



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

2022 NRN Biodiversity Farmer of Year Andrew McMenemy, a calf-to-beef farmer from Co. Donegal (middle), with Declan Phelan (left) and James Claffey (right) from the NRN.



LEADER Programme Update

Activity in the LEADER programme has continued to increase. As of the end of July 2022, there were 5,420 LEADER projects approved with a total value of over €227m.

Since the Transitional LEADER programme came into effect on the 1st of April 2021, bridging the gap to the next LEADER programme in 2023, 935 projects have been approved for funding, worth a combined €41.7m. Moreover, some 140 projects are working their way through the approval process, which have an additional value of €7.2m.

LEADER has continued to progress due to the resilience of the different actors involved in delivering the programme. To learn more about LEADER funding, see: www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader

Donegal Man Named NRN Biodiversity Farmer of The Year

A Donegal man has been crowned National Rural Network (NRN) Biodiversity Young Farmer of the Year. Andrew McMenemy (32), from Castlefinn Co. Donegal, was announced as the winner at the FBD Young Farmer of the Year awards ceremony on 29 November in Cork.

Ireland's native fauna and flora are under threat and sustainable farming methods are essential to protect, enhance and halt the decline of biodiversity in Ireland. The National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award hopes to draw attention to this complex issue, by celebrating farmers who are farming in a sustainable manner by protecting and enhancing biodiversity on their farms.

Sustainability is quickly becoming a key driver for every management

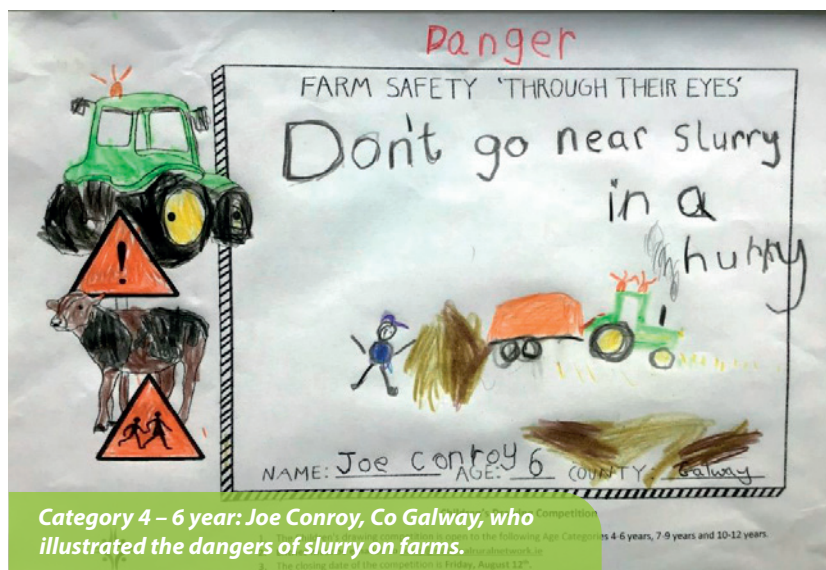
decision made on farms. Biodiversity is threatened by habitat loss, climate change and pollution. Agriculture can place significant pressure on biodiversity.

The National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award hopes to draw attention to this complex issue, by celebrating farmers who are farming sustainably by protecting and enhancing biodiversity on their farms.

The award is presented by the National Rural Network (NRN) and it is part of the FBD Young Farmer of the Year competition.

A full profile of the 2022 Biodiversity Farmer of the Year will be published in the next newsletter.

Farm Safety Through the Eyes of Children



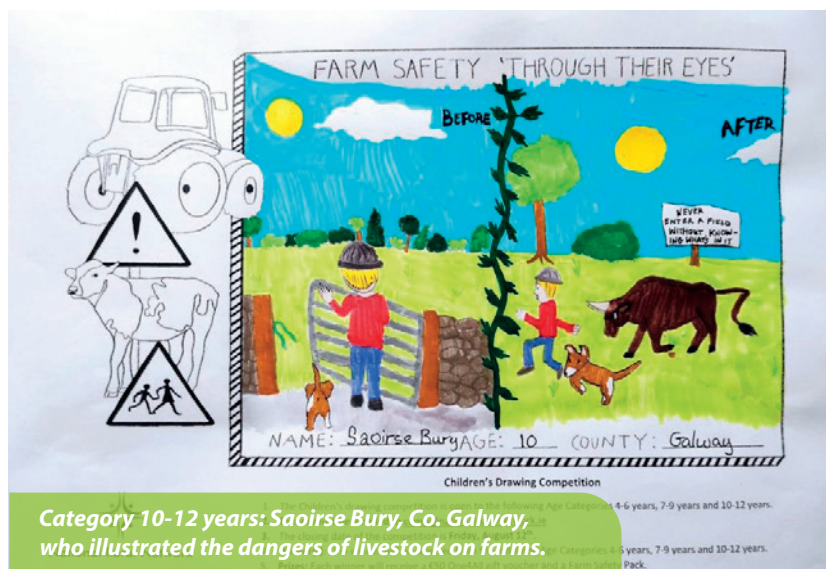
To mark Farm Safety Week (18th – 22nd of July) the National Rural Network (NRN) launched a drawing competition for children with the theme “Farm Safety: Through their eyes”.

Winners of the Children’s Drawing Competition: “Farm Safety: Through their eyes” are:

Farm Safety is a key priority of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 (extended to 2022), and it has been funded and promoted in many forms.

Under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II), the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) provides grant funding for particular investments to enhance the safety of farmers working with machinery and livestock. A core requirement for farmers to avail of funding through TAMS II is the completion of a half-day Health and Safety course or have completed a similar course within an associated time frame to drawdown.

The Farm Safety Investment items available to farmers include cattle crushes, replacement slats for pigs or cattle, calf dehorning crates, wheel changing crates, roof lights with safety cages, hydraulic motors to replace PTO shafts, manhole covers, replacement sliding doors, safety rails on silo walls and calving gates. An illustration of these items is available at: https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Safety-Items-Under-TAMSII_130622-1.jpg



Major European Rural Inspiration Award for LEADER Supported Irish Community-led Digital Initiative

The LEADER-supported 'Broadband 4 Our Community' social enterprise company in Piltown/Fiddown, Co. Kilkenny, was announced the winner of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Rural Inspiration Award's Digital Futures Category at the recent launch of the EU CAP Network, held on the 6th of October 2022 in Brussels, Belgium.

This year's Rural Inspiration Award (RIA) theme was 'The Future is Youth', inspired jointly by the European Year of Youth 2022, the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas, and the Rural Pact. It sought to promote the importance of European youth building a better future across four thematic categories: Green Futures, Digital Futures, Resilient Futures, and Socially Inclusive and Innovative Futures. It is envisaged that showcasing good practice examples that meet the wide range of economic, environmental and social challenges of the 21st century, through the 24 shortlisted projects for these awards, selected from a total of 111 entries across 24 Member States, will help inspire other rural communities to replicate similar initiatives in their own area, subsequently unlocking the potential of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF).

The Digital Futures category of this EU initiative that the Broadband 4 Our Community initiative won, consisted of 6 projects demonstrating sustainable approaches towards advancing the benefits of digitalisation in farming and rural communities, ranging from improving digital and broadband infrastructure and the provision of digital services, to the uptake of new technology to improving digital skills or knowledge. Formed by the local community upon learning that their villages were outside



Declan Rice (CEO, Kilkenny LEADER Partnership); Jim O'Brien (Project Manager B4OC); Kateriina Torvenin, Dr Maura Farrell (NUIG & NRN) and Ulla Kallio (from Ravaka, Finland).

the National Broadband Plan funding area, Broadband 4 Our Community has successfully developed a future-proofed 'fibre to the premises (FTTP) broadband network to the 750 homes and businesses in Piltown/Fiddown. Following an analysis development and training support from the LEADER Programme through Kilkenny LEADER Partnership, in which an FTTP network installation project plan was initially developed, community volunteers, both young and old, subsequently installed the infrastructure necessary to create the network through hard work and dedication. Physically, this included installing a total of 480 metres of buried ducting and overhead fibre serving the community, and the building of supporting infrastructure. This unique locally-led initiative has the potential to not only provide the community with an income from the operation but also to stimulate generational renewal in the locality by making the locality an attractive place to live and work. This community-led project is also closely aligned to the EU Digital Strategy and contributes to several other EU policies and initiatives, including Smart Villages, where such digital innovation is a key component. A case study on the was previously featured in the 2nd edition of the NRN's Smart Villages and Rural Towns Newsletter published in July 2022 (p.18). See www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/leader-news/nrn-smart-villages-and-rural-towns-newsletter-2022/

Case Study: Straw Incorporation Measure (SIM)



Walter Furlong on the family farm in Co. Wexford.

