

# Working towards a more secure future

*"There is such a fine line between making the business work and losing money that it's vital to keep learning."*



Real examples of farmers improving their skills

## Introduction



**The rural businesses illustrated in this booklet clearly demonstrate that developing and improving skills and knowledge can:**

- Help you identify and develop new business opportunities
- Improve your confidence and ability to adapt your business to new markets
- Increase profits

One of the best kept secrets in the South East is the number of businesses that now have a much more optimistic future as a direct result of undertaking training. We hope to inspire you to do the same and then to pass on the message to others.

A number of sources of funding are featured in this booklet that can help with the cost of training, and in particular, Defra can offer 75% grant aid through the Vocational Training Scheme.

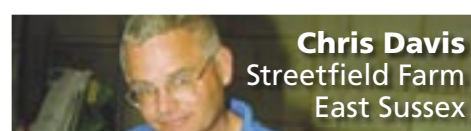
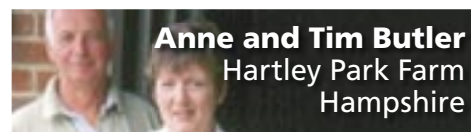
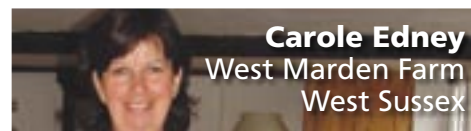
This booklet has been prepared in partnership with the rbat Network and SEEDA. If you have any comments or feedback on this booklet, please email [terry.bradfield@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:terry.bradfield@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

**Terry Bradfield**  
Rural Development Service, Defra

In this booklet, we have illustrated a range of training courses and training providers but we cannot provide a comprehensive list of all of them. Inclusion or exclusion of training courses or providers does not in any way endorse or otherwise their services.

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## *Carole's Need* To ensure her new tourism business is successful

**Carole Edney**  
West Marden Farm  
West Sussex

## Training Summary

### Training undertaken:

- Welcome Host
- Welcome All
- Green Accreditation
- Partners In Success
- Food Hygiene
- Health & Safety

### Provided by:

Tourism South East

### Funding:

Tourism South East members' rate

For more information about Tourism South East's 'Welcome to Excellence' courses, visit

[www.welcometoexcellence.co.uk](http://www.welcometoexcellence.co.uk)

Tourism South East's website: [www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com](http://www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:

*marketing & sales*

*tourism*

*health & safety*

*business law*

*business management*

*construction*

*floristry*

*food & drink*

*human resource development*

*IT...*

*"It's good to be with other people from the same industry so you can bounce ideas off each other."*

In 1995, Carole and Martin Edney realised it was necessary to diversify the family farm business in order to supplement the diminishing farm income.

They converted what was originally an eighteenth century cart store into their first self-catering cottage and subsequently, in 2002, converted a redundant stable block with the help of grant funding through the Defra Rural Enterprise Scheme.

Carole needed to ensure she had the skills to make it a success. She attended several courses run by Tourism South East.

### **Benefits resulting from the training**

- Enhanced customer service, making a tourist board award achievable
- Good levels of customer satisfaction and repeat business
- High levels of occupancy
- Networking with other businesses

*"It's vital to be constantly updating and learning."*

Carole is planning to attend additional Tourism South East courses, such as 'Welcome Walkers and Cyclists', 'Welcome International' and 'First Aid Appointed Person'.



**Anne & Tim's Need**  
To increase sales  
and reduce  
business costs



**Anne & Tim Butler**  
Hartley Park Farm  
Hampshire

*"Networking was very beneficial and has led to cost savings."*

Traditionally a hop growing farm, a change in the brewing industry necessitated a new direction for Hartley Park Farm. Today lavender, which is grown on about 10 hectares of the farm, is distilled on site and its oil incorporated into a range of body care products.

Incredibly busy as a result of selling online and through farmers' markets, it was understandably difficult for Anne and Tim to find time to stop and reflect, plus learn new business techniques. However, a Hampshire County Council initiative provided help through a whole suite of informative evening classes.

