

Winter 2021/2022

Volume 6, No. 4



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

Dr Shane Conway, James Claffey and Daniel Bennett from the NRN pictured with Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, TD at the launch of the LEADER Programme booklet at Trinity Point, Dublin.



LEADER Programme Update

Activity in the LEADER programme has continued to increase. As of the end of November 2021, there were 4,914 LEADER projects approved with a total value of €204m.

Since the Transitional LEADER programme came into effect on the 1st of April 2021, bridging the gap to the next LEADER programme in 2023, 510 projects have been approved for funding, worth a combined €22.7m. Moreover, some 163 projects are working their way through the approval process, which has an added value of over €10.7m.

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

New NRN Booklet Celebrates 30 Years of LEADER Programme

The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys, T.D. recently launched a booklet produced by the National Rural Network (NRN) which celebrates the success of the LEADER Programme in Ireland over the past 30 years. The new booklet tells the stories of 72 inspirational LEADER projects located throughout Ireland funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Through its 'bottom up', locally-led, framework, the LEADER Programme supports the delivery of local development actions which address the overarching needs of rural communities throughout Ireland in an innovative, integrated and inclusive manner. All 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout Ireland and their respective Implementing Partners (IPs) are represented in this publication. Commenting on the launch of the booklet, Minister Humphreys said, "LEADER is all about that community-led, bottom-up approach. I believe this publication will help guide future applicants to develop worthy projects that will benefit the community as a whole...".

This booklet was also launched with a LEADER supported project 'on-the-ground' in Mountbellew, Co. Galway hosted by the National Rural Network on Thursday, November 11th. This particular community-led LEADER project, initiated and spearheaded by the Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network, involved the restoration of an 18th century walled garden in the community. Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway's Rural Studies Centre working on the NRN Project who led the production of this publication said, "Rural Ireland has benefited enormously from the LEADER Programme; not only through capital invested, but more specifically through the enhancement and accumulation of social capital in rural areas. LEADER's focus on innovative community-led local development, clearly evident in this new booklet, is now more important than ever as rural communities adapt, rebuild, and re-energise as part of their COVID-19 recovery response".

Co. Roscommon Beef Farmer Named NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year



2021 Biodiversity Farmer of The Year

Eanna Tiernan
Co. Roscommon



Eanna Tiernan, a young beef farmer from Co. Roscommon was named the 2021 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year at this year's FBD Young Farmer of the Year Awards. The National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award recognises a young farmer who is farming sustainably to protect the environment and actively tries to enhance the biodiversity potential of their farms.

Eanna, who farmed alongside his father since a young age completed a Master's Degree in Engineering in UCD, graduating in 2014. Following this, completed the Agricultural Green Cert Level 6 from Mayo College of Further Education & Training.

Since the start of the lease in 2020, Eanna has focused on rejuvenating the permanent pasture on the farm, which was in poor condition from heavy stocking rates in years previous.

Under the pilot Soil Sampling Programme which is a measure included in Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2022, soils sample were taken from across the whole farm. The results of these will detail the macro and micronutrients available within the soil and provide insights into the current soil health and condition.

Aiming to utilise the resources within the farmgate as efficiently as possible, a liming plan is in place and the benefits are evident within the grass sward. Eanna plans to utilise his organic manure on areas of the farm where nutrient uptake will be maximised.

"On the family farm, we have many types of soils, some that are very heavy and become saturated early on in autumn/ winter but we also have some lighter soils which have been reseeded in the past to maximise grass growth. It is important to know the limitations of the soil you have and of course, how to best manage the soil, getting the biggest bang for your buck is very important for the farms viability."

In the summer of 2021, Eanna was also accepted into the Results-Based Environment Agri Pilot Programme (REAP). The REAP is an agri-environment pilot project which rewards farmers to maintain and improve the environmental condition of their lands. Following the REAP inspection, the permanent pasture on the farm received a field baseline score of 6/10. Field scores are based on the number and abundance of grass and non-grass species, the extent of field boundaries and field margin widths (1m, 2m, 3m and an additional option of 5m for Multi Species Leys). The higher the field score the higher the rate of payment received by the participant.



