

The BBC Trust's Impartiality Review of the BBC's coverage of the Rural Areas in the UK

**The BBC Trust's Conclusions on the
Executive's follow up report**

October 2015

Introduction

In 2014 the BBC Trust published its conclusions on the impartiality of the BBC's coverage of Rural Areas in the UK. This included a report authored by Heather Hancock – a former agricultural land manager, ex-chair of the BBC's Rural Affairs Committee, a small-scale beef farmer and former managing partner at Deloitte. The Trust welcomed her finding that: as a whole, the BBC was impartial; coverage of rural affairs was strong in the devolved nations; and, on network output, factual programmes which focussed on rural matters were very highly regarded and brought to air a wide range of opinions and thoughtful analysis. However she also identified: a deficit in terms of coverage of rural news and current affairs in England; a lack of context on underlying issues; and over reliance on a small number of charities and organisations.

Trustees asked the BBC Executive to report back in 2015 on the areas which needed action. The Executive has now delivered their report to the Trust. It is published here along with the Trust's conclusions on the report.

Background: the 2014 Impartiality review

The 2014 impartiality review can be found here:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/rural_impartiality/rural_impartiality.pdf

Heather Hancock's report recommended that the BBC should:

- Re-establish the post of Rural Affairs Correspondent.
- Identify a senior editorial figure to have oversight of significant rural stories, to promote rural issues across the BBC and to monitor output and report progress.
- Make it easier for journalists working in local and regional output and in the devolved nations to deliver news content at the network level.
- At least annually, gather together the community of BBC journalists and programme makers who are covering rural affairs to share ideas, experiences, contacts, collaboration opportunities.
- Have part of this meeting attended by senior network news and commissioning editors to deepen their knowledge of rural affairs.
- Consider hosting an off the record meeting on rural policy sponsored by the Director, News, to include a wide mix of institutional and local voices.
- Make a concerted effort to revitalise the BBC's rural contacts list across a wide range of expertise.

The BBC Executive welcomed Heather's report and its conclusions and, in response, made the following points also published in June 2014:

- For financial reasons they could not re-establish the role of the Rural Affairs Editor. Instead, however, the briefs of three regional correspondents would be extended so that they would have a special responsibility to report for network news on rural affairs.

- One of the existing Environment Correspondents would be based in Bristol for some of the time, to improve links between News and Current Affairs output and Farming Today and to bring a wider range of voices and story ideas to network news.
- It would seek to develop links between Countryfile and BBC News so that a Countryfile reporter could contribute reports on rural issues to TV bulletins, and offers expertise on radio news programmes such as Today and The World at One.
- An existing Editor would be identified who would take on the additional responsibilities of championing rural affairs across network output, devolved, regional and local programmes.
- The College of Journalism would run an 'expert day' to bring together practitioners and journalists, to "widen and deepen" the contacts known to BBC journalists.
- News would organise a gathering of BBC journalists and programme makers who cover rural affairs to share ideas, experiences, contacts, and collaboration opportunities.
- The Director, News would sponsor an off the record discussion around rural policy.

Background: Trustees' conclusions in 2014

Trustees acknowledged the Executive's commitment to rural affairs. They accepted that the BBC faced significant financial constraints and had sought to find a way forward which would address the short-comings highlighted in the review, while not committing the BBC to the substantial additional expense of a new Editor role. However, they noted the value in having specialist staff who possessed a depth of expertise and a range of contacts that allowed for broader and deeper coverage.

Trustees noted the Executive had responded to the concern about the apparent deficit in the coverage of rural affairs in England by stating that three senior journalists already working in the English regions would be charged with taking on specific network responsibilities in this area. They noted this was intended to allow the BBC to better "sense the pulse of England beyond the South East". They welcomed the intention behind this and were particularly interested in follow-up work to evaluate the success of the proposal.

Trustees acknowledged the Executive was adopting measures to improve links between different programmes and output areas. They noted this was intended to make better use of the knowledge and skills that already existed in specialist programmes and to ensure that it was more easily shared with colleagues in news. They noted too an intention to forge stronger links between network output and colleagues in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to ensure stories and ideas flowed more easily through the BBC. They welcomed the BBC's plans to organise a day when staff working in this area could connect with each other and share story ideas, contacts and expertise.

