



National Rural Network

# NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

## SPOTLIGHT

Our 'Entrepreneurial Young Trained Farmer' case study on 27-year-old Karol Devaney from Drumcliffe, Co. Sligo aims to inspire other young Irish farmers to actively engage with, and avail of the various supports available to them under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP), as well as to think outside the box about the future of their career in farming by embracing innovative diversification practices. See page 8.



## LEADER Programme Update

Activity in the LEADER programme has continued to increase. As of the end of June, there are 4,532 LEADER projects approved with a total value of €188m.

Since the Transitional LEADER programme came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2021, bridging the gap to the new LEADER programme in 2023, 95 projects have been approved for funding, worth a combined €4.6m. Moreover, some 164 projects are working their way through the approval process, which has an additional value of €7.6m.

Despite the impacts of COVID-19, the LEADER Programme has continued to progress due to the resilience of the different actors involved in delivering LEADER.

To learn more about LEADER funding, see: [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader)

## €70 million Transitional LEADER Programme

Details of the allocation of the €70 million Transitional LEADER programme were announced by the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, in April 2021. A key focus of this new programme will be on building capacity within communities which have not received LEADER funding to date and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme will also support job creation; foster and encourage entrepreneurship; support projects which address the climate agenda and digital transformation; and encourage rural communities to build on their existing strengths and assets.

Of the €70 million, €65 million is being allocated to support locally-led rural development projects across the 29 Local Actions Groups (LAGs), €3 million is being allocated to support Cooperation projects and innovation between LAGs and €2 million will be allocated to prepare for the next LEADER Programme.

Commenting on the Transitional LEADER programme, Minister Humphreys said, "The new programme is now open for

applications and I would encourage communities and local enterprises who wish to avail of funding to make contact with their Local Development Company to discuss how the LEADER Programme can assist their plans."

The announcement of the Transitional LEADER programme has coincided with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LEADER Programme, established by the European Commission in 1991. Through its 'bottom up' framework, the LEADER Programme has supported the delivery of local development actions which address the overarching needs of rural communities across the European Union in an innovative and inclusive manner. Here in Ireland, the LEADER Programme has been a mainstay of rural community development, providing local actors with the necessary resources and support to enable them to actively engage and direct the local development of their area.

More details on the new Transitional LEADER Programme and funding allocations in each county can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2UxHipE>



# Colouring Competition Highlights Importance of Hedgerows as 'Hotels for Wildlife'



The National Rural Network (NRN) in partnership with AgriKids recently held a colouring competition to highlight the importance of hedgerows for wildlife.

Children between the ages of 5 and 12 were invited to colour a specially commissioned illustration that depicted hedgerows as "hotels for wildlife". The judges were very impressed by the creativity and artistic skill reflected in the almost 300 entries.

The winner in each of the three age categories received a €50 One4all voucher sponsored by the National Rural Network and an Activity Goodie Bag sponsored by AgriKids.

Congratulating the winners, Seamus Boland Director of the NRN said, "Hedgerows are a valuable part of our cultural and natural heritage. They provide shelter to livestock and crops, as well as nesting and feeding opportunities for farmland birds. The large number of entries received is a positive sign that young people are aware of the importance of this important habitat".

Biodiversity is one of the key themes of the NRN, which is a component of Ireland's Rural Development Programme. For more information on biodiversity visit [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity)





# RDP Helping Farmers Address Farm Safety and the Environment

Schemes under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 such as the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS), Green Low-Carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS), Sheep Welfare Scheme (SWS), Area of Natural Constraint (ANC), Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP) and Organic farming scheme (OFS) provide farmers with opportunities to improve farm safety, animal health and safeguard the environment through water quality improvement measures and enhancing biodiversity. It is welcome news that RDP schemes were extended throughout the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) transition period which will provide continuation of delivery in key areas within the sector.

The NRN recently met with young farmer Claire Bambrick on her beef farm just outside Callan Co. Kilkenny. Claire is a qualified young farmer, graduating from University College Dublin (UCD) with a degree in Agricultural Science in 2013. In 2017, Claire entered into a Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine registered farming partnership with her father.

