

Relu News



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1 Great Land Use Debate draws in a wide range of opinion

Relu's Great Land Use Debate, which was part of the Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Social Science and British Association's National Science and Engineering Week, took place 7-17 March 2008. The on-line debate centred around three questions: 1) 'Have we got the balance right between protecting the environment and producing food?' 2) 'Is rural land management the problem or the solution to flooding in our towns and cities?' and 3) 'What is rural land for?'. Headline pieces were provided by key people involved in land management: leading horticulturalist Mark Tinsley and Mark Avery from the RSPB kicked off the first topic, with an opening comment from Secretary of State Hilary Benn, the second was opened by Joe Morris from Cranfield University and Paul Woodcock of the Environment Agency and the final debate was led by Tony Burton of the National Trust and Les Firbank from the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research. Once each question had been posted on the 'blog' the debate was then opened to allow anyone to leave his or her thoughts and opinions on each question. Around 100 comments were posted, reflecting a range of opinion on the three topics and there were over 4,500 hits on the site from readers. The comments are all available to read on the Relu website, with a synthesis of the debates and an evaluation of the process. See www.relu.ac.uk.

2 Relu contributes to Festival of Science/National Science and Engineering Week UK wide

Relu projects hosted events around the UK, involving scientists, policymakers, schoolchildren, artists and the public in considering different aspects of rural economy and land use.

- The South West: a grassland region Relu researchers from the Realising the Links between Quality Food Production and Biodiversity Protection project and colleagues from Exeter University organised a workshop with guest speakers from the RSPB and Devon and Dorset Wildlife Trusts. The workshop attracted scientists, policy makers, farmers and land managers who discussed the grassland economy in the South West, which proved to be a topical issue.
- Food for the future – is it organic enough? Researchers from the Relu Effects of Scale in Organic Agriculture project and the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex organised an event for researchers and secondary schools in Sussex, Cambridge and Leeds where they examined the environmental and health benefits of organic food and the difficult choices that consumers often have to make when trying to support sustainable development.
- How do you like your woods? Public perceptions of landscape and biodiversity The Macaulay Institute and Relu team from the Collaborative Deer Management project held events in Edinburgh and Aberdeen where members of the public electronically recorded their preferences for woodland landscapes, as projected in a Virtual Reality Theatre, and considered whether attractive landscape views are compatible with other management aims.
- Mapping the perceptions of green space in York The Department of Social Policy and Social Work, York University and Relu project team from Social and Environmental Inequalities in Rural Areas presented the results of a participatory mapping exercise about the perceptions of green space in York.
- Science meets the eye! Moors for the Future Partnership and the Relu Sustainable Uplands project mounted an exhibition of visually stimulating images derived from a diverse range of research undertaken in the uplands of the Peak District and other parts of northern England, accompanied by a series of audio and video podcasts.
- Fishing Communities and Territorial Development Relu's Assistant Director Jeremy Phillipson gave an address in Aberdeen to the Scottish Government and over 50 fishermen's organisations. The publication from this public policy seminar Change and Continuity in Scotland's Fishing Communities, is available at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/news/scottishfishing.pdf>

3 Foresight on land use

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) is beginning a major Foresight exercise on strategic land use, looking at the long term challenges facing the use of our land over the next 50 years. Relu researchers have been drawn into the early scoping of this initiative. Given that Relu is covering many of the critical issues concerning the future use of rural land and encompasses the widest spectrum of relevant expertise, it is not surprising that DIUS's Foresight team has expressed considerable interest in learning from the programme. For more information see <http://www.foresight.gov.uk/LandUse/LandUse.html>.

4 Climate change scheme takes a step forward

The Relu Sustainable Uplands project has hosted a workshop of partner organisations to take forward their scheme to use carbon offsetting to fund restoration of upland areas. Britain's uplands represent our largest store of carbon; more than is stored in the forests of France and Great Britain combined. However, many large tracts of moorland have been damaged by drainage, causing them to lose carbon and biodiversity. The team has evidence that blocking drainage ditches and restoring peat bogs can lock up the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, in the peat and businesses seeking ways to reduce or offset their carbon emissions, are increasingly looking towards land-based schemes that can help tackle or cope with climate change. Partners who attended the workshop included Defra, Environment Agency, Government Office, Yorkshire and Humber Assembly, Forestry Commission, Moors for the Future, National Parks, National Trust, Natural England, RSPB, Universities of Durham and Leeds, and Yorkshire Forward. The workshop focussed on ways to put interested businesses in touch with organisations restoring peat bogs and planting trees. The next step is to draft a carbon-offsetting scheme, to be led by Carbon Action Yorkshire, as part of Yorkshire Forward's Sustainable Futures Company. For more information contact Mark Reed m.s.reed@leeds.ac.uk or see <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Hubacek.htm> and <http://homepages.see.leeds.ac.uk/~lecmsr/sustainableuplands/>

5 Effects on farmers' incomes of pollution prevention

The Relu Modelling the Impacts of the Water Framework Directive project has completed a first case-study analysis of the impact of the WFD on both river water quality and the incomes of farmers if they were required to reduce diffuse pollution from fertilisers. The researchers examined the Derwent catchment in Yorkshire and showed that alternative policy instruments could yield very different changes in water quality - at very different costs. Selection of appropriate measures is vital if decision makers want to ensure that implementing the WFD is a smooth and efficient process. This work is now being extended to cover the rest of the country. <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Bateman.htm>

6 Innovative application of life cycle assessment to food

The Relu project 'Comparative merits of consuming fruit and vegetables produced locally and overseas' has applied the methodology of Life Cycle Assessment to food products in an innovative way. The methodology was originally developed to assess the full environmental impact – through production, use and disposal – of manufactured goods. To extend it to food, which is produced and consumed under such varying conditions, represents a considerable challenge. The Relu team has pioneered a number of technical breakthroughs in putting the methodology into effect. They have developed a model for analysing carbon emissions of food at the consumption stage – a major source of impact that has been omitted from most previous studies. They have also developed frameworks and indicators to bring into the equation the impacts of growing food on soil organic carbon and the demands made on water, using the concept of "virtual water" which is the total amount necessary to grow and distribute a crop. These are factors that have so far been poorly addressed in life cycle assessments.

<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/relu/> and <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/Edwards-Jones.htm>

7 Researchers contribute to Pitt review on flooding

Researchers from two Relu projects: Integrated Floodplain Management and Understanding Environmental Knowledge Controversies are contributing to the ongoing Pitt Review – Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods - in a variety of ways. The Integrated Floodplain Management team is informing the Review of the impacts of the 2007 floods in rural areas and participating in an update of the scientific evidence base used in 2004 Flood Foresight Project. They are reviewing the implications of recent research on how rural land management can affect the generation of floods during extreme weather events. The project is currently collecting data on the impacts of last summer's flooding in rural communities in Worcestershire, Oxfordshire, Yorkshire and Humberside. Interviews are held with farmers, households, businesses and community services to discuss the flood events, impacts and recovery. Members of the project team, Tim Hess and Joe Morris, have also joined the Environment Agency's Quality Review Panel to review the draft Catchment Flood Management Plans produced by the EA regions before it goes out for public consultation. <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Morris.htm>

8 Relu will bring interdisciplinary experience into Environment & Human Health Programme

Investigators on the Relu project 'Managing Food Chain Risks' have collaborated in a successful bid led by Dr Helen Clough from the University of Liverpool that will bring the interdisciplinary experience of Relu into the Environmental and Human Health (E&HH) Programme being coordinated by the Natural Environment Research Council. The additional funding, which is being provided by the Economic and Social Research Council, will strengthen social science expertise within the E&HH Programme and will incorporate new innovative modelling techniques around microbial risk involving stakeholders.

<http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/Shepherd.htm>

9 Land to Mouth serves up feast

Problems such as growing numbers of obese children and adults, food safety scares, global warming and other threats to our environment are everyday news items. Land to Mouth, Relu's latest briefing paper no 8, explores ideas on food and land use in the light of Relu's food chain research. Can the way we use land make our food healthier and safer? Can consumers help the environment? Is a healthy and environmentally friendly diet compatible with innovation and sustainable business? These are all issues discussed in the paper, drawing on evidence from across Relu projects. Email Relu at relu@ncl.ac.uk for hard copies or access it on the Relu website at <http://www.relu.ac.uk/news/briefings/BRIF8.pdf>

10 How to grow tropical fish for food

Getting research into practice is an essential part of any project and Relu's Policy and Practice Note series is designed to target key stakeholders. The second in the series: "Warm water fish production as a diversification strategy for farmers" is available now and is a must-read for any aspiring fish farmers as well as for policy makers. Researchers at Stirling University have investigated the whole process, from what kind of technical set-up is going to suit UK farmers, to establishing a market for the fresh tropical fish tilapia and identifying the "green" and "local" credentials that will most appeal to potential consumers. We will be sending Policy and Practice Note no 2 to everyone who has expressed an interest. If you would like a copy, or would like to subscribe to the whole series of Policy and Practice notes, please let us know by contacting relu@ncl.ac.uk or download it from our website at <http://www.relu.ac.uk/news/policyandpracticenotes.htm>

11 Relu people

• At 5.30 pm on Tuesday 22 April Philip Lowe, Director of Relu and Duke of Northumberland Professor of Rural Economy will give the 2008 Cameron Gifford Lecture: "The Rural North: Landscapes of Endeavour and Enquiry" in the Curtis Auditorium, Herschel Building, Newcastle University. This is a public lecture, open to all, and no registration is required.

• Professor Sir Howard Dalton, who was Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government 2002-2007 died suddenly in January. He was a keen supporter of the Relu programme, and it was he who decided that Defra should co-fund Relu research. Read obituaries at

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=MOV511Q5VXEKXQFIQMFSFF4AVCBQ01V0?xml=/news/2008/01/15/db1501.xml>
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article3191715.ece>

• Henry Buller, of Exeter University, who has been leading on the Relu project Realising the Links between quality food production and biodiversity protection, has been appointed to the Council of the Farm Animal Welfare Council as their expert for social science and education.

• Louise Heathwaite, Director of the Centre for Sustainable Water Management in the Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, who is co-leading the Relu project Assessment of Knowledge Sources in Animal Disease Control, has been appointed as one of the Natural Environment Research Council's new 'theme leaders' who will champion seven environmental science themes and encourage partnerships across the research and stakeholder community. Louise is a NERC champion for the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources theme.
<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/press/releases/2007/38-champions.asp>

• Clinton Devon Estates, whose Director John Varley is on the Relu People and the Rural Environment Forum, was named as one of the best companies in Britain to work for, when it made it into the the Sunday Times top 100.

• Alan Bond, of University of East Anglia, who is working on the Relu project Impacts of Increasing Land Use Under Energy Crops was invited to contribute to the European Parliament workshop on Sustainability Criteria for Biofuels in March.

• Stuart Lane from Durham University, co-investigator on the Understanding Environmental Knowledge Controversies and Angling and the Rural Environment projects will be giving a public lecture "Science failings, policy inadequacies and why flooding can only get worse" in the Newcastle University public lecture series at 5.30 pm on Thursday 1 May in the Curtis Auditorium, Herschel Building, Newcastle University.

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