

Relu news



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1. A written charter for land use could support Big Society action

A written charter for land use could support a “Big Society” approach and enable more integrated management of England’s natural resources, according to Relu’s latest briefing paper “[Shaping the Nature of England: policy pointers from the Relu programme](#)”, a response to the Government’s recent consultation on the natural environment of England.

2. New book on biopesticides examines potential and obstacles

Chemical pesticide methods are becoming less readily available due to increasing resistance problems and the prohibition of some substances. *Biopesticides: Pest Management and Regulation* by Alastair Bailey, David Chandler, Wyn Grant, Justin Greaves, Gillian Prince and Mark Tatchell addresses the challenges of developing and promoting biopesticides instead. Drawing on research undertaken in the Relu programme, it provides internationally comparative analyses on the registration of biopesticides and considers options for future biopesticide practices.

3. Can farming and wildlife be compatible?

Could farming actually help wildlife to thrive in the countryside in the future? If we look more closely how government policy drives farming decisions, which then impact on animals and plants, perhaps modern farming methods could do just that, according to Relu researchers. Their research has shown that we shouldn’t assume profits are the only driver for farmers – we have to understand their attitudes as well. And by looking more closely at the prevalence of weeds, for example, we can begin to identify potential modifications in farming practices that could balance the needs of both food production and wildlife. Relu’s [policy and practice note no 23](#) outlines the implications of the research for future policymaking.

4. Catchment management and public engagement

Relu and the Northern Rural Network will be hosting a short course on Catchment Management and Public Engagement at Newcastle University on 1 February 2011. There will be opportunities to hear about Relu research, including innovative examples of public engagement in science, as well as presentations from the Environment Agency and third sector organisations. The day will be of interest to stakeholders from central and local government, independent organisations, landowners and farmers, as well as academics. For further information and bookings contact nicola.parker@ncl.ac.uk.

5. Conservation conflicts: strategies for coping in a changing world

An interdisciplinary conference is being organised on Conservation Conflicts by Aberdeen Centre for Environmental Sustainability in collaboration with Relu on 23rd-24th August 2011 at Aberdeen Arts Centre. It will include scientific exploration, discussion, and discovery with a range of social and natural scientists, policy makers and artists from all over the world. Visit www.aces-2011.org for more details.

6. Does the CAP need a refit?

Revamped agri-environment schemes could play a major role in ensuring we get maximum ecological and economic returns from UK land, according to research findings drawn from across the Relu programme. Briefing paper no 12 “[Informing the Reform and Implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy](#)” identifies key points from Relu research that could help to steer the reform of the CAP, currently underway. The report advocates designing schemes within an ecosystems services framework, and developing a menu of options that enable each area of land to be managed to maximum ecological effect, and at an appropriate scale. Schemes could include new options for carbon storage, integrated pest management and reduction of public health risks from livestock waste, as well as responding to new disease threats. Stakeholder involvement should become routine, and enable farmers and other local people to contribute their own expertise to securing long term benefits from the land.

7. The power of food

In a new book “Empires of Food: feast, famine and the rise and fall of civilisation”, Relu Interdisciplinary Fellow Evan Fraser and journalist Andrew Rimas explore the innumerable ways that food has changed the course of history. Published by Random House it is available in bookshops or from [the publisher](#).

8. Rural Advocate on the participatory challenge for Government agencies

A workshop in Penrith in December explored findings from the Relu project ‘Understanding and Acting in Loweswater: a community approach to catchment management’ (<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/loweswater.ac.uk/fass/projects/loweswater>) with agency and NGO representatives. The workshop highlighted the challenges faced by these institutions in fostering public participation. In his keynote address, Stuart Burgess, Rural Advocate and Chair of the Commission for Rural Communities, reflected on the opportunities provided by the political shift towards smaller central government and the devolution of power to local authorities and communities. He stressed that an integrated strategy was needed to realise “the localism agenda”, and that national agencies had to be equipped and properly resourced to support local engagement successfully. The workshop concluded that local knowledge and experience were key to such partnerships achieving their aims.

9. How can flood modelling move upstream?

People whose homes have been flooded are often scathing about “flood models” of their local area and they may mistrust the professionals whose job it is to use them. But Relu researchers have found that if residents have the opportunity to contribute their local knowledge, and are actually involved in creating the models, this can give them more confidence in the outcomes and also make these more effective. [Relu’s Policy and Practice note no 22](#) draws on a project in Ryedale in Yorkshire where academics worked with residents, not only coming up with an innovative approach to a flooding problem that had seemed intractable, but also charting new, more open ways of doing science.

10. New website gives upland communities a platform

A [new website](#) from Relu’s *Sustainable Uplands: learning to manage future change* project tells the story of the UK uplands and gives people who live and work there a unique platform to express their views via a collection of video-clips, written accounts, photographs, audio material and artwork.

11. Relu met SUE, across the rural/urban divide

As part of initiatives to link Relu and its interdisciplinary research capacity with other research programmes, and to learn from and pass on lessons, researchers from Relu’s Adapting to Environmental Change projects met up with EPSRC’s £46m Sustainable Urban Environment (SUE) Programme in October. In a [joint workshop](#) they explored interdisciplinary programme management, research practices, and stakeholder engagement. The workshop was also a basis for developing new scientific agendas for strategic/joined up approach to land use, crossing the urban and rural divide, and to build links for future research.

12. Risk workshop in York

A workshop held on 3rd/4th November in York on risk and uncertainty in the context of animal and zoonotic disease management was an opportunity to showcase and discuss the work of three Relu funded projects: Reducing E coli Risk in Rural Communities (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/reluecoliproject/>); Assessment of Knowledge Sources in Animal Disease Control (<http://www.lec.lancs.ac.uk/cswm/LiT/po.php>); and Assessing and Communicating Animal Disease Risks for Countryside Users (<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-77CEKT>). Held over two days, the workshop involved presentations of findings from the projects and an exploration of their relevance and potential future applications. The first day included sessions on Decision-Making Frameworks, Risk Perception and Communication and a European perspective presented by Prof. Ekdahl from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The second day looked at Identifying Uncertainty, and Policy Relevance and Priorities for Future Research. [Workshop report](#)

13. Researchers brief Defra on the changing parameters of disease

Relu researchers have hosted two workshops on animal and plant disease for key stakeholders. "He who bears: a workshop on cost and responsibility sharing" was organised by the *Governance of Livestock Disease* project at Warwick University in October and attended by members of Defra's responsibility and cost sharing team, plus representatives from the NFU and the Horticultural Trades Association. At "Delivering disease prevention: insights from history" held at Defra's London offices in November as part of a series of internal Relu briefings within the department, Relu Interdisciplinary Fellow Abigail Woods outlined the history of state intervention in livestock health and revealed historical precedents to the current promotion of farm health planning.

14. New horizons for animal and plant disease from the Relu programme

A workshop on animal and plant disease management, involving key stakeholders and researchers from the Relu programme, will take place in London on Tuesday 10 May 2011. The event aims to identify key points for advancing policy from the research and to help shape the future research agenda in this field. For any further information or to book a place contact relu@ncl.ac.uk.

15. Who should run the countryside?

There will be a celebration of the achievements of the Relu Programme and an opportunity to look ahead at the future of rural areas on Wednesday 16 November 2011 at The Sage, Gateshead. The event will provide a forum to debate major questions about the future of the British countryside. Innovation in science, methodology and practice from the Relu programme will be on display and there will be opportunities for stakeholders and the wider community to take an active part in the day. Put the date in your diary and contact relu@ncl.ac.uk to be kept informed about plans for "Who should run the countryside?".

