



TRANSFARMATIONDAY

North West Farm Tourism Initiative is way ahead of the rest of Britain in pioneering farm tourism. They continued to set the pace last month by staging their inaugural one-day seminar – encouraging more of their region's farmers to develop tourism projects. Their event TransFARMAtion Day was held at Garstang Golf and Country Club in Lancashire on 18 November 2004 where delegates heard from three keynote speakers – and from four case-study farmers who have successfully diversified in the North West.

GUEST speaker for the first *NWFI* one-day farm diversification conference was **Louiza Patikas** who plays **Helen Archer** in the long running BBC Radio 4 country life drama **The Archers**.

Louiza says she has great affinity with the British countryside, and holds a particular passion for organic food. She was actively involved in the 2002 rally in London when growers and supporters of The Soil Association marched on Westminster asking for financial help from Government to assist with conversion to organic farming.

She remains committed in helping all issues which affect the British countryside and its rural people who earn their living from the land. She is also helping spread the word that farmers **can** stay on the land and earn a reasonable living if they are willing to look at the opportunities of diversification.

Louiza's speech was themed "**The importance of youth – a new generation of farmers**" which she describes as essential to the survival of our rural heritage. She said it is mostly the younger generation playing the leading role in developing tourism projects, lending a new lease of life to the more traditional farming industry.

Louiza moved on in her speech to highlight some of the more unusual and successful ventures already established in the North West. She assured delegates there is plenty of assistance available for those planning to diversify, including £2.68 million through **NWFTI**.



Louiza samples Lamplugh Pudding

TransFARMatIon Day

THREE farm diversification case studies were outlined by their respective owners at the seminar, as examples and inspiration to others.

David Fryer who's family farm on the Lancs/Cheshire border says he's their family representative for farm diversification and had travelled the world seeking new ideas and ways forward. He has developed a Maize Maze in their farm's maize crop – a truly original cash-crop before the maize is harvested for cattle feed. The attraction, which has two miles of paths, is already bringing in 15,000 visitors each year and is being developed all the time.

The Robinson family have been farming at Homescales in Cumbria for more than 100 years. But when son Mathew and his wife Alison took over in 1996, their future in agriculture looked bleak and there were times when they looked to be the last generation of farmers at Homescales.



Mathew's delivery was energetic - as his visions are practical, and he outlined the strategy he and his family had pursued over the past four years in developing an activity centre on their farm. They now boast some impressive blue chip clients including Nike, Barclays and Jeep. But Mathew retains his links with the soil, saying: "I'll always be a farmer".

Mathew said: "It's an honour to be asked to speak on behalf of a NWFTI seminar, as they have helped us so much. Things looked bleak in 1996 when our milk prices plummeted, and I helped organize the Carlisle to Westminster "Milk March".



He explained how they looked at the market and decided to go for the corporate market. He said his wife Alison had trained at Bay (the famous hotel in the Lake District) she is a "an excellent feeder – appropriate to clientel they attract".

He says in the quiet times they have things like hot-pot suppers on log burning fires, and 'Red Letter Days', and say they ask the client what they would like, such as clay pigeon shooting. They also cater for stag and hen parties.

"You have to bring in professionals like NWFTI if you want to attract the big companies to your business", said Mathew.

20 years ago Sarah and Graham Chaplin-Brice inherited a tumble down farmhouse and outbuildings on poor hill land in a quiet corner of the English Lake District. At first blush, the holding looked little more than a heap of rubble on a Cumbria hillside.

But Low Bridge Farm does have one outstanding asset: it has pure ambience. Secluded yet not remote, it has the most beautiful setting in the unspoilt valley of St John's in the Vale, three miles south of Keswick.

So began the challenge of a life-time for this resolute couple who from day-one decided they would somehow establish a life and income from this small acreage. Where others might have been jibbed, they stayed and create a home where their family would have an enviable rural upbringing. The only

dark cloud was how to make this small hill farm profitable. But they have proved it can be done, with 'diversification' becoming the key word.

"We were bowled over by the farm's beautiful setting in this magical valley, and we were determined to stay and make a go of it," says Graham, a now redundant education executive.

"It's been difficult, especially these latter years when we've had to be fairly innovative to bring on several new projects," he said. "But it's so stunning here and really has that 'wow' factor every morning when we get out of bed." Low Bridge Farm now has a popular tea garden adjacent to a busy footpath crossing their land: a camping barn which sleeps eight, boasts an occupancy rate of 73 per cent, and is fully booked from Easter to September; as is their self-catering flat (courtesy of a redundant hay loft): a craft workshop is let to a local potter who sells at nearby farmers' markets: 17 acres of woodland have nature trails and are annually cropped with around 100 Christmas trees: and a woodland display centre has just been opened in the the barn creating more economic activity in the area.

