

Farming Talk

Unleash the economic potential of woodland

The continual rain of 2012 after an initial period of drought and the cold spring this year have presented huge challenges to farmers up and down the country.

Whether the recent weather events are due to man-made climate change and a sign of things to come is anybody's guess. The fact is although the long-term outlook for farming looks positive, in order to survive short-term difficult years, farmers will have to diversify to support themselves during the leaner times.

I have always been a believer that every challenge provides an opportunity. One of the positive outcomes of the horsemeat scandal was that consumers have certainly shown more interest in where their food is produced and put pressure on supermarkets for increased transparency. In turn, the recent weather-related events may be a wake-up call for farmers to rethink options with regard to under-utilised assets on their land. Specifically, I am thinking "timber" for sale or used in-house.

MARTIN JONES

farming@shropshirestar.co.uk



I have written several articles about the extent of unmanaged farm woods that exist in the UK offering significant economic and environmental potential. It's not as if there is any ground-preparation work to do to get these woods established. The trees are already growing there and most of the woods are overstocked with suppressed and biomass-grade trees that require thinning to allow natural regeneration to occur.

Imagine growing a crop of wheat or barley and leaving it unharvested? Why should trees be in any different? Historically, this is probably due to what has been referred to as a lack of "woodland culture" in Britain and the overwhelming drive and focus for the country to become self-sufficient in food as well as a number of other

reasons (economics, lack of woodland management training, industrial revolution etc.), hence the reason why the media talks so much about "food security" in Britain. Nobody ever seems to talk about "timber security".

However, recently I do think the culture has begun to shift somewhat, against a background of rising timber prices, ground-breaking developments in home-grown softwood technology in the form of timber-frame design and construction (brettstapel), the Renewable Heat Incentive and the falling pound against the euro and Swedish krona (making timber imports from Sweden and the eurozone more expensive than home-grown timber). All these factors are giving cause for optimism and that's why we are now seeing a shimmering of political will, too, on the horizon.

Earlier this year, the government developed its response to the independent panel's report of July 2012 for the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England. The Grown in Britain campaign is putting together the creation

and implementation of a Wood Industry Action Plan together with the forestry sector.

Now, at last, there does appear to be some support for an industry-led, market-driven initiative – one in which the government recognises it has an important part to play in establishing the conditions required for business and society to invest in increased levels of woodland management and creation by raising the profile and demand for British-grown timber. Let's see whether and what it can deliver.

If you are a farmer with woodland on your property, concerned about a loss of income, then tapping into the economic potential of your woodland may prove a very useful back-up. It really is a no brainer.

Martin B. Jones is a Member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters and Managing Director of the Woodland Stewardship Company based in Shrewsbury

Groups can bid for a share of funding pot

Report by Iain St John
istjohn@shropshirestar.co.uk

COMMUNITY groups and projects based in villages near Oswestry have until June 7 to apply for money from the first round of the Five Perry Parishes Local Joint Committee (LJC) funding.

The local joint committee covers various villages including Whittington, West Felton, Hordley, Ruyton-XI-Towns and Baschurch.

More than £4,000 was awarded to community groups and projects when the committee met on March 21 at Hordley Village Hall, with a remaining balance being ring-fenced for priority youth projects.

Funding awarded in the last round included £500 to the Ruyton-XI-Towns Broadplace project, £1,084 for the Baschurch Heartbeat Scheme and £302 for Baschurch Creaky Chairs Group.

Perry Riding School was awarded £485 for Perry Riding School, £500 for Heritage Open Days and £1,250 for The Corbet School's safety and signage project.

Enhance

The committee has an annual budget of £14,000 for community and voluntary groups to bid into for projects that look to enhance and benefit the local community.

The next round of funding will be awarded at the committee's next meeting to be held on July 9 with the venue to be confirmed in due course.

Applications must be received by June 7 in order to be considered at this meeting.

Further funding rounds will be awarded at the committee's future meetings in 2013/14, with dates to be confirmed in due course.

Councillor Steve Charmley, vice-chairman of the Five Perry Parishes LJC, said: "These meetings are a great opportunity for us to get together with our communities, to hear about new groups and activities and to better understand the priorities for our residents.

"By working closely with our communities, it allows us the chance to use our allocated budget to benefit local people, clubs, organisations and voluntary groups.

"The meetings also provide a forum for us to hear people's views and listen to any concerns that residents may have.

"We had some fantastic updates from those applicants who have previously been awarded grants, including Boreatton Scouts, Baschurch Bowling Club and the Perry Riding School – all providing wonderful opportunities for young people in the area."

Brew to aid fund

A coffee morning in Telford on Saturday will raise money for an organisation which runs a safe space for clubbers.

Sanktuary is hosting the coffee morning and cake sale from 10am to noon at Wellington Methodist Church to raise money towards the flip-flops it gives out to girls struggling in high heels after a night in Wellington's night clubs.

Marina is making ready for festival



Joint organiser Rodney Cottrell, left, and Audlem Lass skipper Campbell Ward preparing for the Audlem RNLi Festival

A marina on the Shropshire Union Canal will be the setting for a charity event this weekend.

The Audlem RNLi Festival is being held on Saturday and Sunday at the award-winning Overwater Marina, near Market Drayton.

The event will feature an 'around the island' raft race, while Cheshire Fire and Rescue will be demonstrating water rescues and promoting safety.

There will also be craft and boating stalls, galley cookery demonstrations, and a narrow boaters' Question Time session.

Nantwich vets will be hosting a pet show with all pets welcome, while animal lovers will also be able to enjoy a dog

Report by James Pugh

james.pugh@shropshirestar.co.uk

agility course and bird of prey and falconry displays.

