ResULTS project: case study C, interview 206

Face to face interview with crofter, conducted 28/2/19

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R

I What we’re looking for is where are the pinch points, things that make it more resilient or less resilient, where are the possibilities of trade-offs.

R One of the things in terms of resilience, which probably makes it less resilient, is the distance from market, also the distance in terms of transportation, bringing in animal feed, even animal medication, and of course for human food. It’s more expensive generally because of the distances it has to come. If there’s a bad harvest the prices go up to everybody but they go up even more to people in the more rural areas. For instance here we were paying £50 for a big bale of hay and in Uist it was £60, and that’s before Christmas. It shows you that they are even further away and they’ve got the ferry so the further you are away from centres the less resilient you are because you are more dependent on a number of factors, the transportation costs, to get foodstuffs to you. Also, to take animals to the market, that’s not easy either, extra costs, and if you sell them locally at the local mart you’ve got less buyers. So economically if you go local you’ve got less buyers therefore the prices tend to be lower, tend to be not always the case, than maybe if you take your livestock to the likes of Dingwall.

On the resilience side, I guess that you have livestock of high quality that they’re bred and raised naturally, that they’re raised on heather and grass throughout the summer so they have a natural diet, apart from the winter you need to supplement it obviously. They tend not to be housed so that they don’t have the incidence of disease like pneumonia, bovine viral diarrhoea etc, BVD, and other scour in calves that they have in more intensive.

I guess less resilient as well, climate change has made the area less resilient because my late uncle, all that was grass, they were hay fields and we were here all the school holidays. It’s less resilient now because you’re more limited to what you can grow due to the weather pattern. Because of the wet summers you can’t do hay any more, you can’t rely on it. I think there was some in [town 2] doing hay in the field [inaudible] therefore you’re more dependent on bought-in hay.

I Would you do silage?

R No, I don’t like it. I think it’s a thing that my uncles never liked it. Getting over the emotional side of it, you need big pits for it. I think the by-product of draff that’s very good for energy for livestock but you need proper pits which cost quite a few thousand pounds, and you need quite large machinery to get it from one place to another. We’ve got a small tractor, a Massey Ferguson, because the land’s too, you don’t want to put tractors on it, you just churn it up. So people that do silage, they need very expensive machinery to do it, and the other thing that I personally don’t like silage for, SAC when they test silage they say that the majority of silage in [area C] is of low nutritional content, some of it is ok but a lot of it is low nutritional content. Every year you’re putting on hundreds of pounds in value and in cost of fertilizer, I don’t want to do that.

We take soil samples under advice from SAC, I think it’s every four years and then they’ll analyse it and we put on what they recommend to keep nitrogen levels up because of the heavier rainfall here a lot of the goodness is coming out of the soil. So we do do that but it’s for a specific reason, it’s to try and maintain it in a reasonable state rather than for growing silage.

I And you’ve got cattle and sheep? And you’ve got Highland cattle, have you always had Highland cattle?

R We’ve had them since 2002. My late uncle, crofters never really retire do they, so as a people they’re resilient and they’ve probably got a lot less dependency on the health service as well, they’re probably quite cheap in terms of the National Health Service per head/per capita or however it’s judged.

I It seems if you survive into adulthood then you survive until you’re 80 or 90 but you had to get over the first bit.

R He had Aberdeen Angus, they were all crossed with different bulls that were in the township, but I thought Highland cattle would be nice for him because it would give him something to do. He was very fond of them.

I And you kept them still?

R Yes, and I like the idea of traditional, they’re hardy, the ease of calving, great mothers. I like all those attributes, unfortunately economically the market still likes the huge big cows that are fathered by continental oxen. Though I have heard that QMS are saying people now want smaller cuts of meat, because they sell by weight, and they mature a lot later Highland cattle, and you don’t put them to the bull until they’re three because they’re still growing and forming.

I Where would you sell them?

R You can sell them privately or you can sell them at Dingwall mart, there’s a Highland cattle sale.

I And they’d be two years old?

