

News

NEW GRANT FUND - YOUR HERITAGE

On 18th June the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) launched its small capital and/or revenue grants scheme 'Your Heritage' which will provide grants of between £5,000 to £50,000.

'Your Heritage' was introduced to London and the North West as a pilot scheme in 2000 and the success of this has meant that HLF has now opened the scheme to the rest of the country. It differs from the HLF main grant scheme in various ways:

- Simpler application procedures
- Shorter turnaround time for decisions - three months
- Simpler payment procedure

For more information on this and other HLF grant schemes visit the website at: <http://www.hlf.org.uk>

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS AND ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE: CYCLE CARRIAGE BY BUS AND COACH

The Cyclist Touring Club (CTC) has published 3 new leaflets in response to the Government's 1998 Integrated Transport Strategy:

- 'Bus and Coach Services that Carry Cycles 2001 (CTC)' - lists all known bus and coach services in the British Isles that carry cycles. It provides contact details for all existing operators and is aimed at those using or planning to introduce a cycle-carrying service.
- 'Combined Bicycle and Bus or Coach Journeys (National Cycling Forum)' - highlights good practice and provides guidance on access to stations, cycle parking, cycle carriage on buses and coaches, cycle hire, public information for inter-modal schemes and funding for the above initiatives. It can act as a starting point to find out about the different ways cycling can be combined with bus/coach journeys.
- 'Model Conditions of Carriage for Accommodating Cycles on Buses and Coaches (National Cycling Forum)' - explains the legalities and technicalities of carrying cycles by bus/coach and sets out recommended text for inclusion in an operator's 'conditions of carriage'.

CTC is keen to promote the carriage of cycles on buses and coaches. For more information about CTC visit their website: www.ctc.org.uk or tel: 01483 417217.

For copies of the leaflets published by the National Cycling Forum tel: 020 7944 2478.

A copy of the National Cycling Strategy (NCS) is available on their website: <http://www.nationalcyclingstrategy.org.uk>

CREATE A GREEN ON YOUR DOORSTEP

The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities' Scheme has provided £12.8 million for the Countryside Agency run 'Doorstop Greens' initiative.

The 'Doorstep Greens' initiative will run for six years and provide grants for urban and rural communities to create an area of greenspace. This could be either regenerating a derelict piece of land or creating new green space as an area for community use; from a grassy area for community events and ball games to a nature garden, small orchard or tranquil place to sit and relax. The idea behind the scheme is that the community decides what type of greenspace it wants to create.

Applications are now being invited for projects that have strong local community support, and will provide a safe, accessible area that is open during the day. Projects must also have given consideration to the ways in which the wider community can be involved in the design, creation and long term care of the greenspace. Start up grants of up to £3,500 are also available to facilitate community consultation, planning and project development. Successful plans will enable a community to apply for a main grant to carry out their 'Doorstep Green' project.

A leaflet containing further details of the 'Doorstep Greens' initiative (ref: CAX 52) is available from the New Opportunities Fund, tel: 0845 000 0121 or via their website: <http://www.nof.org.uk>. Information is also available on the Countryside Agency website: <http://www.countryside.gov.uk> More information on other Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities initiatives is also available from NOF.

NEW SUSTAINABLE WOODLAND SOFTWARE DEVELOPED

The Forestry Commission and English Partnerships have been working together to develop a decision-making software package, designed for use in establishing sustainable woodlands and greenspace on former colliery sites.

It is expected that the software will significantly increase efficiency in the preparation and approval of the Forestry Commission's reclamation specifications. By establishing a knowledge database, the software will also encourage and develop industry best practice in the restoration of derelict land for woodland end use.

The software is currently being piloted and following this research period it will be distributed in CD format, with a view to creating a web download version in later months.

For more information about the Forestry Commission visit the Commission's website: www.forestry.gov.uk

£18 MILLION FOR AONBS

On 4th July the Countryside Agency announced new funding support of £18 million for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) over the next three years. It is intended to provide local authorities with the resources they need to secure first class land management for these protected areas.

Richard Wakefield, Chief Executive of the Countryside Agency, said that "The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 created a framework to bring AONB conservation up to the same high standards as National Parks. AONBs should be living, working landscapes for rural businesses and communities".

