



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Andrew Doyle TD (third from the right) with the organisers of the 13th NRNs meeting, from left to right: David Lambe (ENRD), Seamus Boland (NRN), James Claffey (NRN), Veronika Korčeková (ENRD) and Michael Gregory (ENRD)



Significant increase in LEADER activity

Activity under the LEADER Programme increased significantly in 2018 and some key achievements included:

- Funding approval of €38 million for 984 LEADER projects
- 589 payments to over 500 individual project promoters to the value of €12.5 million
- 180 full-time equivalents (FTE) new jobs created in LEADER supported enterprises with a further 589 (FTE) existing jobs sustained across a variety of sectors
- Completed works on tourist facilities attracted in the region of 350,000 visitors
- Participation of over 6,600 young people in completed rural youth projects
- The joint launch of the LEADER Food Initiative, with a budget of €15million.

At the end of April 2019, 1,867 projects have been approved for funding of €64.4 million, and a further 403 projects seeking €25.4 million are at various stages in the approval process. For more see www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader

Athlone Plays Host to 13th NRNs' meeting

On 21st February, representatives from 24 EU Member States (and 28 National Rural Networks) gathered in Athlone, Co. Westmeath, for the 13th NRNs' meeting. The gathering was hosted by Ireland's National Rural Network (NRN) and the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), the body that brings together all the stakeholders working on rural development in the EU. The meeting tackled four themes: connecting the delivery chain; open space topics; updates on rural networking activities, and the networX event which took place in Brussels on 11th and 12th April.

Participants were also given the opportunity to attend a fieldtrip on the theme of Generational Renewal. Delegates visited two family farms in the Midlands, both excellent examples of successful farm succession by the next generation.

Pat Lalor's family farm produces and markets organic food products from the farm's own organic oat crop. Pat's son, John, returned to Ireland, after several years working abroad, in order to support his family's business in the marketing of its farm products.

Meanwhile, the Connors family farm is a third-generation beef farm. Dave and his son Rob are now involved in the Succession Farm Partnership Scheme, which offers the possibility for part-time farming and the transfer of land.

For more on generational renewal and succession, please see page 2.

The NRN would like to thank both the Lalor and Connors families for hosting the fieldtrip.

A report on the 13th NRNs meeting is available at www.bit.ly/2GIGbKf

Generational Renewal Workshop: Making Rural Areas More Attractive for Young People



Delegates visited the Connors family's beef farm

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), in conjunction with the NRN, held a Generational Renewal workshop entitled 'Attracting Young Farmers and Entrepreneurs in Rural Areas' on 22nd of February, the day after the 13th NRNs' meeting.

Interest in generational renewal and its impact on the structural development and growth of rural areas and the farming sector, has grown considerably amid concerns about depopulation, limited employment opportunities and migration from rural areas. In particular, an aging European farming population and the steady decline in the number of young farm families are widely reported as key factors in the demoralization of rural communities. In 2017, the European Commission estimated that only 5.6% of all European farms were run by farmers under the age of 35, while over 31% of all farmers in the EU were older than 65 years of age. Consequently, it is increasingly clear that a major challenge presents itself in creating a more age-diverse rural with population. So much so that European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, maintains that generational renewal must be one of the priorities of future CAP reform.

The NRN team at NUI Galway - Dr Maura Farrell and Dr Shane Conway - were among the speakers at the Generational Renewal workshop. Dr Farrell presented on the policy tools in Ireland which have been put forward to improve generational renewal for young farmers and new entrants, while Dr Conway gave

a presentation on the current situation regarding land mobility (i.e. transfer of land from one farmer to another, or from one generation to the next) in different EU Members States. Other presenters representing Ireland included young rural entrepreneur and founder of Mid-Ireland Adventure, Jonathan O'Meara. This adventure sports business, supported via the LEADER Programme, provides a range of adventure sports activities to a diverse local and international client base, thus contributing to the sustainability and viability of the local area. Successful examples of youth entrepreneurship from Italy, France and Germany were similarly showcased at the event.