R People sell them at a year, because then finishers will take them. But there’s people that, there’s a farmer on the east coast has a contract with Waitrose for 500 head of Highland cattle per year, and it goes into their speciality Christmas package that’s in the shops once a year. They invited him to the abattoir they use and there’s classical music in it. I’m sure if you mentioned animal [inaudible] that abattoirs should be very calm places for animals because it keeps their adrenalin down etc, and you want it to be as humane as possible. I don’t know if humane’s the right description with animals.

They say that cows, their senses, you can relate them to mild autism. They’ve found in America that they shouldn’t have, there was somebody quite enlightened (Temple Grandin?) and they saw that there was trouble with cattle in abattoirs and it was because they couldn’t see where they were going. They had the ability to introduce different movement in the pathway that they took and found that some bends weren’t as good, and light coming in was very important to them, and where the light came from, about shadows and everything, so they weren’t spooked.

I Would you be selling store lambs as well?

R Yes, keep some for replacements and sell others.

I They’ve come up with three concepts of resilience, absorption, absorbing change, you have a bad year and take a cut in your income. Then there’s adapting, making slight changes, maybe change the source of feed or something like that. Then there’s transformation, which means you start doing something different, whether it’s tourism or energy or something like that. Do you recognise those, are they things that you would see as contributing to resilience?

R Yes, I think that if you’re a small-scale agricultural unit in a rural location, because at least one of them is to do with diversification, I don’t know whether it’s two or three. It could actually, incremental change, it might fit in to two or three. But I think there is actually a limit, because I guess the transform part is radical changes, like someone deciding to have a farm shop or a croft shop.

I Where would you say most crofters in [area C] would be?

R Two. I guess some of them, because a lot of people do tourism, bed and breakfast even. They’ll do it as part of their croft, a lot of B&Bs have nothing to do with crofting but there are some crofts that have campsites etc.

I How do you see those working together? I notice when your Highland cattle are in the field tourists stop and take photographs, how do you feel about that?

R It doesn’t bother me apart from when they go into the field. There’s laws about people can go into the field but it seems very dangerous to go into a field with a Highland bull, or any bull really, if you get it from a good source they’re not, because as well as being bred for conformity they’re also bred for their nature. There’s no point having a lovely bull that’s very aggressive, but you see people go in and you think this is terrible, they’ve got calves there, it’s probably not so much the bull it’s the cow, and they don’t know them. The cows know these dogs and they don’t bother them but they see other dogs that they don’t know and if they’ve got calves they form a circle. It’s quite interesting, the traditional behaviour, if you allow that to take place they’ll protect the calves and one of them will usually charge down the side of the fence. They sleep in their family groups as well, you get the grannies and the aunties, and they babysit as well, cows babysit for others’ calves. Just seeing it on a small scale, if you had a huge big place you would be able to…

I Is that Highland particularly that do that?

R I don’t know. I think before when there were ordinary, non-Highland cows here, I think they were pretty naturally reared, it’s probably in herds generally that are naturally reared, you’re not taking them into milking parlours, you’re not taking calves. A lot of the calves are taken off cows when they’re six, seven months old, that people tend to leave their calves on Highland cows until they wean themselves because you don’t get mastitis that way, that there’s a lot of benefits, they seem happier. If you take calves away from, you’ll hear it when they take the calves to market, the cows cry for days. One of my uncles was saying that he would never do it again until they were older, that him and his wife stood in the kitchen crying because the cows were crying.

So I think there’s resilience in traditional breeds because of the environment, and also because genetically they haven’t been interfered with too much. I know that you feed them so obviously genetically they’re going to change a bit but it’s the same, we’ve got North Ronaldsay sheep that, they’re a bit of a nuisance but they’re quite interesting in terms of we’ve also got Cheviot, North County Cheviot sheep. The North Ronaldsays are interesting because I don’t think they’ve been tampered with because they’ve been on the shores of Orkney for 500 years, and they’re very bright, their survival, they’re much smarter than Cheviots. I don’t know whether the correlation there has something to do with, if you haven’t messed about with the genetics of something that it retains more of its natural predispositions to things that overall make it healthier. They’re wee tiny things North Ronaldsays and I think they live until about 15.

I Do you have a market for them, because they’re a rare breed aren’t they?

