

Inspection of eggs after input

## New incubation unit receives first batch of 'green' eggs

**Scottish Sea Farms' new £2m incubation unit has taken delivery of its first 'green' eggs.**

The eggs, which were fertilised on-site in a first for the company, are doing well, said Head of Freshwater Rory Conn.

'The incubation unit is designed to receive eggs immediately post-stripping, giving us greater control in the earliest days of the production cycle.

'We trialled two, smaller test batches during Q4 2023 ahead of receiving our first full intake of around three million green eggs either side of Christmas.

'These were fertilised on arrival at the new unit.

'We conducted a series of assessments, from evaluating the success of the fertilisation process within the first 24 hours, to checking embryonic development around the 60-day stage.

'Then, when the eggs reach the eyed ova stage, they will go through a further quality check to ensure only the viable ones are transferred to incubation trays in our hatcheries.

'There will be room for procedures to evolve, but from the results to date we know already that the quality of water in the green egg unit has mitigated a number of the issues we had been seeing with our intakes of eyed ova.'

The eggs stay in the incubation unit, which is adjacent to the main Barcaldine

Hatchery, for six weeks to five months, depending on requirements, before being moved to one of Scottish Sea Farms' three hatcheries: Barcaldine itself, Knock on the Isle of Mull, or Girsta in Shetland.



The egg room at the new incubation facility

The new facility enables the eggs to be incubated for longer, at lower temperatures, during the most fragile stages of development.

'We have taken the temperature down to below 2°C which, research suggests, results in better outcomes for fish health later on, particularly cardiac health,' said Conn.

'And by incubating the eggs over a longer period, we can better meet our year-round requirements for eyed ova, ensuring security of supply.

'From this initial batch alone, we will be able to put close to 600,000 smolts

into one of our marine farms at the required time – around late August next year.

'Without the green egg unit, it simply wouldn't have been possible to produce smolts from Scottish-sourced ova at this time of year.'

The bespoke unit benefits from the same purity of water and state-of-the-art RAS (recirculating aquaculture system) technology as the main Barcaldine hatchery.

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Water is drawn from the nearby Gleann Dubh reservoir and filtered to remove anything over 0.1 microns, keeping bacteria and viruses out.

‘We’re very confident of our water quality here at Barcaldine, which has been tried and tested over time,’ said Conn.

‘And the new unit’s ability to maintain water flow, temperature and water quality parameters has been excellent.’

‘Equally impressive has been the level of engagement from colleagues,’ said Barcaldine Hatchery’s Operations Manager Mike Tresise.

‘The green egg unit has given not just the freshwater technicians but also the fish health and engineering teams an opportunity to acquire a whole new skill set.

‘We’re all learning as we go but everyone is being given the opportunity to spend time in the new unit, led by Freshwater Production Support Manager Simon Maclellan, and share responsibility for its success.

‘Receiving unfertilised eggs is part of the freshwater lifecycle that we haven’t been involved in until now and it is a reflection of the calibre of our people that they have got to grips with it quickly and are raring to go.’

While pre-fertilised eggs will still be supplied to Barcaldine, a significant proportion of Scottish Sea Farms’ egg production will go through the green egg unit in the next egg season, which starts in Q3 2024.

The unit has a total capacity of seven million ova at any one time and, with an input of up to three batches a year, it could potentially hold 20 million eggs annually.

‘The facility is delivering what we expected it to do with this first batch and I’m confident that we will be able to produce the number of eggs we need in order to meet our smolt requirements,’ said Conn.

‘That in itself is an achievement in our first run in a brand new facility, doing something we’ve never done before.’



# ‘Mission Control’ takes off at Shetland processing plant



**Scottish Sea Farms’ newly upgraded processing facility in Lerwick now boasts a high-tech data hub that allows managers to see what is happening on the facility floor at a glance.**

Dubbed ‘Mission Control’ by the IT & Digital team behind the installation, the hub occupies a large space upstairs, with banks of screens showing everything from production throughputs, to water consumption, to energy usage.

‘I wanted an immediate overview, with data that’s relevant, accurate and demonstrates how well the facility is running,’ said Scottish Sea Farms Head of Processing Operations Donald Buchanan.

