



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

Teresa Roche developed Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese after returning to her family's farm near Loughrea, Co. Galway after 15 years living abroad. The Roche family milk 100 Pedigree British Holstein Friesians and Teresa has added value to the dairy by using this milk to develop her own farmhouse cheese, with the help of LEADER funding. See pages 4 & 5. Image: Hany Marzouk.



LEADER Programme Update

Activity in the LEADER programme has continued to increase as we progress into 2020. As of the end of May there are over 3,100 LEADER projects approved with a total value of over €122m. This is an increase of over 400 projects and an increased allocation of over €23m since the end of November 2019. A further 424 projects are in the middle of the approval process and these have an additional value of almost €32m.

The LEADER Programme is continuing to operate during COVID-19 with many of the stakeholders involved in delivering LEADER working remotely to minimise the impact on the programme. The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) in conjunction with Local Action Groups (LAGs) are continuing to process payments so that much needed funding can reach rural communities and businesses. To learn more about LEADER funding and how to apply see <https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/>.

Webinars Point Way to Low Emissions Agriculture

The NRN, in association with Teagasc, ConnectED, Dairy Sustainability Ireland and Food and Drink Ireland Skillnet, are currently hosting a series of live webinars every Friday morning at 9.30 am to help pinpoint the way to low-emissions agriculture.

These one-hour webinars are designed to help agri-professionals communicate the best evidence-based advice and guidance to their clients. By working together, the agricultural industry can make major steps towards achieving sustainability and reducing the environmental footprint of Irish agriculture.

Farmers and the agriculture sector need to adopt new ways and technologies that will help the sector reduce emissions while continuing to produce food in a sustainable manner. Many farmers are farming in a manner that takes cognisance of biodiversity and water quality. While much is being done at farm level to preserve and manage habitats and protect water quality more can still be done.

The aim of the series is to bring the evidence-based science surrounding agriculture and its carbon footprint to agri-professionals and those with an interest in agriculture and the environment. To date the webinars have dealt with the following topics:

- Green House Gasses (GHG): why all the fuss?

- Reducing GHG emissions from Irish Agriculture
- Science behind the MACC (Marginal Abatement Cost Curve)
- Feed Management for Productive Ruminants
- Land Management – Water table control & Drainage
- Maintaining the Nitrates Derogation
- Reducing emissions from slurry
- Use of Protected Urea
- Low carbon Dairy Farming
- Water Quality in Ireland
- Nitrogen – Interactions with soil & water
- Phosphorus – Interactions with soil & water
- Protecting Nitrogen & Phosphorus Inputs on farm

Future webinars will include discussions on water quality, understanding the current pressures from agriculture and the pathways to improving our water quality; biodiversity, understanding the importance of biodiversity on farms and the environmental benefits that occur as a result; policy, looking to weather patterns in a bid to predict what future adaptations will be necessary on farms to build resilience and mitigate against the effects of climate change. See www.nationalruralnetwork.ie to view our detailed monthly schedule and to view past presentations.

Curlew Conservation Programme



Five-day old Curlew chick

Image: Joe Shannon/Curlew Conservation Programme

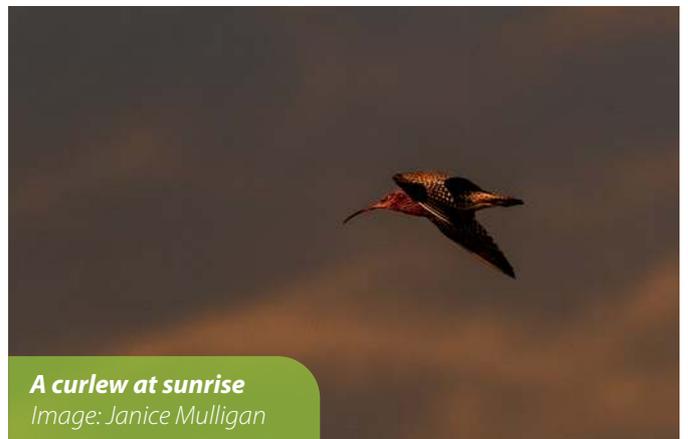
The Curlew is a well-known and much-loved part of Ireland's natural and cultural heritage. The species has declined by 96% since the late 1980s - early 1990s. Unfortunately, threats and pressures are very much present and active and the possibility of Curlew becoming extinct is one of the greatest conservation concerns in Ireland.

