



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

The nine Operational Groups selected from the second round of the European Innovation Partnerships Initiative (EIP) attended a workshop, organised by the National Rural Network (NRN) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in Tullamore on 14th November 2018. Pictured are members of the Operational Groups, with members of the NRN and officials from DAFM



Ireland to host 13th NRNs' Meeting and Workshop on Generational Renewal

The 13th NRNs' meeting co-organised by the National Rural Network and European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) will take place on 21st February in Athlone. The meeting will explore how to connect the delivery chain, provide space for mutual exchanges on themes proposed by National Support Units (NSUs) and also give an update on ongoing activity strands. It will further explore the active engagement of NSUs and the organisation of the ENRD 'networX: Inspiring Rural Europe' event in April 2019. Following the NRNs' meeting, a workshop on "Generational Renewal: Attracting Young Farmers and Entrepreneurs in Rural Areas" will take place the next day (22nd February). The workshop aims to explore how young farmers and entrepreneurs are attracted to rural areas in the different EU member states. Before the two events, attendees will be given the opportunity to participate in a fieldtrip to two locations based on the theme of generational renewal.

Rural Inspiration Awards: Celebrating Innovative Rural Projects

The inaugural Rural Inspiration Awards aim to celebrate how rural development projects and policy contribute to a more competitive, sustainable and inclusive rural Europe. The awards are being organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) to recognise inspiring and innovative projects. They also aim to promote knowledge transfer among rural stakeholders and increase the visibility of rural development.

In late 2018, National Rural Networks across the EU were invited to nominate projects to be considered for the awards. The Irish National Rural Network nominated six projects which received funding through the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). These were:

- the Community Portrait Project at the Gap Arts Festival in county Wexford
- Coillte Sláintiúil, woodland conservation business, in county Cork
- Golashane Farm Nature Reserve in county Meath

- McCauley Wood Fuels, biomass wood fuel business, in county Leitrim
- Mid Ireland Adventure, adventure sports business, in county Offaly; and
- the No Barriers Foundation Bionic Exoskeleton Suit project in county Donegal

A shortlist of 25 projects is expected to be announced in early 2019. From the shortlist, a winner will be selected for each of five competition categories and an extra award will be selected by popular vote. The five award categories are improving the competitiveness of rural areas; environment and climate action; rural revitalisation; social inclusion; and inspiring use of the bottom-up LEADER approach.

Winners of the Rural Inspiration Awards will be announced at 'networX: Inspiring Rural Europe', the ENRD networking event taking place in Brussels on 11th and 12th April 2019.

Climate Change: Focus on Grasslands



Mixed livestock grazing grass

Irish grasslands can potentially play a leading role in mitigating Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Grasslands account for 90% of the agricultural area in Ireland and represent a major carbon stock.

Land management practices which enable sequestration of atmospheric carbon into soils are considered to be important tools in the effort to reduce atmospheric carbon. Some soils have the potential to sequester carbon. Research shows that a percentage of Irish soils are deficient in Soil Organic Carbon (SOC), which demonstrates the potential importance of grasslands to sequester significant amounts of atmospheric carbon. However, without any evidence-based measurement, reporting and verification methods of carbon sequestration, grasslands are not yet included in calculations to contribute to Ireland's GHG emissions reduction targets.

In Ireland there are between 200 and 300 species of grasses but only a small number of these are of any real significance to the farmer. Perennial ryegrass (PRG), Italian ryegrass and White clover account for nearly all of the agricultural grass/clover seed sold in Ireland (DAFM, 2018). Grassland management practices and nutrient management planning (NMP) have a key role to play when adapting to Climate Change.

The NRN liaised with Professor Tommy Boland and Dr. Helen Sheridan of UCD on their research programme, SmartGrass, investigating how multi-species grassland affects lamb and sheep performance. The study took place over a two year period. Ewe and lamb performance was measured on four sward types: PRG only sward vs. three mixes of multi-species swards, including herbs and legumes. Initial results indicate that ewes had heavier live weights, earlier finishing days and

had a lesser susceptibility to worms from multi-species swards with herbs and legumes than those on a PRG only sward. Multi-species swards received less chemical nitrogen than the PRG-only sward.

Farmers need to become more sustainable and financially viable. Increasing farm profitability is a possibility with reduced lamb days to slaughter and a lesser chemical nitrogen requirement than multispecies swards. The initial results of this study look promising.

A range of integrated grassland management interventions such as introducing new species and varieties to grassland has the potential to reduce GHG emissions and enhance carbon sequestration. Grasslands have great potential to contribute to GHG mitigation and adaptation.

Some of the key focus areas of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) are to prevent soil erosion, improve soil management and to reduce GHG and ammonia emissions from agriculture. The RDP contains a range of measures built around the themes of innovation, efficiency and economic/environmental sustainability and contains a number of agri-environment and climate change actions designed to deliver overarching benefits for the rural environment. It also addresses issues regarding climate change mitigation, water quality and the preservation of priority habitats and species.

