

This series of informative fiches aim to present, in summary, examples of practices and approaches that EU Member States and Regions have put in place in order to implement their Rural Development Programmes in the current period. These examples want to contribute to the understanding of what has worked well and less well in the delivery of the 2007-2013 RDPs and as far as possible, draw lessons in the view of future improvement of the programmes.

Cheviot Futures - United Kingdom



BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The Cheviot Hills region, which straddles the English Scottish border, is an environmentally protected National Park and upland hill farming area. The sensitive nature of the landscape means climate change is a major threat to the environment and the livelihoods of the areas farmers and land managers. The most common threats, which are further exacerbated by climate change, include floods, wind erosion, wildfires and drought. Adopting new, innovative technology and techniques to combat these issues can be challenging for farmers who are already working marginal land. Some assurance that these practices were appropriate, could be easily integrated into their

Keywords: Innovation; climate adaptation; implementing the LEADER approach; inter-territorial co-operation.

EU Member State: United Kingdom

Specific Location: The Cheviot Hills which form part of the English Northumberland National Park and continue across the border into Scotland

Main beneficiaries: Tweed Forum (lead delivery partner) Farmers and land managers, Northumberland National Park, Northumberland Uplands LAG, Scottish Borders LAG, Environment Agency including Northumbria Regional Flood Defence Committee. Cheviot Futures Steering Group members.

RDP Measure: Measure 421: Implementing co-operation projects

Funds Allocated: Total cost: EUR 508 340

EAFRD: EUR 235 735

National contribution: EUR 270 000

Implementation Period: February 2009 – February 2014

land management systems and would provide greater economic viability in the long term was required before their uptake became likely.

A research report was published in September 2008 identifying actual and potential threats to the area brought about by climate change. This coincided with the first of several major flooding events across the Cheviot Hills, focusing the attention of farmers, land managers and a range of agencies and support organisations on the particular challenges of climate change in the Cheviots. An initial pilot project was developed to seek practical solutions to these real identified needs which could be implemented by the farming community themselves.

It was quickly recognised however that a larger, more inclusive approach was required and a LEADER inter-territorial cooperation project was developed by the LAGs active in this area, namely Northumberland Uplands LAG and Scottish Borders LAG. This enabled the activity to cover the whole of the Cheviot Hills and to employ a full time facilitator and part time Project Co-ordinator. It was envisaged that this new approach would enable whole farm resilience plans to be developed for individual farms, allow practical on-farm pilots to be developed, encourage openness to new techniques through the development of networking opportunities and create greater resilience to climate change.



Current practices across the EU27



DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

An independent study was conducted on the potential impact of climate change on the Cheviot Hills and was followed shortly after by a number of instances of extreme flooding which acted as a catalyst for a pilot project. This pilot brought together a multi-agency steering group, including Northumberland National Park, Tweed Forum and the Environment Agency, who worked together in the Northumberland Uplands area of the Cheviot Hills. Their experience then led directly to the development of this inter-territorial cooperation project with the Scottish Borders LAG, building on the existing cross border partnership approach of Tweed Forum.



When developing the project it was recognised that processes were required which would successfully engage the farming community with highly innovative methods of climate change adaptation – both physical tools and new farming methods. These approaches needed to be tailored to specific farms through the use of farm resilience plans and managed by a facilitator who could link the potential solutions to the specific on-farm challenges.

This approach required flexibility as the climate change adaptation ‘solutions’ could not be identified until the on-farm resilience planning had been considered. The project plan was therefore more focused on the required outcomes and the need for proactive networking to disseminate the results of these new techniques and technologies. This flexibility enabled the project plan to accommodate the innovation required within delivery and the selection and implementation of a wide range of new activity.

The main risks identified within the project were the ability to effectively engage farmers and land managers with the project including piloting innovative technologies and techniques within their farming enterprises, and creating an environment in which the failure of some of the techniques was acceptable and recognised as an important part of the process. It was recognised by the steering group that these risks could most effectively be minimised by the employment of a full time facilitator and part time coordinator who could undertake the farm resilience plans but more importantly could develop relationships with the farming community, disseminate learning from successes and failures as well as supporting farmers through the process of implementing their tailored climate change mitigation solutions.

Quality control was undertaken by the multi-agency, farmer led steering group which met regularly to monitor the implementation and progress of the project and included a LAG member to support monitoring and communication. This involved regular reviews of outputs and outcomes, assessments of the efficacy of the new technologies and techniques supported through the project, the impact of the dissemination of these results through various forms of networking and the identification of future areas of activity for the partnership.



