

Northern Fells Rural Project

University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Centre for Rural Economy

‘Foot and Mouth in the Northern Fells’

Key findings,

April 2002

This report summarises the economic and social impacts of the recent Foot and Mouth epidemic within the Northern Fells project area. These key findings draw on Bennett, K., Carroll, T., Lowe, P., and Phillipson, J. (2002) *Coping with Crisis in Cumbria: the Consequences of Foot and Mouth Disease*. University of Newcastle: Centre for Rural Economy Research Report, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne. This is a unique piece of research into the effect of FMD on local communities and families, and because of this its findings are of particular significance for the future of rural communities.

1. The Northern Fells Rural Project

The project is part of the Prince of Wales Rural Revival Initiative and receives support from The Countryside Agency, The Prince’s Trust, Business in the Community, the North Cumbria Health Action Zone, Leader II, National Westminster Bank and a local charitable trust. This project in Cumbria is concerned with:

- To pilot methods for the development of services in rural areas using health care as an entry point,
- To identify the unmet health and social needs of rural residents,
- To map the provision of existing support services and to identify gaps,
- To prioritise and implement actions to meet unmet need
- To evaluate the project and disseminate our findings so that solutions can be replicated in other rural areas.

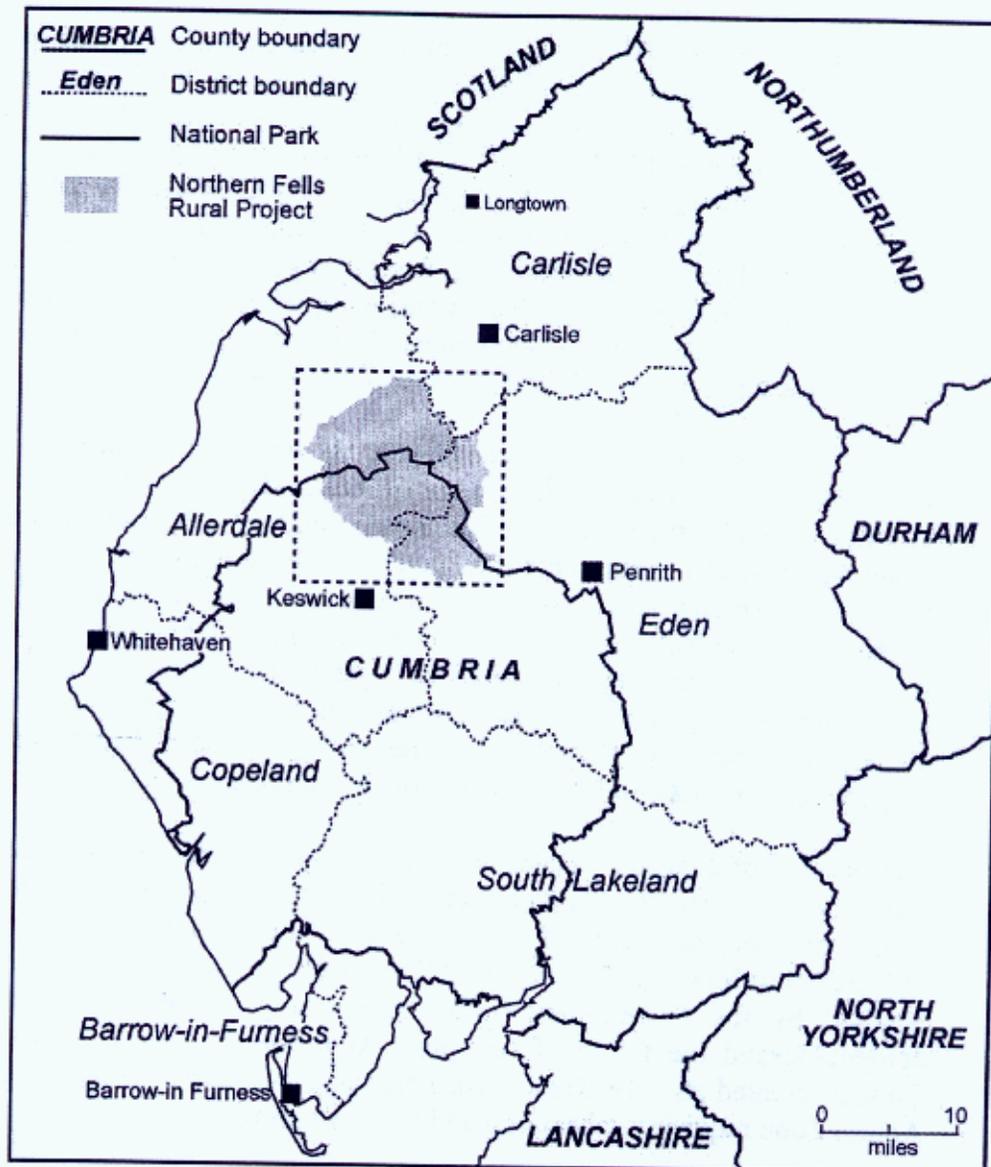
The project focuses particularly on the needs of

