



Key skills communication Level 3 - The future of farming

Tuesday 19 November, 2002

Source Booklet

- This booklet contains source material for the level 3 communication test, November 2002
- The test questions will be based on this material
- You must hand in this source booklet at the end of the test, along with your question paper and answer booklet

The level 3 communication test will assess your ability to:

- evaluate and synthesise information from different sources
- communicate relevant information with accuracy, effectively using a form, structure and style that suits your purpose
- organise and clearly present relevant information, illustrating what you say in ways that suit your purpose, subject and audience
- vary your use of vocabulary and grammatical expression to convey particular effects, enable fine distinctions to be made, achieve emphasis and engage the audience

The Future of Farming

The 1990s saw an economic crisis in the Far East, which cut demand for meat and milk products and led to a build up of world surpluses. International agreements on food tariffs and trade led to the end of the situation where grain prices in the EU countries were up to twice those of the world in general, and turmoil in Russia meant that it could not afford to import food from Western Europe.

For British farmers the strength of the pound, especially against currencies of countries across the Channel led to a rise in imports, especially of dairy products and a drop in exports. Pig and poultry and veal farmers found that extra costs arising from tighter regulations on animal welfare put them at a disadvantage against overseas producers who did not have to observe them.

Then came the BSE crisis in 1996, which led to dramatic falls in demand for beef throughout Europe. The 25% drop in prices might have been made good, but suspicions about the lack of control of the disease outside the UK have kept consumption down. Dairy farmers have been hit by the ban on calf exports, so many are now shot at birth, and the value of their older cows has fallen since they cannot go into the food chain when their milking life is over. We must add to this the extra costs of supervising the slaughter of sheep and cattle and the disposal of residues which now costs money rather than providing a return and which is passed back to the farmer.

The government has made it clear that it wants a restructuring in agriculture. This is a polite way of saying fewer farmers so there is little hope of any help from that direction. Officials looking at the average age of Cornish farmers, and the

reluctance of sons to follow fathers into the industry feel that one third of present full time holdings are at risk.

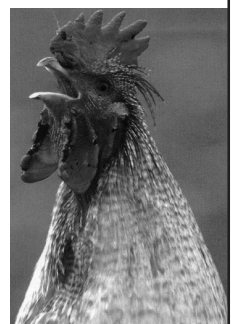
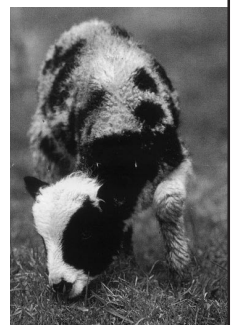
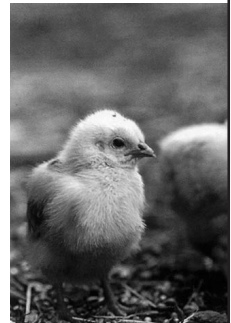
The gloom may be overdone. There are signs of hope. For the livestock sector which makes up 75% of Cornish agriculture, the foot and mouth outbreak may lead to a rethink by the public and politicians on the way that British farming has been heading as it followed the dictates of the food industry.

This could mean a greater emphasis on making food available to the consumer, which has been raised and processed locally. The idea of closing local dairies and slaughterhouses and taking milk and animals long distances and then bringing the processed food back again is becoming unacceptable. In addition the government is taking a harder line towards the supermarkets, who, as the Prime Minister said recently, have an armlock on the farmers.

All farmers can also potentially benefit from the proposed development of the tourist trade where the emphasis is to encourage visitors walking, cycling and other activity holidays, which, by their nature, will take place in rural areas. Visitors, often coming out of season, will be more interested in lower cost farm type accommodation rather than town based hotels. There is money available for groups of farmers to develop tourist trails and cheap camping barns as well as upgrading farmhouse amenities.

So all in all there is cause for very cautious optimism.

Source: Adapted from Cornwall Today May 2001.



