



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

Raymond Langan, winner of the NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award (center), with, from left to right, James Healy (National President of Macra na Feirme), Aoife Smith (NRN), Freda Salley (NRN), Fiona Muldoon (CEO of FBD Insurance) and Joe Healy (President of the IFA)



Climate Change in the Spotlight at NRN Seminar

More than 60 agricultural advisors, researchers and other stakeholders recently gathered in Tullamore Co. Offaly, for a special seminar on the relationship between climate change and agriculture, hosted by the National Rural Network, in association with the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM). The event featured contributions from DAFM, Teagasc, leading researchers from NUI Maynooth, NUI Galway, the Irish Farmers' Association, the Agricultural Consultants Association and Philip O'Brien, Officer at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Secretariat to the Climate Change Advisory Council, Ireland. The presentations are available at <https://goo.gl/tzGnY4>

Co. Mayo Farmer Named Ireland's Biodiversity Farmer of the Year

Raymond Langan, a farmer from Ballycastle, Ballina, Co. Mayo was named as Ireland's first National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year at the FBD Young Farmer of the Year Awards on 11 September.

The National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award recognises a farmer who is farming in a sustainable manner by encouraging biodiversity and protecting the environment.

Raymond was chosen from a strong shortlist for his unwavering enthusiasm for protecting the environment. He farms tough terrain close to the coastline in Co. Mayo, where - working with other farmers - he part farms some 59 hectares of commonage. Here he has 45 breeding ewes and their followers on an additional 24 acres, half of which is low-input permanent pasture and traditional hay meadow, both actions in the Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS).

The judges were very impressed by his limited amount of dosing and antibiotics use, while Raymond has also expressed a keen interest in beekeeping and is taking steps to establish hives on his land by next spring.

Congratulating Raymond, 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 farmers who have expressed a passion not only for farming but sustainability and biodiversity in their farming practices. When we visited some of these farms, we saw wonderful examples of what it is to farm in tandem with the environment. In the end, Raymond was chosen as the National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year for his deep commitment to and enthusiasm for sustainable farming."

See page 4 for more.

Ireland's National Rural Network – Punching Above its Weight

National Rural Networks are networks of rural development stakeholders set up in every EU Member State. Ireland's current National Rural Network (NRN) was established in 2016 and the Managing Authority for the NRN is the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

We have disseminated 34 printed and electronic newsletters to a range of stakeholders such as farmers and farm families, agricultural advisors, farmer representative organisations, rural development companies, rural enterprises, LAGs and public representatives.

A total of 77 case studies have been published in the NRN newsletter and on the website www.nationalruralnetwork.ie. The case studies cover a wide range of themes, including implementation of the LEADER programme, EIP-AGRI operational groups, diversification of farm income, the promotion of biodiversity and actions that address climate change.



702

public and private agricultural advisors have engaged with the NRN.

Since the NRN was established, almost 3,200 rural stakeholders have attended 60 NRN events, held in every county in Ireland. These include networking and information sessions, seminars and conferences on a wide range of themes such as biodiversity and climate change, EIP-AGRI, LEADER and farm viability and competitiveness. For example, more than 700 public and private agricultural advisors have engaged with the NRN.



77

case studies published on www.nationalruralnetwork.ie and in NRN newsletters

3,189

rural stakeholders have attended our 60 events.



A key way that the NRN communicates with rural stakeholders is through social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter. We currently have almost 5,900 followers on social media.

The website is a rich and innovative source of information on Ireland's Rural Development Programme (2014-2020). Eleven blogs, written by guest contributors who are experts in their fields, have been published on issues related to the RDP. Topics covered include collaborative farming, planning farm investment, young farmers, women in farming, digital skills in farming and mobilizing forestry biomass by sustainable means. More than 160 RDP-related videos have been uploaded to the website.

5,900

followers on social media.



You can join the NRN free at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

LEADER Funds Renewable Energy Heating System at Hotel Doolin



energy-efficient event space in the county, and perhaps in Ireland. The steel frame hints at the structure of a typical farmyard shed, while allowing a clear span of the internal spaces. The design also maximises solar gain with strip roof lights on the southern roof, space heating through air-to-water heat pumps and ventilation via a heat recovery system. The concrete block walls and floor act as thermal mass to retain the heat build-up internally," says Donal.

The LEADER Programme is playing a key role in maximising the potential of environmental actions which contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas in Ireland.

