

# LEADER Grants

**The recent Countryside Productivity Scheme has attracted a lot of farmers' attention, offering up to 40% grant funding on a range of livestock and arable farm equipment. But it you've missed the deadline, fear not. The LEADER grant programme, which has been funding rural development projects for years, may still be available in your area.**

**M**any of the recent announcements from Michael Gove's DEFRA have been around the future of support payments to farmers. With all the noise of Brexit, it's easy to forget that many of the calls for radical change affect direct or income support payments only.

Of course the Common Agricultural Policy is split into two "pillars". The first, Pillar 1, consists of direct payments – annual payments to farmers to help stabilise farm revenues in the face of volatile market prices – while Pillar 2 is focused on rural development. This means funds are offered through various grants and instruments to help promote a thriving rural economy, which extends beyond primary food production, and encompasses forestry, hunting and, to a certain extent, leisure and tourism.

The delivery mechanism for Pillar 2 funds lies in the hands of the devolved administrations – in England, the delivery vehicle is called the Rural Development Programme for England 2014-2020.

## England's RDP 2014-2020

The RDP delivers "socio-economic" schemes in England to provide capital funding (not income top-ups) to support the development of businesses in rural areas. The total population of England is about 53 million, of which only 18% live in rural areas. But 85% of the land area is defined as rural, with farmland or forest cover where the population lives in settlements of less than 10,000. But there are fewer jobs in these areas, less skills, and investment in people, training and private capital investment tends to be in the cities. So there is a good case for government to deploy funds in these areas. Several new methods of distributing funds to improve productivity – and therefore competitiveness – have been launched recently, worth about £200m. The current socio-economic schemes are as follows:

- The Growth Programme – a fund worth £165m to fund projects

within business development, food processing and tourism infrastructure. Opened in January 2017, the closure date is 31 May 2018. Within this a £30m Rural Broadband Infrastructure grant was launched in October 2017.

- Countryside Productivity -
  - £60m small grant scheme launched in Feb 2018 closed in March
  - £60m large grant scheme, still open. This has four themes – Improving Farming Productivity, Improving Forestry Productivity, Adding Value to Agri-Food, and Water Resource Management
- LEADER – local programmes have been open in 79 areas of England since 2015.

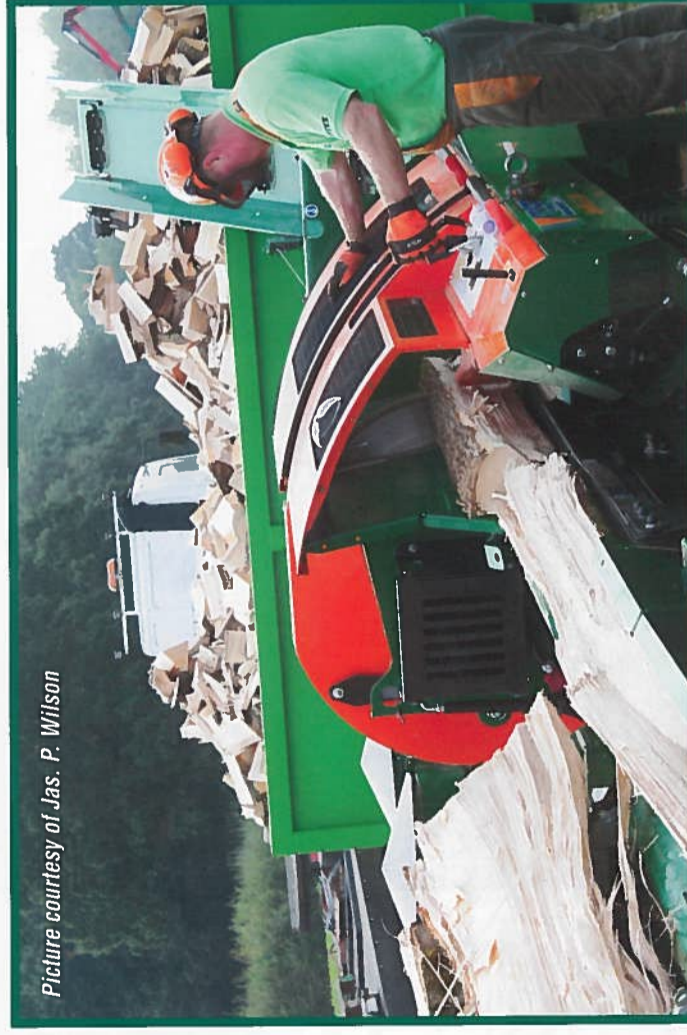
## What is it?