The Countryside Agency will:

- Offer grants of up to 75% of the cost of ensuring an appropriate management structure, including high quality local authority staff, is in place so that new statutory plans can be prepared and put into practice
- Provide grants which will cover up to 50% of the costs of demonstration projects to conserve and enhance AONBs
- Publish guidance for producing the new statutory management plans and for AONB management
- Support AONBs in bids for external sources of grant aid to assist their areas, such as the England Rural Development Plan, European Community funds and the National Lottery distributors

For more information on the Countryside Agency and AONBs visit the Countryside Agency's website at: <http://www.countryside.gov.uk>

PAYING FOR THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE COUNTRYSIDE: A GREENPRINT FOR THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES IN ENGLAND

On 25th July the Wildlife and Countryside Link (LINK) launched its vision: 'Paying for the Stewardship of the Countryside: A Greenprint for the future of agri-environment schemes in England'.

Alastair Rutherford, Chair of Link's Farming Group said: "The outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and the measures to control it, have graphically demonstrated that the future of farming and the countryside are important, not just to farmers, but also to every one of us. The countryside is not just a factory for food production. More than ever before, an attractive diverse countryside is a major economic and environmental resource as well as a vital asset for everyone to enjoy".

The report 'Paying for the Stewardship of the Countryside: A Greenprint for the future of agri-environment schemes in England' is available from the Wildlife and Countryside Link 89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP Tel: 020 7820 8600, Fax: 020 7820 8620, Email: enquiry@wcl.org.uk or as a downloadable pdf file on the LINK website: <http://www.wcl.org.uk/home.shtml>

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE RURAL ECONOMY

The Country Land and Business Association (CLA) published their new policy statement "Climate Change and the Rural Economy" in July 2001.

The CLA believes that rural businesses are fundamental to reducing the negative impacts of climate change, cut emissions, complemented and reinforced by managing and developing carbon sinks in soil and forests, as envisaged by the Kyoto Protocol. The report illustrates the role that land managers and rural businesses can play in helping to mitigate the effects of world climate change, adapt to face the challenges of climate change to ensure that the countryside remains vibrant economically and socially, e.g. flood control management, renewable energy and wildlife conservation.

The report contains policy recommendations for the National Assembly for Wales and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Some of the key recommendations in the report are:

- Support for soil management practices that store carbon to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide and at the same time improve biodiversity
- Develop an on-farm carbon accounting system

for farmers and other land managers to increase awareness of their emissions and highlight areas where they may be captured

- Expand carbon neutral renewable energy sources by growing products such as elephant grass and willow (biomasS) to take the place of non-renewable fossil fuels
- Provide support for foresters to sequester carbon in timber within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol and promote the growing of quality timber as a substitute for other more energy intensive materials
- Develop incentives for managed realignment of the coast and managed re-creation of floodplains, as tools to control flooding
- Increase the land area under conservation agreements (designated and agri-environment areas) to the whole countryside to provide better opportunities for localised species to adapt to change

Copies of this report are available from the Country Land and Business Association, 16 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PQ, tel: 020 7235 0511, e-mail: mail@cla.org.uk or from the CLA website: <http://www.cla.org.uk/climatechange>

PATHS WITHOUT PREJUDICE

On 24th July the Countryside Agency launched its best practice guidance publication, "Paths Without Prejudice" that covers providing improved information for countryside paths, trails and routes that is suitable for users of all ages and abilities.

The publication was produced on behalf of the Countryside Agency as part of a project to improve access for those with mobility impairments on the National Trails of South East England. The report builds upon recommendations in the previously produced publication 'Sense and Accessibility' which highlighted the need for the provision of clear, honest, accurate and objective information.

The report outlines a proposed audit system, a carefully designed methodology for symbols on maps/leaflets and explores the possibilities for web based information provision. The key principle behind both publications is to provide people with mobility impairments with adequate information to make up their own mind about whether they visit a site or route. 'Paths Without Prejudice' is intended to assist Highways Authorities when deciding upon what steps they will be taking to comply with the duties of service providers within the Disability Discrimination Act (1995).

For copies of 'Paths Without Prejudice' (ref CAX 57) or 'Sense and Accessibility' (ref CAX 26) contact the Countryside Agency Publications, PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire, LS23 7EP. Tel. 0870 120 6466 Fax 0870 120 6467 Minicom 0870 120 7405 (for the hard of hearing) E-mail: countryside@twoten.press.net

ENJOY FISHING WITH THE NATIONAL TRUST

On 31st July the National Trust published the fishing directory 'Enjoy Fishing with the National Trust' which includes the Trust's new code of practice to encourage anglers to enjoy fishing while making sure they follow a few basic rules to conserve habitats and help wildlife.

