

# Rural Matters

DECEMBER 2008

## Newsletter of Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Affairs Forum

Welcome to the **DECEMBER 2008** issue of Rural Matters. The aim of the Y&H RAF, which comprises a wide and representative range of rural interests, is to provide an opportunity to influence policy-making and delivery affecting rural parts of the region and to further the implementation of the Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Framework (see: [Rural Framework](#)).



**MERRY CHRISTMAS  
AND A  
HAPPY NEW YEAR**



**Thoughts of  
Shelagh Marshall  
Our Vice Chair**



### POST OFFICES

It was with relief that we heard that the government has abandoned its plans to seek tenders to operate the Post Office Card Account but would negotiate for a new contract with Post Office Ltd. POCA as it is affectionately known allows people to draw their benefits including pensions in cash at a post office. There is also an agreement whereby a limited number of banks allow their customers' bank accounts to be accessed in post offices across the country. The decision had been expected in August.

This will secure the viability of post offices in many rural areas and ensure that those living in remote areas are not financially excluded nor expected to travel miles to the nearest cash dispenser or bank.

This decision came quickly after a full debate in The House on the 10<sup>th</sup> November on the value of the POCA remaining with Post Office Ltd. and where the Secretary of State for Works and Pensions, James Purnell M.P. said he could not anticipate what decision the Government might make about which bidder to award the contract.

### REGIONAL CONSULTATION ON HOUSING.

Some RAF members attended one of the series of 4 consultation meetings organised across the Region. It is the Region which developed the RSS (Regional Spatial Strategy) which effectively estimates the number of new dwellings required across the Region and allocates these across all the Planning Authorities in agreement with the local authorities. Following a Public Inquiry the findings of the Inspector supported the Government's opinion that

far more new build was needed across Y. And H. The responsibility for Planning will become part of the Regional Development Agency's new work so that economic development plans may be linked to housing provision and infrastructure. The workshop I attended had no appetite for the increase in houses demanded by Government and believe that this new number should be challenged. We were all concerned for the carbon footprint increasing if people chose to live in rural areas and commute into city regions to work. In answer to a question I was told that about 40% of the new total should be 'affordable' houses. The Government believes that the increase in new house build will bring the price of property down. The policies in the Plan deal with such issues as climate change, the roles of the places, the location of development and green infrastructure.

'Location, location, location' in my workshop the consensus was that the bulk of the new build should be in the City Regions. We were supportive of Market Towns as the local development and service focus for meeting needs in rural areas. There are no plans to allocate new dwellings of market value to our two National Parks.

**The Housing Challenge** This consultation, probably the last by the Assembly, is still open for comment until 30th January. The details are on our website under the consultation sub head. The document is a very detailed review of housing where, when, what type and covers all the emotive issues. Look at page 23 to warm yourself to the task. The report by the Assembly will set the agenda for Yorkshire Forward to inherit in the next Integrated Regional Strategy. Its no good muttering in the pub or over your dinner table if you have not read this and indeed expressed your views where it matters. The RAF will I hope respond so if you prefer us to feed your views into the system let Carol know [yhraf@askham-bryan.ac.uk](mailto:yhraf@askham-bryan.ac.uk)

## Recession Impacts on the Economies & Communities of Rural England

CRC has been asked through No10 to submit fortnightly reports re the above to the National Economic Council. These reports are being compiled from responses by sub-regional authorities, agencies and partnerships, rural dis-aggregation of government statistics, and a targeted search of regional, local and business newspapers. The reports are therefore a mixture of hard evidence and stories (anecdotal evidence).

Members of the Forum who have information/evidence they deem relevant are asked to e mail this to CRC ([roger.turner@ruralcommunities.gov.uk](mailto:roger.turner@ruralcommunities.gov.uk))

The reports are being compiled using the headings:

### Employment

### Businesses

### Housing

Please forward any relevant information and if possible a copy to [yhraf@askham-bryan.ac.uk](mailto:yhraf@askham-bryan.ac.uk). The Chair has commented on the credit crunch in his latest update [www.yhraf.org.uk](http://www.yhraf.org.uk)

## Credit Crunch Comment From Business Link

Nearly nine months in to the new regional Business Link operation we are pleased with our performance so far. However, we are only too aware of our responsibilities to the Yorkshire and Humber region, particularly in these difficult economic times and believe we are well-placed to coordinate an effective and prompt response to the needs of the region's businesses.