‘Instead of having monthly meetings to review performance against targets, we have dynamic reports and constant monitoring.’

The data hub has been made possible by the in-house expertise of the IT department and, in particular, Shetland-based David Lipcsey and Krystian Lis.

‘There are two purposes to what we are doing here,’ said Lipcsey. ‘One is to see what’s going on during the day in real-time and the other is to be able to store data indefinitely as a historical record. Our role was to harness it all into one database.’

Physically linking the facility hardware to the database involved interfacing equipment such as the Baader gutting machines, Ace Aquatec electric stunner, the robots in the packing area, and the utility meters with computer devices called PLCs (programmable logic controllers).

Lis explains: ‘It’s a matter of taking a

signal from the machine, connecting the wires and fitting it into the PLC. The technology drives improvement by analysing the machinery’s performance, with even subtle changes detectable and potential problems addressed before they happen.

‘With the Baader, for example, we measure how many fish go in, how many go out, how long the machine is running, and how many stops it has on a given day. From this data we can see whether the machine is above or below the target efficiency.’

Although the new system is still a work in progress it has already made a difference, said Buchanan. ‘We’re getting faster all the time. When we opened the facility, we were processing 15 tonnes an hour which equates to roughly 100 tonnes per day. Now we’re processing close to 24 tonnes an hour, with our next target being 30 tonnes an hour.’

Key to the project’s success is the ‘incredibly talented’ IT team. ‘If we didn’t have Krystian and David we wouldn’t have been able to do this because it would cost too much money buying an off-the-shelf system and I wouldn’t have got what I wanted,’ said Buchanan.

‘The beauty of having our in-house IT team is I can ask ‘how can we monitor this area of our operation’ and whatever that is, they will enable us to do it.’

# Antibiotic use: ‘As little as possible, as much as necessary’

**Following the farming challenges faced in 2023, Scottish Sea Farms has reported an increase in antibiotic use. The Source caught up with Head of Veterinary Services Ronnie Soutar to find out more.**

Responsible and sustainable use of all medicines, but particularly antibiotics, has long been a core principle of Scottish Sea Farms.

‘Our approach to antibiotic use aligns with that of RUMA (Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance): ‘as little as possible, as much as necessary’, said Soutar.

In 2020, this approach saw the company achieve zero antibiotic use for the first time. However, very different circumstances in 2023 required the veterinary team to prescribe more antibiotics than in recent years.

‘The winter of 2022 was notably mild, allowing water-borne organisms that are potentially dangerous to salmon to linger.

‘This was exacerbated in 2023 by summer seawater temperatures

rising early, reaching a greater peak, and remaining higher for longer than average.’

Although the organisms that affect salmon are different from those that affect humans, they work in similar ways, explained Soutar.

‘When fish immunity is affected by environmental challenges, opportunistic bacteria can take advantage and cause infections which further threaten fish welfare.

‘As with human health, it’s vital in these circumstances that our vets react quickly by supplying the antibiotics which fight the infections and get our fish back to good health.’

In line with this, fish at seven of the company’s 44 active marine farms were prescribed antibiotics in 2023.

These antibiotics were administered in accordance with medicine regulations and environmental discharge consents, and went hand-in-hand with husbandry measures designed to control infections and remove the risk of them spreading.

‘At all seven farms prescribed antibiotics in 2023, we saw a decrease in bacterial infection and rapid improvement in fish health,’ said Soutar.

‘So while, on the one hand, we exceeded the RUMA Task Force target for the first time since its introduction in 2016, the improvement in fish welfare and growth achieved by targeted antibiotic use really underlines the importance of the ethos: ‘As little as possible, as much as necessary.’

# Bigger smolts take Eday to the next level



**Eday, one of Scottish Sea Farms’ higher energy sites with strong tides and fast flowing currents, has successfully transferred its first smolts direct from Barcaldine Hatchery.**

Young fish destined for the farm have, to date, been raised at neighbouring nursery farm Wyre, which is more sheltered, until they reached 750-800g.

