

NWCPA Takes Action on SCP Quota Problem

Research carried out last year by the group showed an estimated short fall of 300 Suckler Cow Premium Quota Units across the north west parishes of Assynt, Eddrachilles, Durness, Tongue and Farr. In the past few months NWCPA Committee members have met with representatives from HIE, SNH and the Crofters Commission to explore avenues for tackling this problem in order to boost cattle production in the north west.

One idea is to create a new environmental category for applications for SCP quota to the National Reserve specifically for areas like the north west. If the new category had the same status as 'New producer under

40 years' – the highest category – it would improve access to SCP quota units. We will keep you informed of progress. Obviously the nature of the final CAP Reform will be of significance. Quota may be abolished as soon as next year or in a few years time. It is hoped that the way ahead will be clearer after the next round of CAP Mid Term Review talks in mid June.

What Are We Doing for You in 2003?

Following the completion of the Feasibility Study last year the Committee worked hard over the winter to secure funding which would allow the work to continue on your behalf. That effort has paid off. Funding has been secured from The Highland Council, The Crofters Commission and CED – a European source called Community Economic Development. The RSPB is providing 'in-kind' support by printing and distributing two Newsletters for NWCPA. NWCPA has therefore been able to contract a Co-ordinator for a six month period only. The Co-ordinator is Issie MacPhail from Assynt. Her contact details are provided below.

With Issie MacPhail in place the group are working to create a 3 year plan of action which would involve employing a longer term part-time Co-ordinator and a network of Cattle 'Mentors' across the 5 parishes. The Cattle Mentors would provide accessible support and advice close to home for new and existing producers. This would ensure effective and consistent representation of members' views for lobbying purposes too.

Results of the NWCPA Consultation and Feasibility Study 2002

Many thanks to all of you who participated in and supported the work. About 150 producers returned questionnaires, over 45 individuals or businesses registered an interest in buying local beef, a third of all Grazings Committees returned their questionnaire, some 80 people were interviewed and many more sent best wishes for the NWCPA work. Details of the findings are provided over the page and the full report will soon be available on the new NWCPA website now being developed. If you would like a full copy of the Feasibility Study or are waiting for a copy, please do get in touch.

All your enquiries and suggestions are very welcome!

To Contact NWCPA:

Issie MacPhail - NWCPA Co-ordinator
204 Clashmore, Stoer,
Lochinver, Sutherland IV27 4JQ
Tel/Fax: 01571 855297
e-mail: info@nwcpa.org.uk

A Word from The Chairman

I would take this opportunity to inform our members and indeed would be members, that the NWCPA is making steady progress. We recognised from the outset that our declared aim of reversing the decline of cattle in the north west parishes could not be accomplished by a management committee working purely on a voluntary basis. We knew that we would have to make the 'case' that would enable us to access support to appoint a paid Co-ordinator.

It was also clear that if that case was to be made we had to initially identify the reasons people are discouraged from keeping cattle. It is fair to say that The Feasibility Study that was carried out last year has done precisely that.

We have now appointed a co-ordinator to consolidate and build on those findings with a view to drawing up the terms of reference on which to base a three year Action Plan. The intention then is to seek funding to implement it. It goes without saying that a lot of work has been put in to reach this stage and I would urge all producers to give us their support – indeed our success depends upon it.

Finally I would like to reassure our membership that while we have secured financial support from a number of organisations we remain an independent membership organisation whose management committee is accountable to the membership only.

Allan MacRae, Chairman

Who are the NWCPA Committee?

Chair	Allan MacRae, Assynt
Secretary	Anna MacConnell, Farr
Treasurer	Ted Birchall, Tongue
Committee	Robert MacCall, Eddrachilles

This NWCPA work is supported by:



What is NWCPA?

A voluntary group created by crofters in the north west parishes.

What Are We Going To Do?

Reverse the historic decline in cattle numbers in the north west parishes by supporting new and existing producers.

How Can We Help Cattle Keepers?

What would help you to continue or start cattle production? Your top three ideas from the survey were:

Item	Rank
Affordable lease (/buy) of suckler cow quota	1
Access to Machinery & equipment via a group	1
Start up loans/grants	2
Being part of a township or producers group herd	3
Fencing hill ground	3

Proposed Membership Services:

- Support and information for new and existing producers
- Lobbying on behalf of members on key issues like quota
- Action to minimise production costs and make cattle keeping more economically viable
- Market research and development – store calves and local beef
- Ensure producers get best value from agricultural and environmental grants and support
- Organise training for new and existing producers
- Provide assistance with form filling and paperwork

How Will We Do It?

By working co-operatively to support existing cattle producers. Through action to help new people start keeping cattle by providing advice, information and training opportunities.

North West Cattle Numbers

In 1955 Frank Fraser Darling raised serious concerns about falling cattle numbers in the north west parishes and other similar crofting areas. He commented that in the north west a ratio of one cow to 3.5 sheep would keep the ground in good heart. The table below shows the change in actual cattle numbers and the ratio of cattle to sheep since the early 20th century. According to SEERAD statistics there were a total of 113 cattle keepers in the north west parishes in 2001.

