



## **Crofting Policy Resolution**

### **2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election**

#### **ABSTRACT**

*This document defines the policies necessary to safeguard and promote the crofting system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*First (1.) we state the two basic objectives that we believe Government policy should be aspiring to deliver.*

*Then (2.) we outline the social, cultural and agroecological advantages of crofting.*

*Next (3.) we state what is needed in terms of crofting regulation and governance in order to develop and optimise these already existing advantages.*

*Then (4.) we describe the changes of emphasis and direction that we believe are required to bring Scottish agricultural policies in line with emerging issues of biodiversity, resource use and sustainability, as these have been defined by the global community and its institutions.*

*Finally (5.) we make plain our resolve that the time has come for the Government to recognise the advantages that crofting brings to our country and extend the crofting system to make it the model for rural development throughout Scotland.*

**1. SCF call on the next Scottish Government to publish an Action Plan for Crofting within a year of taking office.** The plan should set out the policies that will be put in place to meet two objectives:

1. A majority of Scotland's existing 17,000 crofts being used by active crofters to produce food and public goods – 70% by 2020 and 85% by 2030.
2. Creating 10,000 new crofts by 2020, with a longer term objective of increasing the area of land under crofting tenure so that one-quarter of land in Scotland is in crofting tenure by 2030.

#### **2. WHAT CROFTING OFFERS AND CAN DELIVER**

Scotland's 17,000 crofts provide a home for over 30,000 people in the Highlands and Islands. One tenth of Scotland, three quarters of a million hectares, is in crofting tenure. Crofting already brings the following benefits:

- **Family homes in remote rural areas** – evidence shows that areas in crofting have retained a higher population density than other rural areas. Crofting is preserving culture, history and continuity whilst ensuring that rural Scotland has future resilience.
- **Local, artisanal, and high quality food** – the bedrock of our growing food tourism economy.
- **Tourism accommodation** – as well as through food tourism, crofting supports the tourism industry either directly through accommodation on crofts or by providing the work force for the hospitality industry.

- **Stewardship of high nature value land** – crofting areas support internationally important populations of many birds – corncrake; chough; redshank; dunlin; golden plover; and crofters manage sensitive habitats such as machair and peatlands, which are also important for carbon capture and storage as well as increasing bio-diversity. Crofting is now recognised as a key part of the natural beauty and bio-diversity that is so important for the Highland economy.
- **Provision of skilled workers** – crofters are part of the wider economy of the Highlands and Islands, being skilled stockmen, fencers, dykers, foresters, engineers, joiners, builders, electricians, plumbers etc. Crofters and their families also provide a workforce for key public services in remote places such as postmen, bus drivers, teachers, nurses, doctors, dentists, ferrymen.
- **Rebalancing the rural housing market in favour of young local families** – the creation of **new crofts**, replicating existing crofts, will stabilise the rural housing market allowing new croft entrants to populate empty rural areas and to contribute to sustainable food production and land management.
- **Afforestation** – the creation of **woodland crofts** can play an important part in meeting our afforestation targets. Working at a small scale can change forest economics and help us to establish quality native woodlands for future generations. When timbers in Scotland's Parliament are replaced, they could be replaced with Scottish-grown hardwoods.

This is not to say that crofting does not have its problems. Many crofts are neglected or unused, and many crofters are absent from their communities, but do not want to give up their crofts. The root cause is **lack of viability**<sup>1</sup>; crofting is a regulated system of land tenure, unique in Scotland and possibly anywhere in the world. **Regulated land provides enhanced public goods and appropriate payment should be made for these.**

We believe that by working in partnership with Government we can overcome these problems, and the crofting "model" of small-scale local food production can extend beyond the Highlands and Islands, bringing the benefits of crofting to the whole country.