But the current generation, which went into the water in October, was transferred directly to Eday from Barcaldine Hatchery and are growing well, said Farm Manager Jimmy Dakin.

‘The fish are now 850g and we’re very pleased with their performance. They’re responding well to being in this environment, eating and growing at a good, healthy rate.’

The new approach was made possible thanks to the careful preparation of smolts at Barcaldine, said Dakin.

‘Within the hatchery’s growing areas, water exchange and temperature are regulated to suit each stage of the salmon lifecycle, including conditioning smolts for seawater.

‘The team selected the largest smolts for transfer to Eday and conditioned them to the local marine environment.

‘After a couple of successful trials, we went for the full transfer of smolts straight from Barcaldine to Eday.’

Feeding the fast-growing fish has been made easier with the installation of a reconditioned SeaCap round feed barge and a reliable Starlink internet connection from the shore base, enabling remote feeding for the first time.

‘Instead of being reliant on feeding from a boat, which can mean losing feeding days during bad weather, we can now feed in all weathers,’ said Dakin.

The new arrangements are better for the farm crew as well as the fish, with staff, who work two weeks on/off, no longer having to manage fish at Wyre’s nursery pens.

‘Now we are focused 100 per cent on our own farm, it has been easier to retain staff,’ said Dakin. ‘Everyone is ambitious to take the farm to the next level.’



# Salmon sector 'a frontrunner in welfare' says RSPCA Assured

Freshwater treatment, Shetland

**The RSPCA Assured label has long been the mark of good animal welfare, with nearly all of Scotland's salmon farmers having joined the scheme.**

This means meeting strict criteria covering every welfare angle from water quality and stocking density, to fish feeding, handling, transportation and slaughter.

Now, a new RSPCA Assured engagement team has been set up to support farmers as they maintain those standards and to assist members – terrestrial as well as aquaculture.

Kevin White, Engagement Lead at RSPCA Assured, is based in north Yorkshire and has worked for seven years as an assessor, after a career in farming and agricultural research – mostly in pigs and poultry.

During his time as an assessor, he worked alongside Malcolm Johnstone, RSPCA Assured's long-serving aquaculture manager until his retirement at the end of 2022 and now a consultant for the organisation.

'Of all our sectors, salmon farming probably gets criticised the most, yet in practice it's one of the frontrunners in terms of its work in health and welfare,' White told The Source.

'I think RSPCA Assured salmon farmers are blazing a trail for the salmon sector.

They are very willing to work with us to progress fish welfare and have worked hard to implement each new iteration of the RSPCA welfare standards.'

The RSPCA farmed Atlantic salmon standards are reviewed approximately every two years and the latest revision, written in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, has just been published, including new requirements relating to use of non-medicinal treatments and cleaner fish.

'Because salmon farming is still a relatively young sector, it's continually progressing and advancing its practices.'

Embracing RSPCA Assured has helped improve the lives of millions of farmed animals, across all sectors, said White, because achieving and maintaining certification demands good management.

'Good management gives rise to better welfare and health of the stock, which leads to better production.

'It's really positive that so many producers can see the benefit in improving fish health and welfare and want to work with us to keep making

improvements. Consumers are increasingly demanding that animal produce is higher welfare, so farming to RSPCA standards not only improves welfare but it can also increase marketability at the same time.'

The RSPCA and RSPCA Assured are often targeted by anti-salmon farming activists for working with the sector.

'We understand there are challenges for salmon farming to overcome and, together with the RSPCA, the salmon sector and welfare experts, we are constantly furthering learning and driving towards finding solutions.

'All RSPCA Assured members care about the welfare of their animals and we look forward to continuing to work with them and help them on their higher welfare journeys.'



RSPCA Assured Engagement Lead Kevin White

## New society gives young people a voice

**Young people in the aquaculture sector looking to connect and collaborate now have their own organisation.**



Scottish Sea Farms vet Alison Brough is one of several YAS members who'll help coordinate visits and events

The Young Aquaculture Society (YAS), due to launch officially on May 14 at Aquaculture UK in Aviemore, already has around 80 members and many more followers on its LinkedIn page.

Founder and President Andrew

Richardson, Technical and Standards Manager at Salmon Scotland, devised the idea while working in New Zealand, where a youth body had just been established.

