



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

An Irish language version of the NRN's EIP-AGRI booklet was launched at an EIP-AGRI workshop at this year's Burren Winterage School held in Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare on the 24th of October, pictured right here. (See page five for details).



LEADER Funding Available

Activity under the LEADER Programme continued to increase in the third quarter of 2019. At the end of November, a total of 2,667 projects have been approved for funding of over €98.7m and a further 382 projects are at various stages in the process seeking an additional €32.8m in funding. In October, Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development announced details of the distribution of €5 million in additional funding for ten areas that are most advanced in the delivery of the LEADER Programme. The ten Local Action Groups (LAGs) who will be offered the additional funding of €500,000 each are from counties Kerry, Mayo, Waterford, Limerick, Cork North, Donegal, Tipperary, Offaly, Leitrim and Cavan.

For more see www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader

Kilkenny Farmer Named NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year

Alan Doyle, a drystock farmer from Gowran, Co. Kilkenny, was named as the 2019 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year at the FBD Young Farmer of the Year Awards held in the Castleknock Hotel, Dublin on the 26th of November. The National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award recognises a farmer who is farming sustainably by encouraging biodiversity and protecting the environment.

Alan, who farms with 170 breeding ewes and 23 suckler cows on approximately 86 hectares near the Blackstairs Mountains, is a champion of good environmental management and has demonstrated a sincere passion for farming, which protects and enhances biodiversity. He is an active member of the Blackstairs Farming Group (BFG) which work closely with the Blackstairs Future Farming (BFF) pilot project that aims to adopt innovative approaches to add value to the Blackstairs hill farming system, while simultaneously improving habitats. The BFF pilot

project was granted funding in 2018 by the Department of Agriculture Food & the Marine (DAFM) through the EU co-financed Rural Development Programme (RDP) EIP-AGRI scheme. Alan is also an active participant in the RDP's Green Low Carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS) which is also co-funded by DAFM.

Congratulating the winner, 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 enthusiastic young farmers who have exhibited a passion for farming in a sustainable manner. When we visited their farms, we saw some wonderful examples of farmers working in harmony with nature. Alan was chosen as the 2019 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year due to his deep commitment and enthusiasm for sustainable farming." See page 2 for more.

Profile: Alan Doyle, NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year



Pictured at the 2019 FBD Young Farmer of the Year Awards are (from left to right): Aoife Smith (NRN), James Claffey (NRN), Thomas Duffy (president of Macra na Feirme), Alan Doyle (NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year) and Freda Salley (NRN)

A dry stock farmer from Gowran, Co Kilkenny won the title of 2019 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year award recently at the FBD Young Farmer of the Year Awards. We caught up with winner Alan Doyle on his farm near Blackstairs Mountain.

Alan champions good environmental management and he has demonstrated his passion for farming in a manner that protects and enhances biodiversity. He began farming five years ago lambing 35 ewes. He has expanded his farm, and in spring 2020 he will lamb over 170 ewes from February to April. Alan also keeps 23 spring calving suckler cows. The suckler cows graze on the lower parts of the farm while the sheep graze the upland areas of the commonage. The ewes have adapted to grazing the uplands and play a key role in maintaining local biodiversity. Alan farms a total of 86 hectares, 32 hectares of which is commonage land. The soil on the farm is heavy soil and it receives minimal fertiliser input. The boundary of lower fields consists of drystone walls with hedgerows. Stonewalls and hedgerows are important habitats for plants and wildlife on his farm.

He is an active member of the Blackstairs Farming Group who work closely with the Blackstairs Future Farming (BFF) pilot project, which aims to adopt innovative approaches to add value to the Blackstairs hill farming system, while simultaneously improving habitats. The Blackstairs Mountain provides habitats to support bird species such as the red grouse, kestrel and peregrine falcon, mammal species such as deer, pine martin, Irish hare, Irish stoat and bats and also supports many different species of butterfly, moths and insects. The farming shareholders of the commonage are key to maintaining and enhancing the vast diversity of species and habitats that depend on them.

"I am delighted to have won this award and to be recognised for supporting biodiversity and nature on my

farm. I try to farm in conjunction with nature to protect the habitats on my farm. I want to leave this land in the best condition I can so future generations can enjoy the nature and biodiversity it supports," says Alan.

Alan is an active participant in the Green Low Carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS), and he says being involved in agri-environmental schemes is beneficial to both farmers and biodiversity as the actions carried out aim to improve the quality of habitats on farms and educate farmers about the habitats on their farms. He intends to help further enhance the pollinator population by establishing beehives on his farm in the future.

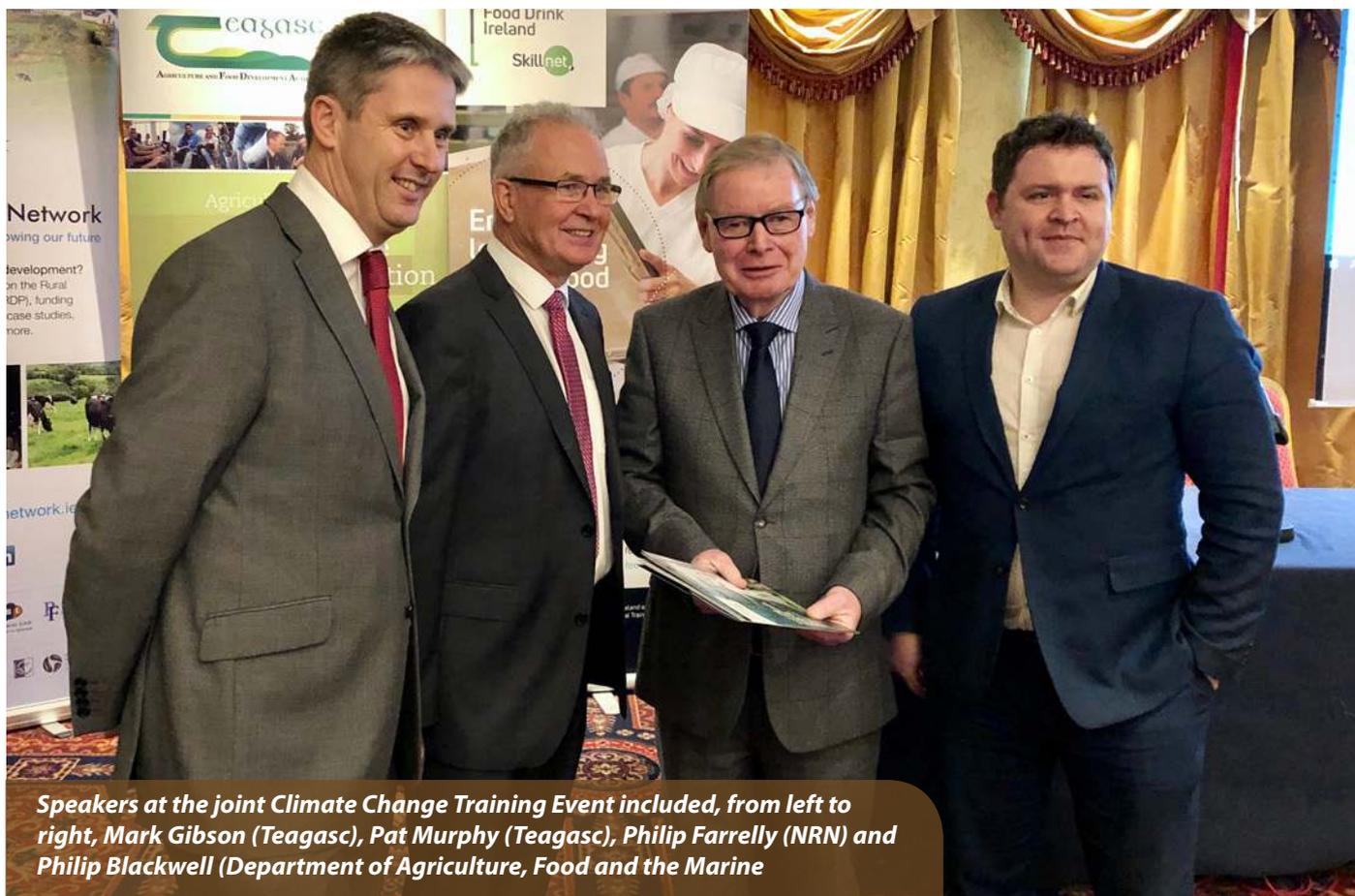


Alan Doyle on his farm in Gowran, Co. Kilkenny

Alan is also interested in social farming. Social farming offers people who are socially, physically, mentally or intellectually disadvantaged the opportunity to spend time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment. He believes the participants in social farming could enjoy farming while exploring the nature readily available to them on his farm.