The directory is aimed at anglers and includes information on waters suitable for fishing and lists of fishing club contacts, and outlines basic 'dos and donts' for all game and coarse anglers. The Trust cares for 600,000 acres of land in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and over 400 of these Trust properties have rivers running through or beside them. The Trust hopes that the recommendations in the directory, along with fishery management plans looking at improving water quality, controlling sediment and fostering aquatic vegetation, will help to develop healthy wild fish stocks in NT waters.

Fiona Reynolds, Director-general for the National Trust, said that "fishing is important as it combines two of the Trust's main objectives - public access and wildlife conservation, but most importantly, it provides thousands of people the opportunity to enjoy a popular sport".

'Enjoy Fishing with the National Trust' is available at many Trust properties, available online as a PDF file on the National Trust website:

<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/thingstodo/fishing.html> or you can order a copy from the Membership Department, PO Box 39, Bromley, Kent, BR1 3XL. Tel: 0870 458 4000

VITAL VILLAGES GRANT INITIATIVE

In July 2001 Margaret Beckett, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs launched the Countryside Agency 'Vital Villages' initiative, based on a set of four grant aid programmes designed to rejuvenate rural villages.

The four schemes are:

- Parish Plan Grants: funding for action plans which

examine and tackle the social, economic and environmental issues facing a village

- Community Service Grants: helping communities maintain or introduce services which are local priorities, such as village shop or child care scheme
- Parish Transport Plans: grants of up to £10,000 to help parishes develop tailor-made community-based solutions to meet their transport needs
- Rural Transport Partnerships: promoting innovative schemes such as car clubs, car sharing, dial-a-ride, taxi and minibus schemes through Rural Transport Partnerships.

For more information on the scheme visit the Countryside Agency website: www.countryside.gov.uk/vitalvillages

To register an interest in applying for a Vital Villages grant scheme or for an information pack tel: 0870 333 0170.

TRADITIONAL FARMING IN THE MODERN ENVIRONMENT

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) launched a new booklet about the Countryside Stewardship Scheme 'Traditional Farming in the Modern Environment' at the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show in July 2001.

The booklet was launched to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the scheme and is aimed primarily at the general public to explain about the scheme and how it works. It includes an introduction to Stewardship and general information on history and development, landscape types and access.

For copies of the report contact the Conservation Management Division, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Room G15, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR. Tel: 020 7238 6907 or visit the website: www.defra.gov.uk

DRAFT MAPS OF OPEN COUNTRYSIDE AND REGISTERED COMMON LAND

On 12th November the Countryside Agency completed the draft maps of open countryside and registered common land for the South East, and the Lower North West of England. These maps are currently displayed on the Agency's website and the consultation period runs until 11th February 2002. The mapping exercise is an integral part of the process initiated by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to establish a legal right for people wishing to walk across 'open country' – these maps, once 'conclusive' will define where the legal right

exists in England. The Countryside Council for Wales has responsibility for the mapping process in Wales.

For more information on the mapping process or to view the draft maps visit the Countryside Agency website at: <http://www.countryside.gov.uk>

HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND SUPPORT FOR AREAS HIT BY FOOT AND MOUTH

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced on 9th August that it was providing money to help the rural tourism economy of areas badly hit by the Foot and Mouth outbreak.

The Fund awarded £97,586 to the Lake District National Park Authority in partnership with the National Trust and English Nature to help with vital repairs to the network of footpaths in the area to speed up the reopening of the region to visitors. This money is part of a £1.46 million HLF Stage One Pass that was awarded in March towards the footpath repair and restoration plan.

For more information about the Heritage Lottery Fund visit their website: <http://www.hlg.org.uk>.

For information about the Lake District NPA visit their website: <http://www.lake-district.gov.uk>

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES HIT BY FOOT AND MOUTH

NFU Countryside, a membership organisation for anyone with an interest in countryside issues, has joined up with Paul Chessum Roses to help those rural communities that have been hit by the foot and mouth crisis. The rose 'Countryside' has been specifically grown and is being sold, with a donation of £1 per plant to ARC Addington Fund.

Jan Rogers, representative from NFU Countryside, said: "The Countryside Rose provides a very visual way of reminding us how important our rural heritage is to us, and is therefore an excellent way for anyone who cares about the countryside to make a small contribution to its renaissance".

The rose is being sold by NFU Countryside through their website: www.nfucountryside.org.uk or tel: 0870 8402030.

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE: THE STATE OF THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

On 29th August the Countryside Agency launched its report 'Foot and Mouth Disease: the state of the

English Countryside' which outlines the immediate impact that foot and mouth has had on the English Countryside, affecting tourism and other areas as well as farming.

The report shows that the impact on the national economy is estimated at £4 billion and that much of that loss is due to the reduction in visitors from overseas. The rural economy has suffered further from the switch in spending by British people from the countryside to urban and seaside breaks, the High Street and DIY. Many of the worst hit areas are those that were already suffering from a depression in agriculture and rely heavily on tourism, such as Cumbria, Devon, parts of Hertfordshire, North Yorkshire and the North East.

Ewen Cameron, Chairman of the Countryside Agency, said that "this crisis has underlined the vulnerability of rural economies - how closely related agriculture is to rural tourism and tourism is to the provision of local services."

In light of this report the Countryside Agency has called for:

- Sustained action to ensure that the level of rural visitors and the income they bring to the countryside is maintained next spring
- More urgent implementation of rural diversification and help with training, so that more economic value can be added to farm and countryside products
- Acceleration of the Rural White Paper measures designed to secure rural services standards and healthy communities, especially in the hardest hit areas, and
- In the longer term, a fundamental shift towards sustainable land management encouraged by a reformed Common Agricultural Policy

The report 'Foot and Mouth Disease: the state of the English Countryside' is available on the Countryside Agency website: <http://www.countryside.gov.uk> or from Countryside Agency Publications, PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7EP. Tel: 0870 120 6466 Ref: CAX63 price £2.00. The findings of this report will be revisited in future national and regional 'State of the Countryside' reports.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY WORKS IN PARTNERSHIP TO CONSERVE COASTAL WETLANDS

On 4th September the Environment Agency, The Wildlife Trusts and the World-Wide Fund for Nature

(WWF) signed a new agreement to conserve England's coastal wetland habitats.

Ecologically important coastal habitats, such as saltmarshes, are eroding at an alarming rate and action is needed to conserve these areas. The new partnership will combine the overall role of the Environment Agency in flood defence and protecting the wider environment with the specialist skills and expertise of The Wildlife Trusts and WWF in managing natural habitats and the wildlife that depend on them.

The Essex Wildlife Trust recently purchased Abbott's Hall Farm with assistance from WWF and National Lottery funding. The site is one of the UK's most important habitat restoration projects where a working coastal farm will embrace sustainable agriculture and coastal management including the recreation of more than 200 acres of saltmarsh. This project illustrates the kind of improvement to the environment and coastal defences that the new collaboration will help realise throughout the country. Other ideas to be tested in the area include the beneficial use of dredgings from navigational channels in partnership with Harwich Haven Authority rather than disposal at sea.

For more information about the organisations involved in this partnership visit their websites; Environment Agency website: www.environment-agency.gov.uk, The Wildlife Trusts website: <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>, and WWF website: www.wwf.org.uk

TRANSATLANTIC COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE - A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

The North America/UK Countryside Exchange offers an opportunity to spend up to ten days in the UK, the USA or Canada, working with and learning from seven fellow team members as they formulate and present practical responses to issues faced by local people in a rural or urban fringe community.

Each team is put together according to the requirements of the specific location. Generally half of each team are from the UK and half from North America. There is a regular need for skills and experience in disciplines including agriculture, community development, conservation, countryside and land management, cultural heritage, economic development, interpretation, landscape, planning, recreation and access, rural enterprise, services provision, social and community enterprises, social exclusion, sustainable tourism, and transport.

Application is to the programme, not to specific locations. Selection is on the basis of the match of skills. Successful applicants pay a registration fee of £90 and are responsible for their own transport costs to a central meeting-point in the country of the case study. Accommodation, meals and transport at the site will be provided.