Furthermore, workshop attendees from NRNs across the EU visited the farm of Dave and Rob Connors in the midlands. Here, the Connors detailed their successful experience of engaging in the Succession Farm Partnership Scheme.

Attendees also visited Pat and John Lalor's family farm-based food business, Kilbeggan Organic Foods, during this field trip. These site visits illustrated how the Rural Development Programme in Ireland is helping to ensure the survival, continuity and future prosperity of the agricultural sector, traditional family farm model and broader sustainability of rural society.

More information about this workshop can be found at: www.bit.ly/2E1brBC

EIP-AGRI: New Booklet Highlights Work of Operational Groups



In Ireland, EIP-AGRI projects are funded by the DAFM and the European Union under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 – 2020. A budget of €59m is set aside for these projects. EIP-AGRI projects are developed by Operational Groups which bring together different actors such as farmers, researchers, advisors and agri-businesses to identify innovative solutions to particular challenges facing the agri-food sector and rural economy.

The 23 Irish EIP-AGRI Operational Groups align well with Ireland's RDP and national priorities and address challenges such as biodiversity, profitability and sustainability and harness creativity and resourcefulness which is the hallmark of Ireland's rural sector. The majority of the projects are bottom-up, led by farmers who are passionate about the future of farming and the environment.

The NRN has also created case study posters and an interactive database of all Irish EIP-AGRI projects to further disseminate and promote the Irish EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, nationally and internationally. This information, graphically displayed on a Storyboard platform on the EIP-AGRI section of the NRN website (www.nationalruralnetwork.ie), consists of a geographical map of Ireland combined with user-friendly interactivity and an individual infographic for each project. This useful tool also includes links to the websites and social media accounts of the EIP-AGRI projects.

The National Rural Network (NRN) team at NUI Galway has, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine DAFM and the NRN, designed and produced a booklet entitled **EIP-AGRI: Ireland's Operational Groups 2019 to highlight and promote the 23 Irish 'EIP-AGRI: Ireland's Operational Groups 2019'**.

This booklet, aimed at inspiring people in the farming community and rural areas to maximize the success of the objectives set out in the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, details the main aims, objectives, activities and background of each of the successful EIP-AGRI projects. It was launched by Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the 17th of April 2019 in Agriculture House, Dublin.

The 23 Irish EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are active across Ireland

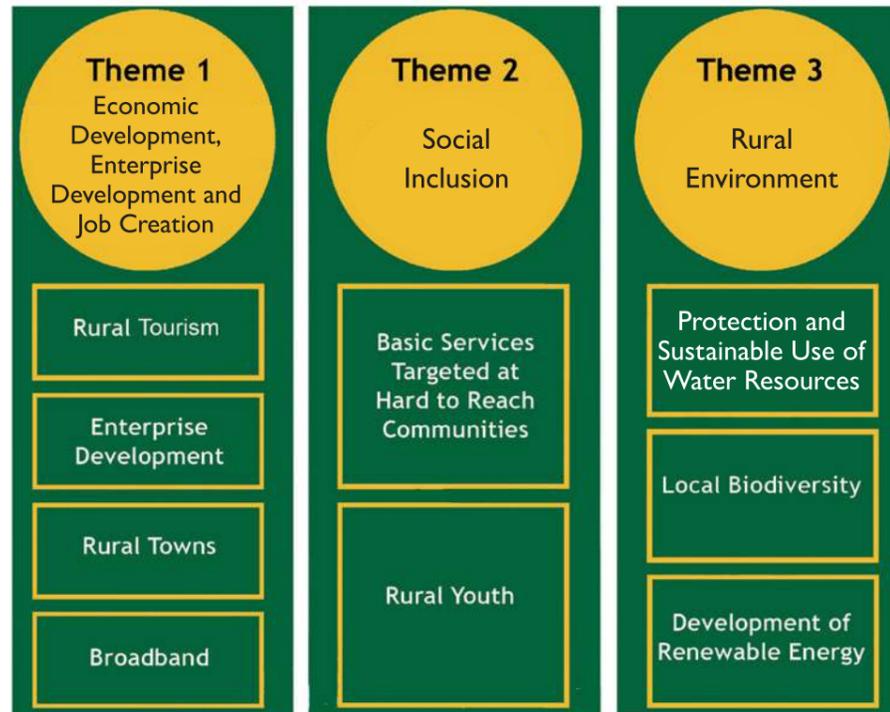
The European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) was launched in 2012 to contribute to the EU's 'Europe 2020 Strategy' of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.



