



# NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

## SPOTLIGHT

At the national seminar, 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland: Revitalising Rural Areas through Community-Led Innovation' organised by the National Rural Network (NRN) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), held on 4th July 2019 in Athlone, were (l-r): James Claffey (NRN), Gabriel O'Connell (Monaghan Integrated Development CLG), JP Mulherin (DRCD), Pat Kennedy (eTownz), Dr Maura Farrell (NRN/NUIG), Dymrna Harney (DRCD), Paul Soto (ENRD), Davie Philips (ECOLISE) and Dr Shane Conway (NRN/NUIG).



## LEADER Funding Gaining Momentum

At the end of August 2019, a total of 2,287 projects have been approved by the Local Action Groups with a value of almost €84m. In addition, a further 100 projects have also been approved funding of over €2.6m for Co-operation and LEADER Food Initiative projects.

The LEADER 2014 – 2020 Programme has a budget of €250 million. It supports locally identified initiatives that seek to address locally identified needs and challenges in rural Ireland. LEADER Projects are supported under the three thematic areas of (1) Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation, (2) Social Inclusion and (3) Rural Environment. These Themes are broad enough to enable funding of a wide range of projects in rural Ireland, from both private enterprise and community groups.

For more see [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader)

## 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns' National Seminar

A national seminar on the EU Action for Smart Villages Initiative, entitled 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland: Revitalising Rural Areas through Community-Led Innovation' took place on 4th July 2019 in Athlone. The event, attended by over ninety delegates, was organised and run by the National Rural Network (NRN) and the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The Smart Villages initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2017. Smart Villages and Rural Towns, in an Irish context, are rural communities that build on, and enhance, their existing strengths and assets through creative thinking, and by embracing innovation, to create desirable places for rural people to live and work. Whilst digitisation is significant in the creation of Smart Villages and Rural Towns, social innovation is also paramount.

The seminar was structured to build a greater knowledge base around the Smart Villages initiative and to demonstrate how it can be planned, implemented and realized in an Irish

context, particularly in the context of the LEADER Programme post-2020.

Speakers included Paul Soto, Policy Expert with the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), Dr Maura Farrell, Lecturer at NUI Galway and Lead Researcher with the NRN, Dr Stephen Brennan, Chief Digital Advisor to the Irish Government, and Davie Philip, Co-President of the European Network for Community-Led initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ECOLISE). They demonstrated how rural communities can help retain and attract people to live and work in their locality by implementing practical solutions to the various local challenges they face in the form of digital, social and environmental innovation.

Attendees discovered how the realisation of such 'smart' rural areas and communities could play a key role in the development and sustainability of rural Ireland by tackling issues such as depopulation, the digital divide, limited employment opportunities and outward-migration, as well as climate change.

## Ambitious Targets in the Climate Action Plan for Agriculture



Sucker herd grazing in Dowth, Co. Meath

The All-of-Government Action Plan to tackle climate breakdown was published by the Government on 17th June 2019, which highlights that a low carbon transition will require a profound change in systems and practices across all elements of the economy and society which will require fundamental behavioural change. The plan sets out over 180 actions to meet Ireland's EU targets for 2030 and sets an ambition of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 while acknowledging the national policy position of an approach to carbon neutrality within the agriculture and land-use sector. For the agriculture, forestry and land use sector there are 34 key measures to implement that require early adoption and high levels of take-up to ensure that the sector can play its part in transitioning to a low-carbon economy and society.

The agriculture sector accounts for over 33% of national GHG emissions, a figure that reflects the need for the agriculture sector to meet reduction targets. Ireland's 2020 target is to reduce non-Emissions Trading Scheme (non-ETS) sector emissions (i.e. agriculture, transport, residential, commercial, non-energy intensive industry and waste) by 20% on 2005 levels which we are not projected to meet. The 2030 target is for a 30% reduction on non-ETS emissions compared to 2005 levels by 2030.

