

# A Farm Land Trust for Scotland: project proposal

## Summary

This document proposes the establishment of a Scottish Farm Land Trust (SFLT). Taking inspiration from crofting, community ownership and Terre de Liens amongst others, the principle is to create an organisation which raises capital to purchase small farms in order to provide secure, affordable leases to growers. Keeping the land in trust would secure it in ecologically sustainable production and support access to land. This is in response to the difficulties experienced by those wishing to gain access to land, resulting principally from the concentrated system of land ownership and high cost of land. It also comes as a desire to counter the pattern of industrialised farming which dominates rural Scotland and support the invigoration of rural communities by enabling small-scale food, fuel and fibre production.

The aim of this document is to summarise the concept and gather support and interest in establishing the SFLT. It includes the principles of the project and an outline of the projected timeline.

We are currently forming a steering committee and taking steps towards establishing the organisation. If in reading this you are motivated to support the establishment of the SFLT please email [jagnew98@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jagnew98@hotmail.co.uk).



## Introduction

### Why do we need a farm land trust?

There is clear evidence that farming is suffering from a number of detrimental pressures which impact directly on people's lives and the local environment.

The Scottish Tenant Farmer Forum's (STFF) report on barriers to new entrants to farming identified the high cost of agricultural land as a first level barrier, lack of security as a second level barrier and the low number of farms for sale as a third level barrier for new entrants to farming.

The report states that "In many areas of Scotland agricultural land values bear little relation to the profitability of agriculture." As a result of the high cost, new entrants are unable to access good farm land. This diminishes the sustainability of rural communities as young people leave the area in search of jobs and affordable housing and the countryside becomes increasingly dominated by wealthy commuters and absentee holiday home owners. As a result, local shops, schools, public transport all become unviable services.

Scotland has the most inequitable distribution of land ownership in the developed world. Less than 500 people own 50% of privately owned Scotland, the majority of the country being dominated by large estates and farms. This is reflected in the size of farms which are big compared to the rest of the EU and getting bigger; the number of farm units over 300 hectares grew 11.6% from 613 in 1993 to 683 in 2007. (This only covers cropping, rough grazing gives a greater number of large farms.) The increasing size of farms exacerbates the barriers to entrants and damages the rural economy by stifling economic diversity.

Scotland's Rural College found that the "average age of Scottish farmers is around 58 and a large proportion do not have a successor in place." This increasingly detrimental issue can be countered by supporting new entrants, which the STFF states "introduces new thinking and creates new business opportunities [which] will be good for the industry..." so improving the viability of farming.

There are other issues associated with the increasing size of farms. Large-scale, industrialised agriculture is energy intensive, (requiring up to ten calories of fossil fuel energy for every calorie of food energy it produces)<sup>4</sup> and ecologically damaging (contributing to the decline of biodiversity in rural Scotland).<sup>5</sup>

To the contrary, small-holding agriculture producing more energy than is put in and directly boosts the rural economy by creating more jobs and re-circulating capital. Furthermore, small farms are important in building social and economic connections between people and land in rural and semi-rural areas.

In short, farming is inaccessible to new entrants and young people, and increasingly dominated by large-scale, industrial farms which have detrimental impacts on communities and the natural environment. There is a strong case for increasing the availability of smaller farms in order to improve the viability and value of farming. There are examples of appropriate models to address this, particularly Terre de Liens in France. The creation of a Scottish Farm Land Trust is needed to create a similar model in Scotland.

## **Vision**

### **What would the Trust do and look like?**

The following contains ideas of what SFLT could look like and is intended as inspiration rather than concrete principles.

It is our vision that the SFLT would enable people to gain access to land for organic and low-impact food, fuel and fibre production. In doing so it would create a network of small-holdings and community farms throughout Scotland and provide a voice for those wishing to gain access to land.

Terre de Liens (TdL) is a successful farm land trust in France (see later). Following this example, the primary function of the SFLT will be to raise capital, purchase farm land and manage long-term affordable tenancies. The land will be held by the SFLT, ensuring that it remains in productive use and can't be sold off to re-enter the commodity market. The rent paid by the landholder will return to the organisation to be re-invested by the SFLT for further land acquisition and other supportive mechanisms. In doing so TdL has acquired 100 farms to date and has an effective financial mechanism to support the further acquisition of 20 farms per year.

Taking inspiration from crofting, an established system of small-scale land use in our own country, tenancies should be fair, heritable and guaranteed. There is financial support available from the Government to help crofters build homes and improve the productivity of their land. Gaining such support may be important for enabling new small-holdings.