R No, I went in to Harbro and there was a doctor’s wife in Broadford, they were moving and she had lots of interesting animals, she had a Shetland cow. I phoned up and that was it, I think she thought she had someone that would look after them, she wasn’t going to let them go. They came up with them and they’re just there.

I Do they eat seaweed?

R Yes, they’ll eat anything. They’re good foragers.

I What are the things that you really want to maintain?

R I think that one of the things you want to maintain through crofting. You want to maintain crofting, and by maintaining crofting you’re maintaining certain skills, sheepdog training skills, that you’re keeping animals here which tourists like, so you’re helping the tourist trade, more important than that you’re helping retain population. There’s some young men in [town 2] will work for the [area 4] Sheepstock Club, gathering sheep etc, not everyone wants to go away thankfully and get degrees, some people just want to work outside. It’s maintaining the culture and maintaining the population through maintaining crofting.

I Do these lads have crofts of their own?

R No, some of them are with their families but they’ve been brought up in it.

I How does a sheepstock club work?

R A sheepstock club is on the common grazings and [person 8] did a study and said that the most successful way or the best way to maintain common grazings is to have a sheepstock club. Basically, there’s people in the township of [area 4] and the crofters in [area 4], a share comes with your croft and you have a responsibility when you have that share to either go and gather or send someone in your family to gather. That’s why [person 13] goes. So people work together. Now it’s not so much maybe the people in the township that do it but you hire in people, so you’re hiring in the local help.

There’s a lot of people go round different sheepstock clubs and they earn money that way, they don’t earn very much, they probably don’t earn enough to put in a tax return or if they do it’s not much over the £12,000, however it’s keeping them and their families here. It’s healthy, they work in March, in terms of resilience there’s a whole backbone comes off it all, sheep go away, cows, and they go to the market, so it helps keep auctioneers in business etc. Also, the sheep shearers. The money that you get for support for a sheepstock club basically goes out in to paying wages, and they’re not massive big wages. The money is distributed within the local economy, more so than you would in a large agricultural unit because if you’ve got these big industrial sized farms they’re largely automated. You probably get one or two senior operatives rather than agriculturalists working, and they get the likes of you guys in and environment to check the soil and everything.

I think contribution to social cohesion of community, that’s really important, food security as well, but of course food security you can do everything that you can within the… That’s a good argument for support isn’t it, because you can have it results based on the health of your stock. It must help keep the food security from field to plate. Food security obviously begins in the field. Wool, you don’t get much for the wool but you get something. Breeding stock, they supply a lot of, here they supply the Cheviot in-bye sheep, the likes of [inaudible] sheep or lambs, they’ll be sold in this country whereas the blackface go overseas, go to Europe.

It was the person that was doing the other part of this was saying, because of the carcass, the shape and the size. I just assumed they all went to Europe. The hill sheep he says go because I suppose they’re not as well kept, because they’re not fed as much and people aren’t looking after them, they’re a different breed. We’ve got two of the hill sheep and they’re a different, two ewes, took them off the road and decided to feed them and they didn’t even know what food was. They get [inaudible] in the winter but that’s all. They’re a different size, much smaller, they look totally different.

Respect of the community, yes, because if people are working, if it’s providing employment opportunities that they’ll have self-respect, which stops things like depression. And the community as a whole has got, it’s meaningful for them, they’ve got an identity. Because it’s very cultural here in terms of, it’s not economics, it’s beautiful but there’s something else going on and it is very much community, cultural.

Succession, crofters are always looking for someone, you get enough work out of them and then you give them the croft. My brothers weren’t, some of them wouldn’t know the front end from the back end of a cow yet we all had the same influences, but I was the one that was interested and always was. I’ve got a niece that is interested and hopefully she’ll take it over, but my daughter’s not. It’s funny, some people are interested, you need to be interested in nature don’t you, and not mind bad weather and like animals, and being outdoors.

