



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

The restoration of a historic forge near Churchill in Co. Kerry is helping to revive tourism in the local area. The project was co-funded by Spa Fenit Community Council (SFCC) through the LEADER Programme. See page 3



LEADER Programme Update

Activity in the LEADER programme has continued to increase. As of the end of July, there were 4,636 LEADER projects approved with a total value of €191m.

Since the Transitional LEADER programme came into effect on the 1st of April 2021, bridging the gap to the new LEADER programme in 2023, 203 projects have been approved for funding, worth a combined €8.3m. Moreover, some 146 projects are working their way through the approval process, which has an additional value of €8.32m.

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: LEADER - NRN (nationalruralnetwork.ie)

Conference to Reflect on 30 Years of LEADER Programme

A world-renowned expert in rural development will be among a line-up of local and international speakers at the 2021 LEADER conference hosted by the National Rural Network (NRN) on 15th November 2021.

Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, will deliver the keynote address at the free online conference entitled '30 Years of LEADER – Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future'. Mark is Professor of Planning at Newcastle University, where he was also Director of the Institute for Social Renewal from 2012- 2018, and is Visiting Professor at Ruralis, Trondheim. His main areas of research include social exclusion in rural areas, rural housing and rural development. He has published 17 books and over 120 peer-reviewed academic papers, as well as coordinating several EU research projects.

The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, will also be in attendance on the day and will deliver an opening address. Following this, there will be a discussion panel on the lessons learned from the last 30 years of LEADER, involving a range of stakeholders who have actively engaged with the Programme. We will also hear from Iwona Lisztwan from the European Commission (DG

AGRI) on what the future of LEADER might look like. In addition, conference guests will have the opportunity to attend a LEADER-themed workshop of their choosing. A second high-level discussion panel, facilitated by John Grieve from the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), will be followed by concluding remarks from Kevin McCarthy, Secretary-General of the Department of Rural and Community Development, which will expand on, and reinforce the main messages emanating from the LEADER conference.

Commenting on the Programme, NRN Coordinator, Seamus Boland said, "As we face continued challenges globally, it is essential to consider rural change, development and sustainability. The NRN LEADER Conference will provide this opportunity by examining the success of the LEADER Programme over 30 years and by planning how such accomplishments can be replicated into the future."

This free conference is open to all stakeholders in the LEADER Programme, including Local Action Groups (LAGs), Implementing Partners (IPs), rural enterprises, academics, community organisations and policymakers. Register at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

Biodiversity Farmer of the Year: Showcasing Important Farm Habitats



Joe Melody, National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year, exploring grassland habitats on his farm

Joe Melody was awarded the 2020 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award as part of last year's FBD Young Farmer of the Year Competition. He farms in partnership with his father JJ, close to Bunratty, Co. Clare. Joe and his father have a mixed farming enterprise which includes a dairy herd and a pedigree Charolais, Limousine, Angus, and Hereford herd. More recently, Joe established a joint venture with his brother Frank, 'Melody Farm Eggs', consisting of a strong 400 bird flock of pasture-raised hens, producing high-quality eggs sold locally.

Joe is conscious that, given the location of his farm, he has some sensitive grassland habitats that require specific management. Joe is an active participant in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme GLAS, funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, extended to 2022. His scheme provides payments to farmers to help tackle climate change, preserve biodiversity, protect habitat and promote environmentally friendly farming.

Joe's farm supports some important grassland habitats, such as maintaining swards to support Wild Geese & Swans, Traditional Hay Meadows, and Low-Input Permanent Pastures. A key measure in Joe's GLAS plan is to produce and maintain a grass sward to feed overwintering geese and swans. The overwintering birds include the Whooper Swan, Greenland White-Fronted Goose, the Barnacle Goose, and the Brent Goose. The farm borders the Shannon estuary

with over 3km of the riverbank. The riverbank is emersed in a reed bed that intersperses with salt marsh, all of which need to be grazed and managed to allow the habitat and its ecosystem to thrive.

"We graze the area very lightly between April & October with young stock; they breakdown some of the foliage to prevent it from becoming too dense, this also rejuvenates the pasture within the immediate vicinity of the riverbank. Sometimes, in the winter, you will see the swans grazing on the farmed permanent pasture too, which shows it also provides support."

There are areas of Joe's farm which support species diverse grassland; these are not intensively managed or grazed by stock. Other important grasslands that Joe's farm encourage are Traditional Hay Meadows (THM) and Low - Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP). The objective is to promote the maintenance of a traditional method of forage conservation that is beneficial to grassland plants and animals; during harvest, turning the cut grass twice allows the seeds of the grasses to be spread, ensuring the meadow continues to maintain its diverse number of species.

The National Rural Network would like to thank Joe for taking the time from his busy schedule to showcase his farm with us.

LEADER Programme: Spa Fenit Community Council - Churchill Forge Project



The Churchill Forge has been fully restored

The Spa Fenit Community Council (SFCC) was set up in 1985 to help develop and enhance the community of Fenit. In 2002, the SFCC acquired the Churchill Forge from a local benefactor, who gave it to the SFCC, in trust, so that the 1840's building could be restored to its former glory after having fallen into a state of disrepair. Initially, LEADER supported the SFCC to fully restore and reconstruct the Forge. In 2016, further LEADER funding was sought to build an additional multi-use visitor space equipped with over 20 display panels detailing the history of forging in Spa-Fenit. This project has not only preserved the history of forging in Spa-Fenit, but it has also developed a community asset and local tourist attraction to benefit the entire community.

Activities

With the assistance of North, East and West Kerry Development (NEWKD), the SFCC applied for LEADER support in 2016 to (i) build an extension that would facilitate the hosting of events; and (ii) help towards kitting out the interior of the new space with visitor display panels. This would supplement the collection of metal forming tools already housed in the Forge workshop.

Match funding was required to accelerate the project. The SFCC relied on the fundraising efforts of the local community as well as many corporate donations.

Once LEADER funding had been approved, the SFCC acquired a bridging loan from Clann Credo who provides community loans for LEADER and community development projects in Ireland.

“It would have been terrible if the Forge was left to go into disrepair because it would have been knocked and a lot of the history attached to the area would have been lost” Dermot Crowley, SFCC

Results

The multi-use visitor space and the installation of over 20 display panels have enabled the Forge to open as a tourist attraction. The space, which has a capacity of up to 60 people, has been used to host a number of traditional nights, cultural events, local community events and talks from guest speakers. In addition, the Forge hosts a local open day during National Heritage Week to showcase a range of traditional skills and crafts including weaving, bottle making and beekeeping. As well as actively engaging with local schools, by running an interactive competition each year, the Forge has also hosted many visitor tours, with over 2,000 attending prior to March 2020.

This project was a winner in the 2020 NRN LEADER Impact Campaign. View their entry here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNRn3P27gT0

Organic Sheep and Horticulture Farmer, Co. Dublin



The National Rural Network recently met with Pat Bobbett from Lusk, Co. Dublin. Pat and his wife Heidi are the owners of Juliasdale Organic Farm, which consists of some 35 acres of permanent pasture which includes clover. Pat, who hails from Co. Meath, returned from the UK, to Ireland in 2006 and wanted to manage his land to complement the surrounding area. During Pat's time in the UK, he gained experience working on allotments which provided a therapeutic farming experience to people in need, and this is where his motivation to develop an organic farm with a therapeutic focus began. Farming organically was the only route that seemed most sympathetic with the environment.

Pat participates in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) and the Sheep Welfare Scheme (SWS). OFS is a scheme funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, extended to 2022, under which farmers receive financial support to encourage the production of organic foods.

In 2008, Pat erected a large polytunnel to grow vegetables, fruits, and herbs. An organic butcher processes up to 20% of Pat's lambs annually, all of which are sold directly off-farm. "I love being able to grow my food. Everything grown in the polytunnels is fresh, tasty, and wholesome, I'm constantly harvesting herbs and salads for dinner, and my family loves it." Pat has also planted a small apple orchard which is bearing some fruit on the trees.

Since returning home, Pat has established an organic

grass-fed sheep flock of seventy breeding pedigree Lleyn ewes. As land and facilities such as animal housing were limiting factors, Pat chose to produce pedigrees. "Breeding Pedigrees is a speciality; you have to be interested in the genetics and traits of the breed and target rams that most complement the flock and hopefully produce lambs that will boast the most desirable traits required from the breed." The Lleyn sheep originate from the Lleyn Peninsula in North



Pat in his polytunnel

Wales and are medium-sized lowland sheep, renowned for their hardiness, prolificacy, easy lambing, strong mothering instinct, milkiness, and easy handling.

Pat lambs his ewes outside in early Spring, "The breed is amazing, they are such low maintenance and produce very hardy lambs, the ewe requires little to no handling at lambing, and the lambs are up and suckling on the mother within minutes of birth. They suit the system I have to offer." Across the winter, ewes receive additional organic hay and some organic meals in the weeks leading up to lambing.

The Sheep Welfare Scheme is a scheme funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (extended

ewes have single lambs also can save you money as they do not have the same feed requirements, and if they are overweight at lambing, this can cause problems."

Mineral deficiencies within a flock can affect performance, fertility, and the general health of your flock. Mineral supplementing post-mating ensures the ewe remains in good health, which encourages high conception rates.

Pat has continued to help people in need by offering his farm through social farming. Social Farming provides the socially, physically, mentally, or intellectually disadvantaged the opportunity to spend time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment. He also facilitates



Pat has established an organic grass-fed sheep flock pedigree Lleyn ewes

to 2022), which provides financial support to farmers for taking extra steps to improve the welfare of their flock. Farmers receive €10 per breeding ewe for completing flock welfare measures. Pat has introduced Scanning and Mineral Supplementation Ewes Post Mating; both measures have only enhanced Pat's efficiency at lambing time.

"Knowing how many lambs each ewe is carrying is beneficial; you can supplement ewes carrying doubles & triplets to ensure they have adequate energy intake in the weeks leading to lambing. Adequate feeding prevents ewes from becoming ill after giving birth. Knowing which

school visits and is motivated to educate children and young people on where their food comes from and the value and principles of organic produce. "I have always wanted to create an environment that was an interesting place to come to. Watching the plants grow, from planting the seed to harvesting the fruit, is a great sense of achievement, and I want to share that."

The National Rural Network would like to thank Pat for taking the time from his busy schedule to share his story with us.

FarmPEAT EIP-AGRI Project Launched by Minister Pippa Hackett at Clara Bog Visitor Centre, Co Offaly



Dr Shane Conway (NUIG & NRN), Minister of State, Pippa Hackett, James Claffey (NRN) and Eileen Delaney, the Project Manager

On 29th July 2021, the National Rural Network (NRN) attended the launch of the FarmPEAT EIP-AGRI Project at Clara Bog Visitor Centre, Co. Offaly. James Claffey, project manager with the NRN, moderated the launch and stated that the NRN is looking forward to working with the project team to disseminate its actions and results.

This project is developing a locally-led, innovative, results-based farm scheme for farmers who manage lands that surround some of Ireland's finest remaining raised bogs. The protection of our remaining raised bogs is a national priority and the agricultural lands that surround these bogs will play an important role in their long-term conservation. The FarmPEAT Project will be working with the farmers and the local communities to design and develop a programme that will deliver both for the environment and the farming community. Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Senator Pippa Hackett, officially launched the €1.2 million scheme and had the opportunity to meet both the FarmPEAT team and some of the farmers taking part in the pilot project. Minister Hackett said at the launch "it is an honour to partake in the launch, not just as a minister, but as an Offaly woman and a fellow farmer". The FarmPEAT project is one of many in a series of EIP-AGRI projects funded by DAFM under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP). In total, DAFM has committed €64 million to these EIP-AGRI projects over the lifetime of the RDP.

Speaking at the launch Minister Hackett said: 'It's encouraging to see work beginning on these inland bogs.

Raised bogs represent one of the most valuable natural ecosystems in Ireland and the appropriate management of adjacent agricultural lands that surround them can play an important role in maintaining and enhancing their long-term conservation value.'

Caroline Lalor, the Project Manager added: "We are delighted with the interest that local farmers have expressed in the Project. We are offering 42 farmers a contract for the first year and are planning to offer additional places next year". She continued "it is wonderful to see so many of the pilot farmers here today and we look forward to working with you over the next two years."

For further information on the FarmPEAT project, visit their website at **FarmPEAT Project**

Free Webinars for Agri-Professionals

In association with Teagasc ConnectED, Dairy Sustainability Ireland, and Food Drinks Ireland Skillnet, the National Rural Network hosts weekly online webinars called the Signpost Series.

These weekly webinars began in April 2020, and over the last 18 months, have continued weekly every Friday morning. These one-hour webinars are designed to help Agri-professionals communicate the best evidence-based advice and guidance to their clients. By working together, the agricultural industry can make significant steps towards achieving sustainability and reducing the environmental footprint of Irish agriculture.

