has increased its work with crofting communities and grazings committees to strengthen this aspect of the crofting system. As part of this work, the Commission has produced a standard template for grazings regulations with common grazing guidance that addresses the questions most often raised by townships. It has also held grazing workshops in partnership with the Farm Advisory Service. Many grazings committees function very well and each committee requires the necessary flexibility to address local circumstances and to manage its common grazing in a way they deem fit.

Active grazings committees are the best way to ensure that common grazings are used effectively. The Commission has taken action to reverse the decline in the number of common grazings that have a committee in office by providing support and advice to townships without an active committee, or whose committees are due to stand down. As a result of this action the number of grazings committees in office rose from 418 in 2019 to 495 in 2020, and there is scope for this to increase further.



Across the crofting counties there are approximately 550,000 hectares⁴ of common grazing land, approximately two-thirds of all croft land. Low density high nature livestock grazing is still the principal activity by crofters on many common grazings. There are many benefits to sheep and cattle grazing in upland areas. Livestock grazing protects, and can enhance, biodiversity, reduces invasive species and lessens the risk of wildfires. The Scottish Government will continue to support the sustainable use of common grazings by livestock.

However, the ways in which this land is used is evolving. If common grazing land is to maximise potential benefits and continue to add benefit to the crofting system, crofting needs committees in office. Furthermore, it is necessary for those committees to be empowered to take action to ensure that the land is being put to active use and that degraded habitats are restored. Diversification of croft and common grazings presents options for crofters who may benefit from multiple forms of land usage.

⁴ Crofting Commission Annual Report 2019-2020



Crofters and crofting as a whole will benefit from knowing the extent to which common grazing land is being claimed through support, and which grazing shares remain underused or inactive. The Scottish Government aims to ensure funding schemes support both agriculture, climate change and environmental initiatives. The Scottish Government will make information available to the Commission on common grazings that are in receipt of financial support.

The Commission will continue to support grazings committees by providing guidance and training, and helping to resolve any issues, and working with townships to secure accurate lists of shareholders. In addition, beginning in the Western Isles, Commission staff will develop closer relationships with grazings committees that wish to expand or diversify their activities.

The Commission recognises that collaboration between landowners (including community landowners), crofters and grazings committees is an important part of diversifying land use. Innovations that are agreed and supported by all parties, will result in far fewer barriers to progress. In the long-term, the balance of rights in statute may need to be reconsidered to ensure that initiatives, either by a landlord or a crofting community, will be encouraged.



The Commission will continue to support existing committees and the establishment of new grazings committees to increase active management of common grazings.



The Commission will encourage partnership working between common grazings committees and landlords to encourage diversification of the use of the grazings, including woodland creation and peatland restoration.



Mapping and Registration of Common Grazings

The Commission maintains a Register of Crofts containing basic details about each croft, such as its status, owner(s) and crofter(s). It does not include a map of the croft. The map-based Crofting Register, held by Registers of Scotland, was introduced in 2012 to provide a definitive and current record of the extent of, and interests in, crofts and croft land, which includes common grazings and lands held runrig. The Crofting Register is separate to the Land Register and the Register of Crofts.

Registration of each croft in the Crofting Register is the responsibility of the crofter, who has to pay the charges necessary for the service. Registration is mandatory following trigger events such as the assignation of the croft, and consequently the amount of land in crofting tenure that is registered is increasing over time. By 2020 approximately 30% of all crofts had been mapped and included in the Crofting Register.

 Please see the chapter on 'Crofting Register' for more information.

However, only the Commission can apply to register common grazings, and much of the work involved in the preparation of the application falls to the Commission, along with townships and landowners. Over a four-year period between 2012 to 2016 the Commission undertook a grazings registration project which aimed to facilitate the early registration of common grazings. This work culminated in around 330 common grazings being registered, about a third of the total. However, the work was more costly and complex than originally expected.

By spring 2021, the Commission will have conducted a study of the registration of common grazings, in order to review the challenges and achievements of the 2012-2016 project, the complexities of the registration process (including mapping difficulties) and the legislation, and the practical benefits that may have resulted from registration. Following consultation with Registers of Scotland, the Commission will report to the Scottish Government on the way in which this work could best be taken forward. It is the Commission's and the Scottish Government's long-term aim to register all common grazings in the Crofting Register.



By June 2021, the Commission will have reviewed the practicalities and the benefits of common grazings registration, consider when and how the work can be resumed, and report to the Scottish Government with a plan to progress the registration exercise.



New Entrants

Attracting and providing opportunities for new entrants to crofting is critical to its future. For any sector to be sustainable it requires a blend of experience and youth. With new entrants and youth comes new practices, innovation and an enthusiasm that can energise the sector.

There are positive signs that people still want to enter crofting, with evidence suggesting a steady flow of new entrants. The table below shows that from 2019 up until 6 November 2020, there were 827 new entrant tenant crofters and owner-occupier crofters.



Photo credit Georgina Macmillan

Table: New Entrants into Crofting 2019 and 2020⁵

	Women	Men	Not Known	Aged 41 & over	Aged 40 & under	Total
Argyll & Bute	22	25	2	32	17	49
Highland	180	224	5	288	121	409
Orkney	4	7	0	10	1	11
Shetland	40	44	0	59	25	84
Western Isles	118	154	2	185	89	274
Total	364	454	9	574	253	827

It is important that this level of turnover continues and, if possible, increases. The Scottish Government and the Crofting Commission aim to help and encourage new entrants and create opportunities in a number of different ways.

⁵ Figures provided by the Crofting Commission for 2019 and up to 6 November 2020



Women:

It is pleasing to note that 44% of new entrants are women and that 32% of new entrants are aged 40 or under. The 2019 final report of the Women in Agriculture Taskforce stated: “The cultural practice of passing on farms, crofts and small holdings to one person, usually the eldest son, was the single largest barrier to women’s entry into agriculture identified in the 2017 research.”⁶ The gender split in crofting has long been more balanced than in the farming sector, perhaps because assignation of a family croft will often go to the family member, irrespective of gender, who expresses most interest in active crofting. However, women must have as much opportunity to become crofters as men. The Scottish Government is committed to doing everything possible to empower women and address the invisible, cultural and practical barriers faced by women in the crofting community and, more generally, in the farming sector.

Obtaining a Croft:

Croft tenancies traditionally transfer between family members and friends, making it harder for new entrants without a crofting connection to gain access to a croft. However, more crofters than ever are choosing to sell their croft tenancies on the open market. There is a number of reasons for this, including a lack of potential successor, or simply the wish to realise the value of the asset. An individual crofter has the choice to dispose of the croft privately or on the open market.

In certain crofting areas, high prices are realised in the selling of croft tenancies. The Commission cannot reverse the market trend, but it has some powers, at least, to insist that crofts are tenanted or owner-occupied by crofters who will be resident in the locality and will use their croft land for cultivation or another purposeful use. This helps to ensure that crofts are more accessible for those who wish to work them.

Tackling Breaches of Duty:

The Commission will increase its work of addressing absenteeism and bringing crofts back into productive use. It is already engaging with those crofters who have indicated on their annual notice (crofting census) that they are not meeting their duty of being ordinarily resident on, or within 32 kilometres of, their croft. The Commission continues to write to these crofters providing options to resolve the breach, such as assignation or subletting, and is developing plans to expand this work.

In all cases, the existing crofter or owner-occupier crofter is given the opportunity to regularise the position, which can lead ultimately to the croft being made available to a new tenant. In those cases where the crofter or owner-occupier crofter fails to correct the position, the Commission may arrange for the letting itself, and on these occasions the Commission will choose the applicant who appears to have the most to contribute to the crofting community. This valuable work needs to continue. It is imperative for the longer-term sustainability of crofting that crofters are active and compliant with their legislative duties. The Commission will also be following up on those who do not return their annual notice.

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/final-report-women-agriculture-taskforce/>



There are owned crofts where, the owners are not regarded as owner-occupier crofters in terms of the legislation, and the croft is regarded legally as vacant. Although these owners are not subject to crofting duties, the Commission could take action at any time to require these owners to let the croft to a crofter and would consider doing so where the owner is not living on or close to the croft, is not using the croft, and/or is allowing it to become neglected.

Decrofting Applications:

The Commission has another vital role which indirectly supports opportunities for new entrants, which is to make decisions on decrofting applications. Crofters may apply to decroft part, or all, of their croft land. The Commission's responsibility is to weigh up the benefits of the immediate proposal against the detriment of the long-term loss of croft land, which will inevitably lead to fewer crofting opportunities in the future, especially for new entrants.

It is the Commission's policy that any decrofting application should be for a reasonable purpose, backed up by relevant supporting documentation (such as planning permissions and business plans), and the extent applied to be decrofted should be strictly limited to the footprint of any development. This is to ensure that land is kept within crofting tenure, which is seen as fundamental to the longer-term sustainability of crofting.

Failed Succession:

The Commission also helps to open opportunities for new entrants by acting to resolve failed succession cases, where there would otherwise be no new crofter to take over from one who has deceased, and by working with landowners, including community landowners, who are interested in creating new crofts and common grazings.

Creating New Crofts:

Since 2007, it has been possible to create new crofts, and this presents another way in which the Commission is able to create crofting opportunities for new entrants. The Commission is willing to promote and assist, where possible, landowners or others who wish to do so. The Commission will give particular consideration to the creation of crofting opportunities through the creation of new crofts. The Commission will seek to ensure that the creation of new crofts leads to the retention or development of population and the effective use of land for recognised crofting purposes. It will be considered whether new common grazing will also be required and become available. Applications to create woodland crofts will also be considered within this context.





The Commission will explore new ways to ensure that entry to crofting is more accessible.



The Commission will encourage a culture of succession and turnover of crofts from people who no longer wish to work them, to those who do, creating opportunities for new entrants.



The Commission will continue to work with those crofters who return their annual notice.



In 2021, the Commission will expand its Residency and Land Use work, by:

- Following up on those who do not return their annual notice.
- Taking action on failure to cultivate and neglect of croft land, as well as non-residency.
- Implementing policies to require non-resident owners of vacant crofts to let them.
- Piloting a Land Matching Service to facilitate the transfer of crofts through assignation or sublet.

Succession

Like other parts of the community, crofters are living longer, and in many cases they continue to live in their homes, the croft houses, for many years after they have retired from active crofting. These crofters are not exempt from the responsibility to ensure that their croft land is worked, and this is often arranged informally, with a younger family member working the croft, or the older crofter may decide to decroft the croft house and assign the tenancy of the remaining croft to a younger relative or younger person of their choice. These are important decisions, and agents and solicitors have a vital role in advising older crofters of their options. The Commission will assist by making general information about the options readily available, and by considering, along with local authorities, solicitors and other partners, how the flow of croft land from one generation to the next can be facilitated when so desired. It will always be the choice of an individual tenant whether to assign the croft to another party, including a family member, though new crofters must be able to comply with crofting duties.

For those crofters passing on their croft, or the new entrant starting out, the next steps can be daunting. The appropriate assistance to the outgoing and incoming crofter therefore needs to be in place to reduce impediments to such transfers. There is usually a great deal of help available from other local crofters and from professional agents and advisers. However, it can be difficult to know where to look for initial advice, covering not only crofting law,



agriculture and housing issues, but also expert input on social care and social security. The Commission, with its specialist knowledge, will play a coordinating role in this process.

 **Please see the chapter on ‘Signposting’ for more information.**

Succession planning is also key to creating opportunities for new entrants. Succession is not only about retirement but also about planning for the future, ensuring that crofters and their families and croft businesses are carefully considered. Collectively, we need to encourage and help facilitate early discussion by providing the necessary support mechanisms for crofters to recognise the benefits of planning ahead.



In 2021, the Commission, in consultation with other organisations, will produce information for crofters who are considering passing on their croft. This will include information about their options and the implications of these.

Partnership Working

In planning for its new development role, the Commission has recognised the importance of working in partnership with a wide range of organisations that share the responsibility for supporting communities, population and land use across the Highlands and Islands. As part of this, there will be a stronger connection between the Crofting Commission and the

Scottish Government’s Rural Payments and Inspections Division (RPID).

The Commission already relies on RPID to report on local inspections of crofts in connection with regulatory casework. For example, an RPID report can be in the form of an ‘Area Report’ in regard to access, or a ‘Grazings Report’ on enlargements and improvements. The Commission also works with RPID to support active crofting on the Scottish Government’s crofting estates. Having two of the Commission’s new posts based at the RPID office in Stornoway, and two based at the RPID office in Benbecula, will provide an opportunity for RPID to build a closer and stronger working relationship with the Commission, and help deliver a more coordinated approach that will benefit all of crofting.

One specific benefit of this collaboration will be the sharing of RPID’s Mapping Tool and database with the Commission, so that the Commission can benefit from RPID’s mapping information in carrying out its regulatory and other functions. This in turn will reduce the turnaround times in some applications.



The Scottish Government will ensure that there are closer working relations between the Commission and RPID.



Elected and Appointed Commissioners

The Commission's Board is currently made up of six elected commissioners and three appointed commissioners. The six constituencies are the South West Highlands, West Highlands, Shetland, Caithness and Orkney, Western Isles, and East Highlands. The Commission is the only public body in Scotland with the majority of Board members having been elected by the people it serves. Since the introduction of elections in 2012, every five years, crofters are invited to stand for election as members of the Commission's Board. Crofting is increasingly diverse, and the Scottish Government would like the Commission to reflect that diversity on its Board.



The Scottish Government and the Commission will engage with, and actively encourage applications from, women, young people and minority groups, and Gaelic speakers, for the role of Commissioner and Assessor.

The Commission's elected and appointed Commissioners are collectively responsible for establishing policies, ensuring existing policies are applied as intended, and providing strategic direction to the Commission. Elected Commissioners are not there to represent individual constituents' interests but to bring their knowledge of local crofting issues from their respective constituency areas and use this knowledge to better inform Board considerations of regulatory matters. Election as a Commissioner provides an opportunity for crofters, and those non-crofters nominated by crofters, to play a fundamental role in assisting the Scottish Government in developing and delivering future crofting policies and ensuring that crofting remains sustainable for generations to come. This is especially so with the enhancement of the Commission's resources and increased role in crofting development.



Mairi Mackenzie – Crofter and Crofting Commission Elected Commissioner for West Highlands.

“Elected in March 2017, I found myself surrounded by a mountain of policy, business plans, and Board and strategy meetings. You can imagine it was rather different to my life on the croft.

3 ½ years on, my commitment to crofting is stronger than ever. I have an insight into the working of the Crofting Commission which is tasked with regulating crofting. It is a complex system, yet the ultimate aim in our decision-making is to both promote and protect the interests of crofting.

Being a Commissioner has given me the opportunity to be directly involved in talks regarding changes in legislation, setting policy, and taking decisions on difficult regulatory applications which must be approved or refused at a higher level.

An enjoyable aspect of my role as Commissioner is working with experienced staff who have such an in-depth knowledge of regulation and legislation, whether it be round the table talks with crofting landlords, their agents and crofters, meeting up with crofters on the ground, or just being available to answer crofters’ queries, they provide invaluable support to Commissioners”.

The role of an appointed Commissioner is very similar to that of an elected Commissioner. All Commissioners share in the decision-making on regulatory applications, in developing the Commission’s policies and strategic priorities, and in overseeing the performance of the organisation. The Scottish Ministers must ensure that at least one person on the Board can speak Gaelic, and that one person is able to represent the interests of croft landlords. If the elected Commissioners are not able to satisfy these requirements, an appointed Commissioner can fill the gap.



David Campbell – Crofting Commission Appointed Commissioner

“I have been a member of the board of the Crofting Commission since spring 2014, and what has struck me from the beginning of my time as a commissioner, was the need to think strategically and thinking on a wider plain than just what happens on the croft.

A healthy and thriving crofting system is very much about crofting but it's also about communities, it's about people and populations. As a Commissioner we are charged with protecting the system and we are charged with promoting the system, and when we do that, we also help the wider communities of the crofting counties.

As a board member you have a responsibility to make the crofting system, and therefore the wider communities where crofting is found, more resilient and stronger. We do this by considering how our decisions impact crofters, but also ensuring that the wider results of our decisions deliver stronger rural communities in many of Scotland's remote and fragile communities.

Board membership can be hard work and challenging, but it is also rewarding. You are in a unique and privileged position, with input in setting the policy and direction of a public body that has been around for more than 100 years, and remains as relevant today as it did at its inception”.

Assessors

The Commission also has an appointed network of volunteers known as Assessors, who have knowledge of crofting and live in the crofting area they represent. They are able to pass on information locally, they are available to signpost crofters to a range of services, and they provide an important and highly valued role of advising the Commissioners on the issues facing their communities, helping to ensure that the Commission stays in touch with the grass roots of crofting.

Since 2015, it is no longer considered appropriate for volunteer Assessors to advise the Commissioners on applications made by individual crofters, and this initially narrowed the Assessor's role, with the Commission subsequently appointing a smaller panel of Assessors in 2017. However, since then a new and different role for the Assessors has been evolving. Assessors are now involved in advising the Commission's Board and management on policies and priorities for crofting, both in the short-term and for longer-term regulatory change. In addition, they have assisted with practical projects such as the redesign of application forms and the Commission's website.

The expansion of the Commission's development role, including support for grazings committees and enforcement of residency and land use, may provide new opportunities for even greater engagement by the Commission's volunteers.















Catherine Mackinnon, assessor and crofter in Glen Roy.

“Having a keen interest in crofting I put myself forward for the assessors network in order to represent active crofters. It has given me a better understanding of the work of the Commission and I have felt able to contribute to the future of crofting and its support structures. I have cows, sheep, pigs and hens and am an active member of my local grazings committee and sheep stock club. I feel passionately that crofting has much to offer in terms of food production, land management, community cohesion and cultural transmission. Local representation is important to act as a two way communication enabling those on the ground to better understand crofting regulation and for the Commission to have insight into the challenges and opportunities that are faced by active croft custodians”.



Summary of Actions

-  The Crofting Commission will expand its current capacity, going beyond the delivery of regulatory functions to further enhance its role in crofting development activity.
-  The Scottish Government, in partnership with the Commission, will create new Commission jobs. The first stage, in 2020/21, will see two additional development posts in the Western Isles, additional residency and land use officers in the Western Isles and Inverness, and an administrative assistant in the Western Isles.
-  The Commission will continue to support existing committees and the establishment of new grazings committees to increase active management of common grazings.
-  The Commission will encourage partnership working between common grazings committees and landlords to encourage diversification of the use of the grazings, including woodland creation and peatland restoration.
-  By June 2021, the Commission will have reviewed the practicalities and the benefits of common grazings registration, consider when and how the work can be resumed, and report to the Scottish Government with a plan to progress the registration exercise.
-  The Commission will explore new ways to ensure that entry to crofting is more accessible.
-  The Commission will encourage a culture of succession and turnover of crofts from people who no longer wish to work them, to those who do, creating opportunities for new entrants.
-  The Commission will continue to work with those crofters who return their annual notice.
-  In 2021, the Commission will expand its Residency and Land Use work by:
 - Following up on those who do not return their annual notice.
 - Taking action on failure to cultivate and neglect of croft land as well as non-residency.
 - Implementing policies to require non-resident owners of vacant crofts to let them.
 - Piloting a Land Matching Service to facilitate the transfer of crofts through assignation or sublet.
-  In 2021, the Commission, in consultation with other organisations, will produce information for crofters who are considering passing on their croft. This will include information about their options and the implications of these.
-  The Scottish Government will ensure that there are closer working relations between the Commission and RPID.
-  The Scottish Government and the Commission will engage with, and actively encourage applications from, women, young people and minority groups, and Gaelic speakers, for the role of Commissioner and Assessor.



Crofting Register

The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 (the 2010 Act) requires the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland (RoS) to establish and maintain a free to search, public register of common grazings, crofts and land held runrig called the Crofting Register. This register provides crofters and other interested parties legal certainty over the extent of, and interests in, land held under crofting tenure. This is one of a number of registers maintained by the Keeper.

The purpose of the Crofting Register is to provide:

- transparency as to the extent of crofts and land in Scotland that is subject to crofting tenure. Croft land is displayed against a backdrop of the Ordnance Survey map.
- an accurate and current legal record of croft land.
- security and confidence to crofters, landowners and others over the extent of, and interests in, land held in crofting tenure.
- a platform that enables crofters to realise the economic potential of croft land.
- an important tool for the Crofting Commission in the effective regulation of crofting.
- a means of ensuring that land does not inadvertently fall out of crofting tenure.

Registration in the Crofting Register is required following certain ‘trigger events’⁷ and through voluntary registration of individual crofts and common grazings, or groups of crofts through a more collaborative approach to registration.

Fees

Registration fees for the Crofting Register are set by the Scottish Ministers and can be viewed in the Registers of Scotland (Fees) Order 2014 (SSI 2014 No. 188)⁸. The current £90 fee per registration has remained unchanged since the Crofting Register was first introduced in November 2012.

Support

RoS continues to offer support to crofters and landowners seeking to submit an application to register croft land and promotes a collaborative approach towards agreeing the extent of croft land before submitting applications for registration in the Crofting Register. This provides an opportunity to ensure information entered in the Register is accurate and thereby minimises the potential for challenges against registration and the requirement for changes in the future.

RoS offers similar support to those wishing to submit a community application, where a collaborative approach is particularly relevant, and would encourage all of

⁷ <https://kb.ros.gov.uk/other-registration-types/crofting/who-should-register-and-when>

⁸ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2014/188/pdfs/ssi_20140188_en.pdf



those with a local interest in croft land to participate in the process. For example, RoS has assisted communities by arranging visits to discuss the requirements for registering croft land, to explain the mapping requirements and to assist with any local issues relevant to successfully registering croft land.

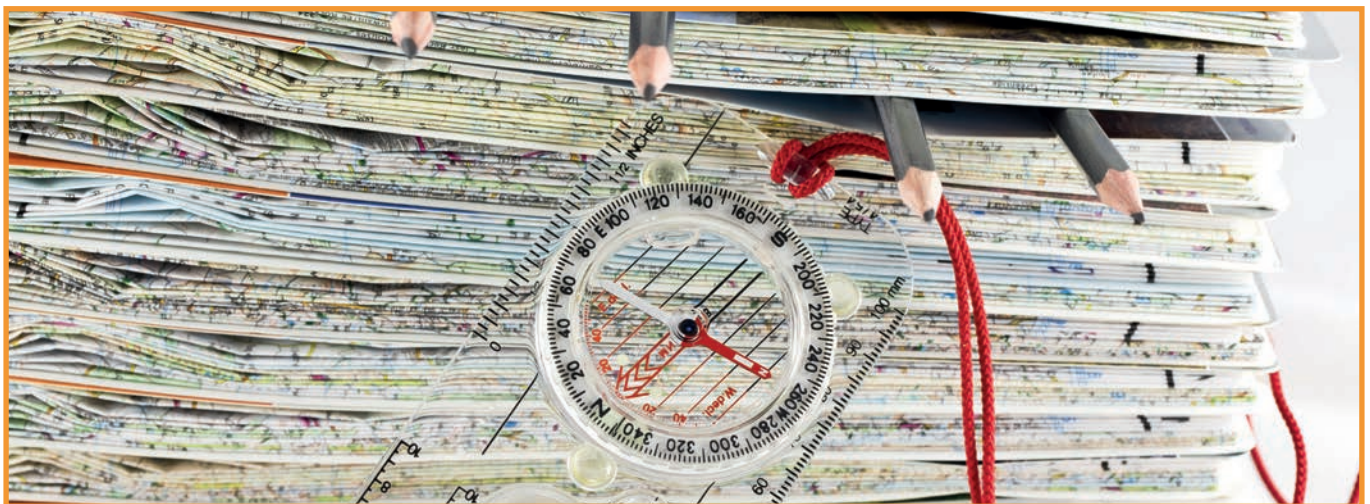
Support from RoS also includes the provision of maps to crofters to enable them to accurately define the boundaries of their croft when preparing applications for registration.

In addition, RoS works collaboratively with other crofting stakeholders, such as the Scottish Government, the Crofting Commission and crofting representative bodies. This is to ensure that the Crofting Register continues to deliver an accurate representation of land held in crofting tenure.

As at October 2020, RoS has registered 69 community applications totalling 864 crofts, accounting for 12% of the total number of 7,141 registered crofts. There are also 335 common grazings registered in the Crofting Register. The online Crofting Register⁹ contains extensive guidance on how and when to register your croft.



Registers of Scotland will continue to work collaboratively with the Scottish Government, the Crofting Commission and other crofting stakeholders to continually improve the Crofting Register registration process for all involved within the current legislation.



⁹ <http://www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home>



Economic And Community Development

Crofting continues to play a significant role in establishing and sustaining populations in communities throughout the Highlands and Islands, and is able to develop best where the wider community and region is able to grow and thrive. Growing populations and increasing income levels are particularly important to our remote communities.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) is the economic and community development agency for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. HIE, and its predecessor organisation, the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB), has been working with organisations and communities for over 50 years to ensure the region remains economically successful and competitive.

HIE states its current vision is to **'help build a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy across the Highlands and Islands, attracting more people to, live, work, study, invest and visit'**.

All crofting areas are served by HIE and benefit from HIE's work with businesses, social enterprises and community groups through a place-based collaborative approach to growing the region's economy, and enhancing its attractiveness and resilience.

Central to that effort is HIE's overall approach to strengthening communities. This includes support for asset-based community development, where HIE is a partner in delivering the Scottish Land Fund, and its support for community anchor organisations, generally community development trusts or large community landowners, which are actively involved in whole community development and regeneration. HIE works to sustain and develop a vibrant rural economy with people and place at its heart. HIE works with local, regional and national partners to provide a strong voice for the region, making sure opportunities and needs are understood. Through direct support and influencing others, HIE seeks to build an inclusive economy through a place-based collaborative approach that reflects local circumstances.

Rural areas face a unique combination of challenges including potentially a major impact on market access for primary food products. This, together with the need to move towards a low carbon economy, will create opportunities for local food producers with strong provenance and high nature value activity. As a sustainable form of land use, crofting already delivers a wide range of public goods. With the right support, crofting has the potential to grow, adapt, diversify and further contribute to rural and island resilience and climate change targets.



Development Activities

Bulleted below is a cross section of HIE's current development work. For the reasons already stated, some of these elements are designed as short-term 'emergency responses' to pressing challenges, and will be concluding very early in the currency of this plan.

- The Young Companies Capital Investment Scheme: this is a short-term, COVID-19 recovery programme (2020/21 financial year), for companies which are less than five years old. This could be a useful source of capital for entrants into crofting, or longer-term crofters who have started distinct new commercial ventures, within the last five years.
- Two pilot 'Rural Food Tourism Places' are being facilitated in Northmavine/Delting (Shetland) and in the Uists. These pilots involve cohorts of crofters and food, drink and tourism businesses, which are being supported to explore innovations and new collaborations which bring economic benefits and opportunities to diversify their activities and businesses. Whilst the ability to work closely together has been affected by COVID-19, there is still a desire to pursue this work when conditions are more favourable.
- Currently, HIE is financially supporting a programme of crofting skills for transition from COVID-19. The programme was developed and is being delivered by the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF). The programme delivers targeted skills-development modules, via safe virtual methods, for crofters and smallholders suffering from the impact of the pandemic.

The programme will run until late spring 2021. Courses currently available include:

- Planning for Staycations – COVID-19 Best Practice Cleaning Guidance
- How to Start a Local Community Food Hub
- Virtual Sheepdogs – Braehillor Sheepdog Handler Training
- Crofters Who Diversify – Instagram Marketing for your Business
- Fantastic Food from Local Producer Food Markets
- Crofting the Brand – Adding Value
- Income from Small-scale Growing
- As part of a more strategic national approach, HIE is collaborating with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Lantra, and the SCF, to promote new entrants and seek a way to mainstream crofting skills development. It is important that skills development is more broadly integrated with practical rural skills provision, and less reliant on pulses of project funded activity. Achieving this will make it easier for crofters and other rural based groups to be more proactive in planning their continuous professional development.
- Through the 'Innovation Voucher' scheme, HIE can provide support to crofters who are exploring new ways to enhance their business. HIE provides a range of capacity and leadership development opportunities that can be accessed by individuals with crofting interests. For example, crofters can currently access the Scottish Enterprise Rural Leadership Training Programme, which HIE funds in the Highlands and Islands region. This popular programme also supports an ongoing



network of previous Rural Leaders, and through the Highlands and Islands cohorts has already supported several crofters with their professional development, enhancing their leadership skills and practice.

- One of the great features of the crofting system is how it can support the creation of housing in crofting areas, allowing crofters to live on or near their holdings, and, in other cases, making land available for other affordable housing in crofting communities, as was done very effectively in Plockton. Such housing creates opportunities for population growth in areas that have a shortage of affordable homes. In support of these efforts, HIE, in collaboration with the Crofting Commission will shortly publish practical advice on the options for creation of housing on croft land.
- HIE is very active in a range of activities to enhance the region's mobile and broadband digital infrastructure, including the delivery of the Scottish Government's R100 commitment (please see the Broadband Infrastructure chapter for more detail). HIE is also proactive in supporting 'digital enablement', with skills training to facilitate the use of the improved infrastructure.

Summary (for economic and community development)

We live in dynamic times where there are opportunities for innovation, digital adoption and diversification as well as pressing challenges, such as climate change, transition out of the EU and the effects of COVID-19. There are also some stark predictions regarding population loss from sparsely populated rural areas. All public agencies have to be agile and responsive to emerging opportunities, challenges and priorities, and HIE will continue to evolve in its approach and focus to ensure that it delivers the best balance of products, schemes, investments and resulting outcomes for the Highlands and Islands. Please refer to the HIE website, www.hie.co.uk and through the national portal, FindBusinessSupport.gov.uk, for up-to-date information.

As the Crofting Commission expands its development function, HIE will work with the Crofting Commission and others to increase the synergy between crofting development and wider rural community and economic development, along with resilience work to which HIE contributes. In respect of those collaborative efforts, HIE expect to contribute to the four development priorities below.





HIE will work with the Crofting Commission and others to increase the synergy between crofting development and the wider rural community development and economic resilience.



HIE will work with relevant partners to encourage innovation and diversification which will create economic opportunities for crofters in rural and island communities.



HIE will work with relevant partners to enhance the attractiveness and resilience of rural and island communities, leading to population retention and growth within crofting communities.



HIE will continue to work with stakeholders with a view to mainstream future skills funding.



Skills Development

Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland

Scotland's rural economy has an important role to play through the significant contribution it makes to national economic output, and in providing employment opportunities for the people who live in our country's rural, remote and coastal communities. The Scottish Government understands that its people are the key to driving forward our rural communities, making them sustainable and inclusive places to live, work and thrive.

The Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland¹⁰ sets out the Scottish Government's strategic approach to support the skills-needs of the rural economy by addressing skills shortages, talent retention and attraction, demographic challenges through enhanced work-based learning pathways, and by increasing access to education and skills provision in rural areas. It seeks to ensure that people in rural communities and businesses have the right skills now and in the future.

The Action Plan has a clear focus on collaborative action across rural Scotland, and will support sectoral and regional Skills Investment Plans and the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan to bring skills demand and supply closer together in our rural areas.



The Scottish Government, through the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland, seeks to ensure that we have the right people with the right skills, and support inclusive growth.

¹⁰ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/skills-planning-alignment/skills-action-plan-for-rural-scotland/>



Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan

The Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan¹¹ (CESAP) is central to the Scottish Government's ambitions to create a future workforce that can support our transition to a net zero economy. The rural economy is poised to play an important role in this transition. Scotland's rural areas help counter national greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and can make a significant impact through the planting of trees, peatland restoration, and the generation and adoption of renewable energy.

Potential opportunities for jobs growth and skills implication were identified across five broad areas of economic activity that will make a significant contribution to net zero transition. These areas reflect national priorities and investment within the Scottish Government's Programme for Government to reduce energy demand and GHG emissions and adapt to climate change:

- Energy transition (including oil and gas, on and offshore wind, hydrogen, electricity, carbon capture and storage);
- Construction, (including the retrofitting of housing and non-residential properties);
- Transport (including road transport, railways, domestic aviation, shipping and aircraft support vehicles);
- Manufacturing (with a focus on engineering); and

- Agriculture and land use management (including forestry).

Agriculture and land use make a dual contribution to the net zero target, with the ability to reduce GHG emissions from agriculture, whilst also increasing the levels of carbon dioxide brought absorbed through peatland restoration. The transition to net zero by 2045 will transform our economy and society.



The Scottish Government, through the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan, will support or create significant numbers of additional green jobs in rural and remote areas of Scotland, with associated skills development and training.

¹¹ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/47336/climate-emergency-skills-action-plan-2020-2025.pdf>



Digital Skills

Digital skills development is critical across the economy and a key driver of economic and inclusive growth. The Scottish Government has invested £26 million over the past six years to support businesses and individuals to develop their digital skills.

Through its 'Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics' (STEM) strategy, the Scottish Government is helping to improve and grow the digital skills base. The Scottish Government will make sure that the approach is inclusive, and that there is equality of access and opportunity to study and pursue STEM jobs and careers. STEM has never been more relevant than it is today as we face a global climate emergency.

The Scottish Government has invested £3 million in CodeClan, Scotland's first industry-led digital skills academy, offering students an intensive four month training programme with direct access to employers and an opportunity to attain a professional qualification. Over 950 graduates have now emerged from the course and into the jobs market. CodeClan Highlands has trained two cohorts of web developers and formed partnerships with more than 20 employers in the region.

Through investment to DigitalBoost, the Scottish Government continues to support small and medium-sized enterprises, helping them become more aware and develop skills to digitalise their processes. The Digital Development Loan enables businesses to borrow up to £100,000 for the purpose of improving their digital capabilities, including development of digital skills for staff.

In May 2019, the Scottish Government launched the £1 million Digital Start Fund, an inclusive growth policy which aims to assist those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits to gain digital qualifications and enter the labour market. A number of providers have been awarded funding to support those living in rural areas, including the University of Highlands and Islands, delivering cyber, data and software development courses jointly with ScotlandIS, and to North Highland College delivering cyber training.



The Scottish Government will continue to improve Scotland's digital skills base, and provide opportunities for under-represented groups, such as women.



Local Food Networks And Agri-Tourism

Local food chains play an important role in ensuring that households and communities get access to food. The Scottish Government is keen to encourage the building of, and participation in, local food networks.

One, commonly used definition of a local food network, is provided by the Permaculture Association: “Local food networks seek to ensure that food is grown and processed as close as possible to those who are going to eat it. Local food networks seek to create communities of producers and consumers of local food and to support local food initiatives”

The Scottish Government wants to encourage crofters, and other local producers, to work collaboratively to develop their businesses, share knowledge, access new markets, and connect with others in the food and drink sector. Crofting is ideally placed to bolster local food networks with its small-scale sustainable food production. It is widely acknowledged that many crofters produce high quality food such as beef, pork, lamb, mutton, fruit, vegetables, eggs and honey.

Why do local food networks matter?

- They bring producers and consumers of food closer together. This fosters a greater understanding of where food comes from and how it is produced, and engenders more respect for the people, families and businesses producing the products.
- It also creates ‘communities’ of people and producers who have shared values, shared interest in keeping money in the local economy, closer relationships between



local people and, arguably, healthier societies. Such relationships go way beyond the simple, transactional act of purchasing food.

- Local food networks are also characterised by the quality of their fresh produce and the standards they uphold, with an emphasis on environmental sustainability, high welfare, full traceability and, in some cases, organic principles.
- They provide an outlet for small-scale producers that would struggle to gain sales in mainstream retail or food service markets.
- There has been an explosion in interest in local food over recent years and Scottish consumers place a lot of trust in produce from the country. For example, Scotland Food and Drink (SF&D) Provenance Perception research 2019, showed that:
 - 69% of Scottish shoppers claim that they would be more likely to buy a product labelled ‘Scottish’.
 - 49% of Scottish shoppers claim that they would be willing to pay more for Scottish produce.



- Local food is a significant contributor to the Scottish economy. According to Connect Local, Scotland's former local food advisory service, the value of the local food and drink sector growth was £440 million in 2017.

Regional Food Groups

Scotland Food and Drink, the industry body for food and drink businesses, manages a network of 15 regional food groups across Scotland, including a number in the crofting counties of Orkney, Shetland, and Argyll & Bute. Groups are cooperative associations of individuals and businesses, including producers, hospitality, and tourism enterprises, with the aim of promoting and growing their area's food and drink economies via business support and food tourism development.

In September 2020, during 'Scottish Food & Drink Fortnight', SF&D announced a new £250,000 fund, supported by the Scottish Government, to fund coordinator posts across the groups for a 12-month period. The posts are match-funded from other partners including local authorities. This new programme aims to create an active network of regional ambassadors who work in conjunction with local authorities to promote regional food and drink and tourism strategies.

Agri-tourism






Agri-tourism diversification increases economic stability by reducing financial risk, stabilising croft or farm income, and reducing the reliance on agricultural support. Agri-tourism and croft diversification will have an important role as part of rural tourism, as it supports:

- rural economies.
- business resilience, enabling crofts and farms to endure uncertain times and potential economic shocks.
- better use of land assets.
- opportunities for tourists from both home and abroad to better appreciate our iconic rural landscapes which are a significant draw for many of our visitors.

