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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Come rain or shine: increasing farm resilience to weather extremes

With memories of this summer's hot spell still fresh, Eden Rivers Trust (ERT) held a successful yet timely event on Friday 15 August at their office at Newton Rigg College, in conjunction with The Cumbria Farmer Network.

Farmers, managers and land owners from throughout Cumbria came along to hear about how farms could become more resilient to drought conditions.

Topics covered during the event included:

Business planning and decision making - the need for planning ahead regarding livestock numbers going into the winter and making decisions for business strength in adverse conditions,

Managing the current situation - measuring crop in stores for quantity and quality and coping with forage shortfalls, and

Looking at alternatives - new drought tolerant grass varieties, alternative forage crops and the use of machinery such as aerators and sward lifters to help reduce compaction and aerate soil when soil moisture levels increase in the autumn.

Whilst there has been a general easing of conditions after recent rainfall, many farm businesses are facing a considerable shortfall in the quantity of winter fodder (up to 40% in some cases). Many dairy farmers have been feeding silage or hay to cows for a number of weeks already to help sustain milk yields.

Suggestions from the speakers on managing crops and feed in the short-term included:

- The careful use of slurry and fertiliser will be paramount in the next few weeks to ensure that further crops of silage are secured and there will be

opportunities to help correct forage shortfalls whilst ground conditions and soil temperatures remain favourable.

- Taking steps to secure additional feed and straw. As indicated by the recent auction prices for standing cereal crops (around £400-500/acre for spring barley and winter wheat), farmers are already doing this, however this increased cost will undoubtedly affect profitability.
- Although straw may be in short supply locally, nationally we are told that more has been baled than in recent years. Transporting it north to Cumbria will naturally incur additional costs.

In the medium term farmers attending the event were mainly concerned with ideas on how to make better use of the fodder they've already got – supplementing it with other crops, looking at alternatives, and making changes to their farming system.

A largely dry, sunny month has meant that river levels remain low and it will be some time before groundwater levels recover. Any rainfall falling now may just run off the top, evaporate or be absorbed into the soil. Soil sampling in recent days is showing that moisture is only penetrating into the ground by about an inch at most and it will be some considerable time before drains start to flow again.

This is a concern for Eden Rivers Trust as they work with farmers via Natural England's Facilitation Fund to manage water on their farm and in the riparian zone.

Andy Dyer, Farming and Conservation Officer, Eden Rivers Trust said:

"We were delighted to partner with The Cumbria Farmer Network to host this event as in the future we may continue to face conditions similar to those which we have experienced in the last twelve months. Our work with over 50 farm businesses in the catchment is focused on looking at how to make better use of the water available, conserving water as well as the more typical management of excess water."

"The event underlined the importance of making informed business decisions and having an increased understanding of long-term planning that accounts for changes in climate conditions, adjustments to farming systems and developments in farming techniques and technology in order to help increase resilience."

“For example, alternative fodder crops such as stubble turnips benefit both the farm business as well as the environment as they enhance nutrient uptake reducing ~~s~~ losses and helping to ensure that nutrients don’t end up in watercourses. This will help to safeguard wildlife and improve water quality.”

Thanks ~~again to our~~ guest speakers, Rhidian Jones of RJ Livestock Systems Ltd, David Wilde from ForFarmers, Rob Hitch from Dodd & Co. accountants, Colin Grigor from Opico and Rickerby Ltd for the loan of the Opico sward lifter.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Eden Rivers Trust is the only charity dedicated to conserving the beautiful River Eden in Cumbria and its hundreds of miles of tributaries. It was set up in 1996 and has completed over 360 projects to improve the condition of the river for its wildlife and for people to enjoy. The River Eden is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is classed by Europe as a Special Area of Conservation.

www.edenriverstrust.org.uk

Eden Rivers Trust and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme Facilitation Fund

Our work with farmers in the Eden Valley is about helping farmers not only farm efficiently but also helping them to deliver all of these other benefits to the wider society.

We do this on the tributaries of the Eden, including the Petteril, Leith and Lowther by working with Natural England and the local farming communities within the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. Through this scheme we offer farmers training and support in applying for grant funding to help deliver environmental improvements to the river.

The Farmer Network is an independent not for profit organisation providing support to farming families and their business’s. The Farmer Network covers Cumbria and The Yorkshire Dales and has over 1,000 members.