



CRC 07/09

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‘People power’ can make the most of £3.9 billion rural fund, inaugural Leader event told

Local Action Groups (LAGs) across the country are urged to share best practice and pool skills, in order to make the most of a share of a £3.9 billion rural boost between now and 2013.

The rallying cry is being made at the first ever Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Network event held in Birmingham on 18 and 19 March and is designed to support LAGs in delivering RDPE grants to best benefit local people.

At the heart of the event is the desire to use the local knowledge of the LAGs to ensure key issues in villages and towns are tackled and opportunities exploited so that the quality of life in rural areas can be improved, competitiveness increased and jobs safeguarded and created.

Rebecca Frost, Programme Manager of the newly-formed RDPE Network, picked up the story: “Funded by the EU and UK Government, RDPE funds a range of schemes for land based businesses (farmers, growers, foresters and primary processors), rural tourism organisations, rural businesses and community organisations. Through small capital grants, strategic investment funding and action plans, the programme will aim to safeguard and enhance the countryside, helping communities to thrive.”

She continued: “Today’s conference has been shaped by the LAGs and the organisations that they work with and is the first time we have been able to get all 64 of them together. We will be discussing the important role they play and how we can provide mutual support in implementing the ‘Leader’ approach to ensure they retain the funding available to them.”

‘Leader’ basically enables a ‘bottom up’, community-led approach to delivery of RDPE funding in rural areas and will be implemented through LAGs, which represent public and private partners and local interest groups.

Local Action Groups have developed Local Development Strategies that will set out their plans and include criteria for the types of projects that can be supported.

“Leader will provide a more integrated approach to making decisions on who gets funding, focusing on adding value to existing local assets and ensuring economic potential is retained, whether that is food produce or heritage features, for example.”

The RDPE Network, which is managed by the Commission of Rural Communities, has been created to support the implementation of the programme through the exchange of experience, good practice and lessons learnt.

The event will provide an insight into projects that are already working and how they can be replicated across the rest of England, with future activities in the pipeline for later in the year.

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes to editors:

1 Further details about the 'RDPE Network – The Leader Approach' taking place at the Aston conference Centre, Birmingham on 18 and 19 March 2009 can be found at:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/draft%20programme.pdf

2 The RDPE Network is being set up, in line with the European Union Rural Development Regulation, to support the implementation and evaluation of the RDPE through the exchange of good practice and experience.

Although many networks related to rural development already exist in England, the RDPE Network will work with and build on, what is already in place, in order to provide support to the implementation of the RDPE overall.

Similarly, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, networks are also being put in place to support their respective rural development programmes.

At a UK level, a UK National Rural Network is being developed to link the four rural development programme networks in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This will also provide a direct link to the European Commission and other networks across Europe.

3 The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has been asked by Defra to co-ordinate the establishment, development and operation of both the RDPE Network and the UK National Rural Network. This work will complement and use the CRC's ongoing activities to identify and promote lessons learnt and good practice and learn from international best practice.

The CRC is well placed to carry out this role, having responsibility to provide:

- the voice for rural people, businesses and communities;
- evidence-based, objective advice to Government and others; and
- monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.