An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

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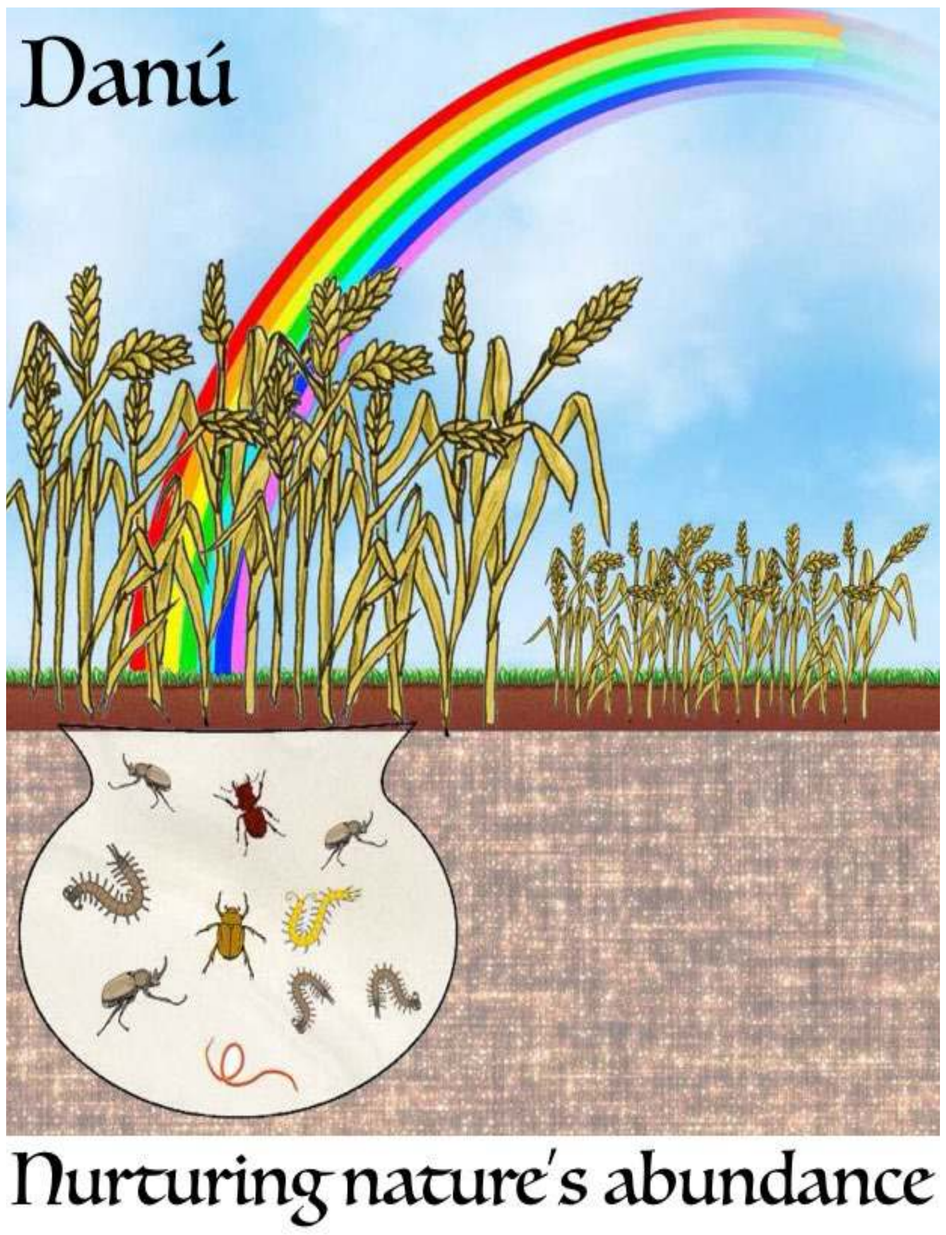
DANÚ Farming Group

Project Plan for a Biological Farming Transition Programme

Geographical Location	Ireland (not limited to one region)
Keywords	Biological Farming, Sustainable farming, Biodiversity
Project Leader	David Wallis (email: wallis.david94@gmail.com)
Project Type	Operational Group
Starting Date	2018
End Date	2022
Project Status	Ongoing
Main Funding Source	Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020
Total Budget	€400,000



Project Rationale

Biological farming is a holistic approach to soil, crop and pasture management that accounts for the agronomic, environmental, nutritional, physical, chemical and biological components of what constitutes a healthy soil. It combines the best practices of conventional and organic farming with an emphasis on attaining pro-ductive soils that display high levels of biological activity. The principles of biological farming are increasingly being adopted in many countries worldwide as evidence grows that its practices can lead to the production of nutrient-dense food, feed and for-ages in addition to minimising plant diseases with minimal or no herbicide and pesticide usage. The existing nature of high output tillage and pasture production systems currently in operation in Ireland has led to a greater interest in, and openness to more sustainable farming practices, such as biological farming.

Project Aims & Ojectives

The project aims to develop a conventional to biological farming transition programme 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.

To achieve these goals, the project will pursue the following specific objectives:

(i) Review current farming practices to identify weaknesses in existing soil, crop and pasture management systems;
(ii) Develop clear, workable guidelines for a successful and cost-effective transition programme to biological farming that any interested farmer can implement based on a sound understanding of soil structure, chemistry, biology and plant nutrition &
(iii) Develop and maintain high levels of soil biological function that will facilitate the production of nutrient dense food, feed and forages, in addition to leading to an increase in soil organic matter and carbon sequestration potential.

Project Activities

- Set up control and trial plots on twelve farms. Baseline information will consist of subjective assessments and objective meas-urements (comprehensive soil tests and bio assays). Treatments will be determined on these results.
- Use treatments to improve soil biological activity and function over the course of the project. Treatments will be adjusted on the basis of their efficacy.
- Monitor and evaluate control and trial plots over the period of the project using an array of in-field and laboratory measurements.
- Monitor control and trial input costs and output values to assess cost of transition process.
- Hold discussion group meetings, workshops and study days throughout the duration of the project. Open days for all interested farmers in years 3, 4 & 5.
- Disseminate results through various media on an on-going basis (e.g. a Danú Biological Farming Group account will be set up on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter).