



NEWS RELEASE

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Standing room only at Hill Farming Gathering

Cumbrian and North Yorkshire Hill Farmers gathered to discuss new opportunities at the hugely popular Hill Farming Matters Conference at Penrith Rugby Club last Thursday 29th January.

The conference which attracted over 90 people was organised by Action with Communities in Cumbria as part of the Carnegie UK Trust on Hill Farming in the North of England Rural Action Research Programme project.

Giving a political perspective on the uplands, Tim Farron MP, Chair of the House of Commons All Party Group on hill farming, pointed out that as hill farming shapes the landscape which makes Cumbria such a popular place to visit, the £3½ million cost of the Hill Farm Allowance scheme is good value for money compared with the value of Cumbria's tourist industry at around £1.2 billion.

He said "Government must understand that despite the resolution of the Upland Entry Level Stewardship scheme, hill farming still faces huge problems with low average incomes, an ageing workforce and lack of succession. Hill farms contribute to food security, landscape and biodiversity and my job is to make sure they are not ignored."

Will Cockbain, NFU Uplands Spokesman, and Peter Welsh from Natural England went on to explain more about the new Upland Entry Level Stewardship (UELS) scheme which is due to be launched in 2010, subject to approval by the EU Commission. Will Cockbain commented; "It is reassuring that the detail of the UELS scheme has now been finalised following a long period of sometimes difficult negotiations with Defra. I am also relieved that we have convinced Defra of the need for an additional year of Hill Farm Allowance payments for 2010 whilst the new scheme is introduced."

Paul Harper and Will Rawling of the Cumbria Farmer Network reported on a fact-finding mission to the north of Scotland to look at the Mey Selection marketing scheme devised by 13 farmers to add value to their red meat products. Although impressed by what they found, the Cumbria Farmer Network contingent recognised that the significant differences in production systems and costs of production between Scottish farms and hill farming in the north of England may affect attempts to replicate the marketing scheme in Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

Farmers at the conference, when asked about developing a similar scheme, had mixed opinions. Some wondered if it was worthwhile given the relatively good current prices, others reflected on the chequered history of marketing schemes in Cumbria.

The issue of an ageing workforce and vital importance of bringing new blood into the hill farming sector resurfaced throughout the conference. Farmers were keen to hear from Fiona Tweedie, from Andersons Farm and Business Consultants, about her experiences running the Fresh Start Programme in Yorkshire and Humber, the Share to Farm initiative and the North York Moors Fell Farming training scheme.

Nancy Tweddell from the North West Development Agency gave information on the North West Livestock Programme which will include advice on animal health and welfare and nutrient planning, supported by technical grants. Adrian Banford also explained how the Cumbria Fells and Dales Rural Development Programme could provide grants for farming, forestry and rural businesses on projects including farm diversification, adding value to local products, training and renewable energy. Both programmes are part of the new Rural Development Programme for England.

As the conference concluded with a short film about the Commission for Rural Communities' Inquiry into the future for England's upland communities, farmers expressed their willingness to meet with Viv Lewis and Geoff Brown of the Carnegie UK Trust to give further evidence to the enquiry.

Summing up the conference, Geoff Brown, said: "Things generally seem to be going in the right direction at present : prices are relatively good, food production is high on the agenda again, farmers are currently highly appreciated by the general public and government and agencies seem to be acknowledging the important role which farmers play. But no one should be lulled into a false sense of security. The underlying trends have not altered and it remains as important as ever that policy is fit for purpose and that hill farms have a viable and sustainable future."

For more information about the conference and presentations, please contact Viv Lewis on 01931 713335 / 07748185049 Email: vivlewis1@yahoo.com

- Ends -

Photo:



Top L-R: Geoff Brown, Tim Farron MP, Will Cockbain, Peter Welsh
Bottom L-R: Fiona Tweedie, Viv Lewis, Roger Roberts, Paul Harper, Will Rawling

Further press information available from:

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Notes to Editors:

The Carnegie UK Trust's Hill Farming in the North of England Project is based at Action With Communities in Cumbria. The project is carrying out research with hill farming communities across the north of England to work towards a sustainable future for the sector. For more information see

http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/rarp/remote_and_peripheral_areas/hill_farming_communities

Action with Communities in Cumbria

(Previously known as Voluntary Action Cumbria)

- ACT is Cumbria's Rural Community Council and a registered charity.
- ACT is working with people and communities to improve the quality of life in rural Cumbria.
- ACT 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 ACT 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 ACT's website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk