



Farming & Rural Business Project



***Creating Partnerships
& Reaching Rural Communities***

Project Review 2007

Farming & Rural Business Project_Review 2007

Tackling Rural Crisis_

Formed as a pilot project with the backing of Yorkshire Forward in December 2003, the worth, impact and credibility of this initiative quickly exceeded targets and was rolled out from the northern dales to across North Yorkshire. And whilst the widely publicised Foot and Mouth Crisis of 2001 - 2002 became old news, the legacy of this era and new pressures on farming communities have ensured that the rural idyll is far from a reality for many communities in the region. The need for this distinctive form of service has become ever more apparent.

The Farming and Rural Business Project is a partnership of the Farm Crisis Network (FCN), the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber (CRC) and local churches. Rural Development Officers Bob Baker and Sally Conner (succeeded by Kate Dale in March 2007) help farmers and rural communities to access essential support services, advisers and partner agencies, and help identify needs and priorities. The project has an unrivalled track record of engagement between rural agencies and the rural communities of North Yorkshire, and is distinctive in its reach, approach, position of trust, credibility and integrity.

"The work undertaken by the project has had a tremendously positive effect on the lives and work of many people in the rural community."

Colin Barker, Thirsk Farmers' Auction Mart



_A majority of cases come from direct contact made whilst networking in local auction marts

Project Aim:

To proactively reach and engage with people who have fallen outside the official network of support in the countryside.

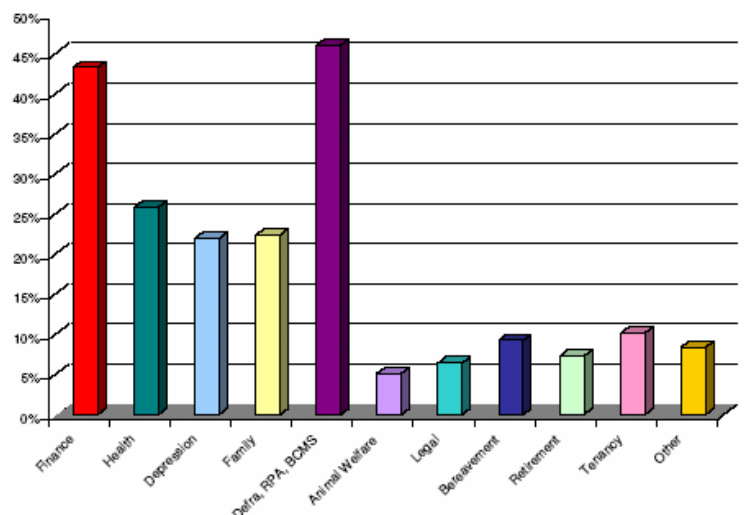
Farming Pressures:

Farmers and land-based businesses are struggling to survive and adapt to new market conditions including:

- Depressed farm gate prices - dairy farmers currently receive on average 17p for every litre of milk produced - a fall from 26p in 1996, 4p less than cost of production.
- New bureaucratic systems for farm payments
- Breakdown of payment systems and delaying income
- Lack of viability of farming business leaving farmers isolated and under pressure
- Long term and succession planning for family farm businesses and pressure to keep farms going against the odds
- Reluctance to access existing agencies for support and advice

These pressures lead to a diversity of problems as demonstrated by the FCN graph of cases nationwide below.

Problems presented in new FCN cases 2006



Working in Partnership_

Agencies

The project does not attempt to duplicate existing business support agencies, but rather to strengthen their effectiveness, providing a credible route to support in a manner that is acceptable to them. Support is highly responsive, flexible and targeted to people who would not otherwise access mainstream business or social support. Relationships of trust with agencies such as Business Link, Local Authorities, the National Farmers Union, Trading Standards and other statutory agencies secure relevant support, avoid escalation of crisis and ensure many positive outcomes from potentially difficult cases.

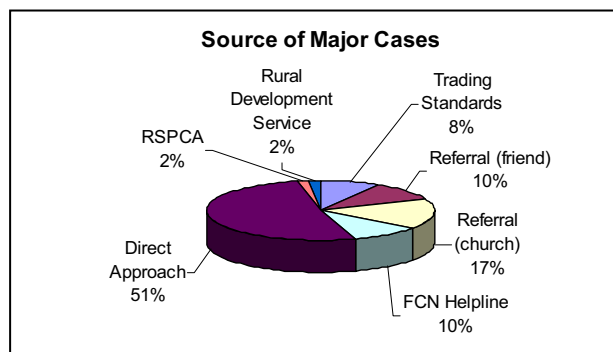
Developing partnerships, for example in the health sector, are also facilitating proactive, preventative approaches to the problems faced by farmers. Liaison with the local Primary Care Trust aims to build greater awareness of health issues in the farming community and reduce the incidence of stress, stress-related illnesses and suicides. Experience gained from grassroots activity also equips the project with expertise and a perspective of rural communities that is critical to inform rural policy making.

