

UNITED KINGDOM

Promoting
knowledge and
improving human
potential

Location

Abersystwyth

Programming period

2007 - 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 1 – Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector

Measure

M111 - Vocational training and information actions

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 18 500
EAFRD 10 175

Project duration

JUL 2014 – NOV 2014

Project promoter

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Welsh rural development competition inspires innovation among young sheep farmers

Summary

A farming organisation from Wales in the United Kingdom used RDP funds to help implement a 'Farmer Enterprise Competition'. The livestock husbandry contest was organised to encourage young farmers to experiment with innovative methods for rearing local sheep breeds.



Competition organisers provided both the lambs (of the same breed) and the land (on the same research farm). Teams of candidates did not need to deal with the day-to-day husbandry of the animals but they had full responsibility for the grazing strategies, animal health planning, use of Information technology, and lamb selection etc. A panel of specialist judges was also recruited by the project to follow the teams' progress.

Results

Winning teams won their prize for their achievements in sound cropping decisions.

The results were analysed and widely publicised through regional farm advisory services. This helped the knowledge and innovations gained to reach and benefit a broad range of livestock farmers.

Lessons

- ❑ The competition confirmed the potential for rural development projects like this to strengthen the innovation, cooperation, and husbandry skills of the next generation of EU farmers.
- ❑ The competition showed that there is no 'right or wrong' system of lamb production and in fact it is the management of that system that makes the difference.
- ❑ A number of specific technical lessons from the husbandry trials were also identified.

Context

One way of helping to encourage good use of public funding in rural areas is to run competitions that inspire people to think about what they could do to improve their economic, environmental, and social circumstances. Results from such competitions can not only generate benefits for those submitting their entries for new products and processes, but the knowledge gained can also be transferred to help others learn about different opportunities.

Objectives

Project outcomes were expected to increase new knowhow about improved sheer husbandry techniques that could help improve the competitiveness of local sheep farms. The competition would also help improve the business skills of young farmers and promote the benefits of cooperation because the competition was implemented using teams of farmers.

Activities

A farming organisation from Wales used RDP funds to help implement a 'Farmer Enterprise Competition'. The livestock husbandry contest was organised to encourage young farmers to experiment with innovative methods for rearing local sheep breeds. The competition was launched in 2013 and also received RDP funding in 2014. Competition organisers provided the lambs (of the same breed) and the land (on the same research farm) - in order to ensure a 'level playing field'.

Contestants teams were tasked to agree and apply a livestock husbandry strategy for rearing 50 lambs on 2.5 hectares of upland fields. The teams did not need to deal with the day-to-day husbandry of the animals but they had full responsibility for the grazing strategies, animal health planning, use of Information technology, and lamb selection etc. A panel of specialist judges was also recruited by the project to follow the teams' progress. They established assessment criteria that included examining the teams' success in: choice and management of fodder crops; production costs; and the weight gained by lamb flocks.

Key results

Winning teams won their prize for their achievements in

sound cropping decisions.

Analysis of all the results was subsequently written up and widely publicised through regional farm advisory services. This helped the knowledge and innovations gained from the RDP-funded competition to reach and benefit a broad range of livestock farmers.

Lessons and recommendations

Valuable lessons were learned from all the competitors' ideas as well as from the context itself. The competition confirmed the potential for rural development projects like this to strengthen the innovation, cooperation, and husbandry skills of the next generation of EU farmers.

A key finding was the conclusion that there is no 'right or wrong' system of lamb production and in fact it is the management of that system that makes the difference.

Some specific lessons from the husbandry trials also included:

- Knowing your land is essential to target nutrients and cultivation accordingly.
- Welsh mountain lambs can be controlled by electric fencing, but introducing them to the fence prior to putting them on the crops would have been beneficial.
- Rotational grazing or controlled grazing with electric fences has increased crop utilisation which was critical on a dry season.
- It was small production costs that added up to a significant difference in lamb profitability. Scaling this up to a farm level shows the importance of knowing and recording costs and outputs on an on-going basis.
- Electronic identification proved valuable in order to monitor lamb growth rates so that management decisions can be implemented immediately.

"The Farmer Enterprise Competition brings together essential business and innovation principles... and demonstrates the importance of mentoring and knowledge transfer. It shows how important and beneficial it is to adopt an enterprising, business-like and strategic approach to farming and emphasises the clear benefits of animal health planning, benchmarking and using Information Technology."

Rebecca Evans, Deputy Minister for Farming & Food for Wales, UK

Additional sources of information

- <http://cms.menterabusnes.co.uk/resources/838.pdf>
- <http://cms.menterabusnes.co.uk/resources/789.pdf>