Summary of the BBC Executive follow up report in September 2015

The Executive restated its commitment to the reporting of Rural Affairs and noted:

- The three journalists working in the English regions, who had been tasked with covering rural stories for network, had been very successful in bringing stories to air for television and radio news bulletins.
- The senior editorial figure with responsibility for rural output had been effective at improving links between specialist programmes and news and current affairs output. The specialist teams he worked with had shared valuable knowledge and stories with colleagues in news.
- Network factual programmes outside news had sought to broaden their coverage of rural issues.
- Network news teams and those in the devolved nations and English regions had worked to cover stories in a way that avoided a 'binary' approach, there had been a careful consideration of tone and the need to convey a more nuanced picture of rural issues.

The BBC Trust's Impartiality Review of the BBC's coverage of the Rural Areas in the UK: The BBC Trust's Conclusions on the Executive's follow up report of 2015

One of the BBC's Public Purposes is that it should "represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities". Trustees considered that it was essential that the BBC should understand and reflect the lives and experiences of all licence fee payers in order to retain the support and trust it has built up. It was not only of great significance to people who lived in rural areas that their lives should be reflected in BBC output, but it was also important for people in urban areas to be connected with the rest of the UK.

Trustees welcomed the work undertaken by the Executive and reflected in the BBC's progress report. The detailed information provided by the Executive on the increased range of output at network level over the past year was encouraging. Trustees appreciated that journalists working in the nations and regions had worked increasingly closely with network production teams to extend the range of stories that were being broadcast across the UK – and that it was becoming easier for stories to flow between different parts of the BBC as a result of this closer working. They welcomed, too, the commitment that journalists with specialist knowledge had shown to sharing their skills, contacts and expertise with colleagues.

Trustees understood from the Executive that the news gathering operation considered the identification of three regional reporters in England who had been given particular responsibility to cover rural issues for the network had been very successful; that it had increased an awareness of rural matters generally and had led to an increased sense of responsibility for reporting them. They also welcomed the links that had been developed between correspondents specialising in rural issues in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and network.

The Executive explained that specialist members of staff provided background information to news and current affairs journalists by – both in terms of on-the-day stories and through detailed briefing notes about significant issues. Trustees thought that making better use of internal BBC resources had led to a clear and direct improvement in the coverage of rural matters at network level as evidenced by the range of stories in the Executive's report. This was very encouraging. However, Trustees appreciated that dedicated programme teams were often small and that it was, potentially, a considerable extra burden on them to act as a research facility for other parts of the BBC. They felt this was an area where a careful balance had to be found – so that the value to the BBC of leveraging the expertise within it was properly recognised. While how this was done was an operational matter for the Executive, they were encouraged that News had already acknowledged the benefit they had had in drawing on the knowledge of specialist programme teams.

Trustees appreciated the commitment shown by the senior editorial figure who acted as a bridge between specialist, factual programmes and news. They noted that Heather Hancock's report had accepted there was a difficulty in reflecting - what were often slow-burn - rural stories in the daily news agenda. They were pleased to see that this senior figure had worked closely with news to promote rural issues and to develop ways of covering them. It was encouraging to see so many examples of output that had come from individuals working together across different output areas.

Trustees noted that the Executive had organised an event in the autumn of 2014 which brought together journalists and production teams with a particular interest in rural matters. They had reported that this had proved to be very valuable – not least because the editorial staff involved tended to be scattered across the UK and did not generally have an opportunity to meet and discuss this area of output. Trustees noted that a further similar event was being planned by the Executive for 2015.

Trustees understood that better professional links between members of staff was a powerful tool in improving the BBC's output. They considered it was important that the Executive should not only have established processes which allowed stories and ideas to flow across the corporation – such as routine meetings – but should also nurture less formal ways to improve communication and links between members of staff.

The Trust is satisfied that the BBC Executive is taking significant steps to improve its coverage of rural issues in the UK. The requirement to “represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities” has never been more difficult to fulfil – shifting political affiliations, changes in working lives, the UK's rich cultural make-up and the pressures felt by every family mean that a simplistic division between rural and urban does little to capture the truth of people's lives. In order to remain relevant, the BBC must constantly be striving to develop deeper and better contacts across the UK, to reflect the lives – urban and rural – of its inhabitants and to allow them to understand the differences between them and the connections which bind them together.

A report by the BBC Executive

UPDATE ON BBC COVERAGE OF RURAL AREAS IN THE UK

Purpose

1. In June 2014, the Trust published its report on BBC Coverage of Rural Areas in the UK, and the Executive's response to this Report. The Trust asked for an update from the Executive in September 2015 on progress in six areas. This paper provides this update.
2. As stated in its initial response to this Report, the Executive takes its commitment to the reporting of Rural Affairs very seriously. We welcome the Report's endorsement of our programming and impartiality, singling out flagship rural affairs programming on BBC One, BBC Two and Radio 4, as well as coverage in the regions and Nations for particular praise.
3. This report details measures put in place by the Executive to further strengthen coverage of Rural Areas.

