

**NORTHERN UPLAND CHAIN**  
**Local Nature Partnership**



**High Nature Value Farming Forum**

hosted by the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership  
Redworth Hall Hotel, County Durham  
11 & 12 February 2015

**Conference notes**

**Day 1**

**Welcome and introduction – Mervyn Edwards, chair of conference**

Mervyn was brought up on a hill farm on the Berwyn Mountains of North Wales, the oldest of eight children.

“One of four boys, our duty and dedication, throughout our school age was to help father on the farm, in all the hours that were available. We thought hill sheep farming was one of the best jobs that existed.”

Mervyn became an agricultural adviser, joining the Ministry of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Advisory Service in 1968. He subsequently had over 40 years working as a government adviser in North West England, 20 years in agri-business followed by 20 years in agri-environment before retiring from Natural England in 2011. He has worked on the ESA scheme and worked within the NE national team as upland agri-environment lead adviser. He has been a member of the NSA Northern Region Committee for over 20 years, and Secretary of the Cumbria Hill Farming Discussion Group for 30 years.

The key issue for this meeting from Mervyn’s perspective is the effect of the brown envelope payment which is so dominant in the farm business. How can this be addressed without losing what’s special about the uplands and the traditional farming methods.

**What’s in it for me? A farmer’s perspective, Johnny Wilson**

Johnny is a third generation organic sheep and beef farmer on a tenant farm on the Beamish estate near Powburn in north Northumberland. The family has farmed there since 1949 and the tradition will continue, when Johnny’s son Ross takes over in the future. Lamb is marketed through an online box scheme and direct to restaurants.

“There are many pressures and demands faced by farmers from a multitude of organisations – at times competing against one another and taking up a significant amount of time and energy. For me personally, the support I have received from Northumberland NPA and from Natural England has made a true difference to the

farm. It has enabled us to work with neighbouring tenant farmers at a landscape scale. This has been very positive and proves that it is good to work together and share ideas. We have to look at alternatives to support our traditional way of farming as European funding may not go on forever.”

### **Why we are involved – NUCLNP perspective, Adrian Shepherd**

Adrian is a farmer’s son from Lancashire, whose career started as a FWAG adviser before moving to being a farm adviser for the Peak District National Park and latterly the Yorkshire Dales National Park. He is now head of Land Management at the Yorkshire Dales and is one of their representatives on the board of the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership (NUCLNP).

Adrian described the development of the NUCLNP and of the common interests and shared priorities, the partnership and farmers have. The partnership is keen to support farmers that consider themselves to be High Nature Value Farmers (HNVF) as it is this way of low intensity farming that supports the highest levels of biodiversity and maintains the dramatic landscape of the NUC. It also provides a range of benefits to society – often unpaid benefits such as clean water and carbon storage. Could it also be termed ‘low economic value farming’? Incomes are low, and there is pressure to improve grassland management in order to increase ‘profit’. Traditional farming in the uplands is at risk of change. The NUCLNP with funding from NE supported 4 pilot projects looking at the costs, challenges, benefits and risks of being a HNVF. A final report has been produced drawing together the 4 pilot area findings and has suggested a number of recommendations that farmers, government organisations, EU and the NUCLNP should take forward in support of HNVF. Many involve increasing awareness of HNVF with government and the public. The development of a farmer led forum could be the key to this.

### **Overview of UK networks - Rose Regeneration, Ivan Annibal and Jessica Sellick**

#### **About:**

Rose Regeneration is an economic development business. They work with communities, government and businesses to help them achieve their full potential – providing departments, local authorities and agencies with reviews, evaluations, policy design, economic analysis, toolkits and practical advice.

#### **Key notes from presentation:**

On behalf of Royal Agricultural Society of England, Rose Regeneration (RR) reviewed and compiled a report on co-operative working and farmer networks from across the country. The report is called ‘Putting the spotlight on rural communities’. RR presented the findings:

- There are 3 types of networks:
1. Commercial – technical, financial agronomic advice
  2. Social – wider community support/benefits
  3. Representative – professional representation

The report focused on 5 holistic farmer groups from across the country and noted the common approaches between the groups:

- Groups were self reliant
- They were farmer focused or had a local focus
- They were able to challenge opinion
- Groups extended membership to other organisations for support.

The groups worked extremely well if grown organically from farmers, and/or were locally owned and delivered.

