

NORTH WEST CATTLE PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

ACTION PLAN - 2004 TO 2006 AND BEYOND

1. North West Cattle Producer's Association

NWCPA was created by a group of cattle producers in North West Sutherland in 2000 to increase cattle numbers in the area and to provide a support network for those involved. There is currently no similar organisation in the North of Scotland. The aims of the organisation and the membership services it offers are listed below.

Vision

- To halt and reverse the historic decline in cattle numbers in the North West by supporting new and existing producers.

Aims

- Work to increase the cattle herd in the North West.
- Maximise the opportunities for cattle to secure environmental benefits and promote the fact that cattle are essential for the well being of the land.
- Raise awareness of the role of cattle in our rural area through education and other promotional activities.
- Take action to minimise production costs so that cattle keeping becomes economically viable
- Develop markets for North West producers, with an emphasis on niche and quality markets
- Provide practical hands-on advice and support for producers on issues such as cattle handling, registration, agricultural and environmental grants, online form filling and other administration requirements
- Organise training and networking opportunities for new and existing producers
- Maintain a well-supported organisation and the necessary funds to enable sustained action on all of the above.

Membership Services

- Representation of members interests to include:
 - Lobbying and other representation on key aspects
 - Membership of appropriate committees and groups.
 - Participation in appropriate partnership projects which will benefit NWCPA
 - Liaison with key bodies such as CC, SEERAD, SAC, HC etc.
- Provision of a Producers Support Service to include:
 - Practical agricultural and environmental advice
 - Advice and Support for new producers
 - Training and networking opportunities
 - Signposting service to other sources of support
 - Development of useful publications such as a Cattle Handbook
 - Website and newsletter
- Proactive action in securing economic return from cattle to include:
 - Investigate opportunities for niche and quality markets
 - Liaison with other operators in the farm to plate chain
 - Raise awareness of opportunities and encourage co-operative working

- Participate in promotional events
- Facilitate the formation of co-operative working to include:
 - Encouragement of machinery groups
 - Advice about feed co-ops in partnership with Norcelt
 - Services to encourage bull sharing
 - Provision of details of agricultural contractors
- Research, education and awareness raising activities to include:
 - Development and participation in relevant research to forward NWCPA aims
 - School activities to fit with curriculum
 - Regular press releases and articles in local papers
 - Community events

NWCPA is currently an unincorporated association but is considering the need to become a Company Limited by Guarantee; this in part will depend on the level of funding secured and the nature of its activities over the coming years. The membership of the group is increasing steadily. In April 2002 membership stood at 20 including 2 groups. In April 2003 membership stood at 38 members of which 2 were groups. As of early September 2003 membership stood at 3 groups (equivalent of 47 individuals) and 49 individuals giving a total of 52 members or representation of 96 individuals, some of which are cattle keepers others whom are interested in cattle. It has been calculated that 50% of current cattle keepers in the North West (41 out of 82) are members and this is likely to rise to 75% by the end of the year.

NWCPA has a strong and active Management Committee that currently meets every 2-3 months. In addition a range of members also undertake activities for the group on a voluntary basis. While not formalised it is envisaged that the voluntary effort will develop into a number of distinct working groups to help develop aspects of the NWCPA's work such as research.

2. Background and Progress to Date

NWCPA was formed in 2000 by a group of cattle producers in North West Scotland who looked to reverse the historic decline in the cattle herd in the area through a wide range of activities. This is in response to the indisputable fact that cattle numbers in the area have been falling for some 100 years. There is a strong belief that more mixed agriculture including the production of cattle is essential for the well being of the land and is a key part of the jigsaw required for retaining thriving rural communities in the North West.

Since inception NWCPA have been very busy. Initially the focus was on raising the profile of the group, pulling together information to demonstrate support for the general ethos and to identify the range of activities and support required to effect a positive change. After a slow start due to FMD in 2001 a major Feasibility Study was undertaken in 2002, which clearly established both the need and desire for change with some detail on the range of actions that were desirable. It is important to note that the Feasibility Study was based on broad consultation – over 80 one to one interviews and further postal questionnaires.

On the completion of the Feasibility Study a small amount of money was obtained which helped to consolidate the activities of the organisation including the building of membership. **This funding was secured on the basis that it was for some initial development and that further funding bids would be submitted.** The work achieved through employing a part time co-ordinator over the last year clearly demonstrates the benefits of providing funding for NWCPA: just some of the actions taken in 2003 are listed below;

1. Increase in membership to 52 members (inc. 3 groups with 47 members), this includes 50% of current cattle producers (early September 2003).
2. Development of a register of current and potential cattle keepers.
3. Provision of a range of support services – this includes advice to 8 potential cattle keepers
4. Production of 2 newsletters distributed to all crofting households in NW, members and other interested parties (distribution of approx. 650)
5. Development of a Website, which is due to go live in November 2003, this includes access to all NWCPA reports and publications.
6. Press releases issued and articles prepared for local and farming papers in May and September.
7. Three Workshops organised to be delivered on 5 evenings in October/November 2003.
8. Three school events delivered in September 2003.
9. Dissemination of Information – 80 copies of Feasibility Study distributed and over 250 leaflets issued.
10. Letting of a contract investigating the entitlement to support for cattle keepers in the area – this is currently being completed.
11. Considerable progress in lobbying and representation. This includes meetings with:
 - SNH, HIE, The Highland Council and Crofters Commission (Support Entitlement)
 - Crofters Commission Board
 - SEERAD Chief Agricultural Officers during their meeting in Assynt
 - Mr Hulot, EU Head of Rural Development
 - Eleanor Scott and other Green party representatives
 - Jack MacConnell, First Minister
 - Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for SEERAD

In addition there have been a number of written submissions, including:

- Response to SEERAD review of agri-environment schemes
- Comments on the implications of CAP reform for north west producers to SEERAD and Jack MacConnell

In addition to the above there has been a considerable amount of advice already provided to both new and existing cattle producers. There is an emerging demand for advice on cattle that is currently not provided by anyone else, this is evidenced by the fact that SEERAD and SAC advisory staff are already referring those interested in cattle to NWCPA.

All of the above has been achieved in large part through the employment of a temporary part time Co-ordinator. Even with the high level of voluntary commitment of the committee and some members it would be impossible to make progress on so many fronts without paid support and additional funding for specific projects and activities.

3. Action Plan

Listed below is the whole range of activities that NWCPA hope to undertake over the next three years and beyond. After exploring options this is seen as the best way of actually achieving progress across the geographical area covered by the organisation. What is clear is that this work cannot be achieved on an entirely voluntary basis.

Key to the implementation of the Action Plan is the employment of a part time Cuidiche (Co-ordination and Administration) and the development of a Fieldsmen Network. Further details on these aspects are included in the Appendices.

Activity	Years				Delivery Mechanism	Notes
	1	2	3	4+		
Organisation & Information						
Establish NWCPA Structure	✓	✓	✓	✓	Committee	Will be reviewed regularly
Create databases of current and potential cattle producers	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	Will need to be maintained
Establish Calendar of Social Events	✓	✓	✓	✓	Committee	Should be self financing
Recruit and Support Part Time Co-ordinator	✓	✓	✓	✓	Committee	Details in Annex 1
Representation of Members Interests						
Represent NWCPA on other committees or at appropriate meetings as and when required.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Committee	Requires Travel Expenses?
Liase with all relevant bodies on an ongoing basis keeping them informed of NWCPA work and views	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Committee	Requires Travel Expenses?
Lobby for positive changes on the range of issues affecting members both as individual producers and participants in group production – to include agriculture, business and environmental issues.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Committee	
Prepare written responses to relevant consultations as and when required.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Committee	
Provision of a Producers Support Service						
Establish a regular NWCPA newsletter	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	2 per year
Create a website and leaflet describing membership services	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	
Establish NWCPA phone line and email	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	