How the Executive's proposal to give three reporters in the English Regions extra responsibility to provide rural stories to the network has translated into stories on the network. Evidence of the network news and current affairs coverage of rural issues in England that has resulted from this.

4. The three reporters from the English Regions who have been given extra responsibility to provide rural affairs stories to Network News are: West Midlands - David Gregory Kumar (Rural Affairs Correspondent, Birmingham); East - Richard Daniel (Correspondent, Look East / Radio Suffolk); East Yorkshire & Lincolnshire - Paul Murphy (Environment and Rural Affairs Correspondent, BBC Hull).
5. All three are being used more widely across the BBC. Paul Murphy and David Gregory Kumar have produced special reports for network news, especially the News Channel, *Breakfast* and *Farming Today*.

Examples

- a) Some of the television reports from David Gregory Kumar include an item about a group of scientists who are asking for the public's help in understanding how murmurations are formed. This was commissioned by *Breakfast* and also ran on the News Channel. David also did a report for *Breakfast* on the recovery in barn owl numbers, linked to a longer version for *Inside Out* and he makes regular contributions to *Farming Today*, including several reports about milk prices and bovine TB.

- b) Paul Murphy provided local context and expertise for the coverage about the bird flu outbreak at a duck farm in Yorkshire, with an authoritative two-way on *Farming Today* followed by lives for the News Channel. Paul now regularly exchanges ideas and stories with *Farming Today* on subjects such as rural broadband and flooding and continues to look for stories which he can offer to network news.
- c) Paul's rural expertise on bird flu was flagged in News editorial meetings and programmes were encouraged to make use of his local knowledge of how the outbreak could affect the livelihoods of poultry farmers in the area. As a result of this, the UK Online desk commissioned a 140 word text box from Paul which they added to their story: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-30090400>
- d) The closer working relationship between different parts of the News division is illustrated by Richard Daniel's report for *Look East* on the upgrading of pumping stations in order to protect eels in the Fens which was also carried by *BBC World News*.

How the Executive's proposal to identify a senior editorial figure to champion rural output has improved coverage of rural issues from the regions and nations. Evidence from output of the items or programmes that have resulted from this and evidence of improved working between programmes and output areas.

- 6. Dimitri Houtart, Rural Affairs and Environment Editor, Radio 4 has been identified as the rural affairs 'champion' for the year ahead. Dimitri is responsible for programmes such as *Farming Today*, *Costing the Earth* and *On Your Farm*. He and his specialist teams have a wealth of knowledge and contacts within the industry.
- 7. Dimitri is working with Newsgathering and directly with individual news programme teams to encourage the coverage of rural affairs and the inclusion of rural views within general news stories. He sends regular rural affairs briefing notes across News on big rural stories, designed to highlight important issues. The result is that such subjects are usually covered by our flagship programmes. News editors and their teams now also regularly contact Dimitri and the *Farming Today* team for advice or suggestions and producers have been briefed on milk prices, organic production, the badger cull and problems with the Rural Payment Agency.
- 8. Dimitri now meets the *Countryfile* team on a regular basis to ensure that radio and television share contacts and information and can look for opportunities to co-operate on big stories.
- 9. Dimitri and Carol Rubra (Health, Science and Environment Assignment Editor, BBC News) have compiled a pan-BBC rural affairs contacts list and a News

contacts list of planning teams so that staff in the regions, and across Radio and Television know who to contact in each area. They have also begun to hold regular BBC rural affairs meetings after the quarterly Rural Affairs Committee so that BBC staff from News, the regions, Radio and Television have frequent opportunities to discuss stories and collaborate face-to-face.

10. Teams across News are making much more use of the knowledge and contacts in the Rural Affairs Unit in Bristol. The *Six* and *Ten*, *Today*, *PM* and other programmes now regularly call the *Farming Today* team for explanation or clarification of stories, to help source contributors, or for experts' comments.
11. Further evidence of improved working between programmes and output areas is provided by the work of two correspondents: Claire Marshall and Tom Heap. Claire Marshall in the Science and Environment team in News has been asked to broaden her brief to take on a wider range of rural affairs stories. She is now based for one week a month with the *Farming Today* team in Bristol. Tom Heap has also been asked to offer stories to Network News on food, farming and rural social issues in addition to his other commitments on *Countryfile*. Tom also works regularly from the Bristol Rural Affairs office.
12. Sourcing of contributors now occurs not just for rural stories but also to obtain rural views in general news stories. For example, a report by Political Editor Nick Robinson on immigration included an interview with a farmer who employs migrant workers.
13. On big stories, the *Farming Today* team has also been providing packages for Radio News – for example, on the badger cull – and has been doing a series of two-ways (GNS) interviews with the nations and local stations.
14. BBC NI has made two recent appointments to improve rural affairs coverage: an Agriculture and Environment Correspondent, and an Agriculture and Environment BJ.
15. The NI team works closely with Newsgathering in London and with *Farming Today*. A number of packages from NI have been featured on *Farming Today*.