RR have identified 4 development phases:

1. Establishment – funding – grants, membership, commercial
2. Development – grow membership, larger portfolio
3. Growth – self funded
4. Consolidation – fully self funded with scope to deliver surplus

For the establishment of a farmer forum you may well need a dedicated staff resource to keep momentum and engagement. An example is as follows:

Costs - £5 – 10k – set up

As group gathers momentum and develops, the following costs may be needed:

£50k – staff costs

£30k – project budget – events, groups, legal status

Total £85k

Keys to success – initiated and run by local farmers

Clearly defined geographical focus

Has credibility

Employed staff come from a farming background

Why bother? – Improve financial performance through collaboration

Enable farmers to participate on an environmental scale

Social benefits for the local community

Every £1 spent there are £10 spent back to the tax payer.

Web link: <http://www.roseregeneration.co.uk/putting-the-spotlight-on-farming-communities/>

### **Yorkshire Dales and Cumbria Farmer Network, Paul Harper (Managing Director) & Matt Barker (Yorkshire Chairman)**

#### **Paul Harper – managing director of the Farmer Network**

The Cumbria Farmer Network started in 2005 following 3 years of a 100% funded RES project

The RES project was set up to see if small groups of farmers could collaborate. It was a success because a core group of farmers believed that by working together, sharing ideas

and supporting each other, they could make a difference in helping more farmers remain

in business.

In 2005 a decision had to be made in terms of the future of the Network of opting to remain small or to grow and employ staff.

They opted to grow. This was because:

Farmers realised they needed to change their business to survive

Main source of income was out of their control

Government funding and advice did not meet the needs of the farmers

Farmers didn't have big clout politically – few votes in marginal seats, therefore, how do you influence policy?

Policy makers and funders prefer farmer groups to take responsibility – funding has followed since the Network formed.

It took 18 months to achieve £70k funding – mostly from Northern Rock bank. Then a membership payment approach was brought in.

The network had to grow further in 2010 in order to become more sustainable and less reliant on grants. Therefore it extended into the Yorkshire Dales in 2010.

How costs are covered – overheads are £60-80k/yr – mostly staff costs.

Covered by membership fees, consultancy work, project management costs

The core aims of the company are:

To help maintain and develop a viable farming community

To maximise rural income via food production and other activity

To support, inform and educate

To raise the profile of farming

The Network achieves this by using local farmer coordinators to speak to local farmers,

find out their needs and then obtain external funds, use membership subscriptions and

work with partners to develop services to meet these needs.

What we do

- A not-for-profit farmer support group that is independently run by farmers for farmers, operating in Cumbria and the Yorkshire Dales
- Save running costs through sharing machinery, plus group buying of fuel, waste plastic disposal, electricity, animal health products etc.
- Help with paperwork and regulations with a free manual and on farm visits.
- Support young people to enter the industry by offering vouchers up to £200/year towards the costs of technical training, offering a low interest loan and grant for starting or developing a farm or farm
- related enterprise and run schemes to train young people and promote their services, so as to help them find work
- Organise networking events for farmers to share ideas and speak to experts on subjects and in locations that they ask for to keep up to date, including demonstrations, meetings and field trials
- Organise training courses on subjects and in locations they ask for
- Educate the public through organising farm walks on commercial farms, attending public events to give demonstrations and organising school visits

The Network now has 710 members - 600 in Cumbria and 110 in the Dales.  
Membership is £50 /year  
It is run by 2 Councils which are elected by members  
It is now a not for profit company Ltd by guarantee owned by the farmers.  
Turnover for 2013/14 - £303,000

Need commitment – this is v. important, or uptake/momentum slows.

### **Matt Barker, Swaledale farmer, committee member and Chair of the Dales Farmer Network**

Joined DFN to get help with accessing grants

Membership benefits:

1. Group buying to reduce costs: fuel 1.1 million litres ordered saving 2-4p/litre  
Electric contract negotiation started 1 yr. ago.  
Animal health products
2. Plastic recycling
3. Membership of Riddings Machinery rings
4. Training grants – £200 vouchers for 16 – 40 yr. old members for courses -  
have been well received
5. Training courses have been put on – pesticides, grandfather rights. Training  
undertaken in local area at convenient times
6. Help with access to the Jason Kanabus Fund – for young farmers to develop  
the farm business. 18 – 30 year olds.
7. Help with accessing low interest loans (Princes Trust)
8. Help with farm paperwork

Projects:

£211k funding has been secured for projects including 2 grassland projects +  
machinery.

