

## Getting the message across to UK farmers

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### Summary

**Climate change presents both opportunities and challenges for farmers and land managers across the UK. The science is gloomy and the research technical and complex but farmers and land managers can be part of the solution to the challenges presented to society by climate change. Communicating and understanding the impacts of climate change is key to enabling farmers and growers to continue developing profitable, sustainable businesses. The project Farming Futures aims to raise awareness of climate change amongst farmers and land managers, and translate research and development into useful, practical information about the impacts of climate change on each sector, and the opportunities and challenges, as well as suggested mitigations and adaptations that farmers can make on farm.**

### Farming Futures - an introduction

Farming Futures is a communications collaboration project between the NFU, CLA and ARF (representing the levy boards) managed by Forum for the Future. The partnership submitted a bid in summer 2006 to Defra's Climate Challenge Fund and won £171,000 of funding to communicate climate change to farmers and land managers. The funding criteria meant the project focus was to communicate existing information on climate change to new audiences and raise awareness of the impacts, challenges and opportunities that climate change presents.

Climate change is often presented in the media in a very 'doom and gloom' manner. The Farming Futures partnership believes it doesn't have to be this way. Although climate change does present numerous challenges for farmers and land managers, it also presents many opportunities. While it is difficult to be sure of the scale and location of the impacts of climate change, it is known that the UK is likely to experience:

- Warmer, wetter winters
- Longer, drier summers
- More droughts
- More extreme weather events (e.g. dry spring and flooding of 2007)
- Fewer frosts and cold winter spells
- Sea level rise of up to 80 cm this century.

The challenges associated with these impacts include:

- Increasing risk of pests and diseases (e.g. blue tongue in summer 2007)
- Water availability (too much or too little)
- Greenhouse gas emission outputs
- Rising (fossil fuel based) energy costs

However, there are opportunities too, including:

- New crops
- New markets (local, organic, Europe and beyond)
- Diversification into tourism
- Longer growing seasons
- Reduced production costs, in some circumstances

### **Translating existing research**

The project partnership used existing research, translating it into accessible and practical messages, and created 14 sector-specific fact sheets – each discussing the impacts, opportunities and challenges of climate change. Each sheet also contains suggestions for mitigation and adaptation actions that farmers could implement on their land. A specific fact sheet on arable crops is in your delegate pack.

### **Stories**

The partnership also sought out case studies of farmers across the country who are already adapting to or mitigating climate change on their farm. Our stories include: Jim Bullock who has changed to minimum tillage, Robert Wiseman growing energy crops in Saffron Waldon, David Jones growing cover crops to reduce the need for nitrogen fertiliser, Mark Diacono growing exotic fruit and olives in Devon and James Hague in Hampshire, reducing the carbon 'hoof-print' of his sustainable dairy. These stories, and many others can all be found on [www.farmingfutures.org.uk](http://www.farmingfutures.org.uk) and the project is on the look out for new stories and best practice examples of sustainable farm businesses across the country.

### **Media**

Given that Farming Futures is primarily a communications project, a large part of the time in 2007 was spent generating media coverage. Last year media coverage generated over £160,000 of advertising value equivalent, and over 8 million opportunities to see information on climate change in the media.

The project has been featured in Farmers Weekly, The Sunday Times, The Guardian, BBC online, FWi, Potato Review, Farming Today on Radio 4, Rural Matters on Sky TV, Sheep Farmer, Poultry World, British Farmer and Grower, Country Landowner and NFU Countryside. It has also been covered in every levy board newsletter and been featured in some of the country lifestyle press including: Country Living, Cotswold Life and The Archers!

### **Events**

In 2007 Farming Futures attended all the national shows including the Oxford Farming Conference where it was launched in January last year, Cereals, the Royal Show and the Dairy Event. Through the partnership, the project had a presence at many sector specific events such as at the VAA biannual conference, UK Irrigation Authority conference, British Potato 2007, AICC and Oilseeds and Pulses conference.

### **Attitude change**

During 2007, Farming Futures surveyed attitudes of over 1000 farmers – recent survey findings are on the website, but generally we have seen an increase in awareness, and

action to adapt and mitigate climate change throughout the year. Over 60 per cent of those interviewed reported that they are already affected by climate change, and 70 per cent expected to be affected in the next ten years. Interestingly, slightly more farmers believe climate change represents a business opportunity rather than a threat, and it is the farmers prepared to adapt to the challenges ahead that will continue to enjoy sustainable businesses in a climate changed world.

### **Working with others**

In mid-2007 the project partnership was approached to share information with the Rural Climate Change Forum – a Minister led group of eight organisations acting as Defra’s main advisory body representing rural interests. These organisations include: Natural England, National Trust, Environment Agency, CLA, NFU, Carbon Trust, RSPB and the Forestry Commission. All of these organisations – and many others – are working on climate change related projects, and although some preliminary work has begun with some partners (the Forestry Commission and Environment Agency), more joint work will take place in 2008.

### **The future**

In late November 2007, Farming Futures secured funding from the Secretary of State who recognised the “impressive contribution” the project has had on communicating the challenges and opportunities of climate change to this sector.

Farming Futures secured up to £250,000 (subject to contributions from partners) to continue raising awareness of climate change, but also to stimulate practical, on-farm action. The new funding will take the project up to March 2009, and during this time we will be working to:

- Create on-farm workshops and best practice case studies for mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Continue translating R&D into practical messages to stimulate on-farm action
- Develop closer relations with the Rural Climate Change Forum, the Agricultural Industries’ Confederation and across the supply chain
- Continue creating, identifying and supporting climate champions
- Develop the range of fact sheets available for farmers and land managers to include forestry and orchards

The project re-launched at the Oxford Farming Conference in early January, alongside Hilary Benn and the launch of the CLA’s greenhouse gas calculator, called CALM – Carbon Accounting for Land Managers.

The Farming Futures partnership is already setting up some of the regional and sector-specific advice events for later on this year, and would like to hear from anyone with a story to tell about how they are adapting and mitigating climate change on their farm. We are looking at ways to work more closely with the Agricultural Industries’ Confederation, members of the Rural Climate Change Forum and the supply chain, to create the push and pull that may be needed before making on-farm changes. A full breakdown of events and activities with which the project is involved in 2008 can be found on [www.farmingfutures.org.uk](http://www.farmingfutures.org.uk).