

Rural and Farming Network

Ask and Offer document

Date: March 2012

1. Context

Ministers are seeking light-touch engagement with representatives from the farming, food and rural affairs sectors in different parts of rural England.

An initial steer from ministers has prompted discussions around the country about the scope to establish self-supporting sub-national groups

There is evidence of an appetite for this type of activity and a request from businesses and community organisations that Defra is as explicit as possible about its 'ask' and its 'offer'.

2. The Defra 'ask'

Ministers would like to see individuals and organisations from the farming, food and rural affairs sectors come together at a sub-national level:

- to provide a basis for effective two way communication between the Minister and broad rural interests throughout the country
- to discuss issues of common interest and learn from each others' experience.

Ministers will be looking for evidence that these groups encourage participation from the farming and food sectors and from those representing broader community, environmental and business interests within the locality and that no one sector or voice is dominant.

The geographical area covered should be sufficiently large to enable the group to take a strategic view of issues and potential solutions – as a guide to scale, Defra is envisaging that the national Rural and Farming Network will consist of 10 - 20 groups.

3. The Defra 'offer'

Groups which meet the broad criteria described above will be invited to join the Defra Rural and Farming Network.

Wherever practicable, Defra Ministers visiting a locality will arrange to meet representatives of any recognised group operating in the area.

Groups will be provided with a named contact within Defra and given access to agreed channels of communication which will enable information/concerns from that locality to be provided to Defra ministers and responses/policy updates to be fed back.

Defra and its agencies will seek to respond positively to requests for input into workshops, conferences and other events organised by the groups.

Defra Ministers will meet with the Chairs of the Rural and Farming Network at least once a year to discuss issues of strategic significance to all rural areas and to review the operation of the network.

A key feature will be that when necessary chairmen of the groups will be able to speak direct to Ministers and similarly Ministers can pick up a phone for direct advice on the ground.

4. Next steps

This document, launched on 11 April, will provide a framework for discussions about the formation of groups at a sub-national level.

Defra officials stand ready to participate in these discussions when requested by the organisers.

Initial expressions of interest from groups wishing to be recognised as members of the Network are invited by 31 July 2011.

The aim is for the Network to be operating by September 2011, although complete coverage of the country is unlikely to be achieved at this stage.

Defra will encourage and respond on an ongoing basis to expressions of interest from groups in those parts of the country not currently represented in the Network.

Defra's Farming and Food Chain Programme and Rural Communities Policy Unit will provide a joint secretariat to support the development and operation of the Rural and Farming Network. Inquiries, invitations to local meetings and expressions of interest in joining the Network should be sent to [\[ruralandfarmingnetwork@defra.gsi.gov.uk\]](mailto:ruralandfarmingnetwork@defra.gsi.gov.uk).

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