



Yorkshire Dales National Park; Photo. Neville Turner

Investing in Rural Creativity: New Rural Arts Strategy

**A proposed arts and cultural sector response
to the new Rural Strategy, (DEFRA 2004)**

**Discussion paper for circulation to the Arts Council England,
DCMS, DEFRA, the Countryside Agency, ACRE, NFU and the RCF.**

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LITTORAL ARTS Trust

*„The Land is the mainstay of human culture“ (Tim Lang). Arts documentation
and exhibition project about Yorkshire hill farmers. Tessa Bunney, 2001*

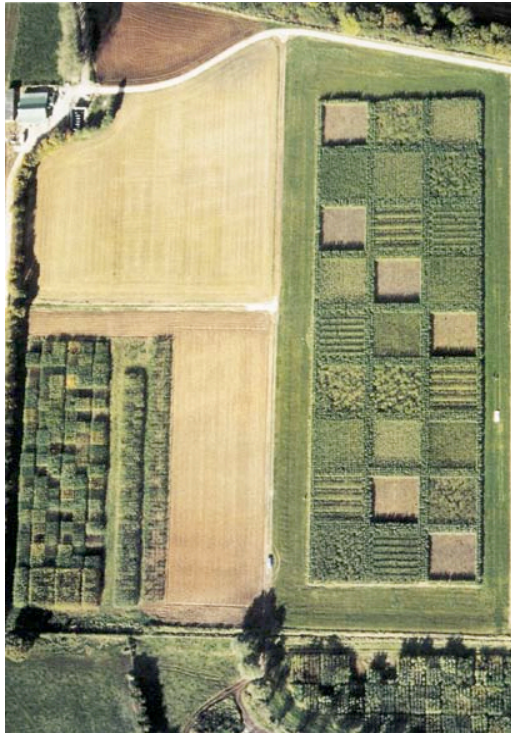
The healing of the land: a new sense of belonging?

It remains a sobering fact that even in the age of global communications and the Internet, civilisation continues to depend on a few inches of topsoil for its very existence. The activity in and around that soil provides the material to sustain life and the environment to give it meaning. The earth is very forgiving of our abuse. But it will not forgive forever.

There is another, more profound reason for reconstructing agriculture in the interests of the wider population. It is about giving the people of these islands a new sense of belonging, countering the mood of rootlessness, alienation and despair that pervades our city streets. Even for those of us that live in towns it is the land that sustains us, that makes us what we are. Equally it is our separation from the land, uniquely in Europe, which contributes so much to our feelings of isolation.

We need to re-establish our stake in the land, to renew our interest in our food, where it comes from and how it is produced. We need to rediscover our spiritual ownership of the countryside, its landscapes and wildlife. And through owning it we shall begin to understand once more what it means to be British. With the healing of the land will come our healing as a nation.

Graham Harvey *‘The Killing of the Countryside’* (Vintage Books, 1997)
(*Graham Harvey is a novelist and scriptwriter and for many years has been agricultural story editor for BBC Radio’s The Archers programme*)



New agricultural aesthetics? Aerial view of willow bio-mass (farming for energy) growing trials, at Long Ashton, nr. Bristol

Contents

	Page
1 Changes in the countryside and rural communities; the new Rural Strategy 2004	1
2 Proposed dual rural arts strategy: linking the rural and agricultural agendas	4
3 Proposals for future arts and rural research, and arts development work	14
4 The Arts and Agriculture; reconnecting agriculture and the urban imagination	17
5 Mapping new rural and agricultural contexts for arts practice	26
6 Planning new arts and agriculture partnerships and interventions	29
7 Investing in rural creativity and new cultural resources for the farming community	38
8 Arts Council England, proposed rural 'cultural interface' and regional pilot projects	41
9 The Commission for Rural Communities and DEFRA: key partners for arts and agriculture	45
10 Arts and Agriculture; national pedagogy, research and training programme	47
11 New Rural Arts programme, management and advisory proposals	47
12 Recommendations for interim new rural arts development mechanisms	46

Executive summary

A discussion document prepared for the Arts Council England outlining proposals for a new rural arts strategy as part of a coordinated arts and cultural sector response to the the Government's new Rural Strategy, (DEFRA 2004).

Section 1 of the report outlines the background to the current crisis in agriculture and the problems in rural communities, referencing the impact of climatic change, CAP reform, EU enlargement, BSE, FMD and other factors imposing rapid change on farming, the countryside and rural life. These issues also raise important social, ethical, aesthetic and cultural questions regarding the future of rural communities and agriculture, and sustainability which could benefit from a coordinated arts and cultural sector input. The Government has also called for creative, imaginative and cross sectoral initiatives in support of rural regeneration and a sustainable agricultural economy. Citing as a precedent the major role played by the arts in the restructuring of the post-industrial economy and urban regeneration in the cities during 1980s and 90s, it seems an appropriate time to now argue for an equivalent arts and cultural sector initiative in support of British farming and the national rural regeneration project.

Based on Arts Council funded research that the LITTORAL Arts Trust undertook in the South West, East Midlands and Yorkshire regions during 2001- 2002, the report reveals that the arts are already playing a significant role in supporting rural social and economic inclusion initiatives, including arts-led support for rural education, rural healthcare provision, rural youth and children's programmes, and rural transport and disability access. It also introduces examples of innovative arts-led farm diversification projects, including creative uses for cattle auction marts and redundant farm buildings; alternative land use and cultivation of farm fibres for the fashion, construction and textiles industries; arts-led rural foods and rural tourism marketing initiatives; and new urban rural and cultural diversity business partnerships. Other arts, including the crafts, design, architecture, new media, digital art, film and telecommunications sectors, are helping to generate new employment through investment in rural SMEs and rural creative industries initiatives, and are opening up new urban, cultural diversity, and international markets for rural skills, countryside attractions, and agricultural products. It proposes that with further investment the arts can play an even greater role in support of rural regeneration, countryside access and agricultural diversification.

Sections 2 - 3 discusses development of a national New Rural Arts Strategy and strategic framework for development of this new area of work. But, when compared with the level of support provided for the urban cultural industries and arts-linked urban regeneration, arts engagement with rural communities and agriculture is still a relatively disorganised and under-resourced area. Furthermore it lacks a coherent arts development framework and pedagogy, and the funding policies required to consolidate and aid its progress, and is further constrained by a lack of coordination and dialogue between the leading statutory agencies for the arts, countryside and rural affairs. Yet there is growing support for arts involvement within grassroots rural and agricultural communities throughout the country, including the main rural constituency organisations: the NFU, WFU, HFI, NFYFC, LEADER + , and ACRE. DCMS, DEFRA, the Countryside Agency and Arts Council England are also aware of these developments.

As a practical step forward the report highlights some of the recommendations contained in the Curry Report (*'Farming and Food; a sustainable future' - 2002*): for *regeneration* of the rural economy and community; and the *reconnection* of farming with the food chain (by implication reconnection of the nation's rural and urban communities and markets). It suggests that these ideas could be taken further through development of art and cultural sector response in support of the Governments' Rural Strategy (DEFRA 2004) and used as a starting point in opening a formal dialogue between the arts sector, Arts Council England/DCMS and DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities, and in sustaining future arts, rural and farming sector partnerships. It also notes that this new area of arts work on farming and rural issues is also being promoted in Europe and elsewhere internationally.

Sections 4 - 9 provides details about a proposed arts and agriculture strategy for England, and how this could be developed in practice. This is likely to require a shift in terms of current (urban) arts and cultural investment priorities, and implementation of rural proofing measures throughout the arts sector as a whole. It also raises the possibility of a cultural strategy for European agriculture; i.e. a proposed EU Pillar III rural cultural development programme. The report then concludes with some suggestions for future debate: i) that the arts and agriculture belong together (Tim Lang, 2003); ii) that agriculture is also a unique form of human cultural and artistic practice and knowledge, with its own aesthetic, cultural diversity, and creative programmes; iii) managing sustainable agriculture and rural change is also fundamentally a cultural task and responsibility; iv) and that rural communities have at their disposal huge untapped creative, entrepreneurial and imaginative potential that could be further unlocked via appropriate arts interventions and cultural investment; v) and, finally, that rural life and agriculture sits at the very heart of sustainability and culture, in that it is vital to the sustainability and survival of all life forms; including the urban and rural communities, environments and economies.

Section 10 - 12 outlines practical recommendations for a joint New Rural Arts and Arts and Agriculture strategy, and comprising three elements initially ; i) a proposal for a national Creative Rural Industries - Arts and Rural Regeneration conference, for 2006 and; ii) 'New Fields', A Rural Biennale of Art and Agriculture, a proposed three year programme of arts and agricultural change pilot projects initiative and an international conference to be held in Yorkshire in 2009. and (iii), the establishment of a dedicated Rural Cultural Forum and art development agency, working in close partnership with the leading statutory rural agencies; DEFRA, Commission for Rural Communities, DCMS and Arts Council England.

Although this report focuses on rural and agricultural issues, it also mentions the need for an arts and cultural sector strategy in response to the plight of the fisheries communities and fishing industry. These too would benefit from new research and, eventually, their own separately constituted arts and cultural investment programme. It also points up the urgent need for the arts community to also begin to address some of the overarching issues and problems relating to global sustainability and climatic change, as being equally important priorities in terms of guiding future arts policy and related research work. In this context the proposals presented in this report for a new Rural Arts Strategy, are really only the first modest steps towards what is likely to become an important new area of critical discourse and policy research within the arts and cultural sector; i.e. towards the formulation of a national *Arts and Sustainability* initiative. This might be something that the Arts Council could pursue further with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Commission for Rural Communities.

Dr Ian Hunter, LITTORAL Arts

Some comments about the Investing in Rural Creativity: New Rural Arts Strategy report:

"The Countryside Agency supports a wider dialogue on the role of the arts in rural areas, and I welcome the New Rural Arts Strategy as a response to this process." (Sir Ewen Cameron, Chairman of the Countryside Agency 12/1/04).

"...the Investing in rural creativity: New Rural Arts initiative can make an immensely valuable contribution, ...and I firmly believe that the rural arts initiative proposed have an important role to play here. This is obviously not only for the individual businesses involved but also for the benefit of the wider rural community"
(Sir Donald Curry, 21/11/03)

"The National Farmers Union welcomes the Arts Council's 'Investing in Rural Creativity' strategy. For too long the important cultural traditions of rural communities, farming and horticulture have been unnoticed and undervalued. This strategy will create a fantastic opportunity to record, understand and explain the role of farmers and farming in countryside beyond the environmental. We hope it will also help the farming, rural and arts communities to work together to give expression to these traditions".
(Tim Bennett, President of NFU, 21/4/04)

"The Investing in Rural creativity: new rural arts initiative will provide a unique opportunity to help the rural and farming communities address the major changes they face following CAP reform. An integrated programme of visual and performing arts will take the heart of the food and farming culture across the urban /rural divide to multi-cultural and urban consumers, in a language and concept that they can identify with, thereby creating a deeper understanding and empathy with the countryside."
(Gillian van der Meer, President WFU 2/3/2004)

"..at this critical time in the future of the upland rural communities and economies in England the new rural arts strategy provides us with a very useful creative strategy and practical way forward, and we applaud the Arts Council's for its help in reconnecting the arts and agriculture, and through this making possible new and more imaginative ways of reconnecting food and farming with the urban consumer and taxpayer".
(Alistair Davy, Chairman, HFI - Hill Farming Initiative, Yorkshire)

"...the new rural arts strategy is a breath of fresh air and offers farming families and the rural community some exciting and challenging new ideas for the future. As well as helping us develop new products and practical marketing strategies for food and farming many artists have a genuine interest and concern for the future of the countryside and sustainability. Without safeguarding and investing in our rural creative traditions the rural communities and farming families of England this country will not survive.."
(Michael Hart, Chairman of the Small and Family Farms Alliance, Cornwall)

"...(the) report represents an excellent starting point for our work. It clearly states the context for arts development in rural areas and the need for the Arts Council England to work in partnership with other agencies....it is extremely useful and we are grateful to you for having taken a lead in this area"
(Aileen McEvoy, Head of External Relations and Development, Arts Council England, North West)

1 The Rural Strategy 2004: change in the countryside and rural communities

- 1.1 In response to the radical changes taking place in the countryside, rural communities and agricultural economy driven partly by demographic, environmental and economic changes - the effects of globalisation, climatic change, the impact of EU enlargement and CAP reform, and a public crisis of confidence in British agriculture following the BSE and FMD outbreaks, and now Avian 'flu', the Government has introduced a new vision for agriculture, the countryside and rural communities in England; the Rural Strategy (DEFRA 2004).

This calls for a national effort and cross-sectoral response and radical rethink about the future sustainability of the rural economy and communities, the appearance and function of the countryside, the production of safe food and renewable energy, and the longer term future of British farming and the agricultural economy. Among the initiatives the Government is advocating are: development of rural creative industries, exploring new cultural interfaces with farming and agri-businesses, expanding the role of new media, ICT and advanced telecommunications in rural areas, promoting creative and artistic solutions to farm diversification, and employing leading designers, artists and architects to invent new 'value added' applications and creative processes for non-foods fibre crops, renewables, and alternative land use projects.

The Rural Strategy also proposes new creative vision and partnerships for the agricultural and rural sector designed to deliver some of its strategic initiatives for economic regeneration, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. It also identified the need for new and imaginative ways of reconnecting farming and food and fibre chains, with the urban consumer and design industry. In addition, the rapid expansion of industrial agriculture and the biotechnology revolution in farming and food production sector (i.e. cloning, zoo-transplants, pharmaceuticals) are also raising important ethical and philosophical questions, and related social, health, environmental and aesthetic issues. These and other issues confronting the future of England's rural communities, farming and the countryside would seem to require a coordinated arts and cultural sector response, and as such these will present the arts and cultural sector with important new creative, aesthetic and intellectual challenges and partnership opportunities which they cannot afford to ignore.

The problems being encountered in the rural, countryside and agricultural sectors also raise important cultural, ethical, social, and health issues, and which will require a coordinated arts and cultural sector response; these also pose new intellectual, philosophical, aesthetic and creative challenges and partnership opportunities for artists and the urban arts sector, which have not as yet been fully addressed.

The Rural Strategy (2004) thus presents the arts sector with a unique opportunity and challenge to form a strategic engagement with the national rural regeneration project. Sections 1 - 3 of the report details how the arts community could address this challenge, and maps out the characteristic of a possible new rural arts practice and arts development strategy.

1.2 A strategic arts and cultural sector response to the new Rural Strategy 2004

Because of the scale, complexity, and systemic nature of the problems in the rural and agricultural sector, any proposed arts and cultural sector response should therefore be developed as an integral part of the Government's Rural Strategy, and implemented in the context of the EU CAP (Reform) Pillar II regulations for rural development. And, given the relatively tight time frame for completion of the main rural structural reforms by 2010/12 (i.e. effectively the end of farming and food subsidies), it is essential that the arts community be prepared to move quickly and develop a new and more socially inclusive and environmentally sensitive set of art practices and arts development strategies. This is what we mean by the term; The New Rural Arts Strategy. This work will be discussed further in Sections 2.5 - 2.8.

The Strategic contexts for the New Rural Arts:

To recap; some of the priority areas and initiatives as outlined under 'Sustainable Countryside' in the Rural Strategy 2004 document introduction, (p 5):

- 1. Economic and Social regeneration**
- 2. Social justice for All**
- 3. Enhancing the value of our countryside**

These should now become the main focus of arts and rural community sector creative endeavour, and around which to develop the appropriate responses and delivery mechanisms. Shaping and informing the (post) agricultural rural discourse, in the context of strategic rural regeneration programmes, rural social and economic inclusion, access to the countryside, and the restructuring of agriculture, provides an important creative opportunity, intellectual challenge, and a social responsibility which the urban arts community cannot afford to ignore.

1.3 The policy context; urban reconnection and rural regeneration strategies

The arts sector now needs to formalise its relationship with the two leading rural statutory agencies, the Commission for Rural Communities and DEFRA, and to pay close attention to the key themes proposed by Sir Donald Curry in his earlier report (DEFRA 2002), which are in part the Government's priorities for the rural recovery programme: regeneration of the rural economic, social, and environmental fabric; and reconnection of farming with the food chain and the urban consumer. And, linking urban and rural economy and communities more closely, and delivery of the 'environmental and public goods' provided by farming (Curry Report, p.109). These also introduce the concept of sustainability more widely into mainstream economic and cultural discourse.

This also brings into focus a hitherto unrecognised urban dimension to the current rural affairs agenda, which may offer further opportunities for the arts in aiding the reconnection between urban and rural consumers, and in bringing in a greater role for urban arts/media workers and other urban cultural communities in helping to support future rural regeneration initiatives.

1.4 Learning from urban communities and the urban arts regeneration experiences

The major role that arts have played in supporting urban regeneration and the restructuring of the post-industrial economy, and inner city community renewal programmes could, with some adjustments, provide a useful precedent and practical model for a new arts and rural regeneration strategy. Furthermore, the arts and media sector has developed a range of specialist practices in response to the needs and experiences of particular urban communities: e.g. arts and social inclusion programmes, arts and health projects, arts and young people, arts projects with refugee and immigrant communities, arts in prisons and work with young offenders, public art and architecture, urban creative industries initiatives, and promoting ethnic cultural diversity arts and social connectivity. This flexibility and diversity of art practices and their demonstrated sensitivity to community issues and social change are transferrable skills, which could also be adapted and re-directed to the benefit rural communities.

The wealth of creative resources, entrepreneurial knowledge and skills built up by urban creative industries, artists and media groups, could be further utilised in support of farming and rural communities, to help them manage the radical changes, and develop the new (post) agricultural rural economy. Similarly the experiences of coping with structural change and the social and economic survival skills developed by urban fringe, refugee, and ethnic cultural minority groups, set alongside those of the coalfields communities, constitute a unique pool of creative and cultural resources that could be shared with rural communities. In particular, to help re-inforce the self-confidence, social cohesion, economic self-help and cultural advancement of the small family farms, and other marginal rural and disadvantaged farming communities throughout Britain.

After the experiences of FMD and BSE any proposed changes to the rural agenda and food and agricultural policy will need to be formulated in as open and transparent manner as possible, and with the consent and support of the urban taxpayer and consumer (Curry Report, p. 95). Equally if the arts community is to develop an effective engagement with the new rural agenda, then a new cultural narrative and rural arts development strategy will need to be constructed to take account of the new social, environmental and political realities. There is no precedent for this in terms of conventional rural arts development practice, which is why the Arts Council England commissioned the LITTORAL Arts Trust to produce the 'Investing in Rural Creativity' and 'Arts and Agriculture' reports (2002 - 03). These reports also identified expansion of arts-led urban regeneration models into the rural context; promoting new urban rural cultural diversity exchanges and business partnerships; and wider involvement of urban arts and media groups in addressing rural, countryside and agricultural issues, as useful avenues to explore further.

The urban arts, media, academic and cultural diversity communities have creative skills and resources at their disposal which could greatly aid the regeneration of rural communities and farm businesses. These sectors should be encouraged to become more directly involved in developing new urban/rural social, economic and cultural partnerships, and in the delivery of rural regeneration; creative rural industries and the new rural entrepreneurial culture called for by Government .

2. New Rural Arts development strategy: linking the rural and agricultural agendas

2.1 As leading art critics, philosophers, architects and academics (Roger Scruton, John Berger, Lucy Lippard, Will Alsop, Griselda Pollock, etc.) have recently pointed out, the problems in the agricultural and rural sector can no longer be regarded as peripheral or irrelevant to urban society. In this context the arts sector response to the Rural Agenda is also proposed as part of a wider cultural re-engagement with the 'twin' discourses on agriculture and environmental sustainability. Following on from this it is important that the arts sector response, including any Arts Council rural arts initiative, should also listen to and embrace the needs and aspirations of both the rural and the agricultural communities. Although it is argued that the agricultural sector is declining in importance in terms of the numbers employed, it continues to play an important role within the nation's tourism economy (estimated at worth several billion pounds in 2005), and remains central to delivery of some of the Government's global sustainability strategies; food sovereignty, NFFO (Non fossil fuel obligation) renewable energy and reduction of carbon emissions, as well as contributing to vital cultural and social 'intangibles' such as the public well being, sense of place and national identity. As the same time the radical changes impacting on the farming sector are also having a major impact on the urban economy and communities. Agriculture, the countryside and the rural are also ideological constructs which are becoming contested sites around which future urban and rural discourse on sustainability, and related social and political struggles are now also being played out and negotiated.

The vital connection between farming, the countryside and the urban economy was also highlighted during the six - eight months 'closure of the countryside' in 2001 due to FMD, which is estimated to have cost the national economy upwards of £8 billion in lost tourism revenue and related earnings. The predicted changes in agriculture, including the issues relating to GMOs and bio-technology, industrial farming, the effects of climate change, and the allegedly negative social impact of WTO and CAP legislation on rural communities, are also of equal concern to urban communities, and are already having a visible and quantifiable impact on urban consumers in Europe and world wide. It can thus be argued that agriculture is now once again at the centre of public discourse.

Agriculture remains important in supporting the national tourism based economy, and farming still makes a valuable contribution to maintaining sustainable energy, safe food, regional landscape character and identity, bio-diversity, and rural social cohesion and economic sustainability. The new rural arts programme is thus recommended as a dual initiative in the context of the twin discourse - for sustainability and agricultural challenge, and combining both an art and agriculture elements and a parallel arts and rural regeneration initiative.

The arguments for a joint rural arts and arts and agriculture strategy are further detailed in the 'Investing in Rural Creativity and Arts and Agricultural Change' reports prepared by LITTORAL for the Arts Council England, and more recently in the 'RURAL SHIFT; the role of the arts in tackling rural social and economic exclusion' report, April 2003. This document should be read in tandem with chapters 9 and 10 of the concluding section to the RURAL SHIFT report.

2.2 Reconnecting urban culture with the agriculture and sustainability discourses

It is further argued that the emerging (cultural) discourse around agriculture and the articulation of a (post)agricultural rural landscape aesthetic, constitute an important new critical site and area of intellectual engagement for the arts and cultural sector, around which future key philosophical, aesthetic and cultural issues in society will be debated and take on new forms. Similar to the post-modernist discourse on urbanism, gender and identity, which resulted in the development of culture-led urban regeneration programmes, and new art genres; public art, arts and multiculturalism, community arts, disability arts, arts and health, creative industries and media arts.

In the DEFRA publication *Working for the Essentials of Life*, 2002, the Secretary of State, Margaret Beckett underlined as central to DEFRA's organisational philosophy, sustainability and a respect for the fundamental interdependence and integrity of all forms of life; and that re-inforcing the connections linking urban, rural and agriculture communities and economies were also central to the sustainability and survival of all life. These issues form the basis around which to construct an appropriate arts and cultural sector response to the new Rural Strategy. This also embraces some of the new critical language and philosophical concepts borrowed from rural sociology, such as: 'neo rural', 'sustainability' and the 'post -agricultural' era.

It can be argued that agriculture and the rural are becoming important critical sites around which important philosophical, ethical, aesthetic and social agendas and artistic discourses will be further engaged and articulated, similar to the post-industrial and urban regeneration project stimulated new urban art forms, aesthetic challenges, and employment opportunities for artists and the arts sector during the 1980s and 90s.

2.3 Innovative art projects in rural and agricultural contexts

The key characteristics and critical co-ordinates of the new rural arts are already emerging in work of established rural and urban-based arts organisations. These include; Beaford Arts, New Perspectives, REAP, Chrysalis Arts, BLAIZE, Rural Arts North Yorkshire, NRTF, and the Rural Media Company in Hereford, the Forest of Dean Rural Community Radio. Other more experimental or 'blue skies' and R&D approaches to new rural arts include: Grizedale Arts, On the Edge (Aberdeen), Aune Head Arts Devon (new rural arts employment initiatives), the artNucleus digital media and traditional rural crafts, Gloucestershire (2001-2003), the Village Hall Road_show programme in Lancashire (2001), and the EARTH _WIRE project, exploring applications of new media and satellite imaging technologies in supporting remote rural economies, 1994.

Innovative arts projects in rural areas are also being pioneered by grass roots rural and farming communities, and rural support agencies; ACRE (Rural Community Councils of England), IRH (Institute of Rural Health, rural education, rural disability access and transport), WFU, (women, farming, food union), and rural womens' organisations, etc. This work is discussed in more detail the RURAL SHIFT report. The report also confirms that rural creativity, artistic practice and cultural enterprise are not the monopoly of the 'professional' arts sector - urban or rural. Artists need to make greater efforts to learn from and support such community initiated rural arts work, and related self-help, economic and entrepreneurial projects.

What is required is a new kind of rural arts practice, that is better organised in support of strategic rural community development and regeneration programmes, more inclusive in terms of addressing a wide portfolio of rural social, environmental, cultural and economic issues, and capable of tackling the complexity and systemic nature of the problems affecting the future of rural communities, the countryside, and agriculture in England.

2.3 What is so 'new' about the new rural arts?

In proposing any new field of art practice for development it is important to be able to present convincing arguments and to show evidence that there is a documented need (in artistic, social and economic terms) for the practice. What is new about the rural arts work can partly be answered by outlining some of the rural issues and contexts it aims to set out to address:

- i Prioritises development of innovative creative strategies in support of the national rural regeneration project and the Government's rural affairs agenda priorities, as stated in section (1.2); including Economic and Social regeneration -through engagement with a wide range of rural issues, constituencies and communities and innovative foods marketing; Social justice for all, support for rural social and economic inclusion initiatives, rural health and disability access; Enhancing the value of the Countryside, promoting rural tourism, biodiversity and rural community and environmental sustainability initiatives.
- ii Development of new creative urban rural reconnection strategies as advocated in the Curry report (2002), including reconnecting farmers with the food/fibre chain and with new urban consumers; promotes innovative arts-led marketing of rural tourism, locality foods and countryside attractions, and wider urban arts and media engagement with rural issues; new urban/rural cultural diversity exchanges and business partnerships; and engaging the full

- iii potential of urban media, arts and creative industries in support of rural regeneration; Embraces an inclusive, cross sectoral and culturally diverse definition of rural creativity: promoting rural creativity and cultural diversity through ethnic urban and rural community business partnerships; employs urban creativity and arts resources to tackle rural problems; promotes new investment in the creativity and imaginative resources of, farmers, rural children and young people, rural women, and also that of travellers, refugees, asylum seekers located in rural areas; and places a high value on the creativity and traditional cultural values and wisdom embedded in our rural elders, retired rural vets and farmers;
- iv Focus on agriculture and the farming community, and seeks to support them through the current crisis and period of radical change; advocates a national arts and cultural strategy for sustainable agriculture in Britain (and, eventually, in Europe - i.e. Pillar III); promotes innovative arts-led alternative land use projects, crafts-based value added farm diversification projects, and creative rural industries economy projects for farming; and encourages the urban arts sector in a seeking a wider engagement with agricultural and farming issues;
- v Proposes establishment of a formal rural arts pedagogy, curatorial/research and training programme, and related arts development support structure; acknowledges that, as a relatively new and untried area of arts practice, it still has some inherent problems, contradictions and deficiencies which need addressing; argues for a more open, reflective, self-critical and collaborative stance on the part of rural arts practitioners; and development of a new rural aesthetic, and the theoretical and critical apparatus capable of interrogating the dominant ideologies currently guiding rural, agricultural, and countryside policy;
- vi Operates an inclusivity of rural practice traditions and draws upon as wide a range of contemporary arts practices, arts development, curatorial and critical art traditions as possible in addressing creative solutions to rural and agricultural problems; actively combines elements of public art, community arts, rural touring, cultural diversity, new media, photography/video, socially engaged art, ecological art, performing arts, and disability arts practices in work with rural communities and in addressing innovative responses and solutions to complex and/or intractable rural problems;
- vii Advocates a 'blue skies' research and R+D rural arts practices in partnership with mainstream academic research in; rural sociology, rural health studies, agriculture, rural economics, rural communications, and related countryside, environmental management and ecological research; arts practices aimed at introducing new critical insights and other philosophical and theoretical perspectives on the rural, and in generating new aesthetic and ethical coordinates capable of guiding future agricultural and rural policy.

The new rural arts adopts an inclusive and culturally diverse definition of rural creativity, inclusive of all urban and rural communities and creative and cultural traditions, to be achieved through partnerships, with urban cultural diversity communities, the indigenous creativity and imaginative resources of farmers, rural young people, rural women, travellers, refugees in the countryside, and rural elders

The Arts Council England 'Investing in Rural Creativity' reports, and the RURAL SHIFT conference report (2002) reveal that the basic elements of this new area of art practice are already partly in formation. What is needed now is some agreement between the statutory agencies and lead arts and rural stakeholders on the outlines of an appropriate arts development strategy and related procedures for their implementation and evaluation.

2.4 **Proposing a history, pedagogy and research programme for the new rural arts**

Without an agreed history and pedagogy, a well resourced and coordinated research and development programme, and a more inclusive and self critical outlook on the part of its practitioner community, the new rural arts will almost certainly continue to flounder or fail to develop. However, these problems can be avoided if a new rural arts pedagogy and research programme can be developed and implemented soon. The next section outlines the rudiments for a history of rural art practice, referencing some of its salient characteristics, and concluding with proposals for a supporting research programme and a management structure.

2.5 **Brief historical overview of the development of rural arts**

Very basically there seem to be four main historical phases or stages in the development of rural arts, and related artists' engagement with rural communities and rural issues:

- i Early pioneering rural arts work, including the important arts and rural economic development experiments conducted at Dartington Hall during the 1930s, and through to the 1960s, (which had their origins in the rural inspired Arts and Crafts movement of the 19th century; e.g. William Morris, and the Cotswolds rural crafts settlement projects of C R Ashbee).
- ii Establishment of dedicated rural arts based organisations and rural arts touring groups and networks during the 70s and into the 80s, providing rural communities with wider access to the arts through touring professional theatre, music, and dance productions and art exhibitions to village halls and other remote rural venues.
- iii Third phase of professional rural arts development during the 1980s and 90s, with the establishment of innovative rural research/rural public arts projects (Common Ground); permanent rural arts centres with extensive outreach programmes (Beaford Arts and New Perspectives), and dedicated rural media agencies - the Rural Media Company, and Forest of Dean Community Radio; and arts projects addressed to specific rural issues and constituencies - rural health, disability access, rural transport, youth work, and work with rural elders, etc.
- iv After FMD/BSE: rethinking the rural and the 'new' rural arts. The radical changes proposed for agriculture and the new rural affairs agenda has encouraged some artists and rural arts organisations to completely rethink their priorities, and to adopt a more inclusive, experimental and pragmatic approach to tackling rural problems. These include arts projects in support of mainstream rural regeneration initiatives, rural economic and social inclusion projects, and arts interventions into a wide range of problems in agriculture and rural policy.

A major study and publication project needs to be undertaken soon aimed at documenting the historical development, theoretical orientations, and critical efficacy of the current projects and programmes contributing to the development of the new rural arts. This would be similar in scope to two ground breaking arts reports and publications produced in the late 70s and early 80's; Naseem Khan's 'The Art that Britain Ignores', which effectively launched a national debate about the arts and cultural diversity in Britain; and 'Community, Art, and the State: Storming the Citadels', produced by Owen Kelly in the mid 1980s, which also had a major impact on the future development of Community Arts in Britain.

Without an agreed history and pedagogy, a well resourced and coordinated research and development programme, and an inclusive and self critical outlook on the part of its proponents, the new rural arts will probably flounder or, worse, fail to deliver on its full potential for critical engagement with agriculture and support for the Government's new rural community and economic regeneration agendas.

2.6 **Characteristics and development priorities of the New Rural Arts**

In constructing such a programme it may be helpful to recap on the above characteristics and outline some of the main characteristics of the new rural arts in practice. These are not intended as absolute or fixed categories, but may be taken as the basis for further research and debate.

- i Rural social documentary; investigative art projects addressing rural issues and contexts
In addition to recording the character and changes in rural and farming life, proposes an investigative, 'R&D', and social documentation aimed at surfacing a new understanding of rural and farming issues, and influencing rural policy by documenting and articulating 'hidden' issues relating to poverty, health, housing, rural racism, and social exclusion.
- ii Practical arts strategies addressing specific rural issues and/or rural constituency needs
Arts projects designed to support the strategic rural regeneration programmes developed by

DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities; addressing the needs of particular rural constituencies and organisations: e.g. rural health workers, children and young people, rural women, hill farmers, fishing port communities and rural elders; the NFU, WFU and ACRE.

- iii Investment in rural community creativity, rural entrepreneurship and social cohesion
Investment in the social, cultural capital and creative capacities of rural and farming communities; developing self-confident and self-help oriented rural cultures and economy; (urban) artists learn how to work from within the rural community experience to enhance the creative potential, self confidence, risk management and enterprise_ of rural communities.
- iv Promoting new rural media, creative rural industries, communications & the digital economy
Providing rural communities with access to advanced digital media, telecommunications, and broadcasting skills and resources to develop new economic, cultural, communications, and rural employment initiatives for themselves: new rural creative industries, and arts-led SMEs and marketing initiatives; arts and rural tourism, new creative rural urban business partnerships, and opening up new urban consumers and international markets on-line;
- v Blue skies - green fields - the arts contributing to new thinking in rural practice and research
R+D and experimental arts work promoting radical new thinking about rural regeneration, reconnecting farmers and the food/fibre chains, promoting new local/locality foods marketing initiatives (Curry, 2002); addressing ethical and ideological issues in agriculture; new creative ways of tackling issues about agriculture, rural regeneration and in the countryside.

These categories are obviously open to further debate and revision. In pursuance of this a major research programme, including a possible New Rural Arts national conference, exhibitions and publications project, should be undertaken and aimed at promoting further development of this new field of arts and rural creativity and as the basis for development of the new rural creative industries and economy.

A formal research programme needs to be commissioned soon towards the production of a definitive publication about the New Rural Arts, and documenting some of its key characteristics along with illustrated examples of best practice. This could be similar in scope and impact to: Naseem Khan's 'The Art that Britain Ignores', and 'Community, Art, and the State: Storming the Citadels', by Owen Kelly in the mid 1980s, which effectively launched Cultural Diversity Arts and Community Arts as major critical and regenerative force in British art.

2.7. Training and educational programme in support of the new rural arts

Apart from the individual efforts of the Rural Cultural Forum, NRTF, LITTORAL Arts, Dartington College of Arts and some local authorities (such as North Kesteven), there does not appear to be any coordinated training programmes for those wanting to specialise in rural arts practice, or in addressing the creative opportunities and challenges of the (post) agricultural rural regeneration agendas. The development of the new rural arts as outlined above appears to be happening in an ad hoc and uncoordinated way which makes it difficult to develop effective training in the field. Until these and other problems are overcome, the reputation of the new rural arts will certainly suffer, and may serve only to re-inforce the urban art world's prejudice against rural arts.

It is recommended that a coordinated national research, conference and publications project be undertaken soon aimed at documenting the wider critical field and traditions of rural arts and rural community creativity; including the emergence of rural issues and agricultural change as a potential new area for future arts development and funding investment; and as an exciting new context for advanced contemporary arts practice.

2.7.1 Constraints to the progress of a new rural arts genre

Drawing on evidence gathered from previous conferences and research, it is now possible to present a clearer picture of the main operational characteristics of the new rural arts. Before discussing these in more detail it may be useful to first outline some of the constraints that appear to be holding back development of this field:

- i There is no agreed history of this new way of working, or the critical and theoretical co-

ordinates needed to guide its development and efficacy as an art form, or its potential to make a contribution to rural regeneration;

- ii There appear to be no formal pedagogy, research programmes, curatorial or evaluative criteria that might enhance the visibility and credibility of the work, and thereby assist in its accommodation by the mainstream arts development and funding agencies;
- iii A strong metro-centric or anti-rural bias still exists in some sectors of the established art world. This makes it difficult for rural art, or art work dealing with rural and agricultural issues, to be discussed seriously or given wider or more appropriate public acknowledgement.
- iv There is a reluctance on the part of some of the established rural arts/touring organisations to engage with the wider challenges of the new rural affairs agenda, possibly due to a lack of confidence or a reluctance to face change, which mitigates against a more open and inclusive debate on the future of the new rural arts.
- v The lack of a formal dialogue or communications between the lead statutory agencies for the arts, rural affairs and the countryside, and agreement on priorities, resources and coordination of future arts and rural partnerships is a problem and impediment that needs to be overcome soon.

2.7.3 Possible new pedagogical models and educational partnerships

In responding to these problems and constraints, there are some useful historical precedents and contemporary/international examples of educational and training programmes for rural arts that could be explored further:

- i Re-visiting the ethos and aims of the pioneering Dartington Hall experiments led by the Elmhirst partnership, during the 1930s and 40s, (including the 19th century antecedents) as the basis for a new dialogue towards the establishment of a national pedagogy and research programme for the new rural arts, possibly at Dartington or at the College of Arts ;
- ii New partnerships with the leading agricultural colleges, including arts support for their rural craft, environmental art, countryside recreational, and (rural) public art programmes now under development; linking the agricultural colleges and urban arts and design schools, in development of a new rural arts pedagogy, summer school and research programme;
- iii Establishment of a formal academic rural research and arts development network or agency, to coordinate research and formalise training in rural arts and community development; promote integrated rural arts and design crossover projects, e.g. Rural Design Studio and architectural school project based in the poor rural/agricultural regions of Alabama, USA; and the AHRB funded 'On the Edge' research programme (a new role for the arts in remote rural contexts) being led by Grays School of Art, Aberdeen.
- iv Survey of international and European rural arts training programmes and arts and agriculture summer schools, including Thailand (Chang Mai rural arts school projects), Germany (the Landwirtschaft und Kunst programme at the University of Kassel at Witzenhausen), and the . Hirsch farm project Illinois; establish a national rural arts forum and conference, exploring new options for developing a rural arts pedagogy, training and summer school programmes.
- v Establishment of a new rural arts pedagogy, curatorial and research working group as an AHRB research programme, in partnership with the Arts Council England, DEFRA and the Countryside Agency, and incorporating the academic forum proposed in section iii; and make recommendations on the future educational, research and training programmes required to consolidate and expand this new area of practice.
- vii Presentation of a 'Researching the Rural' forum or conference for 2004; to bring together lead researchers and practitioners from various research-based academic, arts, NGOs, AHRB and statutory agencies, who are currently involved with or planning new rural research (social, cultural, health, youth, housing, etc.) in the rural, agricultural and

countryside sectors. See detailed proposal in Section 3.6.

2.8 **Researching Rural Change: integrating research in the arts and rural sectors**

Establishment of a new rural arts genre and allied cultural investment programmes will require the support of a well coordinated and resourced research programme, to provide continuous updating of information on rural issues and policy. Research under way in related areas of rural practice and theory which also need to be taken into consideration include.

- i ONLY CONNECT: the impact of rural arts touring. NRTF (Rural Touring Forum) Recently published NRTF report 'Arts Touring and rural Communities', by François Matarasso of Comedia; a study of the social benefits of touring art programmes in rural communities.
- ii RURAL SHIFT: the arts tackling issues of rural economic and social exclusion Conference, research programme and report completed (April 2003) by Littoral for the Arts Council England.
- iii The 'Investing in Rural Creativity' research reports submitted to the East Midlands, South West and Yorkshire regions (2002-2003), which provide up to date information on a wide range of practical arts projects and creative strategies for tackling problems in agricultural and rural areas, including those caused by social and economic exclusion.
- iv AHRC/ESRC and NESTA research into rural economic, social change, and farming culture 'On the Edge' the Robert Gordon Institute/Grays School of Art study of art in new rural contexts and the Dartington College of Art AHRB funded study of new arts-led employment in rural areas, led by research fellow Jennie Hayes and programme coordinator Mary Schwarz, and the AuneHead Arts, Moor Art/Moor Business projects in collaboration with rural businesses on Dartmoor.
- v Formalising links with the leading UK academic centres for advanced rural research: building closer links with the various University rural studies, rural economics, agricultural sciences, veterinary research programmes. e.g. University of Newcastle sponsored study of the social and economic status of hill farming communities; and work about the social and cultural impact of FMD on rural communities, at the Universities of Lancaster and Nottingham.
- vi Rural sociology and the arts; connecting the arts practitioner and research community more closely with the important work now going on within rural sociology and related academic research networks as represented by the European Society for Rural Sociology and the International Rural Sociology Associations. See <www.esrs.hu> and <www.irsa-world.org>
- vi Proposals for future PhD rural arts research, or AHRB post-doctoral and NESTA sponsored rural cultures research programmes. Aimed at exploring new arts and cultural interfaces and strategies in support of other mainstream DEFRA programmes: promoting creative strategies for environmental sustainability and coping with climatic change; developing new land use options and creative uses for wool and farm produced fibres projects (partnership with CSL, York); exploring Sci-art (Wellcome Trust) and bio-technology interfaces with agriculture; and digital arts-led experiments in rural telecommunications and on-line farm products marketing.

Another major body of research and information about rural issues and development of relevance to the arts, is that represented by the Countryside Agency and DEFRA. They commission and produce a massive body of research work and publications dealing with a wide range of rural social and economic exclusion issues; e.g. 'The indicators of poverty and social exclusion in rural England: 2002', and more information about the research programmes currently being undertaken by DEFRA may be found on <www.defra.gov.uk>. It is impossible within the limitations of this discussion paper to go into detail on all of these. However this is a vitally important area of new rural research and knowledge that the arts community should make a greater effort to engage with inform itself about.

Similarly, the equally valuable rural research work being carried out by NGOs and other rural support agencies; the IRH, Institute of Rural Health <www.irh.org.uk>, ACRE <www.acre.org.uk>, the National Children's Bureau Rural Young People and Children's Initiative <www.ncb.org.uk/rural>, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation rural research programmes <www.jrf.org.uk>.

The arts and cultural sector needs to keep itself better informed about policy issues about rural affairs, sustainability and agriculture; including current research work about rural health, rural communications, rural housing and transport, etc. The Arts sector also need to adopt a 'Rural Proofing' exercise and the Arts Council England should also commission its own programme of ongoing research into the future role of the arts in the context of agricultural change and the national rural regeneration project.

3 Proposals for future arts and rural research, and arts development

Listed under are some areas for future research and development work and as practical pilot studies and curatorial projects in combination with conferences, exhibitions and publications, all of which are aimed at expanding the arts sector engagement with rural regeneration.

3.1 Arts and Rural Health: the arts in support of rural health care initiatives

Proposal for a major arts and rural health research, and arts in the rural healthcare sector development programme. As the rural community and farming families undergo a major programme of social, economic and cultural transformation, so the issue of Rural Health is at the top of the agenda. Using the successful urban arts and health programmes as a precedent, this proposes the establishment and resourcing of a rural equivalent. This would include documenting arts support for rural stress, mental health care, rural disability access and for health education projects with rural young people and elders. Related arts work in rural community hospitals and PCTs, arts-led farm health projects, and addressing the social, health and psycho_logical impact of BSE, FMD and Avian Flu on rural communities. Develop_ment of new media and digital art projects in collaboration with rural tele-medicine research, and health care provision in remote areas. 'Sci-Art' projects addressing possible ethical and health issues relating to bio-technology, animal cloning and GMOs and the implications of xeno-transplants in human medicine. Proposed Art and Rural Health national conference, publication and exhibition project is being developed in partnership with rural health agencies, the NHS, the IRH (Institute of Rural Health), Rural Health Forum and Rural Cultural Forum.

3.2 Arts and rural young people: arts support for rural youth and childrens' initiatives

Proposal for a national Rural Youth and the Arts research, conference and exhibitions programme, promoting a major new programme of arts collaborations in association with the Rural Youth Forum and NCB (National Children's Bureau) programmes for rural children and young people. Survey of current arts projects being developed with rural young people nationally (and internationally) and finding new creative ways of addressing and communicating about their interests, and creative, social and health needs, including AIDs awareness, sex education, anti-racism, rural transport, and rural youth employ_ment. In the context of the new 'Child Protection' legislation, development of new arts projects supporting the important work of rural children's agencies, and in particular a focus on children's arts and educational initiatives in rural areas worst affected by FMD. Promoting new urban/rural youth arts and cultural exchanges, and inter_national rural youth collaborations through use of new media, digital art, web casting and on-line projects. Conference and research programme proposed in collaboration with the NCB's Forum on Rural Children and Young People, National Federation for Young Farmers, and the Rural Youth Forum

3.3 Rural cultural diversity: promoting new urban/rural and rural diversity partnerships

Promoting cultural diversity through urban/rural exchanges and business partnerships, and arts-based anti-racism and cultural diversity awareness initiatives with rural communities. Development of countryside access and exchange programmes for inner city ethnic minority communities, also involving other 'excluded' urban youth groups, the unemployed, and refugee communities in partnerships with rural and farming communities. Furthering partnerships and cultural exchanges through the arts, linking African, African Caribbean, South Asian and Asian cultural communities with rural and farming communities in collaborations and joint arts and

business ventures. National conference 'New Rural Cultural Diversities and exhibition, proposed in partnership with Kala Sangam, AWAD (African Women Art and Development), other BME organisations and the Rural Cultural Forum. National conference and exhibition, Bradford, mid-October 2006

3.4 Arts and Rural Regeneration: promoting the new rural creative industries

Exploring a new role for the arts in the context of the emerging (post) agricultural rural economy. Proposed national conference and exhibition documenting the new creative rural industries, arts in rural tourism, and other arts-based practical rural economic regeneration initiatives. Exploring the potential of the arts and new media in supporting rural economic regeneration and farm diversification; examples of arts-led marketing, development of small and micro rural businesses, rural tourism, and farm foods marketing initiatives, and rural crafts skills and employment. Expanding rural creative industries through new urban creative investment and business partnerships; a new role for the arts in support of the economic and social aims of the rural regeneration programmes, in dialogue with the Commission for Rural Communities, DEFRA, and other rural agencies, and Business Links. Possible partnership with ACE NW, Lancashire County Council, LEADER + East Lancashire. Conference and exhibition dates confirmed for 10 - 13th September 2006, at Lancaster University. Programme outline and details available shortly.

