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farming and food – a shared agenda

Introduction

Over time, local authorities and the farming community have initiated a number of exciting and innovative approaches to challenges and issues of mutual interest and concern. This briefing provides an account of some of these initiatives across a broad spectrum of issues. It describes the diversity of the issues being addressed but hopefully it will also act as a catalyst to further innovation and collaboration between local authorities and the farming community in an increasingly challenging future for both interests.

Background

In September 2000, the Local Government Association (LGA) published *Local Government's Charter for Agriculture*. Designed as a checklist of how local authorities across the country interact with agriculture within their areas, the primary purpose of the Charter was to promote dialogue and strengthen the links between agriculture, local authorities and their communities.

Much has happened since the publication of that document. Major incidents such as the onset of Foot and Mouth Disease and its aftermath emphasised the high level of mutual interests between local authorities and the food and farming community. It also provided the catalyst for a number of subsequent initiatives which have helped to reinforce the significance of that relationship in terms of rural economic and social development and regeneration.

Over the same period, other specific issues, such as flooding, along with more general legislative and policy developments and initiatives have continued to shape and influence that relationship. The result has been a further strengthening of the working partnerships between local authorities and their farming communities as documented in the LGA report *Achieving rural revival* (2003).

A climate of change

Change is prevalent in rural areas and the mutual agenda for local authorities and the farming community is no exception to that. Current and emergent changes to food and farming policy and regulatory frameworks, environmental policy, the water agenda, the land use planning agenda and the wider rural policy and delivery agenda are but five illustrations of current and forthcoming challenges and opportunities for future collaboration and partnership working.

The acknowledged importance of Community Strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships in the delivery of local government's objectives further underlines that. The government's response to the modernising rural delivery proposals as spelt out in the Rural Strategy 2004 adds impetus to that agenda. Developments such as the Rural Pathfinder initiative aimed at simplifying rural delivery offer the prospect perhaps of an improved ability to join up and respond to local opportunities. In such a climate of change, the need for collaboration is paramount and the potential for innovative approaches is considerable.

A shared agenda

The purpose of this document is to demonstrate the nature and strength of the current working relationships between local government and the food and farming community across a range of issues and themes. It highlights some emerging and future issues where collaborative action could be mutually advantageous and in that context, identifies some key issues and questions aimed at heightening the awareness of all those concerned of the potential for initiating or facilitating such collaboration.

The content and scope of the document is not comprehensive. It aims to provide examples of positive, constructive working relationships and partnerships which offer useful models that might be developed and applied on a wider scale or in a different policy context.

Strategic consultation

Farming in all its facets remains an important sector for many local authorities. Although its importance as a direct employer in the rural economy has declined over time, when taken alongside its upstream and downstream-dependent sectors, the farming and food production sector still plays a vital role in rural areas. That role continues to grow as farming businesses strive to broaden and diversify their income base.

Agriculture's land and natural resource management functions also remain vital to the interests of local authorities and have an acknowledged pivotal role in delivering many of their sustainable development objectives.

In turn, the strategic policy and decision-making functions of local government are increasingly important in helping to maintain the viability and competitiveness of farming businesses.

For these reasons and in order to enhance the level of mutual understanding, many local authorities maintain consultative fora or panels which facilitate focused discussions with the farming community on issues of mutual interest and concern.

Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture

The value of the Agricultural and Horticultural sector to the County has been estimated at over £600 million and provides direct employment for some 20,000 people. In the face of increasing pressure on the sector, the Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture was set up by the local authority to create a new partnership between the sector, public authorities in the county and consumers.

The Forum acts as a catalyst for food and farming initiatives including the organisation of seminars and discussions which bring together key players in the farming, food processing, retailing and local government sectors.

Sustainable food and farming

The report of the Curry Commission inquiry, *Farming and food: a sustainable future*, and the government's response to that report highlighted the vital importance of maintaining a thriving and competitive food and farming industry in England. To that end, it identified a key objective for public policy as the reconnection of the food and farming industry to include:

- reconnecting farming with its market and the rest of the food chain;
- reconnecting the food chain and the countryside; and
- reconnecting consumers with what they eat and how it is produced.

Local authorities have a key role to play in the achievement of many of these objectives and a number of good examples of this work in action already exist. Some are set out here and even more can be found on the LACORS, LGA, Food Standards

Agency (FSA) dedicated website www.foodvision.gov.uk. This is a public website, although mostly aimed at local authority employees, which has been set up to help share information on the good work being done on healthy food initiatives and raise the profile of the contribution of various local authority services to the food agenda. It offers information on, to date, over 60 detailed case studies of food initiatives, toolkits for example on food strategies and gives the opportunity for local authorities to submit case studies.

The website also provides plenty of information about how various central and local government policies link in with the projects as well as useful websites, research papers and documents. This builds on the LACORS, LGA and FSA statement launched in September 2002 *Food: the local vision* reflecting the shared aims of the organisations, of promoting the production of, and access to, safe, sustainable and nutritious food, with the aim of improving community health and well-being. The statement can be found on the aforementioned website.

Adding value to local meat production

This was the title of a survey commissioned in 2003 by a consortium of interests that included Caradon district council, Devon county council, West Devon's Agricultural Business Information Point, Meat South West and Cornwall Agricultural Council. It aimed to establish both the number of small or specialist farmers retailing their own meat products and also the potential for expanding this market with regard to the practical hurdles that need to be overcome.

The survey established that the strong desire among farmers to add value to their businesses through marketing and retailing was often frustrated by a number of barriers including a lack of relevant skills, insufficient knowledge about modern marketing, confusion about sources of help and logistical problems

surrounding the slaughtering, processing and packaging of produce. In addition to enhanced training for producers, the survey identified the need for a co-ordinator or series of co-ordinators to help farmers access the information and support that they need.

One direct outcome of this initiative is that Cornish Quality Meats now provide a comprehensive service to individual meat producers which includes securing abattoir time, collecting the livestock, putting it through, processing the products according to specifications and delivering it back to the producer.

In addition to providing funding for training through Agribip and the Duchy College, this initiative is now assisting with the proof of need for substantial objective 1 funding for an abattoir and meat processing facility within the North Cornwall district council area.

Farming Connect Cumbria

This is a programme within Rural Regeneration Cumbria, the UK's first rural regeneration company set up by the county council and the North West Development Agency. This package is designed to provide advice and grants to over 1500 farm businesses with an emphasis on sustainable development planning backed up by grants to support necessary on-farm investment. A key feature of this package is the opportunity that it provides for a whole farm audit approach to the farm business linking to capital grants for consequential farming, environmental and economic activities. This £9.8 million funded programme has levered in £9.6 million of private finance.

Rural Regeneration Cumbria is also pursuing a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the added value on the county's milk and meat products. This includes promotion and

development of processing facilities within the county.

Gloucestershire Food Links

This initiative was set up in 2002 to assist the development of a thriving trade in local produce. Involving a wide range of organisations and interests and with the financial assistance and active involvement of the county council, the key aims of Gloucestershire's Food Links include reconnecting customers with local food, working with farmers, food producers, retailers and farmers' markets to improve the availability of local food, making local food available in schools, hospitals and work places and encouraging high standards of food safety and labelling in local produce. Since its inception, this initiative has run a number of pilot projects to provide business advice, training and seminar programmes aimed at helping farmers and other producers to develop their food businesses.

Gloucestershire Food Links is also responsible for running a project entitled 'Gloucestershire's healthy local food in schools'. The project aims to increase enthusiasm for local food through the development of a whole school approach to healthy eating.

Somerset Food Links

Somerset Food Links was set up in 1999 to help develop a vibrant local trade in locally produced food. This joint initiative which includes Somerset county council, South Somerset district council and Mendip district council has three key aims of helping producers to sell more of their produce locally, raising awareness of the benefits of locally produced food and helping consumers to access locally produced food. Since its inception, it has provided business advice, training and grants to farmers and other producers to help them develop their food businesses. Somerset Food

Links was the main driving force behind the setting up of farmers' markets in Somerset and it has also supported the establishment of a direct delivery service for local food and drink. As part of its mission to help people gain access to fresh, affordable food, it is working with community groups in urban areas such as Yeovil and Chard to help them set up consumer co-operatives which spread the cost of buying fruit and vegetables.

East Sussex Sustainable Food and Farming Centre

As part of a wider strategy for the regeneration of rural East Sussex, the county council is supporting a Sustainable Food and Farming Centre. This is a centre of excellence for training, guidance and advice focused on improving the diversity of the rural economy and increasing the quality of skills, services and products in order to improve local competitiveness.

The innovative projects described above are additional to the continuing vital role that local authorities play in ensuring the health and welfare of farm animals and the integrity of the food chain. This is part of their statutory duties under animal health and welfare legislation and food hygiene requirements. An effective role in these areas means local authorities are:

- helping to prevent future disease outbreaks by ensuring compliance with disease control measures;
- assisting sustainable farming by ensuring animal health and welfare; and
- securing the integrity of the food chain by preventing unidentifiable or at risk stock from entering the food chain and ensuring that relevant food hygiene requirements are met.

Collaboration in the food sector

One direct outcome of the Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy has been the setting up of English Farming and Food Partnerships. The organisation's aim is to strengthen the profitability, competitiveness and sustainability of England's farming, food and related farm-based industries. To achieve that, it is seeking to promote collaboration between farmers and their suppliers and customers.

The EFP Action Plan published in May 2004 defines a strategy and programme of action for achieving its objectives. This includes promotion of good practice, exploring opportunities for collaborative ventures in the food service market including public and private sectors, working in collaboration to explore opportunities to maximise the marketing advantages of providing environmental benefits and developing relevant training and skills development programmes with further and higher education establishments.

Local authorities are well placed to engage with this agenda as facilitators of collaborative projects, as effective partners in initiatives including local procurement and, in appropriate circumstances, as providers of training and skills modules.

Devon Food Links

Devon Food Links is a local initiative based in Devon county council. Its purpose is to contribute to sustainable development in the county by a range of actions including the creation of jobs, business opportunities and increased wealth within local enterprises, the encouragement of sustainable agricultural and food distribution practices, increasing healthy food choices and highlighting local distinctiveness.

To achieve these goals, the aim is to increase the local consumption of food that is produced and processed within Devon. To that end, Devon Food Links has undertaken a range of initiatives across the food chain. In addition to the provision of training, advice, business development and mentoring for local farming and food producers, businesses have also been helped to collaborate in order to serve new markets within the county's designated Objective 2 area and beyond.

The success of this initiative depends on partnership working and, in addition to the county council, the Devon Food Links initiative depends on the close co-operation of a range of bodies including district, borough and unitary authorities, Dartmoor National Park, Taste of the West, AONB management projects and health authorities.

Food promotion

A number of initiatives now exist to help connect consumers with local produce and, as such, help to retain the value of agricultural products at the local tier. Whether it is through sponsorship of Local Food Directories or the support and encouragement of Farmers' Markets, local authorities have a key role to play in furthering the promotion and availability of high quality and sustainable local food in both urban and rural communities.

Penwith Produce

Penwith Produce is a collaborative initiative between the district council and Cornwall Taste of the West. It is a directory of both local food producers who sell direct to the public and local shops, restaurants and pubs within the district where local produce can be bought and/or eaten.

By promoting local producers and businesses selling Penwith produce in this way, the council is both celebrating the area's local distinctiveness and encouraging and supporting local farming and other businesses. The local economy benefits as a result.

The initiative is part of a range of measures pursued by the council aimed at supporting farming and the rural economy. This includes the provision of a whole farm business advisory service as well as promotional literature and other material supporting local produce.

Procurement

In addition to enabling farming and food producing businesses to remain viable and competitive through partnership and collaborative initiatives, local authorities can also play a key role as customers for local produce. Whilst projects such as the Department of Health's 'fruit for schools' initiative provide some new opportunities for local procurement, a number of enterprising local authorities have already demonstrated a way forward that is mutually beneficial to all concerned.

South Gloucestershire School Meals Initiative

Local sourcing of food was a central part of an initiative designed to totally revitalise the school meals service within the council. As part of a programme to reverse the declining fortunes of a service that was catering for an ever-decreasing number of pupils, the Council facilitated the establishment of local supply chains to enable local producers to supply fresh produce for the school meals service. Five year contracts between suppliers and a consortium of producers provided the necessary degree of certainty for both parties and, as a result, a significant proportion of the primary produce for the school meals service is now sourced locally.

The benefits of this initiative extend well beyond its contribution to the local rural economy. It has been the catalyst for improved collaboration between producers and for the establishment of a new dialogue between farmers, children and parents as well as playing a key role in the promotion of healthy eating. It has stimulated a number of farm visits by schools as well as providing enhanced satisfaction for those engaged in providing the school meals service and the number of customers for that service has increased.

Bristol city council

The promotion and delivery of healthy eating in its school meals service is a primary objective of Bristol city council contract services – catering. To that end, they are pursuing a number of programmes and initiatives aimed at helping schools and their pupils to make informed choices about what they eat. As part of that policy, the council is seeking to promote increased use of local produce and to that end, have organised events including a meet the buyer seminar for local producers. The aim is to increase the level of local sourcing by the councils contracted suppliers. Other events such as a nutrition awareness day gives pupils direct access to locally produced fruit and vegetables and the council is collaborating with the Soil Association and Sustainable City Team in an initiative to promote increased use and consumption of local/organic produce. Menus reflect the use of more fresh, seasonal foods.

Although still in its infancy, local procurement for school meals services is proving to be successful for a number of local authorities and individual schools across the country. As the Gloucestershire example demonstrates, the advantages of such initiatives can often extend well beyond the immediate issue of new markets for high quality produce.

Tourism

Tourism has become a major growth sector in many rural areas and, in a number of cases, has replaced farming and food production as the leading source of employment. Tourism is an important item on the local authority/agricultural agenda. In rural areas, the 'tourism product' is often a direct outcome of agricultural land management, an important link which was clearly demonstrated during the Foot and Mouth crisis. Tourism is also a popular activity on the farm diversification agenda and in many situations, has direct links to the promotion of regional and local speciality foods.

More on the Moor

This imaginative initiative is the result of a unique collaboration between a local authority, a charity and a diversified farm enterprise. Situated on the south of Bodmin Moor in the parish of Linkinhorne, the businesses concerned provide mutual support by sharing their target audiences. By that means and through a joint marketing programme, Caradon district council's Minions Mining Heritage Centre, Sterts Outdoor Theatre and the Yarg Cheese Farm work collaboratively to promote the area as a day out for visitors. Promoting the area's distinctiveness is a key theme in this initiative which has proved beneficial for all three partners.

Economic development

Although farming and food issues remain an important focus for local authorities, increasingly their attention is on the wider rural economy and the need to develop and sustain diverse and sustainable rural businesses. This is an agenda that they share with the farming community and where there is much commonality of interest.

The ADER initiative

ADER is an organisation formed by a consortium of East of England land-based colleges and training organisations aimed at providing farmers with a co-ordinated range of business training, advice and support. With funds from the East of England Development Agency and the European Social Fund, the ADER programme aims to provide high quality training and skills courses at local colleges and a programme of farm visits to help farmers to develop their business ideas. Farm visits and a beginners' computer course are provided free whilst funded support enables the provision of the remainder of the short course programme at a minimal cost to farmers and their key staff.

Hertfordshire – action for growth in the rural economy

AGRE is co-financed by the Learning and Skills Council and the European Social Fund (ESF).

The project targets farmers and individuals in rural businesses and provides a range of IT and business skills training which, in turn, helps them to improve and diversify their business. A rural business network supports the application of learning in the work place and links beneficiaries to further complementary support through Business Link and LSC-funded courses in the FE sector.

Lancashire rural futures

This initiative provides an excellent example of how local authorities can engage with a diverse range of partners and play a pivotal role in the delivery of economic and environmental regeneration in a rural area. Dedicated, specialist staff drawn from a range of organisations work as an integrated team to provide a one-stop shop for agricultural and rural business customers and clients.

Developed from the original Bowland Initiative, the LRF comes under the umbrella of Lancashire Rural Partnership, a consortium of public and private sector organisations concerned with rural delivery within Lancashire. The Partnership fulfils the roles of both policy co-ordinator and funding conduit with the county council providing the administrative support. The council also acts as the accounting body for any funding targeted by the Partnership.

A key strength of the LRP initiative is that it covers both economic and environmental issues and initiatives. In so doing, it strives to achieve a high level of policy integration between these two policy areas. Following its success in rural Lancashire, this initiative is now being extended to cover the whole of the county and part of Greater Manchester.

As a means of improving and enhancing their local economies, a number of local authorities have now developed origin assurance schemes aimed at encouraging people to buy more local products. One such initiative has been set up by Dorset county council.

Direct from Dorset

This initiative is designed to support and promote the local economy by providing a brand that identifies Dorset products and informs consumers about the importance of sourcing locally. The initiative was a response by the county council to the general downturn in the fortunes of the county's rural economy as a result of the constraints imposed on a number of activities following foot and mouth disease. In view of its upstream and downstream significance in the local economy, food and drink was identified as a key sector for support and promotion.

The Direct from Dorset initiative was developed by the county council with the help of funding from the South West Regional Development Agency. It is promoted by the council's Trading Standards Service which is responsible for ensuring that products which bear the logo meet Direct from Dorset criteria. The scheme is operated in close conjunction with the council's economic development and tourism functions which enables constructive linkages to be developed with other initiatives and programmes within the county. Lead responsibility for running the scheme has now been taken over by the county council's economic development unit.

Development planning and development control

The interests of the land use planning system and the interests of farming are increasingly interdependent. On the one hand, planning policy and decision-making plays an important role in sustaining the viability and competitiveness of many farm businesses. At a time when additional sources of income are needed to maintain viability, planning often plays a pivotal role in enabling the diversification of the farm business. Planning also plays a crucial role in enabling the provision of the mainstream agricultural development and related infrastructure which competitive farming businesses require. On the other hand, many of planning's objectives for the countryside and rural environment are dependent upon the continuation of many of the land and natural resource management functions associated with farming.

The importance of this planning/farming inter-relationship is likely to continue as we move towards a reformed agricultural policy regime and a redesigned development plan regime following the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. The publication of a revised suite of national Planning Policy Statements including PPS7 further underlines the need for increasing dialogue and mutual understanding of the local authority and farming communities.

The committee for rural Hampshire

The committee, which has been in existence since 1991, is a county council initiative involving local authorities, farming interests and other relevant local organisations in the county. It provides a forum for discussion and exchange of information on a range of issues of relevance to rural Hampshire and its future. Through a programme of seminars, conferences and publications, it seeks to improve the level of mutual understanding between planning and farming, influence policy makers and disseminate good practice.

An increasing number of local planning authorities seek to assist and encourage dialogue with the farming community through the publication of guides to help their understanding of the planning system.

Planning for success: a farmers' guide to the planning system

The guide, produced by the Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture, provides farmers with a brief overview of the planning system, how it works and advice on how best to approach the process of making a planning application. The objective is to seek to improve the chances of success by improving the quality and standard of applications.

'Value in store'

This initiative, developed by North Kesteven district council, provides practical support to farmers who wish to bring forward redundant or under-used farm buildings for commercial use. The council's economic development department co-ordinates the input of a number of relevant service departments within the authority and provides a single point of advice and information to farmers on the planning and related issues arising from the proposed re-use. Access to reliable market intelligence also allows the authority to provide advice on the commercial viability of proposals.

As the revised PPS7 contains only a limited amount of guidance on selected aspects of national policy, there is scope for further constructive collaboration between local planning authorities and the farming community to prepare guidance on how the Policy Statement is to be interpreted in a more local context.

Land and countryside management

Land and countryside management remain major issues of mutual interest and concern to local authorities and farmers. Agriculture remains the predominant land use in the countryside and many of the amenity, habitat and biodiversity objectives defined in local authority plans and strategies depend on agricultural land management practices for their delivery. This relationship is particularly critical in our designated areas such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation and other key sites where the sustainability of agriculture is paramount.

In the case of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 further re-inforces that relationship by establishing a new statutory responsibility on local government to prepare management plans for these protected areas. As a result, the relationship between local authorities and the farming community is developing further as they work together to achieve a more integrated approach to land management.

Farming also plays a crucial role within and on the edges of our towns and cities where a high proportion of open land owes its existence to its continuing use for agricultural and horticultural activities.

Local authorities have a long tradition of engagement with the farming community in the development and implementation of land management programmes and initiatives.

Hertfordshire countryside management service

The countryside management service is jointly funded by the majority of Hertfordshire's local authorities. The county council has overall responsibility for its organisation and delivery.

The service offered is county-wide and focuses particularly on working with local communities to involve them in environmental activities and countryside access. It promotes the uptake of agri-environment schemes amongst land managers in the county working closely with farmers and providing a grant scheme brokerage service. The service also administers a small environmental land management grant fund for farmers which often encourages them to participate in projects funded under the England Rural Development Plan. In that context, the service has provided a prototype of Defra's entry-level scheme.

Peak District National Park Farm and Countryside Service

The Farm and Countryside Service has been in existence since 1987. Introduced as a response to concerns about the continuing decline in the Park's landscape, wildlife and historic features, the service provides technical advice and grant aid facilitation to land managers throughout the National Park. With the growth in concern about the rural economy, the service has pursued a more integrated policy approach which seeks to link environmental, economic and social issues within the Park. Positive outcomes from the service include the provision of technical advice on how to integrate environmental issues into agricultural activity, the provision of grants for beneficial projects not covered by existing grant schemes, greater encouragement to businesses to see the environment as an economic asset and facilitating access to national agri-environment schemes for land management.

The creation of a new Integrated Agency for protecting and enhancing the natural environment, biodiversity and landscape and improving opportunities for public access and recreation will provide a new framework for the local authority/farming land management agenda. The lessons learned from local authorities' long engagement with the land management agenda should prove valuable in the design of the new agency's working relationships with its agricultural partners at the sub-regional and local levels.

The reformed Common Agricultural Policy which now severs the link between support payments and production and introduces an important cross-compliance agenda, creates new opportunities for local authorities to work with farmers and others to further those aspects of land management that are of mutual interest and concern. The requirement to maintain land in good agricultural and environmental condition and the agri-environment entry level and higher tier schemes offer a new suite of land and natural resource management measures which provide local authorities and farmers with further opportunities for creative thinking and collaboration on how best to implement land management programmes to their mutual advantage. A sound information base at the farm scale will be an important factor in maximising the potential of any such programmes.

Land Management Information Service

The Land Management Information Service (LaMIS) aims to support better informed farm planning and decision making – by giving farmers and land managers easy access to data about their land held by all tiers of government; by helping land managers to make the most of agri-environment and other funding opportunities; and by promoting and supporting the delivery of local communities' needs, priorities and ambitions for the countryside. In this context, it is seeking to deliver the reconnection of farmers with the wider community objective advocated by the Curry Commission.

LaMIS is currently available on-line in Hampshire, the Sussex Downs AONB and the North York Moors National Park. The intention is to continue to extend its geographical coverage and an offline CD-based service is to be launched in December 2005 to co-incide with the entry level scheme.

LaMIS will ultimately offer three key components:

- an information base;
- software tools to assist in whole-farm planning; and
- information exchange giving farmers the ability to exchange information with public bodies and the wider community.

The primary resource agenda

Whilst land management remains a key environmental interface between local authorities and farming, the priority issues on the environmental agenda are no longer concerned solely with the amenity and/or habitat value of the countryside. The management and protection of our primary resources of water, air and soil are also central to the country's sustainable development objectives and increasingly present an agenda of issues of mutual interest and concern to local authorities and the farming community.

CAP reform cross-compliance, the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the First Soil Action Plan for England 2004-2006 are but three illustrations of national policy and regulatory programmes where the scope for joint action and collaboration is considerable.

The Upper Avon Landcare Partnership Project

The Landcare project has been led by the South Wessex Area of the Environment Agency since 1994. It involves a number of national and local partners including local authorities and farmers with the aim of developing practical solutions to deal with excessive run-off from agricultural land into the river Avon. In addition to the problems of local flooding and mud on roads, excessive run-off increases the level of soil sediment in river gravels resulting in a sharp reduction in salmon numbers in the catchment.

Improved management of land and tracks is reducing run-off substantially and helping to address the problems identified in the area.

Waste management and control is another dimension of this wider environmental policy agenda that requires collaboration and partnership between local authorities and the farming community. The reduction and management of agricultural wastes poses a significant challenge to the farming community, not least because of the forthcoming introduction of revised waste regulations whose scope will encompass a potentially wide range of waste arising on farms.

Farming can also play a role in helping local authorities to meet their waste management objectives and targets and, in so doing, contribute to overall sustainable development aims and objectives.

Somerset county council composting initiative

In order to better cater for local needs and conditions and to minimise the distances over which waste was being transported in its area, Somerset county council introduced a policy to encourage a matrix of different composting sites operating at different scales and using varying technologies or processes to compost household organic waste into a stable end product. As part of that revised policy, the council collaborated with on-farm composters and put in place a composting regime that allowed a number of on-farm composting businesses to secure contracts and make a meaningful contribution to the council's sustainable strategy for waste management.

