



PRESS RELEASE

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Cumbria Hill Farming Goes Digital

www.cumbriahillfarming.org.uk

If there was any doubt before the Cumbria Fells and Dales Hill Farming Systems Research project, there isn't any now: Cumbria's hill farmers provide a huge range of benefits alongside their traditional production of some of the best quality livestock in the UK.

The evidence can be seen in the profile of thirty Cumbrian hill farms at www.cumbriahillfarming.org.uk which highlights the shared commitments and ambitions of these farmers.

Commenting on the website, Will Rawlings of Hollins Farm, Ennerdale said: "We know what we do, but this makes sure that other people know too. We are all committed to farming in the fells with heafed native breeds of sheep and conserving the land to protect natural resources and biodiversity.

"We not only collaborate with other hill farmers and agencies but also actively communicate with local communities and visitors to increase public understanding of the countryside through shows, guided walks, and farm open days.

"By enhancing historic countryside features such as vernacular buildings and dry stone walls, we help to maintain the landscape.

"We do all of this and produce quality local food, and some of us survive - just."

Cumbria hill farmers have, over many generations, hand-made a landscape of world renown and adapted to many challengers and crises. But now, there is widespread agreement that this is crunch time. As Mervyn Edwards of Natural England points out:

"Livestock numbers have reduced since the foot and mouth calamity of 2001 and the Single Farm Payment scheme has exposed a fragile economy.

"Do you know...once family labour is accounted for in the English Less Favoured Area, farms' average business income in 2007 was minus £8800?"

“And then the most daunting long term issue is the decline in the transfer of skills to the next generation partly caused by a lack of affordable housing for younger hill farmers.”

As the Cumbria Fells and Dales Hill Farming Systems Research project comes to an end, the new website offers the potential to expand the farm profiles to up to 200 hill farms, providing a representative sample of farms in the area.

It is intended that this will become the vehicle for a wider project to maintain active up-to-date research on the state of hill farming and its social, environmental, and economic benefits and to develop the rich story of hill farming within individual Lake District valleys and communities.

The website also has the potential to provide hill farmers with access to information about new funding (such as the Rural Development Programme for England) and support them in their applications. Above all, as its logo makes clear, it provides a two-way bridge of understanding and valuing between Cumbria hill farmers and the wider community of policy makers, opinion formers and members of the public.

The Hill Farming Systems Research project was developed by the Cumbria Fells and Dales LEADER + Programme in partnership with Voluntary Action Cumbria in response to concerns about the future of hill farming. It began in January 2006 and was completed on 30th June 2008.

For more information about the Hill Farming Systems Project, please contact Terry McCormick on Tel: 01768 869523, or e mail: terrymccormick@ruralcumbria.org.uk

- Ends -

Photos:



Galloway cattle at Braesteads Farm



Swaledale Sheep at Deepdale Hall

Further press information available from:

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Notes to Editors:

Voluntary Action Cumbria

- VAC is Cumbria's Rural Community Council and a registered charity.
- VAC is working with people and communities to improve the quality of life in rural Cumbria.
- VAC is an independent organisation able to work with a wide range of partners on an open and equitable basis.
- Established in 1948, for 60 years VAC has been supporting communities that are socially, economically and environmentally vibrant where the needs of all are considered.
- To find out more information, please visit VAC's website: www.ruralcumbria.org.uk

LEADER +

- Leader + is a European and UK government funded programme to assist innovative rural regeneration projects.
- The Cumbria Fells and Dales LEADER + programme aims to help projects that add value to local products.