The GLAS scheme (Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme) supports emission reductions and carbon sequestration. Priority actions include hedgerow/tree planting, minimum tillage and encouraging the sustainable management of upland peatlands. It promotes the delivery of targeted environmental advice and best practice at farm level.



Cows grazing a PRG sward

NRN Workshop Sparks a Conversation on Climate Change



Pictured from left to right at the Climate Change and Adaptation workshop: Aoife Smith (NRN), Andrew Flood (DAFM), Freda Salley (NRN), Dr. Sinead Mellett (NUIG), Dr. Conor Murphy (NUI Maynooth), Sinead Nee (NUIG), Dr. Michael O'Donovan (Teagasc) and Philip Farrelly (NRN).

The National Rural Network (NRN) in association with the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) invited Agricultural Advisors and others to attend the workshop on 9th November. The event was a resounding success with almost 100 attendees.

The half-day workshop, which took place in the Tullamore Court Hotel, provided agricultural advisors and others involved in the agricultural sector with information on climate change and adaptation.

The seminar included contributions from DAFM, Teagasc, and leading researchers from Maynooth University, NUI Galway, the Irish Farmers Association, the Agricultural Consultants Association (ACA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The audience heard how climate change is likely to affect Irish agriculture in years to come and what farmers can do to address the envisaged challenges. An overview of grass growth and the impact of the ongoing fodder crises last summer was also presented.

Chairing the event, Phillip Farrelly of the NRN said, "Climate change presents a real and definitive challenge to Irish agriculture. It is important that stakeholders in Ireland's agricultural sector join efforts to promote best practice, thus encouraging farmers to adapt to technologies which will ultimately help and enhance climate change resilience."

"The Rural Development Plan 2014-2020 is addressing climate action by funding measures to help reduce the impacts of climate change. Farmer participation in the GLAS Scheme, Beef Data Genomics Programme, Organic Farming Scheme, Knowledge Transfer Scheme and the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme is designed to help address climate action."

The presentations from the workshop are now available on www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/climatechange

NRN Supports Farming for Nature Award



Farming for Nature Award finalists: Donal Sheehan, Sean Farrell, Kim McCall, Pdraig Corcoran, Martin Calvey (winner) with Michael Maloney (Bord Bia), MEP Mairead McGuinness and Pat Dunne.

The Farming for Nature Award is the brainchild of Burrenbeo Trust, a landscape charity dedicated to connecting all of us to our places and our role in caring for them. The aim of the new award is to uncover case studies, stories and practices that illustrate the theme of “farming for nature”. The project team comprising Brigid Barry, Dr Brendan Dunford, Michael Davoren (Burrenbeo Trust) and Dr James Moran (GMIT) designed the award process to create a positive narrative around farming for nature and to highlight that high nature value farming practices are appreciated and valued by the general public.

The motivation for the award came from the team’s experience of working with farmers in the Burren region for over twenty years, and seeing how farming for nature can be ‘agriculturally, economically and socially progressive’. The award was supported by a number of partners, including the main sponsor Bord Bia, Burrenbeo Trust, National Rural Network, Teagasc, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Irish Farmers Association, Irish Farmers Journal, National Biodiversity Data Centre, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Heritage Council.

The key purpose of the Farming for Nature Award was to obtain and disseminate stories of farmers who made a positive difference to nature on their farms and in their communities. A number of excellent farmers were nominated by over 150 environmental professionals and were eventually narrowed down to six farmers by a judging

panel, which included Dr Maura Farrell, NUIG and the NRN. The six finalists included: Donal Sheehan, Cork; Kim McCall, Kildare; Martin Calvey, Mayo; Pat Dunne, Wicklow; Sean Farrell, North Tipperary and Pdraig Corcoran, Roscommon. A series of excellent videos depicting the farming for nature work of all finalists was posted on-line and nearly 4,000 public votes were cast before the Calvey Family from Keel, Co. Mayo were announced as winners. Martin Calvey was presented with the Farming for Nature Award by MEP Mairead McGuinness at a special event on 27 October in Kinvara, County Galway.

The winning Calvey family have farmed on Achill Island for seven generations and currently farm a herd of 150 black-faced mountain sheep on a commonage shareholding of 20,000 acres, as well as on an area of machair, a rare seaside habitat. Over a number of years, the Calvey family have developed a high quality, award winning product, Achill Mountain Lamb, which sells in their local shop and also in local and national hotels and restaurants, including Ashford Castle. Martin Calvey is a member of the local ‘Custodians of the Commonage’ group and for many years has been a champion of the environment and a keen advocate of farming for nature.