Back in the UK, he sent out a survey to gauge interest and, following an enthusiastic response, the YAS was born. The free-to-join group covers all types of aquaculture and is flexible on age limit, hoping to attract and retain as many members as possible, said Vice-President Rob Stewart, a doctoral researcher at the Roslin Institute at the University of Edinburgh.

'We wanted to make sure we included all young aquaculture professionals in the UK, whether they are in seaweed, shellfish or finfish, and from academia, business or policy making.

'We have young international members,

who want to keep an eye on what's happening in the UK. And we also have experienced sector leaders who are perhaps most aware of the need to appeal to more young people into the sector.'

As well as fostering collaboration, the YAS also aims to connect people who, by the nature of their jobs, live in isolated locations.

And the founding members have been in close contact with similar entities abroad, particularly with Norway's Young Fish, which runs an annual conference.

'It's early days, but it's all going well so far,' said Stewart. 'Now we need to build on the momentum and engage young professionals from across the aquaculture ecosystem.'

## SAIC chief sets sights on sustainable future

SAIC CEO Heather Jones at the recent North Atlantic Seafood Forum, Bergen

**As it approaches its 10-year milestone, the Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) has exceeded even the high expectations of its long-serving CEO.**

Heather Jones, at the helm from the beginning and determined to stay there as the organisation enters a 'transition' phase under new funding arrangements, gives credit for its creation to the aquaculture community.

'It was the sector's vision to have better collaboration with academia and find collective solutions to fish health and disease challenges,' Jones told The Source.

In its role realising that vision, SAIC has turned a project pot of £10 million into industry-critical research worth more than £70 million across over 100 projects, many still ongoing.

Funded solely by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for its first five years, it then received additional support from Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise between 2019-2024.

'As we've evolved, we've broadened the range of research projects we've done to include aquaculture's environmental impact. And we've extended our engagement with the supply chain, particularly SME businesses in the Highlands. Scotland has a lot of innovators and entrepreneurs and we have helped tap into their potential.'

Jones said one of the proudest achievements for her team was bringing many of these companies to SAIC's Sustainable Aquaculture Summit in Glasgow last May and then showcasing Scotland globally by facilitating their attendance at Aqua Nor in Trondheim.

She puts SAIC's influence down to the fact that it is 'a relentlessly positive voice' that finds opportunities that benefit everybody.

'One of the most effective things we've done is to help Scottish companies and universities access close to £20 million of UK funding through the Seafood Innovation Fund and other third-party funding vehicles.

'And we've nurtured future leaders through training programmes, SAIC Masters and PhDs, plus grassroots networks such as WISA (Women in Scottish Aquaculture).'

Given all it has accomplished, it's hard to imagine the sector without SAIC, so it came as a surprise, not least to Jones herself, when the SFC announced its funding would end this year.

'The Scottish Government has asked us to submit proposals, which we've done, for a slimmed down SAIC for the transition period until March 2026. I believe the industry wants to see SAIC's work continue long into the future, and that sector leaders will give valuable contributions to the discussions on how SAIC evolves,' said Jones.

'The Marine Directorate and the Minister, Mairi Gougeon, have given us a strong indication that both the sector and the government are keen to see the applied R&D part of what SAIC does on fish health and survival continue in the interim.'

Scottish Sea Farms Managing Director, and a founding member of the SAIC Board, Jim Gallagher is one of several sector voices eager to see the advances continue.

'SAIC has done exactly what it was tasked with doing – namely, connecting sector with academia to research and address key issues – and a whole lot more besides, firmly establishing itself as a pivotal player within Scottish aquaculture,' said Gallagher.

'Given the farming challenges faced in 2022 and 2023, there's more need than ever for collaborative cross-sector R&D which SAIC is well-positioned to facilitate.'

**SAIC will be at Aquaculture UK from May 14-15 on stand F2 and will host conference sessions on both days.**

## Barcelona kicks off show time for the sector

**It's show season in the aquaculture and seafood sector, with a number of major events taking place over the coming months.**

Seafood Expo Global/Seafood Processing Global, returning for the third year to Barcelona from April 23-25, is expecting more than 33,000 visitors and has so far booked 2,000-plus exhibitors.

