

Rona Amiss' Nuffield Scholarship - New entrants & opportunities in farming

Rona Amiss of Higher Fingle Farm kindly presented her Nuffield Scholarship findings to the Farms Committee on 3rd November. Here is a summary of what she has been up to...

With a growing family of aspiring farmers and a desire to progress, I set out on my Nuffield adventure to see what opportunities there are for new entrants and what could be created. My study became a fascinating tour of amazing businesses from tiny to substantial. I concentrated on trying to identify some things that new entrants could use to get started and how the farming industry could help to increase those first step opportunities. I soon learnt the complexity of land ownership, values and taxation all have a big effect on opportunity. Concentrating on looking at things I feel could be more easily changed I travelled to Eastern USA, Cambodia, Thailand, India, France and Brussels. I also travelled extensively in England as well as attending conferences and seminars. I learnt how essential education is to empower people to make their lives better, how precious clean safe water is and how crucial hygiene is in food production. The businesses I visited varied from speciality hatching eggs, vegetable farms, rice farmers to large chicken rearing set ups. They were all committed, innovative and customer focussed, all the qualities that are needed in the modern farmer. Many were farming dreadful land, paying high rents and having to pay back huge borrowings. They don't get much help, but most are not bitter and are not planning on giving up.

People have been leaving the land since 16th century and over the years the status of the farmworker fell with the increase in mechanisation. The number of farmers and farmworkers is now at an all time low and although the colleges are full of life science students not many are planning to work in practical farming. The average age of a farmer is often quoted as 58, but also the age of the farmworker is worryingly high, this is at a time when UK agriculture seems to be recognised more for its regulation and paperwork than as a customer focussed, innovative industry.

Only 10% of farmworkers are women and around 25% of higher level agricultural course students are female (this drops lower with apprenticeships and practical courses), yet some of the most exciting businesses I visited were driven by amazing women. In an age of mechanisation, large bales and small bag sizes the traditional barriers to women working in mainstream agriculture no longer exists, but still an image persists of a male dominated industry. Lantra research in 2010 estimated farming needed 60,000 new entrants in the next 10 years, an industry that is still not doing enough to encourage women is missing out on a valuable skill resource.

As long ago as 1979 a government survey recognised that farming was in danger of becoming a 'closed shop' and warned of lower levels of innovation meant less business dynamism. Young people, both male and female, will bring innovation and enthusiasm that if supported by experience will drive the industry forward and make us proud to be British Farmers.

Key recommendations

- Leadership and cooperation is needed with a strategy to provide quality opportunities to encourage new entrants and their successful progression on the farming ladder
- Farming needs to address the lack of women in the industry, small steps like using non celebrity farming female role models and ambassadors in schools and colleges to start dismantling prejudices and a more positive attitude in the farming press would help tremendously.
- There needs to be a more flexible approach to land-use with more development of a partnership approach between landowner, agent and tenant. Short term farm business tenancies are not providing the opportunities that are favourable to a new entrant progressing as a successful business, it is in the interest of all partners to have an arrangement that works.
- Risk, it's a time for reevaluation of the risks associated with new entrants. A landowner's patronage of the right new entrant will reap long term rewards for their estate.
- The County Council Farm Estates are a unique and valuable national asset, promote and support before one of the few opportunities to get a start in farming is lost.

Farmers take note, it is in your interest to help and support these new entrants to make UK agriculture a thriving industry again. Without a family farm the new entrant often has no equipment to borrow, no mentor and needs to pay a fortune to have a day off. An informal network of mentors and someone to talk to could prevent a crisis and give the support a business needs to be a great success.



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County Farms News



Devon County Council

The Newsletter of the Devon County Farms Estate

Issue 25

Christmas 2011

Chairman's message

Dear Tenant,

As we near the end of 2011 I think we can confidently say that financial returns from farming in the main are holding up well. All sectors have benefited from increased global demand and weather induced shortages. Let's hope that continues within the industry so that reinvestment in technology and diversification will provide opportunities to face future challenges.

I have just read an article in a Saturday paper by Kate Humble who is critical of the decision by a number of shire councils to sell off their farms to generate capital. A sentiment I'm sure we can all agree with, but it does bring home to me how fortunate Devon has been in securing a continuance of its County Farms Estate. If anyone needs proof of the importance and value that the Estate offers one only needs to look at the number of applicants we are attracting when a starter farm is advertised for tender. The quality and diversity of business plans coming forward are impressive which can only galvanise the importance of retaining the Estate for the benefit of Devon's wider rural economy and a vibrant progressive agri-industry. This year we have successfully re-let 4 farms. One tenant has moved off the Estate onto a tenanted farm in the commercial sector and one tenant is in the process of moving internally which is a testament to the quality of their farming businesses. Congratulations to all those tenants.

As you all know the County Farms Estate staged a Tenants Farms Business Management Competition and the winner was announced at the last Farms Committee meeting on 3rd November. May I congratulate Tom Cleave for achieving first place and collecting the £500 prize money that accompanied the win. May I also thank Melanie Squires NFU Regional Director and Mark Simpson, an estate owner and Devon CLA Vice-Chairman from South Devon for finding the time to be judges. My only disappointment was that only three tenants entered. This type of exercise is your shop window for showing prospective landlords of commercial estates how good your farming businesses are. I do hope in the future more of you may be encouraged to participate.

