



Fun on the farm

A sculpture trail stretching 1.5 miles is to be created by internationally recognised artist Jonathan Stamper across a valley behind his Cumbrian dairy farm, thanks to financial backing from the North West Farm Tourism Initiative.

Jonathan, who runs the 164-acre High Head Farm near Ivegill will create 30 sculptures and interactive panels to mark the route, as well as opening a gallery, workshop and educational resource centre for local schools.

"It was critical for us to get the grant to help us with this big project," he says. *"We're hoping to create a new high-class arts venue with changing exhibits every six to eight weeks."*

The grant is part of the £2.68 million with which the NWDA plans to benefit more than 2,000 farm tourism businesses over four years. The project, announced in 2003, will give help to farmers who already offer some aspect of tourism or those who seek to diversify into that area.

The NWDA hopes to create around 50 new businesses and create a 500-strong network of farm tourism businesses. One of the main aims is to provide farmers with added revenue streams that will make their core business more sustainable.

"We are not looking to expand the 'bed and breakfast' element of farm tourism but improve what we have," explains David Hunter, the NWDA's Senior Rural Policy Officer. He welcomes innovative ideas that will encourage people to stay longer in the rural Northwest.

At Rookin House Farm Alistair and Debbie Hogg encourage visitors to their 'adventure venue' as well as farming mainly sheep on the 135 acres near Troutbeck in Cumbria.

The farm, which lost its cattle in the foot and mouth disease outbreak, offers everything from mini quad bikes for kids, to riding holidays for families to leadership skills activities for corporate groups.

It has recently benefited from grants from the Farm Tourism Partnership of £12,500 to improve the centre's reception area, providing a comfortable area for guests to congregate, and almost £4,000 for marketing its activities.

Debbie says that without the grant, they may not have been able to improve their reception area this summer, *"enabling us to compete on a more professional scale."*

The grant aid is available to farmers across the Northwest - approximately two thirds of the total in Cumbria and one third in Lancashire and Cheshire.

Farmers Richard and Ann Varden have provided traditional farmhouse bed and breakfast accommodation in three rooms at their 16th century Newton Hall Farm in Tattenhall, Cheshire for over ten years, alongside milk production from a pedigree dairy herd.

"We sold our dairy herd this summer as the workload became too great, compounded by poor milk prices, although we still have Hereford cross-heifers," says Ann. *"Only one of our rooms had an en-suite and as guests now expect that type of accommodation, we decided to upgrade our remaining two rooms."* A grant from the NWDA will enable them to complete the work in the New Year.

Ray Kessler, NWDA's Head of Rural Policy, says: *"This project will help to create a significant and positive impact on rural communities and ensure a prosperous future for generations to come."*

For further information: www.stayfarmnorth.co.uk