

Small Farms Association Newsletter

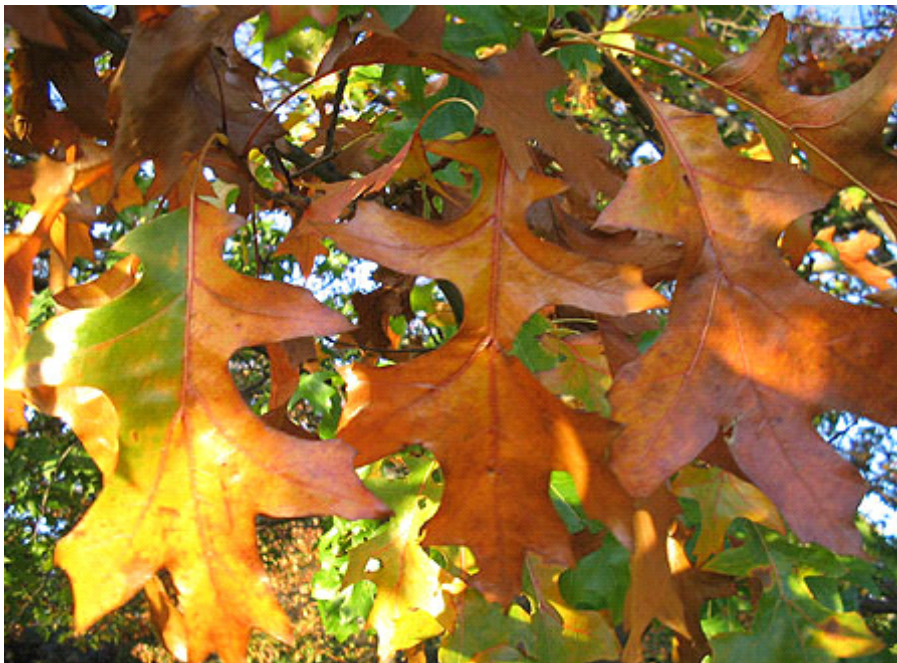


WINTER 2011

Volume 14, Issue 4

Inside this issue:

| | |
|---|------------|
| Comment from the President | 1 |
| NVZ Update | 2 |
| Small Farms AGM Report | 3/4 |
| South Hams Agri Forum - Renewable Energy Seminar | 4 |
| NEWS | 5 |
| FWAG Reborn | 6 |



Dear Members,

I wish all of you a very happy Christmas and a prosperous 2012.

There is so much one could feel depressed about at the moment if one were so inclined: What with general and specific dissatisfaction with the CAP Reform proposals, the prospect of protracted CAP negotiations between member-states, the retail adjudicator without teeth and the loss of FWAG, to mention but a few issues.

Many commentators have described the CAP proposals as either a pig's ear or a dog's dinner. The current set of proposals don't seem to satisfy anyone!

When the EU Commission set out to reform the CAP, they aimed to improve competitiveness, and sustainability and simplify the regulations. Everyone seems to agree on two things: the current proposals will undermine the existing agri-environment schemes and not make farming more productive or competitive.

Apparently, Stewardship applications have been falling off because of the likely impact of CAP reforms on these schemes. There is a great deal of uncertainty out there. No one knows whether farmers will be able to count their ELS towards their 'greening' obligations or whether they will face a double whammy of 'greening' as well as ELS. Then, surely the craziest proposals within the reform of the CAP is the requirement to grow

three crops if arable land is cultivated, the embargo on ploughing permanent pasture and the plan to take 7% of their holding out of agricultural production!

At this point in our history, surely we should be increasing food security and agricultural production; and balancing those requirements with environmental protection? And not creating even more bureaucracy, as is the fear with the proposed greening.

I felt deeply sad that FWAG has been forced into administration as a result of Government and local authority cut-backs. The loss of FWAG will be felt in the coming years. What will happen to its 120 very talented and committed advisors and the trust that was built up between the farming and the environmental communities over 42 years since its foundation in 1969 by a group of Suffolk farmers? I hope we're not throwing the baby out with the bath water, as an organisation such as FWAG is needed more than ever with the prospect of the greening of the CAP on the horizon!

On the plus side, we've had the second warmest and driest November since records began, unless you live in the North where they have had more their fair share of rain. Let's hope the winter weather will continue be kind to us and to our animals.

Happy Christmas,

Phillip Hosking

Statements and opinions expressed in articles, reviews and other material herein are those of the authors and not necessarily of the SFA.

