

Farming Link

Defra news for farmers and growers

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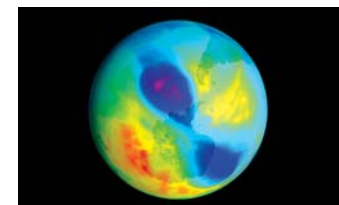
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Natural England to cut red tape

The head of Natural England, the new organisation responsible for conserving England's natural environment, has vowed to cut red tape and work closely with farmers in the battle to improve environmental sustainability.

Helen Phillips, its Chief Executive, said the new body – formed from the merger of three agencies – would have “a far greater understanding of the business of farming” and intended to “work with farmers to better understand our environmental objectives”.

Natural England has taken over from English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service, but with a wider remit and responsibility for safeguarding and improving the natural environment in England. It officially began work on Monday 2 October, from new headquarters in Sheffield.

In an interview with Farming Link, Helen said the organisation would act as a “first-stop shop, which for the farmer means less red tape”.

She added: “We will ruthlessly eliminate bureaucracy and focus on our relationship management at a farm enterprise level. We need to deliver benefits to farmers by reducing the procession of people at their gates through working closely with other regulatory bodies such as RPA, EA, SVS and local authorities. But, more fundamentally, we need to work together to get a clear vision of how to improve and protect the environment.”

She said the merging of responsibilities



Helen Phillips, Natural England's new CEO

allowed for a more integrated approach. A first-stop shop meant farmers and growers would have a “regular, dedicated person from Natural England to deal with”, as well as access to a wide range of experts.

“It means there will always be someone in Natural England who has ownership of their issue and will be their champion on the inside.”

And she concluded: “The Act that created Natural England is the best thing that has happened for the natural environment in the last 50 years. For those farmers who buy into the challenge of providing public goods for public funds, Natural England will be a delight to work with.”

● **Natural England, Environmental Stewardship... and farmers: full interview on page 4**

New rules to protect countryside

The new Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations came into force on 10 October 2006 and are designed to protect the rural environment and help cut red tape for farmers and managers.

The legislation will:

- replace the existing EIA rules on uncultivated land and semi-natural areas. The new rules will continue to cover activities such as the addition of fertilisers and soil improvers, sowing seed, or physically cultivating soil on uncultivated and semi-natural land to make it more productive;
- introduce light-touch new EU-wide rules to guard against environmental impacts from restructuring work such as adding or digging up field boundaries and recontouring land through redistribution of earth or other material. The Regulations will only apply to projects over a certain size. For instance:
- projects on uncultivated land and/or semi-natural areas will normally only be caught if the land concerned exceeds 2 ha in area.
- restructuring projects will normally only be caught if they involve changes to more than 4 km of field boundaries; movements of more than 10,000 m³ of earth or rock; or otherwise restructure an area in excess of 100 ha.

- restructuring projects in sensitive areas (e.g. National Parks, the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Scheduled Ancient Monuments) are subject to lower thresholds of 2km, 5000m³ or 50 ha.

Barry Gardiner, Biodiversity Minister, unveiled the rules in September, and said: “Farmers found the old rules on uncultivated and semi-natural land confusing – the new rules will be clearer, with more farmer-friendly definitions, and we have cut red tape by introducing thresholds below which the rules will not apply.”

“The new rules on restructuring will guard against the possibility of major negative effects on the rural landscape, but they will not catch farmers engaging in routine farming activities.”

The rules will apply when work is likely to cause significant damage to the environment, and anyone wishing to do such work will have to apply to the new Natural England agency to determine whether an environmental impact assessment is required.

i For more information on the new Regulations, contact the EIA Helpline on 0800 028 2140, email eia.England@defra.gsi.gov.uk, or visit the website: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/eia>

Whole Farm Approach

Have you registered yet? Over 4,700 farmers have and can now access the online service to complete the December Agricultural Survey, register for exemptions from waste licensing and complete Soil Protection Reviews, in addition to accessing the latest advice and guidance.

i To register, go to <http://www.wholefarm.defra.gov.uk> or call the helpline on 08459 33 55 77.

Share to Milk – collaborating for profit

How can dairy farmers preserve capital, have an easier life and increase their profits? A new initiative launched by English Farming and Food Partnerships (EFFP), and supported by the MDC and Defra, aims to demonstrate ways of building profitable businesses through collaboration.

A series of free practical “Share to Milk” workshops are taking place around the country to help dairy farmers increase profitability, reduce costs, improve quality of life and share risk. These meetings will help dairy farmers by looking at the many different ways of working together to improve profit, by sharing machinery, labour, land, cows and buildings.

These workshops which are sponsored by Barclays Bank provide real-life video case studies of dairy farmers followed by practical advice on getting started. A range of experts on finance, farming agreements, taxation and the legal aspects will be on hand to provide expert advice.

i See back page for your nearest Share to Milk workshop or contact Sarah Moffatt on 020 7213 0431 (email: smoffatt@effp.co.uk).

Farm Business Advice Service ends March 07

Defra’s Farm Business Advice Service will end on 31 March 2007 when responsibility for providing business advice will transfer to the Regional Development Agencies to form part of their mainstream services.

Around 7,000 farmers have already received advice under the current scheme. Among them is Kent farmer John Warde, owner of Force Green Farm, a 1,300 acre mixed dairy and arable enterprise.

John explored further diversification options with adviser Giles Dadd and received a complete report on the viability of his business aspirations. He said: “The report was brief and to the point. A number of recommendations were made including budgeting some possible changes to help inform decision-making about the viability of the business overall and help establish the capital needed to implement changes.”

i See enclosed leaflet for more information.

The future of farming

by Secretary of State David Miliband

In the last edition of Farming Link I set out what I saw as the challenges and opportunities for the farming industry. I’d like to use this opportunity to talk a little more about my vision for the industry and how we in government need to work in partnership with you to deliver it.

At this year’s Royal Show I explained that we have to take a ‘one planet’ approach to our production and consumption – and this approach must be central to our relationship with you. Farming, like other sectors of the economy, needs to live within the limits of our natural resources – we simply cannot go on living as though we have three planet’s worth of resources rather than one.

Of course, farming is unique in terms of its impact on our landscape and how we use it; and because of its ability to help us all live within environmental limits – whether that be through growing crops for energy or meeting consumer demand for high quality, seasonal produce. When it comes to climate change, farming is on the front line, both in adapting to change and in reducing its not insignificant greenhouse gas emissions. The climate change feature in this edition of Farming Link sets out what we are doing to help you address this.

Alongside being a positive net contributor to the environment, of course farming needs to remain a profitable, innovative and competitive industry and the Common Agricultural Policy has an important role to play in helping to achieve this. The CAP has undoubtedly been one of the single biggest influences on farming practice over the last 30 years. Last December we published our long-term vision for European agriculture. It envisaged a farming sector which was profitable without the need for subsidy, which thrived in a liberalised global market, but which received financial support for bringing public benefits, such as those to the environment, which market-oriented farming alone cannot deliver.

I understand the need for clarity about future support arrangements and we are not proposing abolishing the CAP. The EU needs a common policy structure for agriculture - but subsidies must be directed towards the positive management of the countryside. The 2003 CAP reforms began this work but there is much further to go – for you and for us in Government. Of course the



David Miliband meets farmers in Hampshire

implementation of the Single Payment Scheme has been very difficult and I am acutely aware of the strain that it has put on farmers, for which I am very sorry. I have always said that the 2006 Scheme is likely to be very challenging too. I do hope, however, that as the SPS beds down over the next couple of years, we begin to see the benefits of breaking the link between subsidy and production, with farmers free to make business decisions in response to market signals, and being rewarded for stewardship of the countryside.

I am aware that a lot of good work is already under way. Last March we introduced the Environmental Stewardship scheme which has enabled every eligible farmer in England to earn payments for undertaking environmental management on the land. Together with the existing agri-environment schemes, over 4 million hectares – 40 per cent of available farmland – is being managed in an environmentally friendly way. In the future, we want to reward upland farmers in the same way for the environmental benefits they provide.

In addition, we need a more risk-based and focused use of regulation to underpin our vision for a profitable and sustainable future for farming. We are committed, with the Farm Regulation and Charging Strategy, to using alternatives to regulation wherever possible. And when regulation is necessary we must always ensure it is effective, transparent, proportionate and cost-effective. As part of the strategy we emphasised the importance of sharing the costs and responsibilities of animal health protection. The taxpayer currently spends over £530 million a year on animal health and welfare. It is in all our interests to limit the occurrence and spread of animal disease and livestock farmers must understand the costs of these risks, and

share in ownership of the measures needed to control them.

Alongside changes in farming practice and regulation is a growing interest amongst the general public in where their food comes from and how it has reached their plate. The increasing appetite for locally sourced, seasonal food is of course a great opportunity for farmers and growers, and one that supports a One Planet philosophy. We in government want to do everything we can to help you to make the most of this.

Government has a leading role to play in changing procurement behaviour across the public sector, including our hospitals, prisons and schools. In September the Department for Education and Skills announced an initiative to improve school food. As part of that work my department will continue work to help increase the capacity of small and local producers to bid successfully to supply fruit, vegetables, dairy and meat for school meals. This will include encouraging more farmers to work together to supply schools with sustainable, fresh produce.

Defra is also supporting a Year of Farming and Food in schools which will start in Autumn 2007. We want to improve young peoples’ understanding of where their food comes from, and create better links between schools, farmers and the food sector – that hopefully will have a life beyond the ‘Year’ itself. You can find out more about this on page 8.

I believe we can build a brighter future for farming in this country, and that future is firmly rooted in how the industry and the public is becoming increasingly conscious of its relationship with the environment. But it will only be through working together that we can help farming confirm its rightful place as a success story that the British public is proud of.

In conversation with: Sir Don Curry

Sir Don Curry farms 250 hectares of arable and lowland grass in Northumberland. In 2001 he was appointed by the Government to chair a Policy Commission to advise on the future of farming and food. The report (commonly referred to as the *Curry report*) provided an important new vision for the industry. Sir Don is currently chairing a Group with responsibility for driving forward the Government's Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy (SFFS).

We asked Sir Don about his programme of regional visits which take place annually so that he can see how the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy is being delivered on the ground. The 2006 visits began in July with a visit to the South East region.

Q: Why are these visits important?

A: It has been quite clear since the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy was established that regional delivery would be vital. Without engagement across the regions, we will not succeed.

The regional visits are an opportunity to hear about any problems, discuss local issues, and to see first-hand how the Strategy is progressing at the business end. For example, a key part of the Strategy is the need to reconnect the food chain with consumers. Therefore, in terms of regional delivery I see many examples of how this works in practice, for example through food cooperatives, local procurement initiatives and marketing schemes. Encouragingly, I am also now seeing an increase in non-food crops including biomass.

Q: What have you learnt?

A: Each region is different and therefore has different priorities. In each region activity is being driven by a number of dedicated people who lead on a broad range of different subjects. Having a committed individual to facilitate and drive forward activity really seems to make a difference.

It is also important to have the right balance between the public and private sector. A commitment to make sure the Strategy succeeds is crucial so whether it be the Government Office, the RDAs, the key agencies and trade associations, or the private sector companies and farmers – engagement is essential. Each region also has an independent chair and that's invaluable.

Q: What really stood out on your most recent visit?

A: I have seen some exciting examples of diversification. In some cases as an extension of the farm business, in others, not related. But all ensuring a more sustainable future.



Sir Don (right) on a visit to John Whitby's farm in the South East

The increase in local and regional production of food is very exciting and bodes well for the future sustainability of the sector. In the South East I saw an example of a farm that is using its proximity to an urban community as an opportunity and not a threat.

Also, the South East is establishing champions to promote opportunities in different sectors, such as fruit, public sector procurement, bio fuels, milk, horticulture and livestock.

Q: What will you be looking for during future visits?

A: I am looking for evidence of progress and cultural change. Changes as a result of CAP reform are proving challenging for many businesses and difficulties with the Single Payment Scheme payments have been a serious distraction. We now need to see businesses moving on and looking for solutions to ensure sustainability in the broadest sense of the term – economic as well as environmental.

I am particularly interested in up-take of environmental stewardship schemes in each region. I also want to see action on environmental protection, and whether regions are addressing the social impact of change in addition to the broad range of economic activity which is vital to sustaining rural businesses; the expansion of markets, public procurement of food for schools, hospitals etc, local and regional food, energy etc, as well as greater cooperation and improving business skills, benchmarking, risk management etc.

I am also keen to meet with young farmers. I am encouraging each region to bring together forward-thinking young farmers as I would like to hear their views on the future of the industry.

I will also be discussing the Year of Farming and Food which will start in September 2007 and how the regions will engage in it. The aims of the 'Year' will be about improving young people's

understanding of where food comes from; improving awareness of the role of farming and the countryside; developing healthy eating habits through better understanding of how food is produced; and increased appreciation of the environmental issues associated with food production.

Q: Have you noticed any changes after four years?

A: Over the last four years, the industry has seen huge changes. These changes can be daunting. However, despite the challenges change inevitably brings, we have got to stay focused on the initiatives which will ensure a sustainable future for the industry. It is early days, but I am very encouraged by the progress that has been made. The growth in local food initiatives has been particularly impressive and meets the consumer demand for food which is fresh and has local provenance. The introduction of the environmental stewardship schemes is a big step forward.

Q: What do you think are the key challenges for the future?

Structural changes have been introduced this year. Natural England has been established. The RDAs have increased responsibility, and there are increased financial constraints on Government departments, especially Defra. These are significant developments which are hugely important and could impact on the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy.

We must continue to work closely with regional colleagues to ensure that systems are bedded in and relationships are established which are crucial to ensuring a sustainable future for the industry. This Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy must succeed!

i For further information on the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy see www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/index.htm

EU approves rural funding

The European Commission has confirmed the allocation of rural development funding for Member States from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The UK's allocation is about £1.3 billion, broadly in line with Defra's expectations. It is, however, disappointing that the Commission has chosen to deploy this funding based on historic allocations, which leaves the UK with a disproportionately small share of the European funds.

In England the money will be used to fund the new Rural Development Programme from 2007 to 2013. It will be supplemented by domestic match-funding and voluntary modulation. Voluntary modulation will be a key element of the funding package for the next England programme, but Defra cannot confirm the overall budget until a new European regulation governing voluntary modulation is agreed.

Environmental Stewardship will be at the heart of the next Rural Development Programme. The Secretary of State, David Miliband, reaffirmed commitment for Entry Level Stewardship to be open to all farmers, and to continue with Higher Level Stewardship, at the Royal Show in July 2006. The ongoing discussions about the voluntary modulation regulation



will not affect existing agreements under the current England Rural Development Programme, or agreements entered into by the end of 2006

Environmental Stewardship is now delivered by Natural England, who will be contacting current and potential future customers through the autumn.

● See pages 4-5 for an interview with Natural England's Chief Executive, Helen Phillips.

Introducing Natural E

Natural England opened its doors for business at the beginning of October. We asked Helen Phillips, Natural England's Chief Executive, to ask what the new organisation will mean to farmers and growers

Why is Natural England being created?

Natural England brings together biodiversity, natural beauty, access and recreation, and the delivery of agri-environment schemes. Until now, these have been championed and delivered by separate bodies. As a result, the multiple benefits they can bring have often been lost. We will change this by offering a new first-stop shop, which for the farmer means less red tape, a clarity of purpose and less bureaucracy.

But this is more than just a merger. Natural England will be much bigger than before, with a far more influential voice and a much wider remit.

What are the advantages of bringing together English Nature, Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency? Aren't their individual skills and knowledge at risk of being watered down?

On the contrary, we will build on the successes and strengths of our predecessors. English Nature (EN) brings practical experience, ecological knowledge and leading-edge science. Countryside Agency (CA) brings a focus on people, increasing access and enjoyment of the natural environment and a reputation for effective innovation. Rural Development Service (RDS) brings an extensive knowledge of farming and the expertise to help farmers deliver a more sustainable future for their families and the environment.

In addition, we will ruthlessly eliminate bureaucracy and focus on our relationship management at a farm enterprise level. We need to deliver benefits to farmers by reducing the procession of people at their gates through working closely with other regulatory bodies such as RPA, EA, SVS and local authorities. More fundamentally, we need to work together to get a clear vision for how to improve and protect the environment. This will allow our staff to take a more proportionate, risk-based approach in our dealings with the farming community.

The strategy document for Natural England talks about providing an integrated approach. What will this mean to farmers and growers?

The previous situation was confusing for farmers and growers. We aim to provide a first-stop shop. This means they will have a regular, dedicated person from Natural



WHAT IS NATURAL ENGLAND?

Natural England is the new body responsible for protecting and improving England's natural environment – its land, flora and fauna, freshwaters and marine environments, geology and soils.

Created as a result of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, it brings together English Nature, the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency.

The Act defines its purpose as: "To ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development."

Its headquarters are in Sheffield.

WHO IS HELEN PHILLIPS?

Chief Executive Helen Phillips joins Natural England from the Environment Agency, where she worked for 11 years, most recently as Director of Environment for Wales. She was previously Head of Strategy and has a background in zoology.

England to deal with but it won't preclude them from gaining access to a range of experts across a range of disciplines. It does mean, however, that there will always be someone in Natural England who has ownership of their issue, will be their champion on the inside and provide clear and unambiguous land management advice on the best way forward.

The integrated management of land, water, flora and fauna is critical for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. The Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative is an important step towards this outcome. As a lead partner for farm advice, Natural England will seek to raise the bar in nine of the catchments covered by the initiative to bring the management of these important natural resources together.

How will Natural England be involved with farmers and growers and what impact is it likely to have on them?

On a wider basis than ever before, all farmers and land managers can be paid for looking after wildlife, landscapes and natural resources. Environmental Stewardship is a major step forward and it will be down to us to make sure it is adequately funded in the future and actually delivers the benefits it promises.

The new Entry Level scheme (ELS) element will involve simple low-cost measures like maintaining hedgerows, ditches and in-field trees. The Higher Level

Scheme (HLS) is more ambitious. It includes provision for managed access and education, and allows for more costly and targeted options such as moorland restoration and fallow plots for arable plants and ground-nesting birds.

HLS will enable us to encourage an improvement in the condition of our 4,000 SSSIs. We will supply information to farmers and, through HLS, the grants needed to manage these nationally important sites. That will help us achieve the ambitious target of ensuring that 95 per cent of SSSIs are in healthy condition by 2010. Currently we're only at 69 per cent.

Working with government, we'll have to consider what is the right balance between the ELS and HLS components of Environmental Stewardship. The emphasis at the moment is on ELS, which in many ways will help us create a level playing field and get some of the basics right. That advantage Natural England brings, however, is being able to work on a landscape and catchment scale and really target incentives to where we have precious habitats and species that need conserving, and this is where HLS comes in.

This opens the wider question of the balance between Pillar 1 and Pillar 2. I've been controversially quoted in describing Pillar 1 as a national travesty. This reflects my view that we pay farmers to meet basic operating requirements that would represent minimum standards in other industries. Natural England can't achieve its ambitions for the natural environment without an economically sound agricultural industry. Surely this isn't best achieved by

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subsidies that are inevitably unsustainable. More and more farmers are recognising that the public money they receive must be in return for public goods.

How will Natural England be good for farming?

As one organisation, we will have a far greater understanding of the business of farming and we intend to work with farmers to help them understand our environmental objectives. David Miliband refers to a new environmental contract with the public. Natural England will be at the vanguard of this in creating a shared vision with farmers of the role the countryside should play in sustaining us, in body and soul, and tackling the big global issues of the day, such as the role of land managers in helping us to tackle climate change, as carbon managers.

One of Natural England's targets is to make £3m efficiencies in its first year. Is this possible without damaging the service to farmers and growers?

Absolutely. In fact, the business case for Natural England, which requires us to make £11m savings over the next three years, is actually small fry compared with what we should be able to deliver by merging three organisations into one. My passion is to reduce the cost of running Natural England so we have more money to spend on the natural environment. Already we have identified £21m in savings, but in all of this we are jealously guarding the pot for ELS and HLS.

What is your biggest immediate challenge?

Without doubt it is to protect the financial resources available to agri-environment schemes in the future. While we have some influence in this, rather irritatingly it is not in our control. The first thing to secure is a sensible deal on the level of voluntary modulation and co-financing from Treasury, which is largely within the gift of the Government. The ability to vary the level of modulation across the devolved administrations, referred to as regionalisation, continues to grind on in Europe, as does the level of funding to be made available to Axis 1 and 3 and the so-called franchise, which will determine whether farms receiving less than €5,000 are excluded from the calculation of the overall size of the pot. This is complicated stuff – but it's key to all our futures.

Natural England has said it intends to be a plain-speaking organisation. What is your message to farmers who might be viewing it as another layer of government bureaucracy?

Natural England opened its doors on Monday 2 October. My advice is to watch this space. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Within three months of my arrival, we published a statement of what it is you can hold us to account to deliver on. The Act that created Natural England is the best thing that has happened for the natural environment in the last 50 years. For those farmers who buy into the challenge of providing public goods for public funds, Natural England will be a delight to work with.

The effects of our changing climate on agriculture

There's no doubt that the drought in the UK this summer had everyone talking about global warming and the impact of climate change, but the dramatic change in the weather in August demonstrated how difficult it is to draw conclusions from our highly variable weather conditions.

The UK experienced a wet May, followed by a June that had only 30 per cent of its average rainfall. July saw some very high temperatures with limited rainfall and falling levels in reservoirs, but August brought heavy prolonged rain and window-rattling storms – by which time many people were saying “What drought?”

Britain's farmers will feel the impact of our changing climate very directly, but this can present both threats and opportunities. Potential threats include:

- prolonged and more frequent drought
- changes in rainfall distribution
- more storms and other extreme weather events
- rising sea levels
- reduced crop yields (and indeed whether growing a particular crop is still viable)
- increased pest loads (pests don't get killed off if the winter is mild)
- development and spread of new pests (Bluetongue, a disease whose spread is very much influenced by temperature, has just reached Belgium)
- increased nutrient requirements for arable crops
- increased risk of heat stress in livestock farming

However on the other hand, rising temperatures and longer growing seasons will provide opportunities for farmers to diversify in terms of potential new crops and new uses for existing crops. There is also huge potential from growing biomass to produce renewable sources of energy and alternatives to fossil fuel based products.

The challenge for UK farmers is to diversify and adapt, and many are already adapting their farming systems to address the threats of reduced water availability, new and increased pests and diseases and extreme weather events.

One example is the UK's only commercial tea plantation at the Tregothnan Estate, near Truro in Cornwall. The weather is very similar to that of Darjeeling, and it's possible that climate change could extend tea growing to other areas, particularly with springtime frost growing less common in southern England.

Then there's the landscape consultant who has taken advantage of our changing climate to embark on a project to produce Britain's first commercial harvest of almonds at an organic farm near Honiton, East Devon.

Less exotically, take forage maize. The area of forage maize grown in the UK has roughly quadrupled during the 1990's due in part to the introduction of new varieties better adapted to UK conditions. At one time you'd only see it being grown south of the M4 – now it's found north of Birmingham.

But the agricultural sector also needs to look at reducing direct emissions. The agriculture and forestry sector contributes seven per cent of UK greenhouse gas emissions, but the major issue for farmers is tackling direct emissions of nitrous oxide (NO₂) and methane (CH₄). Agriculture is the single biggest emitter of NO₂ and CH₄, and accounts for over half of CH₄ and around two-thirds of NO₂ emissions in the UK. These emissions arise mainly from animals, animal waste and fertilisers. Although annual total emissions fell by 22 per cent between 1990 and 2004 there's still a long way to go.

Emission reductions can be achieved through changes in agricultural practices, for example NO₂ emissions could be achieved by improved management of fertilisers and manure and good soil and nutrient plans. CH₄ reduction is more challenging to address because it mainly comes from the stomachs of ruminants – tackling emissions from manures and slurries may be more feasible short-term.

One thing all farmers can be doing is to improve their resource efficiency. Just by making best use of your diesel and targeting nitrogen use, you can achieve environmental benefits but reduce bottom-line costs.

In terms of water, there are likely to be restrictions on water use in future years and farmers need to be thinking about reducing run-off from their land, what their water storage options are, and how best they can minimise the amount of water they use and target where it goes.

Climate change is one of the great challenges facing the world today and agriculture will be, and is, the first sector to feel the direct effects of a changing climate. UK farmers have long been used to dealing with the vagaries of the British weather, but the impacts of climate change require a long-term approach to handling the risks and opportunities for their businesses.



Almond orchards could soon be a feature of the UK landscape

KEY FACTS

- A new UK Climate Change Programme was published in March 2006 – chapter 7 highlights the role of agriculture, forestry and land management in addressing climate change. See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/ukccp/index.htm>
- The Rural Climate Change Forum has been established to provide a high-level forum for dialogue with Government, and authoritative advice and leadership to rural stakeholders. See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/agriculture/rccf/tor.htm>
- Defra's Non-food Crops Strategy can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/crops/industrial/non-food/index.htm>
- Defra has undertaken to produce a UK Biomass Strategy by May 2007. See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/crops/industrial/energy/biomass-taskforce/index.htm>
- The UK National Adaptation Policy Framework is currently being developed. It will help to provide a more strategic approach to adaptation, identifying key risks and opportunities common across a number of policy areas and to coordinate approaches where possible.