There are almost 10,000 farms farming over 300,000 hectares of tillage, representing 7.5% of all farm holdings in Ireland. The sector supports approximately 11,000 full-time jobs and is estimated to contribute over €1.3bn per annum to the Irish economic output. Tillage is regarded as having a good environmental footprint with low emissions, is important for biodiversity and is essential for some bird species (UCD, 2020).

Cereal crops include wheat, barley and oats. These are categorised depending on the time of year they are sown into 'Winter cereals' and 'Spring cereals'. Winter cereals are sown in the autumn, while Spring cereals are sown in the spring. Barley is the most widely sown cereal in Ireland and is used for animal feed and supplies the malting industries.

Soil health is a key pillar of tillage farming

Soil health is vital for the sustainability of any farming practice. Soil organic matter is an essential component of soil health. Soil Organic Matter (SOM) is the foundation for any productive and healthy soil and includes mineral matter, organic matter, water and air. SOM encompasses the remains of plants, animals and microbes at various stages of decomposition and the living component of soils, microorganisms, plant roots, and more significant soil life such as earthworms.

Soils high in SOM have good soil structure, can meet crops' nutrient demand, regulate water storage capacity, contribute to nutrient cycling, and capture and store carbon. High SOM soils also provide excellent habitats for microbes enhancing overall soil biodiversity (Teagasc).

Many tillage farmers incorporate cultivation practices to help improve SOM on their farms. Traditionally, cereals are harvested from mid-July through to September, and the grain is collected, dried and stored. The straw, a by-product from

growing the crop, yields approximately 1.1m tonnes of straw annually. Markets for straw usage include animal bedding, incorporation into animal feeds and soil incorporation. Recycling straw back to the soil improves soil structure and builds on existing organic matter content.

Walter Furlong, Young Farmer Co Wexford

The NRN recently met with Walter Furlong Jnr. from Caim outside Enniscorthy Co. Wexford. Walter is a young farmer who, alongside his father, manages a large area of tillage, including cereal crops such as wheat, barley and oats, and protein crops such as beans, rye and oilseed rape. A cornerstone of the Furlong farming practice is based on soil health.

"Since the 1990s, we have prioritised increasing soil organic matter and nutrient retention in the soil. Some of the changes include cultivation techniques and changes to cropping rotations."

Some of the following actions incorporated to enhance soil health:

- **Cultivation Techniques:**

In 1999, we swapped from using a regular plough to using minimum tillage.

- **Cropping Techniques:**

In 2004, Cover crops were incorporated. Cover crops are grown between rotations to avoid the land being laid naked with soil exposed after harvest; other benefits include prevention of soil erosion, limited nutrient loss, a reduction of incidence of disease, pests and weeds, allowing Nitrogen fixation, all contributing factors to building on soil organic matter content. "Catch crops have different rooting depths, which help improve soil

structure; this is important for the nutrient, water and carbon storage capacity of the soil and gives the ground a welcome break from continuous cereal production, feeding into added benefits such as a reduction in pest or weed levels in the crop."

- **Recycling Straw**

In the early 2000s, the straw from the harvest was chopped and incorporated back into the soil. Bailing straw to sell off-farm is expensive, but depending on markets can create an extra revenue stream for tillage farmers. In 2021, approximately 450 hectares of straw were incorporated into the soil to boost SOM with the rest baled and sold.

Straw Incorporation Measure (SIM)

In March 2021, the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine added a support measure for tillage farmers called 'The Straw Incorporation Measure (SIM)', which could be applied for as part of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). The measure is an Agri-environmental and Climate measure that operates during the transitional period between Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) programmes. SIM is supported by EU Recovery Instrument Funding under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2022.

The SIM was introduced as many tillage farmers do not have an on-farm supply of organic manures for soil applications. The SIM aims to encourage tillage farmers to boost soil organic matter levels through increased recycling of straw, adding to the carbon sequestration potential of tillage soils, thus reducing GHG emissions and further improving the sector's environmental sustainability.

