

## Mid October update 2007

### Foot and Mouth

The last month has been dominated by Foot and Mouth and more latterly Bluetongue. We have used the RAF website to explain to a wider audience the 'farmer' language associated with the control measures and I have been in close touch with my fellow RAF Chairs in the NE and NW to help northern understanding and to learn from each other. We have also been in close touch with the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) and through our RAF chair of chairs and the Defra Stakeholder Group.

Although for F&M movement limitations are back to normal, except for live exports, the severe disruption and license complications to trading still make day-to-day decisions for our farmers very difficult. This has all been compounded by Bluetongue and we shall keep the special updates on the website going for time being. The general view in England seems to be that the market will gradually get back to normal and solve the problems, but the same view is not being taken in Scotland and Wales where they are using a welfare cull for lightweight male lambs to remove the numbers blockage from the marketing chain.

Although some financial help will be given to hill farmers in November, the cash flow crisis and the very poor returns, in what is now an oversupplied market (the result from the backlog but also loss of export and other lowland markets), means there are many severely affected businesses in our regions rural economy. This is spreading beyond farming; not only to its service industries but also now some other retail sectors that rely on farmer spend. The only real short term help is with the farming charities - as listed on our website see [RAF notice board](#), which have just launched an appeal for more funds. The Prince of Wales, and his friend the Duke of Westminster, together with certain retailers and food distribution companies, have made a joint donation of some £600,000 and Defra have added £1million. It is time we all did our bit and I have added a special section to the website to give full details. Our Steering Group member Howard Petch, from the CRC, is very much involved and we are both in close liaison with Rev Canon Leslie Morley, one of our Forum members from the church, to help spread the word.

The effects of these outbreaks of animal diseases, taken together the changes in CAP and the sudden rather unexpected changes in cereal/protein prices, will have serious repercussions on the profitability of livestock farming, which will be particularly severe in the hills. The rural economy in total, including tourism, landscape management, housing and social cohesion, will change. I am liaising with the other Northern RAF chairs and the Curry Sustainable Farming chairs to try to encourage a holistic study of this situation with the aim of updating the Curry Commission type work. In my view, there is a need to guide the changes and balance a rural economy view as no sector is independent of the other on basis of 'no man is an island'.

### Other Business

#### Local Area Agreement and Performance Indicators

I hope those of you who attended the 25<sup>th</sup> September Forum meeting thought the debate on City Regions was worthwhile (see posted [minutes](#)). I see this, taken together with the Sub National Review (SNR) of regional structures, as one of major jobs for the Forum over next twelve months to ensure the interests of rural customers are built in. To this effect the Steering Group decided to work closely with the CRC to build the evidence base and identify action points for the 200 or so Local Area Agreement Performance Indicators and this is working well. See [here](#) for the full list of the performance indicators (Defra's are numbers 185 to 198) and [here](#), on pg 6, for the Communities and Local Government guide to negotiating Local Area Agreements.

I know it is a chore but we must all look at this and feed back to the Steering Group or Secretariat with your views. Although the subjects of the indicators have already been decided following a consultation in the summer, there will be a further public consultation in later this year on their technical definitions, giving stakeholders an opportunity to give views

on the methodology. This will be run by the Department for Communities so keep an eye on <http://www.communities.gov.uk/>. Once these things are decided the indicators become the tablets of stone for next ten years so please do not wait to complain or will be too late. Remember rural is no longer a special category and everything is being mainstreamed so we need to get bits as sub-paragraphs or footnotes to ensure those in the place defined as 'rural' have same levels of priority as the other sectors.

#### **Y&H Assembly Rural Economy Scrutiny Review**

Shelagh, our Vice-Chair, is busy with the Assembly Scrutiny based around Yorkshire Forward's rural delivery. I attended the public hearing and have also done a RAF submission which encompasses the input from members at the Forum meeting. It is interesting that Rob Scott, our Steering Group member representing the Federation of Small Businesses, has contributed formally, again emphasising that the rural economy is not just land based. There is still time to contribute to the Assembly work so please see [Rural Economy Scrutiny Review](#).

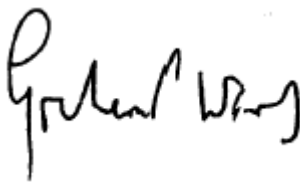
#### **LEADER**

The various groups who are setting up to make initial bids are currently having discussions and I have attended the one being put together in East Yorkshire as it is my home patch. Make sure you are getting involved in this bottom-up process for accessing funds for your rural customers.

#### **RAF Work priorities**

At our next steering group meeting on 6th November, Shelagh is presenting a paper to try to define the RAF priorities. If you have thoughts on which of the vast range of topics we could tackle then please tell Shelagh, a Steering Group member or the Secretariat. As I have mentioned several times, we have a very wide range of interests in the Forum so it will be interesting to see what Rob Hindle presents to the Rural Board about the position of RAF from his review of the Y&H Rural Framework.

I get feedback from our grass-roots members saying all the structural stuff and high level consultation responses are so far away from their village experience its like an academic exercise. In the same meeting I get pressed to do more in the political regional/national establishment high-brow stuff. Both are important but as I say we can not do it all and I remind myself everyday we are supposed to be the rural voice not necessarily the rural bureaucratic or indeed democratic voice. We are basically an independent Forum and it is that group's priorities that we should be following so please let us know your aspirations.



Graham Ward