Enhancements to TB cattle testing programme

Defra recently announced plans for more extensive use of the gamma interferon TB blood test for cattle in England and Wales. From 23 October, use of the blood test (alongside the skin test) will be mandatory in the following circumstances:

- All confirmed new incidents in 3 or 4 year testing parishes;
- Confirmed incidents which fail to resolve, despite taking biosecurity precautions, in 1 and 2 year testing parishes;
- First inconclusive reactor (IR) retest in unresolved IRs in herds in 1 and 2 year testing parishes.

The gamma interferon blood test is a diagnostic tool that detects the same immune response as the skin test. The gamma interferon test has good sensitivity, appears to pick up animals earlier after infection than the skin test and can be repeated frequently. Therefore, making use of both tests (as proposed) will result in diseased animals being identified more quickly.

The gamma interferon test will be used, mainly in herds with confirmed disease, to remove infected/exposed animals as early as possible, to eliminate infection from herds more quickly and reduce the opportunities for further transmission – to cattle or other animals, including wildlife.

Defra has published two reports by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency which have underpinned the decision to roll out use of the gamma interferon test and identified how it can most effectively be used in GB.

i The reports can be found on the Defra website at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb/control/gamma.htm> They detail the results of a field trial into use of the test and a specificity trial.

A Fresh Start for Henry

The Fresh Start Academy, launched in Sussex in March this year, is already helping new farmers find their feet.

The academy encourages new entrants into the industry by improving their business skills and can sometimes team them up with retiring farmers in a unique matchmaking and training project. New entrants to farming are vital to ensure the industry remains dynamic and innovative and the academy helps them develop the skills required for career progression.

Henry Brown is one young farmer who's making the most of the opportunities presented by Fresh Start and *Farming Link* will be following his progress during the coming year.

Henry works with his father at Chalk Farm in Eastbourne. The family runs a tenant farm on the South Downs with 500 ewes and 60 suckler cows. They produce Sussex beef and South Down lamb, some of which the family sells through their butcher's shop in Willingdon. The farm is organic and certified by Organic Farmers & Growers.

Henry, 26, hopes to follow his father into the business, and completed an HND in Agriculture, Production and Management at Sparsholt College, graduating in 2002. He's an active member of Hailsham Young Farmers' Club and about 12 months ago heard about the Fresh Start Academy via a copy of their newsletter.

"The main advantage of Fresh Start for me is the opportunity to

meet other young farmers and to bounce ideas around," he said. "The speakers at the monthly meetings are excellent – really interesting and informative. I found Andy Guy, *Farming Weekly's* 2005 Farmer of the year, particularly inspiring and encouraging for anyone entering the farming industry."

And the calibre of speakers is certainly high. As well as Andy Guy, Caroline Drummond, Chief Executive of LEAF has also been a speaker and recent talks have included presentations on local marketing. Henry has found all the talks to be very relevant and more practical than a theoretical college course. He said: "Fresh Start are willing to help with ongoing training and put us in touch with the relevant people – it's something I hope to take advantage of in the future."

More Fresh Start Academies are being rolled out across the South East region during 2006 and 2007. There are still places in the academies for new entrants. Also, if you are a farmer considering retirement or at least reducing your active involvement in the business or if you are prepared to act in a mentoring capacity to a new entrant, contact Douglas Jackson, Fresh Start Academy Coordinator on 01444 232822, email Douglas@laurencegould.com or visit <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/working/new-entrants/freshstart/index.htm>



Henry Brown at work at Chalk Farm

Cross compliance inspections to include animal welfare

From 1 January 2007 cross compliance inspections will include checks on the welfare of farmed animals.

Legislation and codes of practice already exist to protect the welfare of calves, pigs and other farmed animals, so there won't be any new legislative burdens for the farmer. However it does mean that 1 per cent of all businesses with livestock which are claiming SPS will now have to be

inspected to make sure they comply with welfare rules.

Most farms will be selected on a risk basis. Those with a higher risk of not meeting minimum legislative standards (eg previous and ongoing welfare problems) will be selected for inspection, with only a proportion of visits selected randomly. This is in line with Defra's Better Regulation policy, to reduce burdens on the majority of farmers who

do comply with the law. Defra will be sending details of farmer requirements to all SPS claimants towards the end of this year.

i For further information on SPS, visit <http://defra.gov.uk/farm/capreform/index.htm>, and for details of animal welfare legislation and codes, visit <http://defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/index.htm>.

In brief

New salmonella controls

A new programme to control salmonella (of human health significance) in poultry breeding flocks of domestic fowl is due to come into force in January 2007.

The programme sets a target to ensure that no more than one per cent of breeding flocks with more than 250 birds remain positive for salmonella (of human health significance) by the end of 2009. Breeding flock operators will be required to meet minimum sampling requirements and follow specific procedures if salmonella is discovered.