*"Evening training courses worked well – it was the best time to do it."*

**Benefits resulting from the training**

- Networking, leading to significant cost savings through collaboration in bulk buying bottles
- Improved retail skills
- Increased sales of lavender products

Anne and Tim Butler intend to participate in other courses, organised by Hampshire Fare and Hampshire Training Providers.

**Training Summary**

Training undertaken:

- Accounting
- Marketing & sales
- Product presentation
- Internet
- Setting up a buying group
- Spreadsheets & databases
- Business planning

Provided by:

Wessex Partnerships Ltd. on behalf of Hampshire County Council (SHaRP Project)

Funding:

100% grant from the European Social Fund (ESF)

For more information about Wessex Partnerships, visit

[www.wessexpartnerships.com](http://www.wessexpartnerships.com)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:

- horticulture*
- business management*
- marketing & sales*
- environment/wildlife management*
- health & safety*
- human resource development*
- IT*
- pesticides*
- agronomy...*



## *Fridays' Need* To improve supervising and team building skills

**Fridays Ltd.**  
Cranbrook  
Kent

## Training Summary

### Training undertaken:

Supervising & team building skills:

- Leading the successful team
- Getting the job done

### Provided by:

The Poultry Industry Partnership

### Funding:

75% grant through Defra's VTS (p7)

For more information about the Poultry Industry Partnership, telephone 01400 273889

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:

*human resource development*

*health & safety*

*agronomy*

*business law*

*business management*

*construction*

*environment/wildlife management*

*food & drink*

*IT*

*livestock*

*marketing & sales*

*NVQs...*

*"Training is beneficial not just for its content but also for the sharing of ideas."*

From small beginnings 45 years ago, Fridays Ltd's poultry business now incorporates traditional cage, free range, organic and barn systems plus packing centres, a mill and transport fleet and, more recently, the production of egg products for the catering trade.

The combination of 400 staff spread across 11 farms within a 14 mile radius creates certain challenges for the managers, particularly those newly promoted. To overcome these, Chris Riley (Personnel and Safety Officer) approached the Poultry Industry Partnership for help in putting together a managerial training programme.

A number of managerial staff, at a variety of levels, received training in supervising and team building skills. This included subjects such as leadership styles, motivation, communication, delegation, understanding learning principles and constructive criticism.

### **Benefits resulting from the training**

- Increased efficiency and competitiveness
- Reduced staff turnover
- Improved organisational skills
- Better time management
- More professional approach

*"It not only made their day to day activities easier but encouraged greater willingness to embrace new practices."*

Fridays' staff have also attended many other training courses organised by Mid Kent Training and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

*"With a farming business of this scale, training is of paramount importance, particularly in the areas of health & safety and food hygiene."*

## Anna's Need To increase the sale of meat products



**Anna Brock**  
Manor Farm  
Hampshire

*"I wouldn't have started the business up without first having gone on the course."*

Having already diversified through the purchase of a farm shop, for their arable and livestock farm to survive, Anna and Will Brock needed to increase sales of their home-grown beef and lamb.

Anna made the significant decision to set up her own catering business in order to produce home-cooked meals from their home-grown meat, but she needed to develop her catering skills.

Anna describes the cookery course that she attended as *"absolutely invaluable"*, and the Defra funding that she received as *"a massive help."*

In March 2004, 'Anna's Kitchen' was launched.

### Benefits resulting from the training

- Starting a new product line
- Confidence in cooking complicated dishes, vital for the success of the business
- Increased sales of meat products through their farm shop
- Helpful contacts for ongoing support/advice

*"It will be worthwhile getting cover to release me to attend future training."*

Anna is planning to attend other courses, organised by Hampshire Fare.

## Training Summary

**Training undertaken:**  
Intensive four week cookery certificate course

**Provided by:**  
The Murray School of Cookery in Farnham

**Funding:**  
75% grant through Defra's VTS (fast-track) p7

For information about the Murray School of Cookery, visit [www.cookeryschool.net](http://www.cookeryschool.net)

For information on local food groups, visit the South East Food Group Partnership website: [www.buylocalfood.co.uk](http://www.buylocalfood.co.uk)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:

*marketing & sales*

*food & drink*

*agronomy*

*business management*

*health & safety*

*IT*

*livestock*

*tourism...*

**Adam Vernon**  
rbat Network  
Manager



**rbat**  
**NETWORK**  
rural business advice & training



If you require more information,  
please visit our website  
[www.rbat.org.uk](http://www.rbat.org.uk)

or email Adam Vernon at  
[rbat@rbat.org.uk](mailto:rbat@rbat.org.uk)

The **rbat** (rural business advice and training) Network is a specialist group of advice and training providers that works collaboratively to help support rural businesses across the South East region.

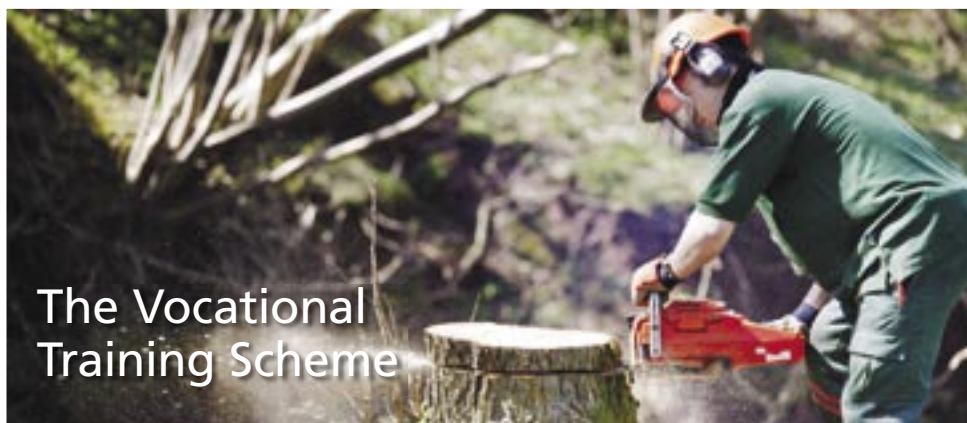
Adam Vernon, the Network Manager, says that “the services of the Network are really having an impact on the region. We now have over 50 training providers working together very effectively, with over 600 short courses available to support business development and vocational training for rural business. By working together the members of the rbat Network are able to be more responsive to the needs of employers and can help satisfy training and advice needs quickly.”

Training courses cover technical, environmental and business management skills and there is a wide range of accredited courses in order to satisfy current legislation and codes of practice. Courses are offered at a variety of different venues across the region, including on your own premises.

Some of the Network’s provision is supported by government funding in the form of projects and grants, or in some cases work is subsidised by other agencies. It is always worth checking with your local rbat members to see if the training you require qualifies for any financial support.

As well as training, the Network contains a large number of advice providers, including Business Link and Lantra. Details of all members are included in a comprehensive advice and training directory and on the rbat website, from where there are links to the websites of individual members.





## The Vocational Training Scheme

*Training made affordable*

Pay only 25% of the cost

### There are two ways in which individuals can benefit from Vocational Training Scheme (VTS) funding:

1. By attending a course held by a training provider in receipt of a VTS grant
2. By applying (either as an individual or as the co-ordinator of up to 10 applications) through the fast-track procedure

### Benefits

- 4 out of 5 applicants in the South East are successful in being awarded grants of 75% of the costs
- The training courses do not have to lead to a qualification
- Applications may be submitted at any time
- There is no minimum application size
- Application forms are available online
- Access to free advice from RDS on how to apply
- Telephone support throughout the application process
- For fast-track: a quick decision (within one month) and minimal paperwork

### Who can apply through VTS?

Those working in one of the following:

- Farming (at least 50% time)
- Horticulture (at least 50% time)
- Forestry (at least 20% time)

Check the VTS booklet for further details

### Six simple steps for fast-track applications:

1. Complete form **ERDP/GEN1** unless you have completed one for a previous grant application
2. Complete the trainee application form (**ERDP/VTS2**)
3. Complete the individual training needs assessment (**ERDP/VTS6** - one per trainee)
4. Provide details of the course, where and when it is being held and its cost
5. Send the above to: **Jon Fewings, Rural Development Service, Government Buildings, Coley Park, Reading RG1 6DT**
6. Wait for your funding decision

Rural Development Service



### For more information:

Telephone **Jon Fewings**  
on **0118 939 2057**

Request a copy of the new  
**VTS Guidance Notes** booklet

Visit: [www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/training/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/training/)

For application forms and/or to complete an online training needs assessment visit: [www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/forms/erdp/vts](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/forms/erdp/vts)

### Please note that:

- A fast-track decision within one month is dependent on the receipt of a fully completed application
- Funding is paid in arrears
- No other public funds can contribute to the training
- It is a competitive process so not all eligible applications will receive funding

## *Marilyn's Need* To promote British food and farming

**Marilyn Ivings**  
Mill Farm  
Oxfordshire



## Training Summary

Training undertaken:  
Media training

Provided by:  
The National Farmers' Union (NFU)

Funding:  
75% grant through Defra's VTS (p7)

For more information on the National  
Farmers' Union, visit their website:  
[www.nfu.org.uk](http://www.nfu.org.uk)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course  
categories which may be relevant  
to this business include:

*marketing & sales*

*business management*

*IT*

*agronomy*

*country skills*

*environment/wildlife management*

*food & drink*

*health & safety*

*livestock*

*tourism...*

*"Even for those who didn't get involved in media interviews afterwards, it must naturally improve their confidence in other areas."*

Farming about 80 hectares, the Ivings have arable crops, beef cattle and sheep. They also have a flock of free-range laying hens and some "Aylesbury-type" ducks, with doorstep sales of eggs playing an important part in their business.

Marilyn is a prominent member of her community and is often asked for radio and television interviews and for contributions to articles. It was these requests, particularly some of the more complex ones, that prompted her to attend a one day NFU media training course.

### **Benefits resulting from the training**

- Additional confidence when dealing with the media
- Delivery of numerous positive media interviews for the industry
- Improved communication skills
- Improved promotion of farming in the region

*"The training was excellent; using great techniques such as being videoed, being asked tricky questions and given difficult topics to debate; but most of all, it was fun."*

The training has proved invaluable to Marilyn's business and has also helped in her current role as NFU Chairwoman for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

*"I would have been willing to have travelled further to attend the course as it was so beneficial."*

## Nick's Need

Managing for the future following a fall in commodity prices and rising costs



**Nick Rowsell**  
West Stoke Farm  
Hampshire

*"It's good to be forced to go off the farm for training so you realise you don't have to try and do everything yourself in future."*

At the time of attending this agricultural business management course, Nick and his family were farming 700 hectares. Today he farms 1,600 hectares under different contracts, something which attending the course gave him the confidence to do.

### Benefits resulting from the training

- Increased confidence to farm additional land
- The conviction to think differently and embrace new ideas, such as diversification
- Better delegation to allow time away from the farm
- Networking - "A confidential support network of like minded people."

*"Meeting the other course members was the biggest gain as their diversity provided a large pool of knowledge."*

Going on this course prompted Nick to initiate changes to his business, including the set up of a polo enterprise, expansion of business lettings and increased attention to conservation issues.

*"Everyone who attended this course has since improved their business."*

Courses attended previously by Nick include those run by Hampshire Training Providers and The Arable Group (TAG).

