

GRAZING FORUM MEETING – 17/01/2008
NT Regional Office, Westley Botton

Present: Victoria Perry (NE), Jenny Hawley (NT), Mike Mack (NRBAS), Mike Richardson (EBLEX), Alison Smyth (NT), Roger Gerry (NE), Henry Walker (FWAG), Debbie Gosman (NE)

Apologies: Caroline Cranbrook (Chair), Nick Saltmarsh(EAFL), Paul Wilkingson (WLT), Martin Collison (EEDA), Mike Render (FC) Jim Egan (FWAG) Jim Swanson (GAP), Jane Burch (CLA)

Format of meetings – discussed in the light of small number attending this meeting. It was suggested that it is difficult for many to reserve a whole day and half day meetings may therefore be preferred, but role of group felt to be more important than ever particularly over coming months with main task of putting together a bid for RDPE funding. Also need to address the funding situation for GAP in the near future. New member Bridget Borlase will be joining the forum and will bring valuable experience of livestock farming and meat marketing.

RDPE Bid preparation – A sub group of Forum members met with EEDA representatives on Jan 6 to look at the structure and work required to prepare a bid. Chris Knock, (formally ADER) will lead on livestock, skills and local food elements in all RDPE bids.

At the present time the process for submitting a bid are still being developed but EEDA would prefer one coordinated bid to be submitted for the region's red meat sector (though others may be considered if demonstrated) As we understand it there would be one main project that acted as an umbrella for other smaller projects. (it would appear that projects would have to have a minimum of 10 beneficiaries). How the process will work was unclear, particularly re linking up with other bids and what details will be released to other applicants, so there is a risk of wasted effort unless this can be clarified. To submit a bid the Forum will either need to develop its standing as a legal entity or one member could take on overall responsibility. MR felt that EBLEX would only be able to take responsibility in areas of the bid that are also objectives for EBLEX. MM said that it may be possible for NRBAS to take on this role but he would need to check available resources first.

ACTION: MM, VP, MR to meet with Chris Knock to establish how to take forward.

It is important that the bid goes beyond what is already in place as EEDA will not want to fund existing activity. It was noted that RMIF funding will cease in the near future and that there may be items to pick up from that. Levy funds from EBLEX could be used as match funding alongside in kind contributions for the RDPE bid.

Priorities for the bid are seen as supporting existing and new graziers through benchmarking, training (esp. in livestock handling), veterinary medicine/health plans, extending the slaughterhouse network, and developing marketing. DG felt that

making the link with importance of grazing to tourism in the region should also be included as this was very poorly developed in Norfolk especially. A network of demonstration farms could be developed to incorporate best practice in many areas of interest. It would be more effective to identify and develop existing good examples, e.g. EBLEX have some trial sites in operation for outwintering techniques. AS suggested NT's Wimpole site where a plan exists to integrate processing and marketing on site which might be encouraged with the chance of new funding.

ACTION: VP to ask Forum members for additional points to be included in the bid.

Start Date - MM suggested we should aim for early Summer 2008 as a starting point for the programme so that it would be possible to get events in place for winter 08/09.

Milestones - Priorities (as mentioned above) for each year need to be listed as the programme milestones . Some additional points that could be included if the scope allows are: promoting use of lesser cuts to consumer/enhancing returns on these to farmers, improving consumer information of origin, enhancing supply chain understanding, assessing financial viability of a contract grazing system.

Project Costs – Need to look at use of in kind funding and also investigate matching with use of other funding streams (e.g. Interreg).

Project Option Analysis – The bid needs to demonstrate that alternative approaches have been considered besides those actually proposed in the bid.

NE subproject updates

Wash Saltmarsh Beef – RG reported that the information gathering visits to saltmarsh graziers in support of the Wash Estuary Group's proposal had now been completed and summarised. The findings suggest that potential for a coordinated saltmarsh beef brand is low although some potential could exist for smallscale individual direct marketing to customers. The findings will be reviewed with the Wash Estuary Project Officer.

Undergrazing Research – DG reported that phase 3 of the research on environmental impacts of undergrazing is now underway, despite the very limited NE funds available. DG asked Forum members to consider whether they would be prepared to contribute to ensure completion. MM suggested including this within the RDPE bid as essential project development work.