The agriculture sector must adapt to and mitigate climate change and is working towards the long-term goal of an approach to carbon neutrality by 2050. The challenge for the sector is to meet the growing global demand for food while ensuring it is produced in a climate friendly way.

This will necessitate the use of research, and technology to demonstrate how agriculture can be sustainable with farmers taking proactive steps to reduce emissions through resource efficiency and improving land management practices.

The main agriculture measures in the Climate Action Plan were informed by the Teagasc Marginal Abatement Cost

Curve (MACC). These include efficiency measures such as the Dairy EBI programme and technical measures such as changes in fertiliser type or low emissions slurry spreading.

Irish farmers are already engaging with more efficient farming systems which will contribute to reducing emissions through using technology such as low emission slurry spreading techniques, funded through schemes such as the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme, and by using Carbon Navigators on their farms, which is a requirement for participation in the Beef Data Genomics Programme.

The future CAP post 2020 will have an increased emphasis on higher levels of environmental and climate ambition. Up to 40% of the new CAPs budget is expected to contribute to climate action.

Farmers need to be informed by advisors and industry of the integrated benefits that reducing emissions will have, including economic, environmental and social benefits. An example of industry leading research is the exciting work being carried out by Devenish on their research farm in Dowth. Devenish are working towards carbon neutrality to improve the sustainability of livestock production. The work offers farmers and the agriculture sector an insight into some of the steps necessary to tackle climate change, such as improving soil pH, including clover in grass swards, and planting agroforestry.

Devenish are looking at the greenhouse gases emitted by cows and calves and then comparing this to the carbon sequestered by trees, hedges, and soil on the farm. Devenish recently hosted an open day on their research facility at Dowth for members of the Agricultural Consultants Association (ACA), who were given a full briefing on the industry leading research programmes being undertaken at Dowth, Co. Meath. It gave the consultants much food for thought on the proactive measures farmers can implement on their farms to tackle climate change.

## LEADER Programme Promoting Social Inclusion: The Ankara Festival, Co. Clare



The Ankara Festival

More than a quarter of people living in rural areas across Europe are considered to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This is often linked to specific disadvantages associated with rural areas, including limited job opportunities and access to education, remoteness and rural isolation. LEADER supports rural communities throughout Europe, and Ireland, by providing funding to tackle such issues and to try to improve the quality of life in these areas.

LEADER recognises that there is not a 'one size fits all' model for the development of rural areas, and therefore, facilitates locally led development projects which fall under certain themes. One of the main themes under which LEADER provides funding for projects is social inclusion. It is recognised that often people or specific groups, such as immigrants, the elderly, rural youth or people with disabilities, can be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities, due to inadequate income or resources. Support under this theme aims to reduce poverty, enhance economic development and promote social cohesion within rural communities. LEADER currently focuses on two main target groups: rural youth and those in hard to reach communities, including immigrants or people with disabilities.

One example of a project that LEADER has supported through the theme of social inclusion in Ireland is the Ankara Festival in County Clare. The Ankara Festival is organised by the Association of Nigerian Community in Clare (ANCC), which was established in 2006 and currently has over 100 members. The primary aim of the group is to promote integration of, and between, Nigerian, Irish and other ethnic groups. The ANCC also aims to promote and

maintain Nigerian cultural heritage within the different Nigerian communities across Ireland. The Ankara festival is one of the main cultural events run by the ANCC, aiming to promote diversity and social inclusion among the Nigerian community in Clare and across Ireland. It does this by showcasing Nigerian culture through music, fashion, food, dance, song and poetry. The event has grown year on year and attracts visitors from across Ireland and the UK.