Anybody interested in making a real contribution to a rural area and at the same time developing their own skills through some intensive action learning should contact CEI Associates Ltd., Progress Centre, Charlton Place, Ardwick Green, Manchester M12 6HS, or phone 0161 274 3337 or e-mail cei@cei-associates.org.

GREEN LANES - 'BIODIVERSITY RESERVOIRS' RESEARCH

Researchers at Staffordshire University are studying the biodiversity of ancient greenlanes across Cheshire, Trafford, Yorkshire Dales, Hampshire, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. They believe that these lanes could be as rich in birds, bees and other wildlife as hedgerows based on findings from their research including the fact that green lanes contain more than 25% more species of plant than hedgerows.

Ecologist, John Dover from Stafford University's School of Plant Sciences hopes that this research will help to gain official recognition for green lanes so that they can be protected from development and enable them to be properly managed. Some of the lanes are more than 2,000 years old and also have cultural and historical value. There are believed to be around 5,000 miles of green lanes in England.

The report was presented to the International Association for Landscape Ecology at its conference "Hedgerows of the World" in Birmingham on 6th September 2001.

The report has not yet been published, but for further information contact Dr John Dover at the Department of Biological Sciences, Staffordshire University, College Road, Stoke on Trent, ST4 2DE or email j.w.dover@staffs.ac.uk

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES IN WALES

The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) has been looking into its grant aid programme for 2002 and 2005 and hoping to attract innovative new schemes/projects that support sustainable development, combat social exclusion and promote

equal opportunities, in line with National Assembly for Wales priorities.

CCW's priorities for grant aid are:

- The fragile state of rural communities after foot and mouth and the need for recovery;
- The new rights and responsibilities that have come into force under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act;
- The National Assembly's clear desire to work through the voluntary sector and through local communities, and to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities;
- The need to reflect the Assembly's Sustainable Development Scheme; and
- The need to take into full account the Disability Discrimination Act.

CCW has around £4 million each year to offer as grants to partners in Wales, and is hoping to attract new partners and projects, whilst continuing to support those projects that have already been awarded funding. CCW grants can also be used as match funding for other grants, such as European Union funds, for larger projects.

For further information visit the CCW website: <http://www.ccw.gov.uk>

SUSSEX DOWNS CONSERVATION BOARD ANNUAL REVIEW 2000/2001

The Sussex Downs Conservation Board has published their Annual Review 2000/2001. The report highlights the broad range of issues affecting the Downs, the work of the Conservation Board in tackling them and future issues and practical work.

The Sussex Downs Conservation Board is involved in the Countryside Agency's work on National Park designation of the Downs through practical ground work and participating in the consultation process.

For a copy of the report "The Sussex Downs Conservation Board Annual Review 2000/2001" contact The Sussex Downs Conservation Board, Chanctonbury House, Church Street, Storrington, West Sussex RH20 4LT. Tel: 01903 741234 or e-mail info@southdowns-aonb.gov.uk

GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICE IN SEASCAPE ASSESSMENT

The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) has been working with the University College Dublin and Brady Shipman Martin environment consultancy,

Dublin, on a project to devise a method of assessing the value and quality of Wales and Ireland's coast and sea or 'seascapes'. On 25th September it published the project report 'Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment'.

The publication is intended to act as a guide to ensure that developments along coastlines are appropriately sited, including 'green energy' developments e.g. coastline developments, marinas, coastal defences and windfarms, and do not conflict with landscape values and tourism. It has been seen by CCW as an opportunity to put the sustainable development priorities of the National Assembly for Wales into practice.

Seven pilot studies were undertaken to find the best way of assessing seascapes, including north Anglesey, the Pembrokeshire Coast, Swansea bay, Ireland's Eye to Skerries, Arklow to Morriscastle and Dun Laoghaire to Greystones. These were then evaluated on the following to come up with the best seascape assessment method. The studies looked at:

- Physical forms in the areas - such as geological coastal features, the nature of the shore and settlements
- Human activity - such as recreation, shipping, fishing etc
- Views from the land to sea and from sea to land

For an on-line copy of the report and more information on the work of the Countryside Council for Wales visit their website at: <http://www.ccw.gov.uk>

'WTHR 4 YOU' FOR WEATHER FORECASTS SENT STRAIGHT TO YOUR MOBILE

The Met Office with Vodafone UK and BT Cellnet have worked together to set up a service that allows mobile phone users to find out the weather forecast anywhere in the UK.