Activity	Years				Delivery Mechanism	Notes
	1	2	3	4+		
Provide a Producers' Support Service giving practical support on the wide range of issues from cattle handling and all aspects of legislation and paperwork to environmental issues.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Fieldsmen Network	See Annex 2 for more details of Fieldsmen Network
Develop a Cattle Handbook which will include sections relating to New Entrants, Environmental Issues, Co-operative Action etc.	✓				Small Contract to Complete	
Investigate support available for new cattle producers and liaise with potential funders to ensure they understand issues e.g. Highland Fund, LEC etc..	✓				Cuidiche & Committee	Liaison with public sector funders.
Subscribe to SAC Technical Notes and 'Beef & Sheep Notes' & distribute information	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	
Investigate the possibility of funding to re-establish the necessary basic infrastructure to facilitate cattle keeping	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	Liaison with public sector funders.
Encourage the public sector to create a Partnership project which includes extra funding for fencing and dyking of hill ground since the costs are beyond the means of most townships - modelled on North West Development Plan.		✓			Cuidiche & Committee	Will require commitment from public agencies.
Organise winter workshops –cattle handling, regulations, support schemes and paperwork, winter feed production, feeding options for hill cattle, health, woodchip corrals, halter training, calving, RSS etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche + External Trainers	3-4 per year
Develop research agenda relating to cattle production in peripheral areas and identify and secure funding for projects that can be progressed in the NW	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Committee	Will require additional funding to be sought
Organise annual study trip	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Others	1 per year
Proactive Action in Securing an Economic Return from Cattle						
Participate in promotional events where appropriate	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche & Committee	Estimate 2 per year including Durness Food festival
Facilitate area breeding strategies and batching		✓			Cuidiche	
Develop links with other producers at the different production stages and provide market information	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	
Develop links with buyers, abattoirs, butchers, food writers etc. and develop understanding of conformation issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	

Activity	Years				Delivery Mechanism	Notes
	1	2	3	4+		
Assess the costs of converting Lochinver butcher to Low Throughput Cutting Plant	✓				Cuidiche & Butchers	
Assess group finishing options based on a finishing unit elsewhere		✓			Small Contract to Investigate	
Register the domain name 'Far North Beef' and formally register same as a beef label	✓				Cuidiche	
Trial sales of local beef with Highland cattle making a feature of seasonality	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	May be opportunity to provide income stream for NWCPA
Facilitate the Formation of Co-operative Working						
Facilitate informal and formal creation of feed co-ops, machinery groups, in wintering schemes and encourage related job creation	✓				Cuidiche & Fieldsmen	Each individual group will require additional external funding
Create a register of needs by parish for contractors and shared feed/Mart transport and a North West Machinery and Labour ring			✓		Small Contract	
Create a register of demand for bulls and bulls available, including assessment of transport options	✓				Small Contract	
Investigate ways to recreate bulling parks, facilitate this and encourage area/township breeding strategies to make bull sharing possible			✓		Cuidiche	
Research, Education and Awareness Raising Activities						
Schools events – Food & Future production – Arts events, Croft visits	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	Approx. 2 per year
Develop an environmental arts event focusing on Cattle & Crofting		✓			Small contract to develop ideas & identify funding	Will require additional funding for event.
Produce regular press articles about NWCPA activities to maintain profile and momentum and build membership	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cuidiche	At least 4 per year

4. Key Outcomes

The following key outcomes have been identified as what the likely achievements of the NWCPA will be. Some of these will be directly achieved by NWCPA others are more dependant on others but we are confident that these will form part of the overall impact of our proposals. A pragmatic approach to these must be taken as to some extent the outcomes of the organisation's activities are subject to many external forces such as UK government and EU policies on agriculture and market dynamics – as such these are aspirational targets.