One of the Award organisers, Dr Brendan Dunford, said, “This year’s finalists represent such a rich and varied cross section of all that’s great about Irish farming: hard working farmers who love their land and their livestock and who really care for their natural environment. We can all learn



Pictured at the awards ceremony: MEP Mairead McGuinness, Farming for Nature Award Winner, Martin Calvey, Michael Maloney (Bord Bia) and Dr Maura Farrell (NUIG/NRN).

something from these inspiring people and we should all be grateful for what they do. I’m delighted for the Calveys and how they have managed, as a family, to bring a taste of Achill to food lovers all across Ireland. It is testament to their entrepreneurship and hard work”.

Project Coordinator, Brigid Barry added “We are thrilled with how the process came together for this first year. The shortlist was compiled from an initial longlist of farmers nominated by over 150 environmental professionals. There was incredible buy-in from the public to support these six shortlisted farmers with nearly 4,000 votes coming in over the last month. Each one of the six farmers has incredible farms in a such different landscapes and with diverse habitats, they are all doing fantastic things for nature and are keen to share their stories so that other farmers are inspired to improve their land as well. Each one of them is a

winner as these positive stories will hopefully create positive change. We look forward to see what 2019 brings as there are many more inspiring stories to share out there”.

In its first year, the Farming for Nature Award captured the attention of the farming community, environmentalists and the general public. The National Rural Network were delighted to be involved in supporting this award and disseminating the excellent work carried out by all Irish farmers who farm for nature.

For further information on the finalists and winner of the Farming for Nature Award see: www.farmingfornature.ie



The Farming for Nature Awards project team: Dr. Brendan Dunford, Dr. James Moran, Michael Davoren and Brigid Barry.

Case Study: Award Winning Accora Orchestra Supported Through LEADER



Accora Orchestra's senior orchestra pictured after a recent performance at a Viennese Ball in Headfort House, Co. Meath.

Under the social inclusion and rural youth sub-theme of the LEADER 2014-2020 programme, Accora Orchestra received a grant of just over €10,000. This supported a rebranding project and investment in new equipment resulting in a wide range of benefits.

Accora Orchestra has approximately 90 members from the south-Cavan and north-Meath area. It has four orchestras, including the 'Mini Musicians' orchestra developed in 2017 for four to six year olds.

Accora Orchestra was formerly known as the Castletown Accordion Orchestra, which was established in 1981 in Nobber Co. Meath. In 2014, the orchestra relocated to St Killan's National School, Mullagh, Co. Cavan. Since the move, it looked to re-brand itself. The rebranding project was a collaborative process and the theme of friendship merged strongly during the process. The name 'Accora' is derived from an abbreviation of the word accordion. It is also a play on the word chord, chorus and, more importantly, the Irish word 'a cara' meaning 'dear friend' reflecting the spirit of the orchestra. The rebrand has rejuvenated the orchestra, bringing a newly revived sense of pride. Barbara Carolan, Committee Member of Accora Orchestra says, "Rebranding has helped support a growth in the orchestra's profile, now with a new logo, a modern symbolic representation illustrating the significance of our primary instrument, the classical accordion".

The project also supported Accora Orchestra to invest in musical instruments and equipment to enhance the orchestra's sound and outdoor performance potential. Barbara notes: "Previously we couldn't take up opportunities to perform outdoors because the amplification system was not suitable". However, the new equipment enabled the

orchestra perform at an outdoor concert in Sundgau, France in July 2018.

The funding also went towards purchase of a laptop and software. This has significant organisational benefits, streamlining administration, enhancing communication and use of digital services. Barbara explains: "Important documentation is now easily accessible, backed up and safely stored, helping us meet GDPR requirements. We can now communicate efficiently with members, parents and other relevant organisations by email and avail of internet banking".

The LEADER grant covered 75% of the total project costs. Accora Orchestra carried out fundraising to generate match funds. Fundraising is challenging and wider funding sources are of vital importance. Barbara explains: "Fundraising is ongoing and continuous. You can end up tapping into the same people time and time again. That's why LEADER funding was so important to us. There are only so many raffle tickets you can sell".

Reflecting on the LEADER application process, working closely with the LEADER team at Breffini Integrated CLG was crucial. Barbara notes the importance of cooperation and trust between promoters and Implementing Partners. She explains: "Ongoing guidance to project promoters is essential and understanding the difficulties promoters face. Don't take anything for granted. Some committees, given their voluntary nature, may not have either LEADER application experience or relevant expertise available. Once I had a reason why things had to be done in a certain way then I could go back to the committee and rationalise it".

For more information see:
www.accoraorchestra.com

EIP-Operational Groups Begin Implementation

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) held an information workshop in conjunction with the NRN for the nine Operational Groups successfully selected from the second open call of the EIP-AGRI (European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability) initiative, in the Tullamore Court Hotel, Co. Offaly on 14th November. Over 50 delegates attended this workshop, which included a networking session. A variety of presentations was given to help the delegates move to the implementation stage of the EIP process.

