

Cultivating Hope Conference Report

**Confronting and managing change
in the farming industry**

The Maltings, Ely



Friday 7th February 2003

Speakers :

Sir Don Curry

Revd. Rosalind Brown

Rt Revd. Dr Anthony Russell, Bishop of Ely

Jointly chaired by:

The Rt Revd Christopher Herbert

Bishop of St. Albans

The Rt Revd Dr Anthony Russell

Bishop of Ely

Organised by:

The Diocese of Ely

**on behalf of The East of England Churches Network
and**

The East of England Development Agency

Executive Summary

The Cultivating Hope conference on 7th February 2003 followed a successful event focused on the future of farming in the Eastern Region organised by the Diocese of Ely on behalf of the East of England Churches Network in Spring 2002. This conference was focused on moving beyond the identification of issues and towards identifying solutions to the problems facing the farming sector. The context for the event was provided by two excellent presentations, the first focused on the government’s Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy by Sir Don Curry, chair of the National Implementation Group and the second by the Revd Rosalind Brown of Sarum College on the theological basis of man’s interaction with the land.

During the morning workshop sessions the conference focused on 10 possible principles for action on the farming sector (appendix 1). A large degree of consistency emerged in terms of ranking between work groups. Three issues clearly emerged as being the most important:

- (1.3) **Reconnecting consumers** with the source of their food;
- (1.4) Development of **sustainable rural communities**
- and a third which combined elements of several of the other suggested principles based on the need to **empower local people and to develop their skills to enable them to positively contribute to their own futures**

During the afternoon the conference focused on whether the outcomes and indicators for social sustainability within the national Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy (SFFS) were sufficient and if not, what else needs to be included. The overwhelming view of the conference was that the nationally defined outcomes were too narrow to give a true focus on the social sustainability issues facing farming and rural communities in which it is based.

This was amply demonstrated when the conference moved on to define areas of priority action which need to be taken to achieve greater social sustainability. Six major action areas emerged from this process, namely the need to address the:

- reconnection of consumers with the source of their food;
- affordable housing issues facing those living and working in rural communities;
- provision of support for young people in rural areas to improve their prospects and allow them to gain good employment without having to leave their communities;
- lack of inward investment and job creation in rural areas (to allow those displaced from farming to continue working locally);
- need for more tourism initiatives to capture tourist spending in our rural communities;
- improved water resource management to stop the loss of the intensive cropping sector and its associated jobs.

The challenge to government and the region is to move forward in partnership with the private and voluntary sector in a meaningful way to address these concerns. It is clear that within the region there is a deep seated concern that the national delivery plan for the SFFS must pay more attention to the social sustainability issues highlighted at the conference. Delegates were also concerned that the current plan appeared to have few linkages to other substantive government policies on housing, health, education and the commitments made in November 2000 in the Rural White Paper. This can be seen in the suggested list of actions to emerge from the afternoon workshop sessions, where the issues clearly go beyond the immediate agricultural sector, but nonetheless these issues are felt to be central to the ability to achieve a sustainable farming and food sector.

The challenge to all of those reading this report is therefore how can you help to move this agenda for change ahead? The Church and its partners who helped establish the conference are committed to working with the agricultural community to make a difference. They can not, however, achieve the amount of change needed on their own.

Whilst the outcomes of the conference will help to inform the delivery plan for the SFFS within the region, being developed by Government Office and the East of England Development Agency, the agricultural industry and communities of the region must play an active part in achieving the outcomes identified.

If we are to address the deep seated and knotty questions this conference has raised it will therefore require us all, the government, communities, business organisations, the Church and individuals to work together. The conference organisers hope that they can count on your support in moving ahead so that together we can achieve a more sustainable farming sector within the region. Whilst many others will naturally tend to concentrate on the economic and environmental outcomes the organisers of this conference hope that the overwhelming wish of this conference to also robustly address the social aspects of a sustainable farming sector will be heeded and acted upon by all those involved.

Martin Collison

Director of the Centre for Environment and Rural Affairs at Writtle College

Copies of this report are being circulated to:

- All conference delegates.
- East of England Churches Network.
- Government and its agencies: Sir Don Curry’s National Implementation Group for the SFFS; Government Office; East of England Development Agency; DEFRA Regional Development Service; Countryside Agency; Local Education Authorities; Learning and Skills Councils; Primary Care Trusts; Strategic Health Authorities; Environment Agency; Regional Agricultural Colleges.
- NGOs: County Rural Community Councils; Rural Stress Information Network; CPRE; National Trust; Farming and Wildlife Advisory Service.
- Farming Organisations: National Farmers Union; Country Land and Business Association; Tenant Farmers Association; Womens’ Farming Union.

Report on the workshops conducted during the conference

I. Morning Workshops

Feedback on the 10 priorities

During the morning workshop conference was asked to consider the 10 overarching values and principles (identified in the conference briefing paper and detailed in appendix I) upon which it was suggested a sustainable future for the regions’ food and agriculture sector could be built.

A large degree of consensus emerged with 3 issues emerging as being of the highest priority, namely:

- 1.3 **Reconnecting consumers** with the source of their food;
- 1.4 **Development of sustainable rural communities;**
- and a third which combined elements of several of the other suggestions based on the need to **empower local people and to develop their skills to enable them to positively contribute to their own futures.**

These priorities were felt to be central to the achievement of all of the other suggested principles.

All of the principles developed in the morning were subsequently developed through the afternoon workshops, and the detail of the feedback on them has been integrated with the afternoon workshop feedback below.

A number of other principles also resulted from the discussions, including the:

- need for a holistic approach to the issues facing the agriculture and food sector (and the rural communities in which they are based);
- problems inherent in trying to separate out different principles and outcomes and measuring them separately;
- need to see social and community sustainability as having a symbiotic relationship with economic and environmental sustainability.

2. Afternoon Workshops

Task 1 - Indicators and Outcomes

As part of the process to develop the regional delivery plan for the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy (SFFS) the conference was invited to address a number of key questions in relation to the **Social Sustainability outcomes** identified by the government.

To do this working groups were asked to address whether:

- The ‘Core’ (i.e. national) indicators identified by the government are sufficient, or are there other indicators of social sustainability which should be used nationally?
- Within the Eastern Region are there any other indicators which we would wish to define in addition to those to be used nationally?

Our overarching aim is to promote a competitive and efficient farming and food sector which protects and enhances our countryside and wider environment, and contributes to the health and prosperity of all of our communities

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

INDICATORS

Social sustainability

Better public health, in particular through improved nutrition and workplace health and safety

Consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables

Higher animal welfare *

Improved time taken to clear up cases of farmland and transportation animal welfare cases

More cohesive and productive rural communities

Reduced gap in productivity between the less well performing quartile of rural areas and the English median by 2006, and improved accessibility of services for rural people

(source: SFFS document pages 49-50)

* The issues surrounding animal welfare are the subject of a separate action plan being drawn up by the government nationally.

2.1. Several recurrent themes emerged from these discussions:

- The SFFS has a narrow view of what constitutes social sustainability within rural communities and this will inevitably affect its ability to deliver meaningful change.
- Concern was expressed that the SFFS is primarily focused on economic initiatives and is not linking sufficiently well into the Rural White Paper and other policies and strategies on rural community and social issues.
- The core (i.e. national) indicators of social sustainability identified by the Government are not sufficient. There are in consequence other indicators of social sustainability which should be used nationally.
- Specifically the indicators need to be more focused, the headings are too general, and some are felt to be very woolly. There is a need to define “rural” and “productivity” as in terms of social sustainability these terms can be used in many different ways. The conference also questioned whether “improved accessibility” on its own is a good indicator of social sustainability.
- All the indicators identified by the government are quantitative measurements – no attempts at qualitative measurement appear to have been made. With social issues it is often the qualitative issues which really matter and need to be monitored to assess success.

2.2. Suggested improvements to the outcomes and indicators

Extra indicators for the outcome **‘Better public health, in particular through improved nutrition and workplace health and safety’** are needed which cover:

- Health and well-being of the community;
- Days lost from work through illness;
- Diet related ill health (already measured by the DoH) in terms of obesity, cardiac and respiratory diseases, diabetes, strokes;
- Stress indicators within the population (already measured);
- Reduction in suicide rates (this is a standard within the National Service Framework (NSF) for Mental Health);
- Better public health is not only physical – indicators must include mental and spiritual aspects;
- Access to art, music and leisure and the role of the Church and all faiths are important factors in public health;
- Access to and use of the countryside and other open space for leisure is good for both physical and mental health (this links to environmental sustainability);
- Assessment of poverty (Multiple Index of Deprivation).

Extra indicators for the outcome **‘Higher Animal Welfare’** are needed which cover:

- Better communication and promotion of existing high standards of UK animal welfare to the general public;
- Adherence to and enforcement of animal welfare laws;
- Traceability of food (in the context of production) and accurate labelling to ensure that the origins and the safety of food are obvious to consumers.

Extra indicators for the outcome **‘More cohesive and productive rural communities’** are needed which cover:

Economy links:

- Consumption of local food and products (including use of local services);
- Increase in the amount of money spent locally (includes tourism);
- Inward investment into rural areas to provide jobs for young people and those displaced from traditional industries. Improvements in the quality of / types of employment available locally so that young people want to stay in an area;
- Average age of workforce (within individual communities);
- Education and skills, levels of participation;
- Farmers need to be trusted and respected members of community.
“Affirmation” of the producer when production directly benefits **local** people;

- Use of village buildings (number of second homes, redundant buildings etc).

Services and community links:

- **Good Accessibility to key services** (not just “improved”);
- Provision of services (Indicator would be the range of local services available (per head of population measured against the Rural Service Standards) – Needs to include service provision for **all members** of community including young people and not focused just on adults and the elderly. This should include the level of mobile services provided (where transport provision is problematic and permanent service provision is uneconomic);
- Measurable distances to available services and ‘joined up thinking’ in terms of rural transport provision (transport to, time to shop and transport back);
- Level of membership of village activities (measure of safety, freedom of movement and sense of community in villages);
- Level of affordable housing;
- Demographic trends of migration (influx and outflow by age group).

2.3. Indicators which could be defined within the Eastern Region in addition to those to be used nationally

(N.B. it is noted that many of these issues are already subject to national action or could potentially be actioned nationally)

- Growth in affordable housing for **local** people with an emphasis on housing people who are working locally.
- Greater efficiency in the management and use of the water supply.
- Efficient transport links (road and rail, particularly East – West links and links to ports and airports).
- Perception of crime and feeling “safe” (reported crime is often used as an indicator but a lot of rural crime goes unreported).
- Pockets of deprivation do exist but are still often overlooked in government policy as they are masked by areas of greater prosperity.
- Take up of existing schemes which promote social sustainability measured against the national average.
- Maintenance of social diversity we must not have just a (rural) region for people to have second homes or retire to.
- Reduction in food miles.

3. Task 2 - Identifying the Actions Needed to Achieve the Outcomes

6 key action areas which were identified are presented here (most of these actions were identified by more than one group) and it was interesting to note that a considerable degree of consensus emerged on the priority areas for action on social sustainability.

3.1. Reconnecting consumers

Action required:

- Education, particularly of school age children (aim is to achieve lifestyle changes including healthy diet, increased consumption of local produce, exercise, positive perception of farming). Needs to be part of the National Curriculum, include cooking in schools, national farm visit programme. School food procurement should be local, invite parents in for school meals;
- Local food procurement policies within all government agencies including NHS, MoD, prison service must be reviewed;
- Media awareness of positive issues;
- Information and promotions are needed in supermarkets;
- Labelling of produce needs to be improved (origin and “food miles”);
- Public needs to understand (relearn?) the concept of seasonality.

Who should be involved in taking the action required?

Success will only be achieved by concerted action undertaken by partnerships of:

- LEAs and schools
- Farmers, food producers and their marketing groups
- The NHS and Government
- Supermarkets/retailers (Tesco “Taking the Classroom into the Countryside” project in Scotland)

What timescales should be set for the action to be taken?

- ASAP but this is also a long term project.

What resources will need to be secured to facilitate the action taken?

- Political will and finance from both the public and private sector.
- Expertise and better access to farms/countryside and new teaching resources.

Where should or are these resources likely to come from?

- Government must back the schemes (especially via public procurement) but industry will have to take the lead. This includes supermarkets and retailers, food industry groups and bodies and farmers.

Which outcomes will be supported by each action taken?

- Better public health
- Positive image and affirmation of the role of farmers and farming

- Environmental sustainability through reduced food miles and increased consumption of local produce (in season).

3.2. Affordable rural housing

Action required:

- Local Authority commitment is needed, including more permissive and relevant planning and more section 106 agreements. Consideration needs to be given to more developments in farmyards (should be designated as brownfield sites);
- A proportion of any housing development needs to be low cost and affordable to local people (particularly families), especially those employed locally. Such housing needs to be held under covenant to ensure that it remains affordable and available for the purpose for which it was provided. More low cost rental property for people in low paid work who cannot afford to purchase.

Who should be involved in taking the action required?

- Can only be achieved if Central Government works with Local Government and its planning departments to engage with commercial developers and Housing Associations and Trusts.

What timescale should be set for the action to be taken?