## Training Summary

### Training undertaken:

Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management - a three week residential course including elements such as:

- Computers in management
- Investment appraisal/risk assessment
- Leadership in management
- Global agricultural trading background
- European agricultural policy
- Diversifying agricultural businesses
- Dealing with environmental perceptions and problems

### Provided by:

The Worshipful Company of Farmers

### At:

Imperial College (Wye campus)

### Funding:

Scholarship fund (the course is now supported with a 75% Defra VTS grant)

For more information about the Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management, visit [www.imperial.ac.uk/distancelearning/course/professional.htm](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/distancelearning/course/professional.htm)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:

*business management*

*IT*

*construction*

*environment/wildlife management*

*equine*

*agronomy*

*health & safety*

*human resource development*

*machinery maintenance*

*machinery operation*

*pesticides...*

## *Joanna's Need* To improve farm management and livestock knowledge

**Joanna Hughes**  
Homestead Farm  
East Sussex

## Training Summary

### Training undertaken:

One day courses in

- First aid training
- Food hygiene certificate
- Grassland management
- Adding value to livestock
- A pig producers network meeting

### Provided by:

The Netherfield Centre for Sustainable Food and Farming

### Funding:

Courses subsidised through the Netherfield Centre

For more information on the Netherfield Centre, visit

[www.thenetherfieldcentre.co.uk](http://www.thenetherfieldcentre.co.uk)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:

*livestock*

*health & safety*

*agronomy*

*business management*

*environment/wildlife management*

*food & drink*

*IT*

*machinery maintenance*

*machinery operation*

*marketing & sales*

*pesticides...*

*"There is such a fine line between making the business work and losing money that it's vital to keep learning."*

Although not purchased as a working farm, Homestead Farm now has about 52 hectares plus grazing rights over a further 20, all of which are permanent grassland. The farm produces beef, lamb and pork which are sold directly to customers through the Wealden Farmers Network, a collaboration of 4 farms set up in 2001 (the same year a cold store and cutting room were established at Homestead Farm) to sell local meat to local people.

*"The courses were concise and specialised and provided hands on, practical advice – not just theory."*

Joanna recognised that she needed to learn about farm management and livestock husbandry.

*"It's a question of making time for training. So much of farming is planning ahead."*

### **Benefits resulting from the training**

- Networking, leading to:
  - A mutually beneficial grazing agreement
  - Set up of the Wealden Farmers Network
  - Leasing out her cutting room
  - Linking local producers with local consumers
- On-going mentoring and invaluable support

*"Networking is the greatest benefit as you learn from others' experiences."*

Joanna has booked a place on Environmental Stewardship, Single Payment Scheme and meat smoking courses, all at the Netherfield Centre.



**Priory Farm's Need**  
To develop key management skills to support business growth

**Peta Marshall**  
Priory Farm  
Surrey

*“Training can only enhance your business as it leads to improved staff motivation.”*

Priory Farm started out as an arable farm with a plant nursery and one of the first 'Pick-Your-Own' enterprises. They have further diversified in recent years and can now boast a plant centre, farm shop, fishing lakes, corporate events and even the more unusual sport of mountain boarding!

Such business growth led to the decision to work towards the Investors in People (IIP) Standard. By using the IIP framework, Priory Farm identified a need to strengthen their recruitment and performance management processes and thus decided to undertake training in interviewing and appraisal skills. Their partners and managers attended two on-site short courses run by Business Link.

*“You're never too old to learn.”*

**Benefits resulting from the training**

- Implementation of key management skills to support business growth
- Establishment of a successful recruitment process
- Introduction of a revised performance appraisal procedure
- Increased focus on people and training, leading to higher employee involvement

Priory Farm has a variety of other training courses planned and, following the recent success of two staff receiving the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) retail care awards, other staff have entered the HTA retail plant care awards.

*“If you're organised, you can arrange for your work to be covered so you can get away for training.”*



**Training Summary**

**Training undertaken:**  
Courses in interviewing skills and appraisal training

**Provided by:**  
Business Link

**Funding:**  
Learning and Skills Council funding was used to subsidise Business Link training courses

For more information about Business Link, visit their website:  
[www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

To find out about the Investors in People Standard, visit:  
[www.iipuk.co.uk](http://www.iipuk.co.uk)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:  
*human resource development*  
*business management*  
*horticulture*  
*marketing & sales*  
*agronomy*  
*business law*  
*environment/wildlife management*  
*food & drink*  
*health & safety*  
*IT*  
*machinery maintenance*  
*machinery operation*  
*pesticides...*