For example, LEADER funding of €29,700 from Clare Local Development Company has enabled Hotel Doolin in Co. Clare to install a renewable energy heating system in their new Eco Wedding Barn. The Barn is a first for Doolin Village and the new facility bridges the traditions of a utilitarian agricultural building enclosing a courtyard and the modern needs of a low energy contemporary wedding venue. The project was funded under the Development of Renewable Energy sub-theme of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020. This particular sub-theme, premised on the need to mitigate against the impact of climate change, falls within Ireland's Rural Environment LEADER theme.

As part of the project, nine Daikin ducted indoor units, connected to three outdoor units, were installed in the new Eco Barn. Each indoor unit has a cooling capacity of six kilowatts and a heating capacity of seven kilowatts. This energy-efficient system of heating also has a coefficient of performance (COP) of 4.5. In other words, for every one kilowatt of electrical power consumed, it provides four and a half kilowatts of heating. This efficiency significantly exceeds any other type of electric heating and it is far more efficient than oil or gas.

Donal Minihane, Manager of Hotel Doolin, is excited about the potential of the project: "The desire to be unique and innovative in everything we do is now following through to our barn project. We want this venue and the events that take place in it to be exciting, innovative and inspiring. It will be the most



Staff from Hotel Doolin in the new Eco Barn wedding venue

This successful LEADER-funded project was showcased on a poster produced by Dr Shane Conway and Dr Maura Farrell (from the National University of Galway and NRN), at a LEADER and the Rural Environment workshop held by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the NRN in April 2018. This workshop aimed to build capacity amongst members of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners under the Rural Environment theme of the LEADER Programme. The project is also featured on an interactive storyboard of LEADER projects on the NRN's website. For more information on this and other LEADER-funded projects visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader

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Spotlight: Raymond Langan, NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year

Raymond Langan from County Mayo was declared as winner of the inaugural Biodiversity Farmer of the year as part of the FBD Young Farmer of the year awards on 11 September.



Raymond with Johnny Sheehan (NRN) at the National Ploughing Championships

Raymond farms tough terrain close to the coastline near Ballycastle, Ballina, Co. Mayo, where, working with other farmers, he part farms some 59 hectares of commonage. He also has 45 breeding ewes and their followers on an additional 24 acres.

He is a participant in the Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) and has been undertaking (GLAS) actions such as low input permanent pasture (LIPP), traditional hay meadows, bird boxes, bat boxes, conservation of solitary bees (sand and boxes) and planting a grove of native trees.

Raymond allows the hedgerows around his farm to flower and maintains the beautiful traditional stone walls which act as habitats for a whole range of native plants and creatures. Raymond also has a keen interest in beekeeping and plans to establish beehives on the farm next spring.

Raymond farms commonage land with six other people, and says sustainable stocking rates are required to manage the grass and heather on the commonage. Producing finished lamb from hill sheep is possible where sufficient greenland is available, but it takes good grassland management to keep the sheep thriving.



Raymond at the edge of his commonage located at Ballyknock Co. Mayo

On winning the NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award, Raymond said, "Biodiversity is something I've always been conscious of and agri-environmental schemes like the GLAS Scheme are great for farmers because we want to have a positive impact on the environment and farm in a sustainable manner. We are custodians of the land and hope to pass it on to the next generation in good condition. Ireland's native wildlife is under threat and sustainable farming methods are essential to protecting and enhancing the declining biodiversity in rural areas. In the years ahead, sustainability will be part of almost every management decision made on farms."

Using a tool developed by the National Biodiversity Data Centre, the NRN team found that within a 10km radius of Raymond's farm, there are 89 different bird species present, nine of which are listed as protected species. Raymond says adequately managing the commonage also benefits the ground-nesting birds which reside in the area.

Presenting the award on behalf of the National Rural Network, Agricultural Consultant Philip Farrelly, said action must be taken to prevent the decline in farmland birds, bees and butterflies. He believes biodiversity is likely to feature heavily in the EU's next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with new strategies to protect and improve the state of Europe's biodiversity, therefore, the CAP payment should reward the delivery of environmental public goods that the consumer is willing to pay for such as low input permanent pasture, green cover and crop rotation.

If you would like to find out more about biodiversity please visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity

Met Éireann's Agri-Climate Activities



“Met Éireann provides agricultural related services directly to the community...”

Met Éireann maintains and develops a substantial program of climate observations for the country. Over the last 100 years, it was common for a weather observer to spend their entire career recording observations at one particular weather station and considering this monumental determination by observers over the last century, Met Éireann takes great pride in maintaining, developing and reanalysing Ireland's national climate archive.

