Farm Enterprise Competition

Welsh rural development competition inspires innovation among young sheep farmers

Summary

A ‘Farm Enterprise’ Competition from Wales in the UK is a good example of an EAFRD-funded project that both identifies and raises awareness about agri-business innovations. The competition specifically explored knowledge development and transfer in sheep farming for young farmers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of project</th>
<th>Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agri-business competition</td>
<td>Total project cost €18 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EAFRD contribution €10 175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority/focus area, measure</th>
<th>Type of beneficiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge transfer and innovation</td>
<td>Education &amp; Research; Farmer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness of agriculture</td>
<td>July – November 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abersystwyth, Wales, UK</td>
<td><a href="http://www.menterabusnes.co.uk/farmingconnect/farmers-enterprise-competition">www.menterabusnes.co.uk/farmingconnect/farmers-enterprise-competition</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description

Official project title
Farm Enterprise Competition

Context and needs
Developments in Europe’s countryside have been driven by centuries of innovation in farming, forestry and other rural sectors. New ideas continue to crop up and be harvested throughout rural Europe and EAFRD support can be used to help entrepreneurs take their ideas forward. One way of helping to encourage good use of this public funding is to run competitions that inspire people in rural areas to think about what they could do to improve their economic, environmental, and social circumstances. Results from such competitions can not only generate benefits for those submitting their entries for new products and processes, but the knowledge gained can also be transferred to help others learn about different opportunities.

A farming organisation from Wales in the United Kingdom knew that this type of rural development approach was good practice, and so they used RDP funds to help implement a ‘Farmer Enterprise Competition’. The livestock husbandry contest was organised to encourage young farmers to experiment with innovative methods for rearing local sheep breeds. The competition was launched in 2013 and also received RDP funding in 2014.

Objectives
Project outcomes were expected to increase new knowhow about improved sheep husbandry techniques that could help improve the competitiveness of local sheep farms. The competition would also help improve the business skills of young farmers and promote the benefits of cooperation because the competition was implemented using teams of farmers.

Activities
Actions involved setting each team the same challenge. Contestants were tasked to agree and apply a livestock husbandry strategy for rearing 50 lambs on 2.5 hectares of upland fields. Competition organisers provided both the lambs (of the same breed) and the land (on the same research farm) in order to ensure a ‘level playing field’. The teams did not need to deal with the day-to-day husbandry of the animals but they had full responsibility for the grazing strategies, animal health planning, use of Information technology, and lamb selection etc. A panel of specialist judges was also recruited by the project to follow the teams’ progress. They established assessment criteria that included examining the teams’ success in: choice and management of fodder crops; production costs; and the weight gained by lamb flocks.
Results

Winning teams won their prize for their achievements in sound cropping decisions that the judges considered were well informed by attention to detail. Other findings included the conclusion that there is no ‘right or wrong’ system of lamb production and in fact it is the management of that system that makes the difference. Analysis of all the results was subsequently written up and widely publicised through regional farm advisory services. This helped the knowledge and innovations gained from the RDP-funded competition to reach and benefit a broad range of livestock farmers.

Lessons

Valuable lessons were learned from all the competitors’ ideas as well as from the context itself. The competition confirmed the potential for rural development projects like this to strengthen the innovation, cooperation, and husbandry skills of the next generation of EU farmers. Specific lessons from the husbandry trials also included:

- Knowing your land is essential to target nutrients and cultivation accordingly.
- Rolling was a huge benefit in establishing the crop as the weather was very dry, and Henfaes is prone to low rainfall. Establishment was better on the headland where it was rolled more than once and also on tractor tracks. Direct drilling with little soil disturbance and moisture capture was very important.
- Welsh mountain lambs can be controlled by electric fencing, but introducing them to the fence prior to putting them on the crops would have been beneficial.
- Weed control is essential for crop success.
- Rotational grazing or controlled grazing with electric fences has increased crop utilisation which was critical on a dry season.
- It was small production costs that added up to a significant difference in lamb profitability. Scaling this up to a farm level shows the importance of knowing and recording costs and outputs on an on-going basis.
- Think about the basics of animal health and choose the right product for the right time of the year and for the right reason, especially when planning your worming strategy.
- Electronic identification proved valuable in order to monitor lamb growth rates so that management decisions can be implemented immediately.

Quotes from beneficiaries/participants

“The Farmer Enterprise Competition brings together essential business and innovation principles... and demonstrates the importance of mentoring and knowledge transfer. It shows how important and beneficial it is to adopt an enterprising, business-like and strategic
approach to farming and emphasises the clear benefits of animal health planning, benchmarking and using Information Technology.”

Rebecca Evans, Deputy Minister for Farming & Food for Wales, UK

“There was a big variation in lamb growth rates. Lambs on [two of the six] plots grew at an average of over 120g/day or nearly a kg per week. This matches the performance of many lambs on lowland systems and shows what can be achieved from hill lambs with good management.”

Catherine Nakielny, Competition judge

“We are looking forward to learning more about finishing systems and when to select lambs in order to get the best out of them.”

Beca Glyn, Farmer Enterprise competitor, 2014

Contact
Mr Anwen Williams
Farming Connect
Unit 3, Aberystwyth Science Park,
Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3AH
Wales, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1970 636565
E-mail: anwen.mcconochie@menterabusnes.co.uk
farmingconnect@menterabusnes.co.uk

Additional sources of information, links

- [http://cms.menterabusnes.co.uk/resources/838.pdf](http://cms.menterabusnes.co.uk/resources/838.pdf)
- [http://cms.menterabusnes.co.uk/resources/789.pdf](http://cms.menterabusnes.co.uk/resources/789.pdf)