As one would expect calls into the information centre are currently averaging well over 400 per day from all types of enterprises from across the region. The principal information and support required focuses on: Cash flow issues; Access to finance; Marketing – finding new customers and markets and smarter ways of promoting the business.

Access to, and the management of finance are critical issues at this time for many enterprises. Last week we launched a £ 1.4 m package to help companies through the current economic conditions. Their healthcheck is a comprehensive package of practical and paid support that will target where it will have the most impact; helping those who are affected by the current market to survive and refocus, and for those businesses with opportunities, help to capitalise them so they can boost the overall economy.

The healthcheck has something for everyone. An online action plan, accessed through the Business Link website, takes the user through every aspect of their business so they can take stock and take action. For those who prefer the phone, a trained Business Link adviser can create an action plan with the business over the phone. If more in-depth help is needed, £1000 is available to pay for a meeting with an accountant who will focus on financial priorities and recommend key actions. For more complex businesses, £2000 worth of accountancy support is available.

Business Link Yorkshire's chief executive, Helen West, sees the new service as a development of the business support already offered: "There is no one picture reflecting the region's businesses. Some companies are thriving and growing but others are experiencing cash flow problems for the first time. This health check will identify potential problem areas and address other issues that businesses should consider, such as new markets and making the best uses of existing resources. No business should fail because of lack of access to support"

The accountancy support is aimed at businesses that have been trading for more than one year and which have an impact on their local economy. Businesses can either employ their own accountant or receive the names of three accountants in their area who have had their references checked.

Regional Director of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Chris Manners, has welcomed Business Link's initiative: "This is an ideal opportunity to ensure financial management systems are in place - whether a business is under pressure because of economic conditions, or is thinking of taking advantage of the current economy with expansion plans."

The scheme will be available for three months from 2 December 2008.

Business Link is also running a number of specialist workshops which focus on cash flow, access to finance and 'smart' marketing.

For further information call the Information Centre on 08456 048 048 or visit [www.businesslinkyorkshire.co.uk](http://www.businesslinkyorkshire.co.uk)

## Rural Enterprise Investment Programme Latest news

Yorkshire Forward is very pleased to announce that a number of substantive changes are being made to the Rural Enterprise Investment Programme, part of the Rural Development Programme for England, in light of the fact that businesses may struggle to access the level of private finance which was previously available to them due to the current economic climate.

These changes can be summarised as:

The increase in the grant ceiling for projects that are asking for funding from the Rural Enterprise Investment Programme de minimis budget, from £100,000 to £120,000.

The increase in the intervention rate for processing primary agricultural products from 30% to 40%.

Also,

The Rural Enterprise Investment Programme decision making process will no longer be reliant on four meetings of the REIP panel per year. Yorkshire Forward aims to make a decision regarding grant investment within a month of submission of a full, completed application. This should help clients get through the process faster, helping Yorkshire Forward be more customer focused. Further information on all elements of the Rural

Development Programme for England may be accessed via the 'new look' Yorkshire Forward website at: [www.Yorkshire-Forward.com/rdpe](http://www.Yorkshire-Forward.com/rdpe)

Contact: **Rural Affairs Forum**  
Secretariat, Email: [yhraf@askham-bryan.ac.uk](mailto:yhraf@askham-bryan.ac.uk) **Y&H Rural Framework Website**

## Governments Response To the Sub National Review By Mike Feist

The Government's response to consultations on the Sub-National Review (SNR) was published on 25<sup>th</sup> November.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/citiesandregions/publications/all/>  
(click on Gov response to prosperous places)

The main points of the full response are as follows. The Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward) and the Local Authority Leaders' Board will have joint responsibility as a Joint Regional Board for drafting the Regional Strategy and preparing and monitoring an implementation plan for delivering it.

The purpose of the Regional Strategy is to deliver sustainable economic growth and to contribute to sustainable development. It will set the regional framework for activities, plans and investment decisions of Yorkshire Forward and other public bodies and agencies, including the delegation of decision-making by the RDA to local authorities and sub-regional partners. The agreed draft strategy will be submitted to Ministers. Government may intervene should there be disagreement over the process for producing the strategy and its content.

The Government is committed to stakeholder engagement as a fundamental feature of the processes for developing and delivering the regional strategy. There will be a duty on the RDA and Leaders' Board to consult and engage stakeholders and communities and publish a statement setting out how they will do this. The Government will be providing further guidance on this issue.

The Government believes that, subject to the views of the Committees themselves, the Regional Select and Regional Grand Committees will be able to carry out the necessary scrutiny of the new regional governance arrangements, as well as the development and implementation of the regional strategy.

There will be legislation to create a duty on local authorities to carry out economic assessments, underpinned by statutory guidance and tools to allow better sub regional working, for example statutory sub-regional authorities such as Economic Improvement Boards and duties such as Multi Area Agreements (MAAs).

Local Government Yorkshire and Humber and Yorkshire Forward have been working since 2007 on how to implement the Government's SNR proposals and have agreed the new regional governance arrangements which will replace the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly. The transition period will commence next year. Readers of 'Rural Matters' will recall from the October edition, that the RAF Chair has written, on behalf of the Rural Board, to the Chairs of Yorkshire Forward and Local Government Yorkshire and Humber with recommendations as to how the rural dimension to policy and delivery could be best represented on the proposed new regional decision-making structures to inform and support their work.

## "Mainstreaming" Rural Development in City Regions



Building on the work and recommendations of the successful Humber Rural Delivery Pathfinder programme, the Humber Rural Partnership (led by East Riding of Yorkshire Council) has now prepared a **Rural Strategy for the Hull and Humber Ports**

**City Region.** The Strategy is the first of its kind to be produced in the region (and possibly in England). Nationally, Defra have supported the production of the Strategy as an exemplary solution to the challenge of 'mainstreaming' rural development within City Region contexts. They have also provided resources to formally launch the Strategy at a national/regional event. This will be held on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2009, at Bishop Burton College in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

The initiative has been welcomed by partners in the Hull and Humber Ports City Region Development Programme, and will be used to actively inform and 'rural proof' the City Region's new Integrated Strategy, currently under production. It has been agreed that the Humber Rural Partnership Board will have formal representation on all four of the Hull and Humber Ports City Region's Thematic Boards, and will act as the City Region's rural voice or advocate.

The Rural Strategy for the Hull and Humber Ports City Region identifies a clear rationale for the production of a discrete rural strategy to inform sustainable economic development within a city regional context. It examines the critical policy contexts and identifies the Rural Humber's distinctive features (in respect of landscape, agriculture economy and society) and their current or potential contribution to the development and sustainability of the City Region as a whole. It identifies key challenges for City Region rural partners, and explores ways of addressing these. It investigates the City Region's key rural assets and drivers, and identifies key sectors for targeting rural economic development.

A comprehensive Implementation Framework to deliver the Strategy's aims is currently being developed. This work is being taken forward through the Humber Rural Partnership's Delivery sub-group. A full Implementation Framework for the strategy will be completed prior to the launch event in early 2009.

For further information contact

**Colin Walker**  
**Humber Rural Pathfinder Programme Manager**  
**East Riding of Yorkshire Council**  
01482 391697  
colin.walker@eastriding.gov.uk

## Ensuring the Rural Voice is heard By Graham Ward

The massive change in the National, Regional, Sub-regional and local structures for governance and delivery of Government finances to the Rural community continue at a confusing pace. This is occurring in food production, land management, environmental regulation and maintenance as well as all service delivery. No wonder there are many meetings to adjust relationships, both corporate and individual and concerns over new funding streams as priorities and delivery routes change. Perhaps the chaos theory rules or, given a huge whisky, optimism says calm may prevail.