Future climate modelling is also a core activity of Met Éireann. Through the EC-Earth consortium and collaborative projects (largely involving our colleagues at the Irish Centre for High-End Computing), work is continuing on global climate simulations, as well as downscaling the output for the local Irish region. It is these local Irish climate change projections that are routinely communicated and used by policy makers and academics.

Due to the recognised importance of the agricultural sector in Ireland, Met Éireann established a dedicated Agricultural Meteorology Unit in 1965, which has remained active to this day. The primary aim of this Unit is to support the Irish agricultural community through the provision of modern meteorological products and services.

Met Éireann agriculture related services provided directly to the target community include the online daily farming forecast, the dedicated Farming Weather RTE television broadcast, soil moisture deficit information and blight warnings. The majority of Met Éireann's work in this area is, however, hidden from public view.

Through collaborations with Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, specialised climate services have been developed to assist these government organisations support the community.

As an example, climate change models run by Met Éireann and its partners, predict a higher frequency of heavy rainfall events and longer dry spells during future summers. The earlier arrival of spring temperatures and plentiful supply of moisture can accelerate early grass/shrub growth. If followed by very dry summer conditions, there is an increased potential for fire risk and this additional ground 'fuel' could rapidly spread forest fires. Met Éireann runs forest fire severity products driven by weather forecasts, to assist The Forestry Service in issuing fire risk warnings, aimed at protecting life and property.

In another example, a warming world has seen some viruses, traditionally more common to Mediterranean regions, migrate further north. Some of these viruses (e.g. Blue Tongue Virus) can be spread by midges carried in the wind from the Continent. While Ireland can monitor and control animals physically entering the country, little can be done to stop the windborne incursion of virus infected midges from our overseas neighbours. Another challenge is to predict the windborne dispersion of very contagious viruses such as foot-and-mouth in the event of an outbreak in Ireland. Again working with its partners Met Éireann has developed and now runs meteorologically driven airborne virus dispersion models to help relevant Irish authorities in their emergency preparedness.

In addition to these operational products, Met Éireann collaborates in a vast array of international, national and local research projects related to agriculture, weather and climate. It is this ongoing research which ensures that Irish society and decision makers have access to the best available, scientifically verifiable, information related to both past and future climate as well as weather related extremes. It is a combination of this work that provides a scientific basis for policy related to climate action.

Beef Data Genomics Programme: Driving Efficiency in the Suckler Herd



"The beef data genomics programme (BDGP) is an effort to improve the genetic merit of the suckler herd..."

The efficiency of Ireland's beef herd is currently in the spotlight. Farmers have to take steps to improve efficiency and to reduce carbon emissions per unit of beef from their suckler herds. The beef data genomics programme (BDGP) is an effort to improve the genetic merit of the suckler herd through better fertility and earlier finishing of cattle - both of which are important.

The recently announced Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP) program will build on the success of the BDGP and will also focus on improving efficiency within the beef herd. The (BEEP) program will include a €20 million fund which will focus on measuring efficiencies of the suckler cow, with a view to further reducing carbon emissions per unit of beef from the suckler herd.

The BDGP was introduced in 2015 and is designed to improve the genetic merit of suckler herds and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Irish beef herd. The aim of the scheme is to utilise genetics to address the decline of key maternal traits among the national suckler herd. Utilising genetics provides a double dividend of improving profitability and carbon efficiency of the national herd.

There are currently 24,000 farmers and 550,000 cows participating in the scheme, which represents 55% of the total suckler beef cow herd in Ireland. Farmers are paid €90 per cow, per year, to complete key actions in relation to the scheme. (For example recording, genotyping and targets for four and five star cows and bulls).

The scheme has resulted in significant improvements in maternal traits e.g., calves/cow/year has improved from 0.80 in 2014 to 0.87 by the end of 2017.



Teagasc and the Irish Cattle Breeders Federation have undertaken validation works across multiple herds over the last three years. This work has confirmed that 5 star cows are:

- more fertile
- lighter (requiring less feed)
- have more milk (i.e., a heavier weanling)
- produce a heavier carcass
- more carbon efficient compared to 1 star animals

The Euro-Star Index is a breeding index designed to aid beef farmers in the selection of more profitable breeding animals. It quantifies the genetic component of an animal's performance across all traits of importance for Irish suckler farms.