Applied to the Princes Countryside Fund for the YD Apprenticeship Project for 16 yr.  
olds.

16 demos/ meetings over the last year: Topics chosen by farmers to help their  
businesses

North Lakes labour scheme - We recently received confirmation of funding from the  
Rural Growth Network for a new project in the Ullswater/Bassenthwaite catchment  
area which covers much of the northern Lake District. The funding is to train and find  
work for young people to carry out practical tasks and another person to help with  
paperwork. There is also funding to work with 9 farmers to improve management of  
their farms, including testing and demonstrations

Web link: [www.thefarmernetwork.co.uk/](http://www.thefarmernetwork.co.uk/)

### **South West Uplands Federation (SWUF) – John Waldon**

Formed in 2005, SWUF is an initiative created by and for the benefit of hill farmers in  
South West England. It functions as a farmer led alliance of hill farmers and

representatives from the relevant statutory agencies. The alliance encourages discussion and agreement between agency staff and farmers.

### **Why it started**

Single Farm Payment Scheme came in; farm incomes fell by 40% - lost with the demise of livestock subsidies

Anti NFU feeling, very aggrieved farmers.

SW hill farmers felt they were being ignored and felt Defra had lumped all hill farmers together without realising how different some of the farming practices were between upland areas. SWUF farmers predominantly cattle farmers as opposed to northern hill farmers who are predominantly sheep farmers

Originally set up as a lobbying group, the federation includes each upland area within the SW – Bodmin Moor, Dartmoor and Exmoor. Different farming cultures in each area

Objectives:

- To provide a voice for hill farmers from Bodmin Moor, Dartmoor and Exmoor.
- To promote the distinctiveness of the uplands, especially the moorlands, of the south west peninsula.
- To identify the public benefits hill farming in the south west can provide.
- To provide a forum for the exchange of information.
- To develop and promote initiatives, including common stances on marketing, that will reward appropriate stock rearing in the south west hills.
- To encourage the training of future hill farmers in the south west.
- To commission research and surveys that will provide evidence to support our work.

### **SWUF structure**

3 farmer reps from each area

1 chair Prof Ian Mercer

1 secretary John Waldon

Now have representation from English Heritage, Natural England and Environment Agency on the group. But have to have a higher no. of farmers than agency staff on the group.

Needed resources to begin the process, so struck an alliance with the 2 National Park Authorities who have been able to provide a small amount of funding each year.

It now has 200 members, but is still struggling to network with the majority of farmers across the three areas.

Funding is starting to dry up for covering overheads and core costs.

Easier to get funding for set projects.

Over the last 10 years the federation have spent £80k

Potential to focus on ecosystem benefits

There maybe a possible role in developing a payment for ecosystem services project

## **Achievements**

SWUF has undertaken various surveys of hill farmers in SW England and commissioned research into the economics of upland farming. It has submitted comments on the future of the Hill Farm Allowance and engaged with Defra/Natural England during the development of Upland ELS. Participation in the Commission for Rural Communities Upland Inquiry included written submissions and providing original research. Most recently work to provide clearer guidance to those farmers who come under restriction due to bovine TB and to measure the impact of TB on hill farming was commissioned and distributed. SWUF is preparing a response to Defra's consultation resulting from the EU proposal's for CAP reform. Occasional newsletters are provided free to all hill farmers in the South West.

In October 2010, together with the Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter, SWUF organised a seminar to offer the opportunity for farmers and decision makers to debate the situation facing hill farmers and identify potential solutions. 2006 HFA review – SWUF targeted civil servants in DEFRA

SWUF is now seen as a direct route in to policy decision making

Moor Benefits leaflet developed – selection of public benefits and key attributes including costings of the value of the Moors and what they brought to the rural economy. A simple, straight forward leaflet on SW moorlands - why they are important, what benefits do they bring, what is the problem.

RDA provided funding for hill farming support. 3 projects set up.

Dartmoor Hill Farm Project

Exmoor Hill Farm Project – training, advice, technical dissemination support

Bodmin Hill Farm Project

Without hill farmers, England would be a much poorer place in delivering public benefits

## **Federation of Cumbria Commoners, Viv Lewis and Dave Smith**

Various issues and causes for concern instigated the setting up of the federation:

1. There wasn't a collective voice for the 57 common associations in Cumbria
2. Foot & Mouth highlighted the fragility of the common grazing system
3. Outsiders had increasing influence but didn't understand commons
4. Rehefting problems
5. Aging farmers

The Federation was set up soon after F&M using a Defra grant.

