

our land, our people
and our place
in the future



GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT

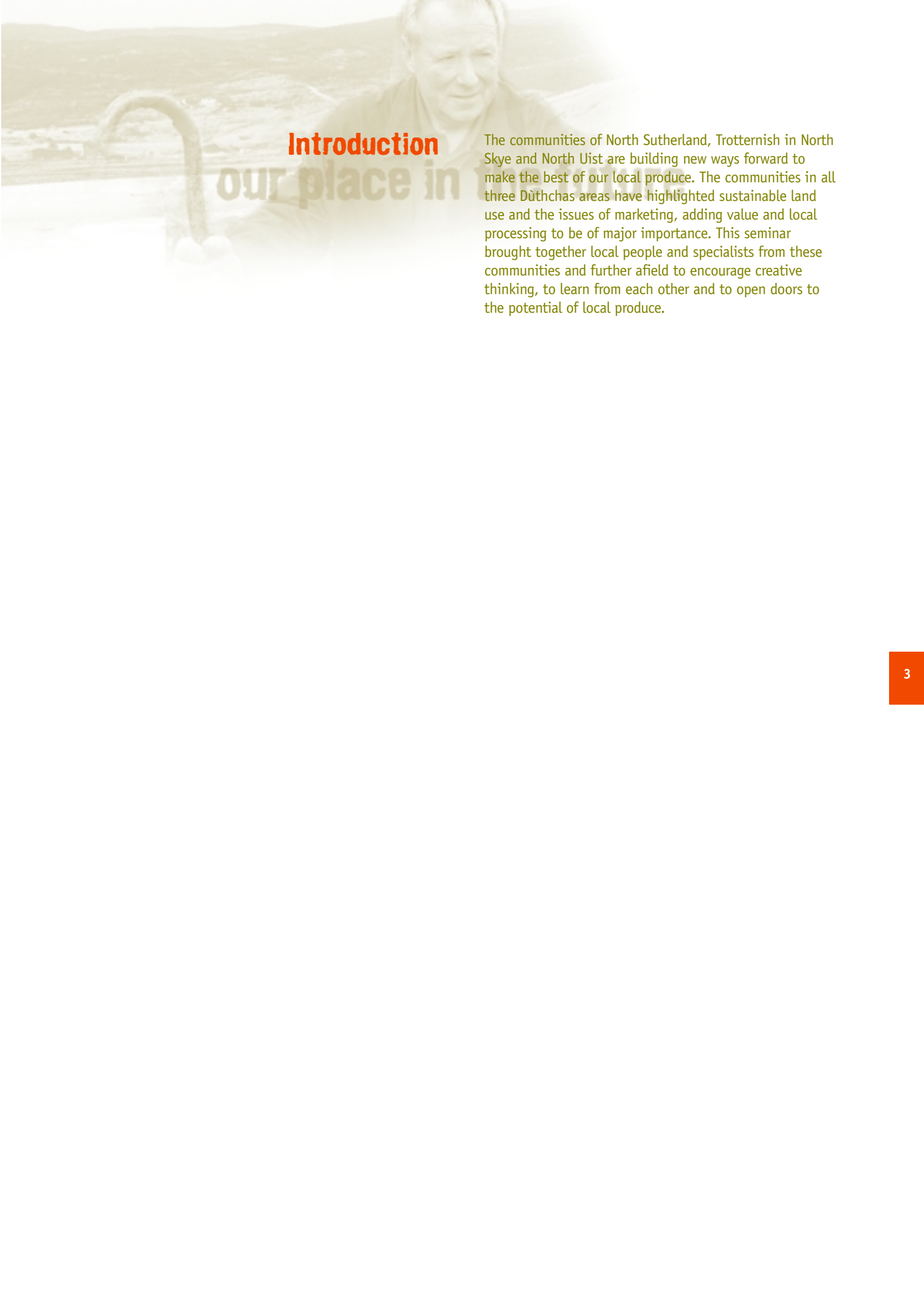
**Dùthchas Information Seminar
Tongue Village Hall
North Sutherland
8th & 9th September 2000**



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Introduction

our place in the world

The communities of North Sutherland, Trotternish in North Skye and North Uist are building new ways forward to make the best of our local produce. The communities in all three Dùthchas areas have highlighted sustainable land use and the issues of marketing, adding value and local processing to be of major importance. This seminar brought together local people and specialists from these communities and further afield to encourage creative thinking, to learn from each other and to open doors to the potential of local produce.