- Elderly people
- Young people
- Those with disabilities
- Carers
- Young parents
- Unemployed people and those on low income
- People without their own transport

The project covers seven parishes around Caldbeck in Cumbria (3,600 people in an area of approximately 180 square miles). These are the Parishes of Ireby with Uldale, Westward, Boltons, Caldbeck, Sebergham, Castle Sowerby and Mungrisdale.

Further information about the project can be found at www.nfrp.org

Figure 1.1: Cumbria and the Northern Fells



2. The Impact of Foot and Mouth Disease in Cumbria and the Northern Fells

In 2001 Cumbria in general and the Northern Fells in particular were devastated by the epidemic of Foot and Mouth Disease. The Northern Fells Project Steering Group took the view that the impact of FMD on the area could not be ignored and in June 2001, commissioned the Centre for Rural Economy at the University of Newcastle to undertake work on the economic and social impacts of the epidemic on farm and non-farm

businesses throughout the project area. This research was funded by the North West Development Agency, the Countryside Agency and Business in the Community.

Key findings:

- 2.1 The 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the UK was the most serious animal epidemic in this country in modern times.
- 2.2 Cumbria bore the brunt of the outbreak. 44% of all UK confirmed cases happened in the county. More than a quarter of all farm holdings had livestock culled leading to a loss of a third of the country's grazing livestock.
- 2.3 The impacts extended well beyond farming. What commenced as an effort to control an animal disease quickly developed into a crisis for the rural economy as tourists and visitors were discouraged from visiting.
- 2.4 The rural economy of Cumbria was weak before the outbreak of FMD. It is heavily dependent on farming and tourism. Agricultural incomes have experienced serious decline in the past five years. Tourism has remained fairly stable but does not appear to have shared in the growth recorded across the UK generally. Much of the employment in tourism is seasonal and part-time.
- 2.5 It has been estimated that the lost output from agriculture would be £200 million, equivalent to 40% of all agricultural output, for the County for the year. Loss in gross tourism revenues for the year is likely to be around £400 million.
- 2.6 Estimates of the number of jobs "at risk" in the county due to the Foot and Mouth crisis were put at between 15,000 and 20,000, equivalent to 6-8% of the Cumbrian workforce. In a county like Cumbria, there is a considerable degree of hidden unemployment and underemployment that has masked the full extent of any job losses.
- 2.7 The more redundancies and business contractions or closures that occur, the less disposable income will be spent in the local economy and the greater the induced effects. One consequence is that the full impacts of the FMD epidemic on the rural economy of Cumbria will not emerge for another year.
- 2.8 Almost half the farm holdings in the Northern Fells were culled out in the FMD outbreak. During this period farming families lived through a period of turmoil and uncertainty that none of them had ever before experienced. Not only were

- their farm enterprises hit, but so too were off-farm incomes and diversification activities.
- 2.9 The vast majority of farms are family businesses, each one managed and run by one or more households. Such family-based businesses draw even more heavily on family resources at times of crisis.
- 2.10 Movement restrictions cut off farms' main income source. Financial worries were deepened when household members stopped going off the farm to work, were laid off or their work activities depended on people being able to access the house or farm.
- 2.11 At the centre of household life and mopping up all the tension like a sponge were women. They had to tend to husbands who turned in upon themselves or talked of nothing else, and to deal with the angst that the children experienced.
- 2.12 On the surveyed farms household members confined themselves to the farm for an average of 19 days. Four farmers recalled isolation on the farm for over 60 days. Out of the 24 farms surveyed with school-aged children, 14 of them stopped children from going to school because of FMD. Undoubtedly, the whole episode had a profound impact on farm children. Through being isolated from their friends or their parents it made them feel apart. Some clearly felt torn between identifying with their beleaguered parents and the farming community, and reassessing their own feelings towards a way of life that now seemed tarnished.
- 2.13 For days, even weeks after, some people remained in mourning. With the cull of their stock, households lost not only the animals but also the legacy of accumulated breeding acumen of previous generations. In a way, the family biography, lived out through the stock, was brought to an end.
- 2.14 FMD had repercussions not just for farming families, but for the whole community in the Northern Fells. Nearly everyone became wary about unnecessary journeys and policed their own movements. Household, business and village life were all disrupted.
- 2.15 FMD revealed the extent to which business and household life are intricately connected, with one sustaining the other. Businesses looked internally and relied

upon their households for help and solutions, taking smaller wages and cutting back on household spending, to deal with declines in business turnover. FMD had economic and social consequences for the households of businesses.