***Given visionary Government we could see crofting tenure extending over one-quarter of Scotland by 2030, and we call on the next Scottish Government to adopt this target.***

### **3. HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP CROFTERS TO HELP THE WHOLE COUNTRY**

The use of croft land is regulated by the Crofting Acts. The last two Parliaments have devoted a considerable amount of time to reform crofting law, and we are grateful to politicians of all parties who have worked hard with us towards getting the regulatory framework right. We recognise that further reform of crofting law in the lifetime of the next Parliament is unlikely. However, we are committed to working with Government to implement the crofting laws. **We owe it to the taxpayer to capitalise on the investment wisely.**

#### **We want to see:**

- **Support for Community Mapping** – We believe that there are multiple benefits to be had from assisting crofters to work together to map their land and avoid time-consuming and expensive disputes over boundaries. With courage and imagination, the mapping exercise can be the starting point for community asset planning and mapping, rather than disagreement and divisiveness. This needs to be supported by Government and its agencies, and given time to work before the "trigger points" in the 2010 Act are brought into force.
- **The Crofters Commission being a democratic body** – to establish its credibility in the Crofting Counties, an elected Commission must have a majority of elected members – and it is essential that its Convener is among those elected. It must be properly resourced to implement regulation on absenteeism and neglect. Government must monitor the Commission's progress.

- **Harmonisation of regulation** – Crofting procedures and planning procedures need to be symbiotic. The Crofters Commission must work with the planners to ensure that houses are not built on cultivable land, a precious resource that took generations to establish and which if built on is lost. Government must monitor progress.
- **The rapid extension of the crofting system** – the current financial climate creates an opportunity like never before for public bodies to create new crofts for the many people who aspire to live and work in rural Scotland, and to take care of their own part of it. We must seize this opportunity. **The next Scottish Government should embrace a target of creating 10,000 new crofts by 2020.** Half of these crofts should be woodland crofts<sup>ii</sup>. The vast majority of these crofts will provide a new, cost-effective means of caring for large areas of public land, but we see no reason why the private sector cannot play its part in realising this vision, and the next Government should consider land reform legislation to help enable this.
- **Simplified crofting legislation** – Crofting law is complex and hard to understand, not least because it exists in a series of amended Acts. **It should be consolidated in the lifetime of the next Parliament.**

#### **4. CROFTING AND EUROPEAN SUPPORT TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGROECOLOGY**

The Scottish Government spends £700m per year through the CAP. Much of this money is not being well used. It is subsidising the income of large farmers and agribusinesses, many of whom do little, or in some cases nothing at all, to provide the wider environmental and public benefits associated with crofting.

**The public benefits provided by crofting are many, significant and clearly in line with the now widely acknowledged need for governments to adjust their support for farming towards crofting-type approaches.** This need for change has been most forcefully argued by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology which is a massive study on the future of agriculture initiated by the World Bank in partnership with the United Nations, the World Health Organisation and representatives of governments, civil society, private sector and scientific institutions from around the world.

They call **agroecology “the foundation of sustainable agriculture”** and their report describes it as “the science and practice of applying ecological concepts and principles to the study, design and management of sustainable agroecosystems”. The IAAKST report concludes:

An agroecological approach recognises the multifunctional dimensions of agriculture and facilitates progress towards a broad range of equitable and sustainable development goals. A wide variety of technologies, practices and innovations including local and traditional knowledge draw on the science of agroecology, including integrated natural resource management, organic agriculture. . . .conservation agriculture and agroforestry

In the Scottish context, **crofting is the model best placed to deliver these emerging 21<sup>st</sup> agriculture policy goals.** We believe that, if it was better resourced and supported by Government, **there is also the potential for economic growth within crofting that is both considerable and sustainable.**

#### **We want to see:**

- **The Scottish Government support small producers in the next round of CAP reform, as the European Commission has already proposed** – there should be a **degressive** system of single farm payments above €10,000 per holding, and a **ceiling** of €100,000. This fits well with Europe’s aim of support being better targeted at the smaller farm. If headage

payments are introduced, there must be higher payments for smaller herds and flocks, as under the current SBCS.