Farmers and the agriculture sector need to adapt to and implement new ways and technologies that will help the industry reduce emissions while sustainably producing food. Many farmers are farming in a manner that takes cognisance of biodiversity and water quality. While much is being done at farm level to preserve and manage habitats and protect water quality, more can still be done. The webinars discussed the challenges and opportunities that face Irish and International agriculture. For more information on the Signpost Series, visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland Newsletter

The National Rural Network have recently published a newsletter focusing on the EU Action for Smart Villages initiative entitled 'Smart Villages and Rural Towns in Ireland'. Showcasing a wide range of community-led smart initiatives, this publication features six guest authors as well as a host of other smart examples, which aim to bring local actors to the fore. Smart Villages (and Smart Rural Towns in an Irish context) are rural areas and local communities which 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. In creating a Smart Village, community groups and individuals often overcome local challenges by exploring and implementing practical and tangible solutions. Ireland's position concerning the development of Smart Villages and Rural Towns is that it can be greatly enhanced through the successful delivery and modernisation of the LEADER Programme. Creating synergies between the LEADER Programme and the various smart supports, projects and initiatives showcased in this insightful newsletter, through increased levels of collaboration, has the potential to greatly improve the quality of life for people who live and work in rural towns and villages throughout Ireland. This newsletter's focus on

innovative community-led local development is now more important than ever as villages and rural towns throughout Ireland and Europe adapt, rebuild, redevelop and re-energise as part of their COVID-19 pandemic recovery response. It is important to note that, whilst digitisation is key to the creation of a Smart Village, social innovation is also paramount. You can freely view/download this booklet here: <https://bit.ly/2ZVLzWp>



Eight Farm Health, Safety and Wellbeing EIP-AGRI Projects Awarded Funding

The Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) with responsibility for Farm Safety, Martin Heydon T.D., recently announced the list of farm health, safety and wellbeing projects successfully selected under Phase 2 of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) initiative. The eight successful projects are: The Fitness, Awareness, Resilience, Meitheal (F.A.R.M) Connect Project, Farm Family Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Project, Béal Átha na Muice Project, An Meitheal Feirme Project, Farmers Inspiring Farmers to be Safe Project, Safe Farm Project, Eco-T Project and Sláinte agus Beatha Feirmoirí Conamara (SBFC). The initial budget of €1m set aside for this EIP-AGRI call has been increased to €1.8m by DAFM to ensure the maximum number of project proposals possible could move to full implementation. As farming is one of

the most dangerous occupations in Ireland in terms of the incidence and seriousness of accidental injuries, with around 2,500 serious injuries reported annually on farms, this support is very timely and illustrates the DAFM's commitment to achieving positive change in this area. Moreover, figures by DAFM highlight that agriculture exhibits disproportionately high fatality rates, when compared to other sectors, with around 21 people dying every year. Indeed, fatalities on farms account for nearly half of all fatal workplace incidents in Ireland but only represent 6% of the workforce, hence the importance of this innovative, farmer-centred initiative in helping to bring about positive change. An infographic, produced by the NRN team at NUI Galway's Rural Studies Centre, detailing the geographical location of Ireland's new Farm Health, Safety and Wellbeing EIP-AGRI Projects can be freely viewed/downloaded here: <https://bit.ly/3kBpkq7>

Farming for Nature Ambassadors 2021

The Farming for Nature initiative, now in its fourth year, aims to source, share and promote stories of farmers across Ireland who are judged to be managing their land and livestock in a way that benefits nature on their farms and in their communities. This year 23 farmers were selected as Farming for Nature 'Ambassadors' after a rigorous selection process of interviews, farm visits and assessments by a panel of judges, which included Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at Galway's Rural Studies Centre working on the National Rural Network Project. These Ambassadors, located throughout Ireland, include beef, sheep and tillage farmers who manage a wide range of valuable habitats including species-rich grasslands and heaths, wetlands, woodlands and hedgerows. They are all outstanding and inspiring examples of how farming can have a positive impact on our biodiversity and climate. Dr. Brendan Dunford of the Burren Programme, founder and committed volunteer with Farming for

Nature explains that "this year's farming for nature ambassadors are, like their predecessors, just so engaging and inspirational. They provide a powerful and timely testimony as to how farming and nature can, and must, work in harmony and that simple actions can make a big difference. These farmers deserve our respect, gratitude and support: they embody all that's great about rural Ireland and they offer great hope at a time of climate and biodiversity crises." The NRN are delighted to support this initiative, showcasing the excellent work carried out by these Irish farmers who farm for nature. By celebrating these Farming for Nature 'Ambassadors', it is hoped that other farmers, as well as members of the general public, will be inspired to follow suit and do what they can to protect and enhance biodiversity in their local area. The full list of ambassadors can be found on the Farming for Nature website. See: www.farmingfornature.ie

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