



PRESS RELEASE

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Free support for village shopkeepers

RURAL shopkeepers are being offered free support and advice to help boost their businesses through two tailor made events based on what they say they need.

Owners of village shops across the county took part in an in depth survey last year, highlighting what business help they needed. Now a team from Voluntary Action Cumbria, who commissioned the survey, are hosting two Sunday session when shop keepers can meet with local producers and business advisors.

More than 250 retailers were recorded and face-to-face interviews involved almost 70 independent rural shops as part of the survey, which VAC commissioned a team from Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency to carry out on behalf of the Rural Retail Advisory Partnership. The work has been funded by the DEFRA Social and Community Programme. The findings reveal that village shop owners want to develop their skills in marketing, display advertising and finance.

Lorraine Rockminster of VAC said: "The two free events will be an opportunity for shopkeepers to meet and network with local producers and discuss ideas and small scale solutions.

"As well as producers, business advisors and specialists, there will be three speakers at each event. The research, commissioned by VAC as one of the partners in the Cumbria Rural Retail Advisory Partnership, demonstrated the negative impacts that result on the wider community through the loss of village shops, but also identifies areas where support is needed to help rural retail businesses.

"The two events bring together a wide range of specialists, and offers an opportunity to develop ideas and a chance to work together to provide a sustainable future for local rural shops.

"The report has provided a clear picture of the current situation and identified some key areas where we can take action and offer practical support to our rural retailers. As the report concludes, we believe that, with the right help, many shops can continue and thrive, whatever the near future might bring, and the social and economic benefits to Cumbrian rural communities will not be lost."

As well as the two free events, there will be targeted one-to-one support for up to 30 individual businesses, provided by South Lakes Development Trust and funded by Cumbria County Council.

As part of each event there will be a seminar on boosting business profiles and an opportunity to win PR support for your business.

Local producers interested in attending and showcasing their goods need to book their free place in advance.

The first event will be held on Sunday, February 24 from 10.30am until 2.30pm at the High Head Sculpture Valley and will include a free lunch, and the second will be held at The Lane Farm Resource Centre, Westmorland Showground, Crooklands, on Sunday, March 16.

Booking for the free event is essential for both producers and retailers, contact Lorraine at VAC on 01768 869517.

- Ends -

Further press information available from:

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