While every care has been taken in the compilation of this information and every attempt made to present up-to-date and accurate information, we cannot guarantee that inaccuracies will not occur.

SFA News published by

Small Farms Association
Ley Coombe Farm, Modbury,
Devon,
PL21 0TU.
Tel 01548 830302
Fax 01548 831272
www.small-farms-association.org

Why throw your money away?



Report by Mary Talbot-Rosevear



In the autumn issue of the newsletter, I reported that I had attended a NVZ workshop on 28 September organised by the Environment Agency. I would like to update you what's been happening with some of the recommendations made at that event.

Mail out to farmers in NVZs

The Environment Agency (EA) agreed to write to all farmers in a NVZ in the South West to remind them of the 1 January slurry storage deadline and to give them opportunities to seek advice from a range of partner organisations.

There were data protection issues associated with such a mailing; and it was agreed that those would be sorted out with Defra. The EA has now had confirmation from Defra that they will write direct to farmers themselves; but the EA does not know when the letter will be sent out. The EA has given a commitment that it will continue to liaise with Defra and endeavour to provide all participants at the NVZ event with a copy of the letter when it's available.

NVZ final communication push

In the meantime, the EA is continuing its communications efforts to reinforce the message to farmers who have not yet acted. Since we met in September, the EA has sent out a 'two months to go' reminder, the SFA and the NFU have run regular reminders in their newsletters, the EA has had a feature in the Mole Valley newsletter and displays are going up in Mole Valley branches across the West Country.

The latest press release from the EA follows, which reminds farmers that there's less than a month to go before the deadline of 1 January. The press release urges farmers to seek help if they haven't already done so and explains the action the EA will be forced to take if they do not comply.

Environment Agency Press Release

The clock is ticking down to 1 January 2012, when farmers in NVZs must have adequate slurry storage to comply with NVZ regulations. Dairy and livestock farmers within a NVZ must have at least five months slurry storage and pig and poultry farmers must have six months storage.

With just over a month to go, the Environment Agency is reminding farmers who don't have adequate storage to act urgently. Phil Shere, Principal Agricultural Officer says "From 1 January 2012 we will be checking whether farmers in NVZs have enough storage to comply with the regulations. Those who aren't may be referred to the Rural Payments Agency, who might decide to withhold part of their SFP".

"Many farmers I've spoken to have taken steps to increase or improve their slurry storage. But we are aware that, for a variety of reasons, not all farmers are going to have the required slurry storage by the beginning of 2012. We will look at the steps these farmers have taken towards becoming compliant when considering enforcement action. For example, evidence of submitting planning applications, getting quotes, placing orders or booking contractors. Put simply, the more evidence a farmer can provide that they have taken steps to comply; the less likely we are to prosecute. Farmers who have taken no action at all will be viewed most seriously".

Storage is needed as the Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations set closed periods when farmers in NVZs may not spread slurry or manufactured Nitrogen fertilisers. This will reduce pollution incidents caused by spills, leaks and spreading in poor conditions and will maximise the benefits of the nutrients by avoiding spreading when crops will not absorb them.

It's not just farmers in NVZs who should ensure they have sufficient slurry storage to get them through the winter closed period. Spreading slurry on the land when it is frozen or wet is a waste of a valuable resource. Phil Shere explains, "Spreading during the closed period is like throwing your money away. The land cannot take up the nutrients and most of the slurry will be washed off into the nearest water course causing pollution. On top of that, using machinery on your land at this time will damage and compact your soil and you will be contravening the Code of Good Agricultural Practice.

The message is clear, act now before it really is too late. You can call Phil Shere for advice on 01392 442 082. You can also find out more about looking after your soil and reducing compaction from our short film clip at <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/sectors/123418.aspx>

Full details about NVZs and SSAFO regulations can be found on our website at <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/sectors/118798.aspx>

Small Farms AGM Report 2011



'Local Food Initiatives' - a talk given to the SFA members at their 2011 AGM by Bob Willars (Chairman of Kingsbridge Agenda 21)

Bob started by explaining to members that he wanted to tell them about some new initiatives being taken by Kingsbridge Agenda 21 to make 'Local Food' more accessible, but would first give them a little background information.

He explained that as an organisation concerned with local (and global) sustainability, the Agenda 21 group has an interest not only in environmental issues (biodiversity, loss of habitats, pollution, etc.); but also the sustainability of Kingsbridge as a viable market town, the survival of our local villages as centre of community and the health of our South Hams region. By health, he explained, he meant not only our physical and mental health, but also the balance of people (indigenous and newcomers/young and old) in the community.

Kingsbridge Agenda 21 have always had an interest in food – particularly affordable, local food – with all the benefits it brings of:

- reduced food miles, and consequently CO₂ production and costs
- fresh and healthy produce, when you know its provenance
- the encouragement of the local economy, etc.

Bob told us that Agenda 21 had held a local food market in the town – as a result of which a number of the producers now have more permanent stalls on the Farmers Market and elsewhere. They have also run a Youth Market on a regular basis in Kingsbridge for several years, with many of the stalls selling home-made produce. That has led to their presence at the Kingsbridge Show this year, and to some of the young people being asked to supply local businesses. Finally, the Agenda 21 group were prime movers in pushing SHDC to operate the Farmers Market in Kingsbridge every other Saturday, rather than once a month, and to have extra market days on the run up to Christmas.

So, he felt they had already done a number of things to stimulate trade in local food.

More recently, both individually and as an organisation, they have been actively involved in the process of community consultation, planning and research which led to the production of TASK (Towards a Sustainable Kingsbridge) – an action plan for the town to take local responsibility for carbon reduction.

Interestingly, as well as issues such as Renewable Energy, Transport and Energy Efficient Homes, one of the key area which people felt they should address to reduce the town's carbon footprint was Local Food (and associated food waste and food packaging waste). Since the plan's production in the summer, the Agenda 21 Group has been trying to keep the momentum going by taking action on some of the issues in the plan.

They recognised from the outset that there was scope for improving ways of helping local producers get their produce to local people, and helping local people get better access to local food. Bob explained that while they had many ideas for how this might be done, they wanted to get more information before taking any major action. So, over the summer they used a questionnaire to gather feedback from around 200 local shoppers.

Bob gave a number of statistics which have emerged from the survey, and will publishing them soon. Overall, they have concluded that:

1. People would like more access to local food (both in town and in the villages)
2. They value it for its 'localness', freshness and seasonality.
3. They would like it to cost less.
4. There are problems of transport to overcome
5. Some would like to grow more of their own and people want more information
6. Many people would value a regular local food stall.

Bob said they already know that many of us can't afford the time to stand each week behind a market stall (and still have the time to farm our land). And they know that they can't afford the lease costs to set up a local food shop (at least at this stage).

Their plan therefore is to establish a regular, weekly market stall on the Town Square in Kingsbridge – not as part of the Farmers Market, but on a Friday when there is no other presence in the market square. They recognise that has risks (no footfall), as well as benefits (single focus on food and other local produce), but believe they can make it work. Rosemary Speed, who was also present, had run a glut stall in September/October on the bandstand and they were surprised at the

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

number of shoppers who visited the stall.

The stall will be on a co-operative, not for profit business – to help keep the food affordable. They like the business model used by the Country Market i.e. those that can, help out selling, but it is not being a requirement for being able to sell produce at the market. They intend to take 20% of takings towards costs from producers who simply drop off/pick up at the stall, but only 10% from those that can commit a minimum of a few hours per month behind the stall. The producers will set the prices, but with guidance from those running the stall as to what the market will take. One idea is that all produce is personally labelled – Mary's cakes or Joe's beetroot - and that they will either restrict produce to that produced within 10 or 12 miles of Kingsbridge, or have stickers which identify those produced that close to Kingsbridge. In any case, they won't accept produce produced outside the South Hams.



The Agenda 21 group have applied for some start-up funding from the Coastal LAG fund, and intend to open the stall in April next year. A longer term aim for the group is to consider ways of getting more, fresh, local food into the village shops. There are a number of issues to consider – the shopkeepers need to see the benefits, there are issues of delivery, storage and display – but at the heart of their thinking at the moment is a delivery service – essentially a van picking up produce on an agreed basis and frequency, and taking it round the village shops. It would provide an employment opportunity, but would need set-up funding – so at the moment they will continue to investigate the strength of the need and the business case involved.

At that point, Bob asked members for feedback on his proposals, and encouraged us to complete his Producers Questionnaire. He also asked for any expressions of interest in becoming suppliers to their stall. Copies of the Questionnaire are available from the SFA office if anyone would like one.

If anyone would like to contact Bob Willars or the Kingsbridge Agenda 21 group, then call 01548 857603 or email bob-willars@sky.com. The group also has a website www.kingsbridgeagenda21.co.uk

NOTICE OF IMPORTANT MEETING

South Hams Agriculture Forum

Renewable Energy Seminar

A renewable energy seminar for rural businesses, particularly targeted at the agricultural sector is planned for the evening of Monday 23rd January 2012 at Follaton House, Totnes.

