



*'Shaping the Future of the Rural & Wider Economy'*

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Rural Policy Group  
2020: Fresh Thinking

## RURAL

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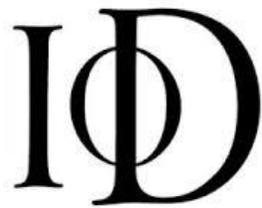


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Rural Policy Group  
2020: Fresh Thinking

RURAL

PROFESSIONAL PARTNERS:





*'Shaping the Future of the Rural & Wider Economy'*

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## 1. Rural Policy Group Rationale & Leadership

### Purpose & Outcome

The Rural Policy Group (RPG) was originally created as an independent action 'Think Tank' acting as the advocate for rural policy and thought leadership. The initial focus has been the county of Kent with a widening remit to include the UK as a whole. Its aim is to provide a representative voice for Rural in the United Kingdom & Wider International arena. With the global pandemic, an opportunity to engage and support business was created through Rural Economic Development (RED) Talks. This was to be innovative and different.

The Rural Policy Group purpose is outlined as:

- I. To provide a focal point for the effective debate and promotion of rural business (& wider initiatives) and the socio-economic importance to the United Kingdom and its value proposition (To government and stakeholders).
- II. To deliver key projects that meet the objective of supporting rural business (& wider sectors) need and matching their short- and medium-term requirements
- III. To leverage the highest level of investment and return in the rural sector utilising all available tax efficient processes and grant opportunities.
- IV. To publish the Rural Policy Group outcomes on an annual basis supported by a rural conference & AGM.

The group is defined as an action 'Think Tank' rather than yet another pointless talking shop or a meeting with no discernible outcomes. This collectively wastes business people's time and provides blockage rather than engagement. Its role is to add value to the rural sector. Rural Issues for this purpose are defined from the perspective of Food & Farming, however not limited to baseline issues for Farmers. Preventative Health, Skills & Technology all feature within the scope of the RPG. Public Relations & Press are agreed by the group at the appropriate times.

The group is also 'safe environment' for discourse, debate and action for all participants who engage. The first major project has been the creation and engagement of the Rural Economic Engagement (RED) talks.



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## 1. Rural Policy Group Rationale & Leadership

### Council

The Group is overseen by a voluntary Advisory Council representing the highest level of expertise in their relevant sectors. The group is not led by a single individual, rather a collective of people that share their knowledge, leadership and expertise at the highest level

The Council has been created following the impactful work of a number s of individuals on the business potential of rural companies, their value (both financially and economically), through to skills and career development. A series of papers on rural policy have also been published with a substantial amount of work ongoing responding to these unprecedented times. This group is an independent action 'Think Tank' acting as the advocate for rural policy and the needs of rural businesses. The focus is initially within the county of Kent; it's aim would be to eventually provide a representative voice for Rural in the United Kingdom.

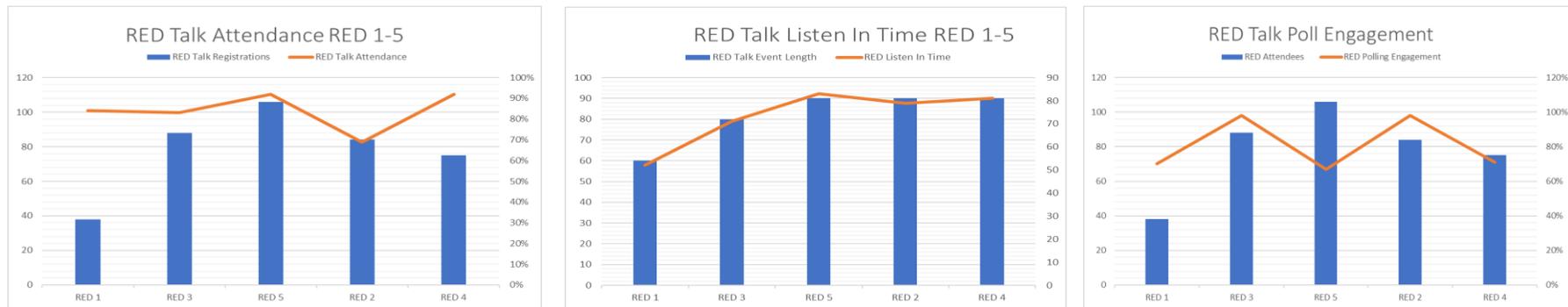
The group is reaffirmed as an action 'Think Tank' rather than a series of meetings with no discernible outcomes. Its role is to meet its purpose and add value to the rural sector as well as now wider areas such as Healthcare and digital. Rural Issues are defined from the perspective of Food & Farming, however not limited to baseline issues for Farmers. Preventative Health, Skills & Technology all feature within the scope of the RPG.

Public Relations & Press are agreed by the group at the appropriate times. The leadership of RPG in term of council will be shared as part of the communications strategy of the group. With what has happened in the recent pandemic situation, bringing together voices for business in a logical and professional way is more important than ever.

The Council is wholly passionate about the rural agenda, and the wider economic and social priorities. By creating original thought, debate and meaningful recommendations that can be used by agencies and business, the group is making a difference. This first original thought document reflects the review of the 3 month activity during the pandemic. There will be further engagements and announcements from council in due course.

## 2. Review of RPG Engagement 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020 to 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020

The Rural Policy Group (RPG), within 3 months has reached many thousands of business across the range of sectors that were covered within the first 5 events. Its statistics are shown:



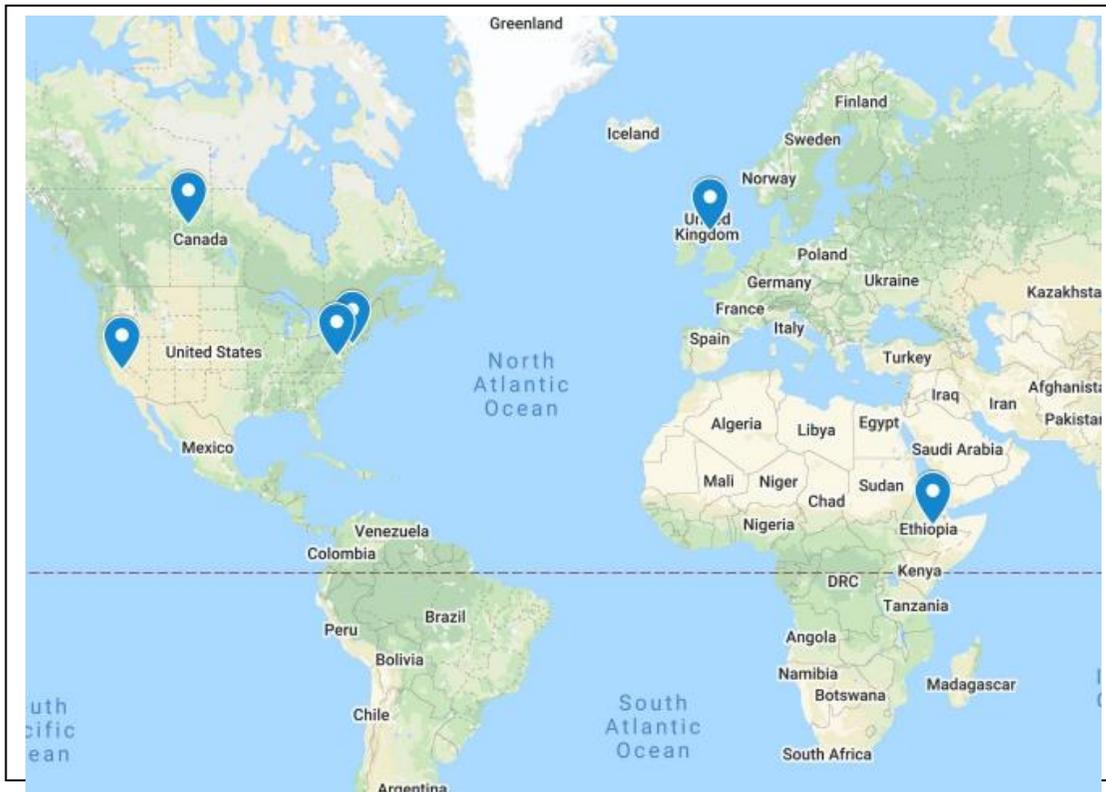
The events have reached over 450 businesses across the rural, healthcare and digital sectors. The engagement level of the business across all of the talks has been high, reflecting the content and quality of both the speakers and the debate. In particular the diverse nature of the polling and interaction reflects how attendees wish to 'be seen' during such events.

RED 1,3,5: Rural  
RED 2 & 4: Healthcare

In future reviews, further detail of the talk statistics will be presented.

2. Review of RPG Engagement 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020 to 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Geographically, the engagement and reach of the events can be shown as:



## 2. Review of RPG Engagement 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020 to 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020

### Our speakers & Spotlights:



Phil Acock  
Managing Director  
Fourayes



Nigel Baker  
Chief Executive Officer  
Pet Industry Federation



Sarah Calcutt  
Founding Partner  
Partners in Produce



Duncan Cochrane-Dyett  
National Lead of Healthcare, Partner  
MHA MacIntyre Hudson



Dr Philip Hopley MRCPsych  
Consultant Psychiatrist & Managing Director  
Cognacity London



Christopher Longden  
Head of Dispute Resolution  
Whitehead Monckton



Mark Lumsdon-Taylor  
Corporate Financier  
Rural Policy Group



Justin Moss  
Partner  
MHA MacIntyre Hudson



Alison Conley  
Head of Retail & Consumer Tax, Partner  
MHA MacIntyre Hudson



Sarah Dodds  
Head of Agriculture, Partner  
MHA MacIntyre Hudson



Jonathan Geldart  
Director General  
The Institute of Directors



Bethan Grylls  
Editor  
New Food



Neil Parish MP  
Member of Parliament for Tiverton and  
Honiton



Sara Pearson  
Founder and CEO  
Spider



Peter Roy  
Business Development Director  
Natures Menu



Jonathan Shaw  
Chief Executive  
Policy Connect



Robert James  
Technical Director & Board Member of AHDB,  
Thanet Earth



Jeremy Kerswell  
Principal  
Plumpton College



Sir Norman Lamb  
Founder of the Sir Norman Lamb  
Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund



James Lawson  
Partner  
MHA MacIntyre Hudson



Rosemary Shrager  
Chef, Author and TV Personality



Jack Tindale  
Policy Manager, Design & Innovation  
Policy Connect



Teresa Wickham  
Non-Executive Director  
Covent Garden Market Authority



David Zeichner MP  
Shadow Minister for Environment, Food  
and Rural Affairs



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### 3. Fresh Thinking' - Rural

The Rural Policy Group has been supported by a range of partners and stakeholders throughout the period under assessment, including:



These businesses and corporate entities have engaged at lead speaking level as well as question time panellists.

### 3. 'Fresh Thinking' - Rural

#### The Rural Work [Red 1, 3 & 5]

##### Frame of Reference

RPG delivered 3 rural focused digital RED Talks. The principles for business that were launched at this event were defined through **"The Role of Effective Commercial Support (ECS)"** which requires business or Individual to think *'Outside of the box'*. In terms of principles:

1. Understanding your communications
2. Use and assess Information wisely
3. Resolve financial crisis and risk
4. Get the business scenarios planned
5. The basics – cash is king

These principles formed the base reference for each of the events held for Rural Business. They apply to business in any sector, and if correctly administered can transform an organisation – as tested by partners on numerous occasions. As shown in the statistics, the level of corporate business interest for the right discussion and the right debate is high. The frame of reference considered the role of 'Cash' (particularly at the start of lock down), the Future of Food (considering the pandemic & consumer purchasing) & finally the role of technology and farming. The frame always returned to Cash, Positioning in the political landscape & People.