- Increase in Cattle Numbers by 5% and Keepers by 15% by the Year 2006¹
- Encourage development of 6 new machinery groups
- Create a part time Cuidiche to support the work of NWCPA
- Create and operate a Fieldsmen Network
- Direct market 2,400 kilos of Highland beef locally²
- Investigate new markets for store calves
- Increase winter feed production by 4%³
- Produce 2 newsletters per annum
- Organise 3-4 Workshops per annum
- Organise 1 Study trip per annum
- Maintain and further develop website
- Work with approximately 2 local schools – develop suitable curriculum based materials
- Maintain and further develop 2 databases in relation to co-operative working activities
- Maintain directories relating to current and potential new cattle producers
- Participate in 2 promotional events annually
- Development of Cattle Producers handbook
- Attend between 5 and 10 meetings representing NWCPA interests
- Respond to up to 5 consultations annually

¹ This represents an average of 4 new keepers per year getting 4 suckler cows each. New keepers will then build up their stock from a small start so cattle numbers would increase by a greater percentage eventually but there is a time lag. SEERAD stats, since they are aggregated, indicate a higher number of keepers and cattle than is actually present. Real numbers are about 75% of SEERAD figures giving 82 cattle keepers with an average of 20 cows each or 1671 cattle in total including followers. In practise a small number of farms have circa 50 cows with followers and the majority of keepers have far fewer cattle. It is important to note that NWCPA has a record of 32 individuals who have expressed an interest in getting cattle. This year one of those has started keeping cattle. The potential number of new entrants is therefore far higher than 4 per year but outside factors such as the projected impacts of CAP Reform and difficulty in accessing RSS may severely inhibit faster growth.

² At this level NWCPA would meet 50% of the local demand indicated by the 2002 survey work. The baseline target would be about 12 carcasses. The aim would be to work towards marketing 8 carcasses per month, 11 months of the year. This target is based on discussion with Alastair MacAskill, Butcher, and would serve to support another full job in the butchers. This would be achieved over a longer period by targeting 'ex-pat' Sutherland folk and Internet sales.

³ 6 new machinery groups would mean a minimum of 12 individuals with access to machinery. The target of 4% is based on 12 people using 1 hectare each for hay or other kinds of winter feed. The survey in 2002 indicated 32 people using 285.4 ha for winter feed but production by the farms makes this average of 8.9Ha per person rather high. Much more modest targets are needed for the average crofter. This target of 4% would mean 12 hectares of new ground (4% increase) being used but an increase of 37% in numbers of people producing winter feed.

5. Summary of Costs

Listed below is an estimate of costs based on the Actions identified in years 1 to 3. There will be ongoing costs beyond that but the first stage is to secure funding from a range of sources for an initial 3-year period.

Action	Cost			Notes
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	
Part Time Cuidiche	£10,000	£10,500	£11,000	Half Time – Self Employed (Direct employee increases costs)
Cuidiche Start Up Costs	£2,500			Recruitment, PC etc.
Cuidiche Expenses (mileage, consumables, phone etc.)	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	
Subscriptions	£200	£200	£200	
Committee Expenses	£750	£750	£750	To cover meetings in Edinburgh, Inverness etc.
Fieldsmen Network	£3,085	£5,570	£5,570	Inc. Cuidiche's T&S plus training for up to 12 ppa
Website	£300	£300	£300	
Leaflet	£250	£50	£50	
Cattle Handbook production	£4,500	£50	£50	£2,000 to complete writing and £2,500 production costs
Newsletter Production	£750	£800	£850	Covers paper, print, envelopes and postage.
Promotional Events	£500	£500	£500	Stall fees, equipment and transport
Contract – Group Finishing Options		£5,000		
Contract – Arts Event Development		£1,500		
Contract – Demand for Bulls Register	£2,000			
Contract – Co-operative Working			£3,000	
Winter Workshops	£1,200	£1,400	£1,600	£300 per w/shop inc by £50 per w/shop each year
Annual Study Trip	£2,000	£5,000	£2,500	Yr1 – Finishing Yr2 – France Yr3 - Orkney
Schools Materials/Trips	£500	£500	£500	Provision for materials & bus hire
Insurance - public liability & indemnity esp for Fieldsmen	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	Estimate only
Total	£32,035	£35,620	£30,370	£97,875

It is anticipated that from Year 4 onwards the ongoing core funding required by the organisation will drop to approximately to £14,000. This covers core activities and a quarter time Cuidiche but no costs towards the continuation of the Fieldsmen Network. The organisation will have income from membership, local fundraising activities and direct marketing of beef, which should cover some of these costs, an income stream projection has been given in Annex 3. It is expected that these income streams will be developed over the next three years so that the organisation can become more self-sustaining.

Annex 1

Job Description and Work Plan for NWCPA Cuidiche

Job Description

1. Support the committee in undertaking representation and lobbying on relevant issues, preparing written responses and submissions as required.
2. Liase with a wide range of organisations on behalf of NWCPA and represent the organisation at a variety of networking meetings including the Highlands and Islands Agriculture Network.
3. Maintain all membership records and other information pertaining to the work of NWCPA – this will include a number of databases.
4. Produce two newsletters annually, develop a minimum of four press releases and produce materials for the NWCPA website.
5. Assist in the development of and subsequently maintain the information in publications including the NWCPA Leaflet and the Cattle Handbook.
6. Commission and manage a range of external contracts.
7. Provide a range of support for new and existing cattle producers in collaboration with the Fieldsmen Network.
8. Establish and provide administration support for the Fieldsmen Network – this will include co-ordination of training sessions.
9. Organise networking and training events for members – including winter workshops and an annual study trip.
10. Arrange 2 schools events per year – this will include the development of materials and a field trip.
11. Facilitate the range of co-operative working and marketing opportunities as identified in the Action Plan.

Time Allocation

Based on 20 days per month Full-time and 10 days per month as half time – 40 days per quarter – a heavy workload but possible if focus is maintained:

JD Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
Days per quarter	5	2	2	4	5	5	4	2	2	1	8	40

Person Specification

Essential Characteristics

- Self-starter.
- Sound knowledge of crofting and issues surrounding cattle production.
- Computer literate including use of databases.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills.
- Good organisational skills
- Good understanding of the range of partner organisations and the support they can offer

Desirable Characteristics

- Knowledge of North West Sutherland
- Previous experience of managing external contracts

Annex 2

Description and Costs of Fieldsmen Network

Background

One of the major issues to be resolved when considering how to encourage cattle keeping in the area is the loss of skills and experience in this sector. There is a need to provide practical advice on a one to one basis both to existing and more importantly to new producers. The question then arises how best to do this as the best advice will come from those with current knowledge i.e. crofters and farmers with first hand experience. But how to do this without putting undue pressure on any one individual who will likely have other commitments. Another issue is how to achieve this over an area, which is large in size and poorly served in road links.

Description

A potential solution would be via a Fieldsmen Network. This would comprise a 'bank' of Fieldsmen each of whom would be an interested and committed existing cattle producers from across the area. Each Fieldsmen would be expected to participate in a training day twice a year to ensure that they were all up to speed with the range of issues that may face them in providing support to their fellow cattle keepers. The new or existing cattle keeper would be provided with a list of NWCPA Fieldsmen who are available. The list would provide a brief biography of each Fieldsmen. From this list the new keeper would choose the Fieldsmen most appropriate for their needs. The choice is likely to be affected not just by proximity but also by breed preferences and other production choices such as organic or non-organic; winter feed options; group production etc. The Fieldsmen would be given a financial contribution to pay for their time and any expenses incurred.

This Scheme has the following advantages

- Good geographical coverage
- Spreads potential economic benefits across a number of cattle producers
- Maximises pool of expertise available to those in need of support
- Reduces pressure (time and cost commitment) on any one individual to provide support
- Reduces sense of obligation for those requiring support and encourages them to seek help when required and build a knowledge base of their own.

This system is comparable to the Fieldsmen system operated by the likes of the Highland Cattle Society but aims to be more accessible and local so that fairly informal advice through phone contact and the odd chat is also part of the support. After 3 years the original beneficiaries would be asked to pay a fee for further NWCPA Fieldsmen visits and support similar to Breed Society Fieldsmen systems. This would generate some income but funding would be sought to pay for further support activity for another batch of new entrants.