Eanna Tiernan on his beef farm on the banks of Lough Gara, Co. Roscommon.

Non-grassland species such as vetchlings, sorrel, spike/woodrush, and marsh thistle to name a few were found on inspection. Eanna is working with his advisor to implement grazing and field management regimes to ensure the species diversity within the sward will increase over the coming years.

“During the summer, the fields are full of colourful flowers and there are many types of green foliage present, leaves of all shapes and sizes. In the winter, there are all kinds of birds, ducks and swans that come up from the lake into the grass to graze. I want to ensure that how I farm the land does not negatively impact the habitat”.

Lough Gara is a small lake that lies south-west of the Curlew Mountains in south Co. Sligo and reaches into Co. Roscommon. The lake borders part of Eanna’s farm and is designated as a Special Protected Area (SPA). The objective of designated areas is to protect natural habitats, flora and fauna. Lough Gara supports populations of overwintering birds such as Greenland White-fronted Geese, Whooper Swan, Mute Swans, Mallard Ducks, Tufted Ducks, Great Crested Grebes and on occasion the Golden Plover.

Commenting on receiving the Award, Eanna said, “I am delighted to have received this award and to be recognised for farming sustainably and encouraging

biodiversity on my farm. My sole aim is to farm in conjunction with nature and protect the habitats on my farm. There are crannogs and fairy forts on the land, they were there a long time before me and hopefully remain for a long time after. I want to leave this land in the best condition I can so future generations can enjoy the history and nature that it is associated with. While farming the land, I take pride in embracing my role as a custodian of the land and protecting the environment.”

Congratulating the winner, Philip Farrelly of the National Rural Network said, “Throughout the semi-final and final rounds of this competition, the National Rural Network has been engaging with enthusiastic young farmers who have exhibited a passion for farming in a manner that protects and enhances the environment. Eanna was awarded the 2021 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year due to his passion, commitment, and enthusiasm for the nature his farm supports. That said, I would like to acknowledge the enthusiasm from all of the competition participants, each illustrating encouraging portraits of what their farms are doing for the environment.”

National Rural Network Conference Celebrates the Past and Future of the LEADER Programme



#LEADERCLLD

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

On Monday, 15th November 2021, the National Rural Network (NRN) hosted a half-day online conference, entitled “30 Years of LEADER: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future”, which provided an opportunity to reflect on past and current programmes, and to debate rural policy and practice in the context of the next LEADER Programme. The event, attended by almost 300 delegates, attracted a wide range of rural stakeholders from throughout Ireland and abroad including representatives from Local Action Groups, Implementing Partners, rural enterprises, academics, community organisations and policymakers.

Opening the conference, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, highlighted the vital role of LEADER in the Government’s rural development policy moving forward: “The

LEADER Programme is integral to further enhancing the participation of local communities in building their futures.”

The NRN was delighted and honoured to welcome a prestigious lineup of rural development experts from Policy, Research and Practice to speak at the conference. The keynote address was delivered by Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Newcastle University. Sharing his renowned experience of rural development, Professor Shucksmith spoke of the central role played by Ireland in the creation of the LEADER Programme 30 years ago and of how he looks forward to continuing to learn from and be inspired by the Irish experience of LEADER.

The first discussion panel of the day, chaired by Dr Maura Farrell (NUIG / NRN), reflected on the lessons learned from the last 30 years of the LEADER Programme. This generated lively debate and discussion from a range of stakeholders who have actively engaged with the LEADER Programme during this period. Dóirín Graham (CEO, Clare Local Development Company), Terry Keenan (Chairperson, Forum Connemara), Sonya Kavanagh (Interim CEO, Kildare County Council) and Mary Clarke (LEADER recipient from Caltra Community Development Association) joined Professor Shucksmith on the panel.