#### Insights:

- Technological innovation is one of the biggest levers the food and farming industry can pull to become more competitive in the fight to fend off imports.
- Industry and education must work together to deliver technologies, a relevantly skilled workforce and an appetite for change.
- Consumer education and public awareness of food production, food standards and cooking are essential to building demand for British grown and British made products.
- There cannot be a technological revolution in agriculture without government funding to support it. There are simply not enough private grants and investors to do the job.
- Growers are concerned that if the current, minimal, level of returns continue development and investment will stall, hence the need for central support to ensure continued development, improved efficiencies and greater self sufficiency
- Issues of food insecurity highlighted by COVID-19 are helping government to give greater priority to the UK food and farming industry, food standards and food security for all.
- Food and farming businesses are sceptical about whether the Agriculture Trade Commission will deliver on support for food standards and British farming.
- Calls for self-sufficiency continue. 8 out of 10 businesses felt that the national diet should become more home grown-centric in support of our national food security.
- 60% of those in the industries think food businesses & farmers need a unified and coordinated lobby to engage with government and press the need for financial support for agritech and the associated reskilling. Neil Parish also urged the industry to lobby harder on a range of issues.

3. 'Fresh Thinking' – Rural

**The Rural Work [Red 1, 3 & 5]**

**Point of Difference**

The point of difference here is the evaluation and reality recommendations that arise from these debates. For example, the debate around skills and people in this industry has been so well rehearsed it would be a perfectly delivered Opera in London. The commercial solution is quite simple: A clear joined up industry lead requirement approach to operational training (1) and the transparency of higher-level opportunity in rural industry (2). Simple. Turning to the themes that came through the engagements.

**Cash**

| Assessment Recommendation   | SMART Action  |
|---|---|
| The Finance of Food is defined by scale, Streams & Sustainability. To leverage more profit business need to collectively challenge the down stream return from retailers.   | 1. To gauge interest from producers, growers & related business to create a fresh coordinated PR & Media plan that works to improve finance – financed collectively with a <b>discernible SMART 'outcome driven' media framework.</b>   |
| The short and mid term business modelling for rural remains a challenge. Sweating every opportunity for Funding, Research & Development & Efficiency is both the known unknown & the unknown unknown.   | 2. To develop a 'new' digital dynamic focal point providing Business Support, (Self Help where appropriate) to access grant support and exploit linked opportunities for SME/Microbusiness. <b>A SMART accessible digital footprint.</b>  |
| To sustain business you must adapt as a minimum – the environment is changing at an ever faster pace. To be resilient, investable, and innovative; The positioning of companies externally and internally will affect profit and ultimately cash. | 3. For Business to be aware of services and opportunities to be supported, through either the transition from Corporate Social Responsibility into evolved structures. For RPG to work with its corporate partners in 'profiling' leading businesses who respond and for those that need support. <b>SMART Communications</b> |

3. 'Fresh Thinking' – Rural

The Rural Work [Red 1, 3 & 5]

**People**

| Assessment Recommendation  | SMART Action  |
|--|---|
| Forget about the constant debate around 'we need to change the skills mix'. The position is quite straightforward. Segment the requirement in a coordinated way through industry sectors, and change the perspective.                      | 4. To hold a <b>SMART REDXtra Debate</b> specifically around the skills requirement for the rural sector. Outcome driven debate to assess the appetite of business to either 'just wait for the government to do it' or 'to take decisive action themselves'. |
| Skills requirements for business mean different things to different organisations. If business 'came together' and invested in standard baseline skills requirement program – colleges & providers would deliver, and the sector benefits. | 5. Building within the REDXtra Debate specifically around the skills requirement for the rural sector, create a high level blueprint (again) <b>SMART action driven – with the financial backing to achieve it.</b>   |
| Talk up the sector. It is one of the most technologically advanced industries in the UK  | 6. Use <b>SMART Action 1</b> to drive the media positioning of the sector, and RPG as a focal point to 'talk up' rural with facts, stats & tech not rhetoric.   |

**Political positioning**

| Assessment Recommendation  | SMART Action   |
|--|--|
| The Rural Sector sits at the bottom end of the Cabinet Table. The importance of Food, Diet & wellbeing is in inextricably linked to performance in business. There is a requirement to change the status quo.  | 7. To Continue to assert and champion the importance of rural profile through national networks such as the CBI, IOD & Think tanks that operate at a national level. To also directly <b>SMART feed</b> into such business-critical reviews on the future of food in the UK. |
| The Rural agenda is often lost in the large lobbying and membership organisations as it is not seen as a 'coordinated' sector and not of the appropriate scale. £121bn is contributed to GVA & £226bn is spent by consumers on food, drink & Catering (2018). Time to change this. | 8. As with all of the above recommendations, to continue to issue 'fresh thinking' documents that can be used to effect policy change, and bring key agendas together. <b>SMART open door policy to affect and sustain change in the rural sector.</b>                       |

4. Do it

| Assessment Recommendation  | SMART Action  |
|--|---|
| The Finance of Food is defined by scale, Streams & Sustainability. To leverage more profit business need to collectively challenge the down stream return from retailers.  | 1. To gauge interest from producers, growers & related business to create a fresh coordinated PR & Media plan that works to improve finance – financed collectively with a <b>discernible SMART 'outcome driven' media framework.</b>   |
| The short and mid term business modelling for rural remains a challenge. Sweating every opportunity for Funding, Research & Development & Efficiency is both the known unknown & the unknown unknown.  | 2. To develop a 'new' digital dynamic focal point providing Business Support, (Self Help where appropriate) to access grant support and exploit linked opportunities for SME/Microbusiness. <b>A SMART accessible digital footprint.</b>  |
| To sustain business you must adapt as a minimum – the environment is changing at an ever faster pace. To be resilient, investable, and innovative; The positioning of companies externally and internally will affect profit and ultimately cash.                                  | 3. For Business to be aware of services and opportunities to be supported, through either the transition from Corporate Social Responsibility into evolved structures. For RPG to work with its corporate partners in 'profiling' leading businesses who respond and for those that need support. <b>SMART Communications</b> |
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The actions below will be coordinated by the Rural Policy Group Council and implemented with a timeframe to be published with partner agreement. All of the work and associated policy can be published through RPG professional partners and associated agreements with stakeholders.



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## 5. Information

Takeaway Quotes (Rural)

### RED TALK 1

#### **Sarah Dodds and James Lawson:**

"At the present time, considered cash management should be a fundamental focus for all. Where applications for interruption finance are contemplated, owners and management teams should be prepared to demonstrate the underlying financial health of a business prior to the pandemic, and to set out a financial and strategic plan of how the funding will facilitate survival and a return to growth."

#### **Sarah Calcutt**

"Supply chains will be judged, as will all businesses, by the way they conducted themselves during this period. Those that showed good business ethics, customer care and were considerate towards other businesses within their chain will be regarded very differently in the future to those who have been found lacking. For many firms this time has seen the most rapid change in their trading careers, those that could adapt quickly will have to continue that pace of early adoption but will be with us going forward."

#### **Jonathan Geldart**

"My one piece of advice would be 'Never waste a crisis' misquoting Sir Winston Churchill. These times allow us to think differently about our businesses. There will be significant changes in the behaviours of the British public after the crisis and this will probably drive price/value decisions in everything from staycations increasing as people want holidays but will be fearful of flying to locally sourced produce to support British producers as the economy recovers."

#### **Mark Lumsdon-Taylor**

"We are delighted that Rural Policy Group engagement has been so positive. At a time when the food chain is critical, the voice of food and farming needs to be debated in a fresh and effective way"



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## 5. Information

Takeaway Quotes (Rural)

### RED TALK 3

#### **Teresa Wickham**

"The Pandemic has given us a chance to re-look at our food supply chain and our relationship with food. Retailers responded rapidly coping with increased demand especially online. However, those supplying the hospitality sector found themselves with plenty of product but unable to get it to the consumer. This was mainly due to lack of packaging. We have seen a growth in box deliveries from farm shops, convenience stores and local food outlets who have used this opportunity to either develop or grow their existing business. The lockdown provides people with time to think about their food and eating habits in many cases eating together and cooking together. Previously they may not have had the time to do this. Online will continue to be a major player and it will be interesting to see if people retain their loyalty to local food suppliers who have served them well during this period. We also need to look at the link between nutrition and health. A full review should include looking at the supply chain from Soil to table to provide what we need to maintain good health."

#### **Daniel Zeichner, MP**

"Great discussion - confirmed my view that we need an urgent and better plan to address food security. Labour's call for an emergency food plan should be heeded".

#### **Rosemary Shrager**

"Because of prices we have to have complete visibility of the food to ensure that everyone understands and pays and gets paid fairly. Everyone wants everything cheaper, times are hard, but we need to find another way for people to spend the right amount support producers and eat healthy food. Seasonal produce must be at the centre of this - why do we need to be global when we really have the most amazing farming and agriculture industry at our fingertips. They need the right support".

#### **Sarah Calcutt**

"Labour has been an issue to the wider food sector for a number of years and will continue to be for a while yet. Food and farming offers such exciting opportunities, we need to tell our story better to bring the best people into the sector".



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## 5. Information

Takeaway Quotes (Rural)

### RED TALK 3

#### Christopher Longden

"Be optimistic, keep looking for opportunities, innovate where you can, and always focus on quality".

#### Phil Acock

"Food in the UK is CHEAP. We are the cheapest in Western Europe and come in 8% less than the EU average. In the last 60 years the proportion of household income spent on food has halved, whilst at the same time our spending on housing costs have doubled. We import 50% of our total requirement, which does not give us food security as a nation and our farmers are not getting a fair share of the income. British farming needs to be at the top of the government agenda to deliver proper food security for our nation, profitability for our farmers and as a result we might see the average age of our farmers start to come down from the ridiculous age of 59!"

#### Mark Lumsdon-Taylor

"The Agri-Food Industry GVA is worth £108Billion – 10% of UK GVA. The profile, definition, and priority of rural needs to be championed – Consistently, logically, and financially – It is not something that should just sit at the end of the political table."



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## 5. Information

Takeaway Quotes (Rural)

### RED TALK 5

#### Neil Parish, MP

The debate has highlighted that we need to be competitive, and we need to give help to new technologies, the means of production, the methods of production and marketing to achieve that competitive edge. We need to keep farming going, produce great food at prices shoppers can afford and put a system in place to support those that need the most cost-effective food.

#### Rosemary Shrager

Education is the absolute priority. It is about marketing, teaching people how to cook, teaching people where food comes from and about production. If people cannot cook, they won't buy raw ingredients and they won't support British farming.

#### Mark Lumsdon-Taylor

We need to promote the value and worth of the food and drink industry to attract greater levels of investment and funding for new developing, acquiring and implementing new technologies. And we need to be at the forefront of ethical and sustainable policy so we are teaching the next generation how to do things right.

#### Jeremy Kerswell

Colleges have a key role to play in the adoption of new technologies and future competitiveness of British food. They need greater flexibilities in funding for people to upskill or continue their professional development. They need capital investment in resources and facilities; colleges provide vocational training and need resources to be able to demonstrate the best and most innovative industry practices and work with industry partners in applied research. If government can commit to that funding it will make a big impact on accessibility of training for farmers and new entrants, challenging perceptions and raising ambitions.

#### Phil Acock

Neil [Parish] is a great advocate for farming. It is comforting to have someone flying the flag in government. Farmers should be regarded as being at the top of the food chain. If we can't have a level playing field in trade deals, we need more support from government to level the field domestically. As a nation we need to become more food secure and try to move from 50% to 70% domestic production.



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## 5. Information

Takeaway Quotes (Rural)

### RED TALK 5

#### **Beth Grylls**

##### **Posed a spotlight question as Editor of New Food magazine**

We need more action on food insecurity. The use of food banks is at an all-time high and we need to learn from the pandemic and be ready to support the food insecure in the event of a second wave.

#### **Rob James**

##### **Posed a spotlight question as Technical Director at Thanet Earth and AHDB Board Member**

We need to find a way to articulate the value of food to government to support policy. The industry is very responsive, market driven and wants to improve. We need to find a way of linking science and research with horticulture and agriculture so investment in one side has an impact on industry so we can continue to deliver healthy nutritious food to the whole population.

#### **Sarah Calcutt (Chairing)**

It is time for us to come together with a single voice for British farming to inform government and inform consumers. How will we get what we need unless we have a single voice with concise messaging and very good data behind it? We are never going to reach our potential without good communication. As a piece of work the farming lobby needs to work on its communication and needs to come together rather than seeing ourselves as disparate parts of the same industry.