Further Examples

- a) The *Today* programme set up a discussion between a farmer and the editor-in-chief of *Computer Weekly* about the problems farmers had been experiencing with the online registration system for claiming EU farm subsidies. The night before, Dimitri had alerted news teams that DEFRA had decided to abandon the system and he provided a detailed briefing note. The result was that *Today* was able to have a topical and informed discussion.
- b) Dimitri's other briefing emails have resulted in programmes covering the badger cull, milk prices and GM crops.

- c) In the run up to the General Election, Dimitri sent out a briefing note on rural issues that should be covered during the campaign. This led to issues such as rural broadband, solar farms and wind turbines, and access to services and transport featuring on the *One*, *Six*, and *Today* and on other programmes during the campaign.
- d) Stories Claire Marshall has covered for main News output in the last year include: Cutting edge farming technology (*Breakfast* / *Today*); Closure of animal health testing laboratories (*Today* / *Six* / *PM* / *1800*); Pesticides: Commercial farmers' efforts to safeguard wildlife and improve yields (*One* / *Six* / *1800*); Rural Crime Figures (*Breakfast* / *One* / *Six* / *PM* / *1800*); Tree disease (*Six* / *Ten* / *PM* / *1800*); Milk prices (*Six* / *Ten* / *1800*); Farmland bird decline (*One* / *Six* / *Ten* / *1800*); Planning changes threaten affordable rural housing (*Six* / *Ten* / *WATO*); Beaver colony can stay in the wild (*Six* / *1800*); Putting a value on nature reserves and parks (*Six*); End of milk quotas (*One* / *Six* / *Ten*); New design of pylons (*One* / *Six*); Concerns of rural voters (*Six*). Most of these stories ran online and on the News Channel as well.
- e) Stories Tom Heap has covered for Network News include: EU Pesticide legislation (*Today* / Radio bulletins / *Breakfast* / *One* / online); Pesticide ban affecting crops (*Six* / *1800*); Rural manifestos (*Today*); Five reasons why you should ditch the satnav (online explainer).

How network factual programming outside news and current affairs has extended coverage of rural issues – whether through new commissions or through broader coverage in existing programming.

16. We have worked hard to extend coverage of rural issues in existing programming as well as new commissions. Existing programmes have extended their reach for example the BBC Radio 4 *Food and Farming Awards* was widely covered across the BBC and more people tuned in to watch the *Food and Farming Awards* coverage than the BAFTAs which happened on the same day; the *Farming Today* team broke the Rural Payment Agency story and shared it across the BBC, and *On Your Farm* has developed to make it a better listen for the audience, resulting in an increase both in audience share and reach.
17. The Radio Production team in Bristol have produced a two-part documentary series for Radio 4 called *This Farming Life* which followed the daily lives of several farmers who live and work in Somerset and *A Country Practice* about the challenges facing a small GP practice treating the rural community in Coniston in the Lake District.
18. The Rural Affairs report was complimentary of Television's programming like *Countryfile* and the *Watches*. Commitment to those returning series remains

undiminished as they continue to provide a mainstay of the Television schedules.

19. One of the criticisms of Television's rural affairs coverage was that some of the output does not address the "darker" sides of rural life. Steps have been taken to address this.
20. *Countryfile* makes a particular feature of covering specialist rural stories, including "hard core" agricultural and environment subjects. Stories in the last few months have included: Campylobacter in chickens; wind turbines; anaerobic digestion; blue broadband; Neonicotinoids; rural crime; tenant farmers; Bovine TB and the badger cull; 10 years of the Hunting Ban; Biodiversity; Climate Change; the Shooting Economy; the milk price crisis (on several occasions); the glut in potatoes; National Park budget cuts; herbicide-resistant black grass; ash dieback and other tree diseases; bird crime; the lack of affordable rural housing; and the contamination of "green waste".
21. The *Watches* have taken steps to deepen and sharpen their journalistic approach to the big issues affecting UK wildlife – badger culling; deer management; rare raptor persecution; the decline of our migrant birds; marine pollution (plastics); beaver and sea eagle re-introduction – all divisive and current aspects of the rural conversations out there. They also continue to investigate the issue of badger ecology with a badger collaring science project at the *Springwatch* base at Minsmere.
22. Another regular prime time stalwart, *The One Show*, continues to cover a range of rural stories within its portfolio. Recent examples have included: Granny Canute – the story of a woman living in a caravan on the edge of a crumbling cliff in East Anglia who, in spite of pressure from the local council, refuses to move; Flooding eels – how taxpayers' money is paying to replace infrastructure on Britain's waterways with expensive, eel-friendly versions. Further examples currently in production for *The One Show* and to air soon include: Landowners in Sussex; and Broiler units.