Further details will be circulated in January. If you are interested in attending please email Carol Trant at: carol.trant@southhams.gov.uk

AGM Report from Hon. Treasurer, George Rosevear

The Chairman David Trigger M.B.E. welcomed all of those attending and introduced the guest speaker for the evening Mr Bob Willars Chairman Kingsbridge Agenda 21 Group, who was accompanied by his Secretary and Treasurer, Rosemary Speed.

Bob Willars gave a brief history of Agenda 21 globally and then the development of the Kingsbridge Group. He went on to outline the current work of the Group and in particular their recent TASK Report, for the Kingsbridge District, which concentrates on the stimulation and encouragement of locally produced food for local markets. See his report on pages 3/4.

SFA AGM

Chairman David thanked everyone for attending the AGM and, in his report stated that, like many other groups, this was a time to keep body and soul together and to keep playing to our strengths. He considered that the highlight of the past year was the BBQ at Hillhead Farm, kindly hosted by David & Jane Johns. This brought together, not only members, but their families and friends, as well as participants from other locally based groups and traders. Next year the challenge will be thrown out to increase the participation in both numbers and groups, as well as fierce skittles competition, in which everyone participated, including Pippa Woods, Chair of the Small and Family Farms Association.

Accounts to 30th June 2011

Treasurer George Rosevear presented the accounts for the year and the key point is that the SFA has a healthy balance of funds.

Committee departures

After a decade of membership and service on the Main Committee, Carole Constable had decided to call it a day due to pressure of work and let the "youngsters" have ago. Chairman David said she will be sadly missed, a view echoed from the floor. Carole was presented with a set of 'Special Breed' mugs from the Devon Cattle Breeders Society as a memento.

Zoe Woodham also decided to step down to give more time to her family. She will also be sadly missed, as she brought a clear scientific edge to much of the SFA's work.

Elections

Chairman David is in the midst of his term and so remains in post, as does George Rosevear (Treasurer & Secretary); David Johns and William Mann were elected and Philip Hosking remains Honorary Life President.

The full minutes will be published in the spring 2012 issue.

Small Farms Association

News roundup

£20 million for farming and forestry businesses

A new £20 million fund to help rural businesses increase profits and reduce their impact on the environment was launched in November by Agriculture Minister Jim Paice; and also mentioned in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 29 November.

Farmers, foresters and horticulturalists can apply for grants of up to £25,000 to invest in green projects and new machinery to grow their businesses in an environmentally friendly way.

The Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme will fund new profit-boosting green schemes that:

- save energy and reduce carbon emissions;
- reduce dependence on artificial fertilizers through better use of manures;
- improve soil quality;
- improve animal health and welfare;
- save and recycle water; and
- promote woodland management by processing timber more efficiently.

Agriculture Minister, Jim Paice said:

"Growing our economy goes hand-in-hand with protecting and improving our environment. We want rural businesses to thrive and this new fund will help farmers, foresters and horticulturalists to boost their profits and use greener and more efficient ways of working."

The Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme is part of Defra's Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

Funds will be allocated between now and December 2013. Grants will cover a maximum of half of the total cost of projects in uplands areas and at most 40% of the total cost of projects in non uplands areas. The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) aims to improve competitiveness in the agriculture and forestry sectors, safeguard and enhance the rural environment, foster competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities.

Under the Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme, all farmers, foresters, contractors and horticulturalists in England are invited to apply for grants of between £2,500 and £25,000. Applicants will be assessed on their ability to meet one or more of six objectives.

Some grants are available to enable farmers to improve soil quality and reduce their use of artificial fertilisers through better use of farm slurries and manures. Others will help businesses to reduce or recover energy, saving money and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Farmers, foresters and horticulturalists can apply for funding that will help them to save, recycle and reuse rainwater, or to improve the health and welfare of farm animals. Money will also be invested in new mechanical equipment to process timber more efficiently, giving land owners a financial incentive to manage woodland and improve biodiversity.

Applicants are invited to either contact their local RDPE delivery team, or visit the DEFRA website at:
www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/11/10/pb13678-ffis-guidance/.

What you may have missed

Cattle movement licences

Failures in the government computer system run by the Animal Health and Veterinaries Laboratories Agency means that cattle movement licences have been delayed resulting in animals being stuck on farms unable to move to abattoirs or other holdings. Some cattle have had to be shot. Robin Page, a supporter of the SFA, wrote a very sobering piece in *The Telegraph* on 3 December on his sad experience. To read Robin's tale go to: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/robin-page/>

Update on Single Payment Scheme

Agriculture Minister Jim Paice updated Parliament early in November on the progress the RPA is making with payments to farmers under the Single Payment Scheme.

