

## THE APPLICATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT MEASURES IN ENGLAND

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### Résumé

L'article présente le plan de développement rural anglais. Il décrit la façon dont le gouvernement est arrivé à la rédaction de ce plan puis analyse les mesures prises avant de souligner les problèmes encore à résoudre.

### Mots-clés

développement rural, Countryside agency, développement durable, conservation de la nature, Angleterre

### Abstract

*The article presents the English Rural Development Plan. It describes the way the plan has been prepared and analyses Rural Development Regulation measures adopted. It concludes with problems still to tope.*

### Key Words

*rural development, Countryside agency, sustainable development, nature conservation, England*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Countryside Agency is a new Government Agency in England with a remit to conserve and enhance the countryside, promote social equity and economic opportunity for the people who live there, and help everyone - wherever they live - to enjoy this national asset. We were created by a merger of the former Countryside Commission and Rural Development Commission. We began work in April last year.

In this presentation, I will briefly outline current issues affecting rural areas in England. I will explain how our Government intends to use the opportunities presented by the Rural Development Regulation to address these issues. I will then say a few words about LEADER + and conclude with some comments about future directions. I will not talk about Structural Funds, Objective 5b or LEADER 2 in any detail.

I first need to explain that four rural development plans have been prepared for the United Kingdom. There are separate plans for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Plans have yet to be approved by the European Commission - they should be shortly - so what I say about England could be subject to slight changes.

### II. ISSUES IN RURAL ENGLAND

Agriculture has become increasingly intensive. Output and productivity have grown but this has been at the expense of fewer farms and less labour in the industry, which has been falling year on year. It has also been highly damaging to the landscape and biodiversity with significant losses of semi-natural habitats and declines in farmland birds and other species.

Yet agriculture is currently in severe recession. Real incomes for farmers are as low as at any time during the past 30 years. Many businesses are losing money. This is accelerating the loss of jobs in the industry and the ability of farmers to invest in looking after the landscape and biodiversity. The call is for more diversification to add value to products and provide new income streams for farmers.

While agriculture is a problem area, English rural areas generally have prospered over the last 30 years. Population and employment is growing as people and small businesses are relocating to rural areas for better lifestyles and economic advantage. Indeed, unemployment in rural areas is generally lower than in the rest of the country.

However, not all rural areas have shared in this prosperity and there are still areas with particular economic and social disadvantage, notably in the remoter rural areas and in former coal mining areas. Most of these areas will benefit from Objective 1 and Objective 2 status under the Structural Funds programmes. Many of the remoter areas are also hill lands and are defined as Less Favoured Areas where special farm support arrangements apply.

Forests and woodlands are not a major feature in England at around only 8 % of the land area. This is less than one quarter of the EU average, but the area is slowly and steadily growing. The policy is for further expansion where new woodlands can provide most benefits for the community.

A feature of England is its great diversity for its small size. Some of the regions are mainly rural while others are more densely populated and urbanised. In all of them the countryside is highly valued. The England Rural Development Plan tries to reflect European Community, national and varying regional needs by having a national framework for the plan and nine regional chapters that will form the basis for implementing many of the measures at the regional level.

### III. RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

#### A. How the England Rural Development Plan was put together

The Plan has been prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in partnership with a wide range of organisations. These include :

- central government departments, such as in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Education and Employment
- the Forestry Commission
- the Government's regional offices
- newly formed Regional Development Agencies that will be important bodies in delivering rural development.
- the Government's statutory environmental advisory agencies - the Countryside Agency, English Nature, Environment Agency and English Heritage.

There was a National Planning Group involving these organisations to oversee the preparation of the whole plan and to draw up the national section, and separate Regional Planning Groups with similar membership to prepare the regional chapters. There was also wider consultation with a Forum involving NGOs and farming organisations. The planning groups are to remain in being to advise on implementing the plan.

#### B. Government policies for rural areas

The Government's overall aim for rural and countryside policy is : « To sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all »...

It has five objectives for rural and countryside policy. They are :

- To facilitate the development of dynamic, competitive and sustainable economies in the countryside, tackling poverty in rural areas
- To maintain and stimulate communities, and secure access to services which is equitable in all circumstances, for those who live and work in the countryside
- To conserve and enhance rural landscapes and the diversity and abundance of wildlife (including the habitats on which it depends)
- To increase opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside
- To promote Government responsiveness to rural communities through better working together between central departments, local government, and government agencies; and better co-operation with non-government bodies.

The Government seeks to deliver its national rural and countryside policy through the combined use of a range of European Community measures complemented by national measures. The England Rural Development Plan cannot deliver everything.

#### C. Key features of the Plan

In establishing priorities for the Plan, the main considerations were :

- the scope of the Rural Development Regulation which mainly targets agricultural and forestry activities and activities close to these sectors;
- the constraints in the UK imposed by a low EU financial allocation
- the opportunity afforded by the Horizontal Regulation under Agenda 2000 (Regulation 1259/99) to supplement EU funding for rural development measures through modulation of farmers' direct aids
- the results of wide ranging consultation
- whether the measures would contribute to the delivery of national priorities
- other national mechanisms for supporting rural development

Out of this thinking process has come two priorities for the England Rural Development Plan :

- Creation of a productive and sustainable rural economy
- Conservation and enhancement of the rural environment

Countryside recreation and tourism, social issues and less localised economic issues will be addressed in other ways. Actions to support the rural economy and the environment will, of course, make a contribution to sustaining rural communities.

#### IV. RURAL DEVELOPMENT REGULATION

##### A. Measures adopted

Member States have considerable discretion on which measures under the Rural Development Regulation they propose to implement. Only implementation of agri-environment schemes is mandatory.

##### 1. A productive and sustainable rural economy

To help secure the creation of a productive and sustainable rural economy, the following schemes will be run :

- a new Rural Enterprise Scheme (combining the use of Article 4 and seven measures under Article 33) providing grants for : capital investment in agricultural diversification schemes; setting up of farm relief and farm management services; marketing of quality agricultural products; basic services for the rural economy and population; diversification of agricultural activities and activities close to agriculture to provide alternative incomes; agricultural water resources management; development and improvement of infrastructure connected with the development of agriculture; encouragement of tourism and craft activities
- a new Energy Crops Scheme (combining use of Article 4 and Articles 30 and 31) providing grants for the establishment of Miscanthus and Short Rotation Coppice to contribute to delivering our climate change CO2 reduction targets
- a new Vocational Training Scheme (Article 9) to help facilitate delivery of all the other RDR measures being implemented
- the reintroduction of a Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme for Agricultural Products (Articles 25 to 28) to encourage innovation and investment to achieve added value for products and enhance market opportunities
- an expanded Woodland Grant Scheme and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (Articles 29 - 32) to encourage woodland expansion and better woodland management, and the afforestation of agricultural land

##### 2. Conservation and enhancement of the rural environment

To help secure the conservation and enhancement of the rural environment, the following schemes will be run :

- Agri-environment Schemes (Articles 22 - 24) which will comprise : the existing Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme to protect the landscape, wildlife and historic interest of specific areas in England which are

of national environmental significance and where conservation depends on maintaining particular farming practices; an expanded Countryside Stewardship Scheme to conserve, enhance and restore specific categories of landscape which have been targeted because of their natural beauty, wildlife diversity, historic and recreational value; an expanded Organic Farming Scheme to encourage conversion of land to organic production

Less favoured Areas support (Articles 13 - 21) to encourage the sustainable management of upland areas and to help maintain the social fabric in upland communities. Support will comprise a new Hill Farming Allowance Scheme from 2001 based on area payments

- Within the new Rural Enterprise Scheme mentioned above, two other Article 33 measures : renovation and development of villages, and protection and conservation of the rural heritage; protection of the environment in connection with agriculture.

##### B. Measures not adopted

The Plan will not use measures for :

- early retirement
- aid to young farmers
- Article 16 support for areas with environmental restrictions (Natura 2000 sites)
- four of the Article 33 measures : financial engineering, disaster support, reparation, and land improvement

##### C. Funding

The European Union allocation for implementing the Rural Development Regulation in England was very disappointing being based on historic levels of spending on agri-environment schemes, which were low in England. It has only been possible to produce a meaningful plan by introducing modulation to provide additional funding for the « accompanying measures ». This rises to 4.5 % of farmers' direct aid entitlements by 2006.

The Community Initiative LEADER + follows on from previous LEADER schemes but is significantly different in that it is not confined to Structural Funds areas. It will be delivered by local partners formed into local action groups, which will be selected by a competitive process. They will be responsible for drawing up and implementing an integrated and sustainable pilot demonstration strategy targeted at the special needs in their local area.

There has been consultation on how LEADER + might operate in England but decisions have yet to be reached. LEADER + clearly complements what might be delivered through the England Rural Development Plan. Its main emphasis will be on innovation. We hope it will be used imaginatively to help understanding of what is integrated

sustainable rural development and how it can be achieved in practice.

£33 million will be available for the programme in England over 7 years.

#### V. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the welcome injection of funds through the England Rural Development Plan, the scale of environmental and rural development needs greatly exceeds the funds currently available or planned by 2006 and there are few resources for activities « beyond the farm gate ». More European Union funds may become available to the UK over the lifetime of the Plan but these will need match funding.

The Plan is about integrated delivery of rural development. It has proved difficult to achieve fully integrated proposals because of the short time available in plan preparation and because of the way the various measures are structured as separate schemes, including the 13 measures within Article 33. It is hoped that this problem can be addressed at the mid-term review of the Plan.

Different approaches and priorities have been adopted for the separate Plans for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I hope we can learn from these, and from the plans of other Member States, in thinking about the mid-term review of the Plan for England.

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