Further Examples

- a) *Any Questions* regularly visits rural locations, including broadcasting from Wisbech in Cambridgeshire and Logie Coldstone in Aberdeenshire during the 2015 Election period. The programme has also included panellists with a rural perspective, including Minette Batters, NFU Deputy President; and Clive Aslet, editor-at-large of *Country Life* magazine and campaigner on the countryside.
- f) *Costing the Earth* has produced several highly successful programmes on rural issues, including one about endangered plants in the UK; the "electric island" of Eigg; an 'as live' debate at the Food Connections festival on what the new government should focus on when it comes to rural affairs and the environment with guests including Tony Juniper and Heather Hancock.

- g) *Ramblings* is being used as one of the programmes to promote 80 years of the BBC in Bristol. Banners with Clare Balding have appeared across Bristol. The programme's audience and share have both gone up since last year.
- h) Story telling of *On Your Farm* has been developed to make it a better listen for the audience. This has resulted in an increase both in audience share and reach. *On Your Farm* was also recently nominated for a Fortnum & Mason award for Best Radio Programme.
- i) The *Farming Team* has worked very hard in the last year to ensure the programme is relevant, informative and surprising for a wide audience. Audience share is up on last year and since January 2015, *Farming Today* has had one of the highest AI scores of all Radio 4 programmes.
- j) *Open Country* is still travelling the entire breadth of the UK and continues to feature a wide range of voices on the programme. *Open Country* has featured several times on *Pick of the Week*.
- k) Radio 4's weekly science magazine, *Inside Science*, regularly reports on rural issues. These have included the badger cull; invasive species including jellyfish on Britain's beaches; the state of Britain's soil; fracking; goshawks in Britain; climate change; weather; flooding and defences; the plight of bees; aphid survey; pollution including microplastics in the seafloor; and GM chickens.
- l) Helen Browning, Chief Executive of the Soil Association, appeared as a guest on *Desert Island Discs*.
- m) *Woman's Hour* often feature female entrepreneurs who run businesses in rural communities. The programme also regularly discusses isolation and loneliness in both rural and urban communities.
- n) *Countryfile* won the Voice of the Listener and Viewer's Excellence in Broadcasting award for Best Factual TV Programme in June 2015.
- o) In 2015, *Springwatch* received an award for digital excellence from the Voice of the Listener and Viewer, demonstrating it is reaching audiences in modern ways.
- p) This year, reporter Iolo Williams visited the far north of the British Isles as he journeyed from John O'Groats to the Shetland Islands in a 300-kilometre journey taking in some of Britain's most remote and wildest terrain.
- q) In 2015, the *Great British Menu* is all about the Women's Institute, which has rural affairs at its heart. Issues such as milk prices, honey bees and other campaigns are touched on as well. The series has also discussed farming sustainably when in relation to food and foraging, and ethical meat production.

- r) Rural affairs also feature in *Countryside 999*, *Escape to the Country* and *A Taste of Britain*.
- s) Most of Alex Polizzi's *Chefs on Trial* came from small rural businesses, as do gardening formats such as *Gardeners' World*.
- t) BBC Two showed a one-off documentary in January one year on from the Somerset floods.
- u) Further BBC Two commissions due to air this year include: *Lambing Lives* – about life as a sheep farmer in Scotland; *Country Strife: Abz On The Farm* – about a metropolitan couple moving to the countryside; *Harvest* – behind the scenes of British farming; and *Living in the Country* (working title) – a documentary series on *Country Life* magazine.
- v) BBC Four continues to contribute to coverage of rural life with recent examples including: *Life on a Mountain: A Year on Scafell Pike* – a documentary following a year in the life of England's highest mountain; *All Aboard: The Canal Trip* – a two hour, real-time canal boat journey down one of Britain's most historic waterways, the Kennet and Avon Canal.
- w) *All Aboard: The Canal Trip* was featured as part of the *Goes Slow* season which included *Dawn Chorus: The Sounds of Spring*.