2.16 The cull of stock turned usually peaceful villages and countryside into places of turmoil and carnage. The metaphor that many people readily drew upon was that of a war zone. This expressed their sense of the widespread disruption of everyday life and the scale of the destruction involved.

2.17 Within the Northern Fells area after the confirmation of the first FMD case in England, all meetings, activities and events were immediately cancelled. Much has been made in the national press about how the countryside was closed to urban visitors but in a much more pervasive way it was also closed to rural inhabitants.

2.18 On the surveyed farms in the Northern Fells project area the total household income is expected to fall on average by £81,747, and costs to fall by £39,309. The overall impact of the disease and culling has been to leave the farm households facing an average shortfall of £42,438 in 2001-2002.

2.19 Compensation money has been paid to those farmers whose livestock was culled, and it is estimated to range between £122,000 and £185,000 per farm. Insofar as nearly all those surveyed intend to continue farming, this money will be needed for re-stocking and to support the farm in the interim.

2.20 Contrary to opinion and predictions expressed generally in the farming press, only one surveyed farmer would definitely cease farming and three were unsure.

2.21 In considering re-stocking less than half of the farmers said that they would definitely maintain their existing level of farming activity. The rest were divided almost equally between those contemplating scaling down their farmed area and those thinking of expanding.

2.22 There is very little interest in growing new crops, afforestation or converting to organic farming.

3. Conclusions

3.1 The farm survey within the Northern Fells reveals the high proportion of farm income that is derived from subsidy, particularly in the beef and sheep sectors.

- The farms are therefore vulnerable if the likely reductions in commodity price supports and subsidies under the Common Agriculture Policy come to fruition.
- 3.2 A significant proportion of farmers would appear to be potentially receptive, if a suitable scheme could be devised, to the Government purchasing from them some of their quota for receiving the Annual Sheep Premium. Such a scheme could be used to lower stocking densities systematically and permanently.
 - 3.3 A key question is whether it would be possible to devise an agri-environment scheme sufficiently tailored to local conditions in Cumbria, that would also conform with EU regulations and not be too costly and bureaucratic to operate.
 - 3.4 If a regionally differentiated approach is feasible then institutional questions will arise about the mechanics of scheme delivery and the respective roles of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (DEFRA), the North West Development Agency, (NWDA), and Lake District National Park Authority.
 - 3.5 The challenge for rural development agencies will be to provide sound and convincing advice in what may be unpromising commercial conditions and to make funding schemes accessible, flexible and capable of accommodating an appropriate level of risk. In view of the lack of apparent awareness or confidence in Government agencies and the low level of existing uptake of business advice, this is likely to be a significant challenge.
 - 3.6 The main messages for business support agencies are unsurprising: better communication; more transparency in the process of determining eligibility for assistance; a recognition that recovery from the very poor trading conditions in 2001 may take many years; and more sensitivity to the complexities of small businesses including advice and support strategies which do not necessarily imply growth and acknowledge the wider role of small businesses in rural development.
 - 3.7 The research reveals a significant degree of resistance to change in the farming community and this should be of concern to policy makers. Almost all farmers interviewed were expecting to continue farming and many to return to previous levels of activity. Little enthusiasm was expressed for increased participation in agri-environment schemes or alternative land uses.

- 3.8 If farming prospects do not recover then pressures to find alternative income sources will grow.
- 3.9 More farm households will need external advice and what is on offer should embrace families as well as the farmers and should include training and employment as well as business advice.
- 3.10 There has already been evidence to suggest that those in a position to help, such as schools, the surgery, churches and the Quakers' meeting room, have played a proactive role in alleviating stress caused to individuals as a result of FMD.
- 3.11 If there is to be long-term recovery of the rural economy and society, it needs to be sustained at the level of the local community. A potential vehicle to support and enable recovery at the level of the community would be a local regeneration facilitator, appointed to seek funding and work with the local communities to rebuild a new blend of agriculture, countryside stewardship and tourism.

Northern Fells Rural Project

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A copy of the complete report can be obtained from:

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