Farming almost 75 acres, Claire, together with her father manages an intensive beef enterprise. A beef 'finishing system' is the main farming enterprise, this involves purchasing yearling heifers in the springtime which weigh approx. 370kgs or are aged between 12 -14 months of age and feeding them through to meet finishing target weights of approx. 565kgs or aged 20 months. Beef breeds typically kept on the farm include Charolais, Limousine, Simmental and Angus. In recent years, dairy to beef breeds have been added to the enterprise. These include Hereford and Limousine cross heifers.

Off-farm, Claire lectures full time in Kildalton Agricultural College. Efficiency in areas such as safety, time and feeding is key to getting the most out of the farm. In 2020, the partnership applied for the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme under TAMS II to improve safety elements on the farm such as animal handling facilities. As Claire was an eligible young farmer, the partnership was eligible for 60% grant aid on specific farm safety items.

Under the TAMS II scheme, a grant was received on cattle weighing scales, a head scoop and a leg scoop which were added to the improved animal handling facilities.

Claire said, "The improved animal holding and handling facilities will firstly ensure the safety of both myself, my father and anyone helping to use them. The number of



*Claire Bambrick on her beef farm in Co. Kilkenny*

fatalities on farms because of livestock in recent years is staggering and I won't allow any chances to be taken on my farm."

From an efficiency perspective, the handling facilities and holding pens have resulted in improved animal flow in the shed. The livestock are calm and move stress-free through the crush area during inspections or weigh-ins. "Since improving facilities and implementing cattle weighing scales, heifers are handled more frequently which improves overall docility of the herd; it also provides the opportunity to access each animals' performance, and provides a critical early warning for animals delaying thrive." Livestock weights are recorded every six weeks during the grazing season and every two weeks when animals are housed.

Second, to farm safety, Claire was commended for her enthusiasm for safeguarding the environment through participation in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS). On the farm all watercourses are fenced off, leaving a buffer zone up to 4-6 metres in places to help prevent nutrients from the land entering the river. No animals have access to watercourses and an alternative water supply is available through allocated drinking points within the field. Other actions Claire incorporates under the GLAS scheme are Wild bird Cover and management of hedgerows (coppicing). Claire feels that each action has a very positive effect on biodiversity "Protecting the watercourses are crucial to improvements to water quality, water quality is one of our key environmental indicators, like with animal performance we strive to improve and enhance the environment in which we farm."

# LEADER Case Study: Louth Looking Good Initiative



*Louth Tidy Towns Together took over the 'Tidy Estates District' competition from the Louth County Council*

Louth Looking Good is a county-wide initiative with the primary objective of encouraging, motivating and assisting local communities, residents and businesses to play an active role in the environmental presentation of their towns, villages and housing estates, and to formally acknowledge them for their efforts at an annual public awards ceremony. The project sets about providing an independent assessment of each town and village entering into the competition. This assessment offers comprehensive feedback to each submission along with suggestions on how to improve. It also provides an opportunity for all participating groups to liaise with the Local Authority regarding plans and involvement in towns, villages and housing estates. This case study focuses on LEADER support gained by Louth Tidy Towns Together in support of Louth Looking Good 2017 under theme 1: Rural Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation and under the sub-theme: Rural Towns.

## Context

Louth Tidy Towns Together was established in 2006. It works to share good practice, information and experience among Tidy Towns groups in County Louth. Furthermore, it aims to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors. Louth Tidy Towns Together is the first network of its kind in Ireland to be composed of local volunteers from all over the county.

Initially, Louth Tidy Towns Together took over the 'Tidy Estates District' competition from the Louth County Council.

It was then re-developed and re-launched as 'Louth Looking Good', a county-wide Tidy Towns initiative involving the assessment of participating areas, which culminates in an annual awards ceremony. The event, which has expanded and grown over the years, is held to motivate and reward volunteers who give many hours of their time to improve the quality of life of all residents and help build pride in their local places.

A number of stakeholders are central to Louth Looking Good. Louth Tidy Towns Together is the main coordinating stakeholder and represents the voluntary sector and local Tidy Towns groups. Louth Leader Partnership, Louth County Council and the corporate sector are other key stakeholders.