YEAR	Cattle	Cattle:Sheep Ratio
1911	9344	1:17
1947	5622	1:30
2001	2228	1:46

Cattle and the Environment

The historic decline in cattle numbers in the north west has had serious environmental impacts. Without cattle the fertility of croft and farm ground can deteriorate. Fewer trace elements are available and the variety of flowers, herbs, grasses, birds and wildlife declines. Cattle graze differently from sheep and deer. It is the way they graze, trample and dung which can have such a positive impact on the ground. Production of winter feed like hay and oats also provides shelter and food for birds, insects and other wildlife. One cow produces on average 4 tons of dung a year. That dung produces an insect population equivalent to a quarter of the cow's body weight. The insects and their eggs feed other insects, birds, bats, shrews, moles and badgers.

Far North Beef

Our cattle are reared with few inputs and a great deal of care. They graze ground which is known world-wide for its environmental value and distinctive history. Cattle are native to this ground. Beef produced this way is tasty and healthy. Last year 43 local businesses and/or households registered an interest in buying local beef with NWCPA. For these potential customers the most important issues were: 1st – Taste & quality; 2nd – Cattle health; 3rd – Price.

How Can You Help?

Our Co-ordinator, Issie MacPhail, will soon be visiting your area. Her aim is to meet with existing cattle producers and with **your help**, identify potential new cattle producers. If you want to have a chat or make suggestions, please do get in touch – see contact details on front page.

The NWCPA needs all the members it can get so if you have cattle, used to have cattle, might one day get cattle or simply want to support the drive to get cattle back onto the ground for environmental reasons then please join and make your views felt!

PLEASE SUPPORT NWCPA – JOIN US!

Open to all cattle producers and those interested in **supporting** cattle production in the parishes of Assynt, Eddrachilles, Durness, Tongue and Farr.

Joining Fee

- Individuals - £10 per year
 - Groups & Townships - £30 per year
- Please make cheques out to NWCPA .

THANK YOU!

NWCPA Membership Form ----- ✂✂✂✂✂

Full Name						
Address						
Postcode:		Telephone:				
E-mail:		Cheque Enclosed?			YES/NO	
Crofter	Farmer	Township / Local group	Other	Date of Joining NWCPA	If you do NOT wish your details to be added to the NWCPA members' database, used only for NWCPA work please tick.	
Do you keep cattle?.		No. of Cows:	Which breed(s)?:		No of SCP quota units held	Preferred Bull Breed
YES/NO						

Send Membership Form to: Issie MacPhail NWCPA, 204 Clashmore, Stoer, Lochinver, Sutherland IV27 4JQ

New Cattle Stock Club for North West

Keodale Farm in the parish of Durness has been a crofter owned and run stock club since 1923. This year Keodale is adding a herd of cows to their already well known sheep enterprise. The Club has bought 5 Shorthorn X Angus cows from Mr Hamish Campbell at Balnakeil Farm and, with the help of United Auctions, Perth, has bought 11 Simmental X Luing cows from farms in the Stirling and Perth area. On top of that a 'Department' or 'Board' bull has returned to Durness as part of the new venture. A Shorthorn bull has been selected and has been working at Keodale since early April.

Durness has the highest number of breeding corncrakes on the Scottish mainland. Over the winter staff at Keodale have worked hard to create 'corncrake corners' in a range of suitable parks. These provide cover for the corncrakes and will be grazed in late summer after the corncrakes have set their chicks.

Forthcoming NWCPA Workshops

**FREE to NWCPA members;
£10 for Non-members.**

In the autumn NWCPA will be running a series of workshops with the help of the Scottish Agricultural College and your local vet. The topics chosen reflect the most popular requests for information and advice from last year's survey work. These are:

- Hill Breeds and Marketing
- Cattle Health
- Cattle Feeding

It is hoped that it will be possible to run each workshop in both Rhiconich and Bettyhill to minimise travelling distances for members. Further information about dates and venues will be provided during the summer. Watch the press and local noticeboards for details.

Start Them Young

During this year NWCPA will be working with your local Secondary School to illustrate the potential of cattle in crofting agriculture and the local environment.

At Ullapool High School the aim is to talk to the 3rd Year Standard Grade and Higher geography classes about cattle in crofting and the significance of cattle for the local environment. This fits with their curriculum topic – Rural Landuse. We have also been asked to give a talk in Gaelic to the 1st Year Gaelic medium class. This is planned for June. At Kinlochbervie High School the activity will be in late August and the aim is to talk to the 3rd and 4th year Standard Grade geography classes, while at Farr High School similar ideas are under discussion.

If you can help give a talk in Gaelic OR English about cattle and crofting please get in touch. In the future the possibility of relevant work placements may also be explored.

Starting Out in Cattle Production?

Do you know about the Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS)? It is an agri-environment scheme. *This scheme offers the greatest opportunity for those considering cattle production.* For example if a crofter with 10 ha of inbye or less and no cows at present applies to the Rural Stewardship Scheme and is accepted on the basis of cutting 1 ha hay plus 1 ha oats and the intention to buy 2 cows which are native breed or first cross of a native breed, that person would get a payment of £3170 each year. That's a total of £15850 over 5 years! For more information see contact information below:

RSS Help & Information	Service Offered	Contact Details
Rural Stewardship Scheme Information Pack	Phone your local SEERAD Office and ask for one to be posted out.	Lairg: 01549 402167 Thurso: 01847 893104
Advice about making an application to RSS – deadline is 31st March 2004.	For a free advisory visit and a free report assessing your chances of getting accepted into RSS phone SAC or FWAG. Either organisation can do your environmental audit for you too. Crofters get a grant towards the cost of the Environmental Audit.	Bob Tosh, Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) – 01847 892719 OR Fran Lockart, Farm & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) – 01463 811072