

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

The seeds of a food revolution bear fruit in the fight to tackle world hunger

In the sweltering village of La Chorrera in Nicaragua, farmers struggle to coax any crops out of the parched land – but a small seed bank has given hope to this isolated community.

Established by SCIAF's local partner, CANTERA, it acts like an insurance policy, to increase food security and ensure locals can grow a range of crops even in the deepest droughts. Farmers can safely store and exchange their best seeds in an area where the worst effects of climate change can easily wipe out a season's harvest.

It's an innovative solution to the growing problem of climate change. Here and around the world, the climate crisis is making farming harder than ever before, with people who have contributed least to it suffering the most severe consequences.

According to the World Health Organisation, between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress. Measures such as seed banks have therefore become even more crucial to protect vulnerable communities.

Before this one was established in La Chorrera, seeds were expensive and often of poor quality. Community leader Michael Alfredo Aburto says its impact has been profound,



Farmers in Nicaragua and El Salvador trained to grow more diverse crops are just one way to help, says Alistair Dutton

adding: "Without the seed bank we wouldn't exist as the farmers we are today."

This bank was part of a three-year programme to improve the techniques of rural farmers in Nicaragua and El Salvador, teaching them to grow more food and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Figures from our recently-published annual report show it was a huge success. Fifty-nine community-run seed banks were set up, and more than 3,500 people were trained in sustainable methods to grow more diverse crops more reliably. Eighty-seven per cent of families saw an increase in their income.

Michael said: "I don't even want to imagine the community without your help. Some people did not have food security here, but thanks to this project they are now certain they will have food."

It's a similar story in other countries we work in around the world. In 2018, we were able to help more than 261,300 people in 26 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin American and the Middle East. This involved

145 projects in 26 countries, costing more than £7 million. These included training for almost 17,000 people in skills like farming and financial management. We also helped almost 16,000 people start their own business.

None of this would be possible without the generosity of those who support us. People in Scotland gave almost £6 million last year to help us help others in need around the world. This includes £336,000 donated to help survivors of natural disasters like the Indonesian earthquakes and tsunami.

We are a community of ordinary people coming together to do extraordinary things, from our generous supporters in parishes, schools and homes across Scotland, to volunteers and our partners on the ground, who work tirelessly to ensure the most vulnerable people get the help they need.

They have all helped to transform SCIAF from a tiny charity that started life in a classroom in Rutherglen with an £8,000 budget more than 50 years ago, to the organisation it is



↑ Small farmers like Michael Aburto are growing better crops and widening their

range to tackle the effects of climate change, which is already having consequences for vulnerable communities

today, helping to enhance the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in the poorest countries in the world.

I'm very grateful to everyone who has contributed to our work.

But, tonight, more than 800 million people will go to bed hungry, roughly 150 times the population of Scotland. While we should celebrate the fact that we were able to provide

life-changing help to so many last year, we must also remember that there is much more to be done.

Despite our own political turmoil and uncertainty here at home, we must continue to look with solidarity and compassion beyond our borders

and remember that there are many people whose lot is far worse than ours and who look to us with hope for help.

Alistair Dutton is the chief executive of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF).



Don't grouse about game management – our iconic heather moors would vanish without it

Bruce Russell says uplands thrive thanks to country sports

Soon Scotland's moorlands will burst into bloom. Celebrated in song, poetry, art and recognised worldwide, the heather hills were described recently in National Geographic as the "iconic headline of Visit Scotland tourist brochures."

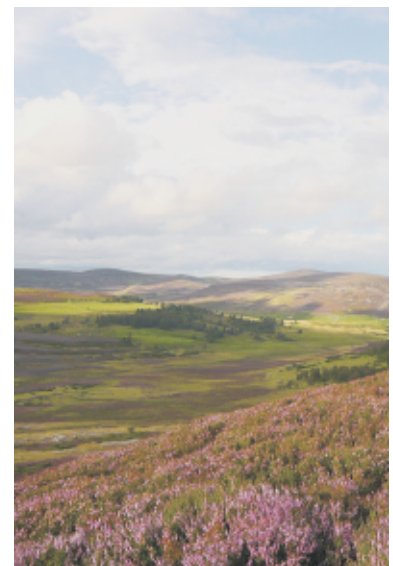
Many take our heather moorland for granted, which is no surprise since it has been in existence for thousands of years, since our ancestors opened up the forests and ling heather began to dominate the landscape. Three-quarters of the world's heather moorland is in the UK, and the majority of this is in Scotland.

In this country have an almost unique need to value our heather, which currently covers around 50 per cent of Scotland's uplands, to

foster and promote it, and to continue to manage this cultural landscape.

Heather's ecological and economic importance is recognised at global level. In 1992, the Rio Convention on Biodiversity ratified the global importance of UK heather moorland. Moorland supports 13 biological communities listed under EC Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna, and 18 species of European or international importance.

But it is a managed environment. The old saying "use it or lose it" springs to mind as, without use, it would soon vanish. The land uses which promote and conserve our open moors are grazing and game management. Commercial forestry and other alternatives including



↑ Tourists love the heathered hills

abandonment, 'wilding' or 'rewilding', where nature is simply left to take its course typically results in a loss of this national asset.

In benefit terms, managed heather moorland provides a habitat for many upland species, birds, animals and plant life, including curlew, lapwing and other waders, mountain hares and rare bumblebees. Grouse is also an economic driver – the birds need young heather shoots to feed on, and this is achieved by regular burning known as 'muirburn', done in early spring time before the ground nesting birds get going.

From an economic perspective heather moorland clearly has tourism value although little of this, except that generated through country sports, finds its way back

to source. Surveys have shown that grouse shooting supports more than 1050 jobs, pays £14.5 million per annum in wages, and generates £23.3 million per annum for Scotland's gross domestic product.

Add to those economic factors the enhanced environmental benefits funded by private investment as a consequence of habitat management and predator control, and it can be seen as a land use delivering high conservation gain at a low cost to the public purse.

Without moorland management, certain species would still exist but at far lower densities, and therefore at far greater risk.

Our moorland also delivers other benefits and ecosystem services. It is a healthy source of food includ-

ing Scotch lamb, game (such as venison and grouse) and honey as well as other niche products.

Heather moorland and its use are currently at the centre of debate. We need to decide whether we value it, or we don't, and, if we do, how we intend to protect it. A total of 25 per cent of Scotland's heathland, of which heather moorland is a valuable component, has been lost since the 1950s to overgrazing by sheep and deer, invasion by bracken, and taken into forestry.

Placing unreasonable stress on the key incentive for management, game conservation, could easily result in our moors disappearing. National Geographic described our heather moorland as "the nation's signature landscape". That's a statement that

cannot be taken for granted if we want that landscape, and all the benefits it brings, to remain for the enjoyment of future generations.

Bruce Russell, director Scotland, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust.



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