*"What is very important is the partnership approach we take to delivering Louth Looking Good and the broader Tidy Towns programme. We all come together to develop ideas on how we can maximise the outcomes. The fact that all the stakeholders are coming together and cooperating on an ongoing basis makes us much more successful at making the most of limited resources. LEADER and the Rural Development Programme is a huge part of that. It wouldn't be possible to run Louth Looking Good how we do without rural development funding," Mary Murtagh, Secretary, Louth Tidy Towns Together*



### Results and Impacts of Louth Looking Good 2017

- Almost 100 independent assessments of participating towns, villages and housing estates were carried out in County Louth and a feedback report was provided to 27 local Tidy Towns groups and 60-70 Residents Associations. Feedback given to these groups, detailing where they gained marks, how they could improve and tips for future development, often forms the basis for the creation of new projects for communities going forward.
- One 15-minute video showcasing the county was produced using drone footage and was made available to local groups to use in their own place-based marketing. This video presents a positive image of towns and villages in County Louth which is important for tourism purposes and economic development.
- Approximately 250 local people were brought together at the Louth Looking Good 2017 Awards, providing a space for acknowledgment of work, local networking and idea sharing. A professionally produced adjudicators book was created summarising the awards and around 200 copies were distributed. The awards presented to participants included the Litter League Awards, Shop Front Awards, Town and Village Awards, a Youth Award and an Age Friendly Award.



*The creation of Louth Looking Good has brought together several key stakeholders*

### Conclusion

Louth Looking Good provides an important communication platform to enable local Tidy Towns groups to start the process of sharing experiences for inspiration and transfer of good practice. The initiative has resulted in more active participation in Tidy Towns across County Louth. Before the awards, some areas were more active than others. Louth Looking Good has driven the strengthened participation in Tidy Towns locally and standards are continuously improving.

The creation of Louth Looking Good has brought together several key stakeholders which have been instrumental to the running of the awards but also in fostering and developing relationships which have allowed Louth Tidy Towns Together to liaise with the Local Authority regarding developments in their respective areas. In addition, Louth Looking Good supports and fosters the spirit of volunteerism, on which the running of Tidy Towns groups across the country heavily relies, by rewarding efforts on a local and county basis.



# Two Peatlands EIP-AGRI Projects Up and Running



*Bog Cotton on Clara Bog  
(photo Patrick Crushell)*

Wetland Survey Ireland along with Green Restoration Ireland Cooperative have secured funding for the Open Call under the European Innovation Partnerships initiative (EIP-AGRI). The two projects secured 2.2 million under Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2021 and will focus on finding better ways to manage on-farm drained peat soils in the Midlands.

The FarmPEAT Project is working towards designing and trialing a results-based agri-environmental programme adapted to the Irish midland raised bog landscape. The Irish midlands are characterised by extensive raised bog systems. The margins of all midland bogs have been subject to drainage and much of this land has been converted to grassland used for agriculture. The FarmPEAT Project aims to develop an agri-environmental model that will enhance the environmental condition of these former peatland areas through an incentivised farm Programme whereby farmers are financially rewarded for maintaining and improving the quality of their farmland habitats.

Caroline Lalor, manager of the FarmPEAT Project stated "We are looking forward to working with farmers in the midlands and highlighting the contribution that agricultural land makes to biodiversity and the wider community. We

see it as an opportunity for farmers within our project area to earn additional income from their land, with higher payments due on lands that are delivering more from an environmental perspective."

Green Restoration Ireland will work with participating landowners who farm peatlands. They will provide supports through participatory learning and accessible advice to voluntarily transition their land use from current conventional farming practices to economically viable carbon farming methods. Lessons learned and data gathered will be used to establish a practical model for future expansion of these new methods on farmed peatlands.

Douglas McMillan said that the project team is looking forward to collaborating with farmers and our other partners to determine fairly compensated, evidence-based solutions that diversify farm income by balancing agricultural production with proper payment for ecosystem services of fixing carbon and improving biodiversity and water quality.

