‘The Natural Health Service’
How farming contributes to the public’s health, an evolving story

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Summary

• The emerging new health system, Public Health England and ‘improving the public’s health’

• The importance of green space and the countryside to improving health and wellbeing

• Some of the issues and some approaches

• What next? – opportunities and challenges
Defining health and wellbeing

• Health is a state of **complete physical, mental and social well-being** and not merely the absence of illness, disease or infirmity.

• Well-being is a **dynamic process** that gives people a sense of how their lives are going, through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and social, emotional and psychological resources or ‘mental capital’.
What determines health and wellbeing?
Health and wellbeing – what influences it?

Source: Holt-Lundstad et al 2010
The New Public Health System: an integrated whole system approach

**Government**
- DH responsible to parliament, with clear line of sight through system
- Cross-government senior officials group to improve health outcomes and use Cabinet Committee structure as required
- CMO to continue to provide independent advice to Government

**Public Health England**
- New, integrated national body
- Strengthened health protection systems
- Supporting the whole system through expertise, evidence and intelligence

**Local authorities**
- New public health functions integrated into their wider role, helping to tackle the wider social and economic determinants of health.
- Leading for improving health and coordinating locally for protecting health
- Promoting population health and wellbeing – role of Directors of Public Health

**NHS**
- Delivering health care and tackling inequalities
- Making every contact count
- Specific public health interventions, such as cancer screening
Public Health England’s mission is to work with and alongside others to protect and improve the public’s health and well-being and reduce inequalities through our advocacy; application of knowledge, evidence and insight; transparent reporting of outcomes; and nurturing the public health system and workforce, and others…….
What does PHE do?

Public Health England:

– works transparently, proactively providing government, local government, the NHS, MPs, industry, public health professionals and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific and delivery expertise and advice

– ensures there are effective arrangements in place nationally and locally for preparing, planning and responding to health protection concerns and emergencies, including the future impact of climate change

– supports local authorities, and through them clinical commissioning groups, by providing evidence and knowledge on local health needs, alongside practical and professional advice on what to do to improve health, and by taking action nationally where it makes sense to do so
Local presence

Four regions, 15 centres

Eight Knowledge and Intelligence Teams
- London
- South West
- South East
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- North West
- Northern and Yorkshire
- East

Other local presence
- ten microbiology laboratories
- field epidemiology teams

Additional support
- Local teams can also draw on national scientific expertise based at Colindale, Porton Down and Chilton
Sets out Public Health England’s priorities and actions for the first year of our existence

Five outcome-focused priorities – what we want to achieve

Two supporting priorities – how we will achieve it

27 key actions to take now

The start of the conversation – a three-year corporate plan will follow
Health and wellbeing benefits of green space and countryside

• Leads to increases in strength of community indicators (Kuo et al., 1998)

• Increases social activity (Sullivan et al., 2004)

• Helps with social interaction and cohesion in different age groups, by providing inclusive places to meet (Bird, 2007)

• Increases perception of community strength and pride through participation in local nature activities (Austin, 2002; Inerfield and Blom, 2002)

Positive associations between greenspace, countryside and better health (both physical and mental health)
Our Natural Health Service

‘If every household in England were provided with good access to quality green space it could save an estimated £2.1 billion in health care costs’

Natural England

http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/31045
Mental Health and Inequalities

There is also a link to stress reducing benefits which can have wider health benefits (impacting on weight gain, heart disease, depression & diabetes) Ref – Davey Smith et al, (2005), Cortisol, testosterone, and coronary heart disease: Prospective Evidence from the Caerphilly Study. Circulation 112(3):332-40

There is also the Mitchell and Popham work (2008) which showed populations exposed to the greenest environments have lowest levels of health inequality related to income deprivation. They studied mortality records for 366, 348 individuals.

In terms of health inequalities, socio-economic factors are the key drivers but green space is a contributing factor and also those who live in more deprived areas are likely to have fewer good quality green spaces and have less access to greenspace and countryside.
Homes within 300 metres of a natural green space

Map 2: Homes within 300 metres of a natural green space of at least two hectares (percentage of addresses)

Source: CABE, Urban Green Nation: Building the evidence base
Figure 10: Populations living in areas with, in relative terms, the least favourable environmental conditions, 2001–6

Source: UC L Institute of Health Equity

Environmental conditions: river water quality, air quality, green space, habitat favourable to biodiversity, flood risk, litter, detritus, housing conditions, road accidents, regulate sites (e.g. landfill)

Source: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs23
Green Space

Figure 4.7 Percentage of population by social grade who visit a green space infrequently in a year, 2009

Source: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Energy Savings Trust
People from BME groups have less local green space and it tends to be of poorer quality.

May be because inner urban areas, which have lower quantity of green space, may have a higher proportion of BME people.

Black African & African-Caribbean people use parks the least.

Source: CABE, Urban Green Nation: Building the evidence base
So what of farming? ......

• Farming, food and nature

• From nature to plate

• Care Farming

• Food production – sustainable, ecologically friendly, educational, awareness and understanding

• Access to countryside – a sense of ‘place’, for community benefit, where people live and work

An asset and a new key player in the production of health and wellbeing
Approaches - LNFYS

The ‘Let Nature Feed Your Senses’ (LNFYS) project organises sensory rich farm visits across England for community groups of all ages and abilities. Groups include older people, disabled adults and children, and adults and children from areas of deprivation. The project facilitates visits to both farms and nature reserves, providing access to a diversity of managed environments both with and without livestock.

The emphasis of LNFYS is on providing sensory rich experiences on the farm, rather than purely educational or ‘care’ visits. The visits are supported both through contact with LNFYS staff and through a wide variety of innovative, interactive resources designed to help hosts develop sensory rich visits.
Impact (University of Essex Evaluation)

Over 11,800 people have had the opportunity to visit farms and nature reserves across England, many of whom didn’t have the opportunity to do so before.

The research has shown that the project has had a positive impact on the wellbeing of participants, has facilitated social inclusion, has improved visitor access to and connection with nature, and has increased understanding of farming and food production, all of which are likely to contribute to healthier lifestyles. These outcomes also support Government calls to connect people with the natural environment and food production, to engage in nature and outside learning, to improve health and promote wellbeing.
Participants views

“The farm visits had an extremely calming and therapeutic effect on the residents. People with dementia can often be withdrawn, distressed or confused, but you really notice the difference it makes when you visit a farm. The huge variety of things to see, touch, smell and hear really helped engage the residents. For many it helped evoke childhood memories.” (Carer, dementia specialist care home)

“I really enjoyed my day at your farm, and thought you made our group all really welcome, but for my own personal experience, I felt relaxed for the first time in years!!” (Letter from visitor to Park Hill Farm)
And more………

Qualitative data from 38 follow-up interviews conducted with group leaders one to six months after a visit; testimonies and quotes from visit evaluation forms and letters and comments received by host farmers; and a focus group with 10 group leaders were analysed. The results revealed that enhanced mental well-being and social inclusion were consistently reported as a benefit of the farm visit. Participants particularly referred to the calming impact of the farm environment; an increase in self-esteem and independence; improvements in memory function and reminiscence ability; and increased communication. The paper concludes that whilst there is a clear benefit and demand for such on-farm experiences, in order to secure future funding evidence of their economic impacts and longitudinal follow-up studies of benefits are required.

The well-being benefits of sensory-rich farm visits (forthcoming publication)

Authors: Mills, J, Taylor, J., Dwyer, J, Bartlett, J.
Other examples

ECOMINDS

www.mind.org.uk/ecotherapyworks

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=0NJDnEGWpzU

Project Wild Thing|: Reconnecting Children with Nature

http://projectwildthing.com
Some issues

• Economic benefits
• Social Return on Investment
• Funding – complexity
• Incentives – disincentives
• Capturing more than the willing
• Future stewardship?
Opportunities

- The new Public Health System
- The new Commissioning Landscape
- Impact assessments (health and wellbeing)
- ‘Green’ Prescriptions
- Partnerships
- Research

Working across ‘silos’
Five Ways to Wellbeing

Commissioned by the Government’s Foresight Project the brief was to

“build on the findings of the outputs of the Mental Capacity and Wellbeing Project, and develop an evidence-based wellbeing equivalent of the health promotion dictum “five fruit and vegetables a day”.”
Illness → Wellness
Asset approach

“Communities have never been built upon their deficiencies. Building communities has always depended upon mobilising the capacities and assets of people and place”

(Kretzman and McKnight 1993)
Living Well

Economy

Wellness

Environment

Next Wave

Public Health

Arrows pointing upwards and outwards from the roots.
Thank you

Working together for the public’s health

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