16. Lessons from collaborative land management

The Relu project 'Collaborative frameworks in Land Management' developed a participatory framework for promoting collaboration amongst neighbours and between policy-makers and practitioners to negotiate conflicts over deer management. That work showed the value of GIS maps for combining practitioner and scientific knowledge of natural resource issues across a landscape. The researchers have won additional funding to promote further knowledge exchange. This follow-on project is providing training, 'best practice' dissemination meetings and support to help officials and land managers in the Cairngorms and Cumbria. For more information contact Althea Davies (a.davies@macaulay.ac.uk).

17. Do policy placements for researchers make a difference?

Relu's workshadowing and visiting fellowships schemes have featured in a review of the role of Placement Fellowships in knowledge exchange between academe and public sector policymakers. The [review](#) was undertaken by the Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) programme and the University of Edinburgh.

18. Stakeholder participation in hydrology

Relu researcher Tobias Krueger is convening a session at the [European Geosciences Union General Assembly](#) in Vienna on 3-8 April, 2011. The past two decades have seen an increase in the involvement of stakeholders in hydrological research and the management of water resources. Arguments in favour include: broadening of the knowledge base, more transparent and democratic decision making, greater acceptance of decisions, and enhanced social learning and responsibility. The session will review the evidence for these claims, map ways stakeholder engagement has been taking place and capture the experience of researchers as it is emerging.

19. Valuing nature network

Relu researchers are leading a new interdisciplinary network for valuing biodiversity, ecosystem services and natural resource use, sponsored by NERC under the LWEC programme. Further information is available at: <http://www.valuing-nature.net>. The network principal investigator is Ian Bateman from the Relu project *Modelling the Impact of the Water Framework Directive* - <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Bateman.htm>.

20. On-farm Anaerobic Digestion commercially viable, but farmers put off by high cost of borrowing

A [report](#) on a farm-level economic modelling exercise conducted by the Centre for Agricultural Strategy at the University of Reading concluded that Anaerobic Digestion is economically viable on commercial arable and dairy farms in the UK. AD appears to be fairly resilient in the face of higher commodity prices. Lack of availability of gate fees is not a constraint to AD, but what does appear to be a constraint is the cost of borrowing. AD requires large capital investment, anything from £2-7k per kW, and on most farms this would require significant amounts of borrowing. The cost of servicing this borrowing is critical, with high interest rates putting many farmers off.

21. Big Society and rural communities

The aim of the Big Society, according to a speech from the Prime Minister, is “to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want”. In [The Big Society: helping communities take action](#), research from across the Rural Economy and Land Use programme makes a timely contribution to this agenda and builds on what we know about how to make community engagement successful.

22. Don't forget tree diseases

Invasive diseases now pose a serious threat to trees, woodland and native plants in the UK. Relu's latest policy and practice note [Memory and Prediction in tree disease control](#) investigates what lessons policymakers, scientists and the growing number of people and organisations with a stake in plant biosecurity, need to learn about previous tree disease epidemics when putting in place measures to anticipate and prevent future outbreaks.

23. Relu people

1. Yang Yu has left the Relu Data Support Service and will be moving to the USA in 2011. Thomas Ensom is replacing Yang and he may be contacted at temsom@essex.ac.uk. Thomas has a degree in Ecology and has just finished his MSc in Taxonomy and Conservation at Imperial College /Natural History Museum.
2. Jon Parke has taken over from Nicola O'Connor as the lead for the Foresight project on land use futures within BIS.
3. Stuart Lane has taken up a Chair at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland.
4. Helen Browning has been appointed as the new director of the Soil Association.
5. Frances Rowe of ONE North East, Jeremy Blackburn, Chris Kolek and Dirk Padoel of the Commission for Rural Communities, have been appointed Visiting Fellows to the Relu Programme.
6. Relu early career interdisciplinary fellow Althea Davies has moved to the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute (Aberdeen) to join a Relu Knowledge Exchange project on collaborative land management.
7. Tony Hams who is part of Relu's People and the Rural Environment Forum has been appointed a member of the Natural Environment White Paper Ministerial Advisory Panel.

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