After a short break in proceedings, the attention turned to the future of the LEADER Programme. Iwona Lisztwan, LEADER Policy Coordinator at the European Commission (DG AGRI),





Keynote speaker, Professor Mark Schucksmith OBE.

outlined her vision during a really insightful presentation: “In today’s complex world, the LEADER approach can transform current individual and global uncertainties into working collective solutions locally,” she said.

Following on from this, delegates attended a workshop of their choice, which was facilitated by a Rural Development Officer. Within each of the five themed workshops, an overview of the topic was provided by an expert in the field. This was followed by a LEADER project presentation and an open discussion focused on two key questions relevant to the theme. The NRN would like to thank the support team and note takers who assisted with the running of these workshops.

LEADER and Social Inclusion

- Workshop Moderator: Judy Dunne (Fingal LEADER Partnership)
- Topic Expert: Dr Anne Cassidy (Galway Rural Development)
- Project Example: John MacNamara (ACM Community Development Society)

Smart Villages

- Workshop Moderator: Conor Carty (Galway Rural Development)
- Topic Expert: Pat Kennedy (eTownz)
- Project Example: Collette McEntee (Innovating Communities)

LEADER and Cooperation

- Workshop Moderator: Claire Connors (Waterford LEADER Partnership)
- Topic Expert / Project Example: Frank Kelly (former Rural Development Manager, Donegal Local Development CLG)

LEADER and the Rural Environment

- Workshop Moderator: Peter Ormond (Westmeath Community Development)

- Topic Expert: Fran Igoe (Local Authorities Waters Programme)
- Project Example: Rebekah Keaveny (Green Offaly)

LEADER and the Rural Economy

- Workshop Moderator: Donna Cleary (SECAD)
- Topic Expert: Dr Mary O’Shaughnessy (Department of Food Business and Development, UCC)
- Project Example: Peter Johnson (St Vincent de Paul North East and Midlands Region)

Delegates returned to the plenary for the second discussion panel of the day, hosted by John Grieve, former ENRD Contact Point Team Leader. At this point, we heard from three active listeners, Dr Aisling Murtagh (NUIG), Michael Kenny (Maynooth University) and Dr Brian Leonard (UCD) who shared some of their observations, thoughts and insights on the key themes emerging throughout the day.

Concluding remarks were provided by Kevin McCarthy, former Secretary-General of the Department of Rural and Community Development, who expanded on and re-enforced the messages emanating from the LEADER Conference.

The conference programme and a full report on the conference are available at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/