Eligible applicants receive payment rates of:

- €250/Ha for incorporation of Oats, Rye, Wheat, and Barley by-product
- €150/Ha for incorporation of Oilseed Rape by-product

Walter successfully applied for the measure in 2021 and committed to incorporating the maximum eligible area of 40Ha. The straw must be incorporated into the soil as soon as possible post-harvest. The straw is finely chopped and is incorporated with either discs or tines. It is important to keep the incorporation as shallow to the soil surface as practically possible; this will:

- Encourage earthworm activity, and
- Reduce the loose soil material in case of adverse weather conditions.

Soon after the crops have been harvested, the straw must be chopped, spread evenly and then incorporated into the soil. An applicant can get paid on at least 5 hectares but no more than 40 hectares.

"The SIM measure embraces the regenerative agriculture approach as it helps reduce the amount of carbon extracted by returning the chopped straw into the soil. We submitted the commitment of the maximum eligible area of 40 hectares during the submission of our BPS application. We successfully applied and received an additional €10,000 in payments in 2021. It was welcomed support and contributed to lowering input costs which is important for the viability of the farm, while also feeding the soil some welcomed organic matter, and it's nice to get recognition for the work already being done on the farm."

Walter noted a subtle reduction in chemical fertiliser requirements over the last 5 to 10 years due to the combined farm practice changes such as using minimum tillage, cover crops and straw incorporation. "We have cut back our nitrogen applications by 10-15 units N/ha in the last number of years, with no impact on production, making a saving of €6.90/ha (based on a cost of €0.46/unit N), which is a lot across the cereals on the farm."

The NRN would like to thank Walter for taking the time out of his busy schedule to participate in this case study.



Soon after the crops have been harvested, the straw must be chopped, spread evenly and then incorporated into the soil

National Rural Network Publishes LEADER Food Initiative Booklet



The National Rural Network (NRN) recently produced and published a booklet showcasing 12 projects and initiatives throughout rural Ireland which have been supported under the LEADER Food Initiative.

Launched in May 2018, the LEADER Food Initiative was allocated €15 million as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme, to support the further development of new and existing food and beverage businesses throughout the country. Administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland, the LEADER Food Initiative provides financial supports, including funding up to €200,000, towards the renovation and extension of production facilities, the purchasing of processing equipment, as well as supporting participants in the artisan food and beverage sector in areas such as market development, competitiveness, and innovation.

This booklet, produced by the NRN, aims to showcase the diversity of projects supported under the LEADER Food Initiative throughout rural Ireland in recent years.

A selection of the projects showcased in the NRN's LEADER Food Initiative publication

Listed on the right are the enterprises featured in the booklet as well as the Implementing Partner of the LEADER Programme in each of their respective areas.

- Blanco Nino Ltd., Co. Tipperary (South Tipperary Development Company CLG)
- Ridgeway Farm Production Ltd., Co. Wicklow (County Wicklow Partnership)
- Camo's Artisan Foods Ltd., Co. Kerry (South Kerry Development Partnership CLG)
- The Artisan Pizza Company Ltd., Co. Dublin (Fingal LEADER Partnership)
- Knockanore Farmhouse Cheese, Co. Waterford (Waterford LEADER Partnership CLG)
- Kelly's Bakery Ltd., Co. Wexford (Wexford Local Development)
- Lavin's Fruit and Veg Ltd., Co. Mayo (South West Mayo Development Company CLG)
- Irish Fish Canners / Próiseáil (An Clochán Liath) Teoranta, Co. Donegal (Údarás na Gaeltachta)
- Praline Pastry Ltd., Co. Cork (Ballyhoura Development CLG)
- Butlers Bakery, Co. Galway (Galway Rural Development Company Ltd)
- Castle Snackfood Distribution Ltd., Co. Kilkenny (Kilkenny LEADER Partnership)
- Manorhill Home Bakery Ltd., Co. Cavan (Breffni Integrated Development CLG)

You can view or download the booklet in full here:

www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/leader-news/nrn-leader-food-initiative-booklet/



23rd NRN Meeting Focuses on Innovation & Implementing the CAP Green Architecture

The 23rd NRN meeting co-organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the Dutch Rural Network took place in Heerenveen, Netherlands on the 20th – 21st of September 2022. The meeting facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges between NRNs and other rural stakeholders from across the EU on the topics of innovation and supporting the green architecture of the CAP.

