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AGRI-BIP NEWSLETTER

As I write (mid July) this glorious spell of hot weather is enabling farmers to catch up on silage and haymaking. Is it me or is there more hay being made this year? A combination of less animals and more expensive silage wrap could be the answer. Non-farming residents travelling through the countryside would wrongly assume that all is well within agriculture. Appearances can be deceptive!

TB continues to spread causing all cattle keeper's stress that they could do without. Prices for most agricultural products are below those of last year and the increase in oil price has caused big price rises in many agricultural inputs, fuel, fertiliser, sprays, etc. These combined together cause pressure on farm profits. Many farmers will wonder how much of the Single Payment will be left (when it finally arrives, Defra having lengthened the payment target date to March 2006 and I suspect will fail to meet this target) to live on or to invest in or outside of the farm business.

What has surprised me recently is the number of farmers who are yet to consider the Environmental Schemes that were launched in the spring. I know that the situation with application forms and mapping is such a mess that many people are tearing their hair out but there is money there to be had at a time when every farm business needs it. We are continuing to run two workshops to help landowners to understand and apply for these schemes.

Firstly, an awareness session discussing all aspects of the schemes and virtually all participants then decide to apply for one or other of the schemes. Secondly, when farmers finally have their maps and application forms, a workshop to cover the completion of the forms, a discussion as to what options are available, then each farmer has a chance to enter their preferred options into a computer programme to see what points they can get.

Almost all farmers achieve their target points much easier than they first thought. Remember 10% of the points/money is for the form filling and a further 10% is available for a Soil Management Plan that all Single Payment Scheme applicants will need to have in 2006 (this plan need not be written at the application stage and Agri-BIP will run events on Soil Management Planning later in the year). If you are yet to consider Environmental Stewardship look at it now. It is partly your modulation monies and its income with little expense, at a time when profitable enterprises are hard to find. Please give us a call if you want to learn more.

**Stewart Horne
Agri-BIP Manager**

Support for Diversification

The Rural Enterprise Scheme provides support for new business activity in land based businesses, Agri-BIP can assist you obtain this support. Grant support is possible throughout the South West. Give us a call to discuss your idea.

In West Devon we can offer support to **anyone** thinking of a new business venture through our pre start service. Whatever your idea for a business, run it past us and find out what help is available.

Further, if your business has just started and is under 12 months of age we can offer an intensive support service with our start up expert, Brian Watson. If its marketing, sourcing supplies, distribution, premises, tax, VAT, whatever, is causing a headache give us a call and we can help with this **free of charge** service.

Marketing Seminar

We recently ran a very successful marketing seminar at our Okehampton Offices. The attendees went away full of new ideas to improve their marketing skills to attract new customers and increase their profits.

We are planning a similar event on a farm near Holsworthy where the farmer has started to market his beef using a box method to customers in the South East of England.

Again, marketing expert, Catherine Oates will examine the methods that can be used to make a success of this new business venture.

The date is yet to be fixed but we anticipate towards the end of August. Please ring to register your interest as places are limited.

Environmental Stewardship Scheme

If you are undecided about making an application, want to know more about the schemes and how they would fit your farm and business, we are running a number of workshops across the region during the evenings.

These meetings are scheduled for 7.30pm.

Thursday 4th August – The Kings Arms, Kingsbridge

Tuesday 9th August – WDBIP, Okehampton

Tuesday 16th August – Eagle House, Launceston

Thursday 18th August – Axewater – On-Farm ELS meeting - TBC

Tuesday 23rd August – Crown & Sceptre, Holsworthy

Thursday 25th August – Treswarrow Park Farm, St Endellion, North Cornwall, On-Farm ELS meeting (7.00pm)

We are also running a series of small workshops to assist people putting together applications. We will help with the completion of the forms, maps and points calculation.

If you are interested in attending application workshops, do call us in the office to register your interest as soon as you have received your correct application packs. We will then schedule a workshop to suit you.

These workshops are funded by the South West of England Land Based Colleges VTS Programme, there is a small charge of £10 including VAT to attend.

Set Aside Update

Many farmers will be undertaking set aside for the first time this year so I thought it would be useful to include some of the critical dates that will affect your set aside land.

Between the 15th July and 15th August all set aside land must be cut and from the 15th July the sowing of crops for harvest in 2006 is permitted. These crops however, must be harvested in 2006. For example a crop of kale or stubble or rape, stubble turnips, can be sown over the next few weeks for eating next year.

31st August is the end of the set aside period and farmers are then able to graze or cut any materials grown on set aside land for use in 2006.

Looking ahead to 2006, if you have land in 6-10 metre strips or intend to have land in set aside in 2006 in 6-10 metre strips, this area must be sown and established a green cover prior to the 15th January 2006. A point to bear in mind for future set aside options is the availability of points under Entry Level Scheme for the addition of wild bird flower seed to set aside land. For those of you with set aside this is a useful option that can gain a significant number of points by enhancing the environmental benefit on the set aside land.