"They're serial entrepreneurs at Low Bridge End," says Carl Bendelow, project manager of Cumbria Farm Tourism Initiative (CFTI) and part of Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency which offers support and guidance to those bold souls who still want to hack-out a rural living.



Richard Delves of *QA Research* told the seminar of the work and findings his company had found in their NWFTI commissioned research of farm related tourism businesses in the North West. Their study had taken in views from around 1,600 farmers across the region.

The findings showed that almost 25% of farms in the area operated a farm business: B&B, self catering, caravan sites, activity holidays, food and drink ventures. A further 13% planned to diversify.

Income from diversification on farms varied greatly: one third said it accounted for 20% of their total income; one third said it accounted for 21%-60% of their income; and one third said it accounted for 61%-100% of their income; one fifth said they earned between £11-£25,00 per year. A further 40% said they expected their income to increase in 2005.

One quarter of the farms surveyed said the produce they provided for guests/visitors was locally sourced.

Context of the Evaluation Study

Farm Tourism is now a significant part of the rural business sector in the North West region. Most of the farms which have diversified into tourism in recent years provide self-catering accommodation in redundant farm buildings – while others offer bed and breakfast facilities. A small number of farms also provide visitor attractions – such as rare breeds, children's play areas, and craft centres.

The North West Farm Tourism Initiative (NWFTI) provides a free business counselling service for any working farm (defined as having a holding number and providing more than 1,000 hours per annum of farming activity) located in the North West. The object is to support viable farms (identified through a Forum Business Advice Service (FBAS) or similar report) by offering advice on any aspect of either developing or improving their farm tourism enterprise. Benefits can include:

Experienced and qualified business counselors to review areas of importance to increase business effectiveness or advise on

TransFARmation Day - North West Farm Tourism Initiative

CELEBRITY CHEF John Crouch gave the event some fascinating detail on the origins of traditional foods and recipes from the North West area. He urged delegates to source local products where possible, and to explain on menus how and where food is produced locally.

To demonstrate, he cooked up a kedgeree using local trout from a smoke house in Penrith. Other ingredients in his kedgeree were locally hand-made butter, and fresh local free range eggs. For dessert he made Lamplugh Pudding, using Cumbrian apples and rum which had for centuries - been traditionally smuggled into the west coast of Cumbria.

He said: "I have a passion for local food, and it's getting much easier to source with many wholesalers and supermarkets like Booths and Asda now stocking local products".

"An easy way for hotels and restaurants to begin is - lots of cheeses are made here in our area, and they're all excellent. There's no need to put edam and brie on your cheese board – delight your customers by putting a completely local selection of cheeses on offer".

"Foods from the North West continue to win taste awards, with Made in Cumbria and North West Fine Foods championing the way. I would urge all rural tourist projects to use local food as they are full of flavour, and the background to the food sourcing fascinates the visitor. It's what they're here for – they want to sample the area, and that includes the local flavours and recipes.

John Crouch gives regular cookery demonstration, and is always advising the benefits of local food to his audience. His interest in food began very early in life and led to 10-years stint as a publisher with *Vouge* magazine in London. He moved to Cumbria in 1981 and is now a well known freelance chef



John Crouch arriving with as many item of local produce he can carry!

and food consultant. He is a regular on BBC Radio Cumbria, and has done food demonstrations for Made in Cumbria, and North West Fine Foods.

He has also championed *Feastcookers* a Leader+ project which aims to keep alive the traditions of Cumberland and Westmorland cooking and recipes, and which supports the growing number of quality local food producers.

development of new business opportunities.

- Advice on the development of a business plan and using this as a tool to increasing profitability as well as raising finance from a bank.
- Help to develop a marketing plan
- Obtaining information on potential sources of financial assistance to farm tourism enterprises. Capital grants on small projects and Marketing grants for groups of farm tourism operators are available through the project.

The initiative has been developed to stimulate innovative farm diversification projects, drive up excellence and strengthen existing farm businesses. Priority is given to key themes such as: Food & drink, Activity tourism (walking, cycling, riding, fishing), Packages (linking farm accommodation to rural activities), Eco tourism, Heritage & culture, Niche markets, Improved ICT, Marketing and leisure skills and building successful marketing partnerships.

TransFARMatIon Day

Key stakeholders findings

The comments of a number of key stakeholders who were interviewed in order to gain their thoughts and opinions on farm tourism in the North West and on the evaluation of the NWFTI have been compiled under the following broad categories:

Planning regulations and grant applications

- Planning permission was seen as difficult to obtain and expensive.
- Grant application forms were seen as complicated
- Complexity of DEFRA Rural Enterprise Scheme
- Catch 22 situation; quality facilities required to gain tourist board accreditation, in the meantime need to win business to pay for quality
- How to get to the people who need the grants but are too scared to ask

Business advice

- Farmers need help with research & marketing
- Encourage the sharing of best practice
- Training required for marketing, balance sheets, guidelines, promotion
- Advice needed on risk assessment
- Advice on marketing for all seasons

Tourist Board/Tourist Information

- Confusion between roles & responsibilities of different tourist boards.
- Tourist Information is patchy in Lancashire. Pendle needs promoting.
- Need to pull marketing for whole region together
- South west and north Cumbria need pushing more – always The Lakes get the marketing grant

Supply & demand

- Feeling that there are too many B&B's and self-catering accommodation - need more diversification into holiday attractions.

Carl Bendelow is business advisor for *North West Farm Tourism Initiative* and says people left “well motivated” from the **TransFARMatIon Day**.

Carl gives his views on the success of the event:-

“The *TransFARMatIon Day* was a first for the *North West Farm Tourism Initiative* and we did not know what to expect. On reflection I was delighted by the event and the response of the participants. The venue was just right and located as near as we could arrange to be central to the region. Interestingly the Garstang Golf and Country Club is owned by a farming family who diversified some years ago.

People who took part in the event said it was a real opportunity to meet other farm tourism operators and I think from our point of view was a chance to meet them all together. It was interesting to hear one of the speakers discussing her farm with one of the farmer delegates whose grandmother had lived on the farm many years ago. From my point of view the outcome was that a couple of clients talked to me after the meeting having decided that Farm Tourism is a real part of the tourism industry and said projects they had been thinking about - they now want to proceed with. They obviously left the meeting well motivated.

There was great comments about the cooking demonstration by John Crouch who clearly illustrated the close connection between food and local heritage, which is what many visitors come to sample. Some delegates on a course at Lancaster University but hailing from China were intrigued by John’s discussion of tea brought from China early last century and the link between the Chinese economy and wool prices.



L-R: Carl chats to a Carlisle farmer who has already diversified by adding horse livery yard and schooling facilities on his land

A very useful day and we are already thinking of possible content for another conference next year.

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- Demand from public for top class accommodation
- Not all farms are suitable for tourism
- Not all farms are in areas suitable for tourism
- Farms should look at competition before they diversify – it’s a competitive market place
- Feeling that everybody wants to do the same thing – B&B

General

- Farmers want to be farmers, not tourism managers

- Still possible to get a good living out of farming
- Farmers should consider long-term effect of diversification

NWFTI

- Well thought of
- Uncomplicated
- Good personnel
- Potential problem with confidentiality
- Awareness is a big issue
- Too much of a grants culture in farming – need more business planning

Gross profit from farm tourism business in 2003

Respondents were asked, approximately, the gross profit from their tourism business in 2003?

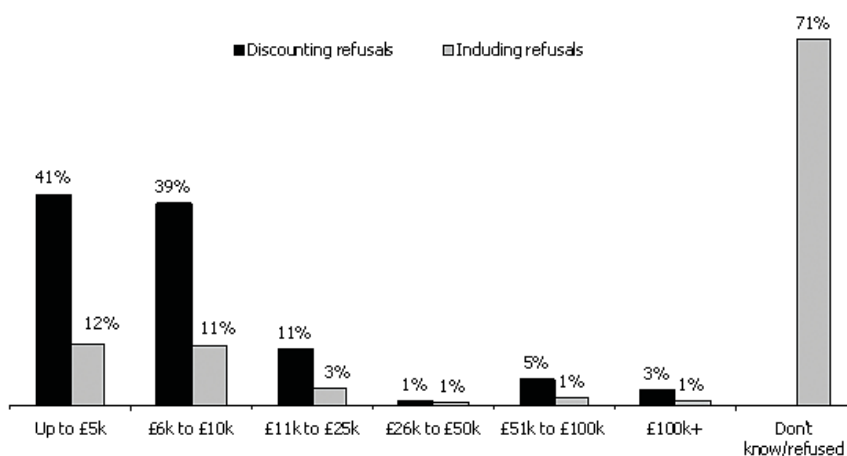
Discounting refusals, 41% of respondents said the gross profit from tourism activity turnover was less than £5,000. A further 39% said it was between £6,000 and £10,000 and 11% said it was between £11,000 and £25,000.

A minority of respondents made a gross profit of greater than £26,000 in 2003.

