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Mr Alexander Daynes

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Dear Mr Daynes,

Definition of rural

Thank you for your letter of 25 June enquiring about a definition of rural. I have been asked to reply.

The rural definition identifies the different types of settlements in which people live in rural areas – these include small towns, villages, and hamlets and scattered dwellings. Because of this single underlying criterion, the definition can be used with other information, such as housing type, car ownership and household incomes, to give a valid means of understanding how these measures vary within rural areas.

It is a more useful statistical tool than our preceding approaches to defining rural areas and provides a more sophisticated way of describing and understanding the differences between rural areas. This helps us and others apply the available evidence to target policy to those groups, communities and businesses who most require support. For us, this means being better able to deliver the priorities in Rural Strategy 2004. You can find more information on the Rural Strategy 2004 on the Defra website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/strategy/default.htm>

The new definition has two components: the first identifies the form of settlements under 10,000 population (those over 10,000 are defined using the Department for Communities and Local Government's (CLG) urban areas definition, which has been in place since 1981). The second identifies the wider geographic context in which settlements are located. This has led to a new classification of rural areas comprising 'rural towns', 'rural villages' or 'dispersed dwellings' in either 'sparsely' populated areas or 'less sparsely' populated areas.

The definition is technically complex – however, a comprehensive methodology paper is available explaining how the definition was developed and the process by which it was validated and peer-reviewed. This is available on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website at:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp>



I hope that this letter is informative.

Yours sincerely,

Amanpreet Pattar
Defra - Customer Contact Unit