Farming for Nature Public Choice Award 2021



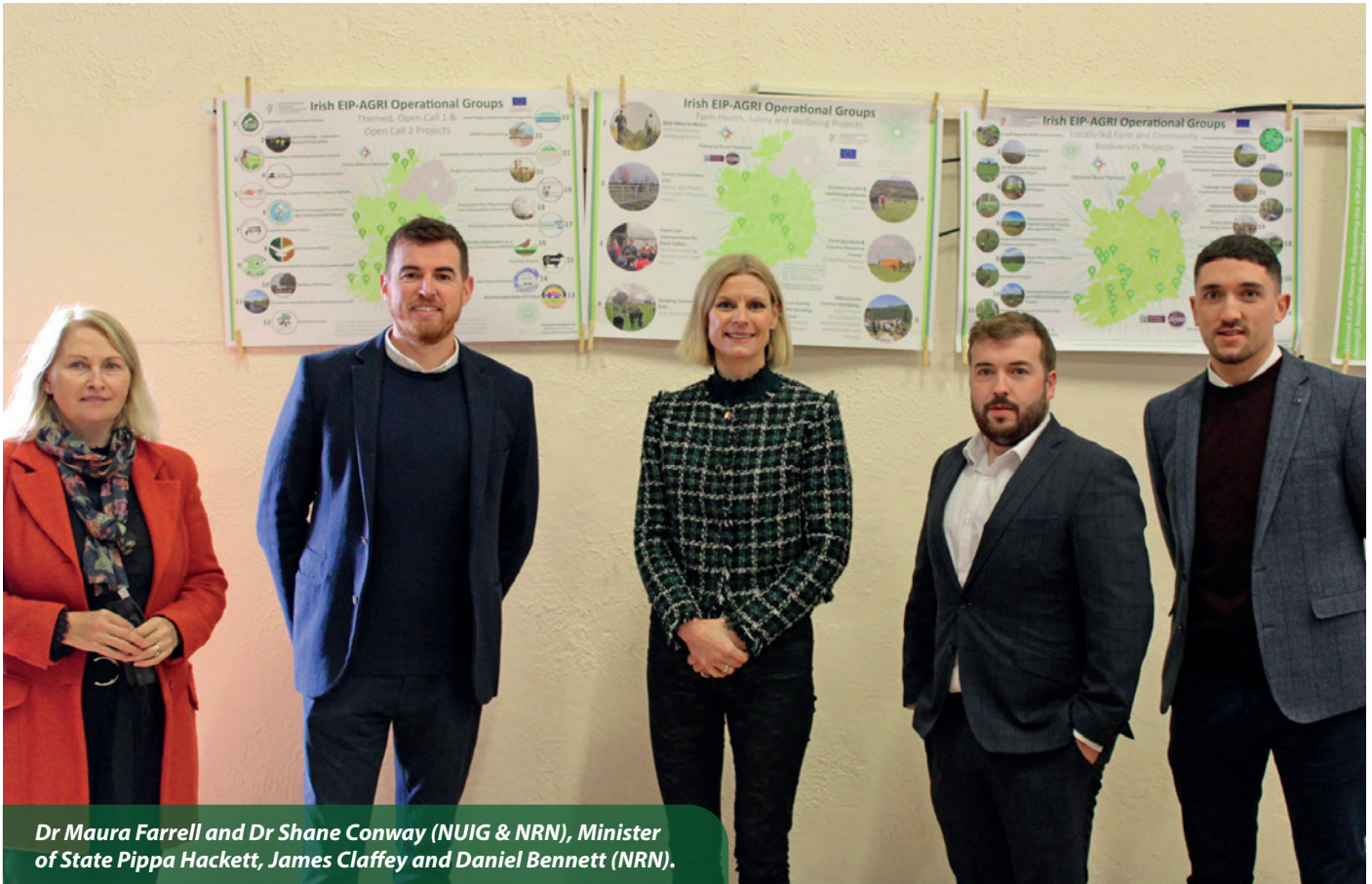
Father and son duo Michael and Norman Dunne from Maynooth, Co. Kildare were recently announced as the winners of the Farming for Nature Public Choice Award 2021 at this year's Burren Winterage Weekend award ceremony, following incredible enthusiasm and buy-in from the public to support this initiative. The Dunnes operate their 400-acre tillage farm under the principles of conservation agriculture, having moved gradually away from a conventional, intensive tillage enterprise to a regenerative farming system over the past 5 years. The Dunnes also participate in the DANÚ Farming Group EIP-AGRI Project. This project aims to implement a transition programme to a biological farming system for a group of sixteen individuals who have come together to learn about and carry out the basic principles of biological farming, in an effort to produce food, feed and forages of high nutritional quality.

Speaking after he and his father received their award, Norman Dunne said 'we are both extremely appreciative of all the support to win the public vote. To follow in the footsteps of the greats of Jim Cronin and Thomas O'Connor (previous winners) is quite a daunting task. But to be considered as equals really strives us forward. Here's to an exciting year ahead and many more farmers empowering each other with their knowledge of their landscape and their soils and of course their care for nature!'

The 7 nominees for the Farming for Nature Public Choice Award 2021 were a cross-section of this year's 23 Farming for Nature 'Ambassadors' who are adjudged to be managing their land and livestock in a way that benefits nature in their farms and communities, following a rigorous selection process of interviews, farm visits and assessments by a panel of judges, which included Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway's Rural Studies Centre working on the NRN Project. These 23 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. 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."