The RAF is basically a Forum (partnership) of as many rural interest groups /individuals as we can contact and with whom we can interchange expertise. We then try to act as a conduit of this information and expert knowledge of the rural territory to the various decision makers. Hopefully to inform those decisions rather than have to comment on them once made (that is often taken as moaning I find )

How are we doing or more accurately what are we doing with the aim of making the rural voice heard.

At the National Level, the RAF together with CRC, ACRE and local authorities are tasked with monitoring the progress of the Defra's DSO for Stronger Rural Communities You can read all about this and particularly the indicators on which Defra will measure their delivery success on our website. The Select Committee which keeps an eye on Defra has recently submitted a critical report on progress to date and we are awaiting Defra's response. Much of the committee's evidence came from consulting the bodies above so it could reasonably be said to reflect the rural voice.

There is much more going on at national level particularly related to the mainstreaming agenda and helping Defra to ensure all other Government departments and their agencies are aware of the need to rural proof their activities and delivery

Regional Level - This mainly concerns structures related to the sub-national review, summarised elsewhere in this newsletter. The Assembly goes at end of March and the regional powers are in animated discussions as to how replacement structures will work. The RAF is awaiting the response to the formal proposals made to the new master bodies, Yorkshire Forward and the Local Government Yorkshire and Humber (again see RAF website) . On the instructions of the Rural Board, the RAF and RPG are refreshing the Rural Framework with a view to getting a document which will satisfy the Rural Board that adequate arrangements are in place to take forward rural interests in the changed circumstances of 2009.

Sub-regional /Local - Here of course rural proofing is underway. The Local Strategic Partnerships and the new LAA process with its performance indicators are agreed and operational, complete with lots of duties to consult. The RAF activity revolves around the embedding of rural into these activities and again we are working closely

with the RCC's and CRC. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill should allow the grass roots to get more involved and indeed require better reporting down to this level. To that end we are firstly getting involved with a "rural" grouping in the National Empowerment Partnership for Y&H which is pursuing the empowerment agenda. Secondly we are hoping to liaise with the Audit Commission on the Comprehensive Area Assessment process to see how they might raise questions about rural delivery under LSP/LAA. These avenues I believe play a valuable role in enabling the rural voice to be heard and its impact assessed.

All this sounds like a lot of boring processes but hopefully in the eventual outcomes will be a proper way for rural expertise and knowledge to be embedded into the

## New Inquiry Post Offices Securing the Future



The Business & Enterprise Committee today announces a new inquiry into the future shape of the Post Office network.

Following the network change programme and the decision to award the Post Office Card Account to Post Office Ltd, the network will contain about 11,500 branches, and 500 outreach services. In addition to access to mail services, it will provide access to other benefits , which will vary from branch to branch. The Post Office network currently receives support of £150 million per year. How can we ensure a comprehensive network which provides the services the public needs for the foreseeable future?

In the first instance, the Committee would welcome written evidence on the following questions.

- 1) What services should the Post Office network offer,
  - from government,
  - from local authorities, and
  - from other sources, including services in competition with Royal Mail Group;
 To what extent would these increase the network's commercial viability? Is there a case for any service to be subsidised, and if so, to what extent.
- 2) How much account should be taken of:-
  - a) Costs to the taxpayer in providing services through the Post Office rather than through cheaper channels; and
  - b) Consumer preference for alternative channels?
- 3) To what extent would a desire for the presence of a Post Office or Post Office services translate into actual use of those services?
- 4) What are the impacts of the availability of post office facilities for businesses, and local residents; and in particular how significant is the network in aiding social and financial inclusion;
- 5) What level of subsidy-if any-per Post Office would be reasonable in the long term; for example, should it be £20,000 or £200,000?