The Ankara Festival

# Biodiversity in the Frame



*First prize: Mary Brennan, temporary pond in Jenkintown. Co. Kilkenny*

**Biodiversity is a key theme of the National Rural Network (NRN), and earlier this year the NRN held a national photo competition to highlight the importance of preserving natural habitats for the future of our native animal and plant life.**

Over 100 entries were received from across Ireland, reflecting the diversity of our natural environment. The first prize went to Mary Brennan, Co. Kilkenny, for her photo of a pond in Jenkintown. Ponds are unique ecosystems. They are a particularly good habitat for an array of plants and wildlife such as ducks, frogs, hedgehogs, birds and even colourful insects such as butterflies and dragonflies. In recent decades, land management has caused a reduction in the quantity of ponds throughout the country, and it is important that they are protected to help preserve biodiversity.

Second place went to Ruth Alfred from Co. Limerick for her photo of birds eating berries. The photos highlight the importance of hedgerows as a source of food for wildlife. Ruth's photograph shows a mother blackbird feeding her young with berries from the hedge. Ruth described how the mother blackbird would disappear into the hedge for a few moments only to reappear with berries in her beak, while the young bird waited on the wall for her return.

Both winning entries demonstrate measures that encourage biodiversity. There are steps everyone can do which will help enhance biodiversity in their locality. The importance of a good quality hedgerow, that is managed correctly for biodiversity, allowing it to flower and fruit, provides a vital feed source and place of security or shelter for wildlife. Creating ponds will attract wildlife and in turn will become a vibrant habitat and feed source where species can thrive.

Farmers play an important role in taking care of and protecting the quality of nature found in the countryside. Land use and land management are key factors influencing the quality of biodiversity present on any farm. The way we farm plays a pivotal role in encouraging, maintaining and enhancing nature in the countryside. Through education and participation in agri-environmental schemes, farmers are choosing environmentally friendly actions that are helping to protect and reverse the decline of endangered species.

Farmers also depend on biodiversity. Pollinating insects such as bumblebees, solitary bees are vital for the pollination of crops and wildflowers. Earthworms are essential for good soil fertility and insects and birds can be used as part of an integrated approach to pest management.

Commenting on the theme of the competition, The NRN's Philip Farrelly said, "Habitats and natural ecosystems are crucial to the preservation and conservation of biodiversity. There are many large-scale projects such as restoring drained peatlands, the Pearl Mussel Project and the Hen Harrier Project that have the objective of protecting threatened species and their habitats.

"Restoring peatlands is important to reinstate lost habitats, while also playing a vital role in carbon sequestration. The Pearl Mussel Project is managing and enhancing ecosystems to maintain and protect some of Ireland's most pristine waters, while the Hen Harrier Project is a land-based species focused scheme, which educates farmers on how to correctly manage their land to encourage successful breeding seasons of the ground nesting birds," said Mr Farrelly.



*Second prize: Ruth Alfred, Co. Limerick, Birds eating berries*

## Other Entries

Here is a small section of some of the other entries:



*A Common Blue Butterfly, photo: Ligia Daroi, Co Dublin*



*Blasket Seal, photo: Noel O'Neill, Co. Kerry*



*Puffin returning to nest with a mouth full of sand eels, photo: Kenny Goodison, Co. Wexford*



*A common frog emerging from spawn, the species is under serious threat and habitats is been lost, photo: Clodagh Blake, Co. Tipperary*

For more information on biodiversity visit: [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity/](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity/)

## Farming for Nature Awards Update

**The National Farming for Nature Award, which is now in its second year, aims to source and share stories of farmers across Ireland who are judged to be managing their land and livestock in a way that benefits nature in their area. By celebrating these 'Farming for Nature Ambassadors', it is hoped that other farmers, and members of the public, will be inspired to follow suit and do what they can for nature.**

A total of 48 nominations were received in 2019, from 39 different farmers. All 39 farmers are invited to a dedicated Farming for Nature field trip, workshop and networking event in the Burren on Saturday 26th October next, as part of the Burren Winterage Weekend ([www.burrenwinterage.com](http://www.burrenwinterage.com)). This event will provide these farmers with the opportunity to meet other likeminded individuals and share experiences and learning from each other.

For some farms, Burrenbeo Trust will commission short films or podcasts and arrange a visit by one or two awards judges over the next few months. The chosen farms represent a good geographical spread, a diversity of farming systems, a range of habitat types and farmers who are enthusiastic and willing to protect and promote nature on their farms. From this cohort, a number of Farming for Nature Ambassadors will be nominated and a further five farms will be shortlisted for a public vote in September. Both the ambassadors and the public vote shortlist will be announced in September. The Burren Winterage School is taking place from 24th to 27th October 2019, and will be focusing on sustainable Farming. The programme will include talks, workshops and field trips on the theme of 'Building healthy futures for people, food and nature.'

For more information, visit:  
[www.burrenwinterage.com](http://www.burrenwinterage.com)

## EIP-AGRI Project Launch: Duhallow Farming for Blue Dot Catchments



From left to right: Dr Darren Reidy, Project Scientist; Maura Walsh, CEO of IRD Duhallow; Michael Doyle, Chairperson of the IRD Duhallow Environmental Working Group; Margaret Murray from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Dr Maura Farrell, NUI Galway/NRN and Michael Morrissey, Project Farm Planner

**IRD Duhallow launched their European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) project on Tuesday 20th August 2019 at IRD Duhallow, James O'Keeffe Institute, Newmarket, Co. Cork.**

The launch of the Duhallow Farming for Blue Dot Catchments project, funded by the Department of Agricultural, Food and the Marine (DAFM), was formally opened by Michael Doyle, Chairperson of the IRD Duhallow Environmental Working Group. Margaret Murray (DAFM) outlined the development of the EIP-AGRI programme and the progress other Operational Groups are making in Ireland, while Dr Maura Farrell (NUI Galway/NRN) provided an overview of EIP-AGRI projects across other EU countries. IRD Duhallow CEO, Maura Walsh highlighted the organisations long history and dedication to farming and the environment through previous

environmental initiatives, which provided the basis for their current EIP-AGRI project. Dr Darren Reidy, Project Scientist provided an excellent overview of the EIP-AGRI project, while Michael Morrissey, Project Farm Planner, outlined how the local farming community can get involved in the project and benefit financially from environmental improvements they make at farm level, which positively impact on the local river catchments.

The €1.47 million, five year project aims to develop a cost effective community led strategy to restore and protect the ecological status of the Rivers Allow, Dalua and Owenanare through an innovative results based payments scheme. All landowners in the area are eligible to apply to take part by submitting an expression of interest form, which can be accessed at [www.irdduhallow.com/environment/duhallow-eip/](http://www.irdduhallow.com/environment/duhallow-eip/).

## 14th NRN Meeting in Romania

**The 14th NRN meeting co-organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the Romanian Rural Network Support Unit was held on 12th and 13th June 2019 in Bucharest. Representatives of 22 National Rural Networks from 20 Member States attended the meeting, with some Local Action Groups (LAGs) and project beneficiaries also attending. The meeting explored ways of boosting cooperation between NRNs and improving the work with local level stakeholders. The event also looked to continue capitalising on the main outcomes and ideas reached during April's networX event in Brussels, including the development of next steps. Using the open space methodology, participants discussed various topics including LEADER and local development, cooperation and innovation.**

As part of the NRN meeting, the Romanian NSU organised a field trip showcasing two projects funded through the Romanian RDP in Prahova County. The Budureasca Wine Cellar used EAFRD funds to improve its competitiveness working in the primary sector. It is now one of the most modern wine cellars in Romania with a production and storage capacity of 3 million litres of wine per year. The second visit, related to the social inclusion strand of the Romanian RDP, was to the children's day care centre 'Sfantul Stelian' set up by the Joy of Hope Foundation. This inspiring initiative uses LEADER support to expand and



James Claffey from the NRN addressing the 14th NRN meeting in Bucharest (photo credit: ENRD)

improve the facilities of the Foundation, which offers out of school services and counselling for 30 children from disadvantaged local families.