Over the next four years, separate programmes will be drawn up for the control of salmonella in layer and broiler flocks of domestic fowl, for turkeys and for fattening and breeding pigs.

i A link to the consultation document is available on <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/ncp-breeders/index.htm>

Sheep and Goats Inventory and Survey to be combined

The annual Sheep & Goats Inventory and December survey exercises are to be combined. There are currently differences in the information that is required by each and so farmers will still need to return two forms this year. However, these will be sent out together in December and can be returned at the same time. The inventory form has been improved this year to make it quicker and easier to complete. The survey form is to be reviewed to see if the number of questions can be further reduced. It is hoped that all the information needed for sheep and goats can be collected on the same form in future.

Hill Farm Allowance

David Miliband has announced that the existing Hill Farm Allowance (HFA) will be rolled over for 2007.

Defra is currently considering the responses to the recent consultation on future upland rewards (including the HFA), and an announcement will be made later this year. Any future scheme will focus on rewarding upland farmers for the environmental benefits they provide. Farming has played a key role in shaping the upland landscape, which is internationally recognised for its biodiversity and as a highly valued part of our national heritage.

Upland farmers who registered for HFA in 2007 will receive a scheme booklet, along with a declaration form to complete and return.

i For further information, contact the RPA helpline on 0845 603 7777.



Protect your birds

If you're a poultry keeper, sign up to the Great Britain Poultry Register to reduce the impact of bird flu. The more premises that are registered, the more effective the system will be because the disease will be more effectively controlled if everyone acts together.

Provide your mobile and email details and you'll be sent updates if there is an increased risk to your flock.

Your information can also be used to help prevent and control other poultry diseases.

i To sign up or update your details, call the Great Britain Poultry Register on freephone 0800 634 1112.

Sustainability is top of the research agenda

Proof that environmental concerns remain at the top of the agenda comes with the news that Defra's Sustainable Farming and Food Science Division is refocusing its research programmes. Research is shifting away from focusing on specific sectors such as horticulture, arable crops, livestock and food towards improving the environmental performance of the food and farming industries.

Two projects on climate change and water efficiency demonstrate the shift in focus and illustrate how the food and farming industries can help deliver a sustainable environment without losing sight of the need for economic viability.

A one-year project is now under way to investigate the potential effects of extreme weather events caused by climate change on agricultural crops. Late spring frosts or windstorms may result in crop failure and severe drought or prolonged soil wetness which may affect crop growth.

The project involves developing a set of high resolution daily climate change scenarios that will be suitable for analysis of agricultural extreme events. It will identify climatic thresholds that have a severe impact on yield, quality and environment for representative crops. Researchers will assess the risk that these thresholds will be exceeded under climate change. Crop simulation models will be used to analyse extreme weather impacts on reproductive and vegetative crop

yields. Knowledge gaps on physiological sensitivities, potential pest, disease and weed threats linked to extreme weather will be highlighted and approaches to reduce the impact of extreme weather events identified.

In addition, a four-year project, due to finish in 2007, is showing significant savings in water and fertiliser applications in vegetable production.

Scientists are developing a system to save water and fertiliser applications to vegetables by using a dynamic fertigation control system. The system automatically monitors water content in the plant's root zone and applies water when it is needed. Fertiliser can also be added through the system, hence fertigation.

By applying water and fertiliser to the base of the crop – little and often – the system allows significant savings in water and fertiliser application. In fact, using this method, lettuce and beans have been grown with 30 per cent less water and 40 per cent less fertiliser when compared to a standard production system following RB209 fertiliser rates.

Look out for news of a stakeholder meeting in early Spring 2007. This will inform stakeholders about the content of the research programme and enable them to contribute to ongoing programme development.

i For more information, contact katherine.bass@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

Levy bodies reform

The five agricultural and horticultural levy bodies (the British Potato Council, the Home Grown Cereals Authority, the Horticultural Development Council, the Meat and Livestock Commission and the Milk Development Council) are to be replaced by a single levy board.

The new board will have several wholly-owned subsidiaries covering horticulture, potatoes, cereals, milk, pigs, and English beef and lamb. (Separate arrangements will apply for meat in Scotland and for beef and lamb in Wales). It will operate from 1 April 2008, following a "Fresh Start" review to find out what levy-funded activities could meet the needs of each sector, and to consider the implications for levy rates in different areas. Further details will be announced shortly, with details published on the Defra website.

The new arrangements will improve industry ownership of the levy arrangements, and provide levy payers with a more efficient and effective service.

Healthy animals, healthy profits

Defra's farm health planning team has been working closely with the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF) and other dairy industry partners to reinforce and raise awareness of the benefits of farm health planning.

Marion Rawlins, who leads Defra's farm health planning team, said, "We are looking forward to working closely with our dairy industry partners in helping to roll out and promote a range of tools to support active farm health planning across England."

Defra is working in partnership with industry to promote wider use of farm health planning, which is a key initiative under the UK's Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. Its aim is to promote high standards of disease prevention and control.

New booklet on management accounting for farmers

Do you know how to convert your financial accounts into management accounts? Help is at hand with a new booklet, "Converting the farm's financial accounts into management accounts: a practical guide" published by Defra.

To raise profits, you need to measure the income of the business and identify its strengths and weaknesses. To do this you need to convert your financial accounts into management accounts. This guide shows how.

