

## Cracking business plan for farm

A Northumberland farm is to create the region's first dedicated free-range egg processing facility – with help from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

The new unit at Detchant Farm in Belford will offer specialist free-range grading, branding and packing services for the first time in the North East, with the potential to handle more than 18 million eggs every year.

With existing providers of egg packaging and grading services working at almost full capacity in the region, the new facility - which will be built alongside an existing egg production unit at Detchant farm – will eliminate the 180-mile round trip into Scotland that the farm's own 'Sunny Hill' brand eggs currently have to make to get ready for sale.



The Jackson family will also be offering the service for use by other egg producers, creating and safeguarding a total of 13 local jobs.

The project is being supported with just over £96,000 from RDPE, funded by the European Union and Defra and managed by One North East.

Sisters Christine Jackson and Catherine Armstrong, who run Sunny Hill Free Range Eggs from the farm, said: "This grant has allowed us to move our business forward onto the next level and to invest with confidence. Our eggs now travel no food miles which has resulted in us being much more competitive. Already we have secured new contracts which were previously out of our reach and are working together with other producers and providers in the region."

With four purpose built hen houses housing a total of 56,000 free range hens, Sunnyhill Free Range Eggs is the foremost producer of free range eggs in the North East. The most recent house, with 16,000 birds, was completed in June and includes a state of the art Natura laying system.

Tenant farmer and One North East Rural Board Member, Ian Brown, said: "This is a fantastic example of how RDPE can enable a farm to diversify its existing operations, at the same time as cutting food miles, safeguarding local facilities and creating a completely new service for producers.

"With more consumers wanting to 'buy local' and understand the journey their food has made to their shopping basket, this is an important addition to the egg supply chain infrastructure and part of the wider work to increase the contribution made by local food to the regional economy."

The farm has had support from Business Link and Strutt and Parker to develop its plans and access RDPE finance, and the North East England Food and Drink Group (NEEFDG) also welcomed the investment.

Business Link's rural account manager Chris France said: "I spent time with Catherine and Christine, analysing their business needs and exploring various sources of financial support.

"I'm pleased to see that the sisters' hard work has been recognised with this investment and that the farm business, and the local rural economy, is already reaping the benefits."

Strutt and Parker funding schemes specialist, Ali Gray, added: "As with any public funding application, the business planning process is demanding.

"However, for others wishing to source RDPE funds in the future, with assistance from Business Link and One North East, the process is crucial and will help achieve the most benefit for all involved."

Sandy Duncan, lead programme manager for the North East Regional Food and Drink Group said: "We're committed to supporting local and regional food produced in the region and in assisting the development of food and drink businesses to reach their full potential. This new grading station will strengthen the local provenance of Sunny Hill products and highlight the message to their customers."

The Rural Development Programme for England 2007-2013 is jointly funded by Defra and the European Union, with the aim of delivering targeted support to rural businesses and communities. It is managed in the region by One North East, Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

The RDPE investment being managed by One North East combines larger projects to help many businesses in different sectors of the rural economy - including bioenergy and land-based skills, and projects adding value to agricultural and forestry products - with smaller investments to help individual businesses to start-up, grow or diversify, and support to develop more sustainable rural communities. Rural community partnerships are shaping how at least 25% of the funding is invested themselves, using the LEADER approach.

For more information on Sunny Hill Eggs, visit [www.sunnyhilleggs.com](http://www.sunnyhilleggs.com)

For more information on RDPE in North East England, visit: [www.rdpenortheast.co.uk](http://www.rdpenortheast.co.uk)

For more information on RDPE, visit:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm)

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/rdpe/index.htm>