Scottish Sea Farms will be among the companies represented on Scotland's national pavilion, where international buyers will be able to sample the best of the country's seafood. Visit [www.seafoodexpo.com](http://www.seafoodexpo.com)

Over two days in May (14-15), the aquaculture community will descend on Aviemore for the biennial Aquaculture UK exhibition and the Aquaculture Awards.

Alongside a record number of exhibitors, there will be a conference programme and an 'innovation theatre' to showcase the sector's fast-changing technology. Visit [www.aquacultureuk.com](http://www.aquacultureuk.com)

Then, in June (11-13), SeaWork, Europe's largest on-water workboat exhibition, will be held in Southampton, featuring 500 exhibitors with over 70 vessels, floating plant and equipment on the quayside and pontoons. For more information, visit [www.seawork.com](http://www.seawork.com).

Later in the summer, the European Aquaculture Society (EAS) and the World Aquaculture Society (WAS) combine forces to stage Aqua 2024 in Copenhagen (August 26-30).

The show, at the city's Bella Centre, will include a scientific conference, trade exhibition, industry forums, workshops, student events and receptions, with the overall theme of 'Blue Food, Green Solutions'. See [www.aquaeas.eu](http://www.aquaeas.eu) or [www.was.org](http://www.was.org) for more information.



# People on the move

## Our first round-up of internal promotions in 2024.

Within the mainland team, John MacQueen, formerly Deckhand on net washing vessel, the Solas Na Mara, stationed at Loch Nevis, has been promoted to Senior Net Technician on the Ossian at Summer Isles.

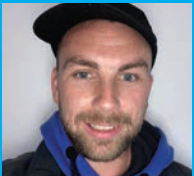
Andrew Ghazal, formerly Net Support Technician on the Solas Na Mara, has taken on the role of First Mate aboard the Sally Ann workboat – his first crew role – supporting our farm teams around the region on a two-week on/off basis.

Andrew takes over from Adam Wright who steps up to Skipper aboard the Sally Ann, where he's been a key part of the crew for over three years.

Over on Mull, Paul Clark moves back to his fish husbandry roots as a Senior at Fishnish, having spent the last year as Deckhand on the Hollie Rose.

Completing the moves between farm and fleet for this round-up, Shetland's Craig Fraser joins the crew aboard service vessel, the Bagheera, as First Mate, following over three years working in fish husbandry at Cliftsound.

Lastly, within Processing, Shetland gains a new Compliance Officer, with Ewelina Dabrowska, formerly Fish Welfare Officer then Food Laboratory Technician at South Shian, joining the Lerwick-based team.



John MacQueen



Andrew Ghazal



Adam Wright



Paul Clark



Craig Fraser



Ewelina Dabrowska

# Workplace wellbeing: free 'Financial Future' webinar

Free webinar inspired by the Young People's Council

## Scottish Sea Farms is offering colleagues the opportunity to join a free online workshop giving expert advice on personal finances.

The Financial Future webinar, provided by workplace wellbeing partner Health Assured via accredited training provider Munny, will guide colleagues through the ins and outs of pension schemes, investment vehicles and retirement planning strategies.

Qualified financial advisers will address common topics including:

- 'How much will I need for a comfortable retirement?'
- 'What is a pension?'
- 'What are my investment options?'
- 'What are the key features, benefits and risks?'
- 'What is compound interest – and why is it so important?'

The expert speakers will also share 'the Rule of 25', along with their five top tips for a more secure financial future and guidance on inheritance and estate planning.

Scottish Sea Farms Head of HR Fiona McCann said the idea for the webinar came from the Young People's Council.

'The company has generous maternity and paternity benefits but some of

our younger employees don't have families yet and are more concerned about how much they should be saving or putting into their pensions now for a financially secure future.

'Equally, the webinar will be just as helpful to anyone who has been working for longer and wants to increase their understanding about one or more key areas to make more informed decisions when it comes to finances.

'A secure, comfortable retirement is something we all hope to enjoy, and there's no better time than now to take the necessary steps towards achieving it.'

