



# NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

## SPOTLIGHT

Pat Murphy, Teagasc; Freda Salley, National Rural Network (NRN) and Philip Blackwell, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, pictured at the Climate Change Technical Update for agri-professionals in Moorepark which took place on February 5th 2020. The event was jointly hosted by the NRN, Teagasc ConnectEd, Dairy Sustainability Ireland and Food and Drinks Ireland Skillnet



## COVID-19 Response

The National Rural Network (NRN) is advising our members to closely observe the COVID-19 emergency measures and the HSE's guidelines on social distancing. We are continuing our work and the NRN can still be reached by email and telephone (see page 8 for our contact details). Please visit our website [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie) or follow us on Twitter and Facebook (details on page 8) for the latest updates on the Rural Development Programme (RDP 2014-2020). Stay safe.

## Climate Change in the Spotlight at Moorepark Training Event

The National Rural Network (NRN) in association with Teagasc ConnectED, Dairy Sustainability Ireland and Food and Drink Ireland Skillnet, recently hosted the second in a series of climate change technical training events designed for professionals working with the agri-food sector.

The full day event, which was held in Moorepark on February 5th 2020, focussed on providing agri-professionals with the most up-to-date technical knowledge to help advise farmers and stakeholders on how best to address climate change. 'Understanding the Issues', 'Managing Nitrogen to reduce emissions' and 'Further actions to reduce the carbon footprint of Irish Agriculture' were key the topics under discussion. Presentations were made by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM), Teagasc and Dairy Sustainability Ireland.

Delegates participated in a breakout session in the afternoon, the purpose of which was to ascertain views of industry stakeholders on actions that could provide the greatest cumulative benefit in relation to climate change. Key focus areas were the Teagasc Marginal Abatement Cost Curve; how the agri-industry could collaboratively work together to ensure early implementation

of recommended actions; and additional information or resources required from research or experts to help agriculture meet its climate change targets.

A number of common themes arose from the breakout sessions including the following: there is no one silver bullet to reduce emissions; a collaborative approach is necessary in order to ensure uptake of efficiency measures at farmer level; farmers must be given clear, easy to understand, messages in relation to what they can do to on their farms to reduce emissions; farmers are not aware of all of the actions they can take at farm-level to mitigate climate change.

Freda Salley from the NRN said, "Climate Change presents a real and definitive challenge to Irish agriculture and it will take a coordinated effort by all stakeholders to mitigate the impact. Effective mitigation will only occur on farms if best practice is communicated to farmers by industry professionals. Industry professionals need relevant technical training to advise farmers on how mitigation and adaptation may impact on the running of their farm."

For more information on climate change please visit [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/climate-change](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/climate-change)

## TAMSII Scheme: Encouraging Multiple Efficiencies on Dairy Farms



Young farmer Matthew Mullen and his father Declan

The NRN met with young farmer Matthew Mullen from Co. Meath. Matthew is a full time dairy farmer, in a registered farm partnership with his father Declan, mother Gladys and uncle Gerry. Matthew completed his Green Cert in 2015 and joined the registered farm partnership in 2017.

That year, the Mullen Partnership put plans in place to build and update the milking facilities on the family farm. Matthew qualified under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (YFCIS) within the TAMSII and was eligible for a 60% grant rate. Declan, Gladys and Gerry were eligible for a 40% grant rate under the TAMSII scheme due to the registered farm partnership.

The building works were completed in February 2018 and the family are now enjoying a bespoke milking facility that has eased the workload on the entire family. A new 26 unit milking parlour, with an automated feeding system and electronic drafting facilities, has reduced milking times alone to just 3 hours per day. Overall cow welfare has improved; the standing time for cows entering the parlour has greatly reduced leading to lesser instances of lameness and improvements in milk yield.

“Without the TAMSII scheme, efficiency technologies such as a Plate Cooler, a Heat Recovery Unit, Auto-washer, Cluster Removers, Drafting Facilities and even office space to centralise all paperwork and records would not have been considered as we simply could not have afforded it. Sustainability and efficiency are high profile topics but to actually implement measures can be very costly to the farmer. The TAMSII scheme has eased that burden.” said Matthew.

The biggest benefit Matthew has seen on the farm is the reduced milking time. “The herd has grown from 140 cows in 2014 to 315 cows today. The new facilities have allowed

us to milk more cows in less time, which means we can now target other areas for increased efficiency, like grassland management. I began measuring and recording grass growths in summer 2018 - we simply hadn't the time to implement it before then.”

Over the next five years Matthew is turning his focus to the herd EBI. Matthew and his father have worked out a breeding programme with their advisor which incorporates the use of high EBI bulls for the 2020 breeding season.

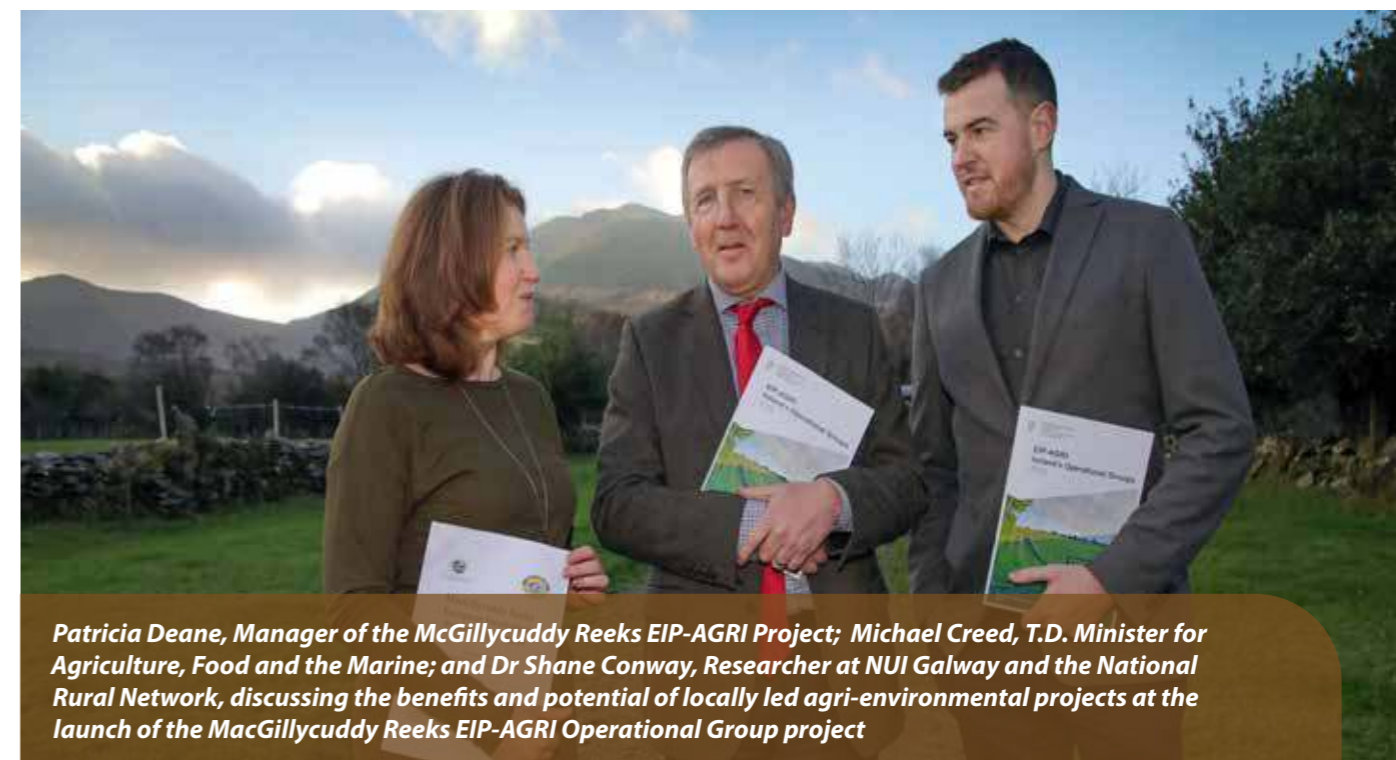
The NRN would like to thank Matthew and Declan for taking the time out of their busy spring schedule to talk to us about their farm. If you would like to read more about this case study please visit our website [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie).