This service is being aimed at people who like to go out and about in the countryside and help them to prepare for their trip. To receive a weather forecast for a specific location the user just sends a text message 'WTHR4' then space before entering the postcode, city, town or village name to either Vodafone or Cellnet. The forecast for that area will then be sent back to the phone covering the next six hours weather.

For further information on this service visit the Met Office website at: www.metoffice.com or contact Customer Centre on 0845 300 0300.

FOOT AND MOUTH RECOVERY - ENQUIRIES, REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government announced on 9th August that there would be two independent inquiries, one into the lessons to be learned from the foot and mouth disease outbreak of 2001, and a Scientific Review by the Royal Society. In addition, there would be a Policy Commission on the future of farming. These inquiries will report to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

POLICY COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF FARMING AND FOOD

On 25th September the Government Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food launched a short (one month) consultation document to determine views on farming and food policy in England.

The Commission is due to publish its report, based on the consultation and associated regional stakeholder meetings around the country, on 31st December 2001.

For more details about the Commission visit the website: <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/farming>.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY SETS OUT MEASURES TO REBUILD AGRICULTURE

On 2nd October at a fringe meeting "The future of the rural economy: making the environment work" of the Labour Party Conference the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, Barbara Young, outlined a series of measures to promote rural development and sustainable agriculture.

These measures are:

- Immediate expansion of funding for agri-environment schemes up to the 20% national discretionary limit under the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The matching funding from the Treasury would save other public funding.
- New whole-farm agri-environment measures to promote management of soil, water and air quality, with greater recognition of protection of natural resources in Rural Development Plans following their mid-term review in 2003.
- A simple but inclusive scheme under the Rural Development Regulations that supports development of environmental management

- plans for all farms, backed by advice.
- At least 50% of CAP funds going to Rural Development Regulations following the next round of CAP reform in 2007.
- An industry-led whole-farm environmental management standard supported by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), with the progressive integration of existing and new regulations into a single framework to simplify environmental regulations for farmers.
- A government-sponsored environmental manager accreditation scheme for farm managers, to foster new land management expertise to meet future environmental challenges.
- More low-input, precision farming systems that can deliver high quality food with good yields with low environmental costs.
- Planning guidance, Rural Development Plans and legislation for the countryside which ensure sustainable growth of rural populations, balanced land use and sustainable access to the countryside.
- A post foot and mouth disease recovery package that supports sustainable farm management (e.g. no re-stocking above land capacity).

For more information the Environment Agencies proposals are set out in the Agency's position statement 'Rebuilding Agriculture' which is available on the Agency's website: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk> in the 'About Us' section. Hard copy can also be acquired free of charge from Public Enquiries Unit, Environment Agency, Rio House, Waterside Drive, Aztec West, Almondsbury, Bristol BS32 4UD. Tel: 01454 624411 or e-mail: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

HASKINS REPORT 'RURAL RECOVERY AFTER FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE' PROMPTS INCREASED GRANT FOR THE BUSINESS RECOVERY FUND

On 18th October Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), announced a £24 million extension to the Business Recovery Fund following the publication of Lord Haskins' report on 'Rural Recovery after Foot and Mouth Disease'. The Fund was set up to help rural communities and small rural businesses damaged by Foot and Mouth Disease and this extension takes the total of the fund to £74 million.

Lord Haskins was appointed Rural Recovery Co-ordinator by the Prime Minister and began work on

the 14th August with a remit to report by the end of September 2001. The report focused on the state of the Cumbrian rural economy, which was the area hardest hit by Foot and Mouth Disease and highlights the measures needed to promote the recovery of the tourism and small business economy in Cumbria. Lord Haskins' recommendations to help the short term survival of businesses include:

- Continued support and a sympathetic line by the banks supported by the Government especially the Revenue departments and an assurance from the Government that the countryside will be back in business by April 2002.
- Reinforce the message the 'countryside is open for business' by providing financial help to support generic advertising aimed at the domestic market.
- Consider providing further assistance to distressed businesses by the injection of an extra £40 million into the Business Recovery Fund.
- Ensure sufficient funding for the Business Links Service so that they can continue to offer good advice to all farmers and businesses who need help on how to work through the crisis and to make businesses and farmers more aware of what they are entitled to.
- Looking to the Regional Development Agencies to be the catalyst for overseeing and targeting support for all sections of the rural economy.

Lord Haskins said that these recommendations would "enable those farmers and businesses who deserve to fight another day, to do just that. But in order to do so, they in turn will need to be resourceful and enterprising in tackling their problems."

Medium term priorities were highlighted as:

- Supporting the concept of a Cumbria Rural Action Zone, business-like local market initiatives and upgrading the tourism proposition.
- Providing a co-ordinated flexible approach to rural planning and other rural regulations.
- Getting rural businesses and farmers on the internet to make use of technology available.
- Providing a co-ordinated approach to the reform of agricultural smart structures, and developing ideas for CAP reform that move away from a system of subsidies and dependence to one which promotes environmental sustainability, rural diversification and enterprise.
- Increasing flexibility of operation of the England Rural Development Programme.
- Developing more skills among the rural workforce.

Margaret Beckett welcomed the report and stated that DEFRA would respond to all recommendations made by Lord Hoskins within the near future.

*For further information and a copy of Lord Hoskins' report visit the DEFRA website at:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/rural/taskforce/haskins.pdf>*

RURAL TASK FORCE REPORT 'TACKLING THE IMPACT OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE ON THE RURAL ECONOMY' PUBLISHED

On 18th October the Rural Task Force published its report 'Tackling the Impact of Foot and Mouth Disease on the Rural Economy'. The Rural Task Force was set up by the Prime Minister in March to advise the Government on the impact of foot and mouth disease on the rural economy. The Task Force comprises representatives from a range of government departments and agencies together with stakeholder bodies including representatives of farming, tourism, small business, conservation and local government.

The Task Force's recommendations focus on five areas, covering both short term help to ensure the survival of rural businesses through the winter months, and the longer term revival of the rural economy.

Short term measures:

- The Government should review the effectiveness of the measures currently in place to assist rural businesses and whether more can be done to encourage take up of advice and help available.
- The Government should continue to provide assistance in the forms currently available until it is clear that the impact of the crisis is over - the report highlights the fact that the pace and extent of recovery will vary between areas - including extending tax deferral and rate relief until March 2002.
- The Government should urgently provide the resources for the continuation and expansion of the Business Recovery Fund and review the current criteria for the fund.

Sustaining rural businesses:

- The Government and agencies should work with farmers to prepare farm reinvestment strategies, focused initially on the areas where stock has been culled, to include increased take-up of agri-environment schemes, renovation of pollution control equipment, restoration of landscape features, and staff retraining.

- Publicly funded advisory services should be provided; the Small Business Service and Regional Tourist Boards should establish a specialised support service to help tourism businesses, and the Small Business Service and DEFRA should further extend the capacity of farm business advisors to provide advice on development and diversification in the context of the whole farm, local economy and environment.

Expanding markets and increasing added value:

- Rural businesses and business organisations should develop local supply chains and marketing networks, promote local distinctiveness, encourage local enterprises to buy food and services locally and promote this, and develop partnerships with major retailers to promote local produce.
- DEFRA and stakeholders should provide a new impetus for farmers markets through promotional campaigns and advice, with an aim to increasing markets by 33% by the end of 2002 and a long term aim of weekly markets in most towns.

Revitalising rural communities:

- The Government should support local strategic partnerships in rural areas in promoting market town regeneration programmes - with some badly hit areas needing extra resources.
- The Government should recognise the impact of FMD on the rural voluntary and community sector and offer additional help to affected communities.
- A special, time limited, gift aid scheme should be introduced, to include environmental and recreational charities, directed principally at activities and areas affected by FMD.

Relaunching the countryside:

- A co-ordinated and user-friendly information initiative should be developed to provide visitors with the facts they need and the confidence that they are welcome in the countryside. This should include a web-based database, to which all Tourist Information Centres should have access, providing information on access to footpaths, national trails and other attractions.
- A major promotional campaign should be developed to relaunch the countryside, based on a distinctive 'brand' and theme which would need national co-ordination but regional and local branding and delivery. It would use the theme of recovery post-FMD to promote growth in sectors which were already fragile, seek to revitalise communities, engage with businesses not traditionally connected

with tourism and engage urban communities in 'joining up' town and country.

