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## **SUSTAINABLE FARMING AND FOOD IMPLEMENTATION GROUP**

**NFU, Agriculture House, Newmarket  
14.00 Friday 11 July 2008**

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### **Attendees:**

Marie Francis (Chair)	Lynsey Craig
Cindy Winn	Nicky Currie
Mick Carr	Nicky Newell
Simon Tonkin	Brian Finnerty
Alan Almond	Edwin Jones

### **Apologies:**

Mike Richardson	Mike Appleyard
Rachel Carrington	

### **Minutes**

#### **1. Welcome & Minutes of the Last Meeting**

Marie welcomed everyone. The minutes were agreed with the alteration that Alan Almond had sent his apologies to the meeting.

#### **2. Update on “Regional Sustainable Production and Environment” paper and November conference**

Marie gave an overview of the process of the discussion paper (now titled “Growing our Future”) and explained the 4 key areas for action. The paper will be distributed widely after amendments and a final version will be ready in two weeks. Comments to Mick Carr by 21 July. Marie also explained how the paper fitted with the action plan and the conference in November. The aim and scope of the conference were discussed.

Nicky Newell explained the Natural England position on food security, and how they are developing a policy position nationally. Marie invited NE to take an active role in the conference, with RSPB to also feed in.

### **Action**

Mick Carr to circulate a paper from IPPR. (attached to these minutes)

#### **3. Farming for the Future**

Mick Carr gave an update on Defra’s SFFS refresh document “Farming for the Future” which has been put on hold until the Autumn. It is expected that it will be redrafted to give a balanced view between production and environmental outcomes. The Cabinet Office Strategy Unit report published at the beginning of July will have a big influence on Defra’s thinking.

(Note – since this meeting, Defra have published a discussion document on Food Security, which can be seen at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/foodstrategy/security.htm> )

#### **4. Refreshed Action Plan**

Marie updated the group on the Action Plan and explained the key areas for action identified in the process. Some discussion was held over the content including the need to add something about the vulnerability of the region to imported plant and animal disease.

A suggestion was made that as R&D was a big feature of the plan, someone from that sector might be invited to join the group.

#### **Action**

Comments on draft plan to be sent to Mick Carr.

#### **5. AOB**

Next meeting to be held at NFU on 19 September at 11am with lunch provided.

Mick Carr  
GO-East  
21 July 2007



# 2008 - Action Plan Priorities for Agricultural, Food and Drink Industries in the East of England

As identified by the Sustainable Food and Farming Industry Group

The group looked at the 2006 Action Plan (arising from the Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy and the EEDA Food and Drink Delivery Plan). They gave their view from an industry point of view on the existing action plan and identified new areas they felt required attention when looking at future projects and funding.

## Response to 2006 Action Plan Priorities

### 1. Food Parks

**The development of food parks and distribution centres to increase the production and marketing opportunities for regional food, with particular emphasis on supplying the food service market in London covering both the profit and cost sectors.**

There was disagreement amongst the Industry Group as to whether using Government money to create new food hubs was the most effective use of resources. However, all agreed if supported:

- they should be run by the commercial sector (not the public sector) funding should be used for start up and pump priming costs of the project, such as business and feasibility planning.

A food hub should:

- act as a one-stop-shop for regional food
- incorporate a main commercial player
- have central facilitation for smaller businesses
- be based on distribution networks
- identify a recognised market before set-up

The aspiration is to engage larger, commercial businesses to drive it forward, and with smaller businesses using it as a means to open up new avenues to markets not easily accessed. These include local food into food service, supermarkets, public sector and London markets.

#### *Action*

*Marie agreed to raise food hubs at the SFF Regional Chairs meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> January, and enquire as to what has happened to food hubs in other regions.*

### 2. Business Support Services

**The provision of a comprehensive business support service that specifically meets the needs of agricultural, food and drink businesses.**

There was a lack of communication about training and funding available in a form that businesses could easily relate to.

Businesses would like:

- to be involved before new initiatives are implemented and have the opportunity to influence ministers at an early stage
- Have flexibility to access training that is tailor made for their work force.
- Joined up thinking across businesses and the public sector to ensure training availability keeps pace with changing business needs
- More training and upskilling of migrant labour on which much of the food industry is dependent.

*Action*

*Marie to discuss with Implementation Group Business Link and LANTRA members how to best communicate messages and information to the industry as to the range of resources, grants and services that are available. This should include making more use of established 'routes to market' such as the NFU, CLA, FCBs and others who have regular dialogue with large numbers of businesses.*

*Marie and Martin to talk to the sector skills councils LANTRA & IMPROVE to investigate how business can have engagement at an earlier stage, when policy and training priorities are being decided.*

*Martin to work with Business Link to provide information for NFU and CLA and other industry outlets on Train to Gain and the £1000 leadership funding for inclusion in member communications.*

*Clarke to follow up with the machinery rings to establish if they wish to investigate putting in a bid under the RDPE to develop a specific training programme to meet their needs.*

### **3. Sustainable Supply Chains**

#### **a) Development of an action plan for the sugar industry in the East of England**

Discussions were held around the need for efficient logistics networks, and improved transport planning to ensure more effective use of lorries supplying the factories.

*Action*

*William Martin to consult with the sugar industry and feed back if there are specific areas not covered where help is required in generating change.*

*Confirmation is needed on whether there is a strong need to facilitate further dissemination of the information from the supply chain work carried out in 2007.*

*Feedback is required on whether there is a need for an independent study on transport logistics to inform a potential change in practices.*

#### **b) Economic and environmental integration of the red meat supply chain.**

It was felt that this work had not progressed in terms of developing an environmental, value added product. Work was being carried out in the undergrazing agenda but it was not clear that results were being achieved.