The first workshop explored different approaches NRNs (future National CAP Networks) can adopt to strengthen innovation support working with advisors, researchers and practitioners on preparing innovative projects. Inge Van Oost (DG AGRI/European Commission), spoke about the development of innovation support services and the increased role for CAP Networks in identifying and extracting innovative grassroots ideas in rural areas, and connecting relevant partners to develop these ideas further.

As part of the second workshop on implementing the CAP Green Architecture, Dr Shane Conway, Researcher with the University of Galway and the NRN, presented on 'How to Communicate Green Themes to Farmers', taking inspiration from the NRN's work with EIP-AGRI Operational Groups since 2017. Dr Conway showcased innovative multi-method communication strategies utilised by the NRN to support the EIP-AGRI initiative, aimed at bridging the gap between policy, research and practice, and which contribute towards

the achievement of green ambitions at farm level. In addition, Dr Conway highlighted the importance of listening to the lifetime experience of farmers working the land and taking daily care of their local environment through various knowledge exchange activities such as farmer-centered workshops and demonstration events, in line with the Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) approach. Presentations from the meeting are available here: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/23rd-nrn-meeting_en



Dr Shane Conway (University of Galway & NRN) and Daniel Bennett (Irish Rural Link & NRN) in attendance at the 23rd NRN meeting

Fifteen New Farming for Nature Ambassadors for 2022

The Farming for Nature (FFN) project has welcomed 15 inspiring new farmers to their growing Ambassador network. Now in its fifth year, FFN, supported by the NRN, was set up with the aim to source, share and celebrate the stories of farmers across Ireland who manage their land in a way that sustains nature, while providing a livelihood for their family. Nominations are sought annually from a broad panel of environmental experts and through a rigorous system of interviews, farm visits and assessments by a panel of judges (including Dr Shane Conway on behalf of the NRN); 15 of these farmers, from a diversity of farming systems and backgrounds across Ireland, have now been selected as Ambassadors this year. The new Ambassadors manage a wide range of very valuable habitats on their farms including species-rich grasslands, uplands, wetlands, woodlands and hedgerows.

Speaking about the importance of this initiative, Dr Brendan Dunford, founder and committed volunteer with Farming for Nature explained that "at a time of so much divisive debate around food security, biodiversity loss and climate change, this year's farming for nature ambassadors offer us the hope, inspiration and practical advice that we so desperately need to navigate the challenges – and embrace the opportunities – that lie ahead. These farmers deserve our respect, gratitude and support: they embody all that's great about rural Ireland and we are so proud of them". A cross-section of the new group of Farming for Nature Ambassadors 2022 was selected by the judging panel for the FFN Public Vote Award (see page 8 for Farming for Nature Public Choice Award Winner 2022).

More information can be found at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/farm-viability/farm-viability-news/farming-for-nature-ambassadors-2022/



National Rural Network

Farming for Nature Public Choice Award Winner 2022

Sean Condon, an organic dairy farmer from Crecora, County Limerick was recently announced as the winner of the Farming for Nature Public Choice Award 2022 at this year's Burren Winterage Weekend award ceremony, following incredible enthusiasm and buy-in from the public to support this initiative. Sean farms approximately 140 acres of good grassland and runs an extensive dairy farming system, milking 50 cows once a day. External inputs on the farm are extremely low and Sean takes pride in managing a low-input, low-intensity productive farm. Sean is the first dairy farmer to win this award.

The five nominees for the Farming for Nature Public Choice Award 2022 were a cross-section of this year's most recent 15 Farming for Nature 'Ambassadors'. These ambassadors are adjudged to be managing their land and livestock in a way that really benefits nature in their farms and communities, following a rigorous selection process of interviews, farm visits and assessments by a panel of judges. The judging panel included Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at the University of Galway's Rural Studies Centre working on the NRN Project. These 15 new 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. You can watch a video about Sean Condon's farm, as well as the other nominees at www.farmingfornature.ie/awards/voting/

The NRN are delighted to have supported this inspiring initiative over the past five years.

Join the NRN

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

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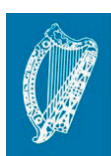
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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Ireland's EU Structural and
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2014 - 2020
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