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National Rural Network

NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

Contents

- LEADER 2014-2020.....2
- Kilbeggan Organic Foods2
- Irish Seed Savers Association3
- Join the NRN.....4

The National Rural Network (NRN) Consortium Coordination Group (from left to right): Michael Kenny, Seamus Boland, James Claffey, Billy Murphy, Deirdre Garvey, Philip Farrelly and Maria Pettit and (not pictured) Dr Maura Farrell & Maria O'Gorman



What is the Rural Development Programme (RDP)?

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 is part of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a set of goals, principles and rules through which the European Union (EU) builds support for European agriculture. The CAP has two parts or 'pillars'.

The first part (pillar 1) deals with direct payments to farmers and 'market measures'.

The second part (pillar 2) covers multi-year rural development measures, including those that focus on the environment and climate change. The National Rural Network (NRN) is supported through this second pillar of the RDP.

Find out more about the RDP at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

New consortium appointed to promote Rural Development Programme (RDP)

As Project Director for Ireland's National Rural Network (NRN), I am delighted to welcome you to our first quarterly newsletter.

Rural communities are facing an uncertain future, and many of our rural areas are under pressure due to loss of services, higher than average unemployment and lack of access to financial resources.

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 is an opportunity for all rural residents to create positive social, economic and environmental outcomes for their local areas.

The RDP is co-funded by the European Union's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the national exchequer. EU support for the RDP via the EAFRD will average €313 million annually, or a total sum of €2.19 billion over the RDP's seven year lifespan.

The NRN aims to maximise the impact of the RDP by bringing it into the lives of as many people and communities as possible, and with this mind, we are calling on all recipients of the RDP to contact us if you wish to highlight projects and best practice in your area.

This first issue of the NRN Quarterly Newsletter showcases the best practices from different elements of the RDP highlighting positive social, economic and environment outcome.

I invite you to visit our website www.nationalruralnetwork.ie for regular updates and opportunities.

Seamus Boland

Seamus Boland
Project Coordinator



LEADER 2014-2020

The LEADER initiative was set up by the European Commission in 1991 to drive rural development in local communities.

LEADER uses a "bottom up" or community-led local development approach to rural development.

The initiative will provide €250 million in financial support to Ireland's rural communities up to 2020. The funding will be managed by Local Action Groups (LAGs). These are partnerships of both public and private entities from each geographic area. The LAGs will be responsible for choosing and approving projects in their local areas.

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government will enter into funding agreements with the LAGs on a rolling basis from early 2016. After this, the LAGs will be inviting applications for funding from both private promoters and community groups for projects that are consistent with the priorities identified in the local development strategies of each.

For more information on LEADER 2014-2020 download the free guide and factsheet at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

Best practice:

A farm with a future

Kilbeggan Organic Foods is a successful family business run by Pat Lalor from his farm in Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath.

The Lalors have always grown cereal on Ballard Farm as part of a balanced and sustainable crop rotation. In times gone by their aim was to grow cereals for beef cattle and to sell the surplus cereal.

This all changed in July 1999 when Pat decided to convert to 'Certified Modern Organic Farming'; and so began Ballard Organic Farm.

The Lalor's organic oats crop was of such a good quality that it was decided in 2011 to develop the grain into products sold under the Kilbeggan Organic Foods brand.

New beginnings

Since the 1970's farming production systems in Ireland and across Western Europe, became intensive with the emphasis on production.

In some cases this led to over

production and the introduction of production limits or quotas.

"This resulted in reduced income from mainstream farming and hence the need arose for me to find other means of land use in order to maintain the family's income," says Pat.

"I spent a few years looking at a small number of alternatives, and I finally plucked up the courage to go for fully certified organic farming. The key issue which swung it for organic farming was that there was a clear message coming from the market place; 'we want organic food and we are prepared to pay for it'.

"My main reason for changing over to organic production was to make more money," Pat admits.

"The experience has been rewarding both in terms of economic returns and job satisfaction.

"But I suppose since then I've come to enjoy the organic way of farming.

"My job is to nurture the soil, look after it, get it into the best possible state of health." - Pat Lalor



"When I was a conventional farmer, I was a chemistry farmer but as an organic farmer, I am a biology farmer." My job is to nurture the soil, look after it, get it into the best possible state of health, so it will grow crops that are disease free.