Bridgeena Nolan of DAFM opened the workshop by congratulating the participants on reaching the implementation stage. Pat Kennedy, owner and digital strategist at eTownz, then spoke on the topic of communications and web design. Denise Duffy of DAFM explained GDPR, Irena O'Meara discussed the roles of the individuals within the Operational Groups, Michelle

Harrison gave an overview of audit and compliance requirements, Margaret Murray of the EIP Division spoke about terms and conditions of the scheme and Barry O'Connor presented on how the successful teams would manage invoicing and other financial issues. Dr. Maura Farrell from the NRN presented on the network's role in supporting the Operational Groups throughout the duration of their projects. Following a questions and answers session, Bridgeena Nolan closed the seminar. The nine new Operational Groups have been added to the NRN's Irish EIP-AGRI Operational Groups Storyboard featuring the key aims, objectives and activities of all 23 operational groups in Ireland.

Visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/innovation for details

LEADER Social Inclusion and Broadband Capacity Building Workshop

On 4th December, 80 members of LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners gathered for a workshop on social inclusion and broadband.

The morning session focused on rural youth and basic services targeted at hard to reach communities; sub-themes which underpin LEADER's social inclusion theme. Barbara Carolan from Accora Orchestra and Abiodun Ladigbolu from Ankara Festival discussed how LEADER funding has contributed to the growth and success of their projects. Anne Walsh from National Youth Council of Ireland and Seamus Boland from Irish Rural Link both gave presentations highlighting rural social inclusion issues, challenges and needs.

The afternoon session focused on the LEADER broadband theme. Dr Stjohn O'Connor from the Department of Rural and Community Development's Regional Telecommunications Unit said that LEADER funded projects should focus on demand elements that support digital engagement once infrastructure is in place. Christine Collins, Longford Broadband Officer, gave an overview of the role of Regional Broadband Officers, and David Hodge, from Coder Dojo Ireland talked about how its network of local clubs is weaker in rural areas, representing an opportunity for LEADER project funding.



Seamus Boland, Irish Rural Link opened the LEADER Social Inclusion and Broadband Capacity Building Workshop to a packed audience

Cutting across the workshop's two focus areas, a need emerged for case studies demonstrating successful projects. The NRN displayed posters at the event featuring four broadband and 10 social inclusion projects. The NRN will continue to develop project case studies to help address this need.

Visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/LEADER

Ireland Strongly Represented at EIP-AGRI Seminar in Italy

An EIP-AGRI Service Point seminar entitled "From Operational Group Project to Impact Building the Innovation Ecosystem for the Future" was held in Spoleto, Italy on 17 and 18 October to explore and share experiences implementing EIP-AGRI in different EU member states.

Dr. Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway and the NRN, attended this workshop on behalf of the network. Margaret Murray and Angela Corcoran from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Prof. Tom Kelly, Director of Knowledge Transfer at Teagasc, and Donal Sheehan, BRIDE Project Operational Group, made up the rest of the Irish contingent participating in this event.

The purpose of this seminar was to improve EIP-AGRI implementation by learning from existing experiences and practical approaches in supporting

Operational Groups' (OG) projects. Simplification in EIP-AGRI implementation, reporting on OG projects and the various challenges that administrations are facing were also discussed. Dr Conway was asked to speak to attendees at this event about the Irish National Rural Network's EIP-AGRI OG Interactive Storyboard as a best practice example to promote and disseminate information about projects and Margaret Murray led a group to discuss how best to support OGs. Conclusions from this seminar will serve EIP-AGRI programming post-2020.

More information about this workshop can be found on the EIP-AGRI Service Point website: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-seminar-operational-group-to-impact>

What is the NRN?

The NRN is a membership network for farmers, agricultural advisors, rural communities and others interested in rural development.

It provides up-to-date information, case studies, seminars and conferences to maximise the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 for rural stakeholders.

The NRN is managed by a consortium led by Irish Rural Link in partnership with The Wheel, NUI Galway and Philip Farrelly & Co.

The NRN aims to:

- increase the involvement of

stakeholders in the implementation of rural development;

- improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes;
- foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.

The NRN is focusing on specific themed areas over the coming years:

- BIODIVERSITY
- CLIMATE CHANGE
- EU LIFE
- EIP-AGRI
- LEADER
- VIABILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS OF FARMING COMMUNITIES

For more information visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

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Join the National Rural Network (NRN) by signing up on our website www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

Once you have joined, you will receive monthly email updates on the RDP, the LEADER initiative, best practice case studies and more.

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Rialtas na hÉireann
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Ireland's EU Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014 - 2020

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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
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