The increasing use of regulation and economic instruments to tackle waste issues has led indirectly to increases in the incidence of illegal dumping and fly-tipping of waste on agricultural land. This is not only a cost problem for farmers and landowners but also an important amenity and public safety issue for local authorities in whose area it occurs.

Fly-tipping joint initiative

In April 2004, the East of England Rural Affairs Forum and the Hertfordshire Rural Affairs Forum jointly sponsored a regional conference on fly-tipping. This had been identified as a major issue by the Hertfordshire Forum following an audit of rural crime. A range of organisations and interests contributed to the conference including the Environment Agency, local authorities, police, magistrates, farmers and land managers. The event led to a regional action plan which includes commitments to information sharing, exchanging of best practice and the identification of issues on which central and local government will be lobbied.

National government commitments to cut CO₂ emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 and the shorter term target to generate 10 per cent of UK electricity from renewable energy sources by 2010 have provided the catalyst for a number of local authority initiatives in which farmers and landowners can have an important role to play.

Renewable energy initiatives

Some local authorities are pursuing a range of renewable energy initiatives that are advantageous both to the authorities and their communities and also to farmers and landowners within their territory. One such initiative is the Nottinghamshire Wood Heat project, in which the county council plays a leading role. It aims to increase the use of green energy in the council's buildings by replacing fossil fuel-based systems with a renewable system based on wood. This initiative is not only carbon neutral but it also helps to stimulate the revival of traditional woodland management and ensures that fuel payments remain largely in the local economy.

summary and conclusions

Many of the general issues of mutual interest and concern to local authorities and the food and farming community are common throughout the country although regional and/or local situations and circumstances often produce particular nuances and variations which require localised or area-specific responses.

The foregoing snapshot of local authority/food and farming joint initiatives provides an illustration of how both sets of interests can work constructively to address these issues. Although some of these initiatives have their origins in the shared need to respond to the trauma of foot and mouth disease, they also demonstrate the increasing interdependence of the local authority and food and farming agendas across a range of issues and the mutual benefits to be gained from collaborative working between and within both sectors.

As society's aspirations for the countryside develop, the agricultural policy response points increasingly towards a multi-functional agenda for farming in which food production is an important but not the only desired output. In parallel, the emerging policy delivery agenda points towards greater recognition of subsidiarity as a defining principle upon which the future delivery of rural policy should be based. In that context, the potential for collaboration, partnership and other forms of joint working will increase.

The extent to which this will actually happen will depend on a number of factors, not least the extent to which the nature of their shared agenda is recognised and acted upon by both local authorities and the food and farming community. It will also depend on a willingness to change systems and methods of working and communicating which is probably a cultural challenge as much as a structural challenge for both parties. Above all perhaps, it will require the investment of time, money, expertise, commitment and enthusiasm. When resources are stretched, it is often easy to argue that this is an investment we cannot afford. In view of the returns from that investment, however, and the medium to

long-term costs of not making it, can we afford not to?

What does a local authority need to think about to take this agenda forward?

Many of the initiatives described in this briefing depend on the opportunity for constructive dialogue between local authorities and the food and farming community.

- **Is that facility for engagement of the food and farming community available within the authority?**
- **How is that engagement taken forward if you are a predominantly urban authority but with a rural hinterland where food, farming and agricultural land management are still important?**
- **Does the authority sufficiently understand the pressure for change within the food and farming community and how the resultant issues interact with the local authority's agenda? How best can the authority develop and enhance that understanding?**
- **Is there a need for the authority to undertake an assessment of the likely implications of the reformed CAP both for itself and for the farming industry within their area?**

Equally critical is the need to assess the likely implications of farming's changing environmental agenda such as the Water Framework Directive, Waste Regulations, Diffuse Pollution, Soil Strategy etc. Arguably many of these are shared agenda issues where the need for mutual understanding is paramount.

- **Is there sufficient mutual understanding on these matters and, if not, how can that be achieved?**
- **Is the policy and decision making structure in the authority sufficiently joined up to deal with an agenda such as food and farming? If not, what is the scope for change?**

Many of the initiatives described in this briefing depend on the efforts and energies of volunteers and enthusiasts which can be difficult to sustain over the time period necessary to achieve desired outcomes without adequate support.

- **Are such initiatives given sufficient time to deliver and is their level of support and funding adequate to enable them to do so?**
- **Where programmes and initiatives depend on EU funding how can their survival be assured should there be reduced European funding to the UK post-2007?**

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