The deadline for NVZ compliance is nearly upon us for those in areas included in the 2008 Directive. The Estate infrastructure programme for meeting that compliance has raced on this year, much aided by the favourable weather conditions. I know that some tenants have had concerns about the unforeseen additional costs incurred with some of those projects. I can assure you that in every case there was no option but to carry out the additional work to ensure a compliant store structure. I am however confident that all the new installations will add long term benefit to both the businesses that are run on those holdings and to the Estate capital value. To all of the tenants who currently are outside of the NVZs I would encourage you to be mindful of the Good Agricultural Practice guidelines when spreading either organic or inorganic fertilisers. The industry cannot afford an enlargement of the NVZ area or more restrictive regulatory processes. Our fate is partly in our own hands.

This being the final newsletter of the year may I wish you all, on behalf of myself and members of the Farms committee, a happy Christmas and prosperous 2012.

Jerry Brook

Christmas Opening Hours

The NPS South West office will be open until close of business on Friday 23rd December and will re-open at 8.30am on Tuesday 3rd January 2012. During the office opening hours please call the usual office numbers. For emergencies out of hours please call the NPS on call surveyor on 07826 858727.

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All comments on this Issue and ideas for future issues to Claire Sampson at the address on the back page.

Tenants Farm Business Management Competition

The inaugural tenants farm business management competition took place recently. Although there were only 3 tenants that entered the judges, Melanie Squires (Regional Director of the NFU) and Mark Simpson (Local Estate owner) were very impressed by the quality of the tenants and their businesses and agreed that the competition had helped to raise the profile of the Estate and its tenants.

The winner was Tom Cleave of Lomans Farm, Broadhempston. Tom and his partner Anna demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of their business, a clear strategy to grow the business and plenty of enthusiasm and ambition for their futures in agriculture. At the Farms Committee meeting on 3rd November Tom was presented with a trophy and a cheque for £500.

Pictured from left to right, Mark Simpson, Tom Cleave and David Horton (Devon NFU Chairman and Tenants Representative standing in for Melanie at the presentation).



Estate News

Demand for farms continues. At the Buckridge Farm viewing day held on a very wet day at the end of August 65 application forms were given out with 30 applications received. 6 exceptional candidates were shortlisted for interview in October. We are pleased to announce that Tom Blaber and his partner Rachel Richards were the successful candidates. Tom has applied for a number of farms in the last few years with each application better than the last. He is planning to rear cattle for Waitrose through the Dovecote Park scheme and supplement his income by working for his current employers while he builds up the business.

At the viewing for Lower Chitterley Farm 40 applications forms were given out with 21 candidates submitting their plans by the deadline. 5 very strong candidates have been shortlisted for interview.

The competition for farms is tougher than ever, only the strongest, most comprehensive and well presented business plans will be shortlisted.

South West Food & Drink - Honor Chapman Mentoring Award

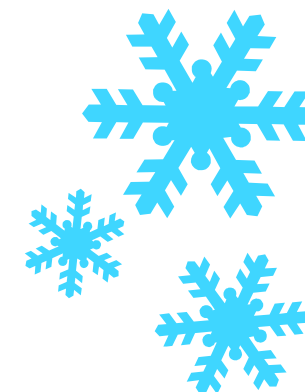
The first Honor Chapman Mentoring Award will be given in June 2012. Although best known for her innovative work in urban planning, her love of farming, food and the countryside were inextricably linked with her heightened sense of community awareness of the threats to the environment alongside the help and encouragement she gave to the young.

The award is given in her memory and a charity 'The Ducky Foundation' has been established to manage the awards. The value of the award is up to £30,000 combining business mentoring from a range of industry experts and an investment in a new enterprise that is commercially sound rather than an academic proposition.

All candidates must have managed their food and/or farming business for no more than five years with a turnover of less than £150,000. Individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 are eligible to make an application via the website www.theduckyfoundation.com, applications close on 31st March 2012.

Adverse weather conditions

If we have another period of prolonged snow this winter please can tenants check buildings post snow melt to ensure that they have not been damaged by snow load. If you do notice any weather related damage please contact the office as soon as possible.



Farming & Forestry Improvement Scheme

At the NFU Tenants Conference on 10th November Jim Paice announced a new grant scheme which aims to award up to £20million between now and December 2013. The Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme will consider applications for grant funding between £2,500 to £25,000 per farming business. In upland areas the grant awarded will be up to 50% of the total cost of the project with non-upland areas receiving 40% of the total cost.

The scheme aims to help farmers in the following areas

- ◆ 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
- ◆ Promote woodland management by processing timber more efficiently.

Applications must be submitted during specific timeframes. Round one of the scheme opened on 16th November until 17th January 2012. No applications will be accepted outside this timeframe. Information, the scheme handbook and application forms can be found on Defra's website or more information and assistance can be obtained from the South West office on 01392 266367 or 0300 0604326.

Tenants who wish to apply must demonstrate that they have at least 6 years remaining on their tenancy agreements and have Landlord's consent if applicable. If you would like to discuss this matter further please contact the office.