Food security, we’ve done that. Provision of other products, a lot of people obviously utilise that, especially now, North Ronaldsay wool, we had loads of it, we didn’t know what to do with it, it was useful but to send it away and make it into wool it would have just been a faff. There’s someone that’s doing dying at [croft 1], we took it over to them and they sent it away with blackface, mixing it with some of the blackface wool, so that’s nice we’re looking forward to seeing that, we just gave it to them. They’re just starting out. [croft 1], it’s a bed and breakfast down from [area 10], they’ve got a Facebook page and it’s [area C] Pie Café. They bought [place 2], the dyeing place that was over in [area 19] they built a nice wooden shed and they’ve got all the big vats and it’s amazing. That’s what they’re doing, they’re not doing their pies any more, they’re doing this.

I It’s interesting, so there are people…

R They’ll take the by-product if you like. They’re very resilient and they’re also very progressive and artistic, and business-minded. I think they’ll hopefully…

I Would you say they’re quite new so they’re just beginning?

R Yes, they’re beginning with the wool dyeing thing and they’ll make products. She’s got a room, a studio for selling it, and they do B&B as well, and he’s doing yoga. So they’re getting away from pies, but I guess you can always go back to making pies.

Local employment opportunities, there’s a lot of individual small businesses that seem to people that are quite… It’s difficult for the crofting perspective because you’re that far from the market that it’s great, you’ve got your own cattle and you can make steak pies or something but you’re that far here from abattoirs and everything so that’s another big, to be able to create product out of your raw material.

I How do you feel about the ideas about an abattoir in [town 1]?

R I think it’s fine, there used to be one then it closed down. I think it would be very good, it would encourage people in terms of thinking that they had something of value that was valued by other people because it would give the means to get it more directly to market. Of course with tourism being so important to the local economy, when you go on holiday everyone likes to eat local things so it would be very nice to eat sheep etc. For that to happen now it’s very difficult because you need to take it to Dingwall, you need to get it butchered, you need to have a freezer van to bring it back. Hotels and other businesses really want a constant supply or a reliable supply if they’re running menus. I know places like the high-end [Restaurant 1] they’ll buy Highland beef etc but I think even then sometimes they’re hard-pressed to get it when they want it. If you had an abattoir, which would obviously provide a small amount of employment, I think it would open things up a lot more, or certainly give another strand to local, local’s good as long as it’s quality.

Reasonable workload, I don’t really know what that is. Profit margins, I don’t think anyone does crofting to make profits, if you break even you’re lucky. Any profit that we’ve ever made we tend to plough it back in, because it’s a separate strand of money to keep the place going. I’ll repair the byre or put up a polytunnel, that’s the way I do it, any profit gets invested back in to the place, whether you buy a sheep [inaudible] stuff like that to make it easier for yourself. I don’t think we’ll be going on any world cruises on the profits from the croft.

Personal family satisfaction and wellbeing, I think it scores very high on that, extremely high. Though I do think that probably, in the North of Scotland and the Highlands and Islands people probably suffer from low-level depression in the winter, not enough for them to go to the doctor and complain but I think with the lack of light etc. Other than that I think there’s a high degree of satisfaction, and of course with the family you see kids out and getting involved in things, it must be great for coordination and how they play, they can go and explore, it’s very healthy and that all helps as an adult, and it helps your imagination as well. I think that scores really high, you see children in towns with friends and they won’t walk along a wall it’s all a bit scary and kids here, we’ve found a den in a gorse bush, he fell down, the wee stories they tell you. It’s safe, no cars, so I think that’s huge.

Recycling money in the local area, that’s huge because you’re buying food, you’re keeping Harbro going, they employ about six people anyway, who have all got families. That’s massive. We talked about the people gathering and obviously vets, [inaudible] yes. Related to public goods services… Part of the cemetery at [town 1] fell into the sea.

I It’s not like in Yorkshire where they’re worried about flooding.

R But you still pay for it in your insurance, it’s gone up quite a bit. Moderation of climate change effects, yes I think in terms of climate change very much so. Rain etc, you can’t crop hay because you can’t rely on it, the dry spells, so that has been a change.

Disease, pest spread, does that include sea eagles? Sea eagles are actually a pest, they’re not a pest they’re rather magnificent but they are having a huge negative impact on lambs, on the hill lambs, which is economically detrimental. I think the way that they were introduced, that there wasn’t consultation and collaboration with the areas that they were going to be introduced in. I think there was a very high-handed approach taken and if people complained about it they were called liars that sea eagles didn’t take sheep, these are government bodies you shouldn’t be calling people liars, aggressive in your public statements.