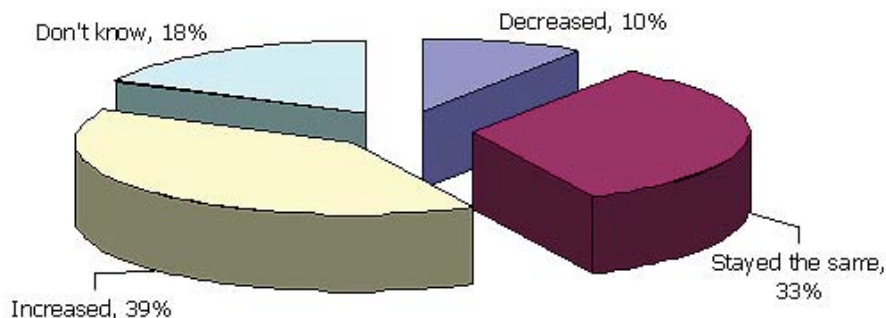
The mean gross profit from tourism activity was £20,853 in 2003. For accommodation providers it was £16,055 and for non-accommodation providers it was £55,400. However, these figures are skewed by a very few businesses making profits in excess of £100,000.

For the majority of farm tourism businesses, the gross profit from tourism activity in 2003 was less than £10,000 indicating a supplementary income.

Gross profit from tourism activity in 2003



Change in gross profit 2002-2003



Comparison with 2002

39% of respondents said that their gross profit from tourism activity had increased on the previous year and a further 33% said it had stayed the same. Only 10% said it had decreased and 18% couldn't respond.

Farm tourism businesses were generally positive on this measure.

Anticipated change in gross profit from farm tourism business in next 12 months

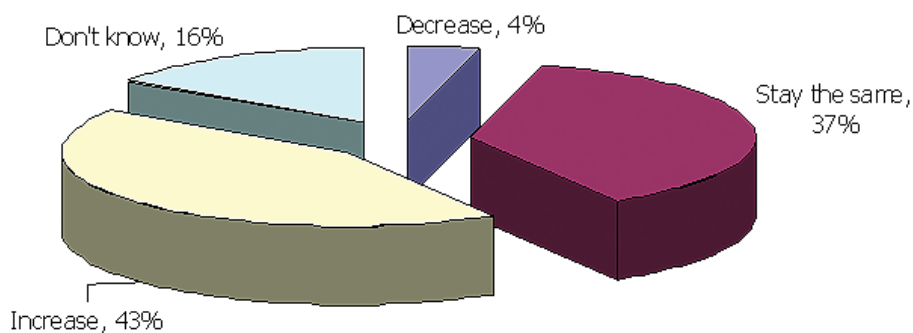
Respondents were asked what expectations they had for the gross profit from their tourism business in the next 12 months.

43% of respondents anticipated that their gross profit from tourism activity in the next 12 months would increase. A further 37% felt it would stay the same.

Only 4% felt gross profit would decrease and 16% couldn't answer.

Further analysis shows that Cheshire respondents were more confident of increasing profits in the future with 51% forecasting an increase compared with 39% of Cumbria respondents.

Anticipated change in gross profit in next 12 months





Conference News

Another conference is planned for Nov 2005: register now with www.farmtourism-matter.org to receive updates of Farm Tourism events

CFTI

Business Development Days

- 27 Jan** Eden Valley – **Big Breakfast Week**
- 20 Feb** Coniston & Hawkshead – **Brantwood & Hawkshead Trout Farm**
- 15 March** Sedbergh & Dentdale – **historic farmhouses and heritage centres**

Farm tourism email updates.

Visit our website www.farmtourism-matters.org and JOIN the email list to receive regular snippets of information on farm and tourism developments

Great Links from Website

Farm Tourism North West also publishes a number of group sites all designed to attract staying visitors to their local areas.

- Cheshire Farms - www.topfarms.co.uk
- Lancashire Farms - www.lancashirefarms.co.uk
- North West Camping Barns - www.campingbarnsnw.co.uk
- Historic Farm Houses in Cumbria - www.historicfarmsnw.co.uk
- Farm Stay UK - www.farmstayuk.co.uk
- Farm caravan accommodation in Cumbria - www.countrycaravans.co.uk
- Cumbria Tourist Board Site - www.golakes.co.uk
- Lake District National Park Authority Site - www.lake-district.gov.uk
- YHA - www.yha.org.uk
- Ramblers Association Lake District - www.ralakedistrict.ukf.net
- North West Tourist Board site - www.visitnorthwest.com
- National Trust Farms - www.gocumbria.org/enjoythefarm

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