

Press Release

11 November 2011

 **“X Factor” style science takes off in Gateshead**

Business people, policymakers and scientists will be voting for research projects “X factor” style at “*Who should run the countryside*?” a national conference being organised by the UK Research Councils’ Rural Economy and Land Use Programme.

**Members of the press are invited to attend the conference at The Sage, Gateshead on Wednesday 16 November 2011.**

The conference celebrates the achievements of a £25 million interdisciplinary programme investigating the challenges facing rural areas. Projects have been researching topics as diverse as the potential for farm-scale energy production, why endemic diseases persist in livestock, the implications of European legislation on water quality, how visitors to the countryside can be informed effectively about disease risks and much more.

As research comes to fruition, the programme has invited teams to enter a contest to decide the best examples of “impact” and of “innovative methodology”.

Stakeholders have been involved throughout in all the Relu projects. These are the people in the worlds of business and government policy who will be making use of the results. Carrying on this theme of involvement, a panel of stakeholders has shortlisted the finalists in the contest, and at the conference everyone will have the opportunity to watch films about the projects then vote to decide on the winners in each category.

Finalists are:

Best Example of Impact:

***Comparing the environmental, community and nutritional impacts of consuming fruit and vegetables produced locally and overseas***

This team of natural and social scientists looked at the concept of “food miles” and whether they were a useful means of measuring environmental impact. They found that although eating local produce in season is generally to be recommended, sometimes importing food can be more eco-friendly than growing it in this country. The findings have widely influenced thinking on this topic and been used by the World Bank in its recommendations on carbon labelling.

***Sustainable Uplands: learning to manage future change***

This project was designed to help upland communities understand the changes that are happening in our hills and what the options are for the future. The results have had impacts in economic and business contexts and been used by companies such as Yorkshire Water, Premier Waste Plc and United Utilities.

Best Example of Interdisciplinary Methodology and Scientific Innovation:

***Understanding Environmental Knowledge Controversies*: The Case of Flood Risk Management**

This project used a new technique of “competency groups” to involve people in working with scientists to model flood risk in their own localities. In Ryedale they used this technique to come up with a completely new approach to flood problems in the catchment.

***Catchment Management for Protection of Water Resources*: A Participatory Modelling Framework to Support Catchment Management**

This project defined a template of principles and approaches for integrated catchment management to improve water quality. They developed techniques to help inform residents about changes to water quality in their area.

Sir Howard Newby, Vice Chancellor of the University of Liverpool, who will be presenting the Relu Awards, said: “These awards represent an innovative example of citizen science in action. It has been a guiding principle of the Relu Programme that stakeholders should be an integral part of the research so it is entirely appropriate that they continue to play a key role in judging its impacts. The rural community is entitled to influence its own future and not just be passive participants in changes being generated elsewhere.”

Notes for editors:

 1 ***Who should run the countryside?***

***Celebrating the Relu Programme and looking ahead at the future of rural areas*** takes place from 10.15-17.00 hrs

Wednesday 16 November 2011

The Sage, Gateshead

Programme for the day is attached.

Presentation of the Relu Awards takes place at 16.30 hrs in Hall 2.

2 Click on the links for more information on the projects that made it to the finals:

[*Comparative assessment of environmental, community & nutritional impacts of consuming fruit and vegetables produced locally and overseas*](http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/First%20Call/Edwards-Jones.htm) The team is from Bangor and Surrey universities.

[*Sustainable Uplands: learning to manage future change*](http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Hubacek.htm)

The team is from the universities of Leeds, Aberdeen, Durham, Sheffield and Sussex and carried out the project in cooperation with Moors for the Future and the Heather Trust.

[*Understanding Environmental Knowledge Controversies*](http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Whatmore.htm): The Case of Flood Risk Management. The team is from the universities of Oxford, Durham, East Anglia and Newcastle.

[*Catchment Management for Protection of Water Resources*](http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/Third%20Call/Smith.htm)  A Participatory Modelling Framework to Support Catchment Management The team is from SOAS, and the University of East Anglia.

1. The Rural Economy and Land Use Programme is an interdisciplinary collaboration between the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), with additional funding provided by the Scottish Government and Defra. See [www.relu.ac.uk](http://www.relu.ac.uk) for more information about the Relu programme.
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