Mr Paice said the government has set tougher targets for the troubled Rural Payments Agency (RPA) for 2011-2012. The challenge is to have paid out 78% of the £1.7bn Single Payment Scheme to at least 86% of those eligible before the end of December 2011, which compares to 70% paid out in the same period last year. At least 95% of farmers should have received their money by the end of March 2012.

Mr Paice said: "That represents a stride forward for the Agency; but, as I discussed with leaders of farming representative bodies last week, there remains some distance to go before I could be happy that farmers are receiving the service they deserve."

Changes to rules on Scrapie



Following the end of a lengthy EU court case, Defra has decided to apply more proportionate controls in sheep flocks and goat herds with classical scrapie. Instead of totally or partially killing out these flocks and herds, it will restrict and test animals for two years after the detection of the last classical scrapie case. Defra encourages keepers to take action to reduce the likelihood of introducing classical scrapie and, where appropriate, to reduce the likelihood of further cases.

More information is available on the Defra website or on the Helpline at Tel: 08459 335577, which is charged at a local call rate; and is available between 09:00 and 17:00 on working days.

Bovine TB

The NFU and the Badger Trust, who are diametrically opposed on their reaction to culling badgers to curb bovine TB, have joined forces to support trials of vaccinating badgers against bovine TB. Vaccination on seven farms started in October. Meanwhile the NFU and Defra have disagreed over the costs of two proposed badger culls on farms in the south west of England. Defra estimate the cost at £1.4m whilst the NFU suggests it will cost up to £112,000.

Researchers at the Roslin Institute of the University of Edinburgh have found that some cattle are more resistant to bovine TB than others, and that such resistance can be inherited. It should, in theory, be possible to selectively breed cows for their resistance ;and this information could be available within two to three years.



The voice of the small farmer

Ley Coombe Farm
Modbury
IVYBRIDGE
Devon PL21 0TU

Phone: 01548 830 302
Fax: 01548 831 272
Email: philhosking01@btinternet.com

We're on the Web!
www.small-farms-association.org

Annual Family Membership £20.00

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

The Small Farms Association was formed in October 1997 because of the reluctance of major farming organisations to support the needs of small farmers. Since its inception, the SFA has addressed the concerns and needs of small farms by the action it takes.

- * *Lobbying MPs and other public representatives*
- * *Communicating the views of small farms to DEFRA*
- * *Working in partnership with other farm organisations*
- * *Contributing to policy, with a small farms' slant*
- * *Working to our own Constitution and Code of Practice*
- * *Advice and support available to members*
- * *Opportunities to socialise*
- * *Training opportunities*
- * *Free quarterly newsletter, including members' adverts*
- * *A website, including opportunities to advertise*

Please help us to continue the work on your behalf by providing feedback on topical farming issues and recruiting new members.

Members' Adverts and notices

Charity makes Christmas cards count



Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) has been selling Christmas cards successfully for a number of years. Last year the scheme raised over £5,000 for the Trust's work conserving wildlife around the county.

There are eight designs in this year's range, which are available to order online, over the phone or by post. The designs include fox, squirrel, robin, deer, and hare and a number of beautiful winter landscapes. The cards are printed on card from sustainable sources and really show off some of Devon's best loved animals.

If you wish to see the collection and buy these lovely cards, visit the DWT Website at: www.devonwildlifetrust.org; or call Devon Wildlife Trust on 01392 279244. The cards are also available through the 'Cards for Good Causes' outlets across the county.

Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)

SFA members may have heard that FWAG has recently gone into administration after over 40 years in the farming sector, advising on agri-environmental matters. This has caused many people to wonder who or what will fill the gap. It has been hailed as 'an independent agri-environmental body with farmyard credibility'. FWAG members and county committees were farmers, some of whom are also Small Farms Association members.



The good news is that many of the 80 nationwide advisers are determined to carry on advising on a self employed basis and are keen to let the farming community know that they will be continuing their valuable work. Some advisers are also working on putting together a regional group to help provide specialist advice and group projects. The south west region, from Gloucester to Cornwall, is one such group, and plans to call themselves FWAG SW.

So if anyone needs professional agri-environmental advice such as helping with Entry level, Higher level Stewardship, management plans, agronomy or general conservation advice please look out for your local (FWAG SW) adviser.

Sally Hope Johnson
South Devon adviser
Email: sallyhopej@gmail.com
Tel: 0845 4294639