For more information on biodiversity visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity

Agri-professionals Gather in Navan for Climate Change Training Event



Speakers at the joint Climate Change Training Event included, from left to right, Mark Gibson (Teagasc), Pat Murphy (Teagasc), Philip Farrelly (NRN) and Philip Blackwell (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine)

Agri-professionals from across Ireland gathered at the Ardboyne Hotel in Navan, Co. Meath on Monday, 2nd December for a special training event on the role of agriculture in tackling climate change. The event, which was hosted by the National Rural Network (NRN) in association with Teagasc ConnectED, Dairy Sustainability Ireland and Food and Drink Ireland Skillnet, was designed to help agri-professionals, including advisers and industry representatives, communicate the best evidence-based advice and guidance on agricultural gaseous emissions to their clients.

Opening the event, Philip Farrelly from the NRN said, "Feeding the world while addressing climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. Agri-professionals need to provide relevant technical expertise to farmers in relation to climate change and advise them on how mitigation and adaptation strategies may impact on the day to day running of their farms. This technical training day will provide evidence-based advice and guidance to agri-professionals in relation to the necessary supports needed to reduce the environmental footprint of Irish agriculture."

Setting the scene, Philip Blackwell from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine provided an overview of the Government's climate change policy. Mr Blackwell said agriculture accounts for around 33% of Ireland's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. He highlighted the importance of early adoption and high-level take-up of the agricultural measures in the Teagasc Marginal Abatement Cost Curve in reaching our 2030 GHG targets.

Pat Murphy, Programme Manager Knowledge Transfer at Teagasc noted that without mitigation, GHG emissions are likely to rise. Mr Murphy outlined a number of mitigation measures, and he explained the marginal abatement cost curves (MACCs), a tool used to appraise the cost effectiveness of climate change mitigation options. A variety of experts then addressed the range of mitigation measures identified through the MACCs, including land management, energy efficiency on the farm, forestry, nutrient management and animal breeding.

For more information on climate change and agriculture visit: www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/climate-change

NRN Supports National Farming for Nature Award



Dr Shane Conway (NRN & NUIG) and James Claffey (NRN) pictured here with Thomas and Claire O'Conner, and Dr Brendan Dunford (Burren Programme)

The National Farming for Nature Award, now in its second year, aims to source, share and promote stories of farmers across Ireland who are judged to be managing their land and livestock in a way that benefits nature on their farms and in their communities. Forty-eight nominations, consisting of 39 different farmers, were received from a broad panel of environmental experts for this year's award. Ten 'Farming for Nature Ambassadors' were subsequently chosen from these nominees after a rigorous selection process of interviews, farm visits and assessments by a panel of judges, which included Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway and the NRN. These ten 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. They are all outstanding and inspiring examples of how farming can have a positive impact on our biodiversity and climate.

The Farming for Nature Award 2019 also included a Public's Choice Award. Members of the public were encouraged to view ten specially-commissioned short films depicting the work of all ten Ambassadors, each with incredibly inspiring stories around managing their land in a way that sustains nature and remains productive, and vote for their favourite one. There was incredible enthusiasm and buy-in from the public to support this award, with over 12,000 video views

and nearly 5,000 votes cast before mixed organic farmers, Thomas and Claire O'Conner from the Manna Organic Farm and Store in the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry were announced the winners of this prestigious accolade. The O'Connors were presented with the Farming for Nature Public Vote Award 2019 at a special event compered by renowned broadcaster Ella McSweeney at this year's Burren Winterage School on the 26th of October. Thomas and Claire manage their mixed organic farm in Gleann na Gealt, Co. Kerry, where they produce vegetables, salads, wheatgrass, meat, poultry and eggs on their farm which they then sell locally in their shop in Tralee. They have 15 acres of native Irish woodland and 4 acres of permaculture including fruit trees. They also have an agroforestry area and promote pollinator and biodiversity friendly habitats. Speaking at the award ceremony the O'Connors explained that they 'truly believe that returning to nature and natural farming systems can only create health and a vibrant environment. It can provide natural, nutrient-dense quality food that can be the cornerstone for future generations. Organic food and caring for the environment we live in is not just a job for us, it is our life, we live it every day: on the farm, in the shop and at home'.

Speaking about the award, project co-ordinator Brigid Barry noted that that "every farmer in Ireland will be able to relate to at least one of these farmers and admire what

they have managed to do on their farms". Each ambassador had a specially commissioned-film made about them so that the public could learn more about farming for nature and choose their favourite story. "We had an outstanding response with thousands of votes cast in the last few weeks. The winner of the Public's Choice Award were Kerry farmers Thomas and Claire O'Connor from Manna Organic Farm. Theirs is an encouraging story on how much nature you can support on 25 acres whilst also having a productive business," said Brigid.

One of the main drivers behind the initiative, Dr Brendan Dunford of the Burren Programme, adds that "the stories told by these ten ambassadors are so educational and inspirational. Their knowledge, passion and eloquence shine through, providing powerful testimony as to how farming and nature can, and must, work in harmony. The work of these ambassadors demonstrates that simple actions can make a big difference for the wellbeing of nature and of people and will hopefully inspire other farmers to take some small steps to look after their farm's wildlife. We felt that these farmers are deserving of respect and support through these awards: they embody all that's great about rural Ireland".

The National Farming for Nature Awards are sponsored by Bord Bia and supported by a wide range of farming and conservation interests including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the National Rural Network (NRN). This initiative has captured the attention of the farming community, environmentalists and the general public over the past two years, and the NRN is delighted to have been involved in supporting this award and disseminating the excellent work carried out by these Irish farmers who farm for nature. By celebrating these 'Farming for Nature Ambassadors', it is hoped that other farmers, as well as members of the general public, will be inspired to follow suit and do what they can to protect and enhance biodiversity in their local area.

For more info visit www.farmingfornature.ie

Irish Translation of EIP-AGRI Booklet Launched

The NRN team at NUI Galway, Dr Shane Conway and Dr Maura Farrell, have designed and produced an Irish language version of a booklet highlighting and promoting Ireland's 23 EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. This publication was officially launched at an EIP-AGRI workshop at this year's Burren Winterage School held in Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare on the 24th of October 2019. The booklet is available in print and digital format from www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/eip-agri-news/



Sheep Welfare Scheme Contributes to Animal Health and Welfare



The SWS provides targeted support to make a positive contribution to sheep welfare

The Sheep Welfare Scheme (SWS) is a scheme under the Animal Welfare Measure of the Rural Development Programme (RDP 2014 -2020). It was introduced to contribute to the continued development in animal and health welfare in the sheep sector and requires farmers to go beyond the relevant mandatory standards to enhance the standards of animal welfare in the Irish sheep flock. A total of €100m was allocated to the scheme, which was introduced in early 2017. The total monies spent under the scheme up to December 2018 was nearly €34m (this figure includes full payment under year one of the scheme and advance payment for year two of the scheme).

The scheme is applicable to breeding ewes and provides targeted support to make a positive a contribution to sheep welfare. In January 2019, the scheme had 18,901 active participants with a combined total of 1,754,561 breeding ewes. The average flock size per farmer in the scheme is approximately 94 ewes.

The scheme participants are classified as “lowland” flocks accounting for 56% while “highland flocks” account for 44%. Counties Donegal, Mayo and Galway have the highest uptake of the scheme with 3,289, 2,775 and 2,229 farmers actively participating in the scheme.

Under the SWS, participants are required to select two actions from a menu of options. Farmers are required to select one action from category A and one action from category B. Where farmers are compliant with the terms and conditions, they will be provided with a payment of €10 per

breeding ewe. The most popular action selected among farmers under category A is “mineral supplementation ewes post mating” and “scanning” under category B.

Raymond Langan from Co. Mayo is an active participant in the SWS scheme and selected ‘Mineral Supplementation Ewes post mating’ and ‘Parasite Control’ for his farm. “A good body condition score at mating and mineral supplementation post mating helps the ewes to lamb with ease. As an uphill farmer I find it is beneficial to supplement ewes post mating to ensure the flock has the necessary intake of vitamins and minerals crucial for the formation of healthy lambs. I try to maintain a low input system on my farm. ‘Parasite Control’ can be costly and I try to reduce this where possible on my farm”. Raymond selected faecal egg counts as a measure under the SWS to identify if problematic parasites were present within his flock. Dung samples from 15 – 20 lambs only must be collected and analysed for parasites. Knowing the faecal egg count of dung samples provides a clear indication on the level of infection and this can be used as a decision support tool to target antimicrobial usage.