Wyecraft Swing Band will be performing on the evening of June 1 and on the following day the 22-piece Rode Hall Brass Band will be playing in the afternoon.

Organisers say over the last two years Overwater Marina and the Audlem Lass Boat Service has raised £8,500 for the RNLi and are looking forward to this year's family event.

Rodney Cottrell, of the Audlem Lass Boat Service and event organiser, said:

"We are so pleased to be able to bring all these people together for a fun event at such a wonderful marina and I hope it raises loads of money for the RNLi so they can carry on their valuable job of saving lives."

Overwater Marina Ltd has received the South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce Best Start Up Business of 2011 Award, the Marine Industry Environment Award 2011, Five Gold Anchors in the Yacht Harbour Association Gold Anchor Scheme, and the ICOMIA Clean Marina Award.

It was also shortlisted for the Trinity Mirror Cheshire Business Awards 2012 – Best Start Up Business.

Welsh farming leaders say report ignores work

A key report from environmental organisations which says more must be done to protect the nation's biodiversity fails to take into account the work done by farmers, Welsh farm union bosses have said.

NFU Cymru bosses were commenting after the release of the State of Nature report, launched by a group of environmental organisations, which suggests 60 per cent of species studied in the report have declined over recent years.

Farm bosses said they were surprised by the findings and said it was unfair to blame the decline on farmers.

NFU Cymru president Ed Bailey said: "Many farmers and visitors to the countryside will be surprised about the report's findings given the huge effort farmers now place on managing the environment.

"The public needs to recognise the good work that is happening on farms, including the massive changes to the Common Agri-

cultural Policy which are now set to go even further over the next seven years.

"If we take farmland birds for example, there are many influencing factors that also affect these, including; extreme weather, predators and urbanisation.

"Populations of specialist farmland species, the goldfinch and the whitethroat have also increased and the red kite's population in Wales is a story in itself.

"Birds like the hen harrier and black

grouse are also bucking the trend here unlike in other areas of the UK.

"Efforts by farmers towards meeting the Water Framework Directive have also had a positive impact on river habitats, with many now thriving. An example of this is the increasing signs of otters in Wales.

"Farmers can be relied upon to conserve the natural environment so long as we are provided with the right opportunities, information and incentives to do so."

STAR BRIEFING

Young sleuth wins top prize

A six-year old Shropshire boy outfoxed his rivals to win first prize in a treasure hunt which took place in four different counties.

Young Jack Sumner, from Market Drayton, used his sleuthing skills to win first prize in a competition organised by the Leek United Building Society.



Jack Sumner

Children in Shropshire, Cheshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire were encouraged to take part in the hunt which involved tracking Leek United's mascot Humphrey the Camel through a town centre.

The Shropshire challenge was held in Market Drayton with Jack the first youngster to follow a trail of clues which led him from shop to shop.

By solving the series of cryptic questions, he was able to discover the seven stores visited by Humphrey, each of which carried his picture in their front windows.

And not only did Jack win first prize at Leek United's Market Drayton branch, he was also picked out as the overall winner of the competition claiming a first prize of a giant Easter egg and a £25 voucher.

Karen Furnival, manager of the Market Drayton branch, said: "A big well done to Jack, he did really well, and we are really grateful to all the shops – Sweets & Treats, Heart to Heart, Craft & Play, Butterfly Daisy, Tuesdays, Tiny Tots and Drayton Deli – who supported the competition and made it possible."

Dignity pledge by care provider

A Telford-based care provider has signed a declaration vowing to put the dignity of the people it supports at the heart of its ethos.

Award-winning complex care provider The Complete Group, which has its head offices in Hawksworth Road in Telford town centre, has highlighted its commitment to maintaining the dignity of people by signing up as a Dignity Champion.

Nationally, there are more than 40,000 Dignity Champions, both organisations and individuals.

Led by the National Dignity Council, Dignity Champions aim to put dignity and respect at the heart of UK care services.

Complete's managing director Sally Yandle said: "Being treated with dignity is not an optional extra, it's a basic human right. For us, it is not enough that care services are efficient. They must be compassionate, too.

"At Complete, our goal is to provide the person-centred care that we would like to receive for ourselves or a loved one, should we ever need it.

"We've been providing complex care since 1996 and have been a champion for dignity every day since then. That's why we're proud to be an official Dignity Champion."

Students track meat from field to fork

Students at a Mid Wales college visited an abattoir to view the production of meat from field to fork.

Catering and hospitality students from Coleg Powys, Newtown, were given food for thought during a recent visit to Randall Parker Foods, near Llanidloes.

The students were able to view the food production process, from hoof to plate, in an educational visit to the meat processing plant. The abattoir, which deals with beef and lamb reared at the college's Fronlas Farm, serves a range of markets in the UK and abroad, slaughtering and processing meat for Morrison's and Waitrose supermarkets.

Lecturer Chris Yapp said: "About 3,000 lambs went through the plant that day.

"During the visit the learners were able to see the whole process from field to fork, from stunning to the transporting of the end product.

"This was with particular relevance to the lamb and beef from the college farm."

Free concert booked for Methodist church

The last in a series of May concerts will take place at a church in Whitchurch tomorrow.

St John's Methodist Church has run the concerts at noon every Wednesday throughout the month as part of a campaign to raise £500,000 for a new roof and improvement work to the building.

The concerts are free to attend but organisers are asking for donations towards the Church Redevelopment Project.

The Grade II listed building has hosted the annual May midday concerts every year for about 10 years.

The final concert will be performed by an instrumental group with local musicians Christopher Jones on piano and organ, Elaine Gollins on oboe and John Gunton on violin.

The concert will start at noon in the church and will last for about 45 minutes. It will be followed by a ploughman's lunch.

For more information, contact the church on (01948) 665925 or (01948) 667282.