Agri-tourism provides a platform to increase food security and highlight the role that crofts and farms play. It encourages a better appreciation of the provenance of good wholesome home produced food, and it also highlights the need to lower food miles, particularly given the need to deliver an effective response to the climate change challenge.

In the 2020/21 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government set out its ongoing commitment to supporting the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) and rural communities, to help us move towards a safe, strong and green recovery for tourism. Building on the work of the RTIF, and the £9 million that the Scottish Government has already committed, the government will explore how continued support may be provided for our most vulnerable locations, many of which are in crofting areas and where agri-tourism businesses are located.



-  The Scottish Government will work with Scotland Food and Drink to connect crofters with the network of regional food groups.
-  The Scottish Government will establish a project group to review the crofting brand marque, and map networks of current crofters who produce food.
-  The Scottish Government will source support to project manage a crofting food network.
-  The Scottish Government will deliver training to equip crofters with the skills to market their goods and promote their business.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to support agri-tourism through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.



Helen O'Keefe

In January 2021, Helen O'Keefe won the Scottish Crofting Federation's 'Young Crofter of the Year' award.

"I came to the North West Highlands from Australia in 2015, after falling in love with the land and the people while on holiday the previous year. I grew up on a small farm and wanted to get back to some kind of agriculture, specifically to be able to grow and sell real food, not just to keep animals and garden for fun.

I was fortunate to be able to purchase three crofts and the Elphin Tearooms, with help from my mother who had moved over from Australia to help me both financially and with labour. The Tearooms provides an outlet for croft produce, both in the kitchen and direct to consumers. Elphin has many skilled, productive backyard vegetable growers and several crofters who already sell meat and eggs direct to customers. I wanted to highlight this and show the public the potential of crofting townships for food production, and provide an easy route to market to encourage others to grow more and sell direct.

We added our small farmshop in 2019, to sell meat and vegetables provided by myself, another crofter, and several other domestic gardeners. Working together as a community provides benefits to us all by sharing branding, marketing and distribution costs, and providing a larger range of products to attract more customers.

In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, my neighbour and I made the decision to start an online food hub on the Open Food Network called 'The Green Bowl', through which we could continue to sell local meat (beef, pork and mutton), eggs, vegetables, soft fruit, herbs and baked goods to surrounding areas. We take orders once a week and deliver to Ullapool or have pickups from Elphin. We have also delivered to wider Assynt and Coigach. Our suppliers are all within Elphin and Knockan, with myself and another crofter supplying the meat and eggs, and other products supplied by us and four other non-crofting neighbours. We hope to expand our horticultural produce next year, with each producer growing more, but also by bringing in more producers. The Green Bowl has been a big success, with a very positive response from the area. There is strong demand for local food, and the ordering and delivery system that we have in place works well for our customers and us. Selling through The Green Bowl helps us to sell more food to local people, which we really value.

I have a flock of about 100 sheep, mostly pedigree Shetlands, breeding for wool, meat and live sales. I sell fleeces direct to spinners and crafters, and have wool spun into yarn to sell directly to knitters. All cull animals (mostly two year old wethers) are taken to the abattoir and meat is sold directly to customers. I have started crossing a portion of the flock with a Beltex tup to sell store lambs, providing a cash injection and reducing the stock numbers during the winter.

I have created a vegetable garden, a small orchard and three shelter belts, one of which is designed to protect the orchard from wind. I have also planted over 50 trees within the fields to provide shelter and forage for livestock. I have used CAGS to deer fence the crofts, which has been essential for the orchard, vegetable garden and trees, and also, unexpectedly, for successfully cutting and baling our first hay last year. The grass simply does not grow enough for hay with 20 stags eating it each night! I have also used CAGS to purchase a lamb weigh crate which will be very beneficial for my direct meat sales (knowing which sheep to send to the abattoir) and to monitor my store lamb progress (plus more accurate dosing). Subsidised training programmes, run by the Scottish Crofting Federation and the Farm Advisory Service / SAC have been very helpful for me, as well as assistance from SAC staff and our local SGRPID office”.



Land, Environment And Biodiversity

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 sets targets to reduce Scotland's emissions of all greenhouse gasses to net zero by 2045. In the December 2020 update to the 'Climate Change Plan'¹² the Scottish Government set out the pathway to delivering these targets and how its ambition for a just transition to net zero can support a green recovery from COVID-19. The update explains how Scotland's land can help deliver the emissions reduction targets whilst supporting the green recovery, for example by supporting an increase in the number of green jobs.

The 'Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry' chapter of the update, sets out the policies and actions that the Scottish Government will take to enable and support woodland creation and peatland restoration. The plan also states that in delivering these actions the government is determined to ensure they are undertaken "...in a just way, and in a way that also supports our wider ambitions and priorities such as:

- protecting and restoring Scotland's biodiversity and natural environment.
- investing in the natural capital that underpins our economy and wellbeing.
- providing a platform for the sustainable production of high quality food.
- providing a source of other long-term sustainable products like Scottish timber.
- providing a base for more renewable energy generation like on-shore wind and bioenergy, with appropriate safeguards for biodiversity.

¹² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>

- prioritising nature-based solutions to societal challenges, including air quality, water supply and quality, flood risk management, climate mitigation and adaptation and much more.
- providing more modern, affordable and energy-efficient rural housing."

Under the provisions of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Scottish Government and all public bodies have a duty to further the conservation of biodiversity. Scottish Ministers also have a duty to publish a strategy or strategies for the conservation of biodiversity and to publish a list of species and habitats which are particularly important for the conservation of biodiversity. The development of a new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is planned but, as indicated in the 'Statement of Intent on Biodiversity'¹³ published in December 2020, 'Scotland's biodiversity - it's in your hands' and 'The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity' will continue to provide a strategic framework and route map¹⁴ to protect and restore Scotland's biodiversity. The Statement of Intent also sets out the Scottish Government's ambition and direction of travel for improving biodiversity in partnership with land managers across Scotland.

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-post-2020-statement-intent/>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-biodiversity-route-map-2020/>



It is known that climate change affects biodiversity. Climate change has an impact, both directly and indirectly, on habitats and, as a result, an effect on the abundance and distribution of the species present. However, the impact of changes in climate can be reduced by maintaining or enhancing biodiverse, interconnected habitats. It is well known that soils, grassland and wetlands, forests and peatlands hold vast stores of carbon. The management of particular habitats, for instance where various forms of agriculture are practised, provides resilience, enabling species to respond more effectively, and affects how much carbon is sequestered rather than released into the atmosphere in various gaseous forms, including carbon dioxide and methane.

Biodiversity and Sustainable Landscapes

Much crofting land use is recognised as being of high nature value. The traditional low intensity management and mixture of activities which are associated with crofting, supports a special range of species and habitats and contributes to creating a characteristic and distinct landscape.

A significant part of crofting activity revolves around livestock production and in some areas this is associated with low-intensity systems of high nature value. It is in these areas that we see a natural balance between food production and the environment, creating a rich diversity of wildlife habitats that are home to many species. The sensitive management of grasslands, habitat mosaics, field margins, and moorland habitats, provides biodiversity and environmental

benefits. A number of particularly outstanding examples are designated as protected sites.

One example is the internationally renowned machair of the Uists, which is a rare coastal habitat maintained by the traditional rotation of cropped and fallow land, and the presence of cattle in winter¹⁵. The swards provide pollen and nectar for insects like the great yellow bumblebee, and breeding sites for wading birds.

The Western Isles, and especially the machair of North and South Uist, Benbecula, and islands in the Sound of Harris, support the largest concentrations of breeding waders in the UK, and is one of the most important in Europe¹⁶.

More than 750,000 hectares of land in Scotland is in crofting tenure, with approximately 33,000 people living in crofting households. The Shucksmith Report¹⁷ stated that “The relationship with the land is at the heart of crofting”. That relationship needs to remain healthy and must adapt to changing circumstances.

¹⁵ Defined as a type of dune grassland. Love, J. (2003). *Machair Scotland's Living Landscapes* Scottish Natural Heritage

¹⁶ Populations of breeding waders Charadrii and their habitats on the crofting lands of the Outer Hebrides, Scotland', *Biological Conservation*, Vol 37, 333-361. Fuller, R.J., Reed, T.M., Buxton, N.E., Webb, A., Williams, T.D., & Pienkowski, M.W. (1986)

¹⁷ https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/crofting-consultation-2017/supporting_documents/Shucksmith%20Report.pdf



The Scottish Government is looking at ways in which to deliver direct environmental benefits through its agricultural support schemes. If an investment under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme requires planning permission, the planning process already ensures that environmental impact is taken into consideration¹⁸. In addition, for any investment where planning permission is not required but the improvement is to be carried out on land within an environmental designated area, applicants will be asked to explain the assessment they have undertaken to ensure there is no negative environmental impact caused by the investment.



Under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme the Scottish Government will ensure that environmental issues are considered for each investment carried out on land within an environmental designated area.

There is a rich variety of habitats and species found in the crofting area. The biodiversity of the Highlands and Islands is in many respects distinct and unique and is often connected to the management of the land. Species rich lowland grasslands and upland meadows are frequently found in crofts and common grazings. These grasslands depend on sensitive livestock grazing and cutting



regimes which allow flowering plants to flower and set seed prior to being grazed more heavily or mowed.

A significant number of priority species which are rare or in decline can be found in the crofting area. The great yellow bumblebee is restricted to machair areas and other flower-rich areas in Orkney, Scottish islands, and Caithness and Sutherland. Marsh fritillary is restricted to the west coast in Scotland.

Species on the Edge is a partnership project of NatureScot and seven nature conservation charities which was launched in 2020. Over a four-and-a-half period a programme of work will seek to improve the fortunes of some of these priority and rare species found along Scotland's coast and islands¹⁹.

¹⁸ Where large scale projects are proposed, the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas) (Scotland) Regulations has a number of requirements to assess impacts.

¹⁹ <https://www.nature.scot/scotlands-biodiversity/species-edge-sote/species-edge-about-project>



Since 2019, NatureScot has been Piloting an Outcome Based Approach working with clusters of crofters and farmers to test innovative approaches to delivering environmental outcomes on crofts and farms. Three of the pilots are in the crofting area (Skye, Argyll, and Strathspey)²⁰. The project is also working closely with two partner projects in Shetland (with the RSPB) and in the Outer Hebrides (with the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism). This work will help inform future schemes as new agriculture policies are developed.

Pollinators

Pollinators are an integral part of our biodiversity and provide an important contribution through pollination to crop production and environmental services.

Many crofting areas, especially machair habitats, are crucial for the survival of some of our rarest bumblebees, including the great yellow bumble bee. Land management, including managing habitats and providing flower-rich areas to ensure a supply of pollen and nectar is important for our native pollinators, and is encouraged under the Pollinator Strategy for Scotland 2017–2027²¹.



Beekeeping can play an important role but care needs to be taken where honey bees are introduced or kept as they can threaten native bumblebees and solitary bees²². Apicultural (beekeeping) businesses in Scotland are generally small or medium-sized enterprises, and the value of their honey production varies from year to year. Collectively it averages several million pounds per annum. In addition, these businesses are important locally as employers. Healthy thriving bee colonies are also important to soft fruit and arable crofters and farmers as crop pollinators. The use of land for beekeeping has been recognised legally as a form of crofting cultivation since 2010.




The Scottish Government takes the matter of bee health very seriously, and encourages responsible beekeeping and management practices that protect local populations of wild pollinators.

²⁰ For more information see <https://www.nature.scot/piloting-outcomes-based-approach-scotland-pobas-project>

²¹ <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-04/Pollinator%20Strategy%20for%20Scotland%202017-2027.pdf>

²² For guidance on this see <https://www.nature.scot/guidance-honey-bees-and-beekeeping-protected-areas>



-  The Scottish Government will continue to support and encourage management practices that support biodiversity.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing a beekeeping package under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to support and encourage action to ensure our native pollinators thrive as part of the Pollinator Strategy for Scotland.



In environments conducive to peat formation, dead plant matter does not decompose completely so the carbon held within them becomes locked into the peat. When peat is exposed to the air through extraction or cultivation, for example, it degrades and the stored carbon is released as CO₂, a greenhouse gas, which exacerbates global warming and climate change. Peatland also forms a unique natural habitat that supports biodiversity and species at risk, such as plants, birds and insects.

Peatlands

In the 2021-22 budget, the Scottish Government announced funding of £22 million for peatland restoration, part of the commitment made in 2020 to invest more than £250 million over 10 years to support restoration of 20,000 hectares of Scottish peatland annually. Peatland restoration has the potential to support or create significant numbers of additional green jobs in rural and remote areas of Scotland, with associated skills development and training.

Crofting areas include large areas of peatlands or peaty soils. These act as important stores of carbon and support biodiversity. The carbon stored in Scottish peatland soils as carbon dioxide (CO₂) is equivalent to more than 120 times Scotland's total annual greenhouse gas emissions.



An RSPB report²³ showed that the densest peatland areas are in Caithness, Western Isles, and west and east Highlands. These are all crofting areas. It is estimated that more than 80% of Scotland's peatland is in poor condition and could benefit from restoration. Peatlands are a vital nature based solution to the twin challenges of the climate emergency and loss of biodiversity. Alongside their role in capturing and locking up carbon, they provide an important range of other co-benefits including offering important natural habitats that support a range of unique ecosystems and biodiversity, contributing to flood risk management and improvement of water quality, reduction of soil erosion and reduction in the risk of wildfire.

It is therefore an increasing priority to restore our bogs and keep them healthy. In order to restore a peatland site we first need to establish the current condition of the peatland. NatureScot, working in partnership with the Scottish Government and the Crofting Commission, are undertaking an exercise to identify and map areas of degraded peatland. Once this exercise is complete, we will overlay that map with records of common grazings to identify which areas we need to engage and prioritise first. A large majority of common grazing land falls under land classified with peatland importance. NatureScot and the Crofting Commission will then aim to work with landowners, grazings committees and crofters to identify opportunities to restore degraded peatland.

²³ <https://rspb.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=2b383eee459f4de18026002ae648f7b7>



The Scottish Government will continue to provide funding to support the restoration of degraded peatland, and to explore the need to provide funding to support the maintenance of healthy peatland.



NatureScot, in partnership with the Commission, will identify those areas of degraded peatland in the crofting counties with a view to prioritising engagement with crofters and common grazing committees.

Restoring an area of bare peat the size of Glasgow's George Square would save 19 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year, which is the same as the emissions produced by 226 car journeys between Edinburgh and John O'Groats²⁴.

Peatland Action is a fund run by NatureScot that supports the restoration of peatlands. Since 2012, Peatland ACTION, working in partnership with others, has set over 25,000 hectares of degraded peatland on the road to recovery. The scheme supports peatland restoration and preparatory work and provides training. There are a number of projects in the north of Scotland.

²⁴ SNH Peatland Action – Peatland and Carbon information booklet



Loch Orasaigh

Loch Orasaigh peatland restoration launched in 2019 in the Isle of Lewis, where there is considerable scope for more restoration activity²⁵. Working alongside Ranish Common Grazings Committee, Soval Estate and Scottish Water, the project will focus on restoring 11 hectares of damaged and eroding peatland within the Loch Orasaigh drinking water catchment area. The restoration aims to re-profile peat hags, block drainage ditches and encourage the stabilisation of vegetation around the edge of the loch. The project will help tackle climate change, as well as potentially reducing water treatment costs and protect two of Scotland's protected species Black-throated divers and Great skua, which are home to the loch.








Peatland Management Scheme and LIFE Peatland project back in 2004²⁶. At the time, techniques were being developed; the project has allowed to restore peatland drains and helped train a number of local people to carry out the drain blocking.

Halladale Common Grazing was one of the first common grazing to undertake peatland restoration and carry out drain blocking. They have managed the grazing for the benefit of the peatlands since their designation in the 1980s. The common grazing is part of the Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland. Initially the area was managed under the Peatland Management Scheme and subsequently a Rural Priorities Contract. The committee now manage it under an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme contract. To further improve the peatland the common grazing worked with NatureScot under the

²⁵ <https://www.nature.scot/peatland-action-case-study-whats-connection-between-peat-and-loch-orasaigh-drinking-water-catchment>

²⁶ <https://www.fas.scot/downloads/common-grazings-case-study-4-halladale-common-grazings/>

Summary of Actions

-  Under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme the Scottish Government will ensure that environmental issues are considered for each investment carried out on land within an environmental designated area.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to support and encourage management practices that support biodiversity.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing a beekeeping package under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to support and encourage action to ensure our native pollinators thrive as part of the Pollinator Strategy for Scotland.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to provide funding to support the restoration of degraded peatland, and to explore the need to provide funding to support the maintenance of healthy peatland.
-  NatureScot, in partnership with the Commission, will identify those areas of degraded peatland in the crofting counties with a view to prioritising engagement with crofters and common grazing committees.
-  The Scottish Government will support or create significant numbers of additional green jobs in rural and remote areas of Scotland, with associated skills development and training.



Woodlands and Forests

Scotland's woodlands and forests are a vital national resource and play an important role in rural development and sustainable land use. As well as providing timber for construction and opportunities for public enjoyment, our forests enhance and protect the environment and reduce the impact of climate change. Trees support soil and water conservation and they absorb carbon dioxide, removing and storing the carbon, while releasing oxygen back into the air. Trees improve biodiversity, increase the number of pollinators, and provide specialist habitat for birds and mammals.

Forestry in Scotland provides around £1 billion to the economy each year and support over 25,000 jobs. Scotland's forests are home to more than 200 species of plants, birds and animals including Scottish wildcats, red squirrels, capercaillie, and our national tree – the Scots pine. Trees remove around 4.6 million cars' emissions each year²⁷.

In February 2019, the Scottish Government published 'Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029'. The Strategy presents a 50 year vision for Scotland's forests and woodlands, and provides a 10-year framework for action. It sets out the long-term approach to expanding, protecting and enhancing Scotland's forests and woodlands, so that they deliver greater economic, social and environmental benefits to Scotland's people, now and in the future. The Strategy supports the delivery of the government's climate



Photo credit WTML/John Macpherson

change forestry targets, including creating 18,000 hectares of new woodland a year by 2024/25, across a diverse range of woodland, including new native woodland.

As crofts occupy around 20% of the Highlands and Islands, they are well placed to contribute to delivery of the Forestry Strategy. For example, through crofter forestry on appropriate sites, and through woodland crofts and “agro-forestry”, where cultivation, grazing and woodland development complement one another and can actually assist in livestock production by providing shelter, enhancing grazing, and better drainage. Local forestry and woodland strategies set out these opportunities and provide a framework for forestry expansion through identifying preferred areas where forestry can have a positive impact on the environment, landscape, economy and local people.

²⁷ <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/woodland-creation>



Supporting Green Jobs

Scotland's forestry sector employs people across Scotland, including where job creation is most needed, such as in rural and remote areas and among younger age categories. As part of the green recovery, Scottish Forestry²⁸ is doubling its recruitment of assistant woodland officers, and Forestry and Land Scotland²⁹ is doubling the number of opportunities for young people (including modern apprenticeships) creating an additional 25 jobs for young people.

Employment in the private forestry sector will also grow in response to rising levels of woodland creation and increasing domestic timber production. Forestry companies in Scotland have already taken up the offer of funding through the 'Young Person Guarantee' and 'Kickstart' programmes to take on young people as part of a new 'Growing Rural Talent' initiative which was promoted at a Forestry Jobs Summit in December 2020.



The Scottish Government is encouraging private sector forestry companies to support new forestry jobs in rural and remote Scotland.

²⁸ Scottish Forestry is the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulations. Scottish Forestry is the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulations,

²⁹ Forestry and Land Scotland is the Scottish Government agency responsible for managing Scotland's national forests and land.

Integrated Land Use

When people think about crofting and all of its traditional practices, they don't immediately consider forestry or the management and creation of woodlands. Through the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS), the Scottish Government aims to help crofters to integrate trees into their business and increase the viability of their common grazing. The 'Sheep and Trees' initiative is aimed at helping land managers identify the many opportunities woodland creation can bring to support and develop existing businesses. New woodland and agroforestry where trees are integrated into farmed landscapes without losing agricultural productivity, planted with clear objectives, designed well and carefully located on in-bye land and within hill and upland common grazings, can bring many benefits.

How crofting can benefit from trees:

- **Shelter and shade for livestock**
Woodland and shelter belts can provide shelter for livestock, slowing down wind speeds, allowing stock to be left outside longer thus increasing productivity, improving animal welfare and reducing costs.
- **Windbreaks to protect crops**
Trees used for windbreaks can help prevent damage to crops and reduce soil erosion.
- **Diversifying croft business**
Woodlands can, in time, be a useful way of generating a different income stream from less productive land. Fast growing species can produce saleable timber in around 20 years through thinning, which also helps manage the woodland for future quality timber production.



- **Adapting to climate change and reducing its effects**

Planting trees absorbs and locks up carbon, helping to reduce net carbon emissions.

- **Landscape and biodiversity improvements**

Planting on less-productive land can improve the landscape and its biodiversity, providing habitat and wildlife corridors for flora and fauna. Woodlands host a large number of insects, helping pollination of nearby crops, and shelters nesting birds which feed on insect pests.

- **Improvement of water management**

Trees can protect against soil erosion. They help prevent runoff of manure and fertiliser into water courses. They increase the rate of water infiltration which can slow the movement of water from land into water courses, thus reducing peak flows and the risk of flooding.

- **Improved soil health**

Trees help to maintain long-term soil fertility by capturing nutrients deep in the ground and returning them to the surface rooting zone.

- **Reduced pests and diseases**

The drying effect of trees can reduce the incidence of liver fluke, and shelter belts planted between fields can act as a biosecurity barrier.

- **Supplementary browsing**

Trees offer the opportunity for supplementary fodder providing a range of micronutrients and anti-parasitic properties.

- **Using new woodland to renew or redefine boundaries**

An important benefit for many businesses is that the current FGS helps with costs associated with fencing new woodlands. New woodlands can be planned to provide a real opportunity for the business to redefine or renew boundaries on the croft and, as a result, help in the future management of the land.

- **Fuel Source**

Trees can be used as a fuel source and provide an alternative to peat.



The Scottish Government will support woodland expansion that helps integrate woodland with traditional crofting activities.



The Scottish Government, through the forestry grant scheme, will provide grant support to crofters and common grazing committees to support the sustainable management of existing forests and woodlands.



The Scottish Government will introduce a forestry loan scheme to help crofters and grazings committees with the cash flow challenges associated with woodland creation.



Getting the Balance Right

The Scottish Government aims to support the creation of new woodland that will bring economic, environmental and social benefits. The benefits will include:

- Helping mitigate climate change by absorbing and storing carbon.
- Restoring priority habitats through developing forest habitat networks.
- Protecting soil and water resources.
- Supporting rural development through local businesses and croft, common grazing and farm diversification.
- Supporting a sustainable forest industry by providing a reliable timber supply.

The Scottish Government recognises the need for better integration of forestry and other land uses, and supports the principle that the right tree species is planted in the right place for the right purpose. Woodland creation and natural regeneration may be suitable in many areas, and must recognise the objectives of other land uses and safeguard priority habitats and species.

It is important that there is engagement with crofters and common grazings committees to help identify where opportunities exist for woodland creation. Getting access to good quality advice early in the process from Scottish Forestry and partners such as the Woodland Trust Scotland under the Croft Woodlands Project, is key, and can prevent unnecessary financial outlay.

The Croft Woodlands Project set up in 2016, supports crofters to create and manage woodlands. The Project is a partnership between the Scottish Crofting Federation, Woodland Trust Scotland, Scottish Forestry, Coigach & Assynt Living Landscapes, Point & Sandwick Trust, Argyll Small Woods Cooperative, Shetland Amenity Trust, Orkney Woodland Project, and the Communities Housing Trust.

The Project offers free support to crofters, common grazings committees and smallholders within the crofting counties. Advisers carry out site assessments, offer technical advice and assist with access to training and funding. The Project also runs a small loan scheme to help crofters with cash-flow. Advice is mainly focused on new native woodland planting, but can also include management of existing woodlands.



The Scottish Government, through Scottish Forestry, supports the Croft Woodlands Project to provide local advisers to help crofters and common grazings committees assess what is possible and realistic on the land and develop woodland proposals.



Forestry Grant Scheme

The Scottish Government provides funding for the sustainable creation and management of forests and woodlands in Scotland through the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) to support delivery of the Scottish Government's woodland creation targets and implementation of Scotland's Forestry Strategy (2019-2029).

The Scheme is delivered by Scottish Forestry, and has a number of different woodland creation options and grants. Payments include support for initial planting and annual maintenance for five years. There is also support for a number of operations which may be required to ensure the successful establishment of new woodland, for example, fencing, gorse removal, and bracken treatment.

As at February 2021, one of the FGS's woodland creation options, which offers the highest level of grant, is the 'Native Broadleaves in Northern and Western Isles' scheme. The minimum block size for this option is 0.25 hectares, up to a maximum of one hectare for the Northern Isles, and a maximum of three hectares for the Western Isles and elsewhere in the crofting counties.

There are also several grants to support the management of existing forests, and woodlands to improve woodland biodiversity, deliver greater environmental benefits, and enhance the public's use and enjoyment of woodlands.

Further guidance and advice on forestry grant support can be found at:

- Woodland creation - <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/woodland-creation>
- Woodland management - <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/forestry-grants>.
- Forestry Grants for woodlands on Common Grazings - <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/farm-woodlands/croft-woodland-project>
- Croft Woodlands Project - <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/scotland/croft-woodlands/>



Sandy Murray

Sandy Murray from Auchumore in Strath Halladale has been planting trees on his croft since 1992. He has combined native woodland planting with shelter belts, timber and Christmas trees.

Well planned woodland integrated with other activities can work really well. Seeing more wildlife as the trees grow and watching sheep take refuge in rough weather has been very satisfying”.

“From a crofting perspective I would say that the biggest benefit was the shelter the new woods gave us. The forestry grants allowed us to improve fencing, and this helped the management of the croft. Now there is firewood coming out as thinnings which offers another benefit.



Photo credit WTML/John Macpherson



The Scottish Government, through the forestry grant scheme, will provide grant support to crofters and common grazing committees to plant trees and create woodlands on croft and common grazing land.

Agroforestry and Woodland Crofts

Agroforestry is a broad term used to describe the integration of crop and/or livestock systems with trees, with the potential to increase croft productivity and its biodiversity value. This may be anything from the simple provision of shelter and shade for sheep, to a woodland-based business including livestock, horticulture, fruit, timber, forest products and tourism.

A woodland croft is largely or wholly covered with trees. It may be on land that has been wooded for a long time, or where new planting has been designed to create a resilient, productive system. It might also have been created from an existing woodland. Woodland management is likely to be a key part of the croft business, and may include income streams from wood fuel or small-scale timber processing.

The Woodland Crofts Partnership³⁰ has been established to support and promote woodland crofts. It is a partnership between the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Community Woodlands Association, the Communities Housing Trust, and Woodland Trust Scotland. It works closely with the Croft Woodlands Project, having many shared interests with it.






“Agroforestry embraces a spectrum or suite of management systems in which tree and woodland management form a binding element of a mixed economy that includes animal husbandry, horticulture, fruit growing or non-tree forest products. As this handbook will illustrate, there is a wealth of possibilities when woodland provides the matrix within which other land uses can thrive. A range of symbioses develops. These are nearly always richer, more productive, more resilient, and often more economic; they also employ more people than the single use systems we largely have today”³¹.

³⁰ <http://woodlandcrofts.org/>

³¹ The Croft Woodlands Project “Highlands & Islands Woodlands Handbook”



Summary of Actions

-  The Scottish Government will support woodland expansion that helps integrate woodland with traditional crofting activities.
-  The Scottish Government, through the forestry grant scheme, will provide grant support to crofters and common grazing committees to support the sustainable management of existing forests and woodlands.
-  The Scottish Government will introduce a forestry loan scheme to help crofters and grazings committees with the cash flow challenges associated with woodland creation.
-  The Scottish Government, through Scottish Forestry, supports the Croft Woodlands Project to provide local advisers to help crofters and common grazings committees assess what is possible and realistic on the land and develop woodland proposals.
-  The Scottish Government, through the forestry grant scheme, will provide grant support to crofters and common grazing committees to plant trees and create woodlands on croft and common grazing land.



Lynn Cassells and Sandra Baer

Lynn and Sandra moved to Lynbreck Croft in March 2016. Since then, they have built up a multi-award winning enterprise, producing high quality meat, eggs and honey, and offering regular croft tours to showcase their nature-based approach to farming.

“We’ve had so much encouragement from neighbours, specialist advisers and networks of like-minded folk. Financial support from the Scottish Government, including the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme and the Forestry Grant Scheme, really gave us a head start.

With no background in agriculture, we had a steep learning curve to try and make our vision fit with what could realistically be delivered on the ground.

Increasing the tree cover on the croft was always going to be a priority for us. In our first year we planted 17,400 native broadleaf trees, creating a ‘living barn’ for the future, where our animals can safely take shelter amongst the trees, whilst foraging on woodland flora and leaves



Photo credit WTML/John Macpherson

The existing birch woods on the croft had suffered from years of overgrazing, resulting in a real lack of young seedlings establishing. We fenced out deer and rabbits to allow them to recover, and our rare breed Oxford, Sandy and Black pigs are opening up niches for new saplings to germinate.

We’re also looking to use trees to provide feed for our animals. With annual hay cuts becoming increasingly difficult to plan and costlier to purchase, we have planted 5,000 trees as part of an agroforestry project, so that we can feed freshly cut branches and dry others to make tree hay for the winter.

Living on the edge of the Cairngorms, harsh weather is part of daily life, but we have become increasingly aware of how the climate is changing, with extremes becoming the rule, rather than the exception.

We can no longer rely on seasonality averages and norms, we have to plan for the worst, allowing us to enjoy the best when it comes. Incorporating more trees on our croft is the best way for us to ‘future proof’ our business”.

Ros and Rab Nash

In 2015 Ros Nash and her husband Rab bought the 12 hectare Cogle Wood in Caithness and created a new woodland croft.

“Our business, Watten Firewood, has been expanding at an exciting rate. We have worked hard to streamline each part of the process, from harvesting logs to allowing customers to order and pay online.

Having our own woodland offers us protection from fluctuations in timber prices, which can vary significantly, whereas the price of processed firewood remains stable. Our customers like knowing that their wood is grown, harvested and seasoned just down the road.”

Ros and Rab have plans to diversify the business over time with the aim of deriving all of their income from the croft.

“We intend to make the most of our forest resource by establishing revenue streams based on non-timber forest products such as edible mushrooms and honey from beekeeping. We also plan to tap into the glamping accommodation market”

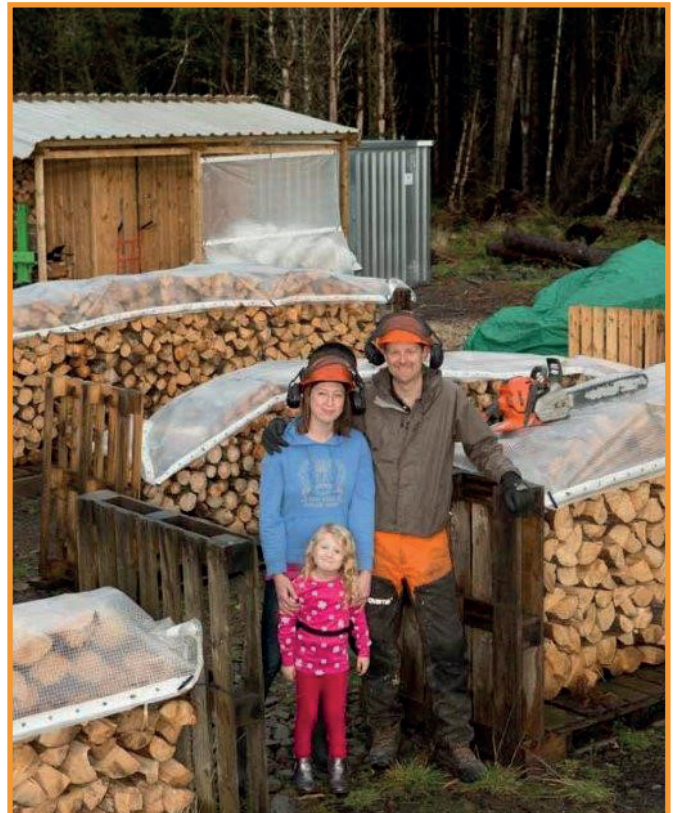


Photo credit WTML/John Macpherson

The forest will develop and change as the business grows, with a richer array of habitats and species

“We plan to replant gradually, practicing continuous cover silviculture, creating coupes as we go, and improving biodiversity by taking a lead from what grows well locally. We’ll introduce species such as willow, rowan, birch, alder, aspen, cherry, sycamore and Scots pine, many of which are currently being nurtured in our tree nursery”.

Additional Carbon Income For New Woodlands And Peatland Restoration

Where the income from the woodland creation or peatland restoration grant is insufficient to make the project viable, it may be possible to generate extra income from selling carbon units from the project. In order to be able to sell carbon units the project needs to be validated and verified to the relevant standard and appear on the UK Land Carbon Registry. These standards are contained within the Woodland Carbon Code³², (managed by Scottish Forestry for carbon sequestration in new woodlands), and the Peatland Code³³, (managed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature UK Peatland Programme, for emissions reduction due to peatland restoration).

What are the Woodland Carbon Code and the Peatland Code?

Excessive emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) are causing damaging climate change. Planting woodland to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, known as woodland carbon capture, is a cost-effective way of compensating for emissions while also providing many other social, environmental and financial benefits. Healthy peatlands store large amounts of carbon, but when degraded they emit CO₂. Restoring peatlands reduces greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere from peat carbon stores. Over time, the conditions for peat formation turn a source of emissions into a sink.

People who wish to invest in carbon projects need to feel confident that the new woodlands and peatland restoration projects will be well managed and will realise the carbon capture or emission reduction claimed. Independent validation and verification to the Woodland Carbon Code or the Peatland Code provides assurances and clarity for buyers with regards to the quantity and quality of emissions reduction purchased.

- A new native woodland might generate 400t CO₂ / carbon units per hectare over 100 years, and carbon units are currently selling, as at November 2020, for between £7 and £20 per unit. As at December 2020, there were almost 270 projects in Scotland registered with the Woodland Carbon Code.
- A peatland restoration project where 10% of the area was actively eroding and 90% was drained before restoration, might generate almost 300t CO₂ / emissions reduction units per hectare over 100 years. As at November 2020, there are 24 projects across the UK registered with the Peatland Code.

Interest from landowners and tenants (including crofters) and companies looking to purchase carbon units has increased rapidly over the last 12 months. For small projects, working together as a 'group' for validation and verification makes the third party checking process much more cost effective. There is a growing number of companies acting as 'project developers' for land managers, who will help with the validation / verification process and the sale of carbon credits as well as 'brokers' who are looking to

³² www.woodlandcarboncode.org.uk

³³ <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/funding-finance/peatland-code>



buy carbon units on behalf of their corporate clients. Scottish Forestry can help signpost companies offering these services.

Other potential income streams

Woodlands and peatlands offer a wide range of ecosystem services benefits, such as improved water quality, reduced flood risk and improved air quality. Some initiatives are starting to find ways to reward land managers for delivering these benefits. These approaches may provide opportunities in the future for crofters to work with local stakeholders and businesses to develop revenue streams for a wide range of benefits their land provides.



Lynn Cassells and Sandra Baer

Lynn Cassells and Sandra Baer of Lynbreck Croft, Grantown on Spey, are creating 15 hectares (net) of mixed native woodland generating over 3,500 tCO₂ in carbon credits which has been sold upfront to Allstar Ecopoint via Forest Carbon. This extra income made woodland creation on the croft viable, allowing trees to play a vital part in the livestock system on this high nature value enterprise, and helping to create a wildlife corridor between Abernethy and Revack Estate woodlands.

Keith MacDonald of Trumisgarry Croft, North Uist, has created 2.6 hectares (net) of native woodland with 20% Lodgepole pine, generating 800t CO₂ in carbon credits which have been sold to Confused.com. The extra income made the woodland creation viable and creates shelter for livestock on the croft. Keith wanted to add to the biodiversity in this highly exposed location where tree cover is very scarce, and better utilise their croft land.



The Scottish Government, Scottish Forestry and the IUCN UK Peatland Programme, will continue to promote the Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code to provide opportunities for private sector funding to make more woodland creation and peatland restoration projects viable – for all landowners including crofters.

Wildlife

The Scottish Government will continue to support wildlife management, including the Sea Eagle Management Scheme, Goose Management schemes, and Deer Management, delivered by NatureScot, and recognises the importance of striking a balance where wildlife and crofting can flourish.

The Scottish Government recognises;

- that Scotland's wildlife is an essential part of the natural heritage we value and protect.
- the success of the re-introduction of sea eagles to Scotland and that, in some locations, predation of lambs by sea eagles can have an impact on croft businesses.
- the impact that geese can have on croft businesses, such as the significant agricultural damage on productive farmland associated with high densities of geese.
- that wild deer can cause damage to agricultural, woodland and natural heritage interests through grazing and trampling, and that owners and occupiers have rights to prevent such damage.
- that through a shared approach we can adopt ways of working with a range of organisations to deliver wildlife management and work in partnership.