How the Executive's acknowledgement of the limitations of binary news reporting has been reflected to newsrooms at network level, in the devolved nations and in the English regions. How the tone of coverage has changed.

23. Since the Trust report, Television News has commissioned regular reports based on topical rural issues, even where the developments are incremental and may never reach a pivotal moment when they might become a "must do" story for the Network. This type of report can be a particular challenge for editors of the main TV news bulletins where space is limited. As a result, the *Six* carried a report on rural housing and proposed changes to the planning rules on affordable housing requirements for small developments even though here was no particular news development on the day it was broadcast.
24. In seeking to expand our range of voices, and to avoid where possible presenting news stories simply as binary disputes, News has aimed to make our coverage more reflective of the nuances of any given argument or development. A report on milk prices did not centre on a binary conflict between 'Farmers for Action' and the supermarkets but explored the issue and the impact on farmers and consumers by interviewing two different working farmers, a 29 year old man just starting out as a dairy farmer who talked about his fears for the whole industry, and an older female farmer whose whole family worked on the farm. Other examples included reports on Ash dieback

- and tree disease and the various options for dealing with it while making clear that there is as yet no simple solution; an examination of the issues around GM crops trials in detail rather than focussing on the conflict and the protests.
25. During the Election campaign, there was an attempt by programmes across News to reflect rural concerns either in self-contained reports or as elements in other packages. These reports were more reflective and articulated the issues rather than portraying conflict.
 26. Over the past 18 months, the West Midlands team has built much stronger links with *Farming Today* and David Gregory often creates radio packages for them on a wide range of subjects. BBC News Channel also often runs these stories.
 27. The annual Birmingham NFU Conference is always a chance to take the temperature of the industry. But rather than just "dip in" the West Midlands team went back to several of the rural affairs stories covered over the preceding few months and asked those involved to send in short questions recorded on their smartphones that could be put to both the Farming Minister and NFU bosses.
 28. The West Midlands team is currently investigating the problems of education in the rural market towns in the Midlands which is a long term project aiming to air in September when children return to school.
 29. In NI, coverage has improved through the setting up of a new team (Correspondent and BJ – see above) who are fully across the objectives for rural reporting and work in a collegiate manner. NI has retained its specialist daily farming slots on radio which are highly valued by the farming community and has also refreshed *Inside Farming* – a 15 minutes farming news programme on Saturday mornings - with new content.
 30. More stories are also appearing in peak time output in NI. Recent examples have included: farmers who run environmental schemes on their land; the potential opening of China for exports of NI pork and dairy products; and how the Police Service of NI is training urban based officers to recognise and deal with agricultural crime.
 31. BBC Wales has always located many news stories in rural areas although the topic under discussion may not specifically be a countryside conflict story or an issue with is seen in strictly binary, conflict-based terms of protestors versus the other side.
 32. BBC Wales often locate health, business, economic, environment and education stories in rural areas in both English and Welsh-language news programmes not because they are specifically rural stories but because often this is where the best interviewees or case studies are and because we actively try to reflect the whole of Wales in our coverage. In October 2014, for example, BBC Wales ran a story on bilingual education and used a rural story as a case study. Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch between Denbigh and Rhuthin serves a rural area and many

parents send their children there as there aren't any other schools available. The story wasn't dealing with a rural issue, but we included the school to show how parents in rural areas can have difficulties finding schools close to their homes.

33. BBC Wales would also acknowledge the point made in the Trust report that many of the issues affecting the countryside particularly are very complex. To counteract the danger of telling the story so briefly that we only reflect polarised views, Wales' Environment and Rural Affairs Correspondent regularly returns to consistently controversial themes such as renewable energy, windfarms and TB in badgers.
34. BBC Wales has followed more closely than most media the National Grid plans in rural mid and north Wales and the impact of pylons because of energy plans to service and benefit populated urban areas outside Wales. Reports have focused on facts and technical details but also the impact, even emotional impact, on individuals and communities.
35. Rural and urban concerns have combined in many of the stories covered by BBC Scotland so far this year. Examples of these have been the removal of on shore windfarm subsidies and concerns over fracking. We sought to demonstrate that these are complex issues and not necessarily rural versus urban conflicts. Often these stories have raised awareness amongst urban populations of the pressures on rural life. Other stories from BBC Scotland, such as the ferries dispute, demonstrate to a wider audience that some rural communities are much more at risk from processes (such as ferry contract procurement) than urban populations. Whilst urban populations often have to deal with the same processes, these have a much lower impact because they are less dependent on them.
36. Coverage of the Scottish Government's land reform plans received UK-wide attention. The Scottish Government argued that changing the way rural land can be owned and managed would result in a revitalisation of remote communities. It is a story BBC Scotland will return to in the future to monitor progress and assess its success or otherwise.