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

The project focused on delivering practical solutions to real climate change problems. This involved employing a full time facilitator, a part time coordinator and, where appropriate, the project also contributed towards the cost of introducing new climate change adaptation technologies or techniques. A network of demonstration sites was established to disseminate information on these new technologies and techniques to the broader farming community through a series of open days. It was hoped these events would encourage other land managers to invest in similar measures once their value had been proven through the project.

The facilitator post created was responsible for:

- ◆ the preparation of holistic, bespoke farm resilience plans;
- ◆ supporting the implementation of climate change adaptation techniques and technologies;
- ◆ identifying and securing complementary funding;
- ◆ sharing best practice and enabling collaborative working between farmers;
- ◆ raising awareness of the potential threat of climate change to associated sectors;
- ◆ developing a network of demonstration sites;
- ◆ creating a critical mass of projects and best practice guidance to create an on-going resource.

It was also anticipated that the project would act as a catalyst for greater integration between the key agencies involved with aspects of climate change and adaptation in sensitive landscapes, particularly cross border working, and would support a whole community approach to combating climate change.

Mowhaugh Farm – The experience of Chris and Louise Dixon

After several major flooding incidences the project facilitator visited the farm in early 2011 to complete a farm resilience plan. The farming family were aware of the project as the facilitator, Tracy, had previously visited to introduce herself and discuss the project to raise awareness of the support available. Information was collected on the challenges on the farm including the impact of flooding within the farm house, across a high proportion of workable fields and the on-going loss of productive ground and fencing through river movements and gravel deposits. The farm also suffered from restricted access to water during the summer months which was limiting livestock numbers and jeopardising the economic sustainability of the farm. This information, supported by many conversations with Chris and Louise was then used to develop the bespoke farm resilience plan. The plan proposed the installation of an innovative water pump system to provide water throughout the farm with Tracy able to manage the administrative aspects of the work, sourcing quotes, dealing with contractors etc. leaving Chris and Louise to focus on the installation of the technology in conjunction with a contractor.



The installation has brought significant changes to the farm as water can now be accessed in all the fields all year round enabling a notable increase in stock and therefore securing farm income. This has given Chris and Louise the confidence to apply for funding to erect a new shed to accommodate the increased stocking levels. *“We couldn’t have done this without the support of the project. Tracy has been particularly good because she is always there, always available to help and has been able to suggest technologies we would never have had the time to find out about. The process has been so different to other grant funds we’ve been involved in, it’s been so much more flexible and we’ve been able to change aspects of the work when we’ve needed to. Having a facilitator who is a real person and the same person makes the biggest difference – it provides continuity and understanding of what we’re trying to do.”*



RESULTS OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project over achieved on all the anticipated outputs. Thirty five active or semi-active resilience plans, works or consent for works were underway or completed by December 2013. These activities and the demonstration open days delivered had engaged with over 670 individuals. Some of the demonstration days attracted over 75 farmer and land manager participants. A series of case study documents were also produced, by the coordinator, which provided guidance and advice on the legal consents required, technological specifications and the contact details for relevant individuals in the statutory agencies.

The project has enabled farmers and land managers to feel empowered to adapt their businesses to climate change. They have started to think more about climate change adaptation as a regular element of their business planning, becoming more proactive and dynamic in their approach to 'future proofing' their businesses. The project has provided them with the advice needed to identify appropriate techniques and technologies, raised awareness of solutions in practice and managed the process of implementation to ease the administrative burden which might otherwise have been an obstacle to participation.



Effective engagement with the farming community has developed a stronger culture of collaboration and encouraged greater networking between farm businesses. This has only been achieved through recognising the importance of a properly resourced animation role, which enabled the right officers to be put in place who understood the community, could talk with them and build positive relationships throughout the lifetime of the project.

The project was founded upon a multi-agency strength and desire to work together. Through this the partners have benefited indirectly from the development of both existing and new networks and relationships at a local level, with the positive experiences from this project encouraging continued cross agency working.

A legacy of information has been created through case studies, information packs and the network of sites. The distribution of these has already led to sharing experience with other environmentally sensitive areas and regional water companies, exploring some of the adaptations which have been implemented within the Cheviot Hills.

This project has delivered a truly 'multi benefit' approach, supporting the environment through such activities as habitat connectivity and improving biodiversity, increased the economic sustainability of farm businesses and delivered measures which safe guard communities.

The learning and the dissemination of both successes and failures, has been a fundamental outcome of all the activity. Within this project the value of failure has also been recognised, an ethos that has been enabled through the LEADER approach.



LESSONS LEARNT

The knowledge brought through the multi-agency approach coupled with the practical experience of the farming community developed a steering group which has underpinned the success of the project. This Partnership of committed individuals and organisations was able to support the project to deliver more effectively on the ground, bringing vital skills and local experience. This was complemented further by the genuine passion and work ethic of the project staff whose commitment to creating positive change in the Cheviot Hills was unbounded. The combination of a delivery officer supporting activity on the ground and a strategic officer to ensure equitable, effective progress and to communicate the projects learning at a national and international level has been particularly successful, especially in this cross border context.

The flexibility built into the project plan enabled the project to be both reactive and proactive, responding effectively to new threats and opportunities as they arose during the project period.

The network of demonstration sites showed that where activity is seen as being relevant and is delivered through a credible, independent organisation farmers and land managers will engage and seek to learn more about the potential benefits to their businesses.

Despite its successes the co-ordination and management of the steering group has been more time consuming than originally thought with some members engagement diminishing before the end of the project. Although the importance of relationship building was recognised during the planning stage, more time to achieve this could have been factored into the project.

One of the remaining challenges for the steering group is how they retain the knowledge and networks which have been built when the project officers are gone. In a rural community like the Cheviot Hills it takes a long time for people to respect and trust an organisation, so once the funding has finished all those relationships can be lost unless an effective exit strategy is put in place.

The administrative burden was exacerbated by several retrospective changes to the necessary paperwork throughout the period of the project so significant additional administration time was required to go back over previous files.

LEADER funding was the only real RDP option for this activity however the broad and flexible method required may prevent this type of project applying to the next round of the LEADER approach.

The farming community involved with the project have suggested that they are now more likely to look for solutions rather than believe things are unable to change. This proactive approach has made them more positive about the future of upland farming, changing ingrained perspectives now and into the future.



WHAT'S NEXT?

The project has been highly successful, creating a legacy of networked, innovative climate change adaptation sites where new technologies continue to be trialed. The accompanying case studies and information booklets will ensure that the learning developed within the project will continue to be disseminated by the lead partners and other members of the steering group (<http://www.cheviotfutures.co.uk/ourprojects.php>). There is a risk however that the networks and relationships built at a local level will not be effectively maintained in the absence of the project officers.

Recognising the success of the approach, the steering group are learning from this project with a view to developing a further phase of activity. Cheviot Futures has become a recognised and well respected brand. The steering group wish to build upon it with 'multi benefit' projects which work to support the environment, rural businesses and communities throughout the Cheviot Hills area. Lead organisations, Northumberland National Park Authority and Tweed Forum, have assured the steering group that they will continue to share the information and ethos of Cheviot Futures.

One opportunity already being explored is utilising available high level, research based advice and guidance on new crops, pests and disease in relation to climate change and deliver farm based trials of these implemented on farm in the Cheviot Hills. This approach would also include the identification and development of new markets for new crops grown.

The lead delivery partners will remain points of contact for project specific publications, and will continue to disseminate information and the ethos of Cheviot Futures within existing and future work programmes.



SUMMARY

This project has sought to support farmers and land managers to adapt to and minimise the most common threats to farmers' livelihoods brought about by climate change, including floods, wind erosion, wildfires and drought. However, for farmers to adopt new technologies and techniques to combat these, they need assurance that they can be integrated into their land management systems without excessive disruption and ideally provide assured economic viability in the long term. This inter-territorial co-operation project, working across the Cheviot Hills area of the Northumberland Uplands and Scottish Borders sought to conduct on-farm resilience plans to provide advice and guidance for the farmer, trial new adaptation technologies and techniques where appropriate and develop and disseminate learning resources based on the projects successes and failures.



The key lessons learnt throughout the project include:

- ◆ A diverse multi-agency and farmer led steering group provided an in depth range of skills and local knowledge which underpinned the success of the project.
- ◆ Engaging the right project staff was vital, people with a genuine passion and commitment to farming and land management in the Cheviot Hills engaged more effectively with the farming community.
- ◆ The combination of a delivery officer supporting activity on the ground and a strategic officer to support higher level engagement and disseminate information worked particularly well in this cross border context.
- ◆ The flexibility built into the project plan enabled it to respond effectively to the changing context.
- ◆ The network of demonstration sites was successful due to its relevance to farming businesses and the credibility of the project.
- ◆ The co-ordination of the steering group was time consuming with difficulties continuing engagement to the end of the project.
- ◆ An effective exit strategy was vital to ensure the networks and relationships built were not lost.
- ◆ The use of a facilitator to ease the administrative burden from the project beneficiaries enabled broader participation. .