The Committee would welcome written evidence from widest possible range of participants before Friday 30 January 2009. Details on how to submit written evidence can be found here:

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/witnessguide.pdf>

## Food & Farming Forum Update By Steve Willis



Since I last wrote we now have a name, we are the Food and Farming Forum. I have continued to meet key stakeholders and remain impressed by the enthusiasm with which they wish to be involved. I am particularly encouraged by the positive attitude of colleagues in Yorkshire Forward and Government Office. We have tendered for a part time secretariat. The contract was awarded to the Yorkshire Agricultural Society and the work is being carried out by Liz Hudson (07702 598 108) and Cheryl Thomas (01423 546 277).

Our Executive group have met for the first time and includes representatives from Yorkshire Forward, Government Office, NFU, CLA, Yorkshire Agricultural Society, Natural England and Young Farmers. We are writing our business plan and we are conscious that we cannot be 'all things to all men', instead we will concentrate our efforts on areas including Animal Health and Welfare, Food Security, Climate Change, Education (including supporting the successor of the Year of Food and Farming, called Think Food Think Farming) and the Uplands. These are vast areas and there is already a lot of useful work being done; we will endeavour to write with a plan which will complement and enhance other work, both regionally and nationally. Underlining all of our work is the importance of sustainability and profitability within our region's farming businesses. To be frank, if they are unable to return a profit, it is unlikely that farmers will want to be involved.

Sir Don Curry (national Chair of the Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food) and Nigel Gibbens (Chief Government Vet) visited South Yorkshire in November. We had a useful meeting with our Executive at Cannon Hall Farm and we then visited a local dairy farm where our London colleagues had a kitchen table discussion with five young dairy farmers and heard first-hand about the challenges that they face. Later in the day the party met with farmers representing a range of sectors who were keen to highlight their issues and to tell the government how they could help.

If I haven't spoken to you and you are keen to be involved, please contact me or one of the team.

Steve Willis ([stevewillisfarming@gmail.com](mailto:stevewillisfarming@gmail.com))

Liz Hudson ([elizabethh@yas.co.uk](mailto:elizabethh@yas.co.uk))

Cheryl Thomas ([cherylt@yas.co.uk](mailto:cherylt@yas.co.uk))



## Farexchange Programme

Farexchange is a supply chain development programme which aims to help Yorkshire businesses operating in the food supply chain to improve their competitiveness and efficiency through collaborative working with their suppliers and customers.

Farexchange can help your business through:

- Identifying new markets for farmers and food companies and help Yorkshire businesses exploit these new opportunities.
- Encouraging farmers, growers and food companies to find new ways of working together to secure supply and ensure the sustainability and growth of the Yorkshire farming and food industry.
- Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of your supply chains, by vertical collaboration to achieve savings at each link in the chain.
- Raising the capability of those in the food and farming sector to achieve business improvements through developing skills in business management, leadership, marketing and supply chain logistics.

Farexchange will assist businesses by providing specialist advice, supply chain facilitation, training and development programmes, each tailored to the specific needs of your business.

### Partnership Approach

Farexchange consists of a highly experienced partnership with specialist knowledge of the farming and food industry and supply chains. Included in this team are:

- English Farming and Food Partnerships Ltd
- Fare Solutions
- Regional Food Group for Yorkshire and Humber
- National Farmers Union
- Country Landowners and Business Association
- EBLEX Ltd - The Beef and Lamb Sector Company and BPEX Ltd
- Askham Bryan College
- Bishop Burton College
- Yorkshire Agricultural Society

For more information contact one of the partners directly or go to the website:

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

## Supporting Greater Local Involvement in Environmental Management

The Rural Policy and Partnerships team within the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC) are in the early stages of developing an innovative approach that will enable greater local involvement in environmental management within the county.

The project will establish a number of local, geographically based, rural environment forums and builds on experience gained through the Defra sponsored Humber Rural Pathfinder project.

The Pathfinder (which ran from 2005 to 2007) identified a number of potential ways of improving the delivery of local services and the effective implementation of major (and often complex) rural policies. One project identified the simple idea of bringing together local people representing farming, parish and wider countryside interests from a manageable geographic area - e.g. a cluster of 12-15 parishes that share similar landscape and environmental characteristics.