- **Meaningful support for agroecology** – Crofting is unique in that it is regulated land tenure. These are regulations that limit crofters' liberty but that protect land and provide enhanced public goods. They apply to no other farmer or landowner in Scotland. In return crofters should expect appropriate, accessible, croft-only mechanisms of support. **We call on the next government to replace and enhance the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme with a Crofters' Agroecological Grant Scheme (CAGS) that supports ecologically responsible land management. Such a scheme will make it economically viable to croft, and, in consequence, allow crofters to continue doing what they are good at – providing the public goods sought by government.**
- **The recognition, endorsement and promotion of native crops** – there is an asymmetry in current seed legislation that gives advantage to a few seed corporations instead of the many farmers and crofters who conserve agricultural biodiversity on their farms and crofts. We call on the Scottish Government to recognise the past, present and future contributions of crofters to the conservation and renewal of cultivated biodiversity in Scotland as enshrined in international biodiversity legislation. This makes it imperative for the Scottish Government to recognise that crofters have the rights to conserve, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed, without requirement to standardise seed for certification, nor to homogenise or stabilise varieties for catalogue registration.
- **Specific support measures introduced for native breeds which are easily accessible and recognise the non-market goods produced by keepers of native breeds.** Our native breeds of cattle and sheep are naturally adapted to survival on land with coarser vegetation and climatic extremes. Extensive grazing by these breeds creates a more diverse habitat for flowering plants and insects, and these in turn support wildlife and enhance the landscape. A third of Europe's native breeds have been lost in the last 100 years and once lost these important genetic stocks cannot be recovered.
- **LFA payments targeted at the fragile and very fragile areas of the LFA** – these are areas identified by Europe as **Vulnerable Areas**, and there should be an element of degressivity, with higher payments for the first 50ha claimed.
- **Schemes under the next Rural Development Plan ring-fenced to crofting.** If there are underspends in one crofting scheme, that underspend should remain within crofting to fund other crofting schemes.
- **The reinstatement of the Croft Entrant Scheme** – if the Government is serious about attracting new entrants to crofting, this scheme should have a budget of £20m over the period of the next SRDP.
- **The extension of the Crofting Connections programme** – Crofting Connections has been an unqualified success. It has already introduced hundreds of schoolchildren throughout the Highlands and Islands to crofting, and is teaching them about where food comes from – by supporting these young people to learn about their land based traditions the Scottish Government are helping to create the crofters of the future. This is a great responsibility and an equally great opportunity. **The programme should be supported throughout the next Parliament, and should be rolled out to schools in other parts of Scotland where new crofts are being created.**
- **Enhancing the support for croft housing** – we want to work imaginatively with Government to provide a loan element to the Croft House Grant Scheme. We believe the solution could lie in working in partnership with Credit Unions.
- **Simplifying the SRDP** – the SRDP has become too complex. Success is skewed in favour of large applications which can justify the cost of employing an adviser to write them. This is surely wrong: the point of the SRDP is to pay land managers for public benefits, not to pay

advisers. We want to work with Government to develop a range of simpler measures – essentially a broader range of Land Managers Options – which crofters and small producers can access. Applications from small producers should be favoured in the assessment process.

- Government policies on supporting local food, renewable energy, and rural development need to be joined up to support crofting. Specifically **Government must work with crofters to ensure that crofters benefit fully from renewable energy development on croft land and we call on the next Government to engage with us in developing a strategy for local food<sup>iii</sup>**.

## **5. BRINGING IT TOGETHER**

**After the various Inquiries and with the Crofting Reform Act finally in place, it is a natural next step for the government to work with SCF, the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting, to identify how crofting now moves forward.**

These actions to support crofting need to be tied together. That is why we want to see the new Government **commit to publishing a Crofting Action Plan within a year of taking office**, setting out the steps that need to be taken to meet the two targets we set out above – a majority of existing crofts being used to produce food and public goods by 2020; and at least 10,000 new crofts created (and one quarter of Scotland’s land in crofting tenure) in the next 20 years.

<sup>i</sup> We define this as 'the well-being of family, community and public assets without financial detriment to the individual'

<sup>ii</sup> The majority of the holding will be woodland. Some holdings can be managed on a woodland pasture system and some holdings will be devoted to producing high quality timber from native species. Afforestation would be a specific requirement for those taking on the tenure of these holdings.

<sup>iii</sup> As defined by 'Food Sovereignty'. Including support to local production, local distribution, local abattoirs and local control.