The EIP-AGRI booklet and the interactive database have been designed and produced by Dr Shane Conway, Dr Maura Farrell and Dr Aisling Murtagh (who are based in the Discipline of Geography's Rural Studies Research Cluster at NUI Galway) on behalf of DAFM and the NRN.

The new booklet and interactive database is available at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/eip-agri and on the DAFM website <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie>

Process and Practicalities: The LEADER Approach Explained



Themes, funding calls and rates

The LEADER Programme 2014-2020 targets funding towards key areas in need of support. Projects are supported in three thematic areas. Themes are broad enough to enable funding of a broad range of community-led projects, from both private enterprise and community groups. Some types of activity cannot be funded, for example, insurance, legal expenses, planning application fees and working capital.

LAGs may operate a 'rolling call' for LEADER funding applications and accept applications on an ongoing basis. Targeted calls allow LAGs to concentrate funding in specific strategic areas of need or opportunity.

The LEADER Programme provides funding to support community-led rural development. Below, we explore how the LEADER funding process works in practice, providing an overview of the main stages and requirements when making an application.

Where to apply and project types supported

Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs)

Decisions on LEADER funding applications are made at a local level by a network of 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs). They approve applications which align with the objectives of their Local Development Strategy, developed in consultation with the local communities. Local Development Companies in each area are responsible for the day to day management and co-ordination of the LEADER Programme, either as implementing partners (IPs) in a wider LAG or by acting as the LAG itself. Applications for LEADER funding are made to these Local Development Companies. Project Officers within these companies are the first port of call when thinking about applying for LEADER funding.

Depending on the nature of the project and the applicant type, different rates of funding aid apply. For example, analysis and development projects from a private business can be funded up to 75% of the total project costs, while for community applicants this rises to 90%.