Milking times have been reduced to just three hours a day

The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMSII) is currently in its 17th tranche, which will remain open till April 24th 2020. Details of further tranche details will be made available on the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine's website [www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie).

## McGillycuddy Reeks EIP-AGRI Project Officially Launched



Patricia Deane, Manager of the McGillycuddy Reeks EIP-AGRI Project; Michael Creed, T.D. Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; and Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway and the National Rural Network, discussing the benefits and potential of locally led agri-environmental projects at the launch of the MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP-AGRI Operational Group project

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed T.D., officially launched the McGillycuddy Reeks Project EIP-AGRI Operational Group at Cronin's Yard, Meallis, Beaufort, Killarney, in the heart of Co. Kerry on the 9th of December 2019. Dr Shane Conway represented the National Rural Network (NRN) at this successful and well attended launch. This locally-led project aims to improve the sustainability and economic viability of farming in the MacGillycuddy Reeks through the development of practical, achievable actions and innovative solutions to address the issues facing farmers on the Reeks, and to protect the biodiversity of the MacGillycuddy Reeks' catchment area. The project covers an area of over 100km<sup>2</sup>, encompassing over eight thousand hectares of Natura 2000 designated land. It stretches from the Gap of Dunloe in the east, to Glencar in the west and from the Kerry Way in the south to the northern foothills of the Reeks. €950,000 has been allocated to this project by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 – 2020. Incidentally, Cronin's Yard, where this project was launched, also received RDP 2014-2020 funding under the Rural Tourism sub-theme of the LEADER Programme to develop a number of facilities for the numerous mountaineers and walkers who visit the area. This illustrates the diversity of support offered by the RDP 2014-2020 to enhance the lives of people living in rural communities throughout Ireland.

Speaking at the launch, Minister Creed commented that 'having locally-designed and led schemes enables greater flexibility in responding to the particular environmental challenges in different areas'. He also commended the involvement of local farmers in the project by highlighting that 'the contribution they are making through their actions will improve not only their own local environment and communities, but through dissemination of the outcomes of this project they will play an even larger role throughout the country'. This point was echoed by both the McGillycuddy Reeks Project Manager, Patricia Deane, and Noel Spillane, CEO of South West Kerry Development Partnership SKDP who added that without farmers the area will be without vibrant rural communities and economies, and also will be unable to deliver on the environmental outputs required to support and enhance biodiversity.

More information on the main aims, objectives, activities and background of the MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP-AGRI Operational Group Project as well as about the 22 other Irish EIP-AGRI projects can be found on the NRN website in the form of an interactive EIP-AGRI Storyboard database (see: <https://bit.ly/2Yvv1OQ>) and EIP-AGRI booklet (see: <https://bit.ly/37nD58u>) as well as on the EIP-AGRI Service Point website in the form of a common format EU abstract database (see: <https://bit.ly/2PxEGla>).

# Social Farming: A Model for a More Inclusive Society



*Social Farming is a key resource*

Social Farming supports multifunctional agriculture as well as current health and social care policy. It does this by promoting inclusion through allowing participants, who have a range of needs and challenges, to engage in everyday on-farm activities. This engagement helps participants to boost their social skills, self-esteem and confidence, as well as improving their general wellbeing by being out and involved in the natural environment. Social farming participants can come from a range of different backgrounds including people experiencing mental health issues, people with intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities, the long-term unemployed, young people who are at risk and refugees, amongst others. Participants choose to become involved in social farming themselves and are assigned to farms based on their interests and goals. Placements usually last for a period of 10 to 12 weeks and take place once a week.

Social farming in Ireland is particularly unique in that it takes place on ordinary working farms, meaning that those participating are based in non-clinical environments, unlike in other countries such as the Netherlands and Norway. Farmers who facilitate social farming placements on their farms receive payment for their time and expenses incurred, helping to boost their income and utilise the natural and human capital of the farm to the fullest.