For more information visit [www.farmpeat.ie](http://www.farmpeat.ie) and <https://greenrestorationireland.coop/>

# Irish National Rural Network Actively Involved in “Rural Vision Week”

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), in close cooperation with the European Commission, organised a virtual event - ‘Rural Vision Week: Imagining the future of Europe’s rural areas’ between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The Irish National Rural Network (NRN) actively participated throughout the week-long event. Dr Maura Farrell was invited to provide feedback on Workshops 2 (Digitally-led innovative rural futures) and 7 (Diverse and resilient rural areas) on the final day.

NRN project manager James Claffey facilitated one of the groups as part of Workshop 3 on fair and inclusive rural futures. Following the workshop, James met with other facilitators to summarise the information gathered before submitted it to ENRD.

As part of the week-long event, the NRN created a virtual stand-in collaboration with ENRD. The virtual stand focused

on the theme of rural youth, featuring case studies funded under Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (extended to 2022). Dr Shane Conway and Aoife Smith participated in the marketplace consultation which permitted attendees with the opportunity to discuss the theme with team members at allocated time slots.

For more information visit: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/rural2040-vision-week\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/rural2040-vision-week_en)



## 20<sup>th</sup> NRN’s Meeting Focuses on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

The 20<sup>th</sup> NRN meeting organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) was held on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021 via Zoom. This virtual meeting aimed to cover recent actions in the consultation process on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, reflecting on NRN activities during Rural Vision Week, and the NRN’s role in supporting communication and stakeholder involvement around the Vision. The meeting provided the opportunity to reflect on specific activities from preceding NRN meetings and workshops that can add value to future networking.

As part of the meeting, James Claffey, Project Manager with the Irish National Rural Network, presented on the NRN’s involvement in the consultation process. James described how the NRN hosted a consultation workshop in January 2021, attended by 140 participants.

At the event, participants were divided into workshops to discuss their long term vision for rural areas, their opinions were gathered by the NRN and submitted to ENRD as part of the consultation progress. James also outlined how the NRN published the consultation through its dissemination channels and are actively participating in the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas Working Group.

To celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> NRN’s meeting, ENRD created a Greatest hits video, featuring the 13<sup>th</sup> NRN’s meeting held in Athlone Co. Westmeath.

For more information on the meeting, please visit [www.enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/20th-nrn-meeting\\_en](http://www.enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/20th-nrn-meeting_en)



# Entrepreneurial Young Trained Farmer

One of the key objectives of the National Rural Network (NRN) is to promote innovative initiatives that can help people in the farming community and in rural areas to maximize the success of the objectives set out in the Rural Development Programme on behalf of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM).

A recent Entrepreneurial Young Trained Farmer case study carried out with 27-year-old Karol Devaney is a key example of how the network communicates important opportunities and outputs in the RDP to relevant stakeholders. Karol graduated from

University College Dublin (UCD) in 2019 with a degree in Agricultural Science majoring in Food and Agribusiness Management. He now farms at home at the foot of Benbulbin in Barnaribbon, Drumcliffe, County Sligo, where his family has farmed since the 1960s. His progression in farming over the past few years is an inspiring story, and one that can assist and encourage other young Irish farmers to actively engage with, and avail of the various schemes and supports available to them under the Rural Development Programme, as well as to help 'think outside the box' in relation to the future trajectory of their

career in agriculture by embracing innovative diversification practices, in the form of Karol's Eweknit brand for farmers example. This case study also featured in a number of leading local and regional newspapers in the west of Ireland over the past few weeks, including the Sligo Champion, the Sligo Weekender and the Leitrim Observer. You can read the full case study here: <https://bit.ly/36PdOq4>



Karol Devaney on the family farm in Drumcliffe, Co. Sligo

## 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.

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T: 090 - 6482744

E: [info@nationalruralnetwork.ie](mailto:info@nationalruralnetwork.ie)

W: [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie)

**National Rural Network**  
Unit 2A Moate Business Park,  
Clara Rd, Moate,  
Co. Westmeath  
N37 W9R0  
Republic of Ireland



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