- Action is needed immediately as the results will take a long time to materialise. Significant progress should be made within the next 5 years. An immediate priority is to contribute to the Deputy Prime Ministers recent proposals.

What resources will need to be secured to allow the action to be completed?

- A positive dialogue between planners, landowners and developers to bring forward and develop suitable sites. The identification of suitable sites for development.
- In the longer term if a negotiated approach is unsuccessful legislation may be needed.

Where should or are these resources likely to come from?

- Finance – It should be a condition of planning permission that Developers should reserve a proportion of any development (above a certain size) for affordable housing (needs to relate to scale of development). Public/private partnerships, particularly with housing associations to provide rental property.

Which outcome(s) will be supported by each action taken?

- More cohesive and productive rural communities. Retaining affordable housing will make communities socially sustainable in that they will be balanced (age, gender and social profiles), provide a local workforce (less travelling) and keep families together.

3.3. Provision of support and services for young people

Action required:

- A co-ordinated approach to public involvement work to find out what young people in rural areas actually need. We need to develop mechanisms to ensure support and services remain relevant to future generations (sustainable) and make best use of resources available. Provision of places for young to interact e.g. a youth shelter;
- Education and skills training are particularly important in developing aspirations and self worth;
- Healthcare e.g. sexual health services within schools (being piloted in West Norfolk to reduce teenage pregnancies), mobile mental health (CMH) teams (Norfolk wide Invest to Save bid includes this, but not specifically for young).

Who should be involved in taking the action required?

- Young people
- Local government e.g. parish councils
- LEAs, Schools, Colleges (FE and HE), Charities / voluntary agencies
- Primary Care Trusts

What timescales should be set for the action to be taken?

- ASAP but work must be ongoing.

What resources will need to be secured to allow the action to be completed?

- Central and local government political will.
- Pooling of budgets and joined up thinking and the use of grants and financial assistance for specific projects.
- Innovative and creative thinking.

Where should or are these resources likely to come from?

- Existing budgets and resources pooled (and flexed). Get rid of duplication and re-engineer existing services to make better use of funding streams from central government.
- Charities and fundraising (public subscription).
- All stakeholders need to think creatively.

Which outcome(s) will be supported by each action taken?

- Cohesive communities. Helps to reduce problems of social exclusion. Encourages young people to feel valued and makes them less likely to move away from a community, also less likely to offend/use drugs etc.
- Education/skills = productive rural communities (next generation workforce), more likely to get employment and reduce burden on taxpayers.

3.4. Inward Investment

Action required:

- Increase inward investment - leading to more local rural employment;
- Freeing up of planning system including re-classification of farmyards as Brownfield sites to encourage development. Must be strictly controlled to ensure infrastructure can support it but villages cannot stay frozen in a time warp;
- People need housing, employment and services to stay in rural communities. Development of infrastructure including transport links (not just road and must include East-west links);
- Technical infrastructure (Broadband);
- Engage communities in discussing LA21 process;
- Development of skills/ skill mix/ skills base.

Who should be involved in taking the action required?

- Planners
- Trade bodies
- Developers
- Residents
- Government

What timescales should be set for the action to be taken?

- Start now, we must build on the Rural White Paper by developing an input to regional and local plans.

What resources will need to be secured to allow the action to be completed?

- The interpretation of planning legislation needs to be developed locally to identify suitable sites for new businesses to move into rural areas.
- Finance to fund developments and the infrastructure to support new economic opportunities.

Where should or are these resources likely to come from?

- Government, regional and central (central for infrastructure).
- Developers and commercial businesses.

Which outcome(s) will be supported by each action taken?

- More cohesive and productive rural communities will encourage business expansion and improve employment opportunities. Make communities more economically sustainable (therefore also more socially sustainable and attractive to live in).

3.5. Community and local tourism initiatives

Action required:

- Encourage people to spend locally by providing good quality, accessible information about what’s available. Includes food, places to visit/see – Churches, shops, pubs, tourist sites, farms and farm shops etc;
- Local people need to “spread gospel” to encourage tourism (repeat and new business) – value of personal recommendation cannot be underestimated;
- Audit of existing practice and gap analysis, by developing a toolkit.

Who should be involved in taking the action required?

- Tourist Boards/ Tourist information
- Local businesses
- Trade bodies
- Countryside Agency
- National Trust, English Heritage etc
- Local people

What timescales should be set for the action to be taken?

- ASAP and ongoing

What resources will need to be secured to allow the action to be completed?