*Farmers who facilitate social farming placements on their farms receive payment for their time and expenses incurred*

Social Farming Ireland (SoFI) is one of the key organisations driving Social Farming in Ireland. It was established in 2015 on the back of an EU funded project 'Social Farming Across Borders' (SoFAB) which operated in the Border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland from 2011 to 2014. SoFI was set up to continue to develop Social Farming in the Republic of Ireland and opened in April 2015 in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, led by Leitrim Integrated Development Company. SoFI has been strongly supported and funded since 2015 by the Department of Agriculture Food & the Marine, largely under the CEDRA fund. One of its key roles is to support the development of a national Social Farming network and to this end it collaborates with a number

of Local Development Companies. These are regionally based and include Leitrim Development Company (Border Midlands), West Limerick Resources (South West), Waterford LEADER Partnership (South East) and South West Mayo Development Company (West). Together they support the practical roll out of Social Farming regionally and act as a support to the different intermediaries which come together to make social farming happen: the farmers, the health and social care organisations, and the participants. Since its inception in 2015, SoFI has delivered over 6,300 placement days to approximately 790 participants on 77 social farms throughout the country.

## Tommy Earley, Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim

Tommy Earley runs a 100-acre farm in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim. Tommy's farm is organic and currently rears Aberdeen Angus cows and calves, grows vegetables and timber and also has a number of trails for his eco-tourism business 'Mount Allen Ecotours'. It was his involvement in hosting farm Eco-walks which led to his involvement in social farming. This, along with a social farming event he attended where he heard one of the participants share his story. Tommy relays this participant's experience whereby "everything had been going super for him - married, house, business really going well - but he got knocked out with depression. He got a chance to go on a social farm and it made a major difference to him, so I thought if I could get it going on the farm here it might make a difference too". Tommy then made contact with SoFI to get more information on becoming involved in social farming and to receive training.

### Benefits of Social Farming

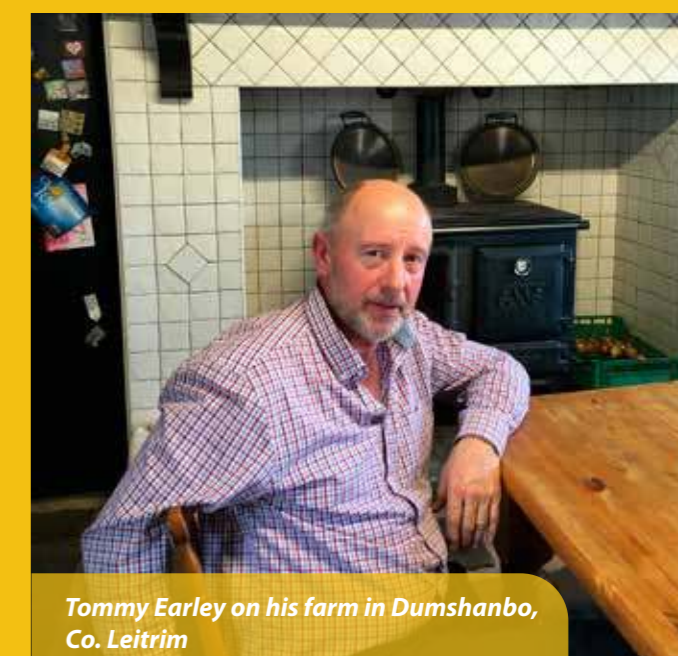
Tommy described one example of how his farm has helped some social farming participants who were non-verbal. He outlines that "the hope was that they would get a couple of new words... So what I would do was take a picture of the hen out there and got it photocopied and we made a little scrapbook. So we'd go out and be looking at the hen and then come back in to the table and look and the picture in the scrapbook and say 'hen, hen', by the time they had left they had 5 or 6 words... So it's making a big difference".

Are you thinking about hosting Social Farming on your farm?

Tommy's advice for those thinking about becoming involved in social farming is to get as much information as possible from SoFI and "if you can get out onto a social farm when there is a group there, and... just see how it works, it'll be a good experience".

To read the full version of this case study please see [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/National-Rural-Network-NRN-Social-Farming-Case-Study-FINAL.pdf](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/National-Rural-Network-NRN-Social-Farming-Case-Study-FINAL.pdf)

For more information and resources on Social Farming in Ireland please see [www.socialfarmingireland.ie](http://www.socialfarmingireland.ie)



*Tommy Earley on his farm in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim*

## Organic Farming: A Way of Life



*Swantje and Eddie with their dog in a field of cover crops*

The NRN met with Eddie Kiernan and his wife Swantje, organic tillage farmers from North County Dublin. Eddie and Swantje are full time farmers, farming 50 hectares. Crops grown on the farm are a mix of beans, oats, potatoes and hay.

Eddie and Swantje have built a good reputation locally for producing high quality organic produce. Oats are sold to Flavahan's, the beans provide high organic protein content to organic animal feeds, such as meals for organic dairies and hay is produced for local equine establishments.

Eddie began the conversion on the farm in 2001 - "Learning to work with nature and weeds was the biggest challenge; very often with conventional farming, spraying crops will suppress the presence of weeds, with organic farming this is not an option, more manual management is required, but the presence of certain types of weeds can be beneficial, they tell you about the field, weather it has poor drainage, is acidic, needs lime or abundant in a certain nutrient, that information helps you decide how best to manage that particular field or crop".

Eddie and Swantje are active participants in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). The OFS is an agri-environmental measure under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. In 2019, approximately €10.2M was spent under the Organic Farming Scheme with a total of 1,530 farmers receiving a payment.

Eddie and Swantje are also active participants in the GLAS (Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme) and the TAMSII (Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme) schemes. The GLAS scheme is a good incentive, the rates provided for completion of actions subsidises the cost of completing the action, there are also added environmental benefits such as rejuvenating the soil and addressing soil

fertility by including nitrogen fixing cover crops on the farm and providing flower and forage areas for wild birds and pollinators'.

'The TAMSII scheme is excellent, it allows farmers to invest in buildings or equipment which they may not have been able to afford without grant-aid. Grant-aid means new, safer and more efficient machinery can be purchased'. Eddie purchased a new Mulcher, Seeder and Mower and also built a new straw/hay storage facility on his farm under TAMSII scheme.

'We see organic farming as a sustainable way of life. As a family our knowledge of biodiversity present on the farm has been enhanced, you become curious of the different plants and flowers growing on the farm, and learn to identify them'. The Kiernans also plant 125 native trees annually and this measure encourages local wildlife to visit their farm.

The NRN would like to thank Eddie and Swantje for taking the time out of their busy spring schedule to talk to us about their farm. If you would like to read more about this case study please visit our website [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie).



*A new hay/straw storage shed built with funding secured through TAMSII*

## Realizing Smart Villages and Rural Towns



*Dympna Harney from the LEADER Unit of the Department of Rural and Community Development pictured here speaking at the 9th ENRD Thematic Group meeting on 'Smart Villages' held in Finland*

The development of Smart Villages 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.

More information about the ENRD Smart Villages Thematic Group can be found here: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal_en)