LEADER is a French acronym which roughly translates as "Liaison Among Stakeholders in Rural Development". A key feature is that the scheme is administered by 79 Local Action Groups (LAGS) – essentially community panels made up of volunteers from public, private and charitable sectors who will review applications and check they deliver against nationally and locally-set priorities. It's important to note that success in a LEADER grant application is not automatic, and not all applications will be successful. You can find out more on how LAGS will assess applications by contacting the group in your area.

## LEADER in your area

LEADER is area-specific and only applications from within the defined geographical boundary of each LAG will be entertained. Those on the panel will be looking to support projects which:

- Increase farm productivity
  - Support rural tourism
  - Support cultural and heritage activity
  - Support small- and medium-sized enterprises and farm diversification
  - Provide rural services
  - Increase forestry productivity
- There will be further, locality-specific



Picture courtesy of Jas. P. Wilson

The Posch S-375 firewood processor has been the subject of many LEADER grant applications. An ideal system for biomass fuel production, producing 50cm logs for boilers or smaller lengths for commercial log sales.

criteria depending on the specific LAG. A good first step is to make contact with your local LAG and have an informal discussion about what they will support.

## What will LEADER fund?

Applications must be for a grant of at least £5,000. The maximum amount will vary between the priorities depending on European funding rules but the general maximum is about £50,000. LEADER grants will fund 40% of a project's total eligible costs, although you will have to provide the cash first and be reimbursed later.

## Who can apply?

LAGS will entertain applications from farmers, growers, foresters, other rural businesses and rural community organisations. They can be private businesses, public organisations, voluntary organisations or someone who wants to start a new business. Applicants must, however, be of age, a "legal entity" and capable of signing a binding contract.

## How to apply

The first stage is to make contact with your local LAG representative (see box). They will send you a copy of the local handbook which requires careful study, and an initial Expression of Interest form with guidance notes on how to complete it. Once they have received it, the LAG can offer feedback on this form and advise on whether you should progress to a full LEADER grant application.

It should be noted that LEADER grants are not for the faint-hearted. Expect to be asked to complete a very detailed and lengthy application process, and provide a good deal of evidence to support your case for a grant. This is likely to require cooperation and contributions from others. Many farmers seek professional advice for this task, which adds a cost to the process. Typically, the process takes three months from initial application to receiving a decision. ■

**Find out more**  
Go to [www.gov.uk/government/rural-development-programme-for-england-leader-funding](http://www.gov.uk/government/rural-development-programme-for-england-leader-funding)

**Am I in a LEADER area?**  
A quick and effective online way to find out if your area is covered by a LEADER Local Action Group is to visit the free government mapping portal [www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk)

1. Click "get started" (and accept terms of use, if asked)
2. Click on the [-+] box by "Administrative Geographies" (second option from top)
3. Click on the [-+] box by "Other Administrative Boundaries" – will drop-down a list of boxes to tick
4. Click in the box for Rural Development Fund Eligibility by LEADER Groups (next to the blue box)
5. Enter your post code or location name in the map search box
6. To identify if your area is covered by a LEADER LAG, click on the "I" symbol in the tools menu in the top banner on the screen, and then click on the area of the map you wish to check.