



West Sussex Rural Forum

The Landbased Sector and effects of the current recession

4 March 2009

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Agricultural Research and Development function is in danger of being disbanded completely. It is important that the County retains this capacity and function as it has always been important to the future of the sector.
2. Diversification is currently subsidising agricultural production in many areas. As some of the diversification activities suffer because of the recession this may impact on mainstream farming activities.
3. West Sussex is one of the most wooded counties in the country and yet we have an under developed forestry sector. It is important that the public sector take the lead in developing demonstration community heating schemes. (hospital development site and new housing were mentioned). It could be possible to write a site planning brief that specifies a woodfuel heating system. There is obviously a need for technical and professional information and advice and this should be recognised and brought into the County to help develop the demand for woodfuels. The example of Austrian technology and know-how was mentioned.
4. There is a key role to be played by public sector procurement in buying local products and produce in order to help the landbased sector (amongst others). How this can be encouraged needs to be investigated and acted on.
5. RDPE and Leader. There are opportunities to make investments that will help the landbased and community sectors through the various Leader and RDPE funded programmes. It is important that publicity, advice and assistance reaches those who would most benefit and who will be adding value to the local economy.
6. The landscape is a product of the farming, horticulture and forestry industries. Therefore we need to keep farming and need to develop wood management initiatives in the county that are sustainable and have long term benefits.
7. The market towns of the rural areas are the local hubs of industry and commerce. A message to support local businesses, traders and producers is an important element to help make local businesses viable throughout the supply chain.

8. Market town traders and businesses should be encouraged to work together to undertake promotions and improvements in the high street. We need to promote the 'department store' mentality amongst local traders and support the role of networking through the chambers of commerce.
9. Farmers and Growers are currently excluded from the Government Loan Guarantee Schemes through a particular interpretation of the EU State Aid Rules. In addition partnerships and sole traders are excluded from these schemes as they are only open to Limited Companies. This could be having an adverse effect on the rural economy because of the number of small home-based businesses, social enterprises, partnerships, service sector businesses. West Sussex Rural Partnership needs to add its voice to those who are lobbying for these rules to be overturned or relaxed.
10. Local economies and local employment need to continue to be promoted. There is a danger that once the National Park is established there will be a move away from local employment within its boundaries. This needs to be resisted.

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Action in rural Sussex

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