## Training Summary

Training undertaken:  
Introduction to spreadsheets course

Provided by:  
learnirect, through Lantra

Funding:  
80% subsidy from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

Lantra is the Sector Skills Council for the Environmental and Land-based Sector. For more information, visit their website: [www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)

learnirect's website is:  
[www.learnirect.co.uk](http://www.learnirect.co.uk)

Other **rbat Network** (p6) course categories which may be relevant to this business include:

*IT*

*business management*

*human resource development*

*business law*

*environment/wildlife management*

*health & safety*

*horticulture*

*livestock*

*agronomy*

*machinery maintenance*

*machinery operation*

*marketing & sales*

*pesticides...*



*"It has made me much more confident about using the computer and has helped me understand more about financial planning."*

Chris and his family are no strangers to diversification as they currently manage a livestock farm, an agricultural merchants and a horticultural contracting company. With such a range of enterprises, keeping track of them all is a major challenge.

To do this, Chris needed a better understanding of computers and he found that the easiest way to fit this training into his already demanding schedule was to do an online, learnirect course through Lantra.

*"Flexibility is key – you can learn at your own speed in your own time."*

### **Benefits resulting from the training**

- Improved technology know-how, confidence and self-sufficiency
- Now able to confidently use spreadsheets to help manage the business
- Increased efficiency by saving time
- Better management of business information
- Realisation of new business opportunities

*"It's no good trying to teach yourself, you need the structure of a course with tutor support and regular assessments."*

Other booklets  
available from  
the Rural  
Development  
Service



Rural Development  
Service



**Project based schemes  
under the England Rural  
Development Programme**

To request a copy of any of these  
booklets, return the freepost reply  
card in the centre of this booklet or  
telephone Jon Fewings  
on 0118 939 2057



## To find out more about VTS, RES and PMG grant schemes



Contact **Jon Fewings**  
 Telephone **0118 939 2057**  
 Email [jon.fewings@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jon.fewings@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.defra.gov.uk/rds](http://www.defra.gov.uk/rds)

## Monthly clinics

If you have an idea you would like to discuss with a Defra adviser, come to a free, informal and confidential monthly clinic. These are held at Defra offices in Guildford, Oxford, Reading and Wye. Clinics are also available on the Isle of Wight.

To book an appointment, telephone **Margaret Rulton** on **0118 939 2347** or email [enquiries.southeast@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries.southeast@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

## Some of Defra's local advisers



**Neville Sherlock** 01233 811266  
**Jonathan King** 0118 939 2633  
**Barry Willett** 0118 939 2626

## To find out more about SEEDA's Farm Diversification Grant (FDG)

Contact **Annie Robertson**  
 Telephone **01483 484294**  
 Email [annierobertson@seeda.co.uk](mailto:annierobertson@seeda.co.uk)

[www.seeda.co.uk](http://www.seeda.co.uk)

## Websites featured within this booklet

These sites are the responsibility of the owning organisations

The rural business advice and training (rbat) Network  
[www.rbat.org.uk](http://www.rbat.org.uk)



The Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management  
[www.imperial.ac.uk/distancelearning/course/professional.htm](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/distancelearning/course/professional.htm)



[www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com](http://www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com)  
 Welcome to Excellence courses  
[www.welcometoexcellence.co.uk](http://www.welcometoexcellence.co.uk)



The Netherfield Centre for Sustainable Food and Farming  
[www.thenetherfieldcentre.co.uk](http://www.thenetherfieldcentre.co.uk)



An independent consultancy helping organisations bid for funds  
[www.wessexpartnerships.com](http://www.wessexpartnerships.com)



Practical advice for business  
[www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)



[www.cookeryschool.net](http://www.cookeryschool.net)



Investors in People  
[www.iipuk.co.uk](http://www.iipuk.co.uk)



The South East Food Group Partnership  
[www.buylocalfood.co.uk](http://www.buylocalfood.co.uk)



The Sector Skills Council for the Environmental and Land-based Sector  
[www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)

The National Farmers' Union  
[www.nfu.org.uk](http://www.nfu.org.uk)



[www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk)