It has an overall aim – viability

And a constant theme – influencing farming policy to fit commons

It has 550 members and is a 'go to' organisation on common land issues

They are constantly involved with NE on issues with Lake District commons and have set up the Cumbria grazing forum – discussion and reasoning of why stock levels need to drop. Seeing it from both sides NE and farmers challenging the evidence

Majority of funding comes from membership £15/person/yr. This money is derived from each commoners associations agri-environment payment. This plus a small amount of other income amounts to £9,000/yr. of that £6500 is used for staff costs on 1 day/ week.

Experience of working with policy makers at Defra and NE – you need strong evidence to support your arguments. Not just anecdotal.

### **UTASS, Richard Betton**

Set up with a MAFF grant in 2000 after a series of 8 suicides in a 6 month period. These suicides happened due to pressure of paperwork and fear of getting it wrong. It is now a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. UTASS is managed by local people for local people. It has a dedicated team of eight project staff, mainly part time plus volunteers providing a wide range of support services to communities in Teesdale and it specialises in agricultural matters.

It's about the 'people' and their culture not just the type of farming and the biodiversity value.

Income from £140k in 2006 to £307k in 2013. This money pays for staff and helps with undertaking a vast array of services and subsidised skills training:

1. 24 hours a day, seven days a week support & advice service for those with urgent needs.
2. Practical support with the completion and submission of complex forms and paperwork, including awareness raising re: CAP Reform regulations.
3. Production and dissemination of regular briefings consisting of essential information distilled and de-jargonised from Defra, EU etc. and pertinent to the running of livestock based farm businesses.
4. Support with issues brought about by Foot and Mouth Disease, Blue Tongue Virus etc.
5. In cases of severe hardship, acting as third party referrers to organisations which include E Finn Care, Independent Age, Addington Trust and RABI.
6. Support and training in setting up of sustainable methods of dealing with on farm paperwork, including the computerisation of farm records.
7. Quarterly Community Newsletters.
8. Various training courses based on locally identified needs including Farmers of the Future.
9. Advocacy and liaison work with local Landlords, Defra, Trading Standards & other agencies.
10. Lamb Bank, Sales & Wants and Labour/Skills List development work.
11. Facilities for advertising local businesses/services.
12. Short term loan of ICT equipment Topical presentations & awareness raising events.
13. Requesting & receiving feedback on consultations at local, regional & national levels.
14. General drop in and telephone advice on a range of issues and signposting to other helper organisations & agencies.



15. Provision of meeting venue & outreach facilities for a range of agencies & organisations including Citizens Advice Bureau, Durham Dales Action for Carers, Age UK, Teesdale Housing and
16. Durham County Council's Environmental & Community Care.

Farmers of the future – certified course run by UTASS within the community.

Sustainability through collaboration

Skills base

Community

Economic &

Environment

### **Questions & comments from the afternoons presentations**

#### **Tenant farming:**

Farm business tenancy (FBT) pressure – the change from generational tenancies to FBT could finish tenant farming in hill farming areas – needs a different way.

Tenancy reform needed. An issue that could be taken on by the network.

Particularly difficult for tenanted properties that have common rights.

Scope for share farming – has had a positive outcome in Cumbria

#### **Broadband:**

Lack of rural broadband puts the hill farmers at a disadvantage and mobile coverage (H&S issue)

Community groups DIY approach to getting broadband in villages where individuals pay slightly more than national providers.

#### **Role of a farmer network / forum:**

Farmer networks should be supporting people through the changes that Countryside Stewardship is bringing

Farmers' networks need to respond to local issues

Knowledge exchange visits to organisation like RSPB farms

Public engagement

Open farm ideas

Strength in numbers evidence. Dartmoor farming futures project – undertaking their own monitoring work. Farmers being trained by NE have their own ID booklet and illustrative guide. Meet with NE once a year.

Ivan – Is there a role for a low input /maintenance overarching group that links networks and issues? It could meet infrequently but would enable existing networks to be more effective. Strengthening links

Andrew Miller – all things to do with hill farming are related to the community

Link it back to nature; help with facilitating the monitoring, training

Informing and influencing the public – big opportunity

Establishing another network – would there be conflict with existing networks. How can they work together?

