

PRESS RELEASE



20th July 2007

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New Rural Grant Scheme Now Taking Shape

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The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) has recently provided information with respect to the Rural Development Programme for England, part of which will provide grant aid for farmers for diversification and other investment.

The new RDPE Grants are a substitute for the previous Grant Scheme, which included the Rural Enterprise and the Purchasing and Marketing Grants. The new schemes represent a significant departure from the previous grant scheme. The old scheme would allow individuals to apply for grant aid for specific projects. While such grant aid will still be available, in the majority of cases the application process is going to involve a Local Action Group. This Group will be set up with the rural community farmers, foresters and non-farming rural businesses wishing to work together to deliver local solutions to local problems/opportunities. This process is known as 'Leader'. Very much larger grant schemes (circa £500,000 grants) may be dealt with direct by SEEDA, but the rest of the grant schemes will be through this Leader process.

Andrew Bays of BCM (Bays Curry McCowen), comments: "This new RDPE has substantial funding, considerably in excess of that which was available under the previous scheme. However, farmers and rural businesses should be aware that the application process for them is going to be significantly different. The formation of a Local Action Group is not mandatory and is being dealt with on an application basis. Indeed, the first application window has already passed. If farmers find that they are not in an area covered by a Local Action Group then the majority of grant aid available under SEEDA will not be available to them. Farmers should be aware of this as the funds available under the Leader process are significant, and farmers and rural businessmen should make sure that they are fully aware of whether there is a Local Action Group being applied for in their area. There is significant opportunity here, with a grant scheme that could be considerably more diverse than its predecessor. However, the principle of the previous scheme that all areas would be eligible, in many ways, no longer applies."

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