3.5 New Rural Media: rural community broadcasting; tackling the digital urban rural divide

Proposed national research project and conference aimed at promoting the economic and social benefits of community broadcasting, broadband/web casting, advanced telecommunications, digital arts, new media, and ICT-based creative industries for rural communities; including provision of rural community training in broadcasting, cultural communications and internet marketing initiatives. Expanding the potential of rural digital media and the new e-economy, including new social, cultural and economic applications of ICT and on-line communications and web-based marketing initiatives; new ways of utilising broadband, advanced telecommunications, and broadcasting in rural communities, proposals for a national networked farm radio and on-line rural audio streaming initiative; development of 'virtual' rural communities and economies, and the possibility of an autonomous rural digital cultural economy to compete with the urban; proposals for new European networked rural digital communications and cultural economy.

3.6 Rural Design; new architecture, craft and design interfaces with agriculture and the rural

Establishment of a Rural Design forum, and development of related research, development, exhibitions and a national conference initiative, in partnership with RIBA Design Council CABI, DEFRA, Commission for Rural Communities and the Rural Cultural Forum. Inaugural meeting of the Rural Design Forum, will take place at RIBA HQ London in early July 2006

3.7 Researching the rural; integrating arts and rural research, and curating the rural

Proposal for a series of research information and networking seminars for artists, curators, the Arts Council, DCMS, etc., designed to update them about current rural issues, and related research and policy initiatives in the rural and agricultural sectors. These could also update researchers and academics working in the rural sector, about the potential of the arts in the context of rural research. Curating the Rural; a programme of research seminars for curators, art gallery, museum and archives directors and staff, designed to enable them to gain an insight and understanding about current issues, policy priorities, and research work in the rural and agricultural sectors. An annual rural research and the arts conference could also be organised involving the wider arts, countryside, farming, academic and rural sociology research sectors.

3.7 Coordination and development of the New Rural Arts

Four of the main recommendations from the report, which were originally submitted to the Arts Council England in October 2003:

- I There should be a formal commitment on the part of the Arts Council England in support of the new rural agenda (i.e. Rural proofing) and the Government's Rural Strategy (DEFRA, 2004) and alongside this, establishment of a nationally co-ordinated new rural arts strategy;
- li That the New Rural Arts Strategy should be developed as a dual arts and rural regeneration and arts and agricultural change initiative;

- lii Further, that the New Rural Arts Strategy would need to be resourced and funded at a level equivalent to that provided by the Arts Council for other similar strategic national partnerships and urban arts initiatives - e.g. percent for art and public art forum, arts and health, disability arts, and arts and cultural diversity initiatives such as the DECIBEL and Creative Partnerships.
- lv The need for the Arts Council England to establish a formal dialogue and partnership with DEFRA, the Rural Cultural Forum, and the Commission for Rural Communities .

It is recommended that the Arts Council England should establish a formal partnership and dialogue with DEFRA, the Commission for Rural Communities, to coordinate and take forward the new rural arts; that this initiative should also be resourced and funded at a level equivalent to that provided for similar ACE funded strategic arts and regeneration initiatives; e.g. public art, arts and health, disability arts, art and architecture and , more recently, for the arts in schools and education (Creative Partnerships) and cultural diversity arts (DECIBEL).

However, it is not expected that the Arts Council England should have to carry the full burden or financial responsibility for this programme alone. It is recommended that DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities should also play a major role in supporting this programme. In this context the report underlines its fourth recommendation.

4 **The Arts and Agriculture: reconnecting agriculture and the urban imagination**

“..We need people on the land. To ease them off the land is to fetishize a narrow economic efficiency before culture. The land is the mainstay of human culture”.
(Professor Tim Lang, Head of Food Policy, City University London)

Given the recommendations of the Curry and Haskins reports (2002 - 03) and the Government’s radical proposals for the reform of the agricultural sector Rural Strategy 2004, it now seems an appropriate time for the arts and cultural sector to consider developing a sustained and critical engagement with the rural agenda, development in the agriculture sector, and related issues connected with decommissioning and the restructuring of the Fishing, and also the new Forestry and land based industries. The following Sections (4 - 9) outline proposals for such an arts and agriculture initiative as the second strand of the new rural arts strategy as discussed previously. Again the two programmes are intended as a dual strategy, combining arts engagement with agriculture, fisheries, forestry and farming issues alongside the core arts and rural regeneration programmes as discussed in Sections 1 - 3. Unlike the established rural arts, which have a documented history of engagement with rural communities, the proposed arts engagement with farming and agriculture is a completely new area, without precedents in the art world and is possibly a more problematic proposition.

4.1 **Background**

The proposed Arts and Agricultural Change strategy is the outcome of three years (2000 - 2003) of research and development work carried out by LITTORAL Arts, encouraged and financially supported by the Arts Council (of) England. The Arts Council regional offices also commissioned three ‘Investing in Rural Creativity/Arts and Agricultural Change’ study reports (East Midlands, 2001/2, South West, 2002 and Yorkshire, 2003), in order to generate new evidence in support of the development of this new area. The findings from the three reports have now been submitted to the respective Arts Council England partners. In summary they confirm that this work is: i) welcomed in the main by farming and agricultural sector leaders and communities; ii) it is not confined to England and is evolving rapidly throughout Europe and internationally, where it is now recognised as a new genre in contemporary art practice; and that iii) an increasing number of urban artists, media, curators, writers and critics are now also committed to working in this area.

Arts and Agriculture is an emerging area of art practice and possible a new genre whose time has arrived; it has been welcomed and endorsed by leading farming and rural support organisations, and is engaging across a wide spectrum of new rural and agricultural issues, and developing new practical, creative and theoretical arts work in support of farming and rural communities and the agricultural sector throughout Britain and internationally.

4.2 **Why an arts engagement with agriculture?**

However, in order to convince the arts community, the new rural arts strategy needs to address three main questions: i) why should the arts sector become involved with farming communities and agricultural issues at this time; ii) in pursuing this area of investigation, are there precedents for such an engagement, and if so, what are some of the critical, aesthetic, pedagogical, and evaluative mechanisms required; iii) and what are some of the likely outcomes and benefits for the arts community?

Sections 4 - 9 now proposes to outline some central arguments in support of an arts engagement with agriculture: i) that the arts and agriculture belong together; ii) that agriculture is also a form of cultural practice, with defined aesthetic, creative and critical coordinates; iii) that farming (and fishing) communities are also comprised of highly creative individuals and have their own diverse and distinct cultural traditions; iv) and that agriculture sits at the heart of culture - urban and rural.

4.3 **Arguments in support of an arts and cultural engagement with agriculture**

The supporting arguments for an arts and cultural sector engagement with agriculture and farming issues have been outlined in more detail in the Arts Council England 'Investment in Rural Creativity' reports). As stated above, it is our contention that agriculture should sit at the very heart of culture. The arts strategy for agriculture is proposed as a counter to the disconnection of agriculture and marginalisation of the rural discourse from urban society, and aims at effecting a process of national reconciliation and healing, whereby the urban and the rural can come together and once again find a common national purpose. As writer Graham Harvey has stated:

"There is another, more profound reason for reconstructing agriculture in the interests of the wider population. It is about giving the people of these islands a new sense of belonging, countering the mood of restlessness, alienation and despair that pervades our streets"

The crisis in agriculture is at its core a cultural crisis.

- i Reframing the crisis in agriculture as a crisis of culture
Until recently problems in agriculture and farming were mainly identified and articulated in terms of economic and environmental priorities (EU Pillar II). However, the emergence of important social, cultural aesthetic and ethical factors in the debate on the future of agriculture bring other values into play, including the possibility of a new cultural strategy (i.e. Pillar III) guiding future agricultural policy and discourse in Europe. The problems in agriculture impinge on all the constituents affecting the sustainability of urban life: food, water, health, human fertility, environment, and the economy. Thus the crisis in agriculture (and in the fishing sector) can also be interpreted as a crisis in culture itself and, consequently, the public debate about sustainable agriculture and fisheries can no longer be relegated to the margins of urban cultural discourse. This is also a cross sectoral responsibility in which the arts also have an important role to play.

The battle for sustainable agriculture is part of the very battle for life itself.

- ii Agriculture: the key to economic, environmental and cultural sustainability?
Global competition for water, land, energy, and other natural resources has repositioned agriculture at the centre of life, and the future of world agricultural communities and rural cultures has emerged as an international focus for public concern. Rationalisation of the agricultural economy world-wide, climatic change, the impact of bio-technology, and industrial farming methods are having a profound affect on rural and urban communities and environments world wide. Issues about safe food, animal welfare, preserving bio-diversity, countryside access, the introduction of GMOs, and industrial farming practices are of equal concern to urban and rural consumers. How well we tackle the current problems in agriculture is also critical to our future survival and sustainability as a human species and culture. Promoting sustainable agriculture and safeguarding family farming and rural traditions is also a major cultural responsibility.

The reform of agriculture is fundamentally a cultural task and social responsibility.

- iii Investing in rural creativity: Managing risk and change in the agricultural economy;
The radical changes proposed in the agricultural imply a major cultural change within the industry; including the need for change within the mindset of the farming community and the

agricultural industry. These 'cultural' changes are also having a major social impact on the morale of farming families and rural mental health, and are in some instances undermining rural community values and social cohesion. (University of Lancaster, interim report on FMD and rural health in Cumbria, 2003).

It is clear that the rationalisation of the agricultural sector will also come at relatively high cost in terms of coping with the negative social, health, environmental and psychological consequences. Farmers are being encouraged to diversify out of agriculture and adopt a new creative, risk taking, self-help culture and entrepreneurial outlook, thereby loading additional psychological and emotional stress onto a community already suffering from great uncertainty and a crisis of confidence. Yet little thought and even fewer resources have gone towards supporting and managing this critical process of cultural change within the industry. However, change can also stimulate new creative thinking and liberate new business opportunities and entrepreneurial resources for farming, including development of non-farming business and marketing skills, use of advanced communication technologies, rural crafts, creative industries, arts and tourism initiatives. The arts can also assist farming communities manage these profound cultural changes: by reinforcing their cultural identity, creativity and pride; investing in new entrepreneurial skills and rural creative industries jobs; and enhancing rural community creativity, social cohesion and self-confidence.

Reconnecting agriculture with mainstream cultural discourse and a new engagement with the urban imagination.

- iv Artists take the initiative: finding imaginative solutions to agricultural and rural problems
Artists are often described as the 'antennae' of society, with a capacity for sensing and identifying cultural shifts well before they are fully recognised or articulated by the rest of society. In anticipation of the new rural affairs agenda artists have already begun working on issues about agriculture and are helping to bring these to the attention of the wider urban community. They are also collaborating with farming and rural communities to help them survive and tackle some of their problems. Other arts and farming collaborative projects include; cultivation and marketing of alternative crops for fibre, pharmaceuticals, energy, and bio-technology; exploring new creative uses for surplus farm buildings and cattle auction centres; new crafts and textile art applications for low grade farm wools and fibres; arts-led farm tourism and food marketing projects; support for farm health and rural stress counselling projects. Arts projects have also been developed about the welfare of farm animals, bio-technology, documenting the debate about GMOs, and the impact of FMD.

Agriculture - a new cultural metaphor for global sustainability.

- v Arts engagement with key social, economic and environmental initiatives
Engagement with DEFRA and the other main agricultural and rural agendas potentially strengthens the arts sector's engagement with strategic Government and EU initiatives for rural social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability. These include: Agenda 21 and NFFO initiatives concerned with energy, conservation, recycling, and combating the effects of global warming; SEU, PAT 10 initiatives for social inclusion, arts and rural youth, young offenders, and rural health; RELU (Rural Economy and Land Use) and RAFE post-FMD rural recovery and rural economic and social regeneration initiatives; DEFRA and Countryside Agency programmes for regional rural development and European networking, including LEADER+; the Countryside Agency 'Eat the View' and 'Market Towns' Initiatives promoting foods marketing and rural tourism; the Rural White Paper Our Countryside - The Future and the Curry Report promoting the reconnection of urban and rural communities and markets; and the MOSAIC and DECIBEL initiatives extending ethnic cultural diversity and partnerships to rural areas.

4. 4 A strategic framework for arts and agriculture

These new cultural opportunities and challenges in relation to the changes taking place in agriculture now urgently require the formulation of a strategic Arts and Agriculture development programme, backed up by a well coordinated and resourced programme of research and practical pilot projects. Details of such a programme are outlined in the recommendations of the three 'Investing in Rural Creativity' reports to the Arts Council England (2001 -2003), and are summarised in Sections 6.3 - 6.4, and 8.1 - 8.4 of this report.

As with the weaknesses identified with the new rural arts, there are problems and constraints in this area that may need to be addressed. i) Most urban artists and arts and media organisations have little experience of working with farming communities, or the necessary skills, time and resources for sustained engagement with the agriculture sector. ii) The established rural arts and touring organisations, with one or two exceptions, seem reluctant to engage fully with agricultural issues, and remain preoccupied with conventional notions of the role of the rural as audience (rural communities as consumers of cultural goods); the artist as the professional expert and main cultural provider, and the art work (i.e. the play, video, exhibition, etc.) as an iconic representation of stable cultural values. This leads to a third problem, iii) the (mainly urban) perception of the rural and agriculture as a deficiency model - an area of underdevelopment and underinvestment awaiting further subsidy from the public purse, and/or interventions by professional outside experts for its recovery and resolution. There are other interesting and challenging problem areas developing between the arts and the agricultural experience that could be also considered.

Listed below are some of the main priorities around which a national arts and agriculture development strategy could be constructed and implemented. These should not be undertaken simultaneously, but they could form part of a coherent overall strategic plan:

- i Constructing the new cultural narratives for agriculture: developing new aesthetic, ethical and theoretical co-ordinates required to tackle the complexities of farming and agriculture;
- ii Mapping the new practices, contexts and partnerships: learning how to work with farming communities; understanding farming traditions, and the diversity of agricultural sectors;
- iii Exploring new experimental, creative and cultural interfaces capable of (re)connecting the urban consumer arts and cultural institutions with the new agricultural and rural agendas;
- iv Developing a national arts and agriculture research, development and pedagogy programme: possible agency, national initiative or regional pilot for research and training;
- v development of the appropriate coordination, funding and implementation mechanisms.

4.5 **Generating new critical and cultural narratives for agriculture and sustainability**

Leading critics, poets, academics and journalists are now writing about agri_culture and sustainability, and introducing new cultural, aesthetic, ecological, ethical and critical perspectives into the debate. Among them: Roger Scruton, John Berger, Jules Pretty, Graham Harvey, Sue Clifford, John Humphrys, Tim Lang, Marion Shoard, Jonathan Dimbleby, Richard Body, W M Adams, Seamus Heaney, George Monbiot, John Vidal, Lucy Lippard, and Richard North.