## Sixth Meeting of EU Rural Networks' Assembly

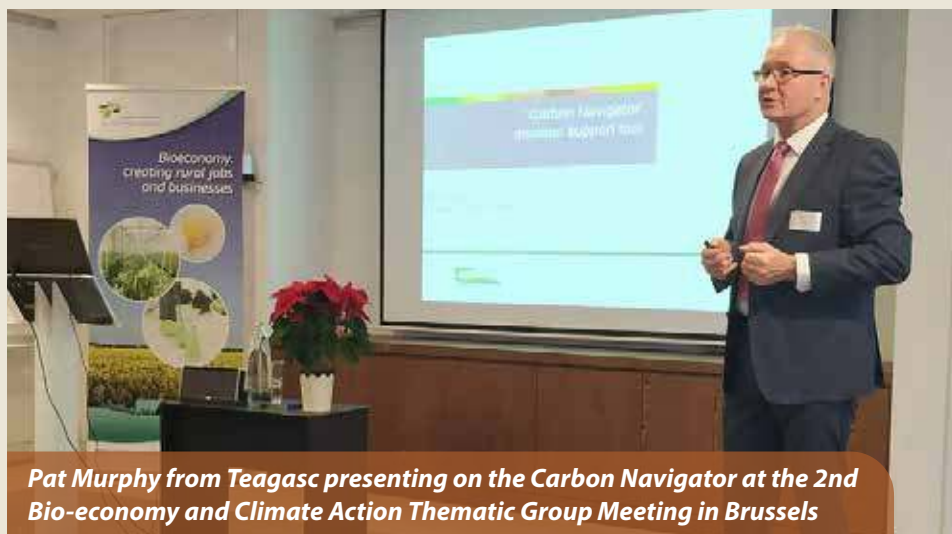
The sixth meeting of the European Rural Networks' Assembly was held in Brussels on the 16th December 2019. The Assembly is the main governing body of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture (EIP-AGRI). Those attending received updates on current CAP reform talks from Gaëlle Marion of the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, while Sari Rannanpää from the ENRD Contact Point, provided an overview of the 2019 Self-Assessment of the European Union's Rural Networks.

Hannes Wimmer presented a very good insight into the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk and activities carried out in 2019, while Véronique Rebholtz from the EIP-AGRI Service Point outlined their 2019 and 2020 activities and events.

The afternoon session of the Assembly provided an opportunity for attendees to reflect on the current and future governance of the EU Networks. Maura Farrell, a member of Ireland's NRN team, acted as rapporteur and provided feedback to the Assembly on the Rural Network's future actions for 2020. As a final element of the Assembly meeting, Paul Soto presented the activities carried out by the ENRD team in 2019 and provided an overview of some of the key activities and event for 2020.

For more details of this event please visit <https://tinyurl.com/r23kqlr>

## Bioeconomy and Climate Action Thematic Group Meetings



*Pat Murphy from Teagasc presenting on the Carbon Navigator at the 2nd Bio-economy and Climate Action Thematic Group Meeting in Brussels*

The 2nd and 3rd meetings of the Bio-economy and Climate Action Thematic Group took place on the 11th December 2019 and 19th February 2020 respectively. The audience at both meetings included National Rural Networks, RDP Managing Authorities, Local Action Groups and other stakeholders involved in bio-economy value chains or rural bio-economy initiatives.

The second Thematic Group (TG) meeting discussed approaches to assist bio-economy actors adopt climate change mitigating practices. Such approaches can include, for example, farm assessment tools to plan farm-level emission reductions, or community level action plans to achieve climate targets within a territory. Pat Murphy from Teagasc presented on the Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) and the Carbon Navigator. This one-day meeting also looked into how wider policy support can upscale such approaches.

The third meeting examined how rural climate efforts can be proved and demonstrated, in order to be recognised by markets, authorities and the wider society. Monitoring, verification and reporting on the environmental and climate sustainability of the rural bio-economy is necessary in order to build trust within value chains and to ensure public measures to compensate for climate outcomes are targeted correctly. As part of the discussion groups, participants expressed the view that such tools and approaches should be simple and easy to use for all rural actors to contribute while not placing an unnecessary burden on the rural actors. Building on examples from different parts of rural Europe, participants discussed possible ways of demonstrating rural activities' contribution to climate action and environmental sustainability. These may include participatory certification schemes, shared sustainability criteria, or territorial climate labels, among other things.

Details of the two meetings are available at <https://tinyurl.com/qod9q75> and [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/3rd-meeting-enrd-thematic-group-bioeconomy-and-climate-action-rural-areas\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/3rd-meeting-enrd-thematic-group-bioeconomy-and-climate-action-rural-areas_en)

## Join the NRN

Are you interested in rural development?

Join the National Rural Network (NRN) by signing up on our website [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://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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