Shared Approach to Wildlife Management

Wildlife management is integral to conservation management, farming, forestry and tourism in Scotland. There is a legal framework and policies to help inform how we manage wildlife, including the mechanisms for both protecting and controlling species, such as licensing.

Wildlife management can be contentious. The Scottish Government has recently introduced the '[Shared Approach' to Wildlife Management](https://www.nature.scot/wildlife-management-shared-approach-concordat)' led by NatureScot that sets out how different interest groups can work together to help ensure healthy and valued populations of wildlife across Scotland³⁴.

The approach articulates the common ground in wildlife management and provides an anchor for making decisions and carrying out actions. It has been signed up to by a broad range of land management organisations and is open to any others that wish to join. The approach is made up of seven ways of working which focus on working in partnership³⁵.

³⁴ Launched in September 2020 developed by NatureScot working with other. Concordat is available here: <https://www.nature.scot/wildlife-management-shared-approach-concordat>

³⁵ Respecting each other's views, building knowledge, sharing information, developing a common understanding, clearly communicating decisions, ensuring best practice in wildlife welfare and achieving benefits for nature and people working the land.



Sea Eagles

The re-introduction of sea eagles in Scotland has been very successful. They form part of our native wildlife, and there is now a healthy breeding population in the west and north of Scotland. In 2020, there were more than 130 breeding pairs. However, it is acknowledged that, in some locations, predation of sea eagles has had an impact on sheep flocks and that this impact can be significant. NatureScot is keen to work with crofters and farmers to minimise this impact.

While there are no easy solutions, the partnership work that is being done with crofters and farmers as part of the National White-tailed Eagle Action Plan, along with the support of NatureScot's Sea Eagle Management Scheme³⁶, is providing a good framework within which progress is being made.

Interventions

The National Sea Eagle Stakeholder Panel has been responsible for developing, and signing-up to, an Action Plan aimed at better understanding sea eagle predation, supporting trials of techniques to reduce impact on sheep farming, and delivering a management scheme to support crofters and farmers. NatureScot is working with partners to review the work done under the Action Plan and to revise the Plan going forward beyond 2020. In addition to the work focused on sea eagle management, there is a wider body of work ongoing to review all agri-environment support mechanisms.

³⁶ <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-wildlife/sea-eagle-management-scheme>

NatureScot has been working closely with a number of monitor farms to test management techniques. In some locations there are techniques that have been successful in significantly reducing impact of predation³⁷. NatureScot has begun to promote support for some of the successful techniques to all scheme entrants through a revised approach to the Sea Eagle Management Scheme from 2020. In locations where the techniques have not worked, NatureScot is working with crofters and farmers to test and refine other management actions.

Sea Eagle Management Scheme

The Sea Eagle Management Scheme, administered by NatureScot, offers support for adapting livestock management and prevention measures that can reduce the impact of sea eagles on hill sheep.

Once a crofter has registered an interest in the scheme, NatureScot will arrange a face-to-face discussion with an experienced contractor who will provide tailored advice on management. The scheme is flexible enough to offer a number of options and to be able to support innovative ideas for management. NatureScot is also working with customers to develop whole farm/croft management reviews, which includes Integrated Land Management Planning, where the aim is to support any changes that can be made to increase their resilience to the impact of sea eagles.

³⁷ These include the use of scaring devices such as gas guns, diversionary feeding, human scaring through additional presence on the hill, creation of lambing parks away from areas of highest predation activity, and creation of new lambing facilities, such as poly-tunnels and sheds.





The Scottish Government, in partnership with NatureScot, will continue to support a Sea Eagle Management Scheme and help mitigate the impact of sea eagles on crofts and farms.



Through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, grant support is available for sheds for lambing, and for CCTV cameras used for monitoring livestock during lambing and calving.

Geese

Scotland is internationally important for the conservation of wintering geese, hosting around 60% of the global population of Greenland Barnacle Geese and 25% of the global population of Greenland white-fronted geese. Although this is a conservation success story, this success brings problems in regard to the impact geese have on agriculture land.

NatureScot spends approximately £1.3 million each year on goose management across Scotland, and is working with stakeholders to balance conservation of protected geese with reducing and preventing the significant financial impact of agricultural damage. In crofting areas, NatureScot delivers goose management schemes for migratory geese on Islay, Tiree, and Uist. NatureScot has also worked closely with crofters to run adaptive management pilots to manage greylag geese in crofting areas on Lewis and Harris, Uist, and Tiree and Coll.

NatureScot has made significant efforts to address migratory goose issues on Uist and Tiree, with the introduction of a new barnacle goose management scheme in 2019, and it continues to support efforts to manage geese in a number of different ways.

Detailed information on each goose management scheme, such as Islay, Kintyre, South Walls, and Uist, Coll and Tiree, can be found on the NatureScot website³⁸.



The Scottish Government, in partnership with NatureScot, will continue to support goose management schemes and help mitigate the impact of geese on crofts and farms.

Greylag geese can be shot during the open season and NatureScot has simplified the licensing process by adding them to the General Licence. Anyone intending to use a General Licence on certain Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation, can only do so with approval from NatureScot Licensing team – all relevant sites are listed on the NatureScot website.

³⁸ <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-wildlife/managing-geese>



NatureScot has been working on pilot-schemes with the Local Goose Management Groups (LGMGs) in crofting areas on, Tiree and Coll, Uist and Lewis and Harris to manage the population of breeding greylag geese. NatureScot also provided additional support to the pilot-schemes to help them make the transition to self-help, where the local community manages the greylag goose population themselves and develops a self-financing model to sustain this work.

The Scottish Government encourages crofters and farmers in other areas to take advantage of the advice and measures, in particular the General License provisions that are available to control the impact of greylag geese, and safeguard their crops. The sale of sustainable harvested goose meat has been supported through NatureScot's Natural Larder, an initiative to promote sustainably harvested and hunted wild food, sourced locally and in season³⁹.

Deer

Wild deer are an integral part of Scotland's nature and biodiversity. Red deer are iconic, especially in the uplands where they are one of the species people most associate with Scotland. However, wild deer can have a negative impact on woodlands, forests and crops. Robust deer management systems play an essential part in reducing damage caused by deer, such as overgrazing, trampling vulnerable habitats, preventing young trees from growing, and damaging crops.



Photo credit Colin MacPhail

Voluntary Deer Management Groups (DMGs) exist across most of Scotland's red deer range. As at December 2020, there are currently 48 DMGs. The membership of these groups comprise representatives from landholdings within the group's area. The diversity of ownership and management objectives within this membership is increasingly varied, and as a result positive, proactive engagement from all landholdings within the group area is important to the effective, sustainable management of deer populations.

NatureScot issues authorisations under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996, to prevent deer damaging the natural heritage and to allow occupiers suffering damage to improved agricultural land or enclosed woodland to control deer in the closed season.

Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach (WDNA) is the Scottish Government's strategy for wild deer. It was developed collaboratively in 2008 and is being delivered by a range of stakeholders. WDNA sets out a 20 year

³⁹ <http://scotlandsnaturallarder.co.uk/wildfowl/>



vision and 17 objectives based around the environment, people and the economy. The Code of Practice for Deer Management (2012), sets out the public interest associated with the management of wild deer in more detail.

Deer Review

In 2017 the Scottish Government established an independent Deer Working Group to review the existing statutory and non-statutory arrangements for the management of wild deer in Scotland, taking into account the varying circumstances of each of the four wild deer species across Scotland.

In January 2020, the Scottish Government published the Group's report⁴⁰. The report sets out 99 recommendations to 'ensure effective deer management in Scotland'.

The recommendations are broad and cover topics such as:

- Tidying and consolidating the legislation
- Taking a more proactive approach to Invasive Non Native Species
- Setting clearer limits and thresholds for acceptable impact on public interests
- Promoting greater equity in assessing and addressing the range of public interests impacted by deer

The Scottish Government is working with stakeholders to consider all of the recommendations made by the independent Deer Working Group, and will publish a full response to those recommendations and set out plans for future deer management in Scotland.

In November 2019, SNH published 'Assessing Progress in Deer Management'⁴¹. The Scottish Government will consider this report alongside other evidence in forming the response to the Deer Working Group Report.



The Scottish Government, in partnership with NatureScot, will continue to support deer management schemes and help mitigate the impact of deer on crofts and farms.



Through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, grant support is available for deer fencing for the protection of crops and grassland, or for deer farming.

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/management-wild-deer-scotland/>

⁴¹ <https://www.nature.scot/assessing-progress-deer-management-snh-report-scottish-government-2019>



Housing

Crofting plays a vital role in maintaining the population in rural and remote rural areas, including the retention of young people and families. Enabling more people to live on or near their croft and work their land is key. The legislative framework for crofting underpins this by placing a duty on the crofter to be resident on, or within 32km of, their croft, and to meet other legal duties such as cultivating and maintaining their croft.

Crofting legislation entitles a crofter to build a croft house on the croft, subject to planning consent. In almost every case the croft house must be provided by the crofter themselves. Due to the nature of crofting and the predominance of self-build as a means to provide housing in rural and remote rural areas, it can be challenging for crofters to access conventional forms of housing finance.

The Scottish Government is keen to continue to encourage investment in crofts and croft houses as this contributes to the economy in crofting areas, helps to halt population decline, and contributes to the sustainability of rural communities.

Croft House Grant

The Scottish Government has a track record of investment to improve croft housing. From 2007 to the time of publishing, the Scottish Government has approved over £22.1m in croft house grants for croft housing, helping to build and improve over 1,030 homes for crofters and their families.

Assistance for croft housing has evolved over the years. Support was originally comprised of a grant and loan. However, following a review, the loan element was removed and an increase was made to the grant. The current Croft House Grant (CHG) scheme was introduced in April 2016, offering grants at two rates: £28,000 and £38,000. This represented an increase from the previous scheme of between 65% and 143%. All island areas, as well as some remote mainland areas, now fall under the higher rate.



The Scottish Government will continue to provide financial assistance to those crofters who wish to build or improve their croft house, and will prioritise those who are most in need.

The current scheme allows owner-occupier crofters to apply for support, giving them parity with tenant crofters, and extends the scheme to include builds on land adjacent to, or adjoining, the croft. Furthermore, eligibility has been extended for the improvement of houses where the historical link to the croft has been removed by decrofting. This change allows active crofters to apply for improvement grants which improves existing house stocks in crofting areas.

It is important to note that the purpose of the CHG is to provide support for the provision or improvement of main residences on or near to active crofts, and not to fund second homes. Therefore care needs to be taken to ensure that crofts are more than just convenient house sites. This is important as



there is already a problem within a number of rural communities where homes are being used as holiday lets or second homes. This practice is causing young people, who may wish to become crofters, to be priced out of the local market, forcing them to leave the area.



The Scottish Government will continue to review annually the Croft House Grant scheme to assess its impact and effectiveness and ensure that it continues to provide much-needed support to active crofters.



Hanno and Anna

“We came to crofting via a longstanding association with the west coast of Scotland and an appreciation for its landscapes, culture and people, coupled with a desire to be self-sufficient and live a balanced, and non-consumerist lifestyle.

In 2012 Hanno sailed his boat to Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula from its winter moorings in Argyll, to take up a position as the Chef at a small rural hotel. Across the road from the hotel was the Ardnamurchan Community Garden, staffed by volunteers and managed by Anna. Hanno soon became a volunteer and got together with Anna, and we have been working together ever since. In March 2015 we became owner-occupiers of our croft at Roag in NW Skye. The croft is approximately 5ha of land, running from the shoreline uphill until it meets the common grazing.

We keep dairy goats, cattle, 25 sheep, and a few pigs, and will soon be adding hens. Through the Crofting Agriculture Grant Support (CAGS) we have added fencing to help create our 0.6 ha market garden, and 0.1 ha orchard, planted with a mix of fruit trees and soft fruit bushes. We also planted 3 areas of woodland with mixed native species, one of which will be used as a range for organic laying hens, another is primarily to provide shelter to the polytunnels and the third is mainly for wildlife habitat purposes. In addition we have planted native hedging in and around the market garden to provide shelter.



We have three polytunnels, the largest of which received CAGS funding, which we use for propagation and vegetable crops. The tunnels allow us to significantly increase our vegetable output, offering tomatoes, chillies, peppers, cucumbers, French beans, peas, and herbs.

We started our Veg boxes in 2018, and also supply a few local cafes. And in the following year we used CAGS funding to build a shed. In the future we aim for the croft to support us entirely, and think that we will be able to live almost solely from croft income by 2021-22.

Since coming to Roag we have started a family, Rosie Rae was born in 2017 and Ella-Grace arrived in July 2020. In 2018, with the help of a £38,000 Croft House Grant (CHG), we started our house build – a 3 bedroom single storey, approximately 100 square metres. We did a mixed build, employing contractors to do the foundations and erect the kit frame. The build took exactly one year, and doing much of the work ourselves saved us thousands of pounds.

It has been great to see Rosie settling into her new much bigger home having had her first 21 months inside our homely, slightly cramped, caravan.

CHG and CAGS funding have been invaluable in helping us get our business and croft up and running. It is hard work on the croft with a young family but we are having a lot of fun, and we wouldn't have it any other way than living here and producing food to be eaten by the community in which we live”.

One of the main priority aims of the CHG is to enable people to stay in remote parts of Scotland who might not otherwise be able to do so without grant funding. The introduction of a formal selection mechanism was considered and introduced in light of comments received in response to a public consultation.

The production and implementation of business plans is strongly supported by stakeholders. It is important that applicants are able to demonstrate a link to activity on the croft and that there is a clear intention to deliver economic value. The five-year business plan allows the Scottish Government to identify and prioritise applicants.



The Scottish Government will continue to target support at those crofters and their families who would not otherwise be able to live in the remote and rural areas of Scotland, and work their croft without grant funding.



The Scottish Government will continue to monitor the use of assessment criteria, and refine parameters as necessary to ensure that the Croft House Grant scheme targets priority considerations.

Selection Criteria

The CHG is not means-tested but is scored across a number of criteria. The scoring mechanism is designed to ensure fairness to all applicants and to ensure parity across the crofting counties. Failure to score highly on one criterion does not immediately result in an application being unsuccessful.

The asset and income assessment criteria facilitate identification and prioritisation of new entrants to crofting and younger crofters who are not yet on the property ladder, as well as those whose financial situation means the house will unlikely be built without grant assistance. The remaining three criteria focus on whether the applicant is adequately housed, what activity the applicant has carried out to date, and what the applicant proposes for the future.

House Size

The floor size specification was introduced following consultation feedback about a proposed limit on the overall cost of a house. The proposed introduction of a limit on overall costs was a response to specific concerns raised that the previous scheme was weighted to fund very large houses to the disadvantage of crofters with a lower income level.

Notwithstanding the above, current CHG floor area limits are significantly above National Standards and the average floor areas contained in National Statistics for house sizes. This gives recognition to the fact that rural houses tend to be larger on average than urban houses. The maximum floor areas offer sufficient flexibility for crofting households. On the case of medical grounds, special requirements will be taken into account, including the provision of external access ramps and accessible bathroom fittings.



Energy Efficiency

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of improving the energy efficiency of houses, and ensures that strict measures are included in all new houses and major improvement work that is supported under this scheme.



Through the Croft House Grant, the Scottish Government will continue to invest in works that improve the energy efficiency of current and future croft homes.



Christina Simmons



“I was born and raised on a croft in West Burrafirth, Shetland. My father’s time on the croft was mainly spent operating the machinery and dealing with the paperwork. It was my mother who was my main mentor when it came to working with stock. From as far back as I can remember I have always had a keen interest in livestock and all the associated tasks of crofting, which led me to study Agriculture at the Scottish Agricultural College. In March 2016, when I was 23 years old, I found myself in the enviable position of becoming a crofter, a position that many young people aspire to, having been assigned the family croft in Twatt, Shetland.

The croft itself consists of 60 acres of good quality silage ground, and an additional 70 acre park of mixed heathery hill with an area of permanent, previously improved grassland. My husband David also grew up on a croft and is a crofter in Sandness, Shetland. We are very likeminded, most of our conversations are crofting related!

In 2016 we successfully applied for a Croft House Grant, receiving a grant of £38,000, which greatly fast tracked our next milestone in life which was to build our dream home, something we had been saving for since our marriage. We were then finally in a position to progress our plans and build our 3 bedroom house on the croft in Twatt. As a time served joiner, David worked many a long day over the course of 18 months, with me at his side, to be able to call our new house ‘Home’.

Originally operating as a sheep only business for the croft in Twatt, we hope to change to a beef enterprise, phasing out the sheep and increasing our cattle numbers steadily over 5 years. We mainly have Aberdeen Angus/Beef

Shorthorn cows with Aberdeen Angus calves. Our plan is to increase the cattle numbers to 20 breeding cows and to finish all the young stock.

Through the summer months, the yearling beasts graze the 70 acre park which leaves the 60 acres of better ground to set-by for silage, and for the cows and calves to graze. We generally cut 30 acres for silage which yields approximately 300 to 350 bales depending on the year. Through the winter when the ground is too wet for cattle, we winter 150 of David’s replacement ewe lambs on the 70 acre park. We take some of David’s ewes from Sandness to flush and run to the tup on the better grazing. They stay up until Christmas when they head back to their winter pasture. Allowing us to utilise the croft year round.

Another scheme that I have relied on heavily is the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS). When I was first assigned the croft nearly all the fencing (boundary and internal) was in need of replacement. We have responsibility for roughly 5000m of fencing for the Twatt croft alone, so we were very glad of assistance towards the cost of replacement! We have also used CAGS to reseed a number of fields and in doing so we have improved the pasture and increased yields, which has enabled us to keep the stock level we currently run.

Without a doubt we would not be where we are today without assistance from the Scottish Government. We are very grateful for the support we have received so far, and hope that it continues for others to utilise. I have achieved my goals mainly due to the local crofting community encouraging me, giving advice and lending a hand when needed. Crofting is a unique way of life for the right person with the right community minded attitude, and I feel it should not be lost nor forgotten”.

Rural Housing

Rural affordable housing is an overarching issue and not exclusively a crofting issue. The strength and resilience of remote communities depends on a broader housing strategy, which is the responsibility of local authorities.

The Scottish Government recognises that good quality, affordable housing is essential to help attract and retain people in Scotland's remote and rural communities, and also that building affordable housing in rural areas presents different challenges to those in urban areas.

The Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) supports the delivery of affordable housing across all of Scotland. Some elements of the AHSP have been developed further to meet the specific needs of rural and remote communities. For example, the Rural and Islands Housing Funds (RIHF) aim to increase the supply of long-term affordable housing of all tenures in rural and island areas. These funds are open to a wide range of potential applicants, including those not able to access traditional funding streams such as community bodies, rural landowners, landlords and private developers. This part of the AHSP retains flexibility to enable rural communities to develop their own housing solutions, and this enables them to take a more active role in meeting the housing needs of their community. Housing developments are currently being supported through the RIHF in a range of crofting areas, including Staffin, Rum and Applecross.

The Scottish Government's "Housing to 2040" vision and route map will set out the long-term objectives for the housing sector for the next Parliament and beyond. The Scottish Government has also made available the Self Build Loan Fund (SBLF) (currently time-limited until August 2021) to assist self-builders where they have been unable to obtain mainstream self-build mortgage finance. The fund is available Scotland-wide and supports additional housing provision across both rural and urban areas. Eligible individuals can borrow up to £175,000. The SBLF is designed to fund the construction phase of a new home. Once this is completed, the borrower will repay the loan either through a mainstream mortgage and/or by using the equity from the sale of an existing home.

The Scottish Government has appointed the Communities Housing Trust to administer the SBLF on its behalf. The loan from the SBLF will make up any shortfall in an applicant's contribution to the build cost of the property. Crofters are able to use the Croft House Grant to fund all or part of an applicant's contribution.



The Scottish Government will continue to support the delivery of affordable housing in order to meet the needs of rural and remote communities.



Planning

When undertaking any new housing project, obtaining planning permission is key. Planning permission is the consent of the local authority on a proposed building project and is in place to deter inappropriate development. The Crofting Commission is a key agency in Local Development Plans, and with its crofting expertise, acts as a statutory consultee for individual planning applications on croft land.

In liaising with planning authorities, the Commission hopes to guide council planners when considering developments on land under crofting tenure, and when drafting their development plans. Amongst other things, this helps to encourage the use of common grazing land for affordable housing or community facilities instead of using good quality in-bye land for this purpose.

In most cases, the Commission's position is that any proposed development will use the least possible amount of productive croft land.

In November 2018, the Crofting Stakeholder Forum met up with planners from the councils of Highland, Orkney, Shetland and Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, to discuss a wide range of planning issues and to encourage crofting stakeholders to engage with councils in the development of their plans.

Occasionally, croft land is identified as the desired site for a substantial housing development, and in these cases the proposers must apply for the Commission's consent to decroft the land, as well as the necessary planning permission. In assessing these decrofting applications, the Commission must weigh the proposed benefits to the local crofting community and the wider public interest, against the negative consequences of the loss of land from crofting. In the last four years, the Commission has consented to decrofting of land for several housing schemes, in Islay, Shetland and Strathspey, in each case allowing the construction of new affordable homes.



The Commission will continue to work in partnership with council planners, and engage with councils, together with stakeholder organisations, in the production or review of Local Development Plans.



When assessing the merits of decrofting applications which are for the purpose of the provision and development of affordable housing, the Commission will balance the impact on the interests of the crofting community and those of the wider public interest, alongside the impact of the loss of the land to crofting.



A crofting tenant has an absolute right to purchase their croft house and garden ground, and an ability to purchase all or any part of their croft land. Although the purchase price of the holding is fifteen times the rent, the landlord can ask for the rent to be reviewed before purchase and can insist on a ten-year statutory clawback. A tenant crofter and owner-occupier crofter are able to transfer their tenancy and/or ownership rights in exchange for payment on the open market, with the assignation of croft tenancies being subject to Commission approval.

The Scottish Government has recently engaged with crofting stakeholders in regard to legislative change. There was a consensus among the members of the Crofting Bill Group that there is a need to establish the legal wherewithal to introduce a standard security provision for croft tenancies. The Scottish Government is in favour of this proposal and looks forward to exploring this matter in more detail once a Crofting Bill Group has been re-established.

 **Please see the chapter on 'Legislation' for more information.**

Crofting Community Right to Buy











The aim of the Crofting Community Right to Buy (CCRtB) is to empower crofting communities and remove barriers to sustainable rural development. The CCRtB creates a regime in which a crofting community body (CCB) representing an identified crofting community, may acquire eligible croft land. It enables the CCB to buy all the land which the crofters use, including the mineral rights on and under the land, the salmon fishing exercisable from that land and, in certain tightly controlled circumstances, some additional land which adjoins the croft land.

The croft land which can be purchased includes the inbye land plus land such as common grazings over which crofting rights are exercised. It does however exclude owner-occupied crofts. CCRtB allows the purchase of all or part of the croft land and, in particular, the CCB may exclude mineral rights and salmon fishings from the purchase and, with the agreement of the owner, can lease back the sporting rights to the former owner following purchase.

Crofting communities interested in acquiring their croft land etc., should view the use of the CCRtB as a fall-back position in circumstances where efforts to acquire the land by agreement fail. The Scottish Land Fund is available to help assist all community bodies with the purchase of assets.



Summary of Actions

-  The Scottish Government will continue to provide financial assistance to those crofters who wish to build or improve their croft house, and will prioritise those who are most in need.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to review annually the Croft House Grant scheme to assess its impact and effectiveness and ensure that it continues to provide much-needed support to active crofters.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to target support at those crofters and their families who would not otherwise be able to live in the remote and rural areas of Scotland, and work their croft without grant funding.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to monitor the use of assessment criteria, and refine parameters as necessary to ensure that the Croft House Grant scheme targets priority considerations.
-  Through the Croft House Grant, the Scottish Government will continue to invest in works that improve the energy efficiency of current and future croft homes.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to support the delivery of affordable housing in order to meet the needs of rural and remote communities.
-  The Scottish Government's future ambitions for self-build will be set out in the Housing 2040 route map, which will be published in 2021.
-  The Commission will continue to work in partnership with council planners, and engage with councils, together with stakeholder organisations, in the production or review of Local Development Plans.
-  When assessing the merits of decrofting applications which are for the purpose of the provision and development of affordable housing, the Commission will balance the impact on the interests of the crofting community and those of the wider public interest, alongside the impact of the loss of the land to crofting.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to support crofting communities with any enquiries or applications under the Crofting Community Right to Buy.



Signposting

Running a crofting business can be challenging, and it is essential that crofters are able to access the right information when they need it. There is a great deal of information provided by various organisations on such topics as crofting law and regulation, grazings committees, finance and grants, livestock and animal welfare, environmental issues, training opportunities, markets and much more.

Crofters navigate this information as and when they need it, drawing on professional advice from representative organisations, agents and solicitors, and with newer crofters benefiting from the advice of their more experienced neighbours. However, there is no easy guide to the kinds of information that are available online from the different national organisations. The Scottish Government, the Crofting Commission and other partners intend to remedy this.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of providing up-to-date and relevant information to crofters on crofting, and currently there exists a significant number of sources of advice and support available, such as:

- Scottish Government – local RPID offices
- Crofting Commission
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- NatureScot
- Colleges and Universities
- Scottish Forestry
- Farm Advisory Service
- Membership Organisations
- Business Gateway
- Crofting Community
- Land Matching Service



Indeed, the Scottish Government's 2018 report on the 'Economic Condition of Crofting' indicated that just over a third of the crofters surveyed had looked for advice or support on crofting activities in the previous 12 months. However, it also showed that a significant number of crofters were unaware of the information sources available to them. For example, of those who responded, only 73% of crofters were aware of the Commission, 59% were aware of the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, and only 48% were aware of the Croft House Grant. Similar results were seen with regard to other sources of support, including membership organisations.

This indicates that crofters are not fully aware of the wide range of support and advice that is available to them.

In order to address this issue, the Scottish Government, working with key stakeholders, aims to help develop a centralised online signposting service designed to direct users to the numerous grants and support available. It will also direct users to the organisations that support crofting and crofting activity,



and that constitute a vital source of information and guidance on crofting.

The Commission is in contact with all crofters at least once per year and is well placed to develop both proactive communication and a responsive service to crofters' enquiries.

It is intended that the signposting service will improve the visibility of available information and the efficiency with which the individual is able to access it. This will support informed decision-making, improved information-sharing, and greater empowerment of the individual within the crofting community.

Providing accessible information to crofters about their options and opportunities is also very important in the case of crofters who are either not able to fulfil their duties or are looking to pass on their croft.

The Scottish Government will expect all stakeholders to work collaboratively to take the following objectives forward, and to identify suitable mechanisms for ensuring that crofters are more aware of the assistance available.



In 2021, the Commission, in partnership with the Scottish Government, will create an online central signposting portal for crofters, which will also be made available in Gaelic.



The Commission, in partnership with the Scottish Government and stakeholder organisations, will make available crofting factsheets providing information and guidance on a range of subjects.



The Commission and stakeholders will encourage crofting communities to continue to support one another through the sharing of knowledge, information and good practice.



Scotland's Farm Advisory Service

There is no doubt that the agricultural sector faces some of the most significant change it has seen in decades, with likely changes to trading relationships and markets, increasing environmental concerns and public demands, and revision in subsidy support. These factors emphasise the increasing importance of an agile and adaptable advisory service.

Crofting Advice

Historically, the Scottish Government's advisory services provision has had a strong connection with crofting. This continues through the two distinct features of the current Farm Advisory Service (FAS) programme: the One-to-Many service and the One-to-One service. These services offer a wide range of advice specifically tailored to support crofters, aiming to:

- Equip the next generation of crofters with relevant skills and knowledge.
- Increase the sustainability of crofts and contribute to environmental and climate change goals.
- Encourage better use of crofting land
- Promote practices benefiting animal health and welfare and productivity.
- Make crofting businesses more resilient in the face of unpredictable change.

One-to-Many

Under the one-to-many component, the FAS delivers events such as workshops and seminars, discussion groups, site visits and demonstrations, newsletters, technical notes, email and text alerts, case studies, fact sheets and social media.

Generally, the FAS aims to improve the environment, biodiversity, resilience, and profitability of croft businesses. This is achieved through helping crofters work co-operatively to improve common grazings, supporting high nature value (HNV) friendly crofting, providing clear and accessible information and guidance on crofting law, and encouraging croft land and infrastructure development.

Towards these overall aims, the FAS has delivered, for example, common grazings group development events in consultation with the Crofting Commission, events, podcasts and videos on HNV crofting, web-based videos and decision trees to help crofters navigate regulations, and a 'Derelict to Productive' croft improvement project that includes advice on conservation, woodland, succession, business planning and targeted livestock improvement events.

Building on previous activities, the service includes a series of online meetings, illustrated guides, videos and online tools that aim to encourage more use of croft land, and uptake of efficiency measures, building confidence in the ability to change direction in the face of new trading and subsidy challenges.



Specific objectives include:

- Increased understanding and use of Crofting Commission processes.
- Practical solutions to increase efficiency and mitigate climate change.
- Improved resilience of crofts.

For example, in 2021 the FAS will deliver:

- Future Crofting: New technology and science to help mitigate climate change, delivered through online panel meetings, podcasts and guides. Various topics will raise awareness of new technology and methods of production, provide insight on veterinary and husbandry methods, woodland creation benefits, provide opportunities to quiz experts and researchers and encourage progress to net zero.
- Season with Cattle: A series of events and publication supporting the management of cattle in small-scale crofting situations as small-scale businesses do not benefit from economies of scale and keeping cattle on crofting is a major challenge to the industry.
- Adding Value: This project builds upon previous FAS delivery on polyproduce, Skye Mutton, adding value to pigs and adding value to croft produce to provide insight and knowledge of new trends and opportunities for crofters following COVID-19 and Brexit. Online meetings will explain the opportunities for crofters to add value to their produce, meet market demand, and explore new routes to market.
- Alternative crops and stock for new income streams and increased business resilience: Meetings and guides to help crofters and small holders to prepare for the future, build resilience and help them overcome the challenge of Brexit. Using successful businesses as examples, explain methods of adding value to croft produce, product development, and reducing waste through nose-to-tail / root-to-shoot.
- Crofternomics: Small-scale DIY or money saving ideas, for example installing watering points to allow rotational grazing. The outputs will be short videos and guides, with low cost, low tech solutions to improve productivity and lower carbon footprint.
- Crofting Regulation: Explanations to encourage the use of crofts by letting, transferring and understanding purposeful use. These will help crofters navigate regulation, which in turn will help the Crofting Commission's processing time and encourage better use of croft land.
- In conjunction with the Crofting Commission, FAS will offer workshops on techniques to help grazing committee members with the smooth running and development of common grazings.



One-to-One

Regardless of land size or business stage, the FAS also offers funding for one-to-one advice up to a total of £3,700 that can help croft owners to grow their business, increase profitability, improve sustainability and avoid the common pitfalls to success.

This includes:

- Mentoring for new entrants, with up to four-days of one-to-one consultancy time with a personal mentor.
- An Integrated Land Management Plan, providing a confidential assessment of individual crofts and help to develop future plans.
- Specialist advice, providing a deeper look at specific issues of concern.
- Carbon audits to measure farm carbon footprint and to suggest areas for improvement.

Adapting to the Future

The impact of COVID-19 on the FAS, notably face-to-face events, continues to be profound. However, the Service is embracing opportunities presented by a higher level of digital engagement and introducing innovative knowledge transfer methods. This is ensuring that the FAS continues to support crofters' ability with the key aims of increasing biodiversity, protecting natural resources and the crofting landscape, meeting crofting regulatory requirements and enhancing crofting businesses.



The Scottish Government's Farm Advisory Service will continue to evolve, respond to changing needs, and ensure delivery of high quality knowledge transfer and advisory services to crofters.



Broadband Infrastructure

The Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme has delivered transformational results across Scotland. Going further than expected, DSSB has provided fibre broadband access to over 950,000 premises – over 100,000 more than originally expected.

Building on the success of DSSB, the Scottish Government has set out a clear commitment that every premises across Scotland will be able to access superfast broadband. This will be delivered by the Reaching 100% (R100) programme. Delivery of the 100% commitment will be met through a combination of the R100 contracts, the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS) and commercial coverage.

The £600 million R100 procurement was split into three geographical lots – North (£384 million), Central (£83 million), South (£133 million) – and focused investment in rural Scotland where it was needed most. The North Lot covers most of Scotland's crofting areas, and includes the Highlands and the majority of Scotland's inhabited islands.

The North Lot contract was signed in December 2020, and will enable delivery of superfast broadband to people, businesses and communities in some of the most remote parts of Scotland.

Given the critical importance of delivering a network that has genuine geographic reach across all of Scotland, deployment of gigabit capable infrastructure in key remote rural locations in the north of Scotland was mandated through the contract. This includes areas such as Achiltibuie and Assynt in the Highlands, South Mull in Argyll & Bute, Uig and Timsgarry in Na h-Eileanan Siar; Sanday and Stronsay in Orkney, and Yell and Unst in Shetland.

The Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS), another key strand of the R100 programme, launched in September 2020 providing grants to broadband customers in both residential and business premises, offering support to customers to ensure they can access superfast broadband of at least 30 Megabits per second (Mbps). Anyone whose home or business broadband speed is less than 30 Mbps, and where there are no plans to bring superfast broadband to their address by the end of 2021, will be eligible for a voucher. As at November 2020, all premises in the North contract area are currently eligible until such time as the contract is signed and build plans are finalised.

Vouchers can be used to cover the cost of installation associated with securing a service across a range of superfast-capable technologies, including fibre, fixed wireless, mobile broadband, and satellite. For further information on the Reaching 100% (R100) programme or to check whether you are eligible for the SBVS, please visit www.scotlandsuperfast.com.



The Scottish Government's £25 million Scottish 4G Infill Programme is continuing to deliver 4G infrastructure and services to up to 40 selected mobile "notspots", mainly in the Highlands and Islands. Although focused on bringing 4G services to rural communities now, the masts are being future proofed to enable delivery of 5G services in the future. The first mast to go live was in February 2020, with a pipeline of activations set to continue over the remainder of 2020 through to 2023. Updates to the programme are regularly published on the Scottish Government's website. As at November 2020, nine of the mast sites are located in the crofting counties:

West Highlands: Polbain, Glasnakille, Skerray, Blairmore, Tarskavaig, Applecross.
South West Highlands: Craighouse.
Western Isles: Baymore, Ranish.

Digital connectivity has played a pivotal role throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting the work of the health and emergency services, enabling many people to work effectively from home, and allowing families and friends to connect remotely. Digital connectivity – both broadband and mobile – will continue to play a critical role in supporting a resilient and green recovery from the impact of the pandemic.



The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that every home and business in Scotland can access superfast broadband.



Crofting Legislation

Work on crofting legislative reform was suspended in October 2019 as a consequence of Brexit preparations. This was regrettable but unavoidable.

Examples of legislative changes proposed by the Crofting Bill Group included:

- amending the requirement for an annual croft census to a census which would be undertaken at least once every five years.
- the purchase of a croft from a landlord being established as a trigger point for first registration on the Crofting Register maintained by Registers of Scotland.
- provisions to apply reasonable and proportionate sanctions where an applicant knowingly provides false information in connection with a registration application (as with the Land Register).
- creating a power to allow the Crofting Commission to confer owner-occupier status to crofters in specified circumstances and if applied for.
- a more comprehensive power for the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland to rectify inaccuracies in the Crofting Register, similar to the Land Register.
- ensuring that any decrofting applications are for a reasonable purpose

Issues identified as requiring further consideration included:

- bringing greater clarity to the legal definition of an owner-occupier crofter.
- enabling a standard security to be issued against a croft tenancy.
- expressly allowing for the creation of joint tenancies of crofts.
- providing the Crofting Commission with additional powers to determine who has a right to occupy a croft.
- a reconsideration of the constitution of grazings committees.

In the meantime, where possible, administrative actions to clearly explain issues such as stand-alone grazing rights (deemed crofts) and the liabilities of common grazing's committees were to be sought.



The Scottish Government remains committed to modernising crofting law to make it more transparent, understandable and workable.



The Scottish Government will continue to engage with stakeholders in regard to legislative reform.



Law Society of Scotland – Crofting Law Reform Project

The Law Society of Scotland is the professional body for over 12,000 Scottish solicitors. The Society has a statutory duty to represent the interests of its members and to work in the public interest.

Conscious of the discussions in the Scottish Parliament and elsewhere in relation to crofting law, the Society undertook a project on crofting law reform in 2019-2020, led by a working group of the Rural Affairs Sub-committee of the Society. The purpose of the project was to propose legislative change in relation to aspects of crofting law, building on work done by the Scottish Government and views expressed by crofting stakeholders.

The project focused on four aspects of the law relating to crofting:

- Aspects of succession
- Owner-occupier crofter status
- Statutory conditions of tenure
- Definition of 'crofting community'

A public consultation ran between February and May 2020 and the working group engaged in discussions with a range of stakeholder organisations both on a one-to-one basis and via the Crofting Stakeholder Forum.