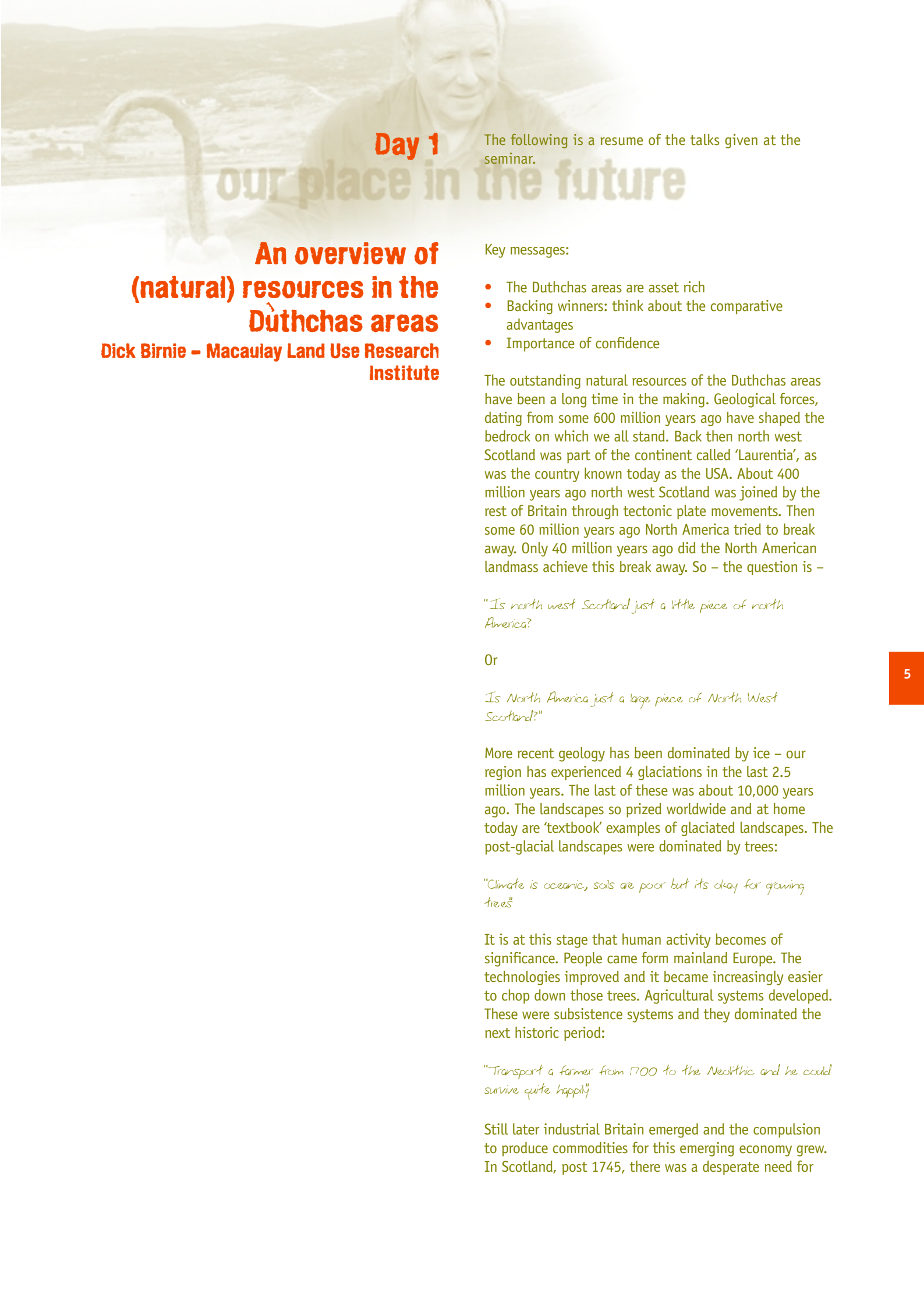
Programme

Friday 8th September 2000

- 09.00 Registration and coffee
09.30 Chairman's Introduction - Ron Beard
- Session 1 Recognising our resources**
- 09.45 Overview of Natural Resource Opportunities in the Duthchas areas
Dick Birnie - Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
- Session 2 New ways of using our resources**
- 10.15 Organic Farming - Opportunities and Realities David Younie - Scottish Agricultural College
10.45 Highland & Islands Organic Production Susan Steven - H&I Organic Producers
11.15 Coffee
11.30 Skye & Lochalsh Food Futures Carole Inglis - SALE
12.00 Mail Order Meat Michael Wigan - Borrobol Estate
12.30 Wise Use of Resources Jon Priddy - North Highland Forest Trust
13.00 Lunch
- Session 3 Local experience**
- 14.00-17.00 Field Visits to Dalcharn Native Woodland, Borgie Forest and Skerry Community
17.00 Return to Tongue Hall. Coffee and feedback
19.00 Gather for dinner at Tongue Hotel
Local Viewpoint Joan Campbell
21.00 Blazing Fiddles in Strathy Hall

Saturday 9th September 2000

- Session 4 Adding value to our resources**
- 09.30 Introduction Sandy Murray
- Local processing**
- 09.45 Developing the local food economy in the Cumbrian Fells
Geoff Brown - Cumbria Fells and Dales Leader II Programme
10.15 Turbogrisen – On-farm slaughtering in Sweden Camilla & Jompa Wolgers
10.45 Discussion
11.15 Coffee
- Session 5 Local direct marketing**
- 11.30 Producer led marketing -The English experience Mark Redman - Bournemouth University
12.00 Direct marketing opportunities in the Highlands and Islands Donnie Macleod - Macleod Organics
12.30 A Success Story Calina MacDonald - Skye Horticulture
13.00 Closing remarks
13.15 Lunch
Close



Day 1

The following is a resume of the talks given at the seminar.

our place in the future

An overview of (natural) resources in the Duthchas areas

Dick Birnie – Macaulay Land Use Research Institute

Key messages:

- The Duthchas areas are asset rich
- Backing winners: think about the comparative advantages
- Importance of confidence

The outstanding natural resources of the Duthchas areas have been a long time in the making. Geological forces, dating from some 600 million years ago have shaped the bedrock on which we all stand. Back then north west Scotland was part of the continent called 'Laurentia', as was the country known today as the USA. About 400 million years ago north west Scotland was joined by the rest of Britain through tectonic plate movements. Then some 60 million years ago North America tried to break away. Only 40 million years ago did the North American landmass achieve this break away. So – the question is –

"Is north west Scotland just a little piece of north America?"

Or

"Is North America just a large piece of North West Scotland?"

More recent geology has been dominated by ice – our region has experienced 4 glaciations in the last 2.5 million years. The last of these was about 10,000 years ago. The landscapes so prized worldwide and at home today are 'textbook' examples of glaciated landscapes. The post-glacial landscapes were dominated by trees:

"Climate is oceanic, soils are poor but it's okay for growing trees"

It is at this stage that human activity becomes of significance. People came from mainland Europe. The technologies improved and it became increasingly easier to chop down those trees. Agricultural systems developed. These were subsistence systems and they dominated the next historic period:

"Transport a farmer from 1700 to the Neolithic and he could survive quite happily"

Still later industrial Britain emerged and the compulsion to produce commodities for this emerging economy grew. In Scotland, post 1745, there was a desperate need for

our land, our people...

money. The growing city populations need food and fibre. Large scale sheep farming developed with the drastic social consequences with which we are all familiar. The 1886 Crofting Act was fought for and passed. This was a social act which it might be argued has had a lasting legacy in terms of the rural economy.

At this stage it is informative to compare the current comparable landscapes in Norway and north west Scotland. The Norwegian example is dominated by trees; the Scottish example is treeless.

The 20th century story is one of declining agricultural commodities and the rise of rural 'products'. There has been a long term decline in agricultural profitability and since 1945, sheep have largely replaced cattle. Concurrently, we have seen an increasing public subsidy whereby £500 million is paid into this economy while £250 million is produced.

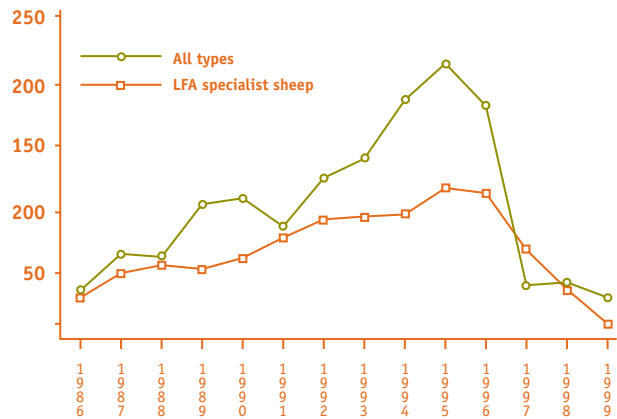
Consumer perceptions and preferences have been changing in the light of BSE and other food scares. This has led to a demand for other types of product: eg CARE. Rural areas have gradually been changing from places dominated by production to places dominated by consumption and 'lifestyle choices'.

Today we face many choices and challenges. The Scottish executive has on the table a discussion document: "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture". While the vast majority of Scottish land remains rural, and the vast majority of that is designated as less favoured area, the

majority of the Scottish population is urban. The peoples and places furthest from major service centres, with 10% or more of the population deriving their income from agriculture are also the peoples and places which can boast the majority of environmental designations such as SSSIs. These and other top level designations signal the very high environmental quality enjoyed by such areas – places such as the Duthchas communities.

A look at income trends in specialist LFA sheep farms shows the alarming fall in real incomes which has been occurring since the 1997 – 1998 season. Now is the time to look at the local natural resources, challenges and opportunities with an open mind and seek new ways of boosting incomes sustainably.

Net Farm Income on LFA Specialist Sheep Farms (£ per farm, real terms)



Here is a summary of some of the Challenges and Opportunities:

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Agenda 2000 (reduced prices) *World Prices Enlargement WTO *Exchange rates *Retail trends (price squeeze) *Food safety and BSE *Environmental pressure *Current pressures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agenda 2000 (market access) Enlargement (growing markets) WTO (reduced tariffs) Market for 'meal solutions' New markets (niche) New products (add value) Direct/local markets New technology Co-operation Tourism and recreation Integration with other land uses

Rural Economies of 'Post-Industrial' Societies

The main features of the emerging rural economies are:

- Food security is no longer the key driver
- Focus is on the wider rural economy
- Future land use will be about 'products' not 'commodities'

The most important thing to bear in mind is:

"All rural areas are facing the same problem - so what gives North West Scotland a comparative advantage?"

What are the comparative advantages?

Traditionally the basic factors in production are land, labour and capital. When facing today's challenges and opportunities, it is important to re-define capital and consider four aspects:

- Natural
- Man-made
- Human
- Social

Let us look at 'natural capital' first and the circumstances in the Dutchess areas:

Air	✓	Clean; wind energy
Water	✓	Clean; whisky
Soil	✗	Acidic; degraded potential
Landscape	✓	International significance
Natural Heritage	✓	International significance
Marine	✓✗	Wave energy; resource loss

Now let's consider the 'man-made capital' assets:

Money	?	EU funding vs. personal
Buildings	✗✓	Vernacular vs. modern
Livestock	✓	Native breeds (Highland)
Crop technology	✗✓	Lazy-beds; polytunnels
Machinery	✓✗	Fish farming
Transport network	✗	Critically poor (cf. 100 years)
Telecommunications	✓	e-business

Looking at 'Human capital', we can see:

Labour force	?	Changing demographics
Knowledge	✓	Returners / in-migrants
Skills	✓	e-business: tourism
Training	?	UHI; colleges

Lastly, let's look at 'Social capital':

"The most critical asset of any individual or community is self-belief"

Social organisation	✓	Co-ops
Cultural cohesion	✓	Gaelic +
Institutional strength	?	Crofting; SCU; ACT
Government instit.	?	?sectoral vs. integrated

So where are the opportunities?

- Renewables: sustainable energy economy!
- High environmental quality: quality image
- Low input systems (=nearly organic)
- Native breeds with high profiles (=brands)
- High expatriot population (=niche market)
- Skills in co-operation and new technologies

And what are the barriers?

- Critical role of government rural policy
- Hold on to vision of a diverse rural economy
- Includes both production and consumption
- Understand the market: product differentiation
- Work back down the production chain
- Product quality, volume, processing capacity, distribution & marketing are all issues
- Understand your competition: be realistic
- Coming off a very low income base
- Capturing a small local market may be the most appropriate entry point

The Future

Future Headlines –what do you want to see? Disasters brought on by global warming or successes created through sustainable rural development? It is up to us all to play a part in shaping that future.

Geologically, north west Scotland is a little piece of North America, but genealogically North America is a large piece of north west Scotland. In the past folk had to leave. Will they still have to in the future?

The answer depends on the UK's ability to understand what integrated rural development really means and supporting it — which is not the same as subsidising it.

A young child with blonde hair is seen from the side, looking out of a window. The view outside shows a vast, open landscape with rolling hills and a body of water under a bright sky. The text 'our land, our people...' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

our land, our people...

The amount of resources natural and otherwise that we have in the three Dùthchas areas is what makes them special. These areas have great scientific interest and a high quality environment, with good air, water, and beautiful scenery. However we have problems with poor accessibility, lack of potential with the soil. With farm and croft incomes falling seriously from 1995, we have to face some serious challenges, but also some very good opportunities.

Our rural economy should not be seen only as agriculture. It is important to view agriculture as part of the rural economy. Wider economic activity is needed. We have man-made assets, human assets, social assets and a land of opportunities, which we have to make the most of, and we need the Government to support us not subsidise us.

Dick Birnie is a Lecturer and Researcher at the Macaulay Research Institute in Aberdeen.



Organic Farming – Opportunities and Realities

David Younie
Scottish Agricultural College

Summary

The term “organic” is a word that is now commonplace in our everyday language. It describes the use of natural systems rather than using chemical sprays and fertilisers. It protects the environment, causes no pollution and results in healthier and better tasting products.

There has been a huge increase in organic production in recent years, a trend which is continuing to rise. In the last two and a half years organic farmland in Scotland has increased 11 fold, but the amount produced is still well below the amount consumed.

70% of organic meat consumed here is imported, this figure could be reduced if facilities were available for local slaughtering butchering and marketing. Registered abattoirs suitable for the production of organic meat are in short supply, with our nearest ones being in Dunblane or Inverurie.

Unfortunately there has been little organic conversion of arable land to date. However, with organic aid schemes farmers and crofters can get payment for their land for the 2 year conversion time and to reduce production. To sell “organic” you have to be registered with a recognised association. 85% of Scotland’s producers register with the Scottish Organic Producers Association (SOPA).

The Scottish Agricultural College run courses on organic farming, and their advisers give free advice to anyone interested in conversion.

Structure of Talk

Why do people buy organic food?

- Incentives for converting to organic
 - Market incentives
 - Subsidy incentives
- What is organic?
 - Principles and certification
 - Standards of production
- Potential problems
- Conclusions

How should we define food quality?

- Nutritional value
 - * Chemical composition
- Hygienic safety
 - * Pathogen free
 - * Pesticide content
 - * Antibiotic/hormone content
- Sensory value
- Freshness

How do we define food quality? (2)

- Authenticity
 - * Extent of synthesis or adulteration in processing
- Ecological value
 - * Impact on environment/wildlife
 - * Food miles
- Ethical value
 - * Welfare status of livestock systems
- Political value
 - * Use of animal feedstuffs from Third world
 - * Use of potential human food for animals

Why do people buy organic food?

% of organic food consumers	Reason given
83	To avoid pesticides
75	Kinder to the environment
70	Concerned about intensive livestock
68	Better taste
40	Support for local farmers
36	Concerns about BSE

Source: Health Which 1997, 62-65

Farm gate prices for organic produce (August 2000)

	£/kg dcw
Finished beef	2.70 (R4L)
Store cattle	Conventional price + 20%
Finished lamb	2.80 (R3L)
Store lambs	Conventional price +20%
Milk	29.5 p/l
Feed wheat	£200/tonne
Feed barley	£175/tonne

Development of organic farming in Scotland

	1997	1998	2000
Area of organic land (Ha)	22,000	130,000	255,000
Total no. of organic farmers	120	300	500
Average farm size (Ha)	183	433	510

Principles of organic farming

- Working *with* natural systems rather than seeking to dominate them
- Enhancement of biological cycles
- Enhancement of soil fertility using minimum of non-renewable resources
- Avoidance of pollution
- Attention to animal welfare
- Protection of farm environment/wildlife
- Consideration of wider social impact

What is organic?

Under EC Regulation 2092/91

Only products licensed by an Approved Organic Sector Body, or licensed directly by a National Certifying Authority, may be labelled as organic or organically produced.

EC Regulation 1804/1999

- Defines organic livestock production
- Published August 1999
- Implemented August 2000

Organic livestock standards: dietary

- Ruminants: at least 60% forage DM on daily basis
- Allowance of non-organic feedstuffs: 10% of annual DM intake
- Conventional allowance disappearing in 200
- Mineral supplements allowed where deficiencies exist
- No artificial flavour enhancers/growth stimulants
- No GMO ingredients, fish meal for ruminants urea, solvent-extracted feeds

Organic livestock standards: veterinary

- Positive health management strategies
- Conventional drug therapy is allowed for individual sick animals
- Extended withdrawal period
- No preventative treatment of healthy animals with conventional drugs
- Except in case of specifically identified diseases or as part of agreed disease reduction plan

Gross Margin: organic store lambs

£ per 100 ewes			
Output	Store lambs	60@£31	1860
	Cast ewes	20@£15	300
	Wool	£1.30/ewe	130
	SAP	£17.13/ewe	1713
	HLCA	£9.87/ewe	987
Less	Ram replacement	£3.00/ewe	300
Total Output			4690
Variable costs	Feed costs	18kg@£370/tonne	660
	Hay	15kg@£95/tonne	143
	Vet/med	£3/ewe	300
	Other expenses	£4/ewe	400
Total costs			1503
Gross margin			3187

Potential problems associated with conversion

Technical

- Maintaining hay/silage yield (clover content)
- Maintaining spring grass growth
- Establishing positive health management strategies
- Reducing dependence on routine veterinary treatment
- Away wintering of ewes

Financial

- Certification charges
- Higher feed costs
- Information gathering costs

Marketing – organic sheep & beef

Negatives

- Geographic distribution of demand
- Large area of rough grazing in conversion
- Insufficient organic lowground for finishing
- Seasonality of supply versus uniform pattern of demand
- Poorly developed market infrastructure
- Abattoirs also need to be registered

So: can all stock achieve a premium?

Positives

- Market infrastructure improving
- Lack of supply is severely limiting market expansion
- Development of new markets – processes products, large scale caterers

Converting to organic in NW Sutherland: Conclusions

- A growing market
- Very strong brand image
- Good statutory support initially

but

- Potentially higher feed costs
- Marketing challenges
 - Surplus of store lambs in short term
 - Approved abattoirs?

Therefore - Need for co-operative production and marketing systems

David Younie is the organic specialist with the Scottish Agricultural College in Aberdeen.

Organic Farming in the Highlands & Islands of Scotland

Susan Steven
Highlands & Islands Organic Production

Susan Steven introduced herself as the secretary of the newly formed Highlands and Islands Organic Association. She spoke on the following themes:

- Organic Farming - the pros and cons
- Choice of produce
- Choice of outlet
- Improving the product
- Tourism & Education

She reiterated what David Younie said and added some very useful information on links and networks and the general management of an organic unit. She spoke about the way forward for the Highlands and Islands Association.

Organic Farming the pros and cons

People choose to farm organically for many reasons. There is no doubt that this method of farming is proving workable here in the north of Scotland. At the present time, the price for organic meat is sustainable and can be guaranteed all year round, especially through supermarket outlets. Store animals have a market in the south of England. Both of these outlets are opened and operated by OFS who market and advise organic farmers on the market requirements. However, on the down side we have to acknowledge the difficulties in producing meat on units, that in many instances, are unable to produce all of their feed requirements, especially the concentrate ration required to finish livestock here at home. We must also acknowledge the lower yields produced in the first couple of years after converting together with the cost of transport of livestock out of the area and foodstuff into the area.


Choice of produce

Historically a lot of livestock produced here leaves the area to be finished elsewhere. We feel strongly that we have a product worth eating ourselves. We as a group are endeavouring to find out how much organically finished lamb and beef is available here and armed with the information intend to encourage at least one local abattoir to become certified, at the same time, we need organic outlets to sell our produce. For example local consumers through butchers, home deliveries, restaurants, schools and hospital meals and self catering tourists.

We need to re-educate the public to again eat Hogget meat, hogget in terms of 15-18 month old mutton, supermarkets are now selling it and most of us know the tasting quality of sheep kept out on heather.

Choice of Outlet

By spreading the livestock into early finished, store and late finished we can spread our overheads and also our



income. LFA area instead of headage payments might in fact be helpful to the hill farmer and crofter. By keeping less stock, it could be possible to carry some animals over to finish and sell onto the local market. We as a group know that if we want to successfully sell our produce locally, we must be able to supply all year round.

Improving the product

It is important to have an identifiable product for sale on the home market, for example Herdwick sheepmeat in Cumbria. I have been told on more than one occasion that the reason for buying New Zealand Lamb is that it always tastes the same. We hope to try and encourage producers to market traditional breeds, for example S.B.F. and Cheviot sheep and British cattle, most people recognise Aberdeen Angus, Highland, Shorthorn, Galloway and Hereford.

Education

We hope to produce literature and create a Website which encourages local people and tourists to see the benefit in supporting local agriculture, explaining how local flocks and herds are kept in areas of scenic beauty and that the beauty of the Highlands and Islands goes hand in hand with crofting and farming.

Summary

Anyone interested in joining our group can take away an application form, or if you want information on organic groups, for example OFS, SOPA or BOG, I can give you names and addresses. Joyce Broklebank, secretary of the Cumbria Organic Group is here this weekend willing to talk and pass on information.

HIOA is making progress with regards to sourcing non GM and organic foodstuff. Our talks with local abattoirs is ongoing, with Granton Abattoir applying for organic certification. We intend to approach butchers through The Scottish Meat Traders Association, and we have some idea of finished livestock that will be available over the next two years.

Improving sheep stocks, HISS are doing work with Cheviot and SBF flocks and are interested in helping farmers and crofters improve their breeding stock.

Interestingly, we can grow more than we think, for instance, I grow really wonderful raspberries, blackcurrants and gooseberries all of which are disease free. Of course fruit and veg. Crops are more labour intensive, organic farming can call on the help of WWOOFS, I have details of this organisation. I also keep bees who pollinate my fruit bushes but get very little except for the heather crop, which has been good this year due to low rainfall since the flowers came out a few weeks ago. I converted a vernacular building into a holiday

home and with an ABIS grant I have planted hardwood trees on some good areas. Eggs is another sideline as is pigmeat. Personally keeping a few chickens and ducks some bee hives, fruit bushes, sheep, cattle and a couple of pigs varies my daily work and makes life interesting without the problems of high production in any one area. Small local companies producing preserves and chutneys are always looking for regular supplies of fruit and vegetables. I have spoken to a buyer at Dingwall mart who is willing to buy organic, but we need to get together and approach such people in groups.


Producer groups can help to cut costs to individual farmers and crofters, for instance, group membership of a machinery ring, more buying power, more clout in the market place and getting joint training courses. However, all too often the burden falls on a few to carry the whole group and the burden can become too great. The kind of help Producer Groups need from Government Agencies is money to pay an administrator, a willing worker instead of an overworked farmer or crofter stretching his or her time too far. Membership fees of a produce group only really pay for newsletters, telephone calls and postage.

Linking up with Consumers. Within our produce group we have great faith in our ability to source consumer outlets for our meat, once the mechanism of abattoirs and butchering facilities are in place, we intend to market our product vigorously. Our future ambitions also see markets for the less easy to market carcasses in the form of burgers and fast foods. Even older breeding animals can be turned into organic pet food here in the Highlands. Our vision is endless, our most pressing shortage in our quest is time to source and gather information and to source available and create new market outlets. We on the committee are all giving freely of our time because we believe in what we produce and believe that we can market some of the product here at home.

The idea of a Highlands & Islands Organic Producers Group was born from my need to make contact with other organic farmers. Having become certified in conversion in August 1999 it became apparent to me that I was isolated, in fact I did not know of any other organic farmer. I took it upon myself to approach my certifying body SOPA to ask for a list of other organic farmers in the Highlands and Islands. I was amazed to learn that there were 85 other producers in the area. Having approached the other 85 SOPA members our group was conceived and now includes the Soil Association members in the area.

It took the group quite a while to get itself organised and we have only been seriously addressing our needs since July of this year. Robin Harper MSP has agreed to be our patron.

Susan Steven runs an organic production unit near Abriachan, Drumnadrochit.



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Food Futures

Carole Inglis
Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise

Setting up of Food Futures

The first steps in the Food & Drink Initiative were:

- Food & Drink Directory
- Local Guide to Eating Out
- Food & Drink Festival

An important consideration was how to sustain the momentum and enthusiasm. This was tackled:

- Through benefits from projects running UK wide
- From tapping into existing information
- By establishing or finding common ground
- By helping to develop a shared vision
- By strengthening the local food sector
- By increasing access to good quality, fresh food

The overall project aims were:

- To bring different sectors, people and agencies together as a community
- To support and help that community in developing its own sustainable local food economy
- To offer a holistic approach to local food production, use and distribution
- To establish at least three new local food initiatives

Support was received from:

- Skye & Lochalsh Enterprise
- Leader II European programme
- Soil Association
- National lotteries Board

The first challenge was deciding where to start. A start was made:

- At a launch Event and first workshop in Portree, November 1999
- Second workshop in South Skye, Feb 2000
- Third and final workshop to be held in portree, Nov 2000

At the Launch Event:

- Over fifty attended
- Wide range of sectors represented
- Chance for networking
- Buffet lunch of fresh, quality local produce

Some of the issues raised and discussed were:

- More local outlets for local food
- Where to find local produce
- Better use of resources eg land
- Need for local meat supply
- More horticultural growers needed
- Quality, cohesive marketing/branding
- Education about access to local food
- Distribution and communication

One solution was the Distribution van. The key elements of this venture were:

- Offer of van and driver – ‘Your Local Food Link’
- One day pilot
- Six week funding
- SCDP grant
- SALE funding to extend pilot
- Business opportunity through distribution van/networking

Communication and Networking was achieved through:

- 200 newsletters circulated locally
- Action group meetings
- Cross-sectoral marketing activities
- Information from food futures team
- Beginnings of political interest
- New alliances eg Food and Learning Alliance, Skye and Lochalsh
- Inclusion of peripheral businesses

Providing examples of good practise was important in encouraging new producers. Solitote Nursery, North Skye is one such site which has been an inspiration to others.

The main accomplishments to date have been:

- Group of growers running box scheme
- Distribution van – weekly deliveries
- Food and learning alliance formed
- Better communication channels
- Local and global on-line information
- Further development of Natural Harvests logo for local branding

Other accomplishments include:

- New funding of £12,700 from Scottish Community Diet project
- Regular food column in local press
- Coverage of local producers in the Scottish press and on BBC radio
- Food hygiene & hazard analysis courses
- Permaculture to packaging workshops
- First stage meat survey completed


The questions to be asked about future work are:

How do we progress the issue of local meat for local people?
Should More use be made of local breeds?

The next steps for this initiative are:

- Constituted local food link group
- Cross-sectoral marketing group
- A further look at local branding
- Encouragement for retail outlets
- Web site for food and drink
- e-commerce development

Carole Inglis works for Skye & Lochalsh Enterprise as co-ordinator of the Food Futures Project



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Mail Order Meat **Michael Wigan** **Borrobol Estate**

Michael Wigan set up his mail order meat company in 1998 after the collapse of the market. He and another local farmer decided to sell lamb direct and miss out the middle-man, selling the product as hill lamb, slow grown at the rate God intended. They succeeded in getting a few orders from a potential list of 3000 possible buyers. This did not work.

Through his links as a journalist, he got a list of restaurants that the food editors felt worth contacting. The result of this was that they supplied 12 outlets, 10 of which were in London, because in the metropolis they have no access to local meat.

They only supply pure bred Cheviots and Blackface. The sheep are never inside, always on the hill, are never fed concentrates only fed silage and hay in winter. All his sheep can be traced back through the Borrobol flock book to 1898. The meat is slaughtered, hung for a week, butchered by Munro's of Dingwall and then packaged in Dingwall by Borroboll Estate. It then travels south labelled as North Highland Fine Lamb.

Transport and haulage are not a big part of the cost, only approximately 10%, and this is actually getting cheaper over time. There are advantages in e-mail and telephone but there is nothing to beat meeting the customer face to face. There is no such thing as a weekly order, you have to have the personal contact. Although many take the lamb every week they still need the personal touch, you can listen to what they want, what is their best seller and so on.

Hill lamb is far and away superior to park lamb and is on a par with wild game. We must capitalise on the fact that we have the potential to provide the best meat around. We have got to sell ourselves as well as our lamb. Half of the sheep in the EU are in Britain !! Why then are the British Army fed on lamb from Argentina and New Zealand?

Michael Wigan is a writer, journalist, entrepreneur and estate owner who has over the years experimented with a number of ideas for diversification on the estate.



North Highland Forest Trust -Wise Use of Resources

Jon Priddy

North Highland Forest Trust is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status and working in Caithness, Sutherland and part of Wester Ross. They aim to involve communities in forestry and promote wise and sustainable use of native woodland and new plantings. We need more woodland regeneration and planting in order to fulfil the potential of the resource. There are 9,000 hectare of forest in North Sutherland and 3,000 hectare in North West Sutherland. Jon gave us some details on climatic conditions that hinder the good growth of trees, a lot of these seem to be prevalent in North Sutherland. It's wet, it's windy and it's overcast!! Nevertheless our woods can be productive:

- Mushroom Logs - Shitake and Oyster
- Charcoal
- Furniture
- Fencing
- Native woodland seed supply

The main essentials for success in developing a product depends on your logo, labelling and marketing.

Practical ways of using woods to their potential:

- Shelter belts
- Tourism
- Recreation
- Wood fuel systems
- Wood chips for cattle corrals

Problems to be addressed:

- Transport road and rail.
- Treating wood (dipping) locally - nearest Golspie
- Lack of local contractors
- Lack of school leavers who go into forest management

We seem to have lost the link between people and the woods, but the 500 people turning out for the North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust Open Day at Borgie proved that all is not lost

A wood culture is essential

Jon Priddy is the manager of the North Highland Forest Trust. He has worked for many years in the Highlands and is committed to getting communities more involved in existing forests and the potential for new developments.

Field Visits

The group visited Dalcharn Native Woodlands Regeneration Scheme. This scheme has been undertaken by the Tongue Grazing Committee. The woodland is mainly Birch and Rowan. It has been fenced and access improved. In the wood, we were shown logs injected with Shitake and Oyster mushroom spawn. It is hoped to start a charcoal burning facility in the wood, and also to use suitable wood for traditional furniture making.

Despite adventures with the bus the group were finally able to move on to Borgie Forest. Sandy Murray explained how the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust had come about and how they hoped to develop. We also saw the local Millennium Forest Trust Scotland project which is sited in Borgie Forest. This is based on the Gaelic tree alphabet and takes the form of a spiral wood walk with artwork by local school children.

Due to bad weather conditions we moved quickly on to Skerry and continued the forest discussion in the Village Hall. In Skerry we saw the Sgeireaidh Dubh. This is a small herd of Black Highland Cattle, run as a co-operative. We also visited the local shop which sells local produce and products, books, groceries and houses the local Post Office. At this site there is also a community office, a small local archive, workshop and garden centre.



Day 2 Introduction

Sandy Murray

Sandy Murray introduced the second day of the seminar. He emphasised the potential we have in our area. From the enormous amounts of sheep we export, to the boat builders, artists, and other producers. The important things Sandy pointed out as vital to all three Dùthchas areas, is to add value to the products produced in our unique environment. To produce a logo for our areas and promote not only the goods, but also the place where these goods and products come from.

Sandy Murray is a local crofter, Chairman of the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust and works for Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise as an advisor on crofting.

Developing the local food economy in the Cumbrian Fells

Geoff Brown
Cumbria Fells & Dales Leader II Programme

Geoff introduced us to his area by showing a video on the Cumbrian Dales.

Geoff pointed out that very few families now work solely on the farm, people all have other incomes along with farming. More economic activity is needed to boost the low income familiar with farming today. In the Cumbrian Dales they have developed local enterprises and activities through the Leader II Programme. They have learned to exploit and market their local produce.

As tourism provides the largest income for the Dales, work has been done to interconnect this with the local produce available in the area. Cafes that produce all their own local baking and recipes, Bed and Breakfasts using all local produce, all enhances the economy. Rather than using imported lamb, hotels should be using local meat.

The main aim is to find a market for what the farmers are producing. Key issues include:

- There are few major slaughter houses remaining in Cumbria. They are at the moment trying to open a new one. There is still some on farm slaughtering
- Publicity can fall in front of you because people want traceable, fresh, quality goods
- Leader run a bottom up programme
- Distribution can be a problem. Although the customers are there it is getting it to them that can be difficult with health regulations etc.
- Branding schemes have to be genuine
- Keep it local
- Have traditional and specific breeds
- Use the landscape and traditional culture as marketing tools
- You have to know your product and what your customers want.
- Be positive about traditional hill farming areas
- Organic is not necessarily better for you or the animal or the land than the traditional farming methods.
- Sell meat through tourism
- Leader + is starting soon. The Scottish Office has to produce a Leader Plan for the future and proposals have to come from local action groups.

Geoff Brown is the local Leader II Project Manager in his area.



Turbogrisen - On-farm slaughtering in Sweden

Camilla & Jompa Wolgers, Sweden

“Turbopig” is a family run on-farm slaughtering facility and farm. They have 35 hectare of rented organic farmland, with cows and pigs. The main activities are:

- 50-80 small pigs are sold
- 30-50 pigs are used for catering, served as spit roast at weddings etc
- 120-150 pigs are for slaughtering

The average pig is 6-7 months old, 84kg, with 57% classified fat content when slaughtered. The pigs are kept outdoors all the time, with specially designed winter shelter.

Key facts:

- Contract slaughtering has risen steadily since 1999 from 20% up to 50% of their income
- Camilla & Jompa slaughter, butcher and package the meat then the farmers sell it to local stores themselves
- Converted an old dairy into the slaughter house for their own production first
- Cost £47,000 in total
- Allowed to slaughter 1000 units per year = 3000 pigs
= 20 units a week
1 unit = 1 bull/cow/calf
= 3 pigs
= 6 lambs
- Cut the meat exactly how the customer requests it on the order form
- 1999 - 600 pigs slaughtered and 200 lambs
- 2000 - already 750 pigs slaughtered and 100 lambs
- They sell none to stores - just sell it directly to customers
- Vet bills are very expensive - they visit twice in every slaughtering occasion.

Producer led marketing – The English Experience

Mark Redman

Agriculture is not the backbone of rural development, it is the heart of it. Local food should be for local people, with a local food economy, that embraces:

- Production
- Prices
- Distribution
- Purchasing

There should be a patchwork of community action around the theme of local food. We need to encourage innovation and new ideas. We need to be optimistic and use all the resources we have i.e. land, knowledge, as well as money.

“Local Food Links” takes in a lot of different areas. Farm shops, delivery vans, boxing schemes, farmers markets, food co-operatives, Internet sales etc. The common theme is that it puts people more in touch with local produce. Local foods link schemes are eminently fundable.

The following are examples of existing schemes -

- Devon Food Links
- Somerset Food links
- West Country Community Food Links
- West Dorset Food and Land Trust

All four encourage farmers markets. The West Dorset Food and Land Trust is close to the community and is thriving, while the others are handicapped by their top down approach.

Agriculture has to be assisted and restructured by farm diversification and to do this a new Rural Development Policy needs to be implemented. We need to encourage small businesses, and partnerships, reintroduce young people into farming and regenerate the local economy in our areas. Community development is necessary and the main word for everyone to remember is **co-operation**.

Mark now works independently with a marketing co-operation with a zero profit policy - F3.



Direct Marketing Opportunities in the Highlands & Islands

Donnie MacLeod
- Macleod Organics, Ardersier

The demand for organic produce is five times higher than what is supplied. 57% of the nation want to eat organic food - 80% of organic produce is imported. We need to go back to the future. Go back to the farming methods of thousands of years ago - organic.

Ardersier Boxing Scheme supplied to the Farmers Market in Inverness, then opened their own shop on the farm. They employ seven people, have 130 ewes, 12 cows and 130 acres of land.

Before 1991 there were no boxing schemes in the U.K. Now there is a turnover of £31.6 million produced by producers certified with the Soil Association. Some 25,000 homes are supplied by boxing schemes.

The Ardersier Boxing Scheme delivers to over 400 families every 2 weeks. They do not supply hotels or restaurants, only private homes, which are more sustainable all year round customers.

Did you know - 50% of all organic carrots sold in Tesco are from Ardersier. Normally farmers get one fifth of the price that the store charges the customer for the product. For example the farm price for 1 tonne of potatoes is £80, shop price is £700. So if you go half way and the customer is paying half the price and the farmer is getting near double for his bag of potatoes everyone would be happy. The market for organic meat is mushrooming at the moment.

People have a varied diet and should not be limited to only the organic products they can get locally. People will go to the supermarket if you can not provide them with what they want. Donnie believes the best way is to run a hierarchy system of produce. Once you have decided what is going in the boxes, you have to take control of the marketplace and go through the following steps to get them:

- Local - Taken from local source if available
- Highland - If not available locally, then go to the rest of the Highlands
- Scotland - If the product can not be found in Highland the search widens to Scotland
- U.K. - If the product is not available in Scotland than go to the U.K. market
- E.U - After the British search, the product is hunted for in Europe
- World-wide - if the product is not available in the European Union the search goes world-wide to find your organic product.



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If the farm has excess goods it sells to similar organic boxing schemes in the same hierarchy system. Local first, then Highland, then Scottish and so on - 70% of the boxes are Scottish all year

Donnie Macleod is an organic farmer from Ardersier, who opened his presentation with the one and only huge success story in farming at present and that is Organics.



A Success Story

Calina MacDonald – Skye Horticulture

Summary

Skye Horticulture was set up in 1994, and started with soft fruit and vegetables. Wind is a big problem but now a lot of fruit is grown in polytunnels and is doing very well.

The demand for local produce was surveyed. We have got to bridge the gap between producer and consumer. One hotelier who said you cannot grow anything in Skye has recently received an award for his menu using local produce. Locals as well as hotels want to buy the local produce, so a market stall was created which only sells goods grown in Skye. This stall employs one market assistant and one grower to man the stall, from March to September. The stall has raised the awareness of the quality of local produce and it provides an outmarket for growers. There is not enough produce to cope with the demand at the market. If you put “Skye” on a product tourists cannot get enough of it.

There is a local boxing scheme which operates during the growing season, run by one grower. Demand for the local produce is rising, and more growers are needed. With 50 members, 20-25 of which are crofters it is clear that more crofters have to be persuaded that this is the way to go because they have the land.

Formation and Aims

Skye and Lochalsh Development Association was established in February 1994 with the objective of developing all aspects of the horticulture trade that could be of local economic and environmental benefit in Skye and Lochalsh. The Association aims to raise awareness of horticulture generally, expand existing markets and identify new ones. It aims to displace unnecessary imported skills and products by developing local skills and resources to supply the market requirements and thus create more employment locally.

Skye and Lochalsh is traditionally a crofting area with a widely spread population most of which are dependant on land and livestock production. However, in recent years there has been a shift away from traditional crofting methods to a system of permanent grazing of land and the skills involved in growing have been lost because of this shift. With the downturn in traditional livestock production, the Association has recognised and identified the potential for alternative land use in the area and for sustainable developments such as horticulture, and feels that there are opportunities for a number of full-time and part-time horticulture related business developments.

Experiences so far

Over the past 6 years the SLHDA, with funding from both the Highland Council and through the LEADER programme of Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise, established a number of trial sites throughout the area to produce a range of crops ie soft fruit and vegetables, and have supported and developed these sites to produce for the local market. In the first instance, a wide range of various soft fruit and vegetables was grown over a two year period and this was a very useful learning period to establish which varieties and produce fared best in our climatic conditions. It was established that a number of products eg soft fruits (strawberries and raspberries especially), did not give good yields when grown in open field conditions. Subsequently these crops are now grown as protected crops ie in polytunnels. It also identified that marketing the produce was a problem for some growers and this was identified as a real issue which needed to be solved. Supplying direct to the local wholesaler also was not successful as the produce lost its 'local' identity and the price achieved for the produce was not considered to be the best for the grower.

A Market Research Survey carried out on behalf of the Association in 1998 highlighted the demand for local produce from both the local catering and retail sectors as well as from the public. This pinpointed the areas (as well as the establishments) which we needed to target and supply and when this was done, along with the appointment of a co-ordinator, then the gulf between the producer and the user was bridged.

It was quickly established that the supply far outstripped demand and that there was a need for local produce to be more easily available to the general public. With this goal in mind, the Association purchased and set up a weekly 'market stall' in Portree which offers growers the opportunity to sell their produce direct to the public. Although this is perceived by some as a 'farmers market' there is in fact only our own stall and we set this up before the present popularity for farmers markets became established. This stall, which runs weekly from the beginning of July to the end of September, has proved to be very well supported by the public (despite being sited outside – in all weathers!) and also gives the growers a dedicated and regular outlet for their produce. For the growers this also means that they are getting the best price for their produce without any 'middle men', although the stall is run as a co-operative venture by the Association and small charge is levied to cover the costs of packaging, equipment etc. It also means that the Association and its growers are able to promote the 'locally grown and produced' nature of their product, which can be lost when sold through a third party ie wholesaler. It also gives the growers and the buyers an opportunity to be 'face to face' and there is no better 'market research' than the horse's mouth!! However, the market stall is not the only outlet for the growers and an

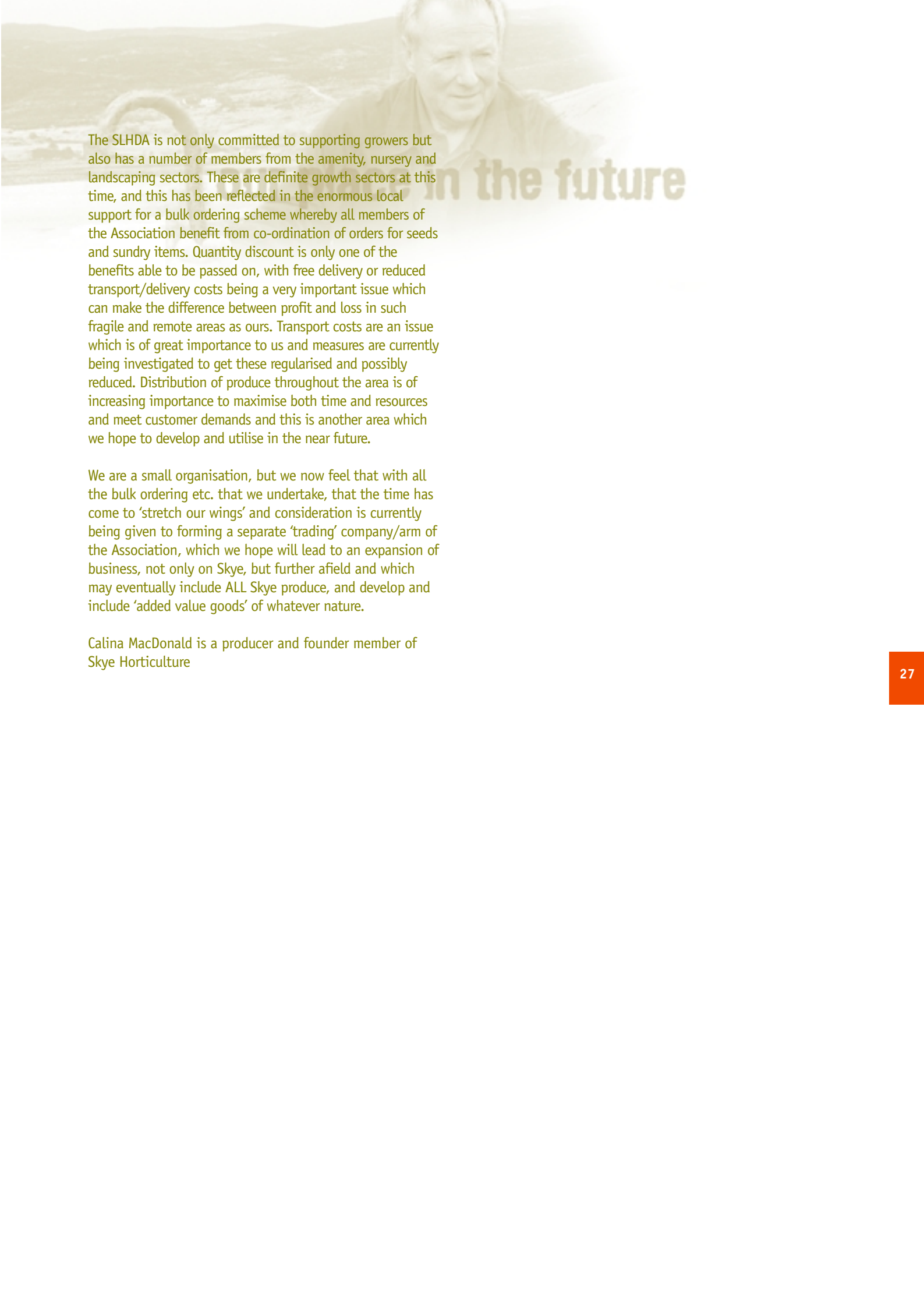
increasing number are now being asked, and are able to supply, direct to the local hotels and restaurants. We have a high proportion of restaurants and hotels featured in the 'good Food Guide', and it is well recognised by these establishments that when a product is prefixed or labelled 'Skye' or 'Locally grown/produced', it becomes a menu favourite – not to mention very high quality and superb taste. A number of growers also run their own Box Schemes although with the widespread populus of Skye, this can mean spending a lot of time and fuel delivering small quantities to far flung customers. However, this is a system which is finding favour with some residents although the 'die in the wool' Sgiathanachs still 'like to see what I'm getting', not to mention that they are getting the 'best' available!!

The Future

As demand for our produce increases, it is essential that we continue to recruit and encourage more growers. This is a very real and urgent requirement and one which has been repeated every year since the project began. Recruiting members to the Association has proved very successful so far with a turnout at our AGM of almost 70 people, a high proportion of whom were new members. We hope that this level of interest and participation will continue and that some of these will eventually go on to be producers.

Last year a number of members came together to form an Organic Producers Group with Soil Association accreditation and we now have the nucleus for a possible second group. The aim of this group is to share the heavy cost involved in achieving and maintaining Soil Association registration and by forming a 'Producer Group' these costs are divided among 10 members. This form of co-operative lessens the heavy burden of Organic costs for small producers and is something I feel should be encouraged more by the Soil Association and other organic bodies. Unfortunately, it would appear that this is not what is actually happening on the ground, and indeed the costs of inspection are increasing and the rules of registration and conforming are becoming ever more onerous.

Organic produce was already available from one of our members but formation of this group and the possibility of further groups, will ensure that fresh organic produce will be more widely available throughout our area. However, it should not be overlooked that ALL the produce grown by our members is grown as naturally as possible with little or no chemicals. Climatic conditions, less intense production methods and selection of proven varieties, as well as inclusion of modern growing methods and techniques means that Skye can produce quality produce to match any produced elsewhere in Britain and possibly even further afield – Nick Nairn certainly thinks our Skye strawberries are the best he has ever tasted!!



The SLHDA is not only committed to supporting growers but also has a number of members from the amenity, nursery and landscaping sectors. These are definite growth sectors at this time, and this has been reflected in the enormous local support for a bulk ordering scheme whereby all members of the Association benefit from co-ordination of orders for seeds and sundry items. Quantity discount is only one of the benefits able to be passed on, with free delivery or reduced transport/delivery costs being a very important issue which can make the difference between profit and loss in such fragile and remote areas as ours. Transport costs are an issue which is of great importance to us and measures are currently being investigated to get these regularised and possibly reduced. Distribution of produce throughout the area is of increasing importance to maximise both time and resources and meet customer demands and this is another area which we hope to develop and utilise in the near future.

We are a small organisation, but we now feel that with all the bulk ordering etc. that we undertake, that the time has come to 'stretch our wings' and consideration is currently being given to forming a separate 'trading' company/arm of the Association, which we hope will lead to an expansion of business, not only on Skye, but further afield and which may eventually include ALL Skye produce, and develop and include 'added value goods' of whatever nature.

