

FOOD & FARMING FORUM YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER REGION

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Committee held at the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate On Tuesday, 24th February 2009

Present: Claire Skinner – Forum for the Future

Executive Committee

Steve Willis (Chair)
Richard Ellison (National Farmers Union)
Dorothy Fairburn (Country Land & Business Association)
David Fraser (Government Office, Yorkshire & The Humber)
Stephen Lofthouse (Young Farmers)
Nigel Pulling (Yorkshire Agricultural Society)
Kate Sharpe (Animal Health)
David Shaw (Natural England)
Ian Smith (Government Office, Yorkshire & The Humber)
Harley Stoddart (NNFCC)
Andy Tordoff, Yorkshire Forward
Mel Towler (Regional Food Group)
Graham Ward (Rural Affairs Forum)
Helen Wright (East Riding of Yorkshire Council)
Stephen Wyrill (Tenant Farmers Association)

Secretariat

Elizabeth Hudson (Project Co-ordinator)
Cheryl Thomas (Project Administrator)

Apologies for absence

George Hamilton (Growing Routes, Yorkshire Agricultural Society)
Peter Nottage (Natural England)
Jane Riley (Department of Health)
Adrian Willis (Young Farmers Club)

1. Welcome and Introduction

Steve Willis welcomed everyone to the Meeting. Introduced Claire Skinner, Business Programme Project Manager, Forum for the Future, based in Bristol, and Harley Stoddart, Regional & Policy Support Officer, NNFCC. The members of the Executive Committee introduced themselves.

2 & 3 Chairman's Report

Feedback from Sir Don Curry's Visit 25th November 2008

Feedback from Sir Don Curry's visit (see attached report)

The Executive Committee Meeting was followed by a visit to Jowett House Farm at the invitation of Jim and Sarah Williams who discussed their experiences (Diversification project - Maize maze) Sir Don was introduced to several local farmers who had been invited to discuss their views/ideas. This was well received by all parties.

An evening meal was held at Tankersley Manor Hotel to allow Sir Don Curry to meet other local farmers/business men and discuss present and future challenges for the industry. All highlighted the common challenges of climate change, food security and disease problems.

Particular mention was made by Sir Don in his report of the positive activity of Animal Health in the region.

Report on Activities Since the Executive Committee Meeting on 25th November

Meetings held with:-

RFG - established common goals

RAF Steering Group

Regional Chairs in London - (Minutes circulated 16th February 2009)

NY Rural Partnership at Malton

Rural Practitioners Group - to discuss progress after Framework for Change

George Hamilton re activities of Growing Routes and Fresh Start

National Non-Food Crops Council - Harley Stoddart

Farexchange Stakeholders Meeting

Jane Riley and Jackie Rigby - Department of Health

Jan Anderson, Executive Director of Environment, Yorkshire Forward at Thirsk Auction Mart

Amanda Donnelly - Food for Life and Yorkshire & Humber Sustainable Schools Co-ordination Group.

Steven Hatcher - Deputy Head of St Aidans School, Harrogate - the successful school meals plan has been adopted by other schools (Increased take-up of lunches, takeaway service to order for staff for evening meals, catering training for pupils)

Secretary of State - Steve Willis and David Fraser (GO) met Hillary Benn, He was keen to promote anaerobic digestors. Steve raised topics of concern in Yorkshire and the Humber (e.g. Animal welfare, sharing cost of disease control).

Liz Hudson (Project Coordinator) attended Change for Life launch, Food Security Conference and event at the CSL

Ian Smith (GO) attended Vision for Sustainable Food System Food Security Conference in Reading

Katrina Williams, Defra Director General - Farming and Food Group - has indicated a wish to Visit the region.

Comments:

RDPE Progress - to date Yorkshire & The Humber is one of the most successful regions for implementation. Yorkshire Forward are actively promoting and disseminating information.

BPEX – Pig research indicates that replacing total breeding stock in the region would eradicate 85% of inherent disease. Grant investment for this would produce a massive saving - current cost to farmers is £8 per pig on average.

Concern was expressed that BPEX was not working with Animal Health on this project. Kate Sharpe responded that AH would only legally have to be involved in the case of a notifiable disease. However, once bids for funding were received, she hoped the opinion of Local Authorities and AH would be sought.

Action – FFF should reiterate to Yorkshire Forward that they should encourage all potential bidders to consult with all relevant stakeholders before putting in a bid. (EH)

3

Richard Ellison requested clarification re item in Regional Chairs Minutes of 4th Dec 2008 relating to the new Defra appointment - Katrina Williams, Director General, Food & Farming.

David Fraser GO explained that Defra had re-jigged Departmental Strategic Objectives - there are now 8. Food & Farming and Food Security, although closely connected, have been split. Whilst Food & Farming remains an important objective, Food Security has been elevated to a similar level and Involves international issues

Dorothy Fairburn raised the subject of Farming Help Partnership supported by South West RDA (Addington fund, RABI, FCN) The CRC meeting at Yorkshire Hotel in Harrogate on 11th March will discuss the Uplands. FFF is awaiting the outcome of the inquiry to avoid duplicating work and wasting resources.

Communications - Funding is available to develop/improve communications in 2009/10. This can take the form of events/conferences to ensure essential messages are delivered to the right people.

Helen Wright – East Riding of Yorkshire Council - Thanked the committee for inviting local authority representatives to join the FFF. Need to ensure local rural partnerships share their knowledge and ideas.

6. Bringing Agendas Together - Andy Tordoff, Yorkshire Forward.

There is an urgent need to develop a Marketing Strategy for RDPE:-

- a. need to let the audience know what is available in the right way.
- b. resolve the current lack of co-ordination and collaboration.
- c. encourage larger projects - we have isolated applications for small projects, which are important, but we need larger projects to make a bigger contribution to the economy.

6 months ago YF started to look at the effectiveness, efficiency and collaboration of agencies in Y&H. There is a growing interest around food - re locality and traceability and visitors to Yorkshire are prepared to pay a premium for local produce. Local events exist and Yorkshire produce has a good name but there is a need for a more effective way of linking food to visitors in the present climate. England and Yorkshire is a good place to visit due to the low £. And we also need to protect/provide jobs.

Food & Farming Forum is an independent body but somewhat limited by resources. Can this joint Food/Visitor/Farming/ Environment Agenda be included in the FFF Business Plan?

Andy Tordoff has the support of Tom Riordan, CE of Yorkshire Forward, and resources could be made available to support a viable action plan.

Consensus of opinion is that individuals need freer access to money. Under current rules businesses need to put money in 'up front'. The banks are reluctant to take risks. Representations have been made to Defra to relax intervention rates but a response is not expected quickly. David Fraser reported that other regions have also approached Defra on this issue and Sir Don Curry is keen to know what is happening.

Mel Tower - RFG - reported that they are working with the Yorkshire Tourist Board and a new guide to food in Yorkshire is to be launched at the Great Yorkshire Show.

Graham Ward - Supported the move. Despite best efforts in the past the excellence of local produce/regionalism has never been seriously promoted and he was glad to hear that Gary Verity, the new Chair of Yorkshire Tourist Board is committed to the Food/Visitor connection.

Helen Wright - Endorsed the plan. At a very local, sub regional level, there is activity promoting local producers and encouraging local hotels to join in. What is required is vertical support – from Regional level.

Action AT requested that the committee formulates a basic business plan before end of March.

Action – All FFF members to suggest ideas to take forward this suggestion.

4. Business Plan (Handout at Meeting)

Initial comments were:-

Animal Health & Welfare

Issues

Bluetongue Vaccination - Campaign to raise awareness is progressing with help of NFU. Need to include small keepers who appear to be overlooked. Defra directive will be published but not in foreseeable future. In Yorkshire & The Humber the basic message is that Vaccines are readily available, ALL animals need vaccinating. Refer to Vets for advice if required

TB - Vigilance is required

Ability to react to outbreak - any notifiable diseases

Partners

- Extend to NFU/CLA/TFA

Related Issues - Animal Health is being restructured to align with Government Office Regions (see email 16 February - Letter to Stakeholders re New Structure)

Food Security

Issues

Lack of clear message - no change to date. Whilst it is acknowledged that this subject is high on the Government's agenda, the lack of direction/information coming from Defra is causing confusion. Announcement not due until the Autumn.

Actions

Breakfast meeting at GYS - not considered a good idea. Defra Directive will not be available and unless an authoritative message can be given, farmers will not attend.

Conference for policy makers - Post the Defra consultation exercise, a conference with Food Council speakers and with a specific message would be a good idea.

Suggested using the press for a question/answer forum - Farmers Guardian/ Farmers Weekly.

Partners

GO North West included because that department is keen to hold a joint conference if appropriate.

Action - Contact Press Office for direction on when messages will be coming out

Climate Change

Presentation by Claire Skinner Forum for the Future (attached)
Research in Yorkshire & The Humber shows:-

- 67% say climate change is affecting their land now (60% nationally)
- 63% think that climate change presents more risks than opportunities (55% nationally)
- 35% taking action to adapt to impacts on their farm (29% nationally) – mainly improving water management, drainage & storage, and changing crop practices
- 43% taking action to reduce GHG emissions (70% nationally, Y&H the lowest region) – 63% say taking energy efficiency measures
- 22% interested in measuring their farm's contribution

Useful case studies, information and educational materials available website

Presentation by Harley Stoddart - NNFCC (attached)

NNFCC is the single, national, independent source of information on the use and implementation of non-food crops, products and technologies (renewable fuels and materials from crop plants).
Funded by government, industry and individual subscribers.

Aims:

- Develop supply chain models for crop-derived fuel, energy and materials
- Advise Industry, Agriculture, Government and Academia
- Encourage the development of new UK business sectors
- Develop communication packages for the media, schools and general public

NNFCC deal with the whole issue - crops through to end use. Supply and demand - do not encourage non- food crops unless it is cost efficient and there is a guaranteed long term end use. Funding for projects is available but we need to get information out there.

Kate Sharpe – AH – Stated that there is current research in how to make animals more efficient so that numbers can be reduced which also reduces, along with methane production.

David Shaw - Natural England – Staff/Offices working practices changing to help reduce carbon emissions. Emphasis is on adaptation - how habitats can adapt and offset carbon, i.e. peat soils lock up carbon. Natural England is identifying a trial area to help study adaptation - ecological data is a good measure of change. Yorkshire & The Humber provides a wealth of areas to study - tidal surges, sea level raises, and flood management.

Education/Communication

Issues

Perhaps this should reflect how to engage with retain people in industry.

Actions

Knowledge transfer between farmers, children, general public etc.

FFF has set up Group of 12 Farmers from all sectors - to discuss industry issues and opportunities – First meeting 17th March

FFF has set up Research Group to tackle knowledge transfer opportunities

Succession work will continue to build on initial F4C and Rural Support Network work.

Research provision of expenses to farmers taking part in discussions from FACE.
BPex - Leeds University project
Liaise with Natural England to use their network to promote activities
Young Farmers County show could be an outlet for partners to promote food and farming

Partners –

Should include Stockbridge Technology Centre, Local Authorities, Craven College, Sheffield Hallam University,

Related Issues –

Inclusion of 'Open Farm Sunday' was queried but it was decided that FFF should support this initiative. .

Uplands

Partners

Include Natural England

Actions

So as not to duplicate effort FFF have decided not to take action on this issue but await the outcome of national policy. Consultative work is taking place and Howard Petch has undertaken to keep us informed

Action - Comments/feedback to Liz Hudson within 14 days please.

5. Financial Climate

Banks reluctant to take risks with lending.

Farmers are currently well placed to survive current crisis as the industry has had to learn to adapt to change over many years. Current crisis is in the processing of food, e.g. ready meals firms, but if these run into trouble this could impact on farmers.

Could RDPE funding rules be relaxed as in other regions to help the economy.?

Date of next Meeting - 19th May - Including visit to new Regional Agricultural Centre

Action - Attach report of feedback from Sir Don Curry's visit	CMT
Action – Communication Funding Bids should be made by the end of March 2009	All
Action - Contact Defra for direction on timescales for Food Security work	EH
Action – Attach presentation by Claire Skinner Forum for the Future	CMT
Action – Attach presentation by Harley Stoddart - NNFCC	CMT
Action – Business Plan - Comments/feedback to Liz Hudson by 10 March	All
Action – FFF should reiterate to Yorkshire Forward that they should encourage potential bidders to consult with all relevant stakeholders before putting in a bid.	EH
Action AT requested that the committee formulates a basic business plan before end of March. All FFF members to suggest ideas to take forward this suggestion (linking food, farming, environment and tourism) by CoP 6th March.	All
Action - Research provision of expenses to farmers taking part in discussions from FACE	
EH.	