The SFLT could take many forms, however it is important that it be led by the people who would be taking up landholdings. The Mexican Zapatista principle of 'mandar obedeciendo', 'lead by obeying' stresses that leaders seek direction from those they serve. Additionally, the establishment and running of small-holdings should involve the local community and develop in a way that is sensitive to surrounding businesses and the environment.

In short, the SFLT would raise capital and purchase small farms, renting them to producers at an affordable rate with all proceeds reinvested on a not-for-profit basis. It would provide an ethical investment opportunity and a means for people to have an active role in genuine land reform. The SFLT should be organised democratically and based on ecologically and socially just principles.

### **How would this be achieved?**

We propose to undertake a feasibility study prior to the establishment of the FLTS. This will enable the appropriate approach for what is likely to be a complicated process.

## Timeline

(Time-line to be confirmed)

### Year 1: Feasibility study

- Establish a voluntary steering committee
- Establish the aims, principles and research questions
- Identify and approach interested parties
- Define the feasibility study
- Acquire funding for the feasibility study
- Carry out and report back on feasibility study

### Year 2 - 3: Pilot project

- Establish the organisation
- Produce a pilot project business plan
- Identify site(s) for the pilot project based on feasibility study
- Raise funds for the pilot project
- Carry out the pilot project
- Review pilot project.

### Year 4 -10: Launch and round 1 land purchases

The feasibility study will seek to answer a number of questions, including the following:

1. What are the mechanisms by which land could be acquired?
2. Where can we find funding for land acquisition?
3. What projects are already out there, how do they work and would they support this?
4. How can we enable affordable housing in association with small-holdings?
5. What political and financial support is available for this project?
6. Who are the stakeholders and how/when will they be involved?
7. What structure and principles should the SFLT be based on?
8. What support will the Trust provide for growers?

## Aims

The preliminary aims of the SFLT are:

- Buy quality land for small-scale low-impact farming
- Permanently remove land from the commodity market
- Provide sustainable rural jobs, particularly for young people and new entrants
- Offer viable opportunities for new entrants to farming
- Boost the rural economy and support the repopulation of rural communities
- Create farm landscapes which are wildlife friendly

- Create a sustainable and affordable model
- Facilitate cooperation between producers
- Provide local, healthy food
- Provide education and volunteering opportunities

## **Inspiration**

### **Crofting**

Crofting is a unique social system that stems from the Highland clearances, in which small-scale food production and care of the environment plays a unifying role. Crofters usually also have other occupations contributing to their livelihoods and the rural economy. A croft is usually around 5 hectares as well as common grazing shared with other crofters. The crofter only pays rent for the land, not for any improvements upon it as these belong to the crofter.

Crofting households account for around 30,000 people in the Highland and Islands – around 30% of households on the mainland and 65% of those on the islands. Over three quarters of a million hectares of land are under crofters' stewardship. Out of 17,700 crofts approximately 2000 are owner occupied but the majority remain tenanted. This type of land-based culture is advocated by many internationally as the sustainable way to produce the world's food.

The Crofters' Holdings Acts (1886) protects crofters from being unfairly removed from their land, guarantee fair rents and allow them to claim compensation for improvements should their tenancy come to an end.

[Scottish Crofting Federation website](#)  
[Crofting Commission website](#)

### **Terre de Liens**

Terre de Liens is a civil society organisation created in 2003 to address the difficulties faced by organic and peasant farmers in securing agricultural land. Land prices are high and land market so competitive that access to land has become a major bottleneck for farmers seeking land for new farms or to maintain existing activities. Terre de liens first supported collective ownership schemes wherein farmers received contributions from their kin, consumers or local community to set up an investment business to buy their land. Since 2007 Terre de liens has also directly acquired farmland which it holds in perpetuity for the sake of current and future generations. Terre de liens' land is let to farmers who undertake to farm organically or biodynamically or who are peasant farmers committed to respecting the environment. Its stated mission is to protect agricultural land as a common good and to improve it in exemplary fashion.

100 farms have been acquired by Terre de Liens with a further 20 farms under consideration for acquisition amounting to 2300 hectares removed from speculation and dedicated to family organic and farming.

TdL is a civic movement of one national and 19 regional associations. The organisation operates by means of three component parts: *La Fonciere* is a limited company which issues shares available for purchase by the general public and buys agricultural land and buildings with the capital raised, renting this to farmers on long-term leases; *Le Fond* is an endowment fund which collects donations of land and cash to rent to farmers; and *Le Fondation* is a land trust which holds farm land in perpetuity and local authorities can donate land to. La Fonciere raised €36 million in seven years. Tdl is a tenant friendly policy where the rent is set on an annual basis depending on how successful the harvest was.