Further Examples

- a) An example of coverage not searching for conflict and binary opposition was an Election report which the *One* commissioned from the BBC's Environment Analyst Roger Harrabin. His report made clear that there was no easy answer to the problem of how to build more affordable rural housing while also protecting important green belt land.
- b) Rory Cellan Jones' reports about the 'Tweeting Shepherd' were another example of a tonal change. The shepherd described how he began tweeting because he wanted to put across a more positive image of farmers, so the reports on the *One* and Online focused on giving a sense of working life of a shepherd from his own perspective rather than concentrating on the media storm around the success of his Twitter feed and subsequent book.

- c) The *Today* programme has carried several issue-based stories in recent months, including a walkabout by Mishal Hussain with an asparagus farmer near Colchester, a discussion on rural broadband in February, and a discussion on the problems with the Rural Payments Agency in March. Jim Naughtie reported from the rural Highlands on access to services and the three hours journey to the nearest hospital, whilst Zoe Conway examined access to home care in rural South Wales.
- d) *Breakfast* also found opportunities to carry a range of topical rural stories. Its steady diet of stories have included: milk quotas, ticks, birds and British wildlife, the dangers of rip tides, the reduction in council budgets for parks and the planning of the largest orchard in Britain. The News Channel also reported live from the *BBC Food and Farming Awards*.
- e) Through its '100 constituencies' series, the *Today* programme was able to reflect a wide range of rural and other issues, using local voices from rural communities rather than the agencies and spokespeople we might usually approach. Examples include Matthew Price reporting from the least populated part of England – the Eden Valley in the constituency of Penrith and the Borders, a vast seat with relatively few voters – on cutting bus routes and rural broadband; a Tom Bateman report from Bridgewater in Somerset on flooding and the building of a nuclear power station.
- f) The *Six* and *Ten* used the 'My Election' series to hear from people around the country and included people from rural areas speaking about what matters to them – for example, a third generation egg farmer on new EU legislation which may prevent him from trimming the hooks off the beaks of his hens; a Scottish fisherman; a Welsh farmer; a businesswoman from a small market town; a retired woman wakeboarder from North Cornwall on affordable homes and transport; a walking guide from Derbyshire on protecting green spaces; the rural economy; and getting people active.
- g) Science Correspondent Pallab Ghosh's journalism was recognised in December 2014 when he won the Science and Technology award at the British Journalism Awards. Pallab had broken the story that the scientific assessment of the 2013 badger culls had found that they were ineffective in killing sufficient numbers of animals and were, in some cases, inhumane by agreed standards.
- h) Radio Oxford reported on the future of the vivid yellow oil seed rape crop following the banning of a pesticide used to protect oil seed rape by the EU because some scientists believe it is harmful to bees. Radio Oxford looked at how the landscape of the Oxfordshire countryside in spring will be transformed without the acres of yellow fields and they included contributions from a wide-range of people including, farmers, the National Farmers' Union, the Green Party, Allergy UK, Defra, and vox pops of countryside users.

- i) Lincolnshire Reporter Jake Zuckerman did a piece about the A17 and how the lack of decent road infrastructure in the country is holding back the economy. He spoke to a haulage company, drivers and the local council.
- j) BBC Hull's Business Correspondent, Sarah Corker, reported on the closure of bank branches in rural Lincolnshire.

How the Executive's proposals for better use of non-specialist staff in Scotland and Northern Ireland is improving coverage of rural issues.

