



Rural Economy and Land Use Programme

Harnessing the social and natural sciences for sustainable rural development

RELU NEWS

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<http://www.relu.ac.uk/>

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1. Impacts on the Rural Environment of Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive promises improvements in water quality but is likely to need large scale changes in agricultural land use. A number of strategies are under consideration to reduce contamination including significant reductions in fertiliser application rates, stocking densities and the area farmed. However, the actual extent of economic impacts and their consequences is uncertain. RELU researchers are embarking on an assessment of how improvements to water quality will affect farm production and incomes and produce wider amenity and recreational benefits. See: http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/cserge/pub/wp/edm/edm_2006_05.pdf
<http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/cserge/research/relu/index>

2. Do organic farmers need organic farming neighbours?

Switching from conventional to organic practices can have significant local impacts on wildlife, soil and water quality, as well as on the ways food is supplied and the economics of running a farm business. A factor that is little understood, and which is the focus of major new RELU research, is how these impacts depend on the scale and

concentration of alternative farming systems across the countryside. See: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/spru/scale>

3. The human factor in biodiverse farming

Variation in management practices between farms is known to be an important determinant of biodiversity. New RELU research is linking models of the dynamics of weed and bird populations and farm management decision making to understand this variability and determine the best ways of targeting agri-environment schemes to reverse the decline of wildlife in the countryside. See: <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Sutherland.htm>

4. More and more deer: a blessing or a blight?

Britain's deer population is growing, including non-native species that are spreading across the countryside. The effects are certainly not welcome by everyone, with increased concerns over road traffic accidents caused by deer, economic losses to forestry, agriculture and horticulture, competition with other wildlife, and potential risks to public health. Deer also present, as yet, unrealised potential for income generation from stalking, venison production and wildlife tourism. New RELU research is underway to investigate how well interests and organisations involved in deer management work together and how this can be improved. The management of deer provides an ideal case study on how to reconcile the different perspectives of those who make their living from the countryside, to make best use of the same ecological resource. See: <http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/RELU/index.html>

5. Composting waste and global warming

Premier Waste Ltd, the largest independent waste management company in the North East of England, is providing £103,000 of funding to develop a carbon balance model for composted wastes. This builds on RELU carbon modelling work at the University of Durham by Dr Fred Worrall. Further information is available at <http://www.env.leeds.ac.uk/sustainablelands/>

6. Does munching on wildflowers make for healthier meat?

Animal science researcher Kirsty Kliem from the RELU project "Implications of a Nutrition Driven Food Policy for the Countryside" has won first prize for her poster and presentation at the prestigious British Grassland Society 8th Research Conference. The poster 'Do biodiverse pastures have the potential to improve the fatty acid profile of ruminant meat?' can be viewed at <http://www.relu.rdg.ac.uk/>

7. Creating a common database for people and the rural environment

RELU has its own Data Support Service - the first one to operate across the Research Councils - to ensure that the different types of information (social and natural, quantitative and qualitative) from its projects are properly collected, managed and stored, so that they are available to other research users. A new booklet *Guidance on Data Management* has been produced. See <http://relu.esds.ac.uk/reluavg2006.pdf> and <http://relu.esds.ac.uk/>

8. RELU PEOPLE

a) Wanted: Science Communications Manager

Based at the Programme Director's Office, the Manager will play a lead role in developing and implementing RELU's communication activities, including: science writing for professional audiences; planning national events; liaising with researchers and stakeholders in devising dissemination strategies; and managing press and publicity. The post is for four years. For further details visit www.ncl.ac.uk/vacancies or call 0191 222 5085, quoting job ref D1529A. Closing date: 01/11/06.

b) Programme Director meets with Secretary of State

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, David Miliband met with Programme Director Professor Philip Lowe in July. The meeting covered the handling of rural affairs by Defra, the vision for a progressive rural policy, and new opportunities in the fields of rural economic development.

c) Lord Cameron joins RELU fora

Lord Ewen Cameron of Dillington, former Chairman of the Countryside Agency, has joined RELU's national stakeholder fora. Other new recruits include Helen Ferrier (National Farmers' Union), Chris Lewis (Fields Farm, Crewe), Howard Petch (Commission for Rural Communities), Linda Pooley (Scottish Executive) and David Macdonald (Council Member of Natural England). See membership details at: <http://www.relu.ac.uk/about/PREforum.htm> and <http://www.relu.ac.uk/about/foodchainforum.htm>

d) SEPA Head to set-up environment business

James Curran, Head of Strategic Planning at the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and Chair of the RELU People and the Rural Environment Forum, has left SEPA to set-up an environmental store, Entrading, in central Glasgow. We wish him well. James will continue to be involved in RELU.

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