- Tourism publicity and media campaigns should be co-ordinated nationally, in conjunction with regions and the private sector, to include themed breaks based on specific leisure activities; countryside events and festivals; special offers for travel and attractions running through 2002; and a place for local communities, products and services.
- DEFRA and DCMS should support the "Welcome to the Countryside" initiative being established by farm tourism operators to co-ordinate activity between businesses and improve the marketing and quality of farm visits, education and accommodation.
- Local authorities, and conservation and access organisations, should develop proposals to enhance access to the countryside. In particular authorities should identify those footpaths and trails that generate significant income within local economies and draw up programmes for their improvement. Conservation bodies and land managers should encourage access to wildlife sites, based on good conservation, visitor management and interpretation.

Other recommendations include:

- In anticipation of any future outbreak of FMD (and other animal diseases), a protocol should be developed, based on a veterinary risk assessment, as to how widely, and for how long, footpath closures and restrictions on access are likely to be justified, and what conditions should be placed on closure powers. This should take account of the impact of walkers and the businesses that cater for them besides the requirements of disease control. Clear guidance on where closure is justified should be issued at the same time as the powers are conferred.
- A review should be carried out of the media and public information strategy during the course of the outbreak.
- The Government should review the data sources - national, regional and local - available to monitor the impact of a crisis such as FMD on businesses such as farming and tourism, in particular on incomes from self-employment.
- The Government should keep the health of the rural economy at large, including farming and countryside tourism, and the impact of the measures already taken and those recommended in this report, under close review over the coming winter, spring and summer. It should be willing to take further measures if the impact of the FMD

outbreak turns out to be even deeper and more lasting than now appears.

Copies of the Rural Task Force Report are available from the DEFRA Press Office or the report can be accessed on the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/rural/taskforce/rtf.pdf

DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL FMD INQUIRY PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Devon County Council have launched the preliminary findings from their own inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak and its effects, looking in particular at the handling of the crisis, the recovery and sustaining of Devon's countryside, and reducing/removing the risk of future similar outbreaks.

The Inquiry Committee was set up of County and District Councillors under an independent Chairman and Terms of Reference were adopted to guide the Committee and anyone submitting evidence. Over 360 submissions were received split roughly between farmers (28%), businesses and members of the public (34%), and interested bodies and organisations (38%).

Recommendations include:

- More research is needed into the transport of the FMD virus by boots, clothing, tyres, hooves and any other passive agent so that the degree of selection, which might be applied to the closure of rights of way, and the type of access may be determined. Until that is done, those managing access should be trusted to apply restrictions in line with veterinary advice in a pragmatic way.
- A national contingency plan should be developed and should identify the organisations that will be involved in response to FMD in a County or Unitary Authority area, explain their responsibilities and the way they will work together.
- Government spending and support patterns should reflect two things; the development and sustaining of a quality livestock produce industry; and an adequate labour force for more sophisticated stock management and more detailed environmental quality.
- Developing the marketing of quality Devon produce (within the 'Devon Brand') should be pursued locally with regional and national extension, building upon existing successful enterprises.
- Government funding (and customer prices)

should cover the cost of a larger labour force in the farming sector to develop both a quality livestock produce industry and maintain the detail of the farmed landscape through environmental and biodiversity improvements. This will carry with it the increased need for training and recruitment of staff and require new approaches to the integration of agricultural and environmental skills in further and higher education.

- Integration of quality food production with recognised environmental outputs should be the ambition of a new universal farmer culture - a culture shift that is best begun at the educational level where new courses should be devised to achieve this integration.
- An opportunity now exists to improve the network of footpaths, bridleways, cycleways, byways and unclassified roads in the interest of farm and livestock management and enjoyment of the countryside. The management of access for leisure, exercise and the welfare of animals must be enhanced. That demands increases in the application of money and manpower to it by all relevant authorities.
- Tourist industry representatives should be included in local and national contingency plan preparation and especially its access management instructions. They should be recipients from Day One in communications planning.
- Tourist operators and accommodation providers across the spectrum should have access to timely and accurate information to help prepare their own advice for visitors.

For further information about this Inquiry visit Devon County Council's website: www.devon.gov.uk

DEFRA was not represented at the Inquiry, but Ministers had agreed to provide written answers to the Inquiry's questions and a response from the Minister for Rural Affairs, the Rt. Hon Alun Michael, can be found on Devon County Council's website: www.devon.gov.uk as an appendix to the preliminary findings and also on DEFRA's website: www.defra.gov.uk/devonletter