- Guidelines
- Audit and development of toolkit will require funding
- Advertising (use of media) and literature

Where should or are these resources likely to come from?

- Joint working
- Capitalise on the free media (press releases, publicity stunts, TV travel shows etc)
- ERDP project funding

Which outcome(s) will be supported by each action taken?

- Economic and social sustainability.
- May also have environmental benefits as could link with reconnecting consumers

3.6. Water Conservation

Action required:

- Consider management and use of water supplies;
- More water storage for farm irrigation, essential for high quality vegetable production;
- All new development should incorporate latest water conservation technology;
- Water meters in all properties, not just new build and businesses.

Who should be involved in taking the action required?

- Environment Agency, DEFRA and Central Government
- Water Supply Companies
- Farmers and property developers
- Planners/Local Government

What timescale should be set for the action to be taken?

- Immediate action needed but will need to have a long term commitment.

What resources will need to be secured to allow the action to be completed?

- Some central government funding for farm investment grants (for reservoirs etc).
- Practical assistance in obtaining planning permission for water storage facilities.
- Legislation is needed via building regulations for property development.

Where should or are these resources likely to come from?

- Government, finance and planning support is available through the ERDP administered by DEFRA for farm water usage.
- Water Supply Companies.

Which outcome(s) will be supported by each action taken?

- Environmental sustainability, better use of natural resources and reduced environmental cost of the food chain.
- Greater security for farmers who require water for crop production and for all of the food supply and processing chain reliant on such production (economic sustainability).
- Lower demand on water resources by major new East of England development projections.

Appendix I – 10 suggested principles to guide the future of the farming sector in the region presented to the conference for discussion and ranking:

1. **Strength in diversity** – the region’s agri-food sector contains a very diverse range of business types and creates a multitude of different food and other products. This diversity is both a community and economic strength that must be further developed.
2. **Balanced development between niche and commodity markets** – the region must establish a viable future for both:
 - commodity producers who will have to operate in global markets by producing quality products at globally competitive prices;
 - niche market food producers who will succeed by offering value for money due to the unique features of the value added products they produce.
3. **Reconnecting the region’s consumers with the source of their food** to ensure they understand the broader significance of local food and farming on the region’s landscape and environment. A major programme of consumer education is needed in which industry and government work together.
4. **Development of sustainable rural communities** which are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. Rural communities should wherever possible be able to meet their own needs and not become ghettos of affluence for those who have the ability to commute to work and use services elsewhere.
5. **Development of the environmental outputs of agriculture** in both physical terms by getting more farmers into the schemes and in terms of the rewards to those who produce them (i.e. paying land managers fairly for the public goods provided).
6. **Development of supply chains** to ensure food miles are reduced and to ensure that more of the economic value added downstream in the food supply chain is retained in the region’s (rural) economy.
7. **New Career Development pathways** need to be created which allow existing and prospective employees to develop their skills, outlook and experience so the sector’s businesses can meet the needs and aspirations of:
 - **New Entrants** to ensure the sector can attract new people with new ideas;
 - **Those leaving** the sector to allow them to exit with dignity and obtain rewarding work elsewhere.
8. **New Technology** needs to be adopted to improve economies of production, allow the sector to compete globally, to increase food quality and safety and to reduce its environmental impact.
9. **Streamlining bureaucracy** and particularly the costs of compliance to businesses is important in allowing the sector to compete globally.
10. **The Churches**, in partnership with other faith communities and agencies, have a responsibility to engage policy makers in acknowledging and utilising these values in the development of the agri-food sector and the community life of the region.

Appendix 2 – Key spiritual values

The following list of values was presented to the conference as suggestions of the key spiritual values with special relevance to the development of a sustainable future for food and agriculture –

- People are ultimately accountable for their stewardship of the earth and its resources. Given the finitude of these resources and the interdependence of the earth’s ecological systems, the exercise of this stewardship has potential not only to enrich life but also to destroy it.
- Sustainable development means identifying ways in which the inherent tensions between economic, social and environmental goals can be harnessed in the service of humanity and the evolution of a just and healthy world order. These ways to include trade mechanisms for restraining greed, reducing world poverty and an equitable sharing of the earth’s resources.
- Food is more than a mere commodity. It is fundamental to human flourishing and binds people together, wherever they live, in family, communal and religious celebration.
- People in both urban and rural communities are called to work together to promote healthy life-styles, the common good and care for the environment.

The Churches, in partnership with other faith communities and agencies, have a responsibility to engage policy makers in acknowledging and utilising these values in the development of the agri-food sector and the community life of the region.