You can watch a video about Michael and Norman Dunne's farm, as well as the other nominees here: <https://www.farmingfornature.ie/awards/voting/> The NRN are delighted to have supported this inspiring initiative over the past 4 years.

Burren Winterage School EIP-AGRI Symposium 2021



Dr Maura Farrell and Dr Shane Conway (NUI Galway & NRN), Minister of State Pippa Hackett, James Claffey and Daniel Bennett (NRN).

Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Pippa Hackett, opened the symposium by highlighting the valuable lessons learned to date from Ireland's locally-led, farmer-centred, results-based approach towards the EIP-AGRI initiative. Minister Hackett said 'the EIPs have been a great success story here in Ireland. We saw there was a need for another way of delivering schemes on a more targeted basis and the results have been excellent. We now have 57 locally-led schemes run by my Department from small-scale community biodiversity projects to the much larger Hen Harrier project. All are making a huge contribution to improving our environment which is only possible due to the wonderful commitment of the farmers and project teams involved in these EIPs.'

This symposium was divided into three informative sessions. Each session explored the EIP-AGRI situation here in Ireland from a different perspective, whilst maintaining the same foci. Session 1 shared the innovative practices and impact of several EIP-AGRI Projects to date. Fergal Monaghan (Hen Harrier Project), Patricia Deane, (MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP Project), David Wallis (Danu Project), Eoin Kinsella (Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities EIP Project) and Henry O'Donnell (Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Project) participated in this enlightening session. Session

2, chaired by Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway's Rural Studies Centre working on the NRN Project, provided farmers participating in the Pearl Mussel Project, Mulkear EIP Project, Caomhnú Árann Project, Protecting Farmland Pollinators Project and North Connemara Locally led Agri-Environmental Scheme Operational Groups with a platform to share their experiences and opinions of the EIP-AGRI initiative. Dr Conway highlighted the value of the EIP-AGRI approach in making the best use of different types of knowledge (practical, scientific, technical, organisational, etc.) in an interactive way to help identify innovative solutions to issues at the farm level during this session. Finally, Session 3 focussed predominately on how lessons learned from existing EIP-AGRI projects can help inform the design and delivery of future agri-environmental schemes. Declan Byrne (SUAS Project), Kathryn Finney (Curlew EIP Project), Donal Sheehan (BRIDE Project), Caroline Lalor (FarmPEAT Project) and Dr Derek McLoughlin (LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature) were invited to speak on this experienced panel by the NRN. An NRN EIP-AGRI poster exhibition was also on display at this successful in-person symposium. A photo album from this event can also be found on the NRN's Facebook page, www.facebook.com/ruralnetwork/

New Booklet Showcase as the Role of LEADER in the Bioeconomy

As part of Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2021 the National Rural Network (NRN) produced and published a booklet entitled "LEADER and the Bioeconomy", showcasing the role that the LEADER Programme can play in the development and enhancement of Ireland's bioeconomy, through its locally-led, 'bottom-up' approach to meeting the needs of rural communities and enterprises.

The booklet features a diverse range of bioeconomy projects and initiatives throughout Ireland, which have been supported by the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 (extended to 2022).

Realising the true potential of the bioeconomy in rural Irish society through innovative bio-based projects and initiatives has the potential to assist Ireland's transition to a low-carbon economy, and could also greatly improve the quality of life for people in rural areas through increased employment opportunities, as well as other substantial environmental and socio-economic benefits.

The booklet can be accessed at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader



Join the NRN

Are you interested in rural development?

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, case studies and more.

For regular updates follow us on:



@ruralnetwork



/ruralnetwork



/company/national-rural-network

T: 090 - 6482744

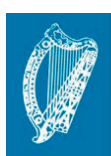
E: info@nationalruralnetwork.ie

W: www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

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



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Ireland's EU Structural and
Investment Funds Programmes
2014 - 2020
Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union



The European Agricultural
Fund for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas

