ResULTS project: case study C, interview 191

Face to face interview with crofter, conducted 21/2/19

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R

I Do you want to tell me about yourself, you’re lecturing as well?

R I am involved with the Scottish Crofting Federation at the moment. They have this access to crofting toolkit, which used to be called the introduction to crofting course, and they run… They’re just coming to the end of three years of the training current funding round, as part of that they ran these five weekend access to crofting toolkit courses which consisted of five visiting speakers plus other bits and bobs, and I delivered two of the lectures on that weekend course, one on croft land management and one on crofting livestock.

I And you’ve got your croft here?

R That’s right, I’ve got my own croft here. I was brought up in the Western Isles, I did countryside management at university, Aberdeen, under Bill Slee, and then I stayed there and did a masters in rural planning. Then I got a job with SNH, came here, got a croft, built a house on it and we’ve had it nearly 15 years now, we’ve slowly been developing it.

We run about 25 ewes and then keep the lambs, about 30 hogs and we’ve got two Dexter cows that are both in calf at the moment, and a heifer that I’ll sell next year. We grow our own silage and what we do, the reason we keep the hogs is that we shear them for the first time and actually get the wool processed, my wife has a little online yarn business called Croft 29 selling Hebridean yarn. There’s a diversification there with the yarn and then last year we built the chalet there, self-catering. That’s kind of what we do on our croft, it’s very much spare time. I work for a firm of solicitors as a land agent, my wife works at the local school.

I The Dexters, is that a new venture?

R We’ve had them about five years. We’ve had the sheep for 12-13 years and about five or six years ago we decided to get these cows, so we’ve just got the two.

I Do you sell the calves?

R Until now we’ve slaughtered two bullocks for our own use, I sold two at the back end of last year to somebody who wanted to use them for rough grazing and then to put them in the freezer, and we’ve got a heifer calf here that I’ll probably sell in the spring, she’s crossed with an Aberdeen Angus. I’ve used the Dexter bull, a Shetland bull twice and then an Aberdeen Angus bull, and now they’re in calf to that Dexter again.

I Where do you get the bulls from?

R That is one of my problems. A friend of mine in [area 10] had Shetland cows for a few years and I used his Shetland bull but then he got rid of them, and I borrowed a young Aberdeen Angus bull from a neighbour then this past year I got the loan of a Dexter bull from one of the people that I got one of the cows from, so it came from [area 8].

I So very local?

R It is a pest, even at our kind of scale that logistics of getting a bull, because you can’t just use, it’s all Charolais and Limousins round here, and you can’t use them on a Dexter. I even thought last year should I just buy one, but that’s what we do. I love the cows and they work really well, they’re great for the ground here, they eat relatively little and our ground’s pretty soft and wet as you can imagine. They’re wintered outside, we’ve got a lean-to they come in and out of but they’re not inside as such.

I Although I’m talking to crofters I’m also talking to other sorts of people, so we’re thinking about the whole food system. You’ve got the food chain where you’ve got the crofters and the farmers, and you’ve got the inputs and the outputs going through the consumers, and all supporting things whether they’re vets or, I guess SCF would be a supporting organisation. You mentioned you’re on the grazing committee as well so I suppose that will fit in here somewhere, and there’s the animals and the plants. Then there’s all the other stakeholders who get affected, the environment, general public as tourists and so on.

We’re interested in all of these things, and we’re particularly interested in interactions and trade-offs because it’s great when you have a win:win that’s an easy decision it’s when you get trade-offs that life gets difficult. What would resilience mean to you?

R That’s interesting, I’m halfway through doing the Princes Farm Resilience programme at the moment. Straight away you think about the economic resilience, and I think are you making enough money to make it worthwhile doing. Having said that, of course in a crofting situation really, is it worth your while.

In a crofting situation you’re very much thinking about community resilience and the resilience of, you need that critical mass of people that are working, not necessarily working together but are able to help each other, and those networks are very difficult to map and to standardise and make policy for. We’re very fortunate here in that there’s a lot of active crofting going on in this part of [area C], if you were to go to [area 11] perhaps or [area 12] there’s fewer numbers of people doing it. I’m very fortunate as a very small-scale crofter to be able to draw on help support advice [inaudible] from people around me, so there’s that sort of community resilience.

I Why do you think there’s more crofting around here?

R I don’t know actually. I’m sure greater minds than mine have… [area 13] was traditionally called the bread basket of [area C], it’s perhaps more fertile, the crofts aren’t particularly bigger but the ground is generally better, good access to common grazings, and it’s the part of [area C] that’s held on to its Gaelic culture and heritage most, maybe that’s because it’s farthest away, it’s quite remote.

I Does that help with the community, the Gaelic?

R I think the two are linked, yes. Our school is on the up at the moment, there’s quite a lot of young families here, I think it’s the only rural school in [area C] that is increasing in numbers. So there’s community and communal resilience, financial resilience. You can speak about environmental resilience as well can’t you, I’ve not given much thought to how you quantify that or clarify it.

I We’ve got three ideas about resilience, more concepts, the first one is about absorptive capacity, so if something goes wrong, let’s say you have a bad year, can you just cut your income and cut what you do? There will come a point when you can’t do that or you reduce the stocking density, or you increase the stocking, you do something to absorb change.

R I think that’s where the crofting system is so strong compared to I guess somewhere like the Lake District where people tend to be full-time farmers. Here we’ve got a lot of full-time crofters but even within that they’re not just working full-time on their own croft, they’re full-time agriculturalists but not full-time farmers. I think that’s where that crofting system is very resilient because it allows people, because they’ve got other jobs mostly self-employed it allows them to, if you’ve got a bad year on the croft you could maybe do a bit more with your digger or if it’s a good year on the croft do a bit less with the digger or if it’s a bad year on the digger you spend spare days doing that ditching on the croft that you’ve always meant to do. So there’s that kind of linkage.

I feel, I think the Scottish Government has overlooked crofting, it’s very keen to get new entrants into farming and all that kind of thing. I think it’s overlooked not just crofting but the crofting model where people are working maybe part-time on a croft but it’s the basis of that self-employed business that they run.

I Would most of the crofters have jobs outside, or would it be that they make another job out of their…

R I don’t know the statistics but thinking about some of the folk round here, they’re full-time crofters but they’ll do a lot of gathering for other people or they’ll work the sheep stock club or like myself, I’m very small-scale. People will maybe have, they may be builders or the wife will be a teacher or that kind of thing.

I Is it easy to get jobs?

R It’s not that easy to get a job but we’re really fortunate on [area C], I think that it’s a place where it’s quite easy… Self-employment, there’s good opportunities for developing a business. I suppose tourism and the economy is strong so if you’re not doing tourism directly then it’s knocking on from that. The construction industry for instance has been booming, and house prices are a lot stronger, they’re insane compared to other parts of the Highlands.

I One of the older crofters said that there used to be far more work, the government used to subsidise road building and people get jobs on the roads, but there were far more infrastructure type jobs, which made me wonder whether the centralisation tendency that everything goes to Inverness, everything gets centralised because it’s cheaper that way. Has that affected the social resilience here at all?

R I’m sure it has, absolutely. Somebody my age was saying how they were brought up in [town 2], and even then there was a resident doctor, a resident policeman, teacher. So straight away that was three professional people, three families, three people who would be contributing to the community, helping to run the youth club and that kind of thing, all of which have gone now and they’ve been centralised to [town 3] or Inverness. For sure that makes your community less resilient.

I Do you find there’s a lot of incomers, you said there was a lot of crofting and Gaelic speaking so it sounds like there’s actually people who’ve stayed here?

R Yes, and I don’t know the statistics but I would say [area 13], [area 10], [town 2], it just feels like proportionally there’s more indigenous people than maybe other parts of [area C]. I don’t have the numbers but that’s my kind of feeling.

I The second thing is, you start doing incremental changes, you get in a different breed of bull or that kind of thing, you change something that you do slightly. And the third one is that you do something completely different, that might be tourism, energy, growing trees, does that make a sense to you the way we’re trying to think about these things? What do you think, is there a dominant pattern in this particular area?

R I wouldn’t say there was one particular thing. Number three I would say when single farm payment came in that was a radical change because people realised that they didn’t have to keep animals to get the subsidy, so they got rid of a lot of hill flocks then particularly. [inaudible ] has been going on, tourism is the classic one there.

I If you want to be resilient, what does resilience mean, does it mean that you’ve got an income, is that enough or are there other things? These are some things we’ve picked up and I wondered if any of these particularly resonated with you or were definitely not the case, or if there was something missing that you thought actually what is important to you is to maintain X.

R I’ll say for myself then. Profit margins, the croft washes its face but we don’t take any money from it, it doesn’t cost us anything but we don’t get an income from it, so in that respect we’d be better off getting a spare time job stacking shelves. Succession, I suppose the family are too young. The family are too young to be thinking about it yet and also it’s not, this isn’t a family croft so I don’t know whether that affects the way I think about it. Local employment opportunities, I’m fortunate we’ve got plenty of work and plenty of part-time opportunities, I think the difficulty is juggling and balancing them through the peaks and troughs. Respect for the community, absolutely. I’m very involved with the community council and the village hall and the local church, so that ties in with social cohesion and respect for community. Food security, we eat our own meat, we grow a bit of veg but nowhere near enough to sustain us, so there’s not security there. I’ve spoken already about our wool so there’s a diversification there. Do we do it for personal and family satisfaction and wellbeing, of course we do.

In terms of the wider public goods, yes I believe in all of these things and I do think that by properly managing, with my background working for SNH I understand that, I’m in favour of it. It kind of has to make economic sense as well, we’re not rich enough that we can do it for the general good of mankind. All these things I feel it’s good to have our land in good strip and positively manage it, and I try and do my bit to encourage the common grazings to be managed positively and properly and environmentally.

I When you got the cattle you said that affected the way that your land is grazed, have you noticed a difference in terms of what you want out of the land?

R Do you mean in terms of land improvement? Not particularly. I suppose it does give us a bit more dung to spread and I’ve been able to take back rougher areas that the cows have taken on better than the sheep but getting the cows wasn’t a bit strong business decision or anything, it was just because we fancied it.

I How open do you find the grazing committee is to, what sort of things do you do to manage the grazing better?

R Not a lot. I’m the grazings clerk, we’re fortunate we’ve got a grazings committee, I think half of commons grazings don’t have a committee, the Crofting Commission will tell you that. We have done, we did five years of land managers options and for summer cattle grazing. We applied for the AECS scheme last year, didn’t get in so we’ve got to apply again this year, just for rural and management. We don’t have a big income stream on our common grazings like some, we don’t have a wind turbine or a hydro scheme or anything like that, so it’s all very low key, but maintaining the fences and making sure the [inaudible] works properly and that kind of thing.

I How might something like carbon management and managing the peat, how does that fit into it?

R If there was money for that through a scheme I think I would be very much encouraging the committee to go down that route. At the moment we do it anyway, and I suppose maybe we wouldn’t call it that but I think we all want that.

I Thinking about some of the pressures and challenges, they’re either challenges or opportunities, we usually think of them all as challenges. Anything here that resonates with you, if I asked you to say the top five?

R Weather has changed. I am old enough to know that it has changed and people older than me will tell you that it has. This land soil and habitat degradation, round here it’s to do with land abandonment, the fact that croft land isn’t used as well or as much as it used to be. We’ve lost that cycle of, in a place like this nutrients wash out pretty quick and we’ve lost the benefits of that rotational cropping and lots of cattle putting the dung on and that kind of thing, and also the seasonal grazing which is so good for the environment, people are keeping sheep in-bye all the time so you end up with that kind of monoculture. I would say degradation is to do with land abandonment and then the challenges of bringing it back is hard work, it’s a slow process.

I When you say coming back, what sorts of things were you thinking of?

R Our croft here for instance, and then we’ve got the subtenancy of a croft along the road which we took on four years ago, cutting rushes, drainage, improving the pH in soil, improving the grass sward and getting rid of the weeds, that kind of thing, making it so you can actually drive a tractor over it.

Brexit and the subsidies is a massive thing, the fact that we don’t know what subsidies are going to look like. I’m not a subsidy junkie but I think you do need to be able to know what your income source is going to be. You’ve got the social drivers here, limited basic infrastructure, broadband, roads, slaughterhouses, all of them, access to services, absolutely. Demographic pressures, there’s a lot of old people here.

I How does that make you feel as a young person?

R I’m not that young any more. From a community perspective I feel that it’s very difficult in this community, we are a disadvantaged area but then as a community it’s very difficult to push ourselves on because the numbers of people that can and do are a much smaller proportion of the overall population.

I Would you like to see more people taking on the abandoned crofts, younger people with a bit more energy?

R Yes. We’re fortunate here that a lot of, in [area 13] a lot of the crofts are well managed. I think I’m more speaking about the community infrastructure and the community, just those strands that tie a community together. Social cohesion.

I Things like youth clubs or doing the shopping for somebody or that kind of thing?

R Yes, or the fact that it’s the same few people that are on every committee, which is not ideal. I suppose you do see other communities, you see case studies of communities that have really pulled themselves up by the boot straps and they’ve got the time, it’s the people with the time and drive and determination and the skills. I would say that’s about it.

I How influential is the church? You said you were involved with the church, that would be the one in [area 13]?

R That’s right, yes.

I Does that help derive some kind of social infrastructure?

R Yes it does. Not formally, it’s not like there’s loads of different formal support networks but I think informally it is.

I Challenges, these are mostly to do with the food side of things rather than the social side, although I think it is difficult to separate these out, is there anything there that strikes you? I’m thinking particularly if you’re doing the Princes Trust course whether there is anything that can come out of that for you.

R Is this me personally?

I You could answer both ways, you personally or in one of your representative roles.

R For myself I’m constantly looking at ways to improve my efficiency and I suppose diversify into new income sources, whether that’s within agriculture or outwith agriculture, using the croft and where we live as a basis for that. Yes, we do share resources and machinery, formally and informally.

I Is there a sheep club or machinery club or anything like that?

R No there isn’t, not here, we don’t have a sheep stock club on our common grazings but myself and my neighbour have bought quite a bit of equipment together, we share that and find that that works quite well. I break it and he fixes it. Then in terms of, what I said earlier about you can phone people for help or advice and that kind of thing, and I’d like to think that you’d offer… Maybe I see, as township clerk I’m able to fill forms in that maybe couldn’t get done otherwise, like filling in the IACS form and that sort of thing.

I’d love to use renewable energy but it’s the capital investment that we as a family have never been in a position to do. Increasing market status, brand reputation, it sounds great but… We’ve got a great opportunity on our doorstep, the [area C], as somebody said recently you could brand that, you could sell [area C] sheep poo, it’s such an amazing brand but it’s actually how to do that well and how to do that properly.

I Does that work for your wool?

R To an extent, yes. I think what we feel is in terms of that little business would be the limiting factor is time.

I You’ve sent it away to be processed?

R Yes, we send it away to be processed and then we get it back, but I would say the marketing of it and the promotion of it that takes the time.

I So you don’t spin it yourself?

R No. But that kind of branding, and I suppose the same with the chalet as well, it’s having the time to do that marketing and advertising on social media.

I That looks like quite a new…

R Yes, last summer we built it.

I Is this the first year you’re going to be letting it?

R We got it going for August last year, so we ran it in August and September, into October, and then it pretty much shut for the winter and starting again coming next month.

I How do you find doing a completely new enterprise?

R Fine. It was quite a natural progression in a way, Rachel does holiday changeovers for a couple of houses nearby and I do property management for some houses nearby, so it was logical.

I Did you have to do a lot of marketing?

R We could do with doing more. It’s fairly easy to stick something on Airbnb these days but to get a bit more than that it’s what you make it. Does that help at all?

I Yes it does. There’s quite a lot of stuff about [area C] and dinosaurs and Neolithic history and so on, does that impinge on anything, any sort of resilience issues?

R I wouldn’t say so, no.

I What about trees or tree planting?

R It’s just not an issue here. I know that in other parts of the country the pressure for planting perhaps more commercial woodlands, a lot of farmers are feeling under threat but it’s not an issue here.

I Too windy.

R Yes, basically.

I Would you say that you were pretty resilient?

R That’s a difficult one. I probably am although I don’t feel it. Maybe because I’ve stopped to think about it. Maybe other people don’t actually stop and think am I resilient as an individual or as a business, they just get on with doing what they’re doing and then occasionally some major thing happens and they respond to that, and think gosh quite resilient. As somebody said, some people are resilient with the water up to here and some people are resilient with the water up to here. I think as a family we’re probably fairly resilient, we’re reasonably well off, with professional jobs and a reasonable range of skills. I suppose I sometimes think as a community we’re not as resilient as we could be, in terms of those (social cohesion?)

I What do you think isn’t very resilient about the community?

R I think it’s the critical mass of people that are willing and able to do the stuff which sadly the skills that you need to have in this more modern world. Things like getting funding for projects that are going to help your community, that’s a fairly specialist skill and one that not everybody…

I Putting in bids and things, yes.

R Yes, that kind of thing, which not everybody has. That’s the sort of thing that’s going to make government and the council and policymakers notice you. You can be resilient in terms of being happy to volunteer time making cups of tea and that kind of thing, which is brilliant. We’ve just as a community council got money to put together, we drew up a community emergency plan to help with emergencies, and actually got some funding, about £2000 to buy some equipment for the community. That’s a really positive thing that a lot of communities don’t have.

I Thinking about barriers or facilitators, what sorts of things are sufficient or already here or what you need?

R Particularly to do with food system?

I When we’re talking about food system I’m going to remind you that we’re looking at all the people involved in the food system as well, not just thinking about producing the food, the inputs, where the livestock are coming from, the feed, the vets, and the people filling in the IACS forms.

R I think we’re, because we’re far from markets here it’s very difficult to get the best price for feed, value for feed or other inputs, it’s also very difficult to get the best price for your outputs, at mart you’re at the mercy of the buyers that are there. I think in terms of setting up cooperatives, the distances, because they’re so huge even on [area C] it is difficult to get these sorts of things going. Farmers markets, there is one in [area 11], I don’t know how successful it is. I suppose SAC provide a good service, and without government subsidy I’m sure they wouldn’t be there. I sometimes think their advice is a bit, it’s not as good as it could be.

I In terms of their advice are not up to date enough or not addressing the questions people want to ask?

R I think giving very generic advice, rather than a bit more specific advice, using the off the shelf answer rather than really looking at innovative solutions to things.

I That’s interesting because some of the interviews, not in [area C] but elsewhere, we’ve had people say they’ve gone for things like soil sample, they’ve gone for advice to New Zealand. Does that happen here?

R I don’t know.

I People are happy with what they get and they do with that?

R Is anyone big enough scale that it would be worthwhile sending the soil samples to New Zealand?

I That was an example, but finding your own advice rather than relying on…

R I suppose I’m fairly fortunate in that I’m reasonably well educated in agriculture type things, and I can work out how to fill in forms, so I suppose the types of support I need is fairly specialist. I’m not saying I know everything, I’m constantly asking friends and neighbours what’s wrong with my sheep or that kind of thing.

[Pause in recording]

I Thinking about your Princes Trust course, is that the kind of thing you think would be needed more widely?

R Maybe, yes. It’s quite funny because I think a lot of these things are actually formalising or professionalising what happened previously in the crofting system anyway. And I think we’ve lost that a lot, that kind of sharing of expertise, advice, knowledge, somebody who tries something and everybody else would watch them and hope that they failed but when they didn’t they would try themselves. That kind of thing, that sharing of resources, helping with efficiencies of scale, that used to happen with crofting, marketing stuff together and all that kind of stuff, we’ve lost it and we’re trying to bring it in but in a much more formal and in some ways artificial kind of way.

I What do you think would happen if you did get an abattoir on [area C]?

R I think that a lot of people would start managing their animals differently. I think they would actually start finishing more of their own beasts. I think that you would perhaps, in theory you would get a better price because whoever it was would be able to be branding stuff, you’re selling [area C] lamb to restaurants in London and that kind of thing. I think from an environmental point of view it’s going to cut down on the number of lorries of lambs coming off and on to [area C].

I Would anybody lose?

R Yes, as with all these things I think there’s going to be some people that are going to embrace that opportunity and adapt their systems, there are going to be other ones that don’t and therefore they’ll miss out there. I think, would it get down to the stage for instance where the marts shut, or will marts stop coming here having sales, so is that going to be a loss. I think as well that are going to be some people, particularly hill systems where they can’t finish their own lambs for instance, so they’re potentially going to lose.

We always speak about diversification, making businesses more resilient and [inaudible] all these buzz words but at the end of the day on an upland hill sheep farm it’s difficult, especially in the remote area the opportunities are so much more limited, especially in a crofting situation or a tenanted farm where you can’t even borrow against your land. So you’re really up against it there, you could have all the ideas in the world but you’re still limited to how much you can diversify and make your business more resilient.

I Would you say people who can [inaudible] chickens and vegetables and poly tunnels and things like that?

R To an extent but again the, your distance to market is huge and the capital investment is huge.

I What about pigs?

R People have, it’s so wet and the ground’s so soft, and the cost of bringing in feed has really stopped it from being anything more than just people having a pig that they’ll buy in, fatten up and then put in their freezer.

I Are there things that other people will be doing that make things easier for you, or would make things easier for the whole crofting community?

R I can’t really think of anything. As I say we’re fortunate here that we’ve still got that critical mass of crofters and people crofting so that there are tractors and balers, dogs and quads around the place. I think the difficulty is when you get to a situation where that’s all gone, then it gets really difficult.

I Are you able to share quads?

R Not so much but you know somebody that’s got one that can come and help you in some way.

I Conversely, are there things that people would be doing that would make life difficult?

R I can’t think of anything particularly.

I Do you see the interactions with tourism for example being a positive?

R I think the whole tourism management thing could be done a lot better here. I’m not saying we want fewer tourists but I do think that we need better tourism management. For instance, I think a lot of the solutions that are used in national parks in terms of better car parks, management of car parks, maintenance of footpaths, interpretation, that sort of thing would be good but I also think that we need better infrastructure. It’s not rocket science but better roads. Information to manage people, the type of tourists coming here has changed a lot and it’s people wanting the selfies on their bucket list rather than the slightly more adventurous people.

I Do you see any conflict when thinking about, with your SNH background, do you see the positive or what’s the relationship between the environmental side of things and tourism?

R That’s what they come for. For sure there’s degradation, if you walk up the [landmark1] now and the [landmark 2] and [landmark3], it’s not awful they’ll still be there long after the tourists but… When I came to [area C] 20 years ago there were 25,000 people a year went up [landmark 1], last year there was 177,000, massive. But yes it’s the environment they come for.

I What about things like wildlife and sea eagles, golden eagles and things like that? I’m thinking about the trade-offs, is there a trade-off between tourism being attracted by sea eagles or some other reason why you want the sea eagles.

R [area C] hasn’t tapped into for instance the sea eagle marketing the way Mull has. Yes, there’s people wildlife watching and people who do wildlife watching tours and photography tours, but that is all as a spin-off from the landscape and the environment. I think there is still a conflict in that the land managers that are not, they’re not directly benefiting the way that they could be. I don’t really know the answer to it. It’s easy to say to a farmer, you can benefit from the environment by going and opening a bed and breakfast but that’s missing the point, it’s missing the point that it’s actually… The danger there is that you stop farming to manage the bed and breakfast. It’s the managing the land which is so critical.

I From your background of training lots of new people ? crofting, what do you think is their biggest driver to why they want to do it?

R I can categorise them in I think four categories. The types of people that come on the course are the people who have inherited a croft and have no idea what to do with it, there’s the wide-eyed lifestyle change type people, there’s the deep green people who want to live off the land. The fourth category is the kind of lifestyle change people. I think they’re the main drivers. I’m always quite encouraged, you meet some people that are a bit wacky and you think it’ll never work but there’s other people that you think are enthusiastic people, you’re great and you’re going to be a real asset to a crofting community if you’re fortunate enough to get a croft. I’m always really encouraged, and I tell them that. It’s great that these courses are fully booked and people with good ideas and lots of different interests, and wanting to do things differently.

I What do you think are the biggest barriers?

R Access to land.

I Why is that if there are multiple abandoned crofts around?

R I think it’s a number of things, one is when crofts do come on the market they tend to be development value, so if a croft comes on the market at £100-120,000 with planning consent for a house or two, there’s no resemblance to the agricultural value of it. We were very fortunate, we didn’t pay anything near that for our croft. The other barriers are people wanting to hold on to crofts because they want to be able to either cash in at a later date or they’ve got an emotional cultural connection to it, and also more cynically there’s not a push driver, whether that’s economic or policy to push people to get rid of them. I suppose as well, then people are informally using, you don’t use your croft but I use it informally, and so the croft is being worked but not to its full potential, but then it’s helping me make my business more viable because I’ve got access to your field. It’s much harder to quantify that.

I One of the things I noticed in the Agricultural Act that’s going through Westminster was a suggestion that older farmers should be given lower rates of subsidy to encourage them to give up farming. What would be your response to that?

R I don’t think you can discriminate like that. In a place like this for instance, some of the most active crofters are the older crofters, they’re the ones that have got time, they’ve got money maybe, and expertise. Perhaps as they get a lot older they’re then drafting in younger people to help with the gathering and fencing and that sort of thing, and so that’s giving them employment. I don’t think you can be quite as black and white about it. The other thing is who’s to say, especially in a crofting situation, we’re not doing it for the money so to cut subsidies people would probably just carry on doing it and subsidising it from somewhere else. I just don’t think it would have the desired effect at all.

I Is there anything you wanted to say that you didn’t have a chance to say?

R No, I’ve spoken rather a lot.

End of transcript