

## **Rural Energy Business Groups**

### **‘Standing room only’**

It was standing room only when some sixty Cheshire farmers interested in forming a ‘Rural Energy Creation Business Group’ attended a meeting at the Leverhulme Centre, Reaseheath College, Nantwich last week (9<sup>th</sup> March 2006). This was the first of three Defra sponsored meetings being run by CMS UK this month in Cheshire, Cumbria and Lancashire. During the Cheshire meeting Keith Roberts from CMS UK outlined the opportunities and examined how a local Bioenergy market might be developed. Angie Jukes from the Cheshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (CHEEAC) also spoke about examples of biomass heating systems in the county such as the Kingsmead School. She went on to explained how Cheshire County Council and the Local Authorities were keen to use renewable heating systems that are powered by Biomass in their schools and office buildings.

### **Outcome of the Cheshire Meeting**

During the meeting considerable enthusiasm was expressed for the possibility of setting up of a local group to investigate and take forward the opportunities for Rural Energy Creation in Cheshire. With the spiralling cost of oil-based fuels, and gas, all agreed there could not be a better time to consider the environmental benefits of alternatives such as energy from Biomass or Bio-fuel. There was strong demand from those attending for more technical details and financial information on growing Biomass such as Short Rotation Coppice Willow and Miscanthus. Cheshire farmers attending also expressed an interest in learning more about the possibility of using arable crops and co-products in local Biomass heating systems and producing energy from conventional crops such as wheat. A significant number of the farmers attending the meeting were interested in understanding more about producing Bio-fuels from oil seed rape and arable crops.

After the meeting Keith Roberts confirmed that as a result of the encouraging response that CMS UK would now form a Rural Energy Business Group in Cheshire. He is confident from the response and very positive feedback that there is sufficient interest and such a group should be set up in the county to take advantage of the opportunities. Once the group has been formed a program for the meetings would be prepared to address the group members’ local needs and interests. In Cheshire this is likely to cover growing Willow and Miscanthus, and the end use, including understanding the opportunities for biomass heat boilers, Combined Heat and Power systems and Co-Firing at Power Stations, from the grower’s perspective. Keith Roberts went on to say as a result of the considerable interest he would also expect the group would wish to learn about the feasibility of producing Bio-fuels from oil seed rape or arable crops, and possibly Biogas from crops or animal waste.



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