Story 1_

Trading Standards asked for support when a farmer fell foul of regulations. Bob Baker was on site within one hour of the call. Problems with stock were dealt with immediately, support was provided through the court hearing and with long term improvements to the farm. The farmer was supported through family stresses. Consequently, the farm regained financial stability and the family is doing well.

Churches and Volunteers

The churches are in a unique position of trust in the centre of all rural communities, and are a source of volunteers and referrals. Awareness raising events in church communities has helped mobilise support and has better equipped churches to respond to the needs of their communities with referrals following. An additional network of volunteers and professionals are on hand in collaboration with the Farm Crisis Network and other faith-based initiatives and support networks. A regular information service on rural issues is circulated to rural clergy.



Direct Approaches

Regular attendance and visibility at rural gatherings such as auction marts maximise access to the support available. 34 of the 64 cases handled by the project have come in this way and yet no support agencies maintain this level of accessibility within such a hard to reach community.

Story 2_

A local church alerted the Project to a farmer going through a marriage break-up following the stresses of Foot and Mouth. Practical support was sourced for administration formerly undertaken by the spouse. Listening and support was provided through decision-making. The farmer became happier and was able to take his children on holiday for the first time.

"Since its inception, this project has proved to be an effective and meaningful way of reaching those in the rural community who are in need of support. The practical people-focussed approach has not only had a positive impact on those in need, but highlighted the value and benefits of organisations working in partnership. It has made a real difference to many farmers in the region."

Nigel Pulling, Yorkshire Agricultural Society



_developing partnerships – Bob, Kate and colleagues from Farm Crisis Network and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute (RABI) discuss health promotion with the Primary Care Trust

Getting Results_

The three year pilot project exceeded expectations with the number of cases supported above targets and beyond the resources of the post. The distinctive, pro-active approach, engaging hard to reach cases in partnership with church based groups, volunteers and agencies continues to succeed in supporting farmers in times of crisis and through the change in culture and re-structuring required to determine future viability of rural businesses.

Support and services provided are as diverse as the needs that the project identifies.

- Key contact for agencies and statutory bodies
- Support for farmers through court cases
- Organising educative events such as the Single Farm Payment Scheme
- Lobbying for improved communications through mobile mast installation
- Support to continue in sustainable farming business
- Support in leaving farming with reduced stress and indignity
- Mediation between farmers and landowners
- Assistance in overcoming problems with farm administration and bureaucracy
- Profile raising events on issues of rural crisis to mobilise support

Story 3_

A farmer fell into difficulties managing the paperwork for his cattle passports – essential documents brought in to enable tracking of cattle following the BSE crisis. Kate Dale was approached by the farmer and intervened. By liaising with the British Cattle Movement Service and dealing with the extensive paperwork on his behalf, Kate was able to resolve all issues and remove the source of stress for the farmer.

Future Developments_

Developments will build on the unique service and position of the project:

Extending Support_ the geographic reach of the project widening to other parts of the region in needs

Succession_ support will include a focus on long term family business and succession planning to increase the opportunities for the next generation, broker solutions and secure the future viability of farm businesses

Animal Welfare_ guidance on health and welfare and new regulations including cross compliance, environmental care and diversification

Education_ Complementary activities on farming and food to combat the high level of ignorance, access new income for farming communities and promote healthy eating and fair trade.

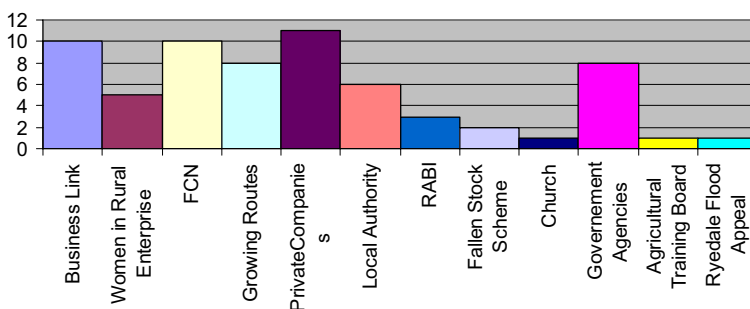
Environment_ extend information services to farmers on opportunities through increased environmentally friendly practices such as access to new subsidies and greater partnership working

Health_ increase recognition of the health benefits provided by pre-emptive work supporting farmers and their families under stress. Improved access to services and information



_Bob Baker highlights issues of rural crisis with the region's church leaders meeting at Bishopthorpe Palace January 2007

Signposting of Major Cases



“Work delivered by CRC’s rural development officers is having a direct economic impact on farming businesses...it offers quite intensive, seamless / no wrong door delivery.”

Extract from Yorkshire Forward's Independent Evaluation Report by MTL, January 2007