Strap line 'Progressive farming that protects the environment' ?

## **Day 2**

Second day focussed on outlining key funding opportunities that could be utilised to set up a forum and a discussion on whether a forum should be the way forward.

### **James Farrer, North Yorkshire, York and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)**

The LEP: Set up by government, it is a partnership of people from local authorities and businesses who use local knowledge to secure government investment in projects and schemes that will make a real difference to the economy.

James talk centred on a number of key points he felt were important to consider if setting up a forum and to be attractive for economic based grant funding:

Environment underpins the economy – agriculture, tourism, tourism related industry and business

Farms must be sustainable

New models of shared working need to be developed, sparking innovation

A bottom up approach, working together because farmers trust their peers

A focus on the next generation is key and allowing them to take control and move forward with the farming business – this in itself may bring innovation and growth.

Funding should pump prime a long term sustainable plan

You need to consider what are the additional benefits to society of a farmer group?

This should be clearly articulated.

What's the return on investment? What kind of economic and growth outputs could be generated by the work of the forum.

### **LEADER – Ivan and Jessica, Rose Regeneration**

European Structural Funding to develop bottom up approaches to economic development and support in rural areas.

Its about collaboration, local ownership, innovation and networking.

£138 million to allocate to LEADER partnerships across England through a competitive bidding process. 3 year plans developed locally and submitted to Defra. Decisions made by a National Panel.

70% of all LEADER funded projects must directly support the rural economy (e.g. developing micro and small sized rural businesses). The remaining 30% of projects must also contribute to the rural economy (e.g. increasing visitor numbers and spend).

£138 million will fund the following objectives:

1. Support for increasing farm productivity – 20%
2. Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification – 40%
3. Support for rural tourism – 20%
4. Provision of rural services – 5%
5. Support for cultural and heritage activity – 5%

## 6. Support for increasing forestry productivity – 10%

LEADER focuses upon farming and growth based projects and may be able to support projects not covered or overlooked by other funding programmes. Cooperation and linkages to Local Enterprise Partnerships/European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development funding, other economic activities (e.g. Rural Growth Network Pilots) and organisations (Local Nature Partnerships).

Web links:

Defra

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leader-approach-in-the-rdpe-national-delivery-framework>

RDPE Network

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/rural-development-programme-for-england-network>

### **Discussion and feedback session**

Conference attendees were then split into three groups to discuss a number of questions on the setting up of a Northern Upland Chain farmer forum.

#### **How can a new forum interact or compliment an existing network?**

It needs to add value to existing networks

Avoid replication and avoid impingement on existing farmer network and UTASS membership.

If it's adding value – a lobbying approach could be the key.

Could have membership from existing networks

Possible to extend existing networks to cover the gaps

Needs to be a simple set up and low cost

The NUC is large but it is possible to join networks together and to act as a lobbying group – united.

Is it a more efficient way forward to get the gaps sorted out first?

3 or 4 areas that would benefit from a new local forum/farmer network set up:

Northumberland, Forest of Bowland and S Dales

Develop an overarching forum with representatives from networks and from each protected area

#### **What type of forum should it be?**

Govt. agencies want to have contact with the farming community. An NUC farmer forum could act as conduit for govt. agencies to farmers and vice versa.

Need to be representative of the type of farmers

Have a lobbying role at a significant scale – across the LNP with support from the LNP

#### **What issues could the forum seek to address?**

Needs to be clear on issues that are to be addressed

Need evidence base to influence – upland centred research, farmer led case studies.

Could be centred on agri-environment outcomes.

Agri environment payment focussed to the hills – need to generate / show why this is important? What are the benefits HNV farmers are providing by utilising agri env. schemes.

How do we show that they are a success and deliver the outcomes desired by NE? Landlord relationship with payment system – further lobbying required to sort this issue out with Defra and EU.

The forum could also influence public opinion on hill farming and showcase the public benefits of HNV farming.

**What are the key barriers to the forum being set up?**

Lack of a consistent funding stream – initially this could be NUCLNP and NE

Lack of farmer commitment

Difficulty in identifying the right farmer champions

**Conclusion:**

General consensus is to push forward with the development of an overarching forum. NUCLNP will facilitate its development initially, but ideally this will be farmer led with back office support from the NUCLNP.