



# INFOSHEET

## **FOOD PRODUCTION IN LOCHABER**

The production of food is inextricably linked to the maintenance of the environment and landscape of Lochaber. From the days of subsistence farming to the latter day livestock farms Lochaber's rural communities were built around areas where food could be grown, reared or caught. However the patterns of land use have changed as the need to produce our own food has disappeared. The environmental consequences of these changes are now becoming apparent.

The growing of grain and fodder crops to support livestock and the growing of potatoes and vegetables for domestic use supported a large and varied bird population. The decline in farmland birds over the last fifty years almost perfectly mirrors the decline in agricultural activity over the same period.

There are many examples of where a return to cropping and support for local beef and lamb has contributed to an upturn in the numbers of threatened species. The corn crackers of Ardnamurchan and the Small Isles for instance rely heavily on cattle based agriculture. The maintenance of wild flower meadows and the butterflies, moths and invertebrates that they support can also be dependant on grazing animals. The extremely rare Chequered Skipper butterfly, of which Lochaber holds the main UK population, needs an open woodland habitat often maintained by grazing.

The common agricultural policy has led, via subsidies, to a system of producing large numbers of animals for markets elsewhere. The development of local markets for local food could lead to production that is more in tune with the environment and of benefit to land and people alike. Food production from a garden to a croft to a farm can have enormous wildlife benefits attached to a rewarding and profitable activity.