[www.terredeliens.org](http://www.terredeliens.org)

[www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Exp1\\_Terredeliens.pdf](http://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Exp1_Terredeliens.pdf)

### **Community ownership**

The rise of community ownership of land in the North-west Highlands and Islands has been impressive and effective. Since the North Lochinver Estate became the property of the Assynt Crofters Trust in 1993 and the Isle of Eigg became community owned in 1996 community buy-outs have spread across the region resulting in close to 500,000 acres of Scotland now under the ownership and control of local communities.

The economic and social case for community ownership is strong. A recent independent study of 12 community owned estates has shown that since community buy-out some 300 housing units have been provided, more than 100 new jobs have been created and business turnover has risen steadily.<sup>6</sup> Community ownership has enabled an energising of rural and island communities formerly held down by big landowners for so long. It has resulted in the production of small-scale renewable energy (e.g. Isle of Eigg), the protection of the natural environment (e.g. the Community of Arran Seabed Trust) and supports small-scale food and timber production (e.g. The North-west Mull Community Woodland Company). Fiona McKenzie in her book *Places of Possibility* has even argued that community ownership de-constructs the capitalist framing of property allowing the creation of a collective identity and a more socially just and environmentally sustainable relationship with the land.<sup>7</sup>

Community ownership of land was made possible both in 2003 by legislation which created the 'community right to buy,' and in 2001 through the establishment of the Scottish Land Fund. Whilst these legislative changes are welcomed land has moved into community ownership only through the sheer determination of communities who have persevered despite inadequate funding and torturous bureaucracy.

<http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/>

## **La Via Campesina**

La Via Campesina an international movement which coordinates peasant organizations of small and middle-scale producers, agricultural workers, rural women, and indigenous communities from Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. Created in 1993 as a group of farmers' representatives, over the past twenty years La Via Campesina has gained strength and legitimacy in carving out a space in the international arena for the voices of peasants, small-scale farmers, women, farm workers and indigenous peoples articulating peasant demands and peasant alternatives. It now embraces 148 organizations from sixty-nine countries including the Crofters Federation. La Via Campesina launched the idea of "Food Sovereignty" at the World Food Summit in 1996. The organisation works to lobby Governments, produces research, supports the rights of peasant farmers and defends small-scale sustainable agriculture whilst opposing corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies.

<http://laviacampesina.org/>

## **Community Land Trusts (USA)**

The first community land trust was formed in 1969 in Georgia by Schumacher Center founders who sought to achieve secure access to land for African American farmers. There are over 240 CLTs in the United States and over 5,000 CLT homes. A number of these CLTs are large scale and urban, with the largest, Champlain Housing Trust in Burlington, Vermont, owning over 2000 homes. There are also a number of city-wide CLTs that have significant plans for development. The model is widely understood as the best model for developing permanently affordable homeownership opportunities in regions of escalating land prices.

<http://www.centerforneweconomics.org/content/community-land-trusts>  
<http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/About-CLTs/History-CLTs>

Current projects by the Schumacher Centre includes **Indian Line Farm**: The first Community Supported Agriculture farm in North America and a model for farmland preservation and conservation. The Community Land Trust acquired the title to the land and is leasing it to two farmers on a 99-year basis. The farmers themselves have purchased the house, barn, and other buildings, and will gain equity through any improvements made to the farm during their tenure.

<http://www.centerforneweconomics.org/content/indian-line-farm-0>

## **The Kindling Trust**

The Kindling Trust is a social enterprise in the Northwest of England which focuses on food (production, consumption and activism) as a vehicle for tackling some of today's most pressing social, economic and environmental problems. The Trust

works with communities, farmers, activists and policy makers to challenge the dominant model of industrial production and work towards true Food Sovereignty by creating and supporting fair, sustainable alternatives. It is inspired and guided by a radical perspective that identifies the need for significant social change.

Last year the Trust launched FarmStart Manchester, “the UK’s first farm business incubator project to help make the route into farming easier.” It is a farm for new growers to trial their farming business ideas in a low-risk setting. This year 11 growers are participating in the project. By trying to remove the barriers that stop people getting started in vegetable production, FarmStart hope to make it possible for a new generation of growers to emerge.

<http://kindling.org.uk/farmstart>

### **Referenced material**

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- 7) Fiona Mackenzie (2012). *Places of Possibility: Property, Nature and Community Land Ownership*