

The Parliamentary progress of the Crofting Reform Bill

The Crofting Reform Bill has been introduced into the House of Commons on 11 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 12 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 13 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 14 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 15 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 16 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 17 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 18 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 19 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 20 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 21 October 2006. The Bill is expected to be debated in the House of Commons on 22 October 2006. 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## Land management contracts – crofting grants stay out of land management contracts

Crofting grants are not to be used to fund land management contracts. This is the message from the Scottish Crofting Foundation. The Foundation has written to the Scottish Executive to say that it does not want to see crofting grants used to fund land management contracts. The Foundation says that crofting grants should be used to support crofting activities, not land management contracts. The Foundation says that land management contracts are a form of industrial agriculture, and that crofting grants should not be used to support industrial agriculture. The Foundation says that crofting grants should be used to support crofting activities, such as crofting education, crofting research, and crofting development. The Foundation says that crofting grants should be used to support crofting activities, not land management contracts. The Foundation says that land management contracts are a form of industrial agriculture, and that crofting grants should not be used to support industrial agriculture. The Foundation says that crofting grants should be used to support crofting activities, such as crofting education, crofting research, and crofting development. The Foundation says that crofting grants should be used to support crofting activities, not land management contracts. The Foundation says that land management contracts are a form of industrial agriculture, and that crofting grants should not be used to support industrial agriculture. The Foundation says that crofting grants should be used to support crofting activities, such as crofting education, crofting research, and crofting development.

## SCF conference: the strengths of the crofting system

IAN MACKINNON reports on the Scottish Crofting Foundation conference in Shetland

A visit to Tommy and Mary Isbister's holding on the island of Trondra in Shetland provided practical example of some of the strengths of the crofting system.

The conference touched on a variety of themes such as: providing high quality local food as a sustainable alternative to industrial agriculture; retaining local traditions and culture to create a strong sense of individual and community identity; finding practical ways to keep young people in crofting areas; and using marketing to promote the authentic traditions of crofting.

However, it was the inspiring visit to the Isbisters' croft that tied many of those strands together and delegates left there with a

spring in their stride.

The couple keep as many native Shetland breeds as they can. There are Shetland cattle, sheep, ponies and even indigenous poultry on the croft and they also grow Shetland Black potatoes and a local variety of oats.

Here was an example of the small-scale mixed farming hailed as "essential for our survival" by the writer on food issues Colin Tudge when he offered the conference a radical perspective on global agriculture.

"If the human species has any future at all then we have to have a global agrarian economy and we have to make it work," Mr Tudge told delegates. "It is very obvious that the powers-that-be in government and the corporate

world, and the scientists who advise them, are supporting a way of farming that is totally antipathetic to that." This comment strongly resonated for some delegates after their experiences battling the Scottish Executive against a Crofting Reform Bill that many feared would lead to the end of crofting.

Mr Tudge added: "We have to conceive of ourselves as a biological species and our world as a habitat if we are going to survive on this planet. Farming is qualitatively different from everything else that we do and efforts to put it into an industrial model are having disastrous results. If you knock out the unsustainable alternatives you finish up with the idea

continued on page 4



Conference feature: Pages 4, 5, 12, 13, 14, 15 & 16

Tommy and Mary Isbister's croft at Burtand, Trondra, Shetland

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE FEATURE

**My most memorable crofting conference ever** by Tommy Isbister

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## SCF conference: the strengths of the crofting system

continued from page 1

of small scale mixed farming carried out by lots and lots of people – in the long term any other route will not work."

Mr Tudge believes capitalism is not itself inherently flawed but has been corrupted by aspects of corporate ideology of the 20th century which in an agricultural context are disastrous.



Tommy and Mary Isbister on their croft at Trondra, Shetland

"I was at a presentation in Oxford recently," he said, "where I heard a recently-retired senior civil servant say that 'agriculture in the UK is finished' because we can buy food so much cheaper from elsewhere. That is the kind of mindset you end up in if you follow the belief that agriculture is just a business."

Bitter experience had taught him that trying to reform the established system was a waste of time and instead called on crofters to join the global renaissance of "enlightened agriculture" – citing organics, FairTrade and the

SlowFood movement as examples of an emerging food culture.

"They are all pulling in the right direction but they are not yet cohesive. If farmers get their act together and start practicing enlightened agriculture there are plenty of consumers out there who would pay to eat their produce."

With their native breeds, the Isbisters are among those able to benefit from consumers willing to pay more to eat their Shetland Lamb, a new brand label that promotes the local meat.

A brand for croft produce was on the agenda when James Hosea of the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration said that crofting produce, like Lanarkshire Blue cheese, is an example of a 'heritage' brand. These stand in contrast to 'modern classic' brands like Bailey's Irish Cream, which was invented in an office opposite the Bailey's Hotel in London and Caffrey's Irish Cream, invented in a laboratory by scientists trying to concoct a mixture of lager and stout.

The croft brand's authentic identity would stand it in good stead when it came to marketing, he felt.

The issue of identity was central to the presentation by land reform campaigner and Professor of Human Ecology at Strathclyde University, Alastair McIntosh, who grew up in North Lochs in Lewis. He saw crofting com-

munities as examples of "real people in a real place" and outlined his view that a healthy human identity is made up of three parts.

He called these: "soil" (people's relationship with the land they live in); "soul" (people's sense of a life-giving spirituality); and "society" (people's sense of community with one another).

"The people with the richest characters I know of are those whose identity has been shaped by the strong communities they were cradled in."

At Trondra, Tommy Isbister showed delegates the "innovation, talent, creativity, diversity and experimentation" that come from his cradling in the Shetland crofting tradition. As the crofters walked on his land, they asked his wife about a couple of elegant rowing boats lying by the shore. Mary said that Tommy had built them himself in a small workshop next to the house. A little further on was a ruined mill which Tommy had restored and now used to grind his oats.

After the tour tea and home baking was provided in the byre. Tommy then pulled out a fiddle and played a tune. The fiddle was one he had made himself in his workshop.

As the crofters got back on the tour bus, one delegate from Lewis was heard to mutter: "That guy should be 'crofter of the year' every year!"