The booklet is the third in the 'Management Accounting for Farmers' series. To order a copy of any of these booklets, free of charge, go to www.defra.gov.uk/farm/working/advice/index/htm

In brief

Simplifying the rules on livestock movements

Bill Madders, a dairy farmer from Stafford, has undertaken a review of the complex and varied livestock movement rules.

Bill presented his report (which contains 21 recommendations) to Ben Bradshaw (Parliamentary Under-Secretary Commons) on 21 July. A copy of the report can be found at: www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/movements/pdf/livestock_movement_controls-review.pdf or a hard copy can be obtained from Frances Adeke on 020 7904 8115.

The Government's response will be published shortly.

New number for free collection of fallen sheep

Instead of contacting their local Animal Health Divisional Office, farmers should now contact the TSE Surveillance Helpline on 0800 525 890. Sheep must be aged over 18 months and must have died within the last 24 hours.

This free collection service is now available seven days a week, although it may not be possible to accept all sheep offered. The UK is required to test 25,000 fallen sheep in 2006.

i For more information, visit www.defra.gov.uk or contact David de Borja at Defra on 020 7904 6293.

Vigilance needed for signs of bluetongue

Since August, bluetongue has been found in the Netherlands, Belgium, in parts of western Germany and in areas of northern France.

Bluetongue is an insect-borne viral disease that affects all ruminants, particularly sheep. Bluetongue is a notifiable disease so if you suspect disease you should report this immediately to your local Animal Health Office or a Defra Divisional Veterinary Manager.

Clinical signs in sheep may include fever; swelling of the head and neck; lameness; haemorrhages in the skin and other tissues; respiratory problems; and a high mortality rate.

Although bluetongue usually causes no apparent illness in cattle or goats, cattle are displaying clinical signs during the current outbreak in Western Europe.

i <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/bluetongue.htm>



The initiative aims to connect young people with good food and where it comes from

Educating tomorrow's consumers

Defra is playing its part in the Government's programme to improve school food and promote its Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative. The initiative aims to get more pupils eating healthy, fresh and nutritious food; provide greater opportunities for small and local food producers to supply schools with good food; give more help so they can take advantage of those opportunities; and allow young people to get better connected with good food and where it comes from – its provenance, how it is produced and the importance of a healthy balanced diet.

There are three main areas of activity:

- To address supply and focus on the establishment of groups of producers able to respond to school food contracts.
 - To ensure that schools demand healthy and nutritious food in a way that allows small and local producers to tender.
 - To promote 2007-08 as the Year of Food and Farming in the education sector. The Year will aim to improve young people's understanding of where food comes from and the role of farming and the countryside; help them develop healthy eating habits through better understanding of how food is produced; and increase their appreciation of the environmental issues associated with food production.
- The Year of Food and Farming will be officially launched at a conference at Lords Cricket Ground on 29 November. This will be the opportunity for an invited audience of key decision-takers in the public sector and those working at the 'coal face' to commit themselves and their organisation to the programme of work.

Calendar

November - December 2006

- November**
- Tuesday 7**
- Share to Milk workshop, Staffordshire
- Wednesday 8**
- Share to Milk workshop Market Drayton, Shropshire
- Thursday 16**
- Share to Milk workshop, Shrewsbury, Shropshire
- Thursday 30**
- Share to Milk workshop, Rookery Manor, Somerset
-
- December**
- Thursday 7**
- Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) meeting
- Saturday 9**
- Anniversary of the launch of the GB Poultry Register.

All dates were correct as we went to press but may be subject to change. Please check the Defra website for the latest information.

Update on Single Payment Scheme

The payment of the remaining claims under the 2005 Single Payment Scheme remains a top priority for both Defra and the RPA. The vast majority of customers have now been paid and the RPA is working hard to complete processing of the remaining claims and correct known errors as soon as possible.

Since the last edition of *Farming Link*, processing of the 2006 SPS forms has begun and the RPA's Chief Executive Tony Cooper has carried out an assessment of the prospects for the coming year. It is clear that there are no quick fixes to address the problems encountered with the 2005 scheme and the recovery process is, therefore, not going to be easy. A statement on the likely payment timetable for the 2006 scheme will be made shortly and published on the Defra and RPA websites.

New uses for non-food crops

Looking for an alternative to traditional crops? Then take a look at non-food crops. They can contribute to tackling waste, pollution and health risks and can form the basis of some renewable energies and fuels. Materials from them carry sound environmental benefits and can make a positive contribution to the Government's sustainable development agenda.

Defra is working closely with the National Non-Foods Crop Centre (www.nnfcc.co.uk) to identify opportunities in this area.

The brewers Adnams are using non-food crops in their new 8,000 m² distribution centre in Suffolk. It's a building that can probably lay claim to being Britain's greenest warehouse.

Architects Aukett Fitzroy Robinson were given a strict brief to minimise environmental impact while creating a building that will meet Adnams' needs for years to come. The resulting design features a living grass roof and incorporates diaphragm walls built with blocks made from lime, quarry waste and hemp. The hemp used in the construction will be supplied by the Hemcore and be produced on farms in East Anglia.

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