This new writing confirms the need for a more robust debate and critical language suited to a new ethical, aesthetic and philosophical discourse on agriculture. Such a language and debate would be likely to influence wider social, ecological and ethical agendas, and to make a contribution to a new cultural discourse on rural policy. Agreement on a critical language as part of a programme for agriculture would help bring the arts, agriculture and research communities closer together, and aid the arts sector dialogue with DEFRA, RAFE and the Countryside Agency. However, little of the current debate about agriculture and sustainability seems to have penetrated the art world, or get addressed by leading urban artists, curators, critics and arts establishment. Yet the new works dealing with sustainability, agricultural and rural issues now emerging in the context of urban film, theatre, literature and music, represent another important source of cultural information, and a potential political and social critique of agriculture, that deserves a wider public and international audience. DEFRA, the RSA (Royal Society of Arts), the RASE (Royal Agricultural Society of England) and the British Council might be interested in pursuing these ideas further, and in wider international and philosophical spheres of discourse.

4.6 **Pillar III? a new cultural narrative and for European agriculture**

New social or cultural narratives are often best surfaced or constructed as part of a programme of convivial exchanges and dialogues between individuals and organisations with different outlooks, but motivated by common interests or shared concerns and values. The Arts Council's support for the Arts and Agriculture initiative (in Yorkshire) signals that such a cultural discourse on

agriculture is now both possible and necessary. But in order to move forward this needs also to become a shared responsibility and supported by the other rural and cultural statutory agencies; DCMS, DEFRA, Commission for Rural Communities, the British Council, Royal Society of Arts, the Royal Agricultural Society of England, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Tate Britain, etc., and aimed at securing additional public funding and resources to support development of the Arts and Agriculture programme. It is recommended that the Arts Council should consider hosting a national conference or forum on the topic, and alongside this commission a coordinated research programme, all aimed at stimulating a wider theoretical, aesthetic and philosophical discourse about agriculture. This might also open up a wider European and international debate about the new links between culture and agriculture.

The pioneering arts and agriculture programmes now developing in England also have the potential of opening a new debate in Brussels and the EU about the possibility of framing a CAP reform Pillar III; this a proposed cultural strategy for sustainable European agriculture, food and rural development. And by employing a wide range of cultural resources, practices and programmes could aid the management of some of the more radical elements of the EU agricultural change and rural regeneration in Europe; and in sustaining a culturally diverse, economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially inclusive future for European agriculture and the rural economy.

It is recommended that the Arts Council should take the initiative and consider hosting a major international/European conference aimed at stimulating a wider theoretical, aesthetic and philosophical discourse and debate about the future of agriculture and sustainability - as a cultural responsibility; proposed as a partnership with the British Council, RSA, RASE, the Council of Europe, the appropriate EU Secretariats and the arts, cultural and agricultural agencies of the respective EU members.

These ideas could be developed further through:

- i Establishment of a cross sectoral forum involving the leading policy and research directorates of the arts sector (DCMS, Arts Council England, Crafts Council, RSA, RIBA, AHRB, NRTF), agriculture (DEFRA, LEADER+, LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), RASE (Royal Agricultural Society of England), NFU, RABI (Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute), HFI (Hill Farming Initiative), SFFA, FFA, (Family Farms Associations), WFU (Women Food and Farming) etc., the Commission for Rural Communities and other rural agencies (ACRE, CPRE, IRH, NCB), and charitable foundations and NGOs with an interest in rural affairs, agriculture, science and the arts, (Rowntree Foundation, Carnegie UK Trust, Esmée Fairbairn, Wellcome Trust, etc.).
- ii Implementation of a rural proofing exercise throughout the arts sector (Arts Council England, DCMS, RIBA, AHRC, arts schools, art galleries and museums) in terms of a response to the new rural agenda, and identifying potential opportunities in relation to future arts delivery of rural social inclusion, rural economic regeneration, and agricultural diversification.
- iii Encouragement of the urban arts, media, academic and cultural community to address the issues relating to agricultural change and rural policy, and assist in developing a new rural aesthetic, philosophical inquiry into the future of agriculture, the countryside, and farming.
- iv Initiating a formal dialogue with the policy makers in the leading rural agencies (DEFRA, the Commission for Rural Communities, the Environment Agency etc.) to share information and agree priorities for development of future arts and sustainable agriculture initiatives.

It is recommended that an arts and rural stakeholders forum be established to promote and consolidate new work in this field, including creative urban rural and cultural diversity partnerships and reconnections. It would also aim to generate a new cultural framework and critical discourse in support of rural regeneration and agricultural change initiatives in England, and as a contribution to developing new cultural interfaces within the European Rural Development programme.

4.7 **The rural other: critiquing current rural and agriculture policy**

Opening up a cultural dimension and narrative for agriculture implies development of a new aesthetic programme, and a critical language capable of describing and investigating these developments and problems in a wider social, cultural and political context. A new critical language and historical awareness is also required through which to interrogate the largely unchallenged conventions which currently underpin rural, countryside and agriculture discourse and policy agendas. This new critical language is already partly being developed by the NGOs active in agriculture - Oxfam, FOE, WFN, Via Campesina . Terms such as food sovereignty, animal rights, the neo-rural, rural crisis and the post agri_cultural landscape are replacing hitherto relatively stable (and unchallenged) terms such as the rural, the natural country_side, farm fresh foods, animal husbandry and industrial agriculture, some of which are now per_ceived as controversial, emotionally charged, and loaded terms ideologically, and/or are saturated with outdated urban prejudices and neo-romantic notions of a preindustrial pastoral rural idyll.

The 'lost' radical history of rural reform, which covers such crucial political events as the Enclosure Acts of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Highland Clearances, the introduction of the Corn Laws, and the stand made by the Tolpuddle Martyrs in mid-19th century rural Dorset, and other much neglected area of radical rural discourse in Britain needs to be re-investigated and possibly revalorised. These reveal a highly politicised discourse about agriculture, rural life and the countryside. Which are further heightened by contemporary issues and controversy about land ownership, farm tenancies, the introduction of GMOs, biotechnology, and related issues about, fox hunting, location of refugee holding centres in rural communities, and the right to roam and countryside access. In this sense the rural has become a new dialogic site for the articulation of competing social, economic, environmental, philosophical and political ideologies and theories.

The new rural debate also has important implications for the future of England's regions, affecting regional cultural identity, the sustainability of local rural economies, protection of the natural environment and bio-diversity, guaranteeing safe food and human fertility, and preserving access for all to the countryside. Public debate on these topics is a matter of national importance, and as such needs to be conducted in as open and democratic a manner as possible, and not deflected by vested interests or co-opted by ideological pressure groups; from whichever end of the political spectrum or persuasion.

The Countryside March Life and Liberty in October 2002 again provided evidence of these underlying and unresolved ideological tensions and political problems, and unfortunately may have served to further polarise and highlight some of the more extreme urban and rural positions and misunderstandings in this debate. Consequently the rural and the countryside are no longer value free areas and are now contested zones, politically and socially. These issues and others now emerging are likely to form the coordinates for the future public debates and discourse on agriculture and the rural. Similarly, the arguments and rhetoric presented in this report, also require critical interrogation, as do the reports and rural policy documents prepared by DEFRA, the Countryside Agency, the NFU, and others.

4.9 **The culture of sustainability; towards a new rural aesthetic?**

Perhaps a somewhat esoteric proposition, taken in the context of the harsh economic realities of agricultural change and farming survival. However, aesthetics are much more closely intertwined with ideology and politics, and therefore in determining policy priorities, than most people realise. Aesthetic and ideological constructs for example underpin much of the current policy and practical work of the Commission for Rural Communities (notions of the beautiful and well managed (bio-diverse) countryside, Local Heritage), and some aspects of DEFRA's work (LEADER+ and ERDP). Aesthetics also to varying degrees influence concepts about: sustainability (i.e. a beautiful and life affirming environment), animal husbandry and livestock breeding, bio-technology - the design and creation of new animal and plant life forms, rural tourism, farm foods marketing, preservation of rural crafts and traditional land management skills, and planning and design priorities for future non-farmed rural landscapes. The fact that this is rarely articulated or acknowledged as such in official documents and policy does not close the area to public scrutiny, challenge and debate. As the conventions and certainties governing

farming, the rural and the countryside begin to break down or are contested, new aesthetic issues and ideological problems begin to arise. These too require an arts and cultural response. Elements of the visual arts and art theory community specialise in formulating new critical and aesthetic programmes. German artist Joseph Beuys promoted the idea of an ethical aesthetic - later taken up by critics and artists as the social connective or transformative aesthetic. Leading art critics and curators; Suzi Gablik, Rosalyn Deutsche, Lucy Lippard, Grant Kester and John Berger also argue for a more socially and ecologically aware art practice, which could involve ordinary people and communities as creative partners in tackling real life problems, and in finding solutions to other environmental and social issues.

A new rural (sustainability) aesthetic could easily build upon elements from these socially and environmentally engaged arts practices, and related ecological, connective, community and dialogical aesthetic programmes. The new discourse on agriculture therefore needs to be firmly grounded in real life experience, and should be developed in close consultation with the rural communities, farming membership organisations and lead rural agencies involved. Section 5 proposes some practical steps for arts projects capable of addressing these issues.

4.9 New Fields; a publication and exhibition about the arts and agricultural change

Artists, curators and critics have begun to discuss the need for a new rural aesthetic and art practice tradition. This has further been supported by research work, forums, publications, video and exhibitions projects led by artists and curators in other countries (Britain, Germany, USA, Australia, Thailand, Italy, France, China, Finland, etc.), which further underline this work as an emerging new field of international contemporary art. This will form the basis for a major publication about the arts and agriculture, to coincide with the New Fields international exhibitions and conference programme planned for Yorkshire in 2009. See Section 12.1.

5. Mapping new rural and agricultural contexts for contemporary art practice

Unlike the more established rural arts, the Arts and Agriculture area of work has not yet been fully developed or accepted as a formal arts genre. The second and third strands of the proposed development programme; 'Mapping the new practices' and the more experimental 'Cultural Interfaces' programme are now proposed to try and address this problem.

5.1 Practical Arts and Agriculture; possible development areas for pilot projects

Four areas have so far been identified under the Mapping new practices and partnerships programme wherein practical arts and agriculture projects are currently being developed and implemented. These are also proposed as temporary R&D envelopes (i.e. art/agriculture, agriculture/art collaborations) to allow the artist and farming partners involved the freedom to experiment with different modes of exchange, and to learn how to work with each other. Four potential development areas are:

- i Work with different regional farming communities and agricultural sectors: documenting farming life - seasonal and economic cycles of dairying, hill farming, livestock rearing, horticulture, and cereal farming - projects about the changes in livestock markets following FMD, and initiatives supporting alternative land use for energy, fibre, and other non-food production and marketing. These projects are presented in more detail in the ACE reports.
- ii Testing the effectiveness of different arts development and curatorial methodologies in tackling a variety of rural, countryside and farming community problems. Examples include: i) the ArtBarns project, to address social and economic exclusion in Lancashire hill farming communities; ii) digital arts projects supporting new farm foods marketing and rural tourism in Yorkshire; iii) a digital arts website project and exhibition aimed at documenting the impact of FMD on farming communities; and iv) the 'Dairy Cow' museum and educational resource project; a proposed architectural collaboration with the dairy farming community in Cheshire.
- iii Projects addressing ethical or more controversial issues in farming and agriculture, including political, ethical, social and health issues, such as loss of rural cultural and bio diversity in the countryside, hunting, introduction of GMOs, animal welfare and biotechnology and factory farming, pesticides and food safety, farm animal welfare, BSE, FMD, farm subsidies, and issue of land ownership and public access to the countryside.

- iv Reconnecting farmer and consumer with the food and fibre chains: promoting public confidence and awareness about the function of the food and fibre chains; creative and imaginative strategies aimed at educating and reconnecting the urban consumer with farming practices and processes involved in food and fibre production; encouraging farmers and the agriculture sector to develop new urban community and educational partnerships and promoting new sustainable urban consumer markets for local farming products.

5.2 **Opening farming to the public: promoting new urban links with agriculture**

This comprises the more experimental or 'Blue Skies' R+D cultural interface projects intended to generate new public understanding about farming, and access to farms and the agricultural sector in general. New cultural perspectives and information about farming and agriculture; enhancing a new dialogue and exchange between the lead rural statutory agencies, and the urban arts and cultural establishment. The cultural interface programme has four main objectives:

- i Opening the statutory agricultural, countryside and rural support agencies to an understanding of the advantages of introducing an arts and cultural strategy for agriculture (and rural regeneration), and bringing a new critical and cultural perspective to current problems in agriculture, and possible future priorities for rural and agricultural policy;
- ii Constructing new experimental art and curatorial interface projects with a rural investigative orientation, aimed at addressing some of the deep-rooted and more controversial issues in farming, such as ethical, political, environmental and social problems relating to farming practice, animal welfare, the countryside, rural life, and agricultural change;
- iii Opening farms and farming to the public (Curry Report, p. 98). New agricultural contexts for education, public access and arts practice; i.e. on-farm exhibitions, cattle stockyard arts projects, museum projects about alternative farming, and farming projects in urban settings: opening up access to new agricultural sites and re-connecting urban and rural communities;
- iv Opening the (urban) art world and cultural institutions to a new understanding and respect for farming and agricultural issues, encouraging leading arts, media and cultural policy makers and practitioners to embrace the challenges posed by the Curry Report and the new agenda for rural affairs and agricultural reform.

5.3 **Understanding the economic and social priorities of farming communities**

The proposed pilot arts projects would also need to address the priorities for social inclusion and rural economic regeneration as identified by the farming and agricultural support agencies; DEFRA, the Countryside Agency, and as underlined in the Curry report, (2002), the new Rural Strategy DEFRA 2004, and the RURAL SHIFT report, Arts Council England, (2003). In essence farming communities are mainly concerned with the struggle for economic survival, and any overly high flown rhetoric about an arts and cultural engagement with agriculture or about new cultural narratives for farming will cut little ice with farming leaders or the agricultural establishment at present. This not to suggest that farmers and agricultural leaders are indifferent to culture or are, somehow, all anti-art rednecks. In fact the opposite is the case, and many in the farming community (including the NFU, WFU, RASE, YFCs, and the SFFA) actively support and patronise the arts. As the three Arts and Agriculture reports have revealed, they welcome new partnerships with artists and the arts.

The main priorities for farming communities can be restated as:

- i Rural economic regeneration: generating new markets for farm produce and skills, new business opportunities, farm diversification, and rural creative industries and crafts initiatives;
- ii Tackling rural social inclusion; addressing rural health, social cohesion, educational and environmental issues; work with young farmers, farming women and farming elders;
- iii Educating the general public and urban consumers about farming, food, fibres and related agricultural practices, and about the countryside and rural traditions in general; documenting rural change and farming traditions; and improving the public perception of British farming;

- iv Improving rural and farming communications, and consolidating the new urban/rural reconnections and partnerships; promoting new urban/rural business partnerships and farmers markets through cultural exchanges and marketing initiatives in the cities; e.g. (temporary) 'farming embassies' to be located in each of the major cities;
- v Taking advantage of EU, DEFRA and Countryside Agency initiatives for rural regeneration; improving quality of life in the countryside, support for farming families and rural communities.

