

CASE STUDY

Cornwall County Council



National Care Farming Initiative (UK)

Cornwall County Council holds a County Farms Estate of approximately 4,500ha, spread between 113 farms. The Estate has traditionally been held to provide opportunities for new farming entrants to come in to the industry and progress to their own or larger privately owned estate farms, and that remains the raison d'etre of the Service as established by the 1970 Agriculture Act. However, in Cornwall in successive strategies since 1999, culminating in the latest strategy likely to be adopted by the Council in November 2007, great efforts have been made to broaden the remit of the Service. In particular, the aim has been to use the assets of the Estate to help support other Council services and, more broadly, the wider rural economy.

Examples of such initiatives include the conversion of a range of barns to rural affordable housing in partnership with the ARC Addington Fund, the funding of a Farm Business Advisor for West Cornwall, the creation of an organic demonstration farm with Duchy College, and exploration of renewable energy opportunities on the Estate.

Plushayes Farm is a 30ha organic, mixed farm on the edge of Bodmin Moor. As a farm it was difficult to envisage how it could remain viable (ie provide a fulltime living and build the asset base of the tenant without resorting to part time work off of the estate) and the opportunity arose to find a tenant who could provide a service for Adult Social Care clients, based around activities on the farm. A tenant was selected who, having already established a similar service on a much smaller holding, could develop their project at Plushayes. The County Council was very clear from the outset that activities at Plushayes must be rooted in agricultural activities with clients gaining benefit from real and meaningful work at whatever level was appropriate to the individual.

The farm was let to Stephanie Pedrick from 1st January 2007. The Council has committed £25,000 of capital improvements to the farm. Reroofing a stone barn, new electrics and toilet facilities have been carried out through a builder and the finishing touches are being carried out through the clients of Adult Social Care being involved in the conversion work itself. The scheme has allowed an existing provider to expand and develop their service using the assets of the Estate to support the wider objectives of the Council.

This is a significant letting for the County Council and potentially for the national network of County Farms Estates. It establishes a model of delivery for adults with learning needs in which the use of a public asset, generates a return both financially through a rent and in service/care terms through the provision of up to 20 client spaces.

One must not forget that the County Farms Service has a long history and elsewhere on the Estate, another tenant in particular has been quietly supporting the work of Social Services for over 16 years, using their holding to nurture and care for over 30 long term foster children.