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Start planning ahead for new grant funding

With over £3 billion of new grant funding for farmers and rural businesses on the horizon, agricultural business consultants Brown & Co are urging farmers in North Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire to start planning ahead.

At the end of May, the Government sent its final proposals to the EU for ratification of the new Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE). These new funding streams will be an important lifeline for agriculture, forestry and the rural economy over the next 6-7 years.

Assuming all goes smoothly in Europe, the new programme is expected to start in late 2007. This will replace previous schemes such as the Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing and Vocational Training schemes.

The majority of these new DEFRA funds will be administered via the Regional Development Agencies – the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) and Yorkshire Forward – and will focus activities on local and regional priorities.

“Areas which have been prioritised in North Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire include local food and drink, renewables, diversification and collaboration,” says Philip Dunn. “There will also be specific measures to assist with business start-ups and business improvements in rural areas.

“This is great news for all those involved in the rural economy. There is still some time to wait for the funding doors to open, however now is the time to start planning. Indeed, in a bid to help the schemes get running as soon as the go ahead is received, expressions of interest in future projects are being encouraged.”

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Nationally agri-environmental schemes, including Entry and Higher Level Stewardship and Organic Entry Level Stewardship, have been allocated £3.3 billion. Meanwhile £600 million will be set aside to make agriculture and forestry more competitive and sustainable and to fund projects to enhance opportunity in rural areas.

The Brigg business consultancy team was closely involved with the previous ERDP schemes, particularly the Rural Enterprise Scheme.

“In preparation for the launch of the new scheme, we recommend early discussions to ensure schemes are developed where possible to fulfil the necessary eligibility criteria,” says Philip Dunn. “Although the new scheme will require a change of mindset from the old system, it does present an opportunity to secure grant funding to support the launch of new ventures.”

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