HELP – farms wanted

Agri-BIP is seeking host farms who are willing to allow us to hold a half day information sessions on the following subjects on their farm:

- Environmental Stewardship including Entry Level Scheme and the Organic Entry Level Scheme. The host farms need not necessarily have successfully applied to join to the schemes but may be undecided as to whether they wish to join or not and the day's discussions will look at the options open to farmers and how they can be integrated into the farming system on that farm.
- Soil Management – Soil Management Plans will become increasingly important over the next year or so and we would like to offer a practical discussion on how you can assess soil management issues on farm.
- Grassland Management – the pressure of livestock enterprises continues especially in the beef sector and as far as we can see the one key card that southwest farmers have is the ability to grow high quality grass. The challenge is to utilise it effectively in systems that can return a profit.
- Finally the whole issue of enterprise costings and what enterprises make a profit and which ones do not will be critical over the next few months as cash flows increasingly come under pressure with the delay in paying the Single Payment and the long-term erosion of the value of that payment.

If you would like to discuss with us the possibility of us using your farm as a host venue please contact the office and we will discuss it with you.

Okehampton Show – Thursday 11th August 2005

Where do farmers fit in the UK economy and how will they earn a living in the future?

As a departure from Agri-BIP's usual show offering, we are presenting an Agri-BIP view of a typical farm business in three to four years time at Okehampton Show. Running twice during the day at 11.30am and 2.30pm, the presentation and the following discussions will cover what sources of income will be important in the future, what will you be growing and raising on a typical Devon farm, who will you be selling to, what changes in inputs can you expect.

- What price beef?
- What type of animal should I be producing?
- How do I reduce my fuel costs?
- Can I reduce my fertiliser bill?
- Should I market my own farm produce?
- Will environmental schemes be profitable?
- Quantity or quality or both?

Obviously this will involve a lot of crystal ball gazing, but the signs are there for a number of options already. Now is the time to be thinking about your business in the future, remember the Single Payment Scheme is barely in place and yet the politicians are squabbling over the budgets, which fund it.

Join us on our stand for an interesting and stimulating debate. I look forward to meeting you there.

Newsletter Distribution

Many thanks to the hundreds of replies to our request for e-mail and fax numbers, which will enable us to continue distributing the newsletter in a much more efficient way.

Thanks also to those people who have offered to pay for continued mail distribution, this is not something that we are considering at the moment but may have to consider, if large numbers are needed to be sent by post.

Please, please could all those who have not yet replied do so as soon as possible, return the sheet to the office or fax or e-mail to team@bipwestdevon.biz

Opportunity for Fruit and Vegetable Growers

As you may be aware the **School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme**, SFVS, was introduced in the South West in November 2004 and 95% of eligible primary schools are currently in the scheme. That's 160,000 four-six year olds receiving a piece of fruit or vegetable every school day with a potential for 170,000.

The aim of the scheme is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among children and to contribute to a reduction in the risk of heart disease and cancer in later life. There is a real market opportunity for growers to secure contracts with the NHS, which can last up to three years and Andy Berry, Rural Development Adviser at Government Office for the South West, is very keen to ensure **the maximum number of local growers and associated businesses benefit from the SFVS market opportunity**. The minimum criteria are that the grower has to be assured registered or equivalent.

Currently the scheme supplies apples, pears, bananas, easy peel citrus, carrots and strawberries and there are cucumber and sugar-snap pea trials underway.

The NHS use the Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA), who award contracts for the scheme and there is useful information for suppliers, distributors, parents and so on, on the [Scheme](#) website. There is a Q&A sheet for new suppliers, which may be particularly interesting; I have attached this for your information.

If you have further queries about the scheme, please contact Andy Berry on Tel: 0117 900 1928 Mob:07795333418
Email: aberry.gosw@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk

Practical IT Skills for Farm Businesses

A number of Agri-BIP clients have attended IT training days over the last few months on a wide variety of subjects including Word, spreadsheets, the use of the Internet and email. Many of these people are now coming back to have a third days training on how to implement these new skills within their farm business.

These half day workshops cover a number of subjects including the keeping of farm financial records, using spreadsheets, the use of the spreadsheet to assist with VAT returns, the production of cash flows, the production of soil management plans and the general use of the internet for research and for electronic communications, including the British Cattle Movement Service. We would now like to open up these days to any other interested farmers who may have some IT skills already but would like to take advantage of the time saving that can be achieved using computers.

Every participant attending will be given a template on disk to take home to us in their business; follow up support is available to the majority of people through our projects.

The schedule for the next few weeks is detailed below. If you have any queries give us a call or to book a place ring 0800 592 872. If you cannot attend the venues below but would like an event organised in your area (Penzance to Gloucester and all areas in between) let us know and we will get it set up.

All workshops start at 10.00am until approximately 4.00pm.

Thursday 28th July – WDBIP, Okehampton – *Financial Record Keeping on Computer and Use of the Internet for Farm Business Training*

Thursday 4th August – Teignbridge Business Centre, Heathfield, Newton Abbot – *Financial Record Keeping on Computer and Use of the Internet for Farm Business Training*

Tuesday 9th August – WDBIP, Okehampton – *Cashflows, VAT and Soil Management Training*

Tuesday 16th August – The Barnstaple Hotel, Barnstaple – *Financial Record Keeping and Soil Management Training*

Tuesday 23rd August – Teignbridge Business Centre, Heathfield, Newton Abbot – *Cashflows, VAT and Soil Management Training*

DISCLAIMER

Every effort has been taken to ensure the information contained in these notes is correct, however, West Devon Business Information Point will not be liable for any loss arising from the use of these notes or any omissions or errors contained within.

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