"In conventional farming, there is a tendency to dominate nature, while in organic farming one must work with nature. Being an organic farmer is like being a real farmer again, one must try to understand the science of the soil and work with it, not dictate to it."

Growing Success

Today, five years since Pat set about producing, packaging and marketing his own consumer ready organic porridge, his products are being sold not only across Ireland, but in markets as far away as New York, Singapore, Thailand and the Middle East.

His Organic Porridge Oats has also received multiple awards, including a Great Taste Award 2013. These awards attracted over 9,500 entries from Ireland and the UK and were blind-judged by a panel of food experts.

"Accessing LEADER funding down through the years has been highly valuable to my business, particularly in the development of a visitor centre on my farm, which has been beneficial for tourism development and as a training centre. We have also benefited from the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS)."

Looking ahead, Pat is very positive about the future of Kilbeggan Organic Foods. "There is a lot of good will out there for artisan businesses like this, and I get a lot of pleasure from this job."

For more case studies visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

Irish Seed Savers is a living testimony to the richness and wealth of our agricultural legacy.



Best practice:

Preserving Ireland's agricultural heritage

Ireland is blessed with a rich agricultural legacy that stretches back thousands of years. But this unique heritage is increasingly under threat from changes in farming practices and environmental pressures.

Anita Hayes set up the Irish Seed Savers Association in 1991 with the aim of protecting, conserving and using Irish plant genetic resources including rare heritage seeds and grains. The work was initially done on a small farm in Co. Carlow before relocating to Capparoe, Scariff, County Clare in 1996.

Irish Seed Savers is a social enterprise which operates with 26 dedicated staff, the majority of which are part-time workers. It currently has approximately 600 vegetable varieties; 48 grain varieties; 140 native apple varieties and a potato collection.

One of Irish Seed Savers Association's main aims is to raise public awareness about the vulnerability of Irish agricultural biodiversity through workshops at schools and community groups. The workshops cover a range of topics including organic gardening, creating orchards, cheesemaking and bee keeping.

Irish Seed Savers attributes much of this success to the availability of LEADER funding, which was used for a range of essential work which included construction of a storage barn and a seed processing facility, as well as the fitting-out of a seed bank.

Irish Seed Savers are constantly expanding the scope of their work. Recent projects include the establishment of a native broad leaf woodland and a wildlife sanctuary. See www.irishseedsavers.ie

About the National Rural Network (NRN)

The National Rural Network (NRN) is a part of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. It will be managed by a consortium led by Irish Rural Link in partnership with The Wheel, NUI Galway and Philip Farrelly & Co.

Our aims

The overall aim of the NRN is to build and sustain a membership-based network that maximises the beneficial outcomes of the rural development programme. This aim will be achieved through the following objectives:

- Raising awareness of key issues of rural concern identified by the RDP and identifying best practice models within a national and international context that can be disseminated to relevant stakeholders.
- Creating a collaborative process between relevant stakeholders to enhance the delivery and quality of the RDP;
- Establishing a supportive themed working group system which will act on key themes emerging from the Rural development Programme;
- Facilitating communication of the RDP-outputs to targeted stakeholders and groups;
- Gathering best practice in all relevant areas and communicating and disseminating to all key stakeholders and groups;
- Supporting the Managing Authority in its networking, dissemination and communication objectives.

Functions of the NRN

The functions of the Network are defined in the European Union (EU) regulations, and the Rural Development Programme for Ireland (2014-2020) and can be summarised as follows:

- The identification and grouping of stakeholders involved in agriculture and rural development programme
- The convening of relevant seminars, conventions and workshops to ensure the use of best practice in programme delivery
- Development of a state-of-the-art website, development of project and statistical databases.
- Publication of regular updates on programme delivery to as wide an audience as possible
- The collection and analysis of indicators and evidence-based programme outputs.
- The provision of a comprehensive information service to groups and organisations
- Representing Ireland on the European Network for Rural Development and other relevant fora and promotion of the rural development programme nationally and abroad.

Our ambition is to bring the RDP into the lives of as many people and communities as possible by communicating its key opportunities and outputs to all relevant stakeholders.

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

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

For regular updates follow us on:



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