Learning from European Experience of Implementing the LEADER Programme



Dr Shane O'Sullivan



Susan Grieve, ENRD Contact Point (right), with Dr. Maura Farrell from the NRN

Networking and knowledge exchange is at the core of the Transnational Education in LEADER Implementation 2 (TELI2) project which brought together LEADER organisations and academic institutions from a number of European countries. The project is funded through Erasmus+.

On 29th August Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT), SECAD (a local development company) and the National Rural Network organised a seminar to share project implementation experience with Local Action Groups (LAGs) and LEADER organisations of implementing the project. The seminar was supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

The purpose of the TELI2 project was to research the learning needs for successful implementation of the LEADER programme, develop a practice-based accredited training course for LEADER organisations and to enhance skills in the delivery of LEADER.

The event was chaired by Dr. Maura Farrell of the NRN and participants were welcomed by Dr. Liam Browne, Vice President for Research, Development and Innovation in LIT. JP Mulherin from DRCD gave an overview of the roll out of the LEADER programme in Ireland.

Seamus Hoyne from LIT gave an overview of the TELI2 project. Dr. Shane O'Sullivan outlined the results of a Training Needs Analysis conducted with LAGs and LDCs in Ireland, Slovenia, Croatia, Poland, Romania and Portugal. He highlighted how this led to development of the Certificate in LEADER Programme Management. In terms of the future of the accredited course, a number of delivery options were discussed, including offering it on a fee-paying basis.

Ryan Howard, CEO of SECAD, highlighted the benefits to SECAD of getting involved and made a number of recommendations for expanding transnational LEADER

initiatives. Ross Curley, Development Officer with SECAD and a participant in the accredited course, noted that "participation in the pilot scheme was an opportunity to share both my own and SECAD's experience. Among the topics we explored was the effectiveness of LEADER over the last 20 years, methods for effective animation and activation of rural communities and LAG structures and roles for the future."

Louis Duffy is a Board member of SECAD and also participated in the accredited course. Louis found the examples of projects from across Europe provided inspiration for new ideas. "While Ireland is further along the cycle, we can now learn again from other countries." He highlighted the need for a collaborative approach to supporting communities.

Susan Grieve from the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Contact Point gave the keynote address, providing a European perspective on simplification of the LEADER process and the potential benefits to programme implementation in Ireland. She presented the results of a LEADER LAG survey carried out in 2017. This highlighted a number of areas where the LEADER process could be improved, including:

- simpler application forms
- simpler and more proportionate system of controls for smaller projects
- simplified cost options
- better common knowledge and networking between LAGs, the Managing Authority and NRNs.

The presentations from the seminar can be downloaded at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/news

12th NRN Meeting Focuses on Networking

The 12th NRN meeting, which took place in Tallinn, Estonia on 16th and 17th September, explored methods of improving the networking section of the ENRD website, specifically the NRN toolkit.

Networks and networking provide crucial support to the achievement of rural development objectives in Europe through, for example, the sharing of knowledge and exchange of ideas" (ENRD website). Rural Networks have a critical role in the delivery of the Rural Development Programmes and must continuously identify more effective methods of sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas. This meeting facilitated a discussion among Rural Networks on potential improvements in the networking section of the ENRD website. The discussions suggested that the structure of the networking section should be simplified, making it more accessible. Feedback from the roundtable illustrated that website content should be short and clear.

The ENRD Contact Point used this meeting as opportunity for Rural Networks to suggest ideas for the structure and content of the Rural Networking conference to be held in Brussels on 11 and 12 April 2019. The audience believed that the conference should highlight good practices, allow stakeholder networking and provide rural networks with the opportunity to showcase their work and outreach. ENRD will be hosting a Good Practice Competition across the six categories of rural revitalisation, social inclusion, environment & climate action, LEADER, improving competitiveness and popular vote. The winner of each category will be invited to attend the Rural Networking Conference in April 2019. Full details of the Good Practice Competition will be available on the nationalruralnetwork.ie website in the upcoming weeks.

What is the NRN?

The NRN is a membership network for farmers, agricultural advisors, rural communities and others interested in rural development.

It provides up-to-date and conferences to maximise the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 for rural stakeholders.

The NRN is managed by a consortium led by Irish Rural Link in partnership with The Wheel, NUI Galway and Philip Farrelly & Co.

The NRN aims to:

- increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development;
- improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes;
- foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.

The NRN is focusing on specific themed areas over the coming years:

- BIODIVERSITY
- CLIMATE CHANGE
- EU LIFE
- EIP-AGRI
- LEADER
- VIABILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS OF FARMING COMMUNITIES

For more information visit 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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Ireland's EU Structural and
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Europe investing in rural areas