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The following is an extract from a paper produced for the BSAS Knowledge Transfer Workshop about knowledge transfer activity in the RDPE Northwest Livestock Programme. This was one of a number of case studies presented at the workshop at the Sixways Stadium in Worcester on 3rd March 2011. The workshop provided a knowledge exchange and learning opportunity about best-practice Knowledge Transfer for those involved in the animal sectors and to provide examples of good practice technical knowledge transfer

The full document can be found in the booklet; "Best-Practice Knowledge Transfer - Knowledge exchange between providers of KT to farmers"

<http://www.bsas.org.uk/downloads/BestPracticeKT.pdf> or contact Kath Lowe at Myerscough College, klowe@myerscough.ac.uk.

Knowledge transfer activity in the RDPE Northwest Livestock Programme

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Introduction

The RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England) Northwest Livestock Programme is a support package specifically for livestock farmers in the North West. Work focuses on improving farm competitiveness through better animal health and welfare, and greater efficiency in the use of farm resources such as fertiliser, water and energy. Support is available for animal health planning, nutrient management planning and resource efficiency audits. There are two elements of Knowledge Transfer activity in the Programme. One involves a range of activities including setting up monitor farms, running demonstration events and supporting farmer groups. The other is a dedicated ICT network to act as a channel for the whole programme and to pass targeted technical information to livestock farmers and their advisers. Both projects are managed by Myerscough College. The Programme started in January 2009 and ends March 2013.

Although this paper focuses on the 2 knowledge transfer projects, it should be noted that they are part of a fully integrated programme of work with the livestock sector, and the benefits of the Programme as a whole much exceed the sum of the parts; any assessment of the individual projects is therefore inevitably imperfect.

A Monitor farms, demonstration events and farmer groups

This project is managed by Myerscough College and is delivered in partnership with The Cumbria Farmer Network, Reaseheath College, English Farming and Food Partnership (EFFP), with support from EBLEX and DairyCo. The overall aim of the project is to improve business performance and sustainability through farmer group working and good practice demonstration activity. The three themes followed are farm competitiveness, nutrient management and, animal health and welfare. Later in the programme, capacity building will take place to help groups to be more sustainable when the project ends.

Since January 2009, six monitor farms have been set up; 3 dairy and 3 beef and sheep. There are 6 monitor farm discussion groups (one for each farm) and on average 18 farmers attend each group meeting (4 per year plus one Open Day). Demonstration events are well attended and receive good feedback from farmers. Several existing farmer groups have been supported and 14 new groups have been formed. Numbers attending group meetings vary widely from 6 in the more remote areas of Cumbria to 90 in East Lancashire where there have been relatively few local opportunities in the past. Interest in the events and group meetings continues and numbers are growing.

Fig 1

RPDE Northwest Livestock Programme Knowledge Transfer Activity Jan 2009 – Feb 2011				
Jan 2009 - 30 November 2010	Number of events	No of farmers attended	Target Number of farmers per event	Average numbers attending
Monitor Farm Open Days	24	345	30	31
Number of Demo Events	36	1,530	30	38
Monitor Farm Discussion Group Meetings	96	501	20	17
No of Farmer Group Meetings	128	1,298	15	16
Total	136	3,675		

*Total number of attendances 3,675 from 2,285 individual farmers

The facilitators working on the project meet quarterly to share best practice, exchange ideas and receive training in communication and facilitation skills.

B. Livestock Northwest ICT Network and Communications Channel

Myerscough College provides a knowledge transfer and technical information e-channel to transmit between RDPE funded activities and farm businesses in the Northwest. The e-channel consists of a website (www.livestocknw.co.uk), with news, technical fact sheets, reports from demonstration events, group meetings and the monitor farms. There is a calendar of events that are relevant to the sector and attendance at Livestock Northwest events /meetings can be booked online. Separate discussion forums have been set up for farmers, and for the vets and advisers involved in the other Livestock Programme projects. All registered users receive a monthly e-newsletter. A quarterly printed newsletter is mailed out to approximately 6000 farmers.

The website was launched in August 2009 and by 31st January 2011 it had 19,422 visits and 11,687 returning visitors. 801 people have registered on the site to receive the monthly e-newsletter and 44 farmers with no email have registered to receive hard copy updates.

A small group of farmers tested the website before it went live to assess ease of use and content. To promote the launch of the site an A5 card with a brief explanation of the purpose and content of the website and a user guide were mailed out to approximately 6000 farmers. The User Guide was an A5 ring - bound 'flip chart' that could be stood up on a desk. Each page had a screen shot and instruction on how to navigate around the website.

Three case studies of dairy farmers who have received performance grants to make improvements on their farms were completed in December 2010. These, together with a short video clip of each farmer, have been posted on the website. They have also been published in a brochure that has been mailed out to 2,225 dairy farmers.

Other aspects of communication are being explored and Livestock Northwest is now on Twitter, Facebook and Linked In. The website is being refreshed and more video will be included.