

HAVE YOUR SAY

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RPA map system is a disgrace

* What is the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) playing at? Our original SP5 maps were correct but, because they weren't created using the latest technology, the EU said they had to be replaced.

After three sets of inaccurate maps – which missed out some fields, included others and amalgamated more – we had higher hopes for 2010 SP5.

Now we have an extra 18 fields to play with, another incorrect set of maps and an SP5 that belongs to my neighbour as well as me.

Having a letter warning us that this might happen does not help. I'll keep calling the RPA to try to sort out the problem. There will be a queue – anything from two to eight minutes – but if you leave your number it will get back to you as soon as possible (that took three days after my first attempt).

How can RPA staff do a proper job with computer systems that aren't compatible and management who haven't got a clue how to run the show? The system is a disgrace.

Richard Daw
Sandwich, Kent

o the future of farming

depicted a different career within generated enormous interest. I cast a national television slogan "tomorrow I hope to animated purple pink sheep, a lip-hop cow. Their prime minister

ntly launched their "ditch the lighting opportunities in this area

ellent landteam (www.landteam.com) sers' imaginations, not only by g it accessible, but by creating a sense of opportunity.

continue to bemoan the lack of st in our businesses as a career andy around statistics such as the 0 new entrants we need in the next as. But we never stop to think that ps we are part of the problem. ning needs to target the supply chain g up with

Ian Pigott is 39 and farms 690ha in Hertfordshire. The farm is a LEAF demonstration unit and 130ha of it is organic. He is a former winner of the *Farmers Weekly* NFU Farming Champion award. **Next week** Stephen Carr

meet the food, environmental and energy needs of the nation unless we engage with the best managers running the best possible workforce.

Denis Chamberlain

Chairman, Fresh Start Initiative
(by email)

From the Forums...

Many have commented on the good looks of the JCB Fastrac 7270 – but what's your favourite?



* Most people have a favourite make of tractor when it comes to criteria such as value or reliability – but what about looks? A debate is raging on *Farmers Weekly*'s website about which is the best-looking tractor – either of those currently on the market or from years gone by. *Farmers Weekly*'s machinery blogger **Emily Padfield** started it when she eulogised about the aesthetics of the Revolution-spec'd Valtra tractors and her long-time favourite, the MF 8690. "For some, though, the looks of the Fastrac 7000 Series hold appeal," she added. "It's MF 8600s all the way," reckons **bubble6470**, while **anmail** reckons it's Valtras as regards current models but, historically, it's got to be the Ford County 1174. **Big Fordy** says: "At the moment the best-looking tractor must be a Fendt 936 in black – gives a whole new meaning to black beauty." **Fast bikes** reckons: "John Deere 7530 is a smart tractor at this time, also the big 936 Fendts." What do you reckon? Have your say at www.fwi.co.uk/bestlookingtractor

talking point

Fiona Davies



Rural women are doing it for themselves

It might not be the men taking the lead when it comes to regenerating the economy

Research shows that women and men have different expectations and face different barriers when starting and developing a business. Women can have a more flexible approach towards their businesses, which is helping them weather this economic storm.

Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE) believes that, because of their ability to seek different solutions, work together and become more efficient to drive a business forward, rural women are part of the solution to regenerating the economy.

Dr Stuart Burgess, the government's rural advocate and chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities, has gone as far as saying business women are the "enduring strength of our rural economies" as well as praising their ability to harness new technology.

It's proof of how rural enterprises are continuing to develop that in the past 12 months alone more than 500 rural women in the West Midlands attended WiRE start-up courses or received one-to-one support for their enterprise. This has enabled more than 80 new businesses to launch, while many more continue to work on their ideas with a plan to start trading in the near future.

It has been proven that business people who seek out and benefit from support and advice at the beginning are 60% more likely to succeed and still be trading 36 months later.

WiRE rural networking groups have continued to spring up across the country, despite the downturn, and are overflowing with positive women, sharing ideas, contacts and business, creating contagious energy and positivity. Every month, local networks – run by local, volunteer business women – offer support to approximately 800 female entrepreneurs. Each group is different and operates according to local needs.

At a BT-hosted WiRE conference last year, a futurologist ended his presentation with the bold statement: "To survive and expand, we must become more efficient in everything we do." He was talking about everything from the planet to household bills, but it's a mantra that women are effectively applying to business.

Women running rural businesses don't have the natural footfall, technological and geographical advantages of their urban competitors, so they have to find innovative ways to create and expand. The use of IT and social media has proven vital in overcoming rural isolation and is an effective marketing tool for many businesses – promoting new relationships and positive leads.

WiRE has also seen more people working collaboratively and embracing all the tools available to increase brand awareness, become more efficient and increase their sustainability.

Modern technology and methods – combined with the tried-and-tested ones such as collaborating, building long-term, trust-based, relationships and acting with integrity – will ensure country women are at the heart of our economic recovery and growth.

Fiona Davies is director of Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE)