

This series of informative fiches aim to present, in summary, examples of projects and practices that address or are driven by young people living in rural areas. These examples want to contribute to the understanding of what has worked well and less well in the delivery of the 2007-2013 RDPs in the view of supporting young farmers and rural youth, show how young people can be involved in policy design and implementation, raise awareness about possibilities offered by EU rural development programmes, and finally draw lessons in the view of future improvement of the policy.

## Fresh Start Academies



*The establishment of Fresh Start academies aims to provide young people willing to enter the farming sector and start their own business with tailored information and advice.*

### 1. Background information: why the approach has been put in place

In 2002 the [Curry report](#) raised concerns over the lack of help and support for those wanting to start a new business or develop a family business in the agricultural sector. It was envisaged that a neutral environment with sound business advice provided at very low cost could help young people to develop their business ideas.

The original concept for Fresh Start academies started from this report; Lord Curry was part of the initial decision making group behind Fresh Start. A range of National Stakeholders have been involved since 2006 in the implementation of the project, including National Federation of Young Farmer's Clubs, DEFRA, National Farmers Union, Tenant Farmers Association, Countryside Landowners Association, Barclays Bank, Arthur Rank Centre and National Trust.



Through the establishment of Fresh Start academies the project aims to provide advice for those wishing to set up farming businesses and show entrepreneurial spirit. The academies seek to introduce key business skills and approaches. Professional speakers, such as accountants, bankers and land agents share their knowledge and expertise with the group of academy participants to help them start their own business. The academies also provide an environment in which participants gain confidence through the sharing of ideas and experiences with others.

The intended benefits are the provision of an environment to build confidence, enabling new entrants to progress with their business ideas, the provision of networking opportunities and insight into the business side of farming. Fresh Start is open to anyone from either a farming or non farming background.

### 2. Description of the approach: how it was done in practice

Fresh Start Academies are usually delivered in a series of evening meetings, which present farmer and business case studies as part of the meetings. Demonstrating the opportunities from various types of joint ventures and different methods of financing are also important parts of the process.

The Fresh Start national project manager works with industry representatives to identify possible locations and sectors to run academies. Each local academy has a steering group, which is set up with guidance from the national project manager.

There are two main types of academies:

- ◆ **General academies:** open to all those interested in land based business. Participants can therefore come from a variety of backgrounds such as agriculture, forestry, horticulture and contractors.
- ◆ **Specialist academies:** these are sector specific so can be far more focused in some areas of delivery.

Timings, venue, speakers, programme content, promotion, launch and delivery are guided by the national project manager, which provides also back-up during this delivery process, attending occasional meetings, monitoring quality of delivery and feedback from participants. Limited project funds help the academies launch but local funding is required to run them, especially for employing a local co-ordinator. However, this is not a large amount of money and is sometimes donated from a member of the local steering group using their own administration staff. All speakers donate their time free of charge. Academies then take day-to-day responsibility of booking speakers, venue, refreshments etc.

Although some elements of Fresh Start academies have altered over the years, the three key elements from its original format remain at the core of its delivery; business academies, mentoring, and match-making. The specialist academies are a relatively new addition to Fresh Start and offer academy programmes over a shorter time frame than was previously the case. Mentoring is now offered as an optional extra after a programme of meetings rather than being integrated into a Fresh Start programme.

The National Federation of Young Farmer's Clubs (NFYFC) has been part of the process since the inception of Fresh Start, helping to feed into the development of the academies and promoting the project to their members. However, it was always the plan of Fresh Start to reach beyond the established groups and during promotion of the academies it is made very clear that Fresh Start is open to all who want to develop a farming business. The reality is that over the years nearly 60% of participants have come from farming families and 40% from non-farming families. Although Fresh Start is not just for young people the average age group of participants is 22 – 35.



### 3. Conclusions/lessons learnt relevant for the future: what were the results

Nationally there have been about 500 participants of Fresh Start academies since 2006. There are currently 12 academies in total, five generic and seven specialist focused on a particular sector (one pig, three upland and three dairy). Over the last year there have been 15 people participating in dairy academies, 40 in pig academies and 17 in upland academies.

Several businesses have started due to the match-making aspect of Fresh Start but the national project manager explained that it is very difficult to qualify results as businesses often started months or years after someone attends a Fresh Start academy. Approximately 20 businesses have started as a result of Fresh Start since 2006.

The national co-ordinator explained that the academy format has worked well and continues to do so. This is also because it has adapted over year to the needs of participants (for example organising meetings in the evening, reducing the number of participants per academy, proposing more focused programmes, etc.).

The new specialist academies allow a more focused approach which is easier to manage and delivers more for the academy participants. Future academies will be following a similar format with flexibility for sector and regional needs to be incorporated into the programme. Furthermore, it was noted that real passion and commitment from young people to go into the farming sector are important to start a new business as well as technical skills. Those factors alone are not the solution though. Business skills are vital for them to make sensible and viable decisions, whatever their background is.

*Information included in this fiche is primarily coming from the case studies carried out within the ENRD Initiative on "Youth and young farmers in rural areas". The fiche is compiled by the ENRD Contact Point on the basis of information collected in the EU Member States and Regions. The content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions, national or regional authorities.*