



CRE NEWSLETTER

Newcastle University is ranked No. 1 in the world for rural development research and impact by ScholarGPS. The Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) at Newcastle University is proud to be part of this globally recognised leader in rural development. CRE is also home to two of the world's top five scholars in the field—Professor Sally Shortall and Professor Mark Shucksmith.

Welcome to the April 2026 edition of the CRE newsletter, your source for updates, research insights, and developments shaping rural communities, economies, and environments. At CRE, we are committed to advancing understanding of rural change through interdisciplinary research, collaboration, and engagement with policy, practice, and communities.

In this edition:

- **Project News** — Updates on externally funded research and collaborations
- **NICRE Spotlight** — Policy and research evidence shaping rural communities
- **Events & Engagement** — Workshops, showcases and outreach activities





PROJECT NEWS 2025 was an active year for externally funded research projects Below is a selection of current and recently completed projects

Peatland Environments and Communities (RESPECT Project)

Amy Proctor and Stuart Brown are contributing to the BBSRC-funded RESPECT project (Rapid Engagement with Stressed Peatland Environments and Communities in Transformation), part of UKRI's Land Use for Net Zero programme. The project launched in May 2025 with stakeholders including Natural England, NatureScot, the Scottish Government, the National Trust and the IUCN UK Peatland Programme.

[More information →](#)

Animal Welfare and Sustainable Livestock Systems

Beth Clark is Co-Principal Investigator on an Animal Welfare Foundation project exploring pig-centred production systems (Oct 2025–Apr 2026). She also completed research on sheep lameness management and breeding strategies with partners at the James Hutton Institute and the National Sheep Association. Beth is additionally involved in the Innovate UK project FLOCKWISE, developing integrated sensing and expertise to support livestock welfare learning.

Understanding Affective States Across Species

Lynn Frewer, Carmen Hubbard and Beth Clark are participants in COST Action Affect-Evo, examining affective states across species from an evolutionary perspective.

[Project link →](#)

Research Culture and Interdisciplinarity

Amy Proctor and Beth Clark completed a Research Culture project exploring interdisciplinarity. A follow-up survey examining research culture is currently underway.



Food Waste and Behavioural Research

Diogo Monteiro is leading research linked to Newcastle City Council's Household Food Waste Collection Scheme. Surveys and focus groups explored participation behaviour and policy implications, with findings informing an upcoming report to the Council.

Video Advice to Farmers

A CRE–NUBS collaboration led by Susan Chilton investigates how advisory visits and short-form video communication influence farmer participation in environmental schemes. Findings will be presented at the 100th AES Conference and submitted to Ecological Economics.

HoliFood Project

Novieta Sari and Lynn Frewer contribute to the EU Horizon HoliFood project examining climate-related food safety risks. A November webinar explored emerging challenges linked to changing consumption patterns and sustainability transitions.



Horizon Europe Grass Ceiling Project

Sally Shortall is Coordinator of the Horizon Europe GRASS CEILING project. This ends in December 2025. This three-year Horizon Europe project is a multi-actor project which aims to empower rural women and increase the number of socio-ecological innovations led by women in agriculture, the rural economy and rural communities. The Newcastle lead was Orla Collins, with Sue Bradley employed as researcher. Melanie Thompson-Glen from NICRE led the Scottish living lab (there were living labs across nine countries). Please find more details here: <https://www.grassceiling.eu/>.

Cultural Heritage and Wildfires — FIRECULT

Menelaos Gkartzios leads a work package within FIRECULT, an AHRC-funded international project exploring links between wildfire and cultural heritage, including research residencies across Europe and Turkey. Please find more details here: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/a-z-research/firecult/>



NICRE Spotlight

Impacts of Land Use Change

NICRE supported a Defra-funded project examining the socio-economic impacts of land use change in rural communities. Led by CRE and the Countryside and Community Research Institute, the research informs development of the UK Land Use Framework.

Rural Evidence at the Heart of Policy

NICRE contributed evidence to a national taskforce examining how government missions — growth, clean energy, opportunity, crime and health — can be delivered effectively in rural areas. Contributions drew on expertise from 11 universities and 49 evidence submissions.

Supporting Women in Rural Innovation

NICRE continues its contribution to the GRASS CEILING project, supporting women entrepreneurs through Living Labs and policy engagement across Europe.

European Innovation and Food Systems Projects

Barbara Tocco contributes to several EU Horizon and UK-funded projects including:

HORT2THEFUTURE — sustainable horticultural innovation

EU4ADVICE — agricultural knowledge systems collaboration

GI SMART — geographical indications and territorial development

School food pilot (Defra)

AI logistics innovation (DfT)

CROP-MATCHING — sustainable cropping networks

Events and Engagement highlights CRE's recent activities connecting research, policy, and communities. From public science events to high-level policy discussions, CRE researchers continue to share insights, engage stakeholders, and inspire sustainable rural development

Events

CRE Event at NU Farms, Cockle Park

NU Farms hosted a CRE event attended by the Duke of Northumberland and Earl Percy. Panel discussions explored land use change, sustainable rural economies, and food systems, highlighting climate adaptation, food security, and rural accessibility challenges.

[More information →](#)

Research Showcase & Networking Lunch

A research showcase brought together policymakers, public bodies, and political representatives to discuss critical issues in food, farming, and rural economies. Presentations highlighted CRE's policy-focused research addressing climate change, agriculture, and social inequalities.

Beamish Science Event

CRE academics and PhD students engaged over 800 visitors through interactive farming and science activities at Beamish Museum, promoting public understanding of rural research.

Visit from the Shadow Minister

Robbie Moore MP visited CRE to discuss food security, productivity, and rural policy challenges with staff and students.

Women in Farming Event

Hosted at Nafferton Farm, this event explored leadership opportunities and barriers faced by women in agriculture, strengthening networks across academia and industry.

Community Engagement: Food Waste Collection

A Festival of Social Science event shared findings from research supporting Newcastle's household food waste scheme, highlighting education and community engagement as key drivers of participation.