5.4 **Closer alignment with DEFRA, RAFE, and Countryside Agency priorities**

DEFRA, the Countryside Agency and the NFU should be fully consulted and involved in developing any proposed future rural arts and arts and agriculture, since elements of current arts work in the field compare quite well with some of the Rural Strategy 2004 objectives, and related programmes such as Eat the View, the Market Towns Initiative, Community Renewables and the LEADER + and ERDF initiatives. Other DEFRA, NFU and Countryside Agency sponsored initiatives: opening up Britain's farms to the public, and related school visits and farm education projects, rural regeneration, and rural young peoples' initiative are other important areas in which the arts could make a significant contribution. Proposals for a formal arts sector partnership and dialogue with DEFRA, the Countryside Agency and the Rural Affairs Forum are discussed in more detail in the RURAL SHIFT document, and at the end of this report. See Section 9 for more details.

5.5 **Finding experienced and qualified artists willing to work in rural contexts**

As in any evolving new area of practice, there is still some uncertainty about this field, and it may not be suited to every practitioner. Artists may find that they have to adjust their outlook (in terms of motivation and practice), and be prepared to give the time required to learn about farming culture, rural traditions and the diversity of agricultural practice. This takes time and patience, and may involve long term work with farming communities, tackling what are in essence non-art problems. It can be a demanding and frustrating area in which to work, in which notions of artistic autonomy and art world career profiles fall by the wayside. These problems could partly be overcome through provision of support for a well coordinated and resourced rural pedagogy, research and education programme as outlined in Section 2.7. Art and Agriculture is not for the faint-hearted.

6 **Planning new arts and agricultural partnerships and interventions**

Section 6.1 goes on to outline possible ways in which arts practitioners can engage with, and build new partnerships with the farming and agriculture sectors. These can be summarised as: (i) Research like practices capable of responding to the social, cultural and economic traditions of farming communities; (ii) developing arts projects aimed at reconnecting farming with new urban and rural consumers and markets; (iii) arts projects that deliver practical outcomes in terms of farm diversification and rural economic regeneration as advocated by lead rural agencies.

6.1 **Investigative projects about farming, food and new land based industries**

- i Rethinking the farm and farming as a new cultural, environmental and economic resource for rural regeneration: exploring farms and farming projects as potential rural heritage and cultural landscapes projects. Proposing new artistic, educational and cultural uses for redundant farms and farmlands/buildings, the farm as a new urban/rural cultural, educational and health resource. Extending the Art Farm concept (developed in the USA and Australia) to the UK - the Hirsch Farm curatorial research projects in Illinois USA; the Kellerberrin Rural Arts studio projects in Western Australia; and the SHAVE Farm arts and rural forum projects in Somerset. New uses for farms as environmental art schools, rural creative industries centres, digital arts and community broadcasting centres, or as cultural centres for isolated rural communities. Investment in farmer led international cultural, arts and music festivals (e.g. Glastonbury), and farm based exhibitions and arts symposia presented in combination with regional farm foods and rural tourism festivals, e.g. Abergavenny Food Festival.
- ii Exploring new economic uses for redundant farm buildings and barns, and arts strategies for dealing with surplus farmland and produce. Artistic, social and environmental uses for

farmland, and alternative land use schemes; arts projects supporting energy farming (e.g. willow growing for bio-mass, and related architectural and crafts applications); generating new creative applications and markets for non-food and fibre crops, in the fashion industry, textile arts, environmental design and architecture. Arts and design-led projects for new uses for farm produced wool, willow, and other alternative fibre crops; examples include: the Sheep and Wool Cultures textile arts commissions with LEADER + Cumbria Fells and Dales; ArtsReach, arts marketing collaborations in Somerset for farm products.

- iii Documenting and preserving regional farming cultural diversity and rural crafts traditions, including the unique diversity of skills and traditions of the livestock, cereal, hill farming and fishing port communities of Britain. A study of the working practices, craft traditions and cultural values embedded in farming practices and the rural way of life, e.g. work with rural women, farming elders, rural youth and young farmers, as a vital cultural resource for the future of sustainable agriculture. Including development of dedicated arts and cultural strategies for marginal farming, rural and primary producer communities (e.g. fishing port communities) to help them secure fuller access to new creative, cultural and entrepreneurial resources to help them manage the process of social dislocation and economic change.

e.g. On the Edge, a study of hill farming communities in Derbyshire; Rural Media Company Herefordshire; Fishing Port Arts Festivals and media arts projects in Cornwall and Scotland, and the ArtBarns public art exhibitions project in partnership with the Hill Farming Initiative in rural Lancashire.

- iv Responding to some of the ethical, aesthetic and philosophical issues and problems relating to future agricultural practices and policy. Including implementation of pioneering agri-environmental initiatives, rural social investment, and animal welfare priorities. Contributing to widening and informing public debates on issues concerning factory farming, animal cloning, GMOs and bio-technology, and food safety, and exploration of new human/animal relationships and bio-cultural interfaces with agriculture. Exhibitions about rural biodiversity, the survival of rare breeds, and the role of veterinary practitioners, animal husbandry and livestock breeding. e.g. the 'Love, Labour & Loss', 300 years of British Livestock in Art'.

6.2 **Generating new urban rural cultural exchanges and economic partnerships**

Re-connecting the urban and rural communities and regeneration of the rural economy have already been identified as key cultural tasks (RURAL SHIFT report 2003, Curry Report, 2002, Rural Strategy, DEFRA 2004). This could partly be achieved by connecting leading critics, art historians, curators, writers, and policy makers from urban arts institutions (e.g. Tate Britain, The Hayward, architecture, theatre/performing arts, literature, film/new communications media, and fashion) with the new agenda for rural affairs. These institutions, together with leading art critics, planners, policy researchers and cultural entrepreneurs play a major role in influencing and guiding the national cultural agenda, and have at their disposal powerful creative, intellectual, economic and imaginative resources which, with encouragement and imagination, could be further deployed in addressing the problems confronting rural and agricultural communities. Such an exchange could be a valuable two way process in which the rural experience would help to inform the urban community, for example in promoting healthy lifestyle and diet, environmental sustainability, and recreational opportunities.

Engagement with agricultural communities also offers a stimulating new context for arts work, and new employment opportunities and audiences for the urban/rural arts community, providing writers, artists, film makers and architects/designers with exciting new intellectual challenges, and interesting subject matter with which to work. For the sake of brevity, discussion of potential cultural interface projects will focus on five categories (there are others - e.g. food) that have emerged from the 'Investing in Rural Creativity' studies. The 'interface projects' are proposed as:

- * Architecture and design (advanced design applications in new agricultural contexts),
- * New theatre, broadcasting and writing, (about agriculture, food, landscape and rural issues)
- * Fashion design and textile arts, (new farm fibres projects - the textiles art & fashion industry)

- * Photography and film/video (documenting rural life, traditions and agricultural change)
 - * Contemporary crafts. (the new rural crafts - revalorising agricultural traditions as crafts)
- Each of the above 'interface' projects would be developed as a minimum three to five years programme, combining practical pilot artist farmer collaborative projects, combined with artists' research commissions and fellowships, seminars, touring exhibitions, curatorial projects located on farms, and art and agriculture summer schools on farms for art students, agricultural students and young practitioners. Sections 6.3.1 to 6.4. discusses these interface projects in more detail.

6.3.1 Architecture and Agriculture: Rural Design Forum architecture designer collaborations

Architecture is a universal art form with a tradition of critical reflection and intervention in other cultural, social, environmental, spatial and aesthetic spheres. Architects are also adept at developing new theoretical, conceptual and design solutions to problems posed by unfamiliar geo-political, economic, environmental, social and spatial problems. They are practised in collaborative and interdisciplinary working, often involving teams of artists, communities and planners, and in creating the cultural narratives, symbolic forms required during the era of urban post-industrial regeneration. Architecture is credited with the introduction of post-modernism into mainstream cultural discourse, which in turn had a major impact on the ideology of urban regeneration. Architects could be encouraged to engage with a roughly similar set of conceptual, spatial/political, aesthetic and social problems now available within the agricultural and rural sectors. Although not on the same scale as the earlier urban engagements, the crisis in agriculture and the national rural regeneration project would seem present them with a unique opportunity to develop a parallel theoretical and architectural discourse on the (post) agricultural era, and about the meanings and functions of the future new countryside and rural landscapes.

To take these these ideas further, a Rural Design Forum and/or a research and development is now being developed by a partnership involving the RIBA, the Architectural Association, and the Landscape Institute, Design Council in dialogue with DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities and the Rural Cultural Forum:

- i The (post) agricultural rural vernacular - new uses for surplus farm buildings and agricultural buildings (e.g. cattle markets, agricultural show grounds); innovative farm barn conversions; farms as new rural housing settlements, rural studios, artbarns, art farms and rural workshops and factories; cattle market conversions as new educational and performing arts venues.
- ii New technologies and media interfaces with agriculture and rural architecture; designs for energy efficient farms, telecommunications farms, farms as TV/film sets; and architecture, and imagining and designing the new (post) agricultural era rural landscapes;
- iii New architectural, construction and engineering applications for farm produced fibre crops, woodlands and natural materials: straw bale house building, rammed earth dwellings, willow architectural structures, wool in insulation and tent structures, and farm timber for housing ;
- iv Future farming; generating new theoretical and aesthetic perspectives on sustainable farming and rural environments: architecture and design-led experiments and speculations about future farms and possible farming solutions to urban housing problems; advancing new thinking about rural and farming issues within the landscape and architectural professions;
- v Documenting vernacular rural and agricultural building as inspiration for new urban forms, using rural landscape forms, crafts traditions and materials in urban contexts; export of traditional rural materials, crafts skills and processes (thatching, weaving, stone-walling, etc.) into new urban design and architectural contexts (e.g. FAT projects in London);

6.3.2 The Pen and the Plough: new cultural narratives for agriculture & sustainability

Theatre, literature and cinema are predominantly urban cultural forms of communication and expression which also have a major influence on the urban imagination, and in opening up new thinking about other social, philosophical and environmental issues for public contemplation and debate. Literature and the theatre has and continues to deal with rural and agricultural issues, but this has always been a marginal area of interest. Given the ethical, social, and cultural

implication of the current crisis in agriculture, and the related health, environmental, and social issues now arising and that affect both urban and rural populations, this might be a good opportunity to re-open some of the links between literature, theatre and agriculture. Urban audiences need an informed, balanced and updated view of British agriculture, and about farming community and rural life in general. It is therefore important to try to make an effort, and using appropriate avenues, to persuade urban writers, theatre directors, TV and film makers of their role in recording and communicating about these matters to new urban audiences. And things are already happening in this direction. In 2002 the Royal Shakespearean Company organised some seminars for writers and farmers to develop new ideas for a programme of plays dealing with the crisis in agriculture. The FMD crisis also spawned a number of theatre projects including those by Harrogate Theatre, Yorkshire Broadsides, and BLAIZE. Dartington College of Arts recently ran a trial series of seminars on theatre and agriculture. The Arts Council Investing in Rural Creativity reports included a range of proposals and for a national conference promoting new writing, theatre and media projects about agriculture. These include:

- i. Fellowship and residency programme for writers developing new drama for urban audiences on rural, countryside and agricultural themes, possibly based with the RSC, BBC, Channel 4, or the National Theatre;
- ii. Residency programmes for urban writers, theatre/media workers, poets, etc., with the rural agencies (DEFRA, Countryside Agency) and with farming communities, the Royal Agricultural Show, farm auction marts or with different farming sectors - dairying, cereal, hill farming;
- iii. Establishment of a writers' forum or network (The Pen and the Plough) connecting urban arts and media writers with agricultural writers and farming journalists; sharing of information about rural and farming issues and rural cultural and social experiences;
- iv. Rural film and media forum, to plan and resource future film, radio, webcasting and telecommunications projects about farming and rural change; coordination of international film festivals and symposia about agricultural change, farming communities and rural issues;
- iv. 'The Pen and the Plough' International/European conference exploring new writing, theatre, media projects about agricultural change and documenting farming cultures world-wide.

6.3.3 Reconnecting contemporary craft with its rural roots and agriculture

The crafts had their origins in preindustrial rural and agricultural communities and creative traditions, and there is a natural empathy and respect between farmers and crafts people. Many urban trained craftspeople have opted to live in rural areas, finding cheap working and living space and healthier lifestyles for their families, and consequently have become adept at marketing their work locally or to urban and international markets from remote rural locations. Design traditions in pottery, glass making, leather work, weaving, furniture making, clothing design, and jewellery often retain something of their rural origins, character and ethos. At the same time traditional rural crafts such as hedge-laying, dry-stone walling, rope-making, blacksmithing, tree-coppicing, charcoal-making, basket-making, rustic joinery and wood-work, saddlery, barn building, and animal husbandry skills are being reworked into new forms by contemporary artists and craft workers, who are finding new markets for rural crafts, skills and materials in urban contexts, and through other innovative architectural and public art applications.

A study needs to be undertaken of the contribution that craftspeople are making to the new rural economy. This would: i) document the contribution already made by craftspeople to rural social and economic development by bringing in new investment and employment, and maintaining cultural and social cohesion and the rural infrastructure; ii) study the potential of craftspeople to make a contribution to rural regeneration in the areas of social inclusion, urban/rural economic and cultural exchange, managing agricultural change, and land based creative industries. (iv) and the role of contemporary crafts as a valuable R+D resources in generating new creative land based industries and value added farm diversification initiatives. Potential research areas include:

- i. Survey of trained craft workers and designers working in rural communities, and

assessment of the economic contribution made by craft practitioners, craft businesses and marketing enterprises to the rural economy;

- ii Expansion of applications and markets for traditional and contemporary rural crafts in the context of urban design, urban landscapes, green engineering, and architecture;
- iii Promoting greater use of traditional materials and products sourced from farming, land based industries and the countryside, and rural craft skills as an inspiration for contemporary design;
- iv Development of rural craft based creative industries, and urban/rural craft collaborations; hybrid rural crafts and new technology and digital media , and virtual marketing projects;
- v Study of rural regeneration initiatives led by DEFRA and the Countryside Agency, to identify opportunities for crafts input (Eat the View, Market Towns Initiative, ERDP and LEADER +).
- v 'Blue Skies' experimental crafts and agriculture research and exhibition projects exploring new urban and rural craft forms and markets;
- vi Proposed national conference and exhibition documenting and promoting contemporary craft interfaces with agriculture and the new rural affairs agenda.

6.3.4 Textile art and fashion design projects: adding value to farm fibre crops

Fashion is another urban cultural form which has potentially a major role to play in generating new economic opportunities and markets for the farming, rural and agricultural sectors. Traditionally the nation's pre-industrial textile and clothing industry was based almost exclusively on home grown fibres, which were produced and processed mainly by regional farming and rural communities. The regional fibre producing and processing economy was based on sheep farming (wool), flax growing (linen); livestock (leather/footwear), cereals (straw and hemp, rope, paper making), and other animal fibre, furs, etc., and these have given us the landscapes we today regard as a quintessential part of the English countryside. Given the introduction of alternative energy and fibre crop cultivation initiatives by Government (e.g. CSL, York) as part of the strategy for farm diversification, there is scope for a re-investigation of these traditional pre-industrial rural economic forms, and development of a new textile arts and fashion design programme to explore creative, environmental and economic applications for farm produced fibres and alternative crops.

Various schemes have been proposed to find new practical and creative applications for wool and other farm produced fibres; amongst these are low grade wool for felt making, insulation and building purposes, and new uses for bio-mass willow and straw in 'green' architecture, bio-engineering and landscape design. The fashion industry also has potentially an important role to play in developing new applications for farm produced fibres and related textiles. It could, for example, employ powerful research, development and marketing skills in persuading urban consumers to support British farming, farm produced fibres, and rural textile products.

To our knowledge the British fashion industry and textile art community has not been formally invited to engage with the possibilities and challenges of the new agricultural agenda. This is not quite as far fetched as it at first sounds. The fashion industry has a tradition of supporting other sectors of British industry through joint international export and marketing drives. 'Naturally British' proposes an industry-led thematic and marketing focus on creative, fashion and design applications for traditional and alternative farm fibres, countryside fashions and industrial textiles.

Examples of proposed agricultural textiles and fashion industry/farming linked research planned or now underway, include:

- i European Sheep and Wool Cultures symposium: a textile arts and agriculture research partnership and marketing initiative; proposals for an international European wool cultures exhibition and symposium for the North West region, possible partnership with the British Wool Marketing Board, National Trust, the Craft Council and other European wool groups.

- ii Digital arts, fashion design and farm textiles collaborations; new commissions and collaborations for fashion designers and digital artists to work on new 'farming and fashion' projects with agricultural partners; design and marketing of new fashion wear for rural youth and young farmers, and exploring 'smart' technologies interfaces with countryside fashion wear and farmer's outdoor clothing;
- iii From the Catwalk to the Stockyards; proposal for a national Fashion and Farming Fibres conference and fashion show, showcasing the best of British natural fibres, countryside clothing and fashion wear; profiling new rural textiles and design wear, and new agricultural clothing produced by the fashion industry for the farming community. Proposed venue Skipton Farm Auction Mart, York_shire; to coincide with British Fashion week 2004.
- iv 'Naturally British' proposed textile industry-led thematic and marketing focus on creative, fashion and design applications for traditional and alternative natural farm fibres, countryside fashions and industrial/agricultural textiles, and promoting the extraordinary wealth of natural fibres, textiles and fashion design products with farming, rural and countryside connections.

6.3.5 New Rural Photography: documenting rural social and agricultural change

Photography is by far the most popular and widely accepted urban cultural form. It is now a part of everyday life, and plays a major role in advertising and the media economy, and carries cultural information to all levels of society. Documentary photography also has strong rural roots and some of the earliest classic photography documentary work arose in response to the crisis in the farming community in 1930s USA. The US FSA - Farm Security Administration project established by the Federal government employed artists and photographers such as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange to record the plight of the share_croppers in the rural deep South. In addition to the valuable photographic archive it left behind the FSA project established the power of farming iconography to influence urban opinion and ultimately agricultural policy. Contemporary photography in Britain has retained some of its rural connections, and is in many ways an ideal medium through which to effect the urban/rural reconnection process talked about by Sir Donald Curry. However, after FMD and the major upheavals in the farming community recently, new work need to be undertaken urgently to document the changes, update the national farming iconography, and develop a critical programme for the new rural photography. Listed below are three projects currently under consideration:

- i Cultural Documents of FMD; recording the social, health and economic impact of FMD
Proposal to establish a national touring exhibition and a cultural archive centre, to record for posterity the impact and consequences of the 2001 FMD epidemic, as portrayed by artists, farmers and rural communities through_out England. Research and co-ordination for a conference and exhibition programme, featuring video, photography, theatre, radio/audio arts, visual arts and the written records produced by farming and rural communities during and after the FMD epidemic.

This includes a proposal to establish a national Cultural Documents of FMD community archive, museum and study centre in Cumbria. The Cultural Documents of FMD exhibition and conference programme have been generously supported by Arts Council England and will take place at Manchester Town Hall, 14 - 16th March 2006.

- ii National Farming and Rural Change documentation project

Following on from the above, a proposal to establish a nationally coordinated programme of rural photographic, video and digital documentation, to be commissioned and developed in response to the changes taking place in rural, agricultural and fishing communities through_out England. This project, combined with the work commissioned over the past five to ten years, is likely to become one of the great social and cultural documents of British rural life at the beginning of the 21st century. Furthermore, the quality and scope of the rural social documentary work being produced by photographers, artists and media groups will inevitably lead to comparisons with the FSA documents housed in the US Library of Congress and at the New York Museum of Modern Art. <www.lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>.

It is recommended that the Arts Council, DCMS, DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities, should consider jointly supporting a national rural arts and social documentary initiative. The contemporary records of farming change and rural life in England will, like the US Government FSA - Farm Security Administration project before it, stand as an important and enduring cultural record, and may be used to inform future rural and agricultural policy making, and in the long run may (indirectly) help prevent further calls on the public purse in compensation for agricultural calamities such as FMD and BSE. This work is already proving of social value in assisting rural and farming communities to cope with the trauma and distress caused by FMD, and preserving first hand records of the epidemic to enable future generations to learn from the experience. It may possibly even help in the containment and better management of any future outbreaks. (Programme outline and discussion paper available)

The new rural documentation work has the potential to:

- i Contribute valuable social documentary materials and visual and oral evidence to inform new thinking about future policy on rural affairs, the countryside and agricultural change;
- ii Empower rural and farming communities to tackle social and economic exclusion and give them the confidence to invest in their own creative traditions, and in managing risk and the negative effects of rural change;
- iii Re-inforce the identity and self esteem of rural people and farming communities by enabling them to record and communicate about their own cultural values, experiences and concerns;
- iv Develop new rural media partnerships, creative rural industries and rural broadcasting and marketing strategies, and expand collaborations with urban digital and new media artists;
- v Promote a new rural documentary tradition in mainstream photography, including proposals for new research, commissions and curatorial projects; revalorising and profiling rural documentary work in art schools, art galleries, and art history research programmes.

6.4 Grains of Truth: from the FSA to FMD - The New Rural Photography conference

The third proposed rural photography initiative is for an international conference about role of the arts, media and photography in documenting rural change and tackling social and economic exclusion in marginal farming and rural communities in Britain and internationally. Focus on photography, digital art and new media projects recording and communicating rural and farming issues to urban audiences, and how this might inform and influence the direction of rural and agricultural policy. Photography as a valuable critical and communications resource in promoting public understanding of rural issues, and aiding rural communities and marginal farming constituencies to articulate their experiences and needs. Commissions for photographers and artists to research and produce new social and cultural documents and exhibitions about rural and agricultural change. Proposed international conference and exhibition and commissions programme; 'Grains of Truth: the new rural photography' in partnership with Nottingham Trent University. Scheduled for September 2005. Conference programme and discussion paper available

The Arts Council England, DCMS and its statutory rural partners DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities, should support as a matter of priority a national rural social documentary initiative (similar to the US FSA project) to enable leading artists, writers and photographers and rural communities to record and interpret the effects of the radical changes now taking place in rural and agricultural communities and the countryside throughout the country, and to make sure that the fishing port communities are also included in this project.

7 Investing in rural creativity and farming community cultural capital

Section 7 and 8 now addresses the question of how the arts might make a practical and contribution to rural economic and environmental sustainability and the social needs of rural and farming communities, and also support the re-structuring of the agricultural economy. The projects outlined under are thus proposed in two sets: firstly the new cultural interfaces now developing within the farming and agricultural sectors, and secondly, the proposed Arts Council England regional pilot projects as outlined in Section 8. These are the core elements of the Arts and Agriculture programme as proposed for development over the next 3 - 5 years. They are also complementary and fully integrated within the overarching arts and rural regeneration programme.

7.1 Creative and arts-led entrepreneurial initiatives for farming communities

The rural community and agricultural sector has considerable untapped creative, imaginative and cultural capital and resources, and the arts have a useful role to play as catalytic agents in helping to unlock and develop this creative and entrepreneurial potential. In this context the cultural interface projects now being developed in the agricultural sector and farming communities also reveal something of the indigenous rural creative strategies for coping with change. This report does not allow an opportunity to fully expand on these, but they hold clues to the shape and direction of the (post)agricultural rural economy. These should be the subject of a study combining sociological, cultural and economic elements. The list below outlines some possible areas for further investigation, and these and other cultural interface projects in the agricultural are discussed in more detail in the RURAL SHIFT and Arts Council Yorkshire and SW reports.

7.2 Farmers as artists: exploring new creative outlets for land based industries

Farmers are diversifying into cultivation of a wide range of non-food crops for energy, for textiles, and for pharmaceutical and industrial applications. They are also eager to find creative uses for surplus farmland, and farmer led crop art projects, crop circle festivals, earth house and straw bale architecture or sculpture projects, and associated farm tourism and marketing ventures, are proliferating across England. Artists are working with farmers on various farm-based environmental art and field art/ecological restoration projects, and this represents a growth area for both the arts and the farming communities, and highlights a new developmental and cultural interface further connecting farming practice and the arts. In a sense farmers have caught up with the land art movement and environmental art, and in some instances are forging ahead in identifying new aesthetic and artistic projects. This area of Arts and Agriculture could become the subject of a research programme: The impact of the arts on the (post)agricultural rural economy: promotion and marketing of arts-related farm tourism, creative industries, and rural cultural attractions, possibly with an international symposium, and an exhibitions programme.

It is recommended that a major research programme be undertaken soon to explore the full potential of the arts in support of the new (post) agricultural and rural economies, including arts-led marketing of farm foods, rural tourism, creative rural industries and rural SME arts and crafts initiatives.

7.3 Farm auction and rural life centres: new rural cultural and symbolic forms

As farming communities grapple with change, new social, economic, symbolic and cultural forms are beginning to emerge in the rural landscape. Farm auction centres and cattle markets are either being sold off for housing or are being transformed to fill new social and economic roles and functions. Architects and artists are also being commissioned to design new social, cultural and educational facilities for rural communities. Surplus farms, farm buildings and farmland are being converted as centres for rural business, recreation, and as housing, media, and other cultural uses. Hitherto marginal sectors of the rural community - women, elders and young people - are working on proposals for Farming Life Centres which perform multiple rural health support, education, recreation, and cultural roles. Farmers' markets, farming life museums and educational farms in both urban and rural locations are other new urban/rural interface projects to have emerged in recent years. Beyond their sociological interest the new architectural, symbolic, spatial, environmental and cultural forms now emerging in agriculture represent a challenging new area for arts research and practice. A major architecture and agriculture research programme, combined with a conference, exhibitions and publication projects should be commissioned to document this important and emerging new sphere of cultural activity in the farming community.

7.4 **Cultural strategies for marginal farming and the fishing port communities:**

While some of the main agricultural sectors - dairying, livestock, cereal and root crops, horticulture are coping reasonably well with the restructuring process, and despite the recurring economic problems have good prospects for recovery and economic stability, the marginal, upland and smaller family farming sectors face a much more uncertain future, and possibly a gloomier prospect. Both the hill farmers and the coastal fishing port communities in England (to point to two such examples) are facing a significant reduction in their level of income, a reduction in the numbers engaged in farming or fishing, and a displacement of their traditional livelihood, skills and cultural identity. Just as the skilled workers in urban centres and the mining industry, some of whom are now employed as designers, artists, craft makers and media workers in the urban sector, received major European and state funding to manage the transformation of their respective sectors and work skills, so an equivalent arts and cultural strategy should now be introduced to enable these last primary producer economies and communities to access the equivalent cultural resources and arts support to enable them to manage the transition and process of change. The Arts Council England studies for the SW and Yorkshire include recommendations for developing arts and cultural strategies for marginal rural communities, and the HFI (Hill Farming Initiative) in Yorkshire has recently commissioned an outline arts and cultural strategy for the UK hill farming community.

7.5 **Tackling the social, health and cultural impact of BSE and FMD**

The two major disasters in the agricultural sector in recent years have been the BSE and FMD outbreaks. While understandably both Government and the farming community now want to put these experiences behind them and move on to rebuild consumer confidence and the farming economy, the social, psycho_logical, health, and cultural impact of these events is still very much in evidence. (University of Lancaster,Voices of Experience, FMD health impact study, 2003).

How to deal with and respond to these problems is also an important cultural task and responsibility. In July 2001 the Cité Museum of Science and Industry in Paris staged 'Vache Folle', a three week public conference, exhibition and symposium with an associated educational and exhibitions, and citizens' forums to discuss the health, social, economic, cultural and ethical implications of BSE in France. (Vache Folle), <www.cite-sciences.fr> At that point England had several hundred cases of BSE diagnosed, while in France they had just under twenty. The conference and exhibition was a great success and drew a large new urban audience into an informed and constructive debate about the future of the livestock industry and agricultural policy in France. Interestingly, one of the co-sponsors for the French BSE conference and museum exhibition was the British Council. The Vache Folle project could provide a useful model for development of a similar UK-wide conference, public debate and exhibitions project about FMD.

7.6 **Arts Council England support for the Cultural Documents of FMD project**

During the 2001 FMD outbreak the Arts Council (of) England (Great Peter Street, London) responded quickly to the grave situation, and provided vital funding support for a national arts-led documentation project about the impact of FMD on rural and urban communities. Thanks to this timely and strategic intervention on part of the Arts Council, a valuable national social, artistic and cultural record of the FMD epidemic is now in existence. However, this work is still relatively fragmented and dispersed throughout hundreds of private collections, museum archives, photography studios, local authority, artists' and community archive collections. This work now urgently needs to be brought together, for cataloguing and preservation and possibly assembled as a national cultural document and enduring record of the FMD experience. Further examples of potential cultural interface projects are detailed in the RURAL SHIFT, Arts Council England regional reports for East Midlands, the South West and Yorkshire.

It is recommended that support be provided for the Cultural Documents of FMD, a proposed major national touring exhibition and public forum programme possibly similar in scope to the Vache Folle project (Paris, 2001), aimed at collecting and archiving, for a proposed national FMD study centre, based on the FMD records and documents produced by artists, academics, scientific, veterinarian and farming communities throughout England.

8 Proposed rural 'cultural Interface' regional pilot projects

The other main purpose of the Arts Council England regional 'Investing in Rural Creativity/Arts and Agriculture' study projects was to identify a programme of practical pilot projects in each of the participating regions which could be taken forward as part of a coordinated national Arts and Agriculture development initiative. In addition to achieving a reasonable balance of geographical spread and regional diversity it was also hoped to test the efficacy of a range of different arts and media practices addressed to particular rural and farming community problems and needs.

Arts Council England East Midlands, South West, and Yorkshire now has a completed set of 'Investing in Rural Creativity reports and recommendations for pilot projects. Because LITTORAL is an ACE NW funded AFO and has pioneered most of this new work in the region initially, a list of recommended pilot projects for the North West is also included in the hope that it might become possible to consolidate some of this work in our home region in the near future.

8.1 East Midlands region:

- i Farming Cultures; arts-based work with rural elders and retired farmers; 'preserving rural wisdom' oral archive project in association with the Farming Life Centre (health) project, REAP and Derbyshire RCC;
- ii FSA - FMD - New Rural Photography: the role of photography and video in documenting agricultural communities and rural change; commissions programme, international exhibition and conference proposed for September 2004 (see section 6.4 for more details);
- iii Promoting rural cultural diversity through the arts; exploring new urban/rural cultural exchanges; partnerships with young people, ethnic minority cultural groups, rural asylum/refugee projects;
- iv Food cultures and rural tourism; arts documentation and marketing of regional and local farm foods, rural crafts and tourism; farm foods marketing, and arts and rural tourism projects in support of Eat the View, and Foods from Britain initiatives.
- v Exploring the human/animal relationship in agriculture: documentation of livestock breeding traditions in the East Midlands; animal welfare issues, and the social and cultural impact of BSE in the East Midlands (Queniborough vCJD clusters) and elsewhere;
- vi New urban/rural architectural forms and hybrids. Farming museums, rural life cultural centres, and the new social and cultural role filled by farm auction houses: ABC Centre Bakewell;
- vii Rural Shift - the arts and rural social and economic inclusion; tackling rural social and health issues through the medium of the arts; work with rural women, rural youth and rural disability groups. N.B. conference took place in October 2002, and the report is now available;
- viii Re-Imaging British Farming Arts and Agriculture exhibition. Arts projects and commissions to support the celebration of 100th anniversary of the NFU (Lincolnshire, 1904).

8.2 South West region:

- i New rural arts pedagogy and research programme: establishment of a national educational, training and research centre and programme for Arts and Agriculture/New Rural Arts. The rural 'pedagogical axis' in Devon, (Dartington Art College, Aune Head Arts and Beaford Arts);
- ii Art farms: research programme: documenting artfarms projects and farmer curated arts exhibitions on farms/farm land; proposed regional initiative exploring new creative, arts and cultural uses for surplus farms and farm buildings; international conference about art farms -Australia, UK, US and Thailand;

- iii Animal Farm; arts projects investigating new human/animal relationships and cultural interfaces, documenting the regions farm livestock and animal husbandry traditions, and new cultural and ethical perspectives on animal welfare, cloning and bio-technology;
- iv Regional Food Cultures initiative: proposed regional foods research fellowship exploring new art and cultural interface with farm and regional food making initiatives. D documentation and marketing of SW region and local farm foods, rural culinary arts, crafts and tourism; arts and rural tourism projects;
- v New Rural Media: exploring digital arts, new media technologies and rural communications. Partnership with Second-Byte - SW conference on new rural digital media economies;
- vi Marginal Lives; arts and cultural strategies for fishing port communities and the SFFA and FSA (small and family farming communities) Proposal for a European and regional exhibition and conference documenting the impact of fishing port communities and de-commissioning;
- vii Theatre, new writing & agricultural change: research commissions for regional writers and theatre makers documenting rural and agricultural change, and an international conference;
- viii Crafts and Agriculture initiative: promoting contemporary crafts in the context of agricultural change. Crafts research projects, and an international rural crafts exhibition and conference;
- ix Cultural Documents of FMD: continuing support for SW region documentation programme and its integration within the national Cultural Documents of FMD exhibition project.

8.3 Yorkshire and Humberside Region:

- i Arts and Rural Youth initiative: research project, commissions programme and conference, proposed in partnership with LEADER + and YFC East Riding, NCB, Countryside Agency;
- ii Promoting rural cultural diversity: urban/rural and ethnic minority partnership projects and conference; new ethnic cultural and rural community business partnership s; proposed with Kala Sangam Bradford (MOSAIC and the Countryside Agency);
- iii New Fields: the arts and agricultural change international symposium. Arts and alternative land use commissions and research programme: new energy, fibre/textiles, and architecture projects (See section 11 for more detailed outline);
- iv Rural media and rural creative industries initiative. Digital art and farming interfaces and rural telecommunications; rural community radio, webcasting and video programmes;
- v Architecture and Agriculture: regional research commissions and exhibition programme, and international conference, exploring the architectural interface with farming;
- vi Farmed fibres and wool cultures: textile arts, fashion design and economic applications for farm-grown fibres. Research and commissions, exhibition and international conference;
- vii Arts and rural tourism: promoting the arts in the context of regional rural tourism, and arts projects in the context of farming and agricultural shows and rural festivals;
- viii Cultural documents of FMD: provision of support for the Yorkshire region documentation programme and its integration within the national Cultural Documents of FMD exhibition;
- ix Farming Cultures Agency/initiative; proposal to develop a pilot national Farming Cultures Agency, to document, research and promote new arts and cultural programmes in support of and in partnership with the farming communities and lead agricultural sectors in Britain.

8.4 North West region:

- i European Wool and Sheep Cultures Symposium: international textile art and wool crafts commissions programme for Cumbria; international symposium and exhibition in partnership with the British Wool marketing Board, DEFRA/LEADER+, and the European Wool Group;
- ii Cultural Documents of FMD; proposal establish the NW region as the centre to coordinate a national FMD arts and cultural documents initiative, and an FMD archive initiative to be based in Cumbria; proposed partnership with University ESRC funded FMD research programme;
- iii Rural Voices: digital media and rural economy initiative. Development of digital art, new media, oral arts, broad_casting and telecommunications interfaces with rural communities;
- iv New urban/rural and cultural diversity partnerships; promoting new ways of connecting urban and rural communities, and ethnic cultural diversity rural community partnerships;
- v Creative Rural Industries - arts and rural regeneration: a focus on the arts in the context of rural social and economic regeneration. Examples of new rural creative industries, crafts, media, and other arts-led rural SMEs, etc. Proposed initially in partnership with LEADER + Cumbria Fells and Dales;
- vi Architecture and Agriculture: ArtBarns Mk II. Exploring new architecture interfaces with regional farming cultures and traditions. Dairy Cow Museum project, Cheshire; ArtBarns II exhibition and documentation project in Cumbria; and links with Architecture Week 2004;
- vii Re-imaging British farming initiative: commissioned photographic, video and digital art projects 're-imaging' regional farming communities; for exhibition in major urban centres, 2003; proposed Farming Cultures Embassy project in Manchester;.

In order to advance the new rural arts and related arts and agriculture initiatives as outlined it is recommended that support be provided for a pilot programme of regional rural arts exploratory project or commissions, and 'cultural interface' arts and agriculture pilot projects supported by conferences and an exhibitions programmes, aimed at generating a coordinated national support framework and delivery mechanism for the new rural arts. And in so doing, would thereby consolidate and affirm England's role as a leader in pioneering a new role for the arts in rural development and in the context of agricultural change in Europe.

It is recommended that support be provided for the proposed regional 'cultural interface' arts and agriculture and pilot projects and associated conference and exhibitions programme, as a first step towards generating a new national framework and practical delivery mechanism for the new rural arts; promoting England as a world leader in pioneering a new role for the arts in the context of rural regeneration and farm diversification, and the possibility of developing a new cultural strategy for the restructuring of the agricultural economies in Europe.

9 The Countryside Agency* and DEFRA: key partners for arts and agriculture

A central theme throughout this report is the need for establishment of a formal dialogue and new partnership linking the lead statutory agencies for the arts, rural affairs, and the countryside. And given the willingness of the arts sector to become involved and support the Government's new rural affairs agenda, that that this should now be taken up as matter of priority.

- 9.1 This requires that the arts sector should also review its hitherto (mainly) urban priorities and bias in the light of the proposed rural proofing guidelines, and make a greater inform itself about rural policy priorities, countryside initiatives, and the new rural affairs agenda. To achieve this the arts now need to actively pursue a dialogue and new partnership with DEFRA, the Countryside Agency and the RAFA. To point the way forward we have listed under a very brief summary of some of the key aims of these agencies. This is clearly an important new area of development work it will require a separate study and research programme. How this can best be achieved

and implemented is for the lead statutory agencies themselves to decide and agree upon.

- 9.2 The Countryside Agency (soon to become the Commission for Rural Communities) and DEFRA, including the Governments' think tank on rural affairs, Rural Affairs Forum for England, would be key partners to consult and if possible to involve in the development of any proposed national strategy for the New Rural Arts. The Countryside Agency is already an enlightened supporter of the arts in rural contexts, and deploys cultural, artistic and aesthetic means to enhance rural economic regeneration, conservation and wider public enjoyment of the countryside. The Agency has supported a number of 'R&D' experimental arts projects within the terms of the proposed research and implementation programmes. Its key objectives are summarised from its Corporate Plan as:

- i Supporting rural community and social enterprise;
 - ii Developing effective projects for young people in rural areas;
 - iii Promoting more effective ways of identifying and targeting rural social exclusion.
- DEFRA is also a key potential partner for the new rural arts, particularly through those of its programmes which target key ERDP and LEADER + objectives. It is not possible within the limited space of this report to go into these in more detail, but the key LEADER + rural themes are:

- * use of new technologies and making rural products and services more competitive
- * improving the quality of life in rural areas
- * adding value to local products
- * making the best use of natural and cultural resources

LEADER + target groups in England are:

- * women
- * young people
- * older people
- * rural unemployed and under-employed
- * rural businesses and workers affected by restructuring

9.2 **Rural Affairs Forum for England**

The Rural Affairs Forum for England (RAFE) was set up to implement the Government's commitment to the Rural White paper on rural affairs, and as a sounding board to allow Ministers to 'have regular and direct contact with the main rural groups, so that they know what is going on and what people in the countryside think'. RAFE recently called for suggestions for future conferences, and amongst the topics put forward were the Arts and Rural Regeneration, exploring the role of the crafts and theatre, and other cultural initiatives in support of the new rural agenda. The Forum has a wide membership and would welcome an input and participation by arts and cultural sector.

A central recommendation of this report is the need for a formal dialogue and closer partnerships between the lead statutory agencies for the arts, rural affairs, and the countryside; and given the Government's lead on the new rural affairs agenda and the Curry report's recommendations on the future of British Food and farming, that this should now be taken up as matter of priority.

10 **Arts and Agriculture; national pedagogy, research and training programme**

For the Arts and Agriculture programme this would follow the same programme of research and training priorities as outlined in section 2.7 for the New Rural Arts programme. The ideal situation would be to run the two programmes together as single 'New Rural Arts/Arts and Agriculture /Sustainability' initiative. A detailed arts and rural/urban sustainability report is in preparation.

11 **New Rural Arts programme, management and advisory proposals**

Management of the full New Rural Arts/Arts and Agriculture programmes as recommended by LITTORAL for development in each of the three Arts Council England regional reports clearly lies beyond the scope of any single agency or an existing organisation to tackle on its own. However, two options are offered for further consideration in the interim: An Arts Council England management or coordination group could be set up consisting of Arts Council officers from the three pilot regions (East Midlands, South West and Yorkshire) with other regions willing to act as advisors to the programme, with representatives from DEFRA, the Commission for Rural

Communities.

12 **Recommendations for interim development mechanisms**

A possible interim strategy for implementation of a coordinated arts and agriculture and new rural arts/arts and regeneration initiative, would be for; (1) the establishment of a major international Rural Biennale of Arts and Agriculture, combining exhibitions and a conference project, to be organised in one of the three original pilot projects regions and developed as a partnership with regional farming and rural agencies; and (2) for national Creative Rural Industries and the arts and rural regeneration conference and exhibition to be organised, possibly in the NW region; (3). establishment of a Rural Cultural Forum, to act as a single coherent voice and rural cultural advocacy, networking and development agency, and to function as a coordinating and advisory body in relation to the initiatives outlined in sections (1) and (2) under.

12.1 **New Fields: arts and agricultural change; international symposium & exhibition**

Putting agriculture back at the heart of culture and the urban imagination. Proposal for a major international exhibition and conference programme to be organised in Yorkshire, and developed as a partnership involving the lead strategic regional arts, rural, countryside, economic development and farming agencies. This could be developed as a new type of rural art and agriculture biennial and symposium, and would require a minimum lead-in period of approximately three years (with 2009 as the earliest possibility). Commissioning practical arts projects in collaboration with regional farmers, including projects by invited leading international and regional artists to be based on local farms in the region. These would later be presented as key case studies in the context of an international art, sustainability and agriculture exhibition. A major public exhibitions programme on related agricultural and farming themes and issues would also be organised in partnership with museums and art galleries in all the main urban centres. The proposal has been adopted in principle by Arts Council England Yorkshire and GOYH as possible regional partnership initiative. This could also profile Yorkshire as the pioneer of a new 'European Region of Rural Cultures' initiative, as both a counter and complement to the hitherto exclusively urban and metro-centric bias of the 'European City of Culture' initiatives.

12.2 **Investing in Rural Creativity; a national arts and rural regeneration conference**

New arts and cultural initiatives for rural regeneration. Proposal for a national conference about a future new role for the arts in support of the Government's rural regeneration programmes and promoting Creative Rural Industries. This would focus on practical examples of arts support for rural economic regeneration and social inclusion initiatives; showcasing practical arts projects that have successfully tackled problems of economic and social disadvantage in areas of the country worst affected by FMD and rural decline; development of new rural media, rural internet marketing, rural community radio, farm-based telecommunications, and rural creative industries initiatives. Alongside examples of successful arts and rural tourism marketing, arts and womens' rural enterprise and businesses development projects from through the UK and Europe; examples of innovative arts-led food chain and foods marketing projects, arts and farming economic diversification schemes, and new cultural and performing arts programmes being run by regional farming and cattle auction centres. Tackling rural isolation and social exclusion, through arts support for rural disability access, and work with rural elders, rural youth and children's initiatives; encouraging greater urban arts and cultural sector investment in the rural and farming community, and exchange of creative rural skills and social resources; and attracting new urban consumers, arts resources and cultural investment to support further development of sustainable agriculture and the future rural economy and society. The conference is now confirmed for 10 - 13th September 2006, and will be held at Lancaster University.

12.3 **Rural Cultural Forum; rural community development and advocacy organisation**

Proposed aims and objectives of the Rural Cultural Forum:

- i Creative Rural Communities. To function as a single powerful rural voice and cultural advocacy agency through which to promote and sustain the cultural identity and rich creative, cultural, social and artistic traditions and resources of rural and farming communities throughout Britain.
- ii To provide an interim platform within which grassroots rural and farming community constituencies and other rural support agencies can come together to discuss and formulate a coherent arts and cultural investment strategy for rural communities.

- iii To establish a dedicated rural community arts development agency and cultural information resource network; and to collaborate with statutory, NGO, urban arts and media, and other community and business organisations (urban and rural) in supporting delivery of the Government's New Rural Strategy (July, 2004).
- iv To work to secure the necessary resources, funding and investment to sustain the future development of creative rural communities initiatives and the arts in rural areas, and to ensure a more equitable distribution of arts and cultural funding and resources to rural communities, and for investment in related creative rural communities and rural cultural traditions projects.
- v To promote a more socially inclusive, grass roots and culturally diverse definition of the arts in rural communities, and further the process of urban/rural reconnection and reconciliation advocated in The Curry Report (2002), through support for innovative urban/rural community cultural diversity exchanges and promotion of new urban/rural creative business partnerships.
- vi To generate new rural economic and employment opportunities, including creative rural industries, new rural crafts, rural media, arts and farm diversification, rural tourism and food marketing initiatives; and support for rural social and economic inclusion measures, and engaging the (urban) arts and media sector more fully in supporting rural regeneration initiatives.
- vii To ensure that rural arts and cultural initiatives engage more directly with initiatives aimed at promoting: rural cultural diversity and social inclusion; investment in development of rural social capital and enterprise; new rural media, ICT and communications technologies; promoting sustainable rural environments and rural transport; the work of the rural health care sector, PCTs. and rural disability access organisations; and promoting rural education, lifelong learning, and work with rural women, rural elders and young people.
- viii To liaise with the lead statutory agencies for rural development; DEFRA, the Countryside Agency, English Nature, English Heritage, the Arts Councils and the arts and cultural sector; and to advise them on rural cultural issues and rural proofing, and generally to raise the profile and advance the cultural, social and creative needs and potential of rural communities everywhere.
- ix Through further meetings and consultations to develop a new rural arts development strategy and cultural investment programme that would reflect the priorities and needs of rural communities; and where necessary develop a coordinated programme of research, fund raising activities, conferences, exhibitions, new media and practical arts projects to support the above objectives.

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LITTORAL Trust
23rd October 2003

(revised and updated, 11th March, 2006)

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