Extract from Countryside Agency Report 2001

Farming and the countryside

Farming and the countryside have been closely interwoven for centuries. Farming was the business of the countryside, occupying its people and shaping its landscapes. However, the role of agriculture in the economy has steadily diminished, and farming is, at present, in severe recession. Estimated total income from farming in 2000 fell to its lowest level in 25 years, while agriculture's direct contribution to the national economy in 1999 declined to less than 1% of Gross Value Added (GVA). Some farmers have responded by diversifying, and there has been growth in farmers' markets, direct sales and organic farming. But these options may not be available to the majority, and surveys reveal an increasing despondency among farmers regarding the future of their business.

Events of the year since the publication of our last report have no doubt furthered the decline in the fortunes of farming and the sense of crisis in the farming community. As farming emerged from the aftermath of the BSE crisis, there was an outbreak of swine fever in East Anglia. An exceptionally wet autumn and winter led to widespread flooding, affecting both towns and the countryside. And most recently, there has been an outbreak of foot and mouth disease, with a growing number of cases across much of England.

Countryside character

Despite its declining direct economic role, farming still occupies more than 70% of England's land area, and the diverse and distinctive natural and cultural character of the English countryside is largely the product of farming. Modern agriculture, however, has had a profound impact on the countryside, affecting its landscapes, wildlife, air, water and soils.

Recent research findings reveal some signs of change. The former steep decline, particularly of the extent of some semi-natural habitats and wild bird populations, appears to be levelling out. The water quality of many streams and rivers in England continues to improve. Policies and programmes to conserve the countryside or promote sustainable farming are beginning to pay off.

Nevertheless, other semi-natural habitats have not fared so well as soil loss through water erosion continues. Some Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) remain in an unfavourable or declining condition. Many historical monuments in rural areas are still at risk of change.

People in the countryside

The growth of the rural population of England continues to outstrip that of the urban population, as more people move into the countryside. The incomers are often younger and more affluent than long-term rural inhabitants. At the same time, the less well-off (often the children of long-term residents) are moving away from rural areas in search of jobs and affordable housing.

There is a widespread belief that the countryside offers a better place to live than towns – a healthier and more attractive environment, less crime, more cohesive and friendly communities and a better place to bring up children. As a consequence, many more people would like to live in the countryside than do so at present.

Many people believe the countryside should be protected from development and are worried about the environmental impacts of agriculture, although even more consider that farmers do a good job in looking after the countryside.

Cash deal will help farmers to retire

**By Valerie Elliott
and Mark Henderson**
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FARMERS are to be paid lump sums of thousands of pounds to take early retirement after the foot-and-mouth epidemic.

The Treasury has given provisional approval to Nick Brown, the Agriculture Minister, to devise a package offering incentives to farmers in return for a restructuring of the industry. The assistance will form part of the national recovery plan for farming.

Mr Brown is attracted to a scheme to buy out sheep production subsidies paid to farmers and combine it with an early retirement deal.

The average farmer with a sheep quota who owns 450 breeding ewes could receive about £25,000 for quitting the land. Farmers' leaders believe that any payment would have to be about five times the annual premium to encourage farmers to come forward.

Other farmers may be willing to sell their sheep quota, or part of it, to the Government and in return rear a better quality sheep that fetches a higher price on the meat market, removing the need for any subsidy at all.

Farmers may also benefit from new state handouts for managing the land

as suggested by the Government's Hill Farm Task Force.

Ministers are convinced that too many sheep are being produced in Britain and that fewer animals would prevent overgrazing of the uplands and encourage biodiversity. The plan is expected to be mentioned in the Labour Party election manifesto next week.

Environmental groups believe that there is 30 per cent overstocking in the uplands and that about 3.5 million sheep should be removed from the hills. The need to reduce sheep production is particularly important at present when there is a glut of lamb on the market and it could take at least a year, and possibly two, for sheep exports to resume.

Mr Brown is also looking at the possibility of top-up sums for tenant farmers who want to give up agriculture.

The creation of such a retirement deal represents a significant shift for the Government. Even before Christmas Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, was opposed to a scheme because he feared that payments would be made to farmers who would be forced to quit the industry anyway.

Source: The Times 12.05.01