“I discuss the tests results with my vet and we take corrective action to improve flock health in a sustainable manner”. Sustainability is a key part of management decisions on Raymond’s farm. The parasitic control action help Raymond identify what parasites are present and if they are problematic within the flock. Targeted antimicrobials can then be administered to combat the problem. To find out more about the SWS visit: www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments

LEADER Programme: Supporting a Diverse Range of Community Projects

LEADER Programme 2014-2020
NRN LEADER Case Study Videos

1 River Moy Search & Rescue LEADER Project

2 Connemara Community Radio LEADER Project

3 Abha Bhán Parish Park LEADER Project

4 Coillte Sláintúil LEADER Project

5 EuroBlue LEADER Project

6 Ballykilcavan LEADER Project

7 Instrumental Outreach Programme LEADER Project

8 Louth Looking Good LEADER Project

National Rural Network
 Brought to you by the Department of Rural and Community Development

The NRN has created booklet and a series of videos highlighting the work of LEADER funded projects

LEADER is one of the National Rural Network's core focus areas and in order to communicate updates, events and the diverse range of project examples, the NRN uses a number of methods.

For example, recently the NRN (in collaboration with the Department of Rural and Community Development, a number of Local Actions Groups (LAGs), Implementing Partners and Project Promoters) developed a new LEADER project examples booklet showcasing a number of projects from across the country under the various LEADER sub-themes. One such example is the 'Purchase of an Exoskeleton Suit' in Donegal. This project used LEADER funding to purchase an 'exoskeleton suit' (featured recently on RTÉ's The Late Late Show) to help those with mobility issues to rehabilitate and train in their own communities. One service user stated, "The benefits of the suit are endless, physical and psychological, it's a great feeling to be able to meet people face to face instead of looking up at them from my wheelchair". This is just one of the diverse projects making a huge impact at community level and a longer detailed version of this particular case study and others is available at www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader.

The NRN have also spent several weeks developing a new LEADER video series, which includes eight different projects and allows those involved to show how LEADER funding has impacted their businesses, communities and the local environment.

One project example featured is the Ballykilcavan Brewing Company in Laois, which is a Rural Tourism project that used LEADER funding to purchase brewing equipment to develop a range of craft beers on the now diversified farm and help establish a tourism offering. Another example is the Marine Litter project by River Moy Search and Rescue in Mayo. Established as a rescue and recovery service, the service received LEADER funding to help purchase boats and safety equipment to tackle the issue of marine litter on the River Moy and help maintain and protect local wildlife and biodiversity.

These are just a snippet of the range of projects that LEADER is supporting across the country. For more updates on LEADER funding, projects and news, follow the NRN on social media and visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader

CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) Stakeholder Engagement Workshop

The National Rural Network (NRN) on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) held a CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) Stakeholder Engagement Workshop on Friday 4th October at the Tullamore Court Hotel, Co. Offaly. This event was a key opportunity for stakeholders to contribute to the draft SWOT analysis as part of the development of Ireland's draft CSP that is currently underway in the Department. The aim of this workshop was to identify the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the Irish agricultural sector. It was the first step in a defined process being undertaken by all EU member states, which includes a needs assessment, an intervention strategy and design, an allocation of financial targets and setting of targets and results. The Department also conducted a public consultation on the draft SWOT as well as hosting a series of townhall meetings in Mitchelstown, Sligo and Portlaoise. Details of these can be found on the Department's website:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/ruralenvironmentsustainability/capstrategicplanpost2020/>

Paul Savage, Assistant Secretary at DAFM, chaired the Workshop, and Ultan Waldron, from Rural Development at DAFM, presented on the importance of the SWOT analysis in the development of the CAP Strategic Plan. Ultan outlined the steps the Department had taken on the creation of the SWOT analysis including the preparation of a draft SWOT "quadrants" and a series of 'town hall' meetings across the country. Brendan Shields from Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants was the next to present and he described the ex-ante evaluation of the 2021-2027 CAP Strategic Plan.

Following on from the presentations, participants were divided into roundtable discussion groups covering the nine objectives and the AKIS (Agriculture, Knowledge and Innovation Systems). The groups were asked to discuss whether the SWOT is comprehensive, which elements required amendment and if any gaps had been identified. A full report of the feedback from stakeholders will be published on the National Rural Network's website.



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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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Rialtas na hÉireann
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