- 37. In addition to the Agriculture and Environment Correspondent, and Agriculture and Environment BJ, BBC NI has four district reporters and rural affairs are highlighted as an important part of their brief and improving coverage of rural affairs was a BBC NI News objective for 2014/15 so general reporters and producers have also done rural affairs stories – for example on agri-business issues.
- 38. For news online in NI, general reporters have produced stories on a variety of stories, including wind farms, puppy farming and farm income.
- 39. David Miller, BBC Scotland's Environment and Transport Correspondent, has continued to lead coverage of rural affairs across all output. Examples over the past year have included: a major wildlife crime investigation after surveillance cameras showed attempts to kill goshawks in Strathdon; a half hour television documentary on BBC One Scotland on the debate over fracking and other forms of unconventional gas extraction in Scotland; coverage of 10 wildlife and conservation organisations joining forces to call for a three year ban on the culling of mountain hares on Scotland's grouse moors; coverage of the concerns of landowners over the Scottish Government's land reform plans; and the impact of changes to the subsidies available for wind farmers on rural areas.
- 40. The issue of wind farms was also covered by Tim Reid, Westminster Correspondent, who reported on the decision by the UK Government to end windfarm subsidies for the onshore industry a year earlier than planned. Tim's report looked at the impact on jobs and investment in Scotland.
- 41. James Cook, Network Correspondent, reported from Islay on the Scottish Government's proposed land reform legislation. This story ran on the Six with a longer version for Scotland 2015 and on the BBC Scotland website.
- 42. Other stories covered over the year by non-specialist staff and featured across all platforms have included: dairy farmers not being paid for their milk; the double-edged sword of wind turbines being built closer to settlements but bringing cash to more remote communities; Scottish Government jobs being centralised and lost to local communities; cottage hospitals in rural communities facing difficulties with out of hours cover and recruitment problems; the Smith Commission's promise to give Scottish farmers a stronger voice; a report from Orkney on the effect of increased rainfall on the island and the impact on cattle; new draft legislation which could mean landowners being

forced to sell some of their land; the introduction of nocturnal wildlife tours in Galloway; a rural watch initiative set up to tackle an increase in crime in the Scotland countryside; a report on the potato glut and the effect on potato farming UK-wide; the reversal in the decline of red squirrels in the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire following a conservation project involving Nature and the RSPB; and the financial impact of the development of world class centres and trails for mountain bike champions in the Borders.

What has been done to ensure better collaboration between different programmes and output areas?

43. There has been a marked increase in collaboration across the BBC, especially between News and the specialised Rural Affairs unit (*Farming Today*). The *Farming Today* team liaise with the key news programmes advising them on stories and helping them source contributors. Working closely with the *Six* and the *Ten*, the *Farming Today* team and Dimitri Houtart have helped News find contributors to reflect rural views in economic, political and immigration stories.
44. BBC News held a Rural Affairs Awayday in October 2014 which was attended by around 30 BBC staff from Network and Regional News, Television and Radio. Heather Hancock addressed the group about her report. The day was an opportunity for those working on the rural affairs brief across BBC News to make new contacts and explore ways of working together more effectively. A range of News programmes sent senior representatives including the *Six* and *Ten*, *Breakfast*, Online, *Today* and the News Channel. Dimitri Houtart organised a strong attendance from his teams.
45. As mentioned previously, in order to continue to bring together those across the BBC who are working on the rural brief, Dimitri Houtart and Carol Rubra have begun to hold regular BBC Rural Affairs meetings after the quarterly Rural Affairs Committee so that all the BBC staff from News, Regions, TV and Radio have a regular opportunity to discuss stories and collaborate face-to-face.

Further Examples

- a) To vastly extend the reach of Radio 4's *Food and Farming Awards*, the team really focussed on collaboration this year working with the 39 English Regions' local stations as well as the three Nations. The team also developed a new relationship with *Countryfile* which saw the programme featuring the three "Farming Heroes" and making a special programme based around the awards. The team also worked closely with *Farming Today*, *You and Yours*, *Saturday Kitchen* and the News Channel to raise the profile of the Awards.
- b) Working with the impact team, the *Costing the Earth* programme on endangered plant theft had the best coverage across the BBC the series has ever had including *BBC Breakfast*, *Today*, BBC Online (the article was in the top feature slot and was the most read story on the BBC), 5Live, News

Channel, Radio News bulletins, and GNS two-ways with 11 stations including Wales and Scotland.

- c) For the special two-part documentary *This Farming Life*, the Radio 4 production team in Bristol successfully linked up with BBC Radio Somerset to simulcast both programmes. This gave Radio Somerset the opportunity to do an OB from Sedgemoor auction market and to generate further content across the station. Radio Somerset repeated both programmes at Easter due to popular demand.
- d) In May 2015, *Springwatch* teamed up with 6Music who ran a week of wildlife focused programmes across the station culminating in a curated hour by Chris Packham on wildlife and *Springwatch* (and the playing of his favourite tracks).
- e) *Springwatch* collaborated with *Blue Peter* for their *Springwatch*-themed programme.
- f) *Springwatch* also works closely with English Regions and provides interviews for local radio and television upon request. Features from *Springwatch* with a local element also feature on local stations – for example the badger releases in Devon.