Free to colleagues, the webinar can accommodate up to 100 people.

'Depending on demand, we can arrange for more than one webinar,' said McCann. 'We're also considering further educational webinars on other subjects of interest.'

To register for the Financial Future webinar, which will be held at 3pm on Friday 19 April, email [hr@scottishseafarms.com](mailto:hr@scottishseafarms.com).



# Dads reap rewards of enhanced parental leave

Back in 2015, the Government introduced statutory shared parental leave rights to help make it possible for more parents to share childcare in their baby's first year.

But for Scottish Sea Farm employees with more than one year's service, there is an enhanced shared parental leave scheme that offers more generous benefits to mums and dads.

Among those who have taken advantage of the package is Callum Cavey, Farm Manager at Hunda in Orkney. He and his wife Molly have no family nearby to help with child care and wanted to both take time off to look after Finn, now six months.

'We fully expected that if I was going to take any leave I would go down to statutory pay and it was only when I was filling in the forms that I realised I was eligible for financial help,' said Callum.

'In fact, I get 10 weeks on full pay, eight weeks on 90 per cent and eight weeks on 50 per cent. So, it made sense when my wife was due to go back to statutory pay, for her to return to work and I would go on to shared parental leave and still receive a good part of my wages.'

Callum began his leave at the end of his wife's, just before Christmas, and they will both have had four months off by the time he goes back to work in April.

'Apart from the financial rewards, I've created a really strong bond with Finn; if I'd gone back to work, I would have missed eight hours of the day when he's most active.'

Leander de Wilde, who works at Nevis B, agreed that the time spent with his baby boy Fergus, now eight months, was worth even more than the money.

'As a guy, you get two weeks statutory pay and then you're back to work and you see the baby for a couple of hours at night and at the weekend,' he said.

Scottish Sea Farms Payroll and HR Administrator Eline Blom, who oversees the company's employee benefits including shared parental leave, said: 'To be eligible for the government's statutory shared parental leave, parents must share responsibility for the child at birth and meet different work and pay criteria.

'If you meet the criteria, and have one or more years' service with Scottish Sea Farms, then you could be eligible for the company's enhanced shared parental scheme.

'The best starting point is to check the government's eligibility criteria via [www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay](http://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay).

'If you're eligible, then reach out to myself and I'll talk you through the next steps. It's important to note that you're required to give a minimum of eight weeks written notice of your leaving date, with several forms to be completed. So, the sooner you can reach out the better.'

# Hat-trick of award wins...



Craig Grounds



Alison Brough



Anne Anderson

## Three Scottish Sea Farms colleagues have been recognised in prestigious awards schemes.

Trainee Farm Manager at Shuna, Craig Grounds, was named Aquaculture Learner of the Year at the Lantra Scotland's Awards for Land-based and Aquaculture Skills (ALBAS) on March 7.

Just a day later, on March 8, fish vet Alison Brough won the WiSA

(Women in Scottish Aquaculture) Rising Star Award, while Head of Sustainability and Development Anne Anderson was recognised for her Outstanding Contribution, alongside SAIC CEO Heather Jones and Director of Innovation & Engagement Sarah Riddle.

# Career spotlight



Krystian Lis, Engineer, Shetland Processing

**What does your role involve?**  
I am a control system engineer, designing automation systems and control systems and generally solving technical problems, focusing mainly on improving existing equipment.

**What's your background?**  
I came to Shetland from Poland in 2014 after high school and joined Grieg Seafood that year. I have been with Scottish Sea Farms since the acquisition in 2021 and am now in the third year of a four-year Graduate Apprenticeship degree in BEng (Hons) at Robert Gordon University, studying Instrumentation, Measurement and Control (IMC). This involves work-based learning and academic study, and is supported by the company.

**Why did you choose this job?**  
I would say the job chose me. My work has evolved from a maintenance role to helping to design robots, with a lot of self-tuition and observing other engineers. Thanks to the trust of my managers, I was given the opportunity to take on increasingly complicated projects and learnt each step of the way.

**What are the biggest challenges?**  
Much of what I do needs to be implemented when there is no production, but production has to go on so I seize my chances when I can. This can be challenging in a very busy facility.

**And the greatest rewards?**  
Seeing things work and how they actually help people. One of my proudest achievements is the Cleaning in Place system I developed for our Baader gutting machines in Lerwick. This replaces labour intensive work with the touch of a button and adds to the facility efficiency.



# Orkney charities seeing rising demand for help

**Last issue, The Source revealed that Scottish Sea Farms' Heart of the Community Fund was changing approach, with a move to smaller, swifter grants of up to £500 to provide more local causes with the support they need, when they need it.**

**£500  
GRANTS**



Photo courtesy of Orkney Starter Packs

Two organisations making every pound count are Orkney's Food Bank and Starter Packs Orkney, both of which have seen a sharp rise in demand for their services in the wake of Covid and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

Alan Scott, who manages the Food Bank, part of the nationwide Trussell Trust, said: 'In 2022, demand was up 35 per cent. By 2023, it was up 40 per cent, with a record number of food vouchers issued.'

'Last summer we were spending about £10,000 a month just to keep the service going, helping clients with food and electricity, and for the first-time in our 10-year history we had to actively fundraise.'

Thankfully, the Orkney public are very generous, said Alan. When the charity, which has boxes in Tesco and the Co-op, held a special collection before Christmas, 650kg food was donated, along with £2,000 in cash.

Starter Packs Orkney is also increasingly reliant on donations, in addition to support from Orkney Islands Council, said Noreen Wright, who is responsible for the charity's administration.

'Orkney might not typically have rough sleepers on the streets, but it does have people in emergency accommodation.'

'Once they get a tenancy, they are

referred to us by the Council, and we provide the basics, such as bedding, crockery, cooking utensils and other household items.

'We've seen a big rise in demand for these starter packs, from 28 referrals in 2021, to 43 in 2022, to 65 last year.'

'All kinds of people can fall on hard times. We're getting quite a lot of single young people, and those who have been through family break-ups. Sometimes it will be disasters like fire or flooding. And recently we've had quite a few Ukrainian refugees as well.'

## Community saves Lismore's 'lifeline' store

**LARGER  
GRANT**

**The only store and post office on Lismore is seen by the local community as a lifeline that makes living on the island viable.**

So, when the business was put up for sale last year residents quickly got behind a campaign to save it, raising almost £80,000 in a matter of months.

The outlet, managed by the Lismore Community Trust (LCT), is now a community-owned asset, after Lismore inhabitants invested in the shop by purchasing shares.

LCT secretary Julie Livingstone said the community bought into the idea that everybody should be involved in trying to keep the store going.

'It was crucial that we didn't lose the post office contract and the shop, which is the only place on Lismore to buy essentials.'

'A round trip to the supermarket in Oban on the mainland can take four

hours and the elderly and those who don't drive rely completely on the shop.'

Open all year round, Monday to Saturday, the store sells everything from basics such as bread, milk, meat, fish and dairy, to batteries, torches, candles and other household goods, not to mention alcohol and takeaway coffees.

'We met our funding target through business donations - including £7,500 from Scottish Sea Farms - and £25 community shares, which saw a rapid take up by the island's 170 residents, former residents, holiday makers and friends, as well as a JustGiving page that raised £15,000.'

'The shop reopened in November and made a small profit in the first month of trading. As well as being a vital service on the island, we hope it will also be a profitable business.'

The funds raised will help pay for the stock, the post office contract, the fittings, refurbishments and the first five years' running costs, said the LCT.

Members of the Lismore Community Trust gather outside the newly opened community store



Photo courtesy of The Oban Times

Donations have already contributed towards a portacabin to store supplies, and have also enabled the acquisition of the old community bus, which was being replaced.

'Scottish Sea Farms has made a massive difference and we're still hoping some of the other local businesses get on board our 'sponsor a shelf' scheme. We're going to wrap a Scottish Sea Farms banner around the chiller unit to mark its support.'

## Heart of the Community at a glance



**2024** so far  
**30** grants approved  
**£31,380** given

**All time** (2011-present)  
**857** grants approved  
**£1,878,531** given

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