



PRESS RELEASE from the Countryside and Community Research Institute

23 January 2015

Countryside Values for the 21st Century

A major rural policy conference took place at the Royal Society in London on 22 January.

'Countryside Values for the 21st Century', was based around three themes; 'Inclusive food systems', 'Well-being, Happiness and Rural Policy' and 'Learning and Innovation for Sustainable Farm Businesses'.

Delegates enjoyed a range of presentations that highlighted the link between social science theory and changes to policy and practice on the ground.

It examined how topics once confined to the countryside, such as farming and food and environmental and climate management, have now become matters of wider and more pressing societal concerns. And similarly it applied wider global debates around well-being, inequality and the economics of happiness to the rural situation.

Taking a lead from current research, and in dialogue with leading experts and actors, the presentations demonstrated how the investments in research made by EU, DEFRA, BIG Lottery and others are feeding into agendas that are making difference to people's lives - Urban Agriculture, Farmers' Innovation and the Happiness and Well-Being agenda.

The conference was hosted by specialist rural researchers at the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), based at the University of Gloucestershire with an organisational team led by Dr Matt Reed.

Professor Janet Dwyer, Director of the CCRI, said after the conference.

"Today's Policy Conference has been a great success. All the presentations fostered an interesting series of debates and I know that everyone enjoyed the networking over lunch. I hope that those people who have not been able to join us in person are able to see some of what happened through the social media." (https://twitter.com/CCRI_UK)

CCRI's Professor Paul Courtney, who gave a presentation on the hot topic of using Happiness as way of re-framing government policy, said,

“The happiness agenda is becoming more widely contemplated, as contemporary thinkers are beginning to realise that it can help shape policies and make them more effective. However, many people struggle to understand the relevance of the happiness to public policy, and in a rural context this debate has been relatively quiet. So I am trying to de-mystify the concept and contribute to this important and growing debate. The CCRI have learnt a lot from studying the well-being of rural communities and the impacts on human happiness of voluntary activities such as community growing, and we are looking to extend that into new areas.”

A panel including Audrey Roy, from Natural England, Andy Dean from Rural Services Network and Richard Wakeford, an expert on Rural strategy and Public policy analysis and implementation, rounded up the day's events and led discussions which highlighted the importance of working with people on the ground to realise change, and the importance of policy being informed by solid social science research.

The conference took place on 22 January 2015 at the Royal Society, London. Full information is available at <http://www.ccri.ac.uk/latestnews/#pc2201> and <http://www.ccri.ac.uk/2015ruralconference/>

Matt Reed's BBC Farming Today interview on the role of cities in farming can be found at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04ykkts>

Presentations from the day can be found at: <http://www.slideshare.net/CCRI/presentations>

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Notes for Editors:

The **Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI)** is a unique partnership between the University of Gloucestershire, the Royal Agricultural University and Hartpury College. It is the largest specialist rural research centre in the UK, having expertise in all aspects of research in policy and planning for the countryside and the environment of the UK, Europe and further afield. See <http://www.ccri.ac.uk/> for more information.

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