Calina MacDonald is a producer and founder member of Skye Horticulture

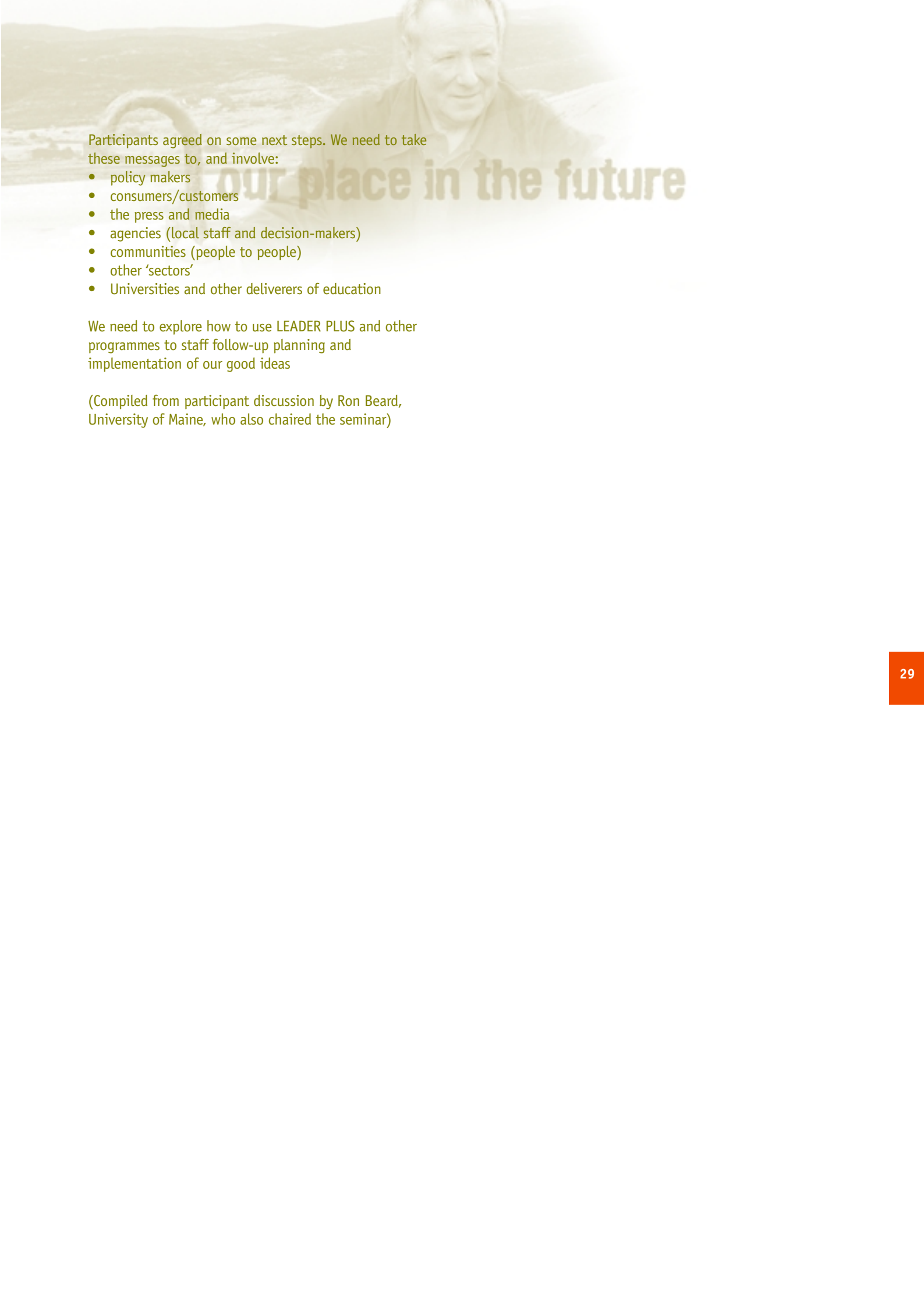
our land, our people...

Discussion

Themes that came out of discussion led by Ron Beard, University of Maine.

At the end of the seminar, participants drew the following lessons from the examples of successful local production and marketing:

- **Co-operation** and **co-ordination** are essential
- **Networking** speeds up learning and progress and brings new ideas together with people
- **Face to Face talking** helps - whether talking to customers or people in a position to aid or block what we are doing
- **Education** in the broadest sense is an important ingredient in a local production strategy
- We need to **monitor bureaucracies** to assure that they are serving us, rather than the other way round
- **Self confidence** is the most important asset to any community or business enterprise
- **Self confidence** helps develop a “can do” culture, enabling us to say “Nay” to the naysayers
- We have **quality products** and **talented, hard working** and **resourceful people** as a basis for our strategies
- We have endless **market opportunities...** customers value local, fresh products and the market for organically produced food and fibre is expanding
- We need services of **local abattoirs**, and there seem to be examples of other communities solving this problem
- **Adding value** to local products is a key strategy... as long as the value is added locally!
- **“Bottom-up” initiatives work**—we shared examples.
- **Environmental quality** counts to consumers
- Innovation and tradition are valuable characteristics
- Ongoing **support** is useful for ongoing **progress**
- **Listening** to people is a key strategy
- We can **educate customers** about the value of our products (The worth of a product or a practice is in the eye of the beholder—we can educate the beholder)
- **Sustainable practices** aid us in the long run
- **We can meet our needs locally if we work together**
- **Food trends are led by both consumer and producer**
- **We have good examples of communities taking things** into their own hands
- **Distribution** of products is a key issue
- **Local people harvesting local landscapes** is a sustainable practice that brings local gains
- **We need long-term thinking (strategies, funding, policies)**



Participants agreed on some next steps. We need to take these messages to, and involve:

- policy makers
- consumers/customers
- the press and media
- agencies (local staff and decision-makers)
- communities (people to people)
- other 'sectors'
- Universities and other deliverers of education

We need to explore how to use LEADER PLUS and other programmes to staff follow-up planning and implementation of our good ideas

(Compiled from participant discussion by Ron Beard, University of Maine, who also chaired the seminar)

Seminar Evaluation

This was done by sending out an evaluation sheet with a thank-you letter (and a reply paid envelope) to the speakers and attendees. The 12 speakers responded as did 25 attendees.

The questions asked (on a scale - 0 - 5+) were -

Was the programme relevant ?

With one exception all the speakers answered 4/5 to this question and attendees were unanimous - 4/5.

Was the programme informative ?

The responses were the same.

Was the seminar enjoyable ?

The responses were the same

What, if anything, do you feel was missing from the seminar ?

The speakers in general would have liked more time to get to grips with issues, and to have seen more local people there, (posters were put up locally and there was an invitation in the local press). The attendees also noted the lack of local people, crofters and other producers, some people felt that more written information could have been available.

What, in your opinion, was the highlight of the seminar?

The speakers in general enjoyed the opportunity to meet and speak with enthusiastic committed people. They highlighted the presentations by Michael Wigan, Dick Birnie and Camilla Wompers as being of special interest. The attendees particularly enjoyed Michael Wigan and Geoff Brown and Camilla, but felt all the speakers were excellent, presenting us with new ways of looking at things. Many felt that the chair did an excellent job. Every one was impressed by the hospitality & the beautiful scenery.



our place in the future

"The sight of the Citylink coach stuck where a coach should never have been"

"Blazing Fiddles were brilliant"

"Overall this was a combination of good information exchange and ideas and an excellent social event"

"The enthusiasm of the speakers and Blazing Fiddles"

"Michael Wigan!"

"There was not one highlight - the quality and relevancy of the speakers made the event outstanding"

"Listening to Joan Campbell is a treat, she has a special quality of words and when you listen to her you start to understand what Dirthchas is all about"

"The talk by Michael Wigan was wonderful - informative, funny and off the cuff."

"The highlight of the seminar? North Sutherland!"

"Camilla Wompers - inspiring!"

"Watching a coach driver attempt mission impossible"

"Just being there amongst lively and engaged people"

Conclusion

The seminar was a great success. All the speakers were first class and it is a pity that their enthusiasm and energy is not done justice by the written word. The ideas put forward were exciting, innovative and thought provoking. If there is any message to be taken forward then it is to keep fighting for small producers and all the advantages inherent in the produce which they have to offer.



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