

Take a lead in boosting your business with EU funding

Rural businesses have the chance to boost their potential by applying for a share of £1.8m of EU funding.

Together with three neighbouring councils we have secured the money, which is available to farmers, growers, foresters and rural businesses and communities through the West Kent LEADER programme.

The last round of funding saw £1.25m being made available to 62 projects generating more than £3.4m for the West Kent economy while creating 35 new jobs.

Grants ranged from £587 to £55,350 and projects were diverse.



One business that benefitted from the funding was Castle Farm in Shoreham, which specialises in lavender production. In partnership with two other farmers, £27,000 in LEADER funding was used to purchase specialist harvesting equipment to ensure the best oil yield could be obtained from the crop.

William Alexander, whose family own and run the farm, says the LEADER funding helped make the project viable and enabled them to provide a harvesting service to other lavender growers.

He says: "This funding provided our collaborative lavender venture with some much needed financial assistance to grow and meet market demand. Business initiatives in the rural sector so often need that extra financial leg up when starting a new project or expanding an existing enterprise. I commend others to examine how the funding may help them."



Another project that benefitted was Crockham Hill based business, the Westerham Brewery.

In 2012, £33,000 in LEADER funding was used to purchase 500 casks, a cask racking system and a malt mill for the business that brought a tradition of brewing back to the area.

Robert Wicks, who set up the business, says: "This funding undoubtedly helped us grow. The equipment has helped to improve efficiency and expand production by 25% enabling us to take on three extra staff."



LEADER funding was also instrumental in setting up a new community shop in Ide Hill. When the village shop closed in July 2011, local people clubbed together to set up a new general store run by volunteers. They secured £20,000 in LEADER funding to help kit out the new facility.

Community Shop Committee chairman, Andrew Edmonds, says: "The new community shop means so much to Ide Hill residents because it removes a seven mile round trip to buy basic commodities. It just goes to show that with a little help from projects like LEADER, communities can change things if they work together for a common goal."

To find out more about LEADER funding visit www.westkentleader.org.uk or e-mail Caroline Lingham at westkentleader@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

LEADER is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) managed by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).