

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.

## Hill Farm Apprentices Scheme



*The Farmers Network, in co-operation with the Prince's Countryside Fund and the Cumbria Fells and Dales LAG, developed the Hill Farm Apprentices Scheme from the need to encourage and train young people to be the next generation of hill farmers in Cumbria.*

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

Many of the skills required to work in hill farming are endemic within the existing farming population in Cumbria; the knowledge hill farmers have of their farm and its environment are invaluable educational resources. Existing hill farmers, many of whom have roles within their local communities, became very concerned about the loss of young people from hill farming, caused on the one hand by the low number of new young entrants in the sector and on the other hand by the difficulty to retain young people within hill farming families in the industry. Business income in Less Favoured Areas such as the Cumbrian uplands remains relatively low, leaving upland farms with little funds for reinvestment or to pay for additional labour or training. Employing an apprentice is often too costly for hill farmers. With fewer young people able to learn the skills required and the RDP for England not including the support to new entrants measure (measure 112), the age demographic of existing hill farmers had continued to increase. The Hill Farm Succession Scheme aimed to respond to these challenges by helping the industry train its next generation of hill farmers, equipping them with the skills and knowledge required to run a successful hill farm.

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

The project was implemented by The Farmers Network, a not-for profit organization developed to help, guide and support farmers in Cumbria and the Yorkshire Dales. The Farmers Network was approached in 2010 by The Prince's Countryside Fund to ask what help might be needed to address the many issues hill farmers were facing. The support from the Prince's Countryside Fund and the Cumbria Fells and Dales LAG, made the realization of this scheme possible.

Eight apprentices were employed by the Farmer Network over an 18-month period. During this period the apprentices participated in training courses, including a level 2 Diploma on livestock production (run by a local college) and additional training covering a range of hill farming skills, such as tractor driving, tractor loader, trailer handling, sheep shearing, fencing, hedging, walling, handling chemicals, dog handling and business skills for self-employment. This training provided the trainees with the certificates they needed to work on farms and was specifically tailored to the needs of the hill farming industry. During this period work placement was arranged for the 8 participants in four hill farms in the region to give them experience of different hill farming systems. Over the final 6 months the trainees become self-employed and were mentored by the Farmer Network to help them find work.

The Farmer Network used a coordinator to act as the liaison point between the trainees and their host farmers, arrange the additional training and act as the contact point with the college. Furthermore, the Farmer Network acted as the employer because of the number of work placements involved and to keep paperwork for the host farmers to a minimum. The Farmer Network paid for the trainee's time on training courses whilst the host farmers were charged for the cost of the trainees' wages but in return received a mentoring fee in recognition of the time they



spent supervising and training their trainee. This meant the host farmer had the benefit of a trainee but only needed to cover their wages and find work for them for one or two days a week, making the project affordable.

Funding from the RDP for England was used to pay for the full cost of the trainees attending additional training courses, providing them with the skills and certificates to enable them to become hill farmers.

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

The project resulted in 8 trainees serving apprenticeships in traditional hill farming at up to four different host farms. They also received training and achieved a Level 2 Diploma in livestock production as well as certificates in a variety of agricultural and hill farming activities including dog handling, walling and tractor driving. Promoting the initiative through existing agricultural and rural networks helped build the credibility of the project and encourage a good uptake both from host farms and young apprentices. The use of the coordinator was crucial to the management of the programme and helped resolve any problems which inevitably arose between the trainees and their host farmers. This involved developing the best 'matches' between host farmer and apprentice. The Farmer Network designed the project to ensure the burden of paperwork was managed in house enabling the participants to focus on the skills, knowledge, training and mentoring. This approach ensured hill farmers could become involved without being put off by any additional administrative requirements. The project's success was also based upon the unique opportunity to learn hill farming skills directly from existing farmers in conjunction with the traditional, higher education based learning opportunities. This has enabled young farmers to learn culturally endemic skills that may otherwise have been lost to the next generation. The trainees were also provided six months support to establish their own businesses which enabled them to focus on a tangible, beneficial outcome from their time within the project.



The main bottleneck in the implementation of the project was the lack of coordination between funders. Alternative sources of funding had to be used where possible, however generally the timeframe for the delivery of the project had to be adjusted in order to accommodate the delays in funding.

Working with the LAG the project promoters were able to tailor their project to meet the needs within the local context. This ensured the project was relevant for the target beneficiaries and also engaged effectively with the farming community to ensure a good number of hill farmers were willing to act as hosts.

This project demonstrated that there is a desire amongst young people in rural areas to stay within or enter the farming sector – even in less favoured areas where profit margins can be low. This would suggest that there is a need to include a measure within the RDP for England which supports new entrants into agriculture.

The difficulties experienced agreeing eligibility within some areas of the application may suggest that many of the issues identified when developing and implementing projects are associated with interpretation of the RDP and its communication amongst stakeholders. The RDP may be better able to assist projects like this, that wish to support young people in rural areas, by developing a consistent and greater 'can do' approach to enabling project applications which focus on this age demographic.



*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.*