Although still early days, it is envisaged these rural environment forums will examine a number of important environmental issues by drawing on local and external expertise. They will be able to build on current communication arrangements both at local level and with relevant public sector organisations. Through this approach the forums will have the opportunity to gain, and share, a better understanding of the implications of the environmental management decision making that affects the area in which they live and work. From January 2009, three pilot forums will be established in the East Riding of Yorkshire. This initiative will be facilitated by a dedicated officer within the ERYC's rural team. The project is being closely followed with interest and it is hoped that 2010 will see the concept extended across the Authority.

For further information on this project please contact David Farnsworth, Rural Environment Forums Officer, [david.farnsworth@eastriding.gov.uk](mailto:david.farnsworth@eastriding.gov.uk)

## Geographic Programmes What on earth are they? By Ruth Hair

### **Defining Geographic Programmes in one paragraph!**

In light of the Government's recent Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, Yorkshire Forward has reviewed all its key policies and has changed its approach to delivery. It has developed a number of "policy products" which will be delivered through "Geographic Programmes" agreed with each Local Authority. These programmes are being put together by Local Authorities at the current time and will come into being on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. They will set out how Local Authorities want to access and use Yorkshire Forward funding for activity in areas such as skills, , enterprise, international business, urban and rural

transport, economic inclusion, competitiveness, enterprise, international business, urban and rural renaissance, lower carbon economy, property and tourism marketing.

An outline of all the Policy Products can be found in Yorkshire Forward's corporate plan by following this link. <http://www.yorkshireforward.com/about/what-we-do/strategy/our-corporate-plan>.

### **What does this mean for rural delivery?**

There really is no substitute for reading Yorkshire Forward's Corporate Plan if you need to understand how these new funding arrangements are going to work! Of course in these days of "mainstreaming" rural, all the policy products are of relevance and so you'll have to read it from cover to cover to get the whole picture. The word "rural" does however explicitly pop up in relation to the Rural Renaissance Policy Product. Here Yorkshire Forward has defined its key aim as **to strengthen and improve rural economic performance by focusing on enterprise, competitiveness, utilising unique assets and key sectors**. In terms of delivery, Local Authorities can therefore structure their Geographic Programme around five key areas of activity;

#### **1. Rural Capitals**

Rural Capitals (continuing support for some RMT towns)  
Enterprise capitals (increasing workspace and business support in selected towns)  
Low Carbon Capitals (again, for selected towns)  
Regional Research (into key regional issues)  
Regional Support (Partnership skills programme)

#### **2. Rural Enterprise**

New businesses (business support and start up programmes)  
Business Growth (business support and growth programmes)

#### **3. Rural Services**

Rural Retail scheme (for isolated rural communities)  
LEADER (community led partnership activity)  
Access to Services (to employment)

#### **4. Rural Policy**

Rural Policy influence  
Rural Policy Development

#### **5. Environmental Assets**

Activity that demonstrates how region's key environmental assets can mitigate the impacts of climate change and delivery sustainable economic gain.  
Tourism and Marketing has its own policy product with key aims, challenges and defined areas of activity which will obviously also impact on the rural agenda.

### **The Current Challenge**

The pace of structural change is fast and challenging. Each Local Authority is now working individually on its Geographic Programme and coordinating activity in different ways. Each Programme however must be underpinned by strong economic analysis in the form of an agreed economic masterplan and, in the case of tourism issues, must be agreed by the sub regional tourism partnerships. Hopefully with adequate strategic input of this nature, the rural agenda will be effectively incorporated and not overlooked?

## LANTRA Update



The Livestock industry in the UK is under great pressure, higher costs, uncertain prices and a shortage of skilled labour all mean that improving skills and knowledge in the dairy, beef and sheep sectors has never been more important. Issues such as infertility, lameness, mastitis and infectious disease are all costing our farmers millions of pounds each year and the LandSkills program has identified Animal Health and Welfare as a priority issue in Yorkshire and Humber.