How to apply for LEADER funding

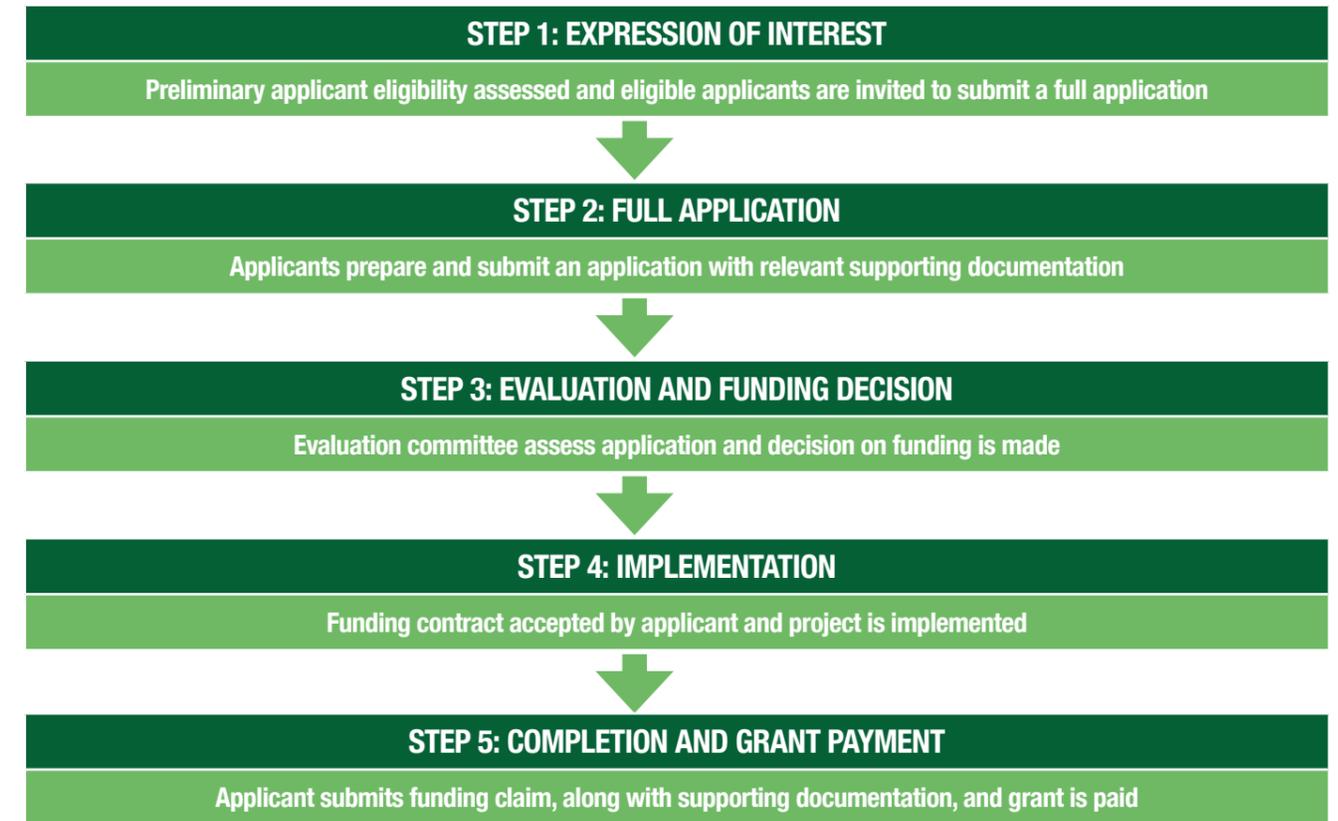
Step 1: Expression of interest

Before formally applying for LEADER funding, applicants must submit an 'Expression of Interest (EOI)'. This helps to establish a project's eligibility, such as its fit with Local Development Strategy objectives. It also helps applicants become familiar with the application process and requirements.

EOIs are then assessed by the Project Officers, with eligible applicants being invited to submit a full application.

Step 2: Making a full application

When submitting an application for LEADER funding, details required depend on the type of applicant and project. For example, farmers need to provide their herd number and businesses their company registration number. Applicants must also include details of the proposed project such as a timeline, its main activities and anticipated local impacts. Each LAG uses the same standardised application form.



Budget and procurement

A budget must also be provided. If the project is part supported through other funding sources, these must be outlined and evidence documented. Similarly, previous public funding support must be disclosed. Carrying out a procurement process is required.

Supporting documentation

A range of supporting documentation must be included with an application. Procurement evidence must be supplied. Accounts for three years and bank statements (three months minimum) for all accounts held are required - Depending on the applicant, different types of accounts are acceptable. Other requirements can apply and the specifics for individual projects can be discussed and determined with the Project Officers.

Match Funding

Projects are generally required to match funding. This can come from private funds or, for community applicants, other public funds, though public funding from other EU sources is not permitted.

Step 3: Application Evaluation and Funding Decision

An evaluation committee from the LAG evaluates applications using set criteria and makes a recommendation to the LAG decision-making members as to the suitability of the project for funding. If a project is not approved for funding, applicants are informed of the reasons for this.

Step 4: Implementation

Once a successful applicant accepts the contract, they can implement their project in line with its terms and conditions. The LAG must also check that the applicant has adequate resources (or bridging finance) to deliver the project. Bridging finance can be sourced, for example, through lending organisations such as Clann Credo, Community Finance Ireland, Micro Finance Ireland or Credit Unions.

Step 5: Completion and Grant payment

When the project is complete, the applicant submits a claim form to the LAG, with the required supporting documentation such as invoices and the relevant bank statements. A Project Officer will carry out a site visit to verify that the project is complete. A grant payment claim is then made by the LAG to the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). Once the funds are paid to the LAG the grant is paid by electronic fund transfer to the applicant's designated account as soon as possible.

To find contact details for your local LAG and IP, please consult the NRN's interactive database here: www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/local-action-groups

RDP Funding – Protecting Farmland Birds



Male Hen Harrier in flight. Source: Hen Harrier Project/Mario MacRory

Modern agricultural practices, such as the use of fertilisers and pesticides, as well as more active management of landscape features, can have an impact on farmland bird populations. This can result in the reduction of habitat areas, suitable nesting and roosting sites for birds and the broader area of natural food sources for wildlife.

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 provides funding to farmers, through a number of schemes, to help to protect farmland bird populations.

The Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) provided options to farmers for suitable management of habitats, nesting ground and feed sources for birds. Over 6,000 GLAS participants selected an option within the "Conservation of Farmland Birds" measure. Options were available for the following species: Breeding waders and Curlew, Geese and Swans, Cough, Corncrake, Hen Harrier, Twite and the Grey Partridge.

Other measures within GLAS which provide benefits for birds include:

- bird boxes
- environmental management of fallow land
- traditional hay meadows
- wild bird cover
- arable grass margins
- farmland habitat (private natura)
- commonage management plans.

The Hen Harrier Project (www.henharrierproject.ie) is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) project funded under the RDP. This project is a practical, results-based, approach to farming in Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated for the protection of breeding Hen Harriers and is the largest species-focused protection project in Europe. The project is a conservation measure for the Hen Harrier and focuses on land management in six different SPAs, which contain the most important breeding areas for the species. Over 70% of farmers within these areas have expressed an interest in the voluntary scheme.

The National Rural Network spoke with Fergal Monaghan, Project Manager of the Hen Harrier Project. He outlined progress to date: "We are delighted that 1,700 farmers have applied to participate in this project, and in due course, contracts will be offered to every eligible farmer who has applied for the scheme this year. We look forward to working with each farmer in the future, and we would like to thank everyone for their patience in the roll-out of the project."

Fergal acknowledged that currently just under 50% of the national Hen Harrier population occur within the SPAs. He outlined how populations were performing within the SPAs covered by the project: "In 2018, areas of Monaghan, Tipperary, Laois, Offaly and West-Cork performed well while parts of Galway, Clare, Kerry and Limerick underperformed due to the poorer quality of habitat available."

The project supports and encourages farmers and farming communities to farm for conservation, with payments to farmers based on habitat quality points earned at field level. That habitat quality refers to specific qualitative environmental variables, or measurable or similar goals, reflects the less tangible or definable properties of habitat condition, landscape value and richness of biodiversity, soil health and water quality being assessed. Payments are increased if additional measures are implemented to increase the quality of the habitat. Bonus payments are made available if the SPA sets additional targets such as reaching a specific number of breeding pairs.

In addition to the Hen Harrier Project, several other of the smaller EIP-AGRI projects - including The Conservation of Breeding Curlew in Ireland and Upland/Commonage projects, - which are in the early stages of their work plans, have the potential to support and enhance farmland bird populations in Ireland.

Clearly, funding provided through the RDP, including for the GLAS scheme and the Hen Harrier Project, is helping to protect and conserve our farmland birds.

Joint Committee on Climate Action Publishes 42 Priority Recommendations

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action's report, which was published on 29th March, contains 42 key priority recommendations in relation to climate action.

Agriculture has a key role in helping Ireland meet its emission reduction targets and the report acknowledges a need to engage with individual farmers in a bottom-up approach to address rising emissions in agriculture. The Committee recommends the implementation of mitigation measures outlined in the Teagasc report 'An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emission in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030'. The three broad classes of mitigation pathways identified therein are:

1. Agricultural mitigation (improved breeding, changing fertiliser types and slurry spreading)
2. Land use: carbon sequestration (increase broadleaf forestry, improved pasture management)
3. Energy efficiency and fossil fuel displacement - biofuel and anaerobic digestion (AD).

The committee suggests farmers should be encouraged to engage in climate mitigation measures, which should be incentivised through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Existing RDP measures incorporate a number of overarching environmental benefits, including climate

change mitigation. Climate mitigation elements are available as options or requirements under the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS), the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) and the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II).

The Committee outlined the potential of measures to sequester carbon, including afforestation, re-wetting peatlands, managing grasslands and maintaining hedgerows. It cited potential opportunities including horticultural production, biomass production, growing alternative crops such as willow and hemp, and called for support for schemes such as the Smart Farming Programme, Dairy Sustainability Ireland, Agricultural Sustainability Support & Advice Programme and Origin Green.

The report's findings will contribute to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, Richard Bruton TD's forthcoming all-of-government plan and the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP).

For more information, see:
www.bit.ly/2OvmIED

National Farming for Nature Award 2019: Voting Now Open

Voting for the National Farming for Nature Award 2019 is now open. This prestigious award, now in its second year, aims to source, share and celebrate stories of farmers across Ireland who are adjudged to be managing their land and livestock in a way that benefits nature on their farm and in their community. The list of finalists shortlisted for this year's award can be found on the Farming for Nature website (see details below).

The award, sponsored by Bord Bia under the Origin Green programme and supported by the National Rural Network (NRN), was developed in 2018 by a group of heritage enthusiasts based in the west of Ireland. The Calvey Family from Keel, Co. Mayo were the inaugural winners of this

national award last year. Dr Shane Conway, Postdoctoral Researcher at NUI Galway and the NRN, is on the judging panel for this award.



For more information please visit
www.farmingfornature.ie or contact Brigid on
info@farmingfornature.ie or 091 638096

LEADER's Leading Role in the Development of Smart Villages and Rural Towns

The NRN is participating in an ENRD Thematic Group on the EU Action for Smart Villages initiative, which explores innovative ways of creating more vibrant, sustainable and attractive rural areas for people to live and work in. The development of Smart Villages, and Smart Rural Towns in an Irish context, can be greatly enhanced through the successful delivery of the LEADER Programme. LEADER is well positioned to become the key policy ingredient and catalyst towards the 'smart' revolution of rural towns and villages in Ireland because of its community-led approach to rural development.

Through its 'bottom-up' framework, LEADER supports the delivery of local development actions which address the overarching needs of rural communities throughout Ireland in an innovative, integrated and inclusive manner. Indeed, the LEADER programme in Ireland already focuses on three core themes i.e.

(i) Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation; (ii) Social Inclusion and (iii) Rural Environment which, taken together, constitute the fundamental principles of what the European Commission considers is needed to create and attain a sustainable Smart Village. The EU Action for 'Smart Villages' concept is also closely aligned to Ireland's new 'Smart Community' initiative. This innovative initiative aims to bring exposure to digital content and technology to rural communities. Creating synergies between the 'Smart Villages' concept and the 'Smart Community' initiative, through increased levels of collaboration, has the potential to greatly improve the quality of life for people who live and work in rural towns and villages throughout Ireland.

More information about the Smart Villages Thematic Group can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2ODP1Kq>

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 information, case studies, seminars 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, case studies and more.

For regular updates follow us on:



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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