I didn’t know much about it until I worked in the vets to cover the phones and a man came in with blackface sheep, unshorn, big sheep, and they had been attacked by two sea eagles, it was so cruel. The vet said, we’ve got an emergency can you go into that drawer, get some gloves and cotton wool, there were all these syringes and I nearly fainted. He was in shock, I think four of them were put down and the vet was going to take pictures of the injuries but, it was maybe six years ago and it was dusk and the phones then weren’t quite so good in cameras, because I think she was going to a meeting about sea eagles later. At night I came in and the man that had been talking to me, the crofter, and I started reading about the predator side, the raptor side of the RSPB, very aggressive.

So I think it’s very good but I think they need to work more with people. There are a lot of places on Mull that have stopped keeping sheep, and a lot of people on [area C] have stopped sheep as well because the predation is so heavy. There’s always been predation from foxes but that seems to have been ok, a few sea eagles would have been alright but they’re actually being very successful at breeding, probably because they’ve got a good source of food. I think sea eagles can make it less resilient. The other thing is that geese are becoming a problem, the grey goose and the blackleg that are sitting in fields and eating away at everything. Their droppings aren’t very good for the ground apparently. We’re not too bothered with them here but they seem to be, I think because they’ve been protected as well.

It’s quite interesting because all these things, natural person-made environment, if you start upsetting the balance, I suppose humans do that all round the world but if you upset it it starts to have an effect on things. I think a lot of the government agencies really need to be, SNH, I think they need to start, instead of coming from this position of crofters are liars, these are God-fearing older men and women that wouldn’t be speaking out.

I Do you see some sort of conflict between tourists coming to see the sea eagles and crofters having the challenge of the sea eagles, can they live together?

R I think so, I just think that it needs management. I think they probably need to control the numbers because now SNH are accepting that they do take lambs but I still think they’re saying that they don’t take sheep. They might not actually take them but they attack them, those markings on those sheep, you could see it was talons, it was cruel.

I This was adult sheep?

R Yes, and it was at the back of the man’s house. He said they tell you that they just take the ill, he said these are in their prime. It has got an effect and sheep have every right to be treated ok as well. I think foxes mainly take lambs, because nature is quite cruel in many respects. So there seems a bit of an imbalance there and I’m sure that could be addressed if people weren’t entrenched, I think being entrenched in a view is quite bad.

You said about tourism, no I don’t think so because they’re magnificent big creatures but you don’t see them that much. I think you would probably need to be renting a house or if you’re lucky driving about, but I think if you come just for, if you see one you probably think it’s a bonus I would imagine. And there’s boat trips take you out from [town 1] [inaudible] to see. They are magnificent but they’re scary, in terms of the size of them, and it’s wonderful that they’re there. We went to see the puffins out of [town 1], they were great. The sea eagles chased away the golden eagles. We had buzzards down there nesting in the summer and a sea eagle came and tried to chase them away.

I Thinking about potential conflicts, I wondered about trees because I think you’re involved in the community forest.

R Oh yes they’re up there, the sea eagles. There’s a bit of it that’s been there, a commercial tree plantation, there’s a bit up there and you’re not allowed to fell it because of the sea eagles, and you’re not supposed to go near them. There’s all these rules about it, it’s very difficult to get a licence to do any felling near them. They won’t tell you where they are because they think you might [inaudible] There’s a huge bit of forestry there that could be felled out but we’re not allowed to touch it because somewhere in there the sea eagles are hanging about. Because no-one will say where it is, it’s very difficult because that would…

I Can I just ask you a bit more about the community wood? That was for the [area 4] community?

R It was the retired vet [person 5] that bought it, he raised money, it was basically Lottery money. It had originally been part of the common grazings and the Forestry Commission took it and planted on it but they didn’t decroft it, so they made a mistake. Then when they wanted to offload them I think they went through a period when they wanted to offload quite a lot of plantations that would have cost them quite a bit of money to fell because there was no access or anything. So [person 5], and [person 13] was the secretary at the time, they did the rounds going round the Forestry Commission and big Lottery and [person 13] did all the applications etc. They got the money and then they felled out so they could replant. It’s well used, it’s good.

I What do people do there?

R They walk their dogs. I do worry sometimes about the amount of dog dirt that’s probably there but I was told that if you put bins who’s going collect the bins. But it’s very well used, they put in a couple of paths, I would like to put in more.

I So it’s a community benefit for recreation primarily? So it’s not for firewood or anything like that?

R No, there’s a wee bit of firewood that was cut and they had a firewood processor but they’re not doing very much now, the wood’s old it’s not a very good burning wood. [person 5] and [person 13] used to do it, they would sell the wood and it would go into, they didn’t charge for their time or anything it was just like a charitable thing. [person 5]’s wife’s got dementia now and he’s in his 70s and he’s the only one that can properly work the firewood processor.

I Is that in a layby somewhere?

R Yes, and it was run by this tractor that literally had old tins of baked beans on it at certain parts, like Heath Robinson. No-one else could do it but [person 5] could start the tractor, this old tractor that you couldn’t even put on the road, to drive the firewood processor. So it’s the thing about putting all the eggs into one basket and we’d say you need something else that everybody, he said no it’s fine.

Because it’s a small area it’s rural but there’s not many people interested in doing anything with it, I don’t mean doing anything with the amenity but really helping or coming up with ideas. I was told by the forester that looks after the place, Dieter from Berlin, and he looks after a Brechin forest on Loch Ness side, it’s more population and there’s a lot of people that are retired marketing directors etc so they’ve got a very skilful board, and he said it’s even the same there, it’s the same people that’ll do things all the time. It’s great, people go up there and walk so it’s actually really good, it was well worth them doing that I think. There’s not much we can do with it, I looked into a children’s area but then you get into all sorts of regulations and rules, so I think just the upkeep of it.

Biodiversity enhancement, I think that’s really important. I think it’s important to have hedges and trees for insects and birds. We planted down at the burn, it was all hazel and we tried to regenerate was the idea. [person 13]’s much better on birds, recognising different bird types, but he says there’s a lot of birds down there that he never used to see in the garden before. We’ve got willow, alder, oak, I think I’ve got two aspen. We planted about 100 and we’ve got another 50 to go down, just because it’s nice to do something like that, and fenced it off of course so the sheep and the cows couldn’t get in, and there’s an otter.

It helps wildlife doing stuff like that, I think stuff like that’s really important. I don’t think there’s any snakes down there, I think they’re quite rare, it doesn’t look much now because it’s February and they’re quite small but even the difference it’s made already. So I think that doing anything you can, and that’s a really important thing in terms of if there’s any support for things like that, and it should be measured on results, outcomes and biodiversity should be that, I think that’s very important if you’re responsible for managing a, looking after a small piece of land or a big piece of land.

I Is it a bit of a challenge in the wind to grow trees?

R It’s not too bad down there. Because they were there anyway and they were small, they take all round down there, all indigenous. They’re quite small, they take longer to get going, and they probably won’t grow that big because the wind will stunt them but they’re there and they’ve taken off quite well. Put wee hedges in but that’s growing things, growing vegetables is that biodiversity? Obviously if you’re not grazing too much etc, and see the primroses down there, and the different flowers that you see, because seeds remain in the ground for a long time don’t they.

I Is that coming up since you’ve fenced it off?

R Yes. I don’t think it would come off in this bit, I think it’s because it’s on either side of a burn, it’ll be the habitat.

I don’t know much about carbon, peatland and forests. We’ve got a lot of peatland up the hill and there’s a lot of [area 4] Common Grazings part of it is an SSI at the top, near the [area 5]. I know there’s things about protection of peatlands and stuff but I’m not really, I know that my family like your family would have gone, I can remember cutting peat when I was wee. Clean air and water, immensely important. A good water supply, and obviously that’s determined by you haven’t got waterways that are mucked up by too many cows etc. And air of course is huge, clean water and air is the basis of life isn’t it, it can cause immense problems healthwise if you haven’t got that. Genetic diversity. North Ronaldsay and the Highland cattle, even the Cheviots, they’re a certain strain of a breed. Dogs, collie dogs.

Preventing depletion of resources through effective recycling. I think that happens with silage because you need to heavily fertilize every year, and then you’re cutting it. So you’re doing it for the silage rather than for the quick growth of the grasses that you want for silage, which might mean that you have more potassium say, rather than an equal balance of magnesium and nitrogen and stuff. So I think you’re probably upsetting the balance, whereas if you’re just doing it for grazing and trying to keep a balance in the soil, then you’re testing and applying occasionally fertilizer based on what the pH should be. To address the climatic changes, the heavy rainfall etc where all the nitrogen as I mentioned earlier gets washed out here.

Also the thing about recycling, not just minerals, there’s a lot of packaging waste on silage, so where’s that going because you’re not allowed to burn it any more. We are too far away for any company, there’s Solway Recycling that seems to do most of it in the Borders that’s one of the biggest in Scotland, and they won’t come here because they’ve said it’s not economically viable for them. So I don’t know what people are doing with their recycling, I wouldn’t like to think about it. I think you should be allowed to take it, if you’re a croft I suppose you’re regarded as a business but it’s not big business so have a small charge but I think in a way that’s quite good for the environment if the government let people take everything to the recycling centre.

Also recycling, I think they need to up their game on it in Scotland. I think part of the reason is because of the rural location but you’re in towns and you can get even foodstuffs is collected and taken away, they don’t do it here and I can maybe understand why but there’s other small countries, Scandinavia etc, and rural areas in France. Scandinavia’s probably strict and looked into it quite well as small countries that have done it, so I really think we need to… There’s animal licks and things, I put them in the recycling but they’re bred and they do have the recycling sign but I don’t think they get recycled, I think they just get land filled because they can’t take black food containers and stuff can it, but they say that they can’t pick that up so I bet it can’t pick up the red bit anyway.

Access and recreation value for the public. I think that’s very important, green areas, it’s good to health etc but as I mentioned about access, people going into fields with calves that frightens me.

I Do they do that quite often with your cows?

R Yes. Our neighbour phoned and said do you know someone’s in the field there, taking pictures of the bull. I looked out the window and two young boys were right up at the bull. I shouted at them. I think the right of access code is that you’re not meant to endanger.

I There are things about livestock.

R It was stupid. I said you’re lucky that bull could have, I wouldn’t have any sympathy for you. We’ve had runners coming through the field and all the sheep running away when they were in lamb. There’s a holiday house down there that people come and walk about, but they do tell them don’t go into the field with the cows. It’s not too bad but one of my late uncles and a neighbour used to say those cows of yours will cause an accident being in that field. I said but that’s where they go for their summer grazing, it’s not the cows it’s the humans. It’s important but it needs to be… You hear a lot about sheep worrying, with people with dogs, which is awfully cruel. So it really needs to be responsible.

I I guess if somebody’s coming from a town they don’t know any different.

R Yes, but the thing about a town, in towns you don’t let your dogs off so why would you let it off necessarily here? They could get into…

I Is there anything that you feel, changes and pressures that are coming that are either going to be a big threat or perhaps a big opportunity?

R I guess the biggest one is Brexit. That would wipe out, I think it’s 85-95% of lamb from Scotland goes overseas, so that’s a huge threat to small low socio-economic areas here because incomes of people will just go. That could have a massive effect on people and on the landscape, and on the lifestyle and culture. So Brexit combined with tariffs, export tariffs plus if you’ve got cheap low quality beef and lamb coming in.

I guess the opportunity is that if there was the infrastructure support by the likes of abattoirs, training maybe on making steak pies, a product that people could sell, that would help. I guess that would be an opportunity but I think you need the structure underneath that to do it. It’s very hard because of our distance from market, you would need something to underpin that.

I Have you been involved with any of the Prince’s Trust initiatives?

R I went to one meeting but I found it rather depressing. It was run by, I thought the Prince’s Trust would be quite good but this particular one that we’re doing through SAC just now in [area C], the first one was about, it was all referring to as examples, cereal farmers, and milking parlours. I said but it’s crofting, and the young up and coming consultant just looked at me. You could see he was quite dismissive but this other woman, because I said something so I think she said something as well about it. I didn’t find it very, each strand, I think there’s about five of them is run by a different consultancy agency and they’re not linking in together, also they haven’t looked at their target audience, which is one of the things if you’re doing work like that it’s really important. So I think they’ve made a number of assumptions and the SAC staff concerned in it are going to give that feedback that a lot of people have given them that went along to it. Because I think it could be quite good but I think it’s not been done as well as it could be and it’s made people not very complimentary about it. It wasn’t to do with training, it was making you look at economies of what you’re doing.

I They’re talking about it as resilience aren’t they? I think it’s about looking at farm economics and croft economics. If you wanted one thing to be done to make crofting on [area C] more resilient, what would you like to be done?

R That’s quite interesting, I can think about five different things but I don’t know how practical or realistic any of them are. I think infrastructure is really important in terms of roads etc. I think there needs to be an abattoir, there should be an abattoir infrastructure. You can’t do much about because it’s a free market about the cost of your goods coming in but I think if there’s going to be agricultural support it needs to be tailored to rural marginal areas. I think the support at the moment is rather blanket in its approach and I think there needs to be very clear outcomes and results on how you get there in order to maintain and enhance the area for the people working there, the people visiting and I guess in a way it’s not equally important, the landscape, the environment, and by that I mean all the insects and birds and everything.

Without support crofting wouldn’t survive. Crofting could survive, however the market won’t pay what it costs to produce something, the market won’t pay that and if the market won’t pay that, it’s the same I guess with a lot of the farming as well obviously, if the market won’t pay it it either doesn’t happen or there needs to be public support or public money to support because it’s enhancing people’s lives, not just the people involved in it but the people that visit, it attracts tourists. They like taking pictures of Highland cattle, that’s fine, there’s a lot worse things to do.

I If somebody wanted to give a pot of money for the crofters in [area C] and said, you guys organise yourselves, decide what you are going to support, how you’re going to support it, how would that work, would that work?

R I guess you would need agreement. My mother always said that [area C] was funny, they’re not very good at working together. But the Outer Isles, Lewis and Harris seem good about doing things together. First of all agreement, but I guess abattoir would be good. I think looking at, not so much creating crofts but there’s a lot of young people, local people that do crofting but it’s their parents’ croft and it would be good to give them an opportunity of having a croft. So there’s crofts that aren’t utilised and though the Crofting Commission do what they can I think you could maybe pay these people money to allow youngsters in and maybe give them a small amount of money to set up with some sheep or something themselves.

Could you make some common grazings, this is probably a bit contentious but use some common grazings areas, common grazings that are no longer worked, could some of those be used for crofts for young people, not just young people just people that are interested because you want a range, you want a diversity of skills etc. People say broadband and stuff but I don’t think it would get any better than what we’ve got. There seems to be a lot of agencies on to that anyway.

Local markets. There was a local market in [town 1], I think there’s one in [area 11] now but that’s a bit far to go, something like that. I think there needs to be more links with, some of the money should be used with, not an association but some sort of support for local horticultural growers to come together and to give them confidence and to find markets for them. I guess restaurants and stuff don’t really want to take a bunch of radish say but they would take umpteen bunches of radish. So you would need some sort of structure to do that wouldn’t you? I think a lot more could be done on the vegetable side.

I Do you think people can put up polytunnels and grow things?

R Yes, that’s somewhere else that the money could be used. Sometimes the cost of things is quite off-putting, people don’t have it in many cases. I’ve got a polytunnel but I was quite fortunate to have that, so it’s not everybody that has been in a reasonably well paid job. I worked in London for a number of years. Things like that, polytunnels are good because then it links in to your environment and respect for the community, and obviously with health issues as well that I think growing is one of the things that is really beneficial mentally for people. They’re doing a lot of the Greencare now, they’re trying to do a thing round Moray I think, and crofting is part of Leader.

I Is there anything that you wanted to say you’ve not had a chance to say?

R No. I don’t know if that’s of any use.

I It’s been very helpful indeed, thank you very much.

End of transcript