Managed by Lantra Sector Skills Council on behalf of Yorkshire Forward, LandSkills has a fund of £3 million available over the next three years, to deliver a range of subsidised activities to improve the skills and knowledge needed to enhance the productivity and profitability of the region's farmers.

Training initiatives have got to address the issues that are of concern to farmers and must have an impact at the farm level by providing them and their staff with new skills or knowledge that they can apply in practice as soon as they get home. The challenge for training providers is to offer the practical kind of training that will help farmers justify investing the time away from the farm and improve profitability.

In the current economic climate training can be seen as an area to cut back on but research shows that businesses that invest in training have more motivated and productive staff. The challenge for farmers is to take advantage of these opportunities that the next three years will present and to make sure that they have their share of the £3million available.

Look out for training opportunities available now in your area or for more information contact the LandSkills team on 01226 766500 or visit [www.lantra.co.uk/LandSkills](http://www.lantra.co.uk/LandSkills) for a full list of training.

## UK Food Security By a Defra Official

2008 has brought food policy and food security to the fore of politics. A combination of factors (high fuel and energy prices, increased input costs, volatility in commodity markets, export restrictions, poor harvests in many countries, and riots in some of the poorest countries have put our global interdependence and the apparent fragility of our global supply chains under the microscope. Add in the current and critical importance of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the need to feed 9 billion of our fellow global citizens by 2050, and you have a challenging recipe for policy makers and stakeholders. Meeting these challenges sustainably, so as not to jeopardise the ability of future generations to manage the earth's resources responsibly, is the crucially important final ingredient.

The Government is acting on several fronts to ensure we

in the UK continue to enjoy safe and secure access to affordable food. Defra, which leads government policy on food, has been reviewing its assumptions, its policies, and examining the role of indicators for food security, to act as a systematic framework to alert us when key elements of our food security show signs of change. In July this year we published a discussion paper to broaden the debate, and invited stakeholders to join the discussion about the Government's role.

The paper built on a large body of existing work across government and set out key issues, drivers and suggested where further action might be needed. A copy can be found at [www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/policy/security.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/policy/security.htm)

Well over 100 written responses to Defra's July paper have been received, workshops held, and opportunities taken to meet with existing fora such as the Yorkshire and Humber Rural Affairs Forum to hear the views and concerns of stakeholders. As we enter 2009, Defra's work with stakeholders to set out a vision for sustainable food will begin, as will the mapping of critical relationships between UK food security and Government policies. We will be working with Government Offices to promote this activity, and to learn more about issues pertaining specifically to the regions.

Defra's Secretary of State, Hilary Benn's, recent announcement of the creation of a Food Advisory Council to advise him on all aspects of food policy, including food security, is a further indication of the crucial importance of food to the Government. (Lest anyone forget, the agriculture and food sector is the UK's largest, accounting for 3.7m. jobs). And, because there can be no UK food security without global food security that spreads risk, ensures diversity of supply, and enables the most impoverished to access sufficient food, the Government is working with its international partners to pursue a Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security.

2009 promises no relaxation of the attention given to food and food security, and nor should it. The fact is, of course, that one of the prime roles of governments everywhere and always is to ensure their citizens have access to sufficient food. The attention given to food over recent months, and the dialogue the Government has undertaken, has helped to sharpen our thinking about a secure and sustainable future for food that is affordable, accessible, and available to all.

### *A selection of rural events and news*

#### *News*

*The Home & Communities Agency has started work. You can get an e-mail newsletter from [mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk](mailto:mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk)*

*Our recent website survey revealed those using it are satisfied and that it adds value. We have a latest updates section try it. We attempt to keep the website updated on a daily basis*

*Credit Crunch—See Yorkshire Forward's website "Response to business climate" <http://www.yorkshire-forward.com/helping-businesses/our-role/response-to-business-climate>*

*Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme—Government has injected more funds. See BERR website <http://www.berr.gov.uk/>*