The meeting showed increasing opportunities for further collaboration between rural networks, building on existing partnerships. Participants suggested that LAGs could assist NRNs to connect with project beneficiaries to highlight good practice examples.

To view the full report, please visit:  
[www.enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/14th-nrn-meeting\\_en](http://www.enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/14th-nrn-meeting_en).

## First National Workshop on Smart Farming and Data Analytics

**The first National Workshop on Smart Farming and Data Analytics took place on 12th of June in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIIM). This event was organised by Dr Peter Mooney and Dr Liadh Kelly of the Department of Computer Sciences in conjunction with the Department of Geography (NUIIM); the U-Flyte project and National Center for Geocomputation (NUIIM); the School of Business, (NUIIM); the National Rural Network; and, the Society of Chartered Surveyors (SCSI).**

Put simply, Smart Farming is the use of digital technology in farming. This can include sensors for animals and plants and can aid in the management of key areas within the farm gate such as soil and grassland management, as well as tracking inputs and outputs. While some of these technologies have been in existence for quite some time, over 90% of data collected at farm-level is never utilised (OECD).

The workshop aimed to highlight how Smart Farming together with Data Analytics can complement existing knowledge and skills among the farming community, and aid them to make



Keynote speakers and organisers of Smart Farming and Data Analytics workshop. R-L: Dr Peter Mooney (NUIIM), Darragh McCullough, Prof Thia Hennessy (UCC), Dr Liadh Kelly (NUIIM) and Dr Teresa Hooks (National Rural Network). (photo credit: NRN)

better economic and environmental decisions at farm-level.

Keynote speakers, Prof Thia Hennessy (UCC) and Darragh McCullough, outlined how Smart Farming in conjunction with Data Analytics can help tackle some of the grand challenges facing agriculture, by showing how technology is changing the ways we produce and consume food. Workshops were organised by Dr Aine Regan of Teagasc and Dr Simone van der Burg from Wageningen University along with number of expert talks from Aidan Magee (NUIIM) in the area of drone usage, Dr Conor Cahalane (NUIIM), who explained the EU Copernicus programme and Dr Christina O'Connor (NUIIM), who discussed the value of data for decision making in SMEs.

Smart Farming and Data Analytics is a growing area of importance within agriculture. For more information on these, visit [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/farm-viability-blog/how-do-we-transition-to-smart-farming-in-ireland/](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/farm-viability-blog/how-do-we-transition-to-smart-farming-in-ireland/).

## Biorefinery Glas EIP-AGRI Project Demonstration Day

The Biorefinery Glas EIP-AGRI Operational Group in collaboration with Teagasc held a successful small-scale biorefinery field demonstration event on 11th of July 2019 at Shinagh Estates Farm in Bandon, Co. Cork. Dr Shane Conway represented the NRN at this event, which was attended by over 200 participants. Biorefinery Glas is one of twenty-three EIP-AGRI projects in Ireland funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020. The Department was represented by Eileen Delaney who is one of the team managing the EIP projects. The Operational Group is among the world's first small-scale farmer-operable grass biorefinery demonstration projects. It aims to improve the overall sustainability, value and resource efficiency of Ireland's agriculture sector through diversification into the bioeconomy.



According to the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, the 'bioeconomy comprises those parts of the economy that use renewable biological resources from land and sea, such as crops, forests, fish, animals and micro-organisms, to produce food, materials and energy'. This particular project is working with Irish farmers to reduce emissions while transforming grass into value-added products for feed, material and energy applications using circular economy principles. Attendees were given a unique opportunity to see a live demonstration of the biorefinery in operation at the event, and also to meet with key personnel in the bioeconomy realm.

## 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](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie)

## Join the NRN

Are you interested in rural development?

Join the National Rural Network (NRN) by signing up on our website [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie)

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

For regular updates follow us on:



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