The Society considers that widespread reform of the law of crofting is required both to simplify and restate the existing law, and to make changes. The Society suggests that this merits action by the Scottish Government and that there would be merit in undertaking such a task as part of a single package of work so as to avoid piecemeal development in the law and reduce the possibility of unintended consequences arising. The Society's work resulted in a number of specific proposals in relation to each of the four aspects covered. A detailed discussion of the issues arising and the full proposals can be found in the full report and summary paper which may be accessed on the Law Society of Scotland website⁴².



⁴² <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/research-and-policy/influencing-the-law-and-policy/our-proactive-policy-work/>



Financial Investments

Scotland's rural economy is on the front line in terms of Brexit and COVID-19 impact, with remote and rural areas likely to be the hardest hit. In response, the Scottish Government has guaranteed Scottish crofters, farmers, foresters, rural businesses and rural communities a period of stability until 2024.

The Scottish Government has made clear its commitment to continuing the current approach to farm and crofting payments during this period. Through the period of 'Stability and Simplicity'⁴³ 2021-2024, we will work with crofters, farmers and land managers to ensure that future support is informed by their expertise. At the same time, work is underway to develop future policy for farming and food production which will inform how support is designed and delivered in the future. This transition period allows new approaches to be piloted, and gives us time to properly consider and design new support mechanisms.

We need to act urgently and take action to address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. So as well as continuing to support businesses to produce food sustainably in the future, we also need to support crofters and farmers to do more to address climate change and enhance the environment. We have set up a range of sectoral groups – for suckler beef, arable, dairy, and hill, upland and crofting – to identify what needs to change and how best to do that.

⁴³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/stability-simplicity-proposals-rural-funding-transition-period/>

Our approach to future land use and to agriculture is set out in the Scottish Government Climate Change Plan update⁴⁴ which also contains specific policy actions. Outcomes will be underpinned by the right science, and will consider practical measures which will help the respective sectors improve efficiency, productivity, sustainability and profitability, whilst reducing emissions at croft, common grazing, farm and estate level.

The first such group, the Suckler Beef Climate Group, has already reported and provides a model for others to follow. A programme board has been established to take forward the suckler beef work quickly. The chairs of all the sector led groups meet regularly in order to ensure coherence across the sector led work. We recognise that the crofting community have a key role to play in contributing to the work of all the groups and to play their part in delivering reduced emissions and improved environment and landscapes.

Longer-term, we are committed to developing rural support to enable, encourage and where appropriate, require, the shift to low carbon, sustainable farming and crofting through emissions reduction, sustainable food production and improving biodiversity. Some of that will involve encouraging and enabling diversification, so more crofters and farmers plant and harvest suitable biomass crops. It will also involve encouraging land use change, with some moving away

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>



from food production to high nature value farming, including woodland creation and regeneration, and peatland restoration.

The financial model we envisage will continue direct income support for our crofters and farmers, but in the future will make that support conditional upon meeting the climate change challenge.

Stability and Simplicity

The Scottish Government set out its proposals for future funding for farming and crofting in its June 2018 'Stability and Simplicity' consultation. These proposals set out the approach for future rural policy until 2024, based upon four principles: stability, simplicity, sustainability and security.

The consultation explained that there will be a period of stability, with little change to the current system, until the end of 2020, followed by a transitional period between 2021-2024, where simplifications and improvements will be made, and potential new schemes for longer-term policy will be piloted. This transitional period aligned to the recommendations made by the Agricultural Champions in their report entitled 'A Future Strategy For Scottish Agriculture' published in May 2018. During this transitional period support will continue for crofters in recognition of their role as food producers.

The Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Act 2020 enables the delivery of the proposals set out in the 'Stability and Simplicity' consultation. That legislation also allows us to enable pilots and, where appropriate, make wider changes to other parts of the current Scottish Rural Development Programme.

Convergence and Bew

Under previous CAP reform, the EU set out to redistribute direct payments more equally, based on average Euros per hectare. The intention was that member states receiving less than 90% of the EU average rate would close the gap by one third by 2019. The UK only qualified for such an uplift because of Scotland's extremely low average rate per hectare. Scotland's per hectare rate was only 45% of the EU average, with England, Wales and Northern Ireland all above the 90% threshold set by the European Commission.

Without Scotland, the UK would not have qualified for, or received, an extra £190 million from Europe. Yet despite this, the UK Government distributed it across the UK as part of the overall Pillar 1 CAP funding package, with Scotland only receiving £30 million. The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing and his predecessor, Richard Lochhead, received cross-party support from the Scottish Parliament on this matter, and continued to press the Defra Secretaries of State, and HM Treasury at every opportunity into agreeing to holding a review into this funding.

Following pressure from the Scottish Government, the Prime Minister publicly stated in October 2019 that the United Kingdom Government would return the £160 million historic convergence funding to Scotland, so that it could be given to the recipients it was always intended for: Scottish crofters and farmers.



The first tranche of convergence funding, over £88 million, was paid out in early 2020. The money went directly to 17,900 crofters and farmers and was split across an upland uplift, top-up to the Basic Payment Scheme and Voluntary Coupled Support. This funding was focused on maintaining support to those crofting and farming in marginal uplands, hill farms and island areas.

The second tranche of £70 million has also now been paid out, ahead of March 2021, as promised. Scotland has been allocated funding in both 2020/21 and 2021/22 as a result of the Bew Review⁴⁵. These funds are ring-fenced by Her Majesty's Treasury for crofters, farmers and land managers. Work is ongoing to explore options for how the funding will be deployed.

However, the Bew funding has not been allocated beyond 2022 leaving a shortfall to be addressed. In total, the UK Government has reduced the funding envelope for farming and for the wider rural development programme (Pillars 1 and 2 of CAP) by £170 million by 2025.

Agricultural Transformation Programme

The Agricultural Transformation Programme (ATP) (announced in PfG 2019-2020) was proposed as one of the mechanisms to aid the sector transition to one which is focused on climate change, sustainability, simplicity, profitability, innovation and productivity. In the shorter term, the programme seeks to support a move from the current CAP support regime to a support system post-2024 that will be designed to deliver on Scotland's longer-term needs. This will assist farming and crofting to play its part in contributing towards the delivery of Scotland's climate change ambitions and environmental sustainability.

The Climate Change Plan update, published in December 2020, provides a route map for transforming agriculture, starting in 2020 with piloting and introducing new mechanisms of support for farmers, crofters and land managers to meet Scotland's climate ambitions, as well as delivering wider biodiversity and environmental benefits and continuing food production.

We will take a co-development approach, working with stakeholders and farmer-led groups to secure increased uptake of low emission farming measures through new schemes and approaches, the development of environmental conditionality and enhanced advisory support. Assistance will also be provided for farmers and crofters who wish to retire or leave the industry with dignity by providing an opportunity to consider alternative land uses or alternative agricultural uses.

⁴⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/829757/intra-allocation-uk-review.pdf



Under the ATP, a new pilot scheme, the Sustainable Agriculture Capital Grant Scheme (SACGS), has been delivered providing around £17 million in grants to over 3,500 successful applicants for investment in specific items of agricultural equipment that should support delivery of the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The first year of SACGS will be evaluated to determine whether to continue it in its current form or adapt and augment it to optimise its impact on reducing greenhouse emissions.

The programme will also be further developed to provide additional support for greenhouse gas emission reduction within the crofting and farming sectors, informed by the sector led groups.

We also need to look across the range of land usage in rural and island communities. For example, we also need to plant more trees and restore more peatland. We have the most ambitious targets in the UK and are starting to meet those. Our plan is to plant around 12,000 hectares, or around 25 million trees a year, rising to 18,000 hectares by 2025. We are devoting over the next ten years around £250 million to peatland restoration.

We are also expanding our renewable energy generating capacity with wind, hydro, tidal, biomass, solar, pump storage and anaerobic digestion. Crofters and farmers are also very much involved as business people in some or all of these other land uses, and encouraged to participate through various schemes. We have the land asset in Scotland to enable all this to happen and to be the engine room of climate change action for the UK.

Actions



The Scottish Government will work with crofters through the sector led groups to develop new schemes and approaches to support low carbon sustainable crofting.



New pilots will be co-developed alongside these groups and crofting stakeholders to enable crofting communities to play a greater part in addressing climate change and enhancing biodiversity and the environment.

Less Favoured Area Support Scheme

Agricultural holdings cover 75% of Scotland's total land area, approximately 5.8m hectares. Of this agricultural area, 85% is classed as 'less favoured'. A significant proportion of croft land falls within the less favoured area and therefore receives additional support.

Financial support to those crofting in our most fragile and remote areas is a priority for the Scottish Government. The Less Favoured Area Support Scheme ("LFASS") is an income support scheme which currently supports over 3,000 crofter recipients each year. The principal objective of LFASS is to compensate land managers in less favoured areas for the particular disadvantages that they face, and thereby sustain crofting and farming in these



areas. This provides the associated economic, social and environmental benefits that are dependent on continued active farming and land management in these areas.

As at 2020, Scotland is the only part of the UK to offer income support to those farming in constrained areas, and it is important that future support is designed according to Scotland's needs.

Funding is used to:

- Allow crofters and farmers to continue to operate as viable businesses
- Avoid the risk of land abandonment
- Help maintain the countryside by ensuring appropriately managed land use
- Maintain and promote a sustainable farming system

The Hill, Upland and Crofting Group has been asked to consider how LFASS should be developed for the future. The group is expected to report during spring 2021.

Basic Payment Scheme And Greening

The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) supports active farming and crofting. To qualify for this support, claimants must actively farm their land. Support under the BPS is available to those who are allocated payment entitlements. Applicants can apply for entitlements based on the land they farm and the activity they undertake.

The scheme also delivers environmental and other benefits by requiring claimants to meet certain practices and farm in a sustainable way. Together, these are called 'Agricultural Practices Beneficial for the Climate and the Environment' and are more commonly known as 'Greening'. Greening is paid on top of the BPS.

From 2021, Greening has been simplified with the requirement to undertake Crop Diversification removed. The Permanent Grassland requirement will be retained to provide protection to Scotland's semi-natural and environmentally sensitive grassland, while Ecological Focus Areas will be retained in the short-term subject to a wider review. Scottish Government will work with farmers and crofters to consider if there are practical simple improvements that can enhance the delivery of environmental and climate change objectives between now and 2025.

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme

This scheme currently promotes land management practices which protect and enhance Scotland's natural heritage, improves its water quality, manages flood risk, and mitigates and adapts to climate change. It also helps to improve public access and preserve historic sites.

The Scottish Government has committed £214 million through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) since 2015. We extended contracts that ended in 2020 for a further year, keeping the area of land managed under AECS in 2021 at around 1 million hectares.



The AECS reopened for a targeted range of options in January 2021, to support delivery of a wide range of environmental measures. The support focuses on protected areas, organics, management supporting farmland waders, corn buntings and corncrakes, slurry stores and improving public access. This will help farmers and crofters to undertake important environmental management, and support the work on climate change. It will also promote public wellbeing through providing infrastructure for recreational activities such as walking, cycling and sightseeing.

The 2021 round is likely to ensure a further £41 million between 2022 and 2026 is invested in these priority areas.

Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme

This scheme currently provides direct support to help maintain sheep flocks in croft and farm businesses that are reliant on poorer quality rough grazing.

As at 2020, businesses which rely on poor quality rough grazing are defined as those which have:

- 80 per cent or more of their agricultural land in Scotland's Basic Payment Region three, and
- no more than 200 hectares of good quality agricultural land in Scotland's Basic Payment Region one.

The scheme aims to maintain the environmental and social benefits that arise from extensive sheep grazing on the Scottish hills and uplands.

Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme

This scheme currently provides direct support to specialist beef producers. The scheme aims to maintain sufficient critical mass in the Scottish beef industry, and the environmental and social benefits that arise from extensive beef suckler herds on the Scottish mainland and islands.

Actions



During the 2021-24 transitional period, support will continue for crofters in recognition of their role as food producers, we will engage with crofters around potential changes to existing support mechanisms so funding begins to work harder to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and produce food more sustainably.



Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS)

Crofting exists in areas where agricultural production and investment costs are traditionally high. The Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS) provides grants to tenant and owner-occupier crofters, including sub-tenants, towards the costs of a range of agricultural operations, in order to encourage and develop production. Funding supports crofters in carrying out individual or collective investments that reduce production costs, improve quality, preserve and improve the natural environment, and hygiene conditions and animal welfare standards. The Scottish Government insists that all agricultural businesses must meet strict hygiene and animal welfare standards.

The CAGS is a very popular scheme that attracts, on average, over 760 applications each year, with approximately 85% of applications being approved. **From 2017 to the end of 2020, the CAGS £2 million annual budget has been fully utilised, and has received additional funding each year to meet demand. In financial year 2021/22, the Scottish Government announced over a 75% increase in the CAGS budget to £3.6 million, to accommodate the current annual spend and to fund the future planned improvements to the scheme.**

From 2015 to 2020, over £15 million in CAGS funding has been invested, helping more than 3,000 crofters and their families with their croft businesses. Common grazing committees and Sheep Stock Clubs also benefit from the scheme, having received over £1.5 million in funding.

Grant Rates

The maximum grant available to an individual applicant is limited to £25,000 in a rolling two-year period. For group applicants, the limit is £125,000.

For those individuals who meet the young crofter eligibility criteria, the grant rate is 80% of the approved costs in less favoured areas. The grant rate is set at 60% for all other crofters in the same areas.

For groups of crofters, the grant rate is set at 90% of the approved costs for young crofters in less favoured areas, and 80% for all other crofters.



The Scottish Government will continue to support and invest in crofting businesses and young crofters.



Eligible Works

There is an extensive list of items eligible for grant aid under the CAGS, including:

- The erection or improvement of agricultural buildings and shelters for the temporary housing and sheltering of out-wintered livestock, including polytunnels and polycarbonate tunnels.
- Works associated with agricultural buildings, such as yards, hard-standings, dungsteads and silos.
- Investment in land management, including the initial grassland improvement works for the restoration of degraded land and the control of bracken.
- Slurry stores.
- Arterial and field drainage, including hill drainage and ditching.
- The provision or improvement of facilities for the organised feeding of out-wintered livestock, including permanently fixed troughs and feed barriers, and associated hardstanding.
- The provision or improvement of equipment for the handling and treatment of livestock.
- The planting of shelter belts and the provision of fences, hedges, walls, gates or stock grids.
- Provision or improvement of amenities, including water supplies, mains electricity connections, electricity generators or gas supplies.
- Provision of electrical equipment.
- Provision or improvement of access tracks to land improvement areas, roads, bridges, culverts or boat slips.



Donald MacSween

In October 2018, Donald MacSween (Sweeny) became the first 'Young Crofter of the Year', winning the accolade at the Scottish Crofting Federation event in Morayshire. Sweeny's family has been crofting in Ness, Isle of Lewis, for over 100 years, and you can catch Sweeny on his croft in BBC ALBA's "An Lot/The Croft".

"All my earliest memories are on the croft, whether that be cutting hay with my grandfather or helping my mother to feed the sheep. For my 21st birthday my parents gave me the 7 acre croft adjacent to the family croft, and from there I took over the running of the business.

For the next 5-6 years, during which I worked at the BBC and the local Council, I kept around 20 sheep on the croft and sold store lambs. As part of a European funded project with the Council, where I helped provide opportunities for young people to stay in the Western Isles, I realised that, whilst encouraging others to follow a career path that they may enjoy, I was not following my own advice. Realising this, I subsequently went part-time at the Council and ordered 300 hens!

In 2017, I finally took the plunge and went full-time with my croft business. I now have around 15 hectares on which I have about 500 hens, 170 sheep, 3 Highland cattle and followers, and 4 breeding sows. In the last 2-3 years I have used the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS) for a cattle crush and Combi clamp, two items that would not have been financially viable to my business without the support. Anyone who has tried



to apply eye ointment to a Highland cow, as I have, will appreciate the benefit of a cattle crush.

I have also used the CAGS for fencing, which currently stretches to approximately 800m with a further 500m to go. In March 2020, as the country was going into lockdown, I finished erecting my livestock Polycrub, the first of its kind, for which I received funding through the CAGS. This has been a huge help to my business especially during lambing where I would have normally commandeered my parents barn. The polycarbonate tunnel has also allowed me to shear sheep in all weathers, even on those wet days, making my business more productive.

I have a further polycarbonate tunnel where I store my tractor, quad and hen feed, amongst other things. This tunnel allows me to bulk buy feed, saving me both time and money, and protects my heavier machinery from the elements.

I would encourage all crofters, especially those just setting-up, to speak with their local RPID office, or visit the RPID website, to find out the wide range of projects eligible under the CAGS.

Tha mise air a bhith na mo chroitear làn-ùine tharais air na trì bliadhna mu dheireadh agus tha mi air feum a dhèanamh à sgeama CAGS tharais air an ùine sin. Tha CAGS air leigeil dhomh adhartas mhòr a dhèanamh air a' chroit, rud nach biodh comasach as aonais an taic-airgid, le uidheamachd agus toglaichean dhan ceannach a tha nan cuideachadh mòr dhan ghnìomhachas agam".

Garrabost and New Garrabost Common Grazings, Stornoway

Since 2013 the Garrabost and New Garrabost Common Grazings has benefited from vital support from the Scottish Government through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS). Support has been received for a number of projects such as fencing, ditching and drainage, the creation of a hardstanding, an access road, and most recently in 2019, a fank.

The existing fank facility was labour intensive, which had a negative impact upon participation in group activity, and resulted in excessive handling of sheep, which had a negative impact upon animal welfare, consequently replacing the existing facility was raised by the grazings committee.

For a variety of reasons, including other priority projects, such as fencing (to control wandering livestock) and ditching, it was a further 3-4 years before the committee took the decision to proceed, and following consultation and agreement by shareholders, progressed the project.

Although the CAGS application process was straightforward, some minor difficulty was experienced in gaining the necessary three quotes and getting the equipment for the project. However, with these issues overcome, the committee received 80% of the project costs through CAGS funding, and the fank was built in 2019.

The Garrabost crofting township is a very active crofting area, with a mix of crofting activity. Although there are some 83 shareholders in the common grazing, the crofts in the township are actively used



by a smaller number of crofters. There are 13 livestock crofters in the township, each benefiting directly from the construction of the fank.

Although not quite finished, the fank is already in use by the shareholders. It is expected that it will be used regularly throughout the year, up to six times per year by the group, with additional use by individual shareholders, as and when required.

Whilst the township has welcomed a number of young new entrants into crofting, there remains a number of older crofters. The fank makes the handling of heavy livestock safer and easier for all, including when administering medicines, and requires a smaller number of crofter participation. Handling the animals is now also a quicker process, which is always welcome, given that crofters can be out in all weathers!

The investment in the common grazing through CAGS has arguably resulted in Garrabost having one of the most utilised commons in Lewis and Harris.

The committee is already giving thought and consideration to potential future projects that could be undertaken on the common grazing.

Future CAGS

In May 2020, following an internal review of the current scheme, the Scottish Government established a CAGS Focus Group to look at possible improvements that could be made to the scheme over the 2021-24 period, and beyond. The Group, chaired by Crofting Policy colleagues, was made up of representatives from the Crofting Commission, including Commissioners, the Scottish Crofting Federation, the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, the Woodland Crofts Partnership, and the Scottish Agricultural College. The Group explored the following three areas:

1 Access and eligibility criteria.

The Group were asked to consider whether we should widen the scope of the CAGS to include those crofters who are not engaged in agricultural operations, and whether the list of eligible works should be extended.

2 Preparatory work required by the crofter before submitting an application.

Under the current scheme, applicants need to provide at least two competitive quotes when submitting an application. Three are required when the total cost exceeds £10,000. The Group were asked to consider whether standard costings should be introduced as this would do away with the need for quotes.











3 Payment process and timings.

In line with most government schemes, the CAGS payment is processed once the project is complete. The Group were asked to consider advanced payments, providing a percentage of the grant to the applicant in advance of the work being carried out, with the remainder paid to the applicant on completion.

Programme for Change

Some of the changes that the Scottish Government plan to make to the CAGS will require legislative change, and will therefore require time. That said, there is a commitment to widen the scope of the CAGS to allow those crofters who are not engaged in agricultural activities to apply. Furthermore, the Scottish Government is committed to exploring the introduction of standard costings, and will continue to explore the possibility of administering a pilot scheme to allow advanced payments.



-  All crofters will be allowed to apply for CAGS support. As in the current scheme, sufficient business justification will always need to be demonstrated before any approval of grant.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing standard costings.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing advanced payments by way of a pilot scheme.
-  There will be updates to the CAGS Guidance for eligible items to reflect advances in technical equipment.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to explore financial assistance towards the purchasing and applying of agricultural lime, based on soil sampling and analysis.
-  The Scottish Government will support applications for laptops to help crofters manage their business.
-  The Scottish Government will remove the need to engage a consultant to help establish a new common grazings committee. Grant support will be given for costs such as advertising and booking halls to help establish a new committee.
-  The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing a beekeeping package.
-  The Scottish Government will widen the scope of horticultural works to include tree nurseries, growing flowers, and other ornamental plants.
-  The current grant conditions will be modified to help ensure value for money.



Cattle Improvement Scheme

The Scottish Government completed its £3 million renovation of the stud farm facilities at Knocknagael in Inverness in April 2013. The modernised stud facility provides quality accommodation for the bulls, optimising their welfare and enabling crofters to continue to benefit from access to high quality, healthy bulls and the supply of quality calves to the beef industry throughout Scotland and beyond. The bulls purchased for the scheme are chosen using Estimated Breeding Values (EBV). All bulls purchased are in the top 50% of EBV for their breeds, producing a quality progeny for selling or from which to breed replacement heifers from. Despite the level of investment, as at November 2020, the hire costs of the bulls have only been increased in line with inflation. The scheme subsidises bull hire by groups of crofters, by up to 60% of the full cost.

The scheme supplies bulls to areas where no practical alternative means of service are readily available. Scheme staff are available to offer advice and guidance on all matters



relating to the husbandry and welfare of the bulls, their mates and progeny. Some townships have returned to the scheme, citing that it is their best option to obtain a good quality sire for their cattle. Approximately 3,500 calves are sired annually by Scottish Government bulls, from which home-bred replacement heifers are retained and the surplus sold on.

The table below provides statistics on the number of bulls hired, the number of groups of crofters involved, and the number of beneficiaries.

Year	Bulls Hired	No. of Participating townships	No. of Crofters Benefiting
2015 - 16	105	96	499
2016 - 17	111	113	498
2017 - 18	111	136	497
2018 - 19	112	117	492
2019 - 20	117	137	494
2020 - 21	115	120	485



Eoligarry Township

Eoligarry township on the Isle of Barra has hired bulls from the stud for over 40 years. They hire an Aberdeen Angus and a Continental breed, usually a Limousin, but recently a Simmental was used with a view to producing milkier home-bred replacement heifers.

There are 11 crofters in the group, with approximately 60 cows between them. Calves are sold as stores at Autumn sales in Lochboisdale and Dalmally and are greatly sought after for their quality and excellent health status.

Angus John Morrison has the largest proportion of the cattle and predominantly uses a Limousin bull. "The bull hire scheme gives easy access to a good quality, high health status bull at a reasonable cost. Being able to have the bull delivered only when the cows are ready, and then collected when the season was over, adds to the benefit. Also, the assurance that should a problem arise with the bull, a replacement would be arranged as soon as possible and any veterinary care required would be covered".

All of Angus John's calves are sold at Dalmally with the exception of the heifers retained for breeding. They always attain the top price, going to a mainland producer who in turn sells them on to the same finisher as they show excellent growth rates and finish with good carcass quality.

The Aberdeen Angus cross calves from the township similarly sell to repeat buyers and are finished as a premium product.

Highlands And Islands Veterinary Services Scheme

The aim of the Highlands and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme (HIVSS) is to ensure the provision of suitable veterinary services. This is to prevent, identify and eradicate animal disease for all animals kept for agricultural purposes where no other provisions are available on the market.

It is necessary to support large animal veterinary practices in some remote areas of the Highlands and Islands, because without them, crofters and their animals would be completely without practical veterinary cover. It is important to ensure these practices continue to provide cover for remote areas as they play a vital role in prevention and identification of animal disease.

In practical terms, this means that crofters and other eligible persons can arrange a visit by a participating veterinary surgeon for a modest maximum charge. This charge is supplemented by a grant to the veterinary practice which will cover the costs of a visit when a vet is called out to take preventative and eradication measures for animal disease.

As at November 2020, there are currently 24 veterinary practices participating in the Scheme.



The Scottish Government will continue to support crofters and their animals through the provision of a subsidised veterinary service.



Conclusion And Delivery

In drafting this Plan, the Scottish Government wanted to not only provide a long-term perspective for crofting, but to also address the issues that crofters raise on a day-to-day basis. At the same time, the Scottish Government needed to consider priority areas such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity. Accordingly, the Plan sets out what needs to be achieved in order to ensure that crofting contributes towards delivery of Scottish Government priorities, as well as preserving crofting, and its culture, for future generations.

Put simply, we need to do all that we can to ensure full occupancy and purposeful use of crofts; establish and maintain active common grazing committees; and for the land to be used to produce food more sustainably whilst cutting emissions and enhancing the environment and habitats. This will take a collective effort. Accordingly, we have tried to identify throughout the Plan the roles that different organisations, groups and individuals will need to play in reaching mutually beneficial goals. Achieving the aims and objectives of the Plan will ensure that crofting communities thrive, and that crofting remains as pertinent to our future as it does to our past.

Crofting is multifaceted, and the views and opinions within crofting circles differ greatly as do the levels of interest and knowledge in each of its parts. It is with this in mind that the Scottish Government has attempted to pitch the appropriate level of detail in each of the chapters and their corresponding actions. The future of crofting will need to be built on consensus – a consensus on how to overcome the key obstacles that we face. However, crofting has strong traditions and origins and this will present a strong foundation on which to build.

In order for this Plan to facilitate progressive change, the Scottish Government and stakeholder organisations will need to work in partnership and take ownership of the actions. Through groups such as the Crofting Stakeholder Forum the Scottish Government and others will provide progress reports and discuss implementation of the actions. That said, things are constantly evolving. Along the way it is inevitable that new and better ways of doing things will surface and that there will be a need for new or additional actions to come to the fore. As a consequence the Plan will need to be kept under review with detailed actions being added or refined as necessary.



Summary of Actions

		Page
1	THE CROFTING COMMISSION'S ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CROFTING	10
1.1	The Crofting Commission will expand its current capacity, going beyond the delivery of regulatory functions to further enhance its role in crofting development activity.	9
1.2	The Scottish Government, in partnership with the Commission, will create new Commission jobs. The first stage, in 2020/21, will see two additional development posts in the Western Isles, additional residency and land use officers in the Western Isles and Inverness, and an administrative assistant in the Western Isles.	10
1.3	The Commission will continue to support existing committees and the establishment of new grazings committees to increase active management of common grazings.	12
1.4	The Commission will encourage partnership working between common grazings committees and landlords to encourage diversification of the use of the grazings, including woodland creation and peatland restoration.	12
1.5	By June 2021, the Commission will have reviewed the practicalities and the benefits of common grazings registration, consider when and how the work can be resumed, and report to the Scottish Government with a plan to progress the registration exercise.	13
1.6	The Commission will explore new ways to ensure that entry to crofting is more accessible.	17
1.7	The Commission will encourage a culture of succession and turnover of crofts from people who no longer wish to work them, to those who do, creating opportunities for new entrants.	17
1.8	The Commission will continue to work with those crofters who return their annual notice.	17



		Page
1.9	<p>In 2021, the Commission will expand its Residency and Land Use work by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following up on those who do not return their annual notice. • Taking action on failure to cultivate and neglect of croft land as well as non-residency. • Implementing policies to require non-resident owners of vacant crofts to let them. • Piloting a Land Matching Service to facilitate the transfer of crofts through assignation or sublet. 	17
1.10	In 2021, the Commission, in consultation with other organisations, will produce information for crofters who are considering passing on their croft. This will include information about their options and the implications of these.	18
1.11	The Scottish Government will ensure that there are closer working relations between the Commission and RPID.	18
1.12	The Scottish Government and the Commission will engage with, and actively encourage applications from, women, young people and minority groups, and Gaelic speakers, for the role of Commissioner and Assessor.	19
2	CROFTING REGISTER	24
2.1	Registers of Scotland will continue to work collaboratively with the Scottish Government, the Crofting Commission and other crofting stakeholders to continually improve the Crofting Register registration process for all involved within the current legislation.	25



		Page
3	ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	26
3.1	HIE will work with the Crofting Commission and others to increase the synergy between crofting development and the wider rural community development and economic resilience.	29
3.2	HIE will work with relevant partners to encourage innovation and diversification which will create economic opportunities for crofters in rural and island communities.	29
3.3	HIE will work with relevant partners to enhance the attractiveness and resilience of rural and island communities, leading to population retention and growth within crofting communities.	29
3.4	HIE will continue to work with stakeholders with a view to mainstream future skills funding.	29
4	SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	30
4.1	The Scottish Government, through the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland, seeks to ensure that we have the right people with the right skills, and support inclusive growth.	30
4.2	The Scottish Government, through the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan, will support or create significant numbers of additional green jobs in rural and remote areas of Scotland, with associated skills development and training.	31
4.3	The Scottish Government will continue to improve Scotland's digital skills base, and provide opportunities for under-represented groups, such as women.	32
5	LOCAL FOOD NETWORKS AND AGRI-TOURISM	33
5.1	The Scottish Government will work with Scotland Food and Drink to connect crofters with the network of regional food groups.	35



		Page
5.2	The Scottish Government will establish a project group to review the crofting brand marque, and map networks of current crofters who produce food.	35
5.3	The Scottish Government will source support to project manage a crofting food network.	35
5.4	The Scottish Government will deliver training to equip crofters with the skills to market their goods and promote their business.	35
5.5	The Scottish Government will continue to support agri-tourism through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.	35
6	LAND, ENVIRONMENT AND BIODIVERSITY	38
6.1	Under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme the Scottish Government will ensure that environmental issues are considered for each investment carried out on land within an environmental designated area.	40
6.2	The Scottish Government will continue to support and encourage management practices that support biodiversity.	42
6.3	The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing a beekeeping package under the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme.	42
6.4	The Scottish Government will continue to support and encourage action to ensure our native pollinators thrive as part of the Pollinator Strategy for Scotland.	42
6.5	The Scottish Government will continue to provide funding to support the restoration of degraded peatland, and to explore the need to provide funding to support the maintenance of healthy peatland.	43



		Page
6.6	NatureScot, in partnership with the Commission, will identify those areas of degraded peatland in the crofting counties with a view to prioritising engagement with crofters and common grazing committees.	43
6.7	The Scottish Government will support or create significant numbers of additional green jobs in rural and remote areas of Scotland, with associated skills development and training.	45
6.8	The Scottish Government is encouraging private sector forestry companies to support new forestry jobs in rural and remote Scotland.	47
6.9	The Scottish Government will support woodland expansion that helps integrate woodland with traditional crofting activities.	48
6.10	The Scottish Government, through the forestry grant scheme, will provide grant support to crofters and common grazing committees to support the sustainable management of existing forests and woodlands.	48
6.11	The Scottish Government will introduce a forestry loan scheme to help crofters and grazings committees with the cash flow challenges associated with woodland creation.	48
6.12	The Scottish Government, through Scottish Forestry, supports the Croft Woodlands Project to provide local advisers to help crofters and common grazings committees assess what is possible and realistic on the land and develop woodland proposals.	49
6.13	The Scottish Government, through the forestry grant scheme, will provide grant support to crofters and common grazing committees to plant trees and create woodlands on croft and common grazing land.	52



		Page
7	ADDITIONAL CARBON INCOME FOR NEW WOODLANDS AND PEATLAND RESTORATION	56
7.1	The Scottish Government, Scottish Forestry and the IUCN UK Peatland Programme, will continue to promote the Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code to provide opportunities for private sector funding to make more woodland creation and peatland restoration projects viable – for all landowners including crofters.	58
8	WILDLIFE	59
8.1	The Scottish Government, in partnership with NatureScot, will continue to support a Sea Eagle Management Scheme and help mitigate the impact of sea eagles on crofts and farms.	61
8.2	Through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, grant support is available for sheds for lambing, and for CCTV cameras used for monitoring livestock during lambing and calving.	61
8.3	The Scottish Government, in partnership with NatureScot, will continue to support goose management schemes and help mitigate the impact of geese on crofts and farms.	61
8.4	The Scottish Government, in partnership with NatureScot, will continue to support deer management schemes and help mitigate the impact of deer on crofts and farms.	63
8.5	Through the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, grant support is available for deer fencing for the protection of crops and grassland, or for deer farming.	63
9	HOUSING	64
9.1	The Scottish Government will continue to provide financial assistance to those crofters who wish to build or improve their croft house, and will prioritise those who are most in need.	64



		Page
9.2	The Scottish Government will continue to review annually the Croft House Grant scheme to assess its impact and effectiveness and ensure that it continues to provide much-needed support to active crofters.	65
9.3	The Scottish Government will continue to target support at those crofters and their families who would not otherwise be able to live in the remote and rural areas of Scotland, and work their croft without grant funding.	67
9.4	The Scottish Government will continue to monitor the use of assessment criteria, and refine parameters as necessary to ensure that the Croft House Grant scheme targets priority considerations.	67
9.5	Through the Croft House Grant, the Scottish Government will continue to invest in works that improve the energy efficiency of current and future croft homes.	68
9.6	The Scottish Government will continue to support the delivery of affordable housing in order to meet the needs of rural and remote communities.	70
9.7	The Scottish Government's future ambitions for self-build will be set out in the Housing 2040 route map, which will be published in 2021.	73
9.8	The Commission will continue to work in partnership with council planners, and engage with councils, together with stakeholder organisations, in the production or review of Local Development Plans.	71
9.9	When assessing the merits of decrofting applications which are for the purpose of the provision and development of affordable housing, the Commission will balance the impact on the interests of the crofting community and those of the wider public interest, alongside the impact of the loss of the land to crofting.	71
9.10	The Scottish Government will continue to support crofting communities with any enquiries or applications under the Crofting Community Right to Buy.	73



		Page
10	SIGNPOSTING	74
10.1	In 2021, the Commission, in partnership with the Scottish Government, will create an online central signposting portal for crofters, which will also be made available in Gaelic.	75
10.2	The Commission, in partnership with the Scottish Government and stakeholder organisations, will make available crofting factsheets and flowcharts providing information and guidance on a range of subjects.	75
10.3	The Commission and stakeholders will encourage crofting communities to continue to support one another through the sharing of knowledge, information and good practice.	75
11	SCOTLAND'S FARM ADVISORY SERVICE (FAS)	76
11.1	The Scottish Government's Farm Advisory Service will continue to evolve, respond to changing needs, and ensure delivery of high quality knowledge transfer and advisory services to crofters.	78
12	BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE	79
12.1	The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that every home and business in Scotland can access superfast broadband.	80
13	CROFTING LEGISLATION	81
13.1	The Scottish Government remains committed to modernising crofting law to make it more transparent, understandable and workable.	81
13.2	The Scottish Government will continue to engage with stakeholders in regard to legislative reform.	81



		Page
14	FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS	83
14.1	The Scottish Government will work with crofters through the sector led groups to develop new schemes and approaches to support low carbon sustainable crofting.	86
14.2	New pilots will be co-developed alongside these groups and crofting stakeholders to enable crofting communities to play a greater part in addressing climate change and enhancing biodiversity and the environment. During the 2021-24 transitional period, support will continue for crofters in recognition of their role as food producers, we will engage with crofters around potential changes to existing support mechanisms so funding begins to work harder to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and produce food more sustainably.	86
14.3	The Scottish Government will continue to support and invest in crofting businesses and young crofters.	88
	CAGS	89
14.4	All crofters will be allowed to apply for CAGS support. As in the current scheme, sufficient business justification will always need to be demonstrated before any approval of grant.	94
14.5	The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing standard costings.	94
14.6	The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing advanced payments by way of a pilot scheme.	94
14.7	There will be updates to the CAGS Guidance for eligible items to reflect advances in technical equipment.	94



		Page
14.8	The Scottish Government will continue to explore financial assistance towards the purchasing and applying of agricultural lime, based on soil sampling and analysis.	94
14.9	The Scottish Government will support applications for laptops to help crofters manage their business.	94
14.10	The Scottish Government will remove the need to engage a consultant to help establish a new common grazings committee. Grant support will be given for costs such as advertising and booking halls to help establish a new committee.	94
14.11	The Scottish Government will continue to explore the possibility of introducing a beekeeping package.	94
14.12	The Scottish Government will widen the scope of horticultural works to include tree nurseries, growing flowers, and other ornamental plants.	94
14.13	The current grant conditions will be modified to help ensure value for money.	94
	HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS VETERINARY SERVICES SCHEME	97
14.14	The Scottish Government will continue to support crofters and their animals through the provision of a subsidised veterinary service.	97





© Crown copyright 2021



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3 or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at www.gov.scot

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80004-204-9 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, March 2021

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS776966 (03/21)