There was a need to better understand the problem. Maybe paying for environmental gain is the way to keep livestock in certain areas and developing a value added end product is not realistic.

#### *Action*

*Discuss the issue with the undergrazing project and EBLEX.*

*Make contact with the deer initiative taking venison to market. Do they require support?*

### **c) Promoting sustainability in supply chains with emphasis on energy, water and waste.**

It was agreed that increased efficiency is high on all agendas, both commercial and Government, and that work in these three areas is of high priority.

There is a continuing need to make the case for water requirement within the sector, particularly as significant increases in housing stock in the region will put pressure on supplies.

## **4. Export and International Trade**

**To provide active support to increase export and international trade opportunities for the agricultural, food and drink industries in the region.**

It was felt that increasing free trade means the UK is under pressure from imports. It was considered important that businesses make the most of exporting opportunities if they are to continue to develop.

It was agreed that the region main area of growth in exports was principally around exporting specialist or added value products. It was proposed that this aspect of the Action Plan be amended to read "export of specialist regional products".

There was also value seen in support through subsidised Trade Fairs.

## **5. Non Food Uses of Crops**

**To develop the potential for non-food uses of crops including production, processing and marketing.**

### **Unassigned Projects**

Some work was carried out in 2006/7 that was not identified in the original action plan. The Industry Group gave their view on whether they felt these areas should be incorporated in the updated action plan.

#### **1. Carbon accounting**

The practice of Carbon Accounting was one that was expected to be of increasing importance for businesses. Particular emphasis was put on communication and training for business.

A plea was almost made that the industry needs a single, robust and straightforward carbon accounting methodology to be adopted, to avoid the problems of claim and counter claims when multiple systems are used.

*Action*

*Incorporate in the Action Plan*

*Investigate ways of providing business support in this area.*

## **2. Developing new products and markets for food.**

The strong R&D base in the region, particularly in the food industry, was not being exploited by regional businesses. Food processing Faraday was identified as having the potential to be better used in the region to identify R&D available to businesses.

*Action*

*Put a selection of businesses in contact with Faraday to see if it can help them access useful sources of research information not traditionally being used.*

### **New Areas for Attention**

The Industry Group identified the following additional key areas that need attention or should be added to the revised Action Plan.

#### **1. Sustainable Supply Chains – The Fresh Produce Sector**

Labour and skills were identified as the areas where the fresh produce production is most vulnerable. Migrant labour is seen as key, so consideration must be given on issues around education, housing and infrastructure issues.

There was concern that there will not automatically be a ready source of new migrant labour available in the future, and we must therefore look to develop the full potential of those who are here now and develop long term careers for them.

*Action*

*Add the Fresh Produce Sector to the Action Plan.*

*Work with William Burgess to further identify the issues around migrant labour and to identify what actions may be appropriate to tackle them.*

*Link to the regional migrant workers group to make sure that the industry's views are fed into this process.*

#### **2. R&D**

In many small businesses, R&D investment is not something that can be realistically explored, but there would be value in the Government providing opportunities to allow businesses to undertake research.

However, as identified in Business Support Services there is a need to ensure businesses are aware of what resource is already available.

Tax incentives for businesses that invest in R&D are necessary to try and fill some of the gap left by the withdrawal of much government funded research.

#### *Action*

*To raise tax incentives for R&D investment by small businesses at a national level.*

*To ensure that in increasing its engagement with the food and drink sector Businesslink pushes the support available for R&D.*

### **3. Sustainable Development and livestock**

There is a critical issue developing about the lack of animal feed in the country. The industry group felt it is time to address the issue of GM feed as:

- Non gm feed is running at such a premium it is pricing regional (UK and EU) livestock producers out of markets and must be addressed as a matter of urgency at UK and EU levels
- Imports of meat are coming in to the country based on animals and poultry that have been fed with GM feed which is banned in the EU – we risk exporting our livestock sector to other parts of the World which often have lower welfare standards as a result of this.
- There is not enough non-GM feed to meet requirements and the problem is getting worse as more countries adopt GM technology.

#### *Action*

*Initiate national debate on GM and the role it has to play in the industry.*

### **4. Sustainable Development and energy, waste and water**

Various ideas were proposed:

- Tax incentives for early adopters of energy, water or waste efficient processes. These would help incentivise capital investment and lead to faster take-up of new technology within the industry.
- Energy suppliers need to be required to produce up to date bills to enable users to better monitor energy use. Many examples of bills a year behind and estimated bills were noted, which did not help energy efficient processes to be implemented. Particular problems occurred with the move between energy suppliers, which is increasingly common.
- Unless businesses can measure energy use regularly they cannot be expected to make savings.
- Business would like to be told to read meters themselves so that bills were correct (with spot checks to ensure some businesses did not cheat). However, it was noted that this may need training and on larger sites we really need to be monitoring at the building/equipment level rather than business supply level. More promotion of smart meters may help, but there is a significant cost involved.

#### *Action*

*Work with NFU and CLA tax departments to see if a tax incentive proposal could be developed.*

*Work with other industries and EEDA to approach energy suppliers and the Government about the need for more relevant and upto date billing on the grounds that if you don't measure you can't control energy costs and CO2.*

### **5. Olympics**

There is a need to ensure that food and farming in the region engages with the opportunities presented by the Olympics.

*Action*

*Add to the Action Plan*