Costs

There are 82 current cattle producers and 32 potential new cattle producers in the area. NWCPA estimates that 15 people would need this type of support in any one year, each requiring an average of 32 hours advice and support. This would mean a total of 320 hours of advice would be required 60 of this would be provided through the NWCPA Cuidiche, and 260 hours would be provided through the Fieldsmen Network.

Fieldsmen Network Average Visit Schedule - some may need less support.

Contacts	Who?	Purpose	Duration
Visit 1	Cuidiche	Provision of Cattle handbook, list of Fieldsmen, explanation of Fieldsmen Network. Explanation of paperwork requirements and financial support options - e.g National Reserve for Single Income Payments; Land Management Contracts, RSS	2 hours plus travel
Visit 2	Cuidiche	Q & A on information provided; arranging choice of Fieldsmen	2 hours plus travel
Visit 3	Fieldsmen	Walk the croft ground; discussion on breeds, markets, feed and cattle handling. Creation of croft plan - number & type of cows; timescales etc.	4 hours
Visit 4	Fieldsmen	Preparation for cattle	4 hours
Visit 5	Fieldsmen	Assistance in buying stock	4 hours
Visit 6	Fieldsmen	Handling stock	4 hours
Visits 7 - 10	Fieldsmen	Quarterly visits and optional monthly contact by phone	2 hours x 4 plus 8 phone calls of 15 minutes
Visit 11	Cuidiche	Annual follow up visit & feedback session on support provided	2 hours

Summary -

Year	No. of New Entrants	Cuidiche's Time	Cuidiche's T&S	Fieldsmen's Time	Fieldsmen's T&S & phone	Cost
Year 1	5	5 people visited 3 times for 2 hours each = 6 hours x 5 =30 hours	5 x 3 journeys pp averaging 100 miles @ £0.35/mile = £525	5 people getting 4 x 4 hour visits; 4 x 2 hour visits plus phone contact @ 8 x 15 mins = 26 hours x 5 = 130 hours @£10/hour?	5 x 8 visits pp averaging 50 miles @ £0.35/mile = £700 +£60 phone	£2585
Year2	10 (5 new, 5 existing)	60 hours	£1050	260 hours	£1520	£5170
Year 3	10 (5 new, 5 existing)	60 hours	£1050	260 hours	£1520	£5170
Total	15	N/a	£2625	£6500	£3800	£12,925

NOTE: if numbers seeking support are higher further funding would be sought since this is a key area of activity. Training for 12 Neach-Càirdeals each year would cost circa £500.

Support for Existing Keepers

Existing but inexperienced cattle keepers could be offered a more limited service at a cost of £175. This would entitle them to 2 visits of 4 hours plus phone support for a year. The visits could include a choice of items - a demonstration of cattle handling, tagging, preparing for a sale, dosing, halter training etc. The cattle keeper could choose from a pre-arranged 'menu'. This would generate some income for NWCPA.

Annex 3

Projected Development of NWCPA Income Streams

The figures given below are an estimate of the level of income that could be developed by NWCPA over the next three years.

Source	Amount Per Year
Membership Subs - 60 individuals plus 5 groups - £10 or £30 sub pa	£750
Fees for Fieldsmen support - 5 people @£175 (See Note)	£875
Beef - sales - 10% of sale price as commission on 2,400 kilos @ £5/kilo *	£1200
Fundraising - collecting jars, annual ceildh	£500
Total for year	£3,325

* Note: this would require some start up costs of £1500 for labelling equipment and £X to register far North Beef as a trading name.

Note: This implies about £10,000 per year will still be needed. Increased beef marketing would increase profit – reaching medium term target of 8 carcasses per month would bring in about £8,880 per year on the same basis of a 10% commission. Other services like carrying out croft or farm annual admin or preparing grant applications for people or groups could be developed for a fee and set against core costs especially the Cuidiche’s time. If all 45 local Grazings Committees joined at a group rate this would be a boost for funds. Likewise development of an Associate membership for agencies and organisations or individuals would generate income. An appeal on the website once it is launched may also bring in funds.