

Small Farms Association Newsletter



WINTER 2010

Volume 13, Issue 4

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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

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Dear Members,

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

I wish to remind you of Cross Compliance rules we need to observe. Cattle tags fall under Cross Compliance Regulations; and lost tags must be replaced as soon as possible.

Similarly, sheep movements and electronic ear tags are now Cross Compliance issues, and new rules are in force. Trading Standards are relying on farmers to keep proper records of sheep movements. Sending sheep to market or direct to slaughter is fairly straightforward, as long as they have the correct ear tags in place; but moving sheep to another holding for winter-keep or grazing requires informing Trading Standards of the number of sheep moved, their new location and their individual ear tag numbers.

The SFA and the Devon Association of Small Holders (DASH) have formed a link to enable both organisations to exchange information and work more closely together. Through this link the SFA was invited to attend a meeting with Trading Standards in Exeter at the NFU Headquarters. Also present at the meeting were the NFU, Dartmoor Commoners, Kivells Auctioneers and livestock transporters. I was able to raise a concern I have about the safety of the cattle pens in the new Exeter Livestock Market: the cattle pens are too low to contain the cattle safely, as they are only 4'10" high compared to Newton Abbot where they are 5'6". The Trading Standards Officer responsible for markets has promised to investigate and report back.

On page 4, Mary has written a detailed report of our trip to London to attend 'Mission Milk'; but I wish to make an additional observation. It transpires that 25% of dairy farmers are members of supermarket Farmer Groups, selling direct for which they receive a premium price and access to investment finance, and good luck to them. My fear, however, is that this type of development could lead to large scale dairy farms, as it could be argued that there is economy of scale in such enterprises.

On 26th November, we were invited to a working horse demonstration and training day at Victor Barry's Treloan Coastal Heritage Farm near Portscatho in Cornwall. George Rosevear, our Treasurer, and I went along. The event was well attended. The working horses were provided by Cornish Horse Power; and Robert Eddy gave a demonstration of a team of three horses pulling a two-farrow plough. There was also a smart pair of black shires that demonstrated harrowing on ploughed land. Unfortunately, George and I had to leave early to attend another meeting; but we really enjoyed the day, especially the real Cornish pasties! (see George's report on page 3).

Once again, let me wish you a happy Christmas and a prosperous 2011. I hope we will have better weather and a good harvest.

Phillip Hosking



New support for farmers to help them deal with the impact of bovine TB, and reduce the risks of further outbreaks, was announced by Agriculture Minister Jim Paice on 11th November.

The Defra-funded TB advice and support service was launched as Mr Paice visited Taverner's dairy farm (which does not have Bovine TB) at Kennford near Exeter to discuss the impact of Bovine Tuberculosis in the West Country.

The Minister stressed, however: *"This is not financial support. This is people support to help with the many issues that crop up when farms are affected by BTb."*

All TB affected cattle farmers can access free support from the Farm Crisis Network (FCN) on the financial and business implications of an outbreak. 300 trained volunteers will provide confidential advice and information on where to go for more specialised help and support.

Results of Government Consultation

Agriculture Minister, Jim Paice MP, confirmed in November that his department had received 1,600 responses to DEFRA's Consultation on the control of Bovine TB in cattle. Not unexpectedly, he declined to disclose the content of the submissions.

The consultation deadline was 8th December 2010; and the Small Farms Association submitted its response, having consulted its members for their opinions on the proposals, as well as forming a time-limited sub-group to review the options.

After careful deliberation and consultation with the members, the SFA supported the Government's proposals, with specific caveats. Anyone who wishes to have a copy of the SFA's response should write to the office and enclose a SAE.

The South West TB Stakeholders Group (comprising farming organisations, veterinary practices and other groups), of which the SFA is a member, met in November to exchange views on the DEFRA proposals; and concluded that the group could be a co-ordinating body for the region when the Minister's decision is announced. The group has agreed it can provide advice and support to farmers and groups of farmers wishing to apply for licences under the Government's proposals. This option is contingent upon the Minister's decision, due in February 2011.

For the worst-hit farmers, FCN's new Business Support Group will work directly with farmers to provide tailored advice through the length of their outbreak.

Defra will give additional support to farmers under long-term restrictions and those experiencing their first ever breakdown through one-to-one visits from private vets, to help them understand how TB spreads and what can be done on their farm to reduce risks. A pilot training event for private vets was held last week, in the Southwest.

Defra, the NFU, Animal Health and the Food and the Environment Research Agency have developed a joint training programme on practical biosecurity measures for farmers. On-farm events will be rolled out early in 2011.

If you would like help, please call the FCN helpline on 0845-367 9990 or email: mail@fcn.org.uk

Could you put rare breeds on the menu?

ITV1's cooking competition to find the UK's most mouth-watering dish returns for a new series in Spring 2011 – and this could be an opportunity to put Rare Breeds on the menu.

The idea of the series is to find the tastiest dish cooked in the UK, with one of those courses going on to win the overall title of *Britain's Best Dish 2011*, plus a £10,000 first prize. The producers are looking for "delicious homemade dishes cooked by people who have a real passion about food". It's a competition for amateur cooks – not professional chefs – who will have the opportunity to present their signature dish.

For rare breeds enthusiasts, this could be an ideal opportunity to showcase the qualities of their produce and to highlight the importance of our rare and native breeds on camera.

Whatever your speciality, register your name and contact details with the production team so you can be invited to "pitch your dish" at a location near you to our panel of experts in the New Year. There will be no cooking involved at that stage but everyone will be asked to bring either a sample of their dish, a photo of it or something else that will make it stand out.

If you would like to register your details for the next series of *Britain's Best Dish* call us on 09011 22 33 11 or email best-dish@itv.com

Heavy horses, ponies and donkeys make light work

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The Nil Carbon Footprint Food Production event on SFA-member, Victor Barry's farm at Portscatho, near Truro on 26th November was attended by Committee members Phil Hosking and George Rosevear, who give an account of their day's adventures.

On a bitterly cold morning Phil and I drove down to Portscatho on the Roseland Peninsula to learn more about working with horses and ponies in small-scale, organic farming. We both looked forward to seeing Victor Barry, Robert Eddy and David Jones in action with their string of heavy horse, ponies and donkeys.

The event aimed to demonstrate the simplicity of producing 'NIL Carbon Footprint Food', which received funding from Business Forward, an EU Social Fund project. Victor worked with one of the Business Forward project partners, Lantra, to plan the event. The training on the day wasn't working toward any qualification; but every delegate received a non-accredited certificate of attendance upon completion of training.

Lantra is the Government training body for land-based Industries. Victor worked with Lantra during the winter of 2007/2008 adding the needs of the Agricultural Horse and Pony into the new QCF qualifications, which has now replaced the old NVQs. This is a huge achievement, as the old heritage system has now been recognised and enshrined in the training system. Now Victor and his team are working

to produce and distribute Nil Carbon Food, in a sustainable way, by a combination of the salient parts of the old and the new technologies.

We also met Verity Biddick, is a farmer's daughter from St. Columb, who works for LANTRA in Cornwall to deliver the Business Forward programme; and is bringing together people from diverse backgrounds. What Victor is trying to do raises many issues not only agricultural, but social ones as well. He hopes, eventually to link with the recently announced Government reform programme by working in areas where unemployment is high. At the moment, as far as he can discern, this

facet of the reform programme is the weakest.

Some of the bodies and people he hopes to enlist are: The National Transition Town Network movement, to help to co-ordinate the very local production units; The National Justice and Peace Network movement, to help co-ordinate the social element of the programme; and LANTRA, to co-ordinate training.

After seeing much of the demonstration and partaking of good Cornish hospitality, Phil and I headed back to Devon via Portscatho and the pasty shop. And delicious pasties they were too!

Treloan Coastal Heritage Farm, Portscatho, Truro, TR2 5EF. Tel: 01872-850888



Mission Milk - the white stuff back on the agenda



The panel at the Mission Milk launch enjoy a lighter moment.

The NFU and the Women's Institute have joined forces to ask what can be done to forge a strong, stable and profitable supply chain for British dairy farmers. ©NFU

As partners in the previous milk campaign in 2008, the Small Farms was invited to attend the launch of 'Mission Milk', the latest attempt by the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) and the National Farmers Union (NFU) to review the current state of the milk sector to ensure its long-term viability. Phillip Hosking and Mary Rosevear represented the SFA at the meeting in London on 16th November, which was also very well attended by farmers from all over the UK.

The meeting was chaired by Ruth Bond, WI Chair; and the panel consisted of: Peter Kendall (NFU President), Mike Coupe (Sainsbury's Group Commercial Director), Neil Kennedy Milk Link Chief Executive) and Andrew George MP (Liberal Democrat MP for St.Ives and the Isles of Scilly).

In her opening address, Ruth Bond linked the milk campaign of three years ago with the current initiative. By revisiting the *Great Milk Debates* she said "we hope to show that consumers have a real stake in the future of the British Dairy industry. We will be calling on retailers, processors, consumers and the Government to play their part in ensuring there is a long-term future for British milk. Over 15,000 members took part in the original debates and we believe that there is still a huge strength of feeling to evoke change today".

Ruth Bond said initially, the call to action had come from farmers' wives, who are WI members, especially from a Devon member who is also a SFA member. The WI had taken up the challenge, which resulted in a motion to their 2005 AGM followed by a campaign with

many partners, including the SFA. Although some progress has been made, such as the significant investment by several major retailers in creating dedicated farmer groups comprising around 2,000 dairy farmers to supply them with liquid milk, the vast majority of dairy farmers are not so fortunate.

Peter Kendall said the work the NFU had done during and since the *Great Milk Debate*, had produced some progress with about 25% of milk producers getting direct sales to supermarkets and getting around 27p per litre for their milk; but, in his words, the other 75% were not happy with the price that they were being paid. He said he has been inundated with messages from dairy farmers fed up with the low prices they are being paid.

Neil Kennedy of Milk Link gave an update on the progress the company had made in the 10 years since its formation. He hoped by some time next year they would be in a position to stop taking out the investment levy from their members' milk cheque.

Milk Link has been one of the few successes of farmer-owned cooperatives. As we all know, many farmers have lost thousands of pounds investing in dairies up and down the country. Mary and Phil met and talked to a farmer from Wales proudly wearing his Farmers Union of Wales (FUW) badge. He said his situation was just desperate; and that he is holding on by his fingernails. They also met a lady from Cumbria who said she was in a similar situation, with her son returning from Australia to the farm to try to earn a living. He was thinking of

adding value to milk by producing soft cheese, which sent the fear of God into her, as she believed the market had enough soft cheese!

Mike Coupe, Sainsbury's Commercial Group Director, gave an update on how his supermarket has risen to the challenge by signing up direct suppliers and investing in their farms. Andrew George MP related how his family had been dairy farmers when he was growing up; and how his family's farm is now only one of two in the parish producing milk. Phil noted there are only four dairy farmers left out of 30 (10 years ago) around Modbury producing milk today.

The Coalition Government is hoping to appoint an Ombudsman by 2013 to act for transparency and fairness throughout the supply chain. But based on what was said at the meeting, it would appear that this appointment will be a very different animal to the one promised in the Coalition Agreement, that is fair dealing without price fixing. Andrew George expressed his concern at the pace of progress in bringing a Bill to the House of Commons to fulfil that commitment. The earliest date would appear to be 2013!

All the efforts that the Milk Campaign partners expended to convince Tony Blair's Government to appoint an Ombudsman with teeth seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Similarly, with this coalition, who committed to such an appointment in their party manifestos and their subsequent Agreement. It's ironic that Caroline Spelman MP (now Secretary of State for DEFRA) who was the shadow spokesperson for DEFRA in 2007 and who received and presented the thousands of signatures gathered nationally during the Milk Campaign to the House of Commons urging the House to demand fairness throughout the milk supply chain may be prepared to accept a diluted package instead of one with teeth.

We urge every farmer to lobby their MP to ensure that if the office of an ombudsman is created that is given the power to bark and not simply whimper. You won't be alone, as there was a lot of disquiet at the meeting and subsequently on blogs about this issue and the lack of a strategic plan for the future of the UK dairy sector in spite of many best efforts and a lot of good aspirations. *plus ça change!*



What is the campaign calling for?

- * Not all retailers have stepped up to the challenge and it's time for all supermarkets to take responsibility for their dairy farmer suppliers by establishing a dedicated pool, with a transparent and fair pricing model.
- * Supermarkets are not the only retailers of dairy products – there are other large customers of British milk and dairy products (coffee chains, high-street food outlets, chocolate manufacturers) that need to play their part in ensuring the dairy industry's survival.
- * Very little effort has been made by retailers to demonstrate any commitment to dairy farmers producing cheese. We want all British retailers to set up dedicated cheese groups to replicate the success of those that have been created for farmers producing fresh drinking milk.



How to support the campaign

1. Keep buying British dairy products
2. Make a list of those products that don't carry the logo—little red tractor
3. Hold a branch meeting
4. Hold a cookery competition
5. Lobby for an effective ombudsman soon
6. Enter the campaign competition (send a photo that captures how dairy cows contribute to the unique look of the UK countryside to jon.chinery@nfu.org.uk, and win £250 worth of Farm Stay vouchers)

Lots more information and the campaign pack available from the NFWI and the NFU online at: www.thewi.org.uk and www.nfuonline.co.uk



News roundup

Bluetongue - changes to post import testing

On 26th November, DEFRA published changes to post import testing requirements for Bluetongue susceptible animals.

As from **26th November 2010** post import testing will change from single post import testing for all bluetongue virus (BTV) susceptible animals entering GB at 5-7 days to a risk-based regime as for other diseases, whereby imports will be tested depending on the risk assessment of each susceptible consignment.

Given the change in risk from BT 100% testing for BT will stop and move to a risk based testing approach, based on: ~

- BTV status of the country of origin
- the level of midge activity in the country of origin which would vary by season.
- random tests prioritising animals perceived to be at higher risk.

These risks will be regularly reviewed so that alterations to the checking regime can be made in response to any emerging risks. Animals imported from The Isle of Man, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland do not require testing for BTV.

BTV cases have decreased significantly across Europe in 2009 and 2010. The mass vaccination campaigns among EU Member States, including the UK, appear to have been successful in controlling the spread of disease. DEFRA considers that the threat of disease from the continent is now very low. GB is also part of a Low Risk Zone which means that all imports arriving from a BTV PZ must be naturally immune or vaccinated.

In view of this changing risk Defra's post-import testing policy has consequently been revised in consultation with BTV experts, The Devolved Administrations and industry stakeholders.

Joint Campaign Against Bluetongue (JAB), launched by the British Veterinary Association (BVA) in 2008, continues, however, to encourage livestock keepers to vaccinate and take advice from their vet when considering whether to vaccinate.

News roundup

Annual General Meeting 2010

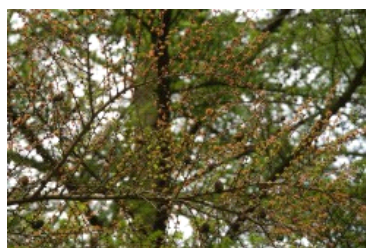


Despite the bitter weather a merry band of hardy souls made their way to Ugborough Village Hall for the SFA's 2010 AGM. The 'entertainment' for the evening was provided by two of the Forestry Commission's (FC) finest - Deborah Elton and Mick Bracken.

The illustrated talk by Deborah and Mick centred around the raft of grants available to landowners for planting and maintaining woodlands; and the problems associated with the ill-named 'sudden oak death syndrome'.

Firstly, the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) was talked about in depth. The options and opportunities for landowners are many and generous through this scheme: These vary from workable incentives (covering 100% of costs in most cases) for the creation of new woodland (plus premiums paid for any land taken out of normal agricultural use) to encouragement to draw up management plans for existing woodland, the WGS is very attractive and user-friendly. Full details can be found on the Forestry Commission's website - www.forestry.gov.uk

A leaflet entitled 'Owners and Grants' has been inserted with your newsletter, giving information on the grants available from the Forestry Commission.



Secondly, *Phytophthora ramorum* commonly known as 'sudden oak death syndrome' was explained and illustrated. This potentially serious disease can cause irreparable damage to larch, rhododendron and numerous other tree species. Much research is being done regarding this relatively new disease - a steep learning curve for those involved. The actual risk to oak trees is considered very small at the moment. Again, further information, plus pictures of diseased trees and what to look out for, can be found on the Forestry Commission's website at www.forestry.gov.uk

Don't forget your soil protection review!

Farmers are reminded that they **must** complete their Soil Protection Review 2010 by 31st December or they risk losing out on payments, including SPS.

*The Soil Protection Review (SPR) 2010 should **NOT** be returned to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) or DEFRA, but should be kept on the farm in case of inspection.*

The purpose of the Soil Protection Review (SPR) is to tackle degradation threats to soil. When soil is lost or damaged through compaction, erosion or loss of organic matter it becomes less productive. It can also have a significant impact on water quality and aquatic ecosystems, contribute to local flooding from increased runoff, and cause problems such as soil on roads. In addition, the majority of carbon lost from soils by erosion will eventually be released into the atmosphere and could contribute to climate change.

Carrying out all appropriate measures to tackle soil degradation threats will help prevent these problems.

Anyone who receives support under the SPS or certain schemes under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) must meet the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) standards for soil management and protection, as well as all the other relevant standards that are set out in *The Guide to Cross Compliance in England*. These rules also apply to new entrants to the SPS and/or RDPE Schemes such as Entry Level Stewardship (ELS). This revised SPR incorporates all four soil Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC), which were previously applicable to soil:

1. Soil Protection Review (GAEC 1)
2. Post-harvest management of land (GAEC 2)
3. Waterlogged Soil (GAEC 3)
4. Crop residue burning restrictions (GAEC 4)

According to the RPA, one in every 14 farmers inspected so far this year had not completed the current version of their Soil Protection Review; and most of them will lose five percent (5%) of their payments.

The online version of the SPR form is available at www.wholefarm.defra.gov.uk; and hard copies are available from the RPA on Tel: 0845 603 7777.

The Cross Compliance Technical Helpline can provide answers to questions on the SPR 2010 - available on Tel: 0845 345 1302.



Rural watchdog highlights need to tackle poverty amongst farming households

A quarter of farming households live below the official poverty line, receiving relatively little support either from agricultural policies or the welfare state. To help address the situation the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) published a report on 30th November called 'Poverty amongst farming households: achieving sustainable livelihoods' identifying the root causes of poverty amongst farming households and setting out what government needs to do to recognise and address the situation.

Dr. Stuart Burgess, Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities said: "There is tremendous variety within farming in this country. While many farming households have successfully increased production, resilience and farm incomes, one in four are living in poverty. A quarter of farming households have an income of less than £20,000, and in the majority of cases this derives from capitalising on the business assets rather than actual farm business profits. These struggling farms are likely to have grazing livestock and be located in upland areas. Many are left trapped in poverty without the resources or support to earn a living wage.

In times of difficulty, farmers, like any resident, can claim benefits but it can be difficult for them to provide the necessary evidence to access the benefits to which they are entitled. For example, it can be difficult for tenant farmers to access housing benefits because tenancy agreements may not separate rental costs for the farmhouse and the land."

A copy of the full report and recommendations is available from: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/2010/11/30/farming-poverty/



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We're on the Web!
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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.

Extreme weather advice

During a weather emergency, although priority will be given to human needs, the welfare of animals is also very important.

Officials (Local Authorities and Animal Health) monitor the situation closely in liaison with organisations that play a role in assisting farmers and pet owners to protect the welfare of their animals.

Responsibilities

- Under the law an animal keeper has a duty of care to his animals and is required to take reasonable steps to protect their welfare and prevent suffering.
- Farmers are expected to take reasonable steps to address animal welfare contingency planning as part of their farm business planning where it is known or could be anticipated that livestock might be at risk during severe weather.
- Equine Industry guidelines on welfare similarly require such business continuity plans.
- As a general principle, animals must not be left in circumstances where they're likely to suffer. If it is possible to take action, even if that action is killing by a veterinary surgeon or other legally competent person, then action should be taken.
- In an emergency Animal Health, LAs, RSPCA and others will do what they can to provide advice, and to facilitate means to prevent or alleviate the suffering of animals. The legal responsibility is with the animal's owner/keeper, however.



Sources of help and advice

- SFA Helpline: 01548-830302
- RSPCA can be contacted by calling – Telephone 0300 1234 999.
- Animal Health Office SW: 01392-266373
- NFU Members – Telephone 0870 845 8458
- County and Unitary Councils - all contact details can be found on the website: direct.gov.uk
- DEFRA Helpline: 08459 33 55 77 (Mon-Fri: 9-6)

DEFRA's website has excellent advice on the requirements of animals (both farm and pets) during these arctic weather conditions – <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/animals/welfare/weather/>