In recent decades, the afforestation of important habitats and farmland, as well as the intensification of agriculture have been among a host of factors that have contributed to the pressures faced by this vulnerable species, and many others who share the same land including Skylark, Cuckoo, Hen Harrier and Kestrel.

The Curlew Conservation Programme (CCP) was introduced in 2017. It is coordinated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service an integral part of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht and a wide range of actors, proactively working together to help the Curlew cause. In 2020, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine became partners in the project, in addition to their involvement in Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS) measure for Curlew and the Irish Breeding Curlew EIP (European Innovation Partnership).

The CCP provides a wide ranging and comprehensive framework that includes habitat enhancement, survey effort, research, nest protection, public and community engagement and much more.

One of the greatest challenges facing the Curlew population is the difficult task of rearing their young. To date the programme has seen promising indications that the work being done is having a positive impact on the population. Year two of the programme noted the number of chicks fledged per breeding attempt had increased to a threshold required to maintain a stable population. Year three (2019) showed the breeding productivity increased even further,



A curlew at sunrise

Image: Janice Mulligan

so while there is a giant mountain to climb, initial steps have been taken.

The NRN spoke to Dr Barry O'Donoghue native of the Stack's Mountains in Co. Kerry who is leading the Curlew Conservation Programme. Barry provided the following insight to the project: "Ultimately if we are successful in providing a template to save the Curlew from extinction, we (the people of Ireland, not just the Programme) will have been part of something momentous that will transcend generations. As it stands, a beautiful piece of our natural heritage, that has been a soundtrack to the summers of our grandparents' grandparents, will be lost in our generation. If we are successful in saving the bird, our grandchildren's grandchildren will have us to thank for the fact they can experience its iconic bubbling call in the Irish summer countryside.

"The fact that local people are part of this equation and solution gives good hope for changes to continue into the future. Schemes will last as long as the money is available, but a truly sustainable future can only be realised if local and national hearts and minds are focussed on treasuring these areas and their Curlew," said Dr O'Donoghue.

TAMSII scheme used to help fund energy efficiency measures on Kerry Pig Farm



Shane McAuliffe Photo: NRN

Energy is a significant cost for piggery operations. Key areas for energy use include ventilation, heating and lighting. Total energy consumption can vary dramatically between piggeries, depending on efficiency performance within these three areas.

The NRN spoke to young farmer Shane McAuliffe from McAuliffe Pig Farms in Castleisland Co. Kerry. Shane is a renowned farmer and operates his family business which comprises of four pig farms and a beef and tillage operation. The total farm size is 700 acres. Shane has a keen interest in protecting and enhancing the environment. He implements efficiency measures on his farm which help to reduce the carbon footprint and attract biodiversity to the farm.

Shane provided an overview of energy use on his pig farms. The pig farms consist of a combined total of 2,000 breeding sows and their offspring. Each year approximately 50,000 pigs per year are finished in a farrow-to-finish system.

Energy efficiency is a vital consideration for an operation of this scale to keep costs to a minimum. The farm buildings are relatively new and energy efficient. However, one key area that Shane recently improved efficiency in was the ventilation system on one of the farms.

Ventilation on a pig farm is important to control and maintain a healthy environment for the pigs. Good ventilation encourages good growth performance in terms of growth-rates and feed conversion. If ventilation is compromised, it can have adverse effects on the animals' behaviour.

With the assistance of funding provided by the Rural

Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) accessed through the TAMSII Scheme, Shane availed of the Young Farmer Capital Investment scheme (YFCIS). This scheme provides a grant of 60% on a maximum spend of €80,000 to qualifying young farmers. Shane applied for and received funding to upgrade a ventilation system on one of the farms. He installed E.C Blue fans. "These fans have a high-efficiency energy-saving motor thanks to innovative E.C. Blue motor technology. They have helped to reduce the energy usage by 50% compared to the previous system," said Shane.

If an applicant is ineligible for the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme they can also apply for these investments under the Pigs and Poultry Investment Scheme at a grant rate of 40%.

Other areas where energy efficiency is practised on the farm include milling. All milling takes place using night saver electricity which results in savings of 60% when compared to day rate tariffs. The heating system on the farm was upgraded to a renewable (air to water) energy system in 2008. Efficient LED lighting is used on all farms. Rain-water harvesting systems are also in place which capture the rainwater from the roofs of the buildings and is then reused for washing and disinfecting purposes.

Shane acknowledged the benefit of receiving funding from the TAMS scheme. "Funding provided by RDP programmes are helping farmers to become more efficient in their operations. Farmers want to farm in a manner that is sympathetic to the environment. By increasing energy efficiency on my farm, I am improving the economic and environmental sustainability on my farm. Other areas where I am focusing on sustainability include creating wildflower strips on each pig farm, planting trees and hedgerows and creating a large pond all to attract more biodiversity to my farm," said Shane.

The Tams II grant aid scheme promotes renewable energy and energy efficiency measures across all farming sectors, not least the pig farming sector. Items that are eligible for grant aid on existing pig houses include solar panels, both thermal (hot water) and photovoltaic (electricity) and biomass boilers in terms of renewable energy; and water meters, heat recovery units, heat pumps, insulation and LED lighting in relation to energy efficiency.

More information on all schemes and investments funded under TAMS can be found on the Departments website as follows : <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/tams/>

If you would like to read more about this case study please visit our website www.nationalruralnetwork.ie.

LEADER Case Study: Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese



Image: NRN

Teresa Roche worked abroad as a nurse for 15 years before returning to the home farm in Kylemore Abbey, Loughrea in Co. Galway. The Roche family have been milking cows since the 1960s and today have 100 pedigree Holstein British Friesians. On her return, Teresa had the idea to try and add value to the dairy enterprise by developing her own farmhouse cheese from the milk produced on farm. After undertaking a number of cheese making courses and training, Teresa developed her own on-farm cheese manufacturing facility in 2017, and in 2018, used LEADER funding to support the purchase of a number of pieces of equipment to help grow the business and streamline the cheese making process.

Context

At the outset, to gain an insight into cheese making Teresa first volunteered with a local award winning cheesemaker Marion Roeleveld of Killeen Farmhouse Cheese and then travelled to the UK and Switzerland to undertake additional cheese making courses and training. It was in the Alps of Switzerland that Teresa decided on making her cheese a premium mountain hard cheese similar to the Swiss Appenzeller cheese. Teresa also developed her business skills by completing the Musgraves Food Academy Programme and also the Start your Own Business

Programme with the Galway Local Enterprise Office (LEO). It was the LEO in Galway that first gave Teresa a grant of €20,373 to renovate an old sheep shed on the farm to turn it into a cheese manufacturing facility, which was renovated and fully certified to start producing cheese in just under a year.

Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese is a fully traceable 'farm to fork' low carbon product due to the fact that the cheese is produced on farm from the fully grass-fed herd of Pedigree Holstein British Friesians. Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese is handmade and is only produced when the cows are out on grass, so generally from April to October, and can take up to 6 months to fully mature before going to consumers.

In 2018, Teresa applied for a LEADER grant to help purchase additional pieces of equipment, including a cheese press, a PH-meter, a data box and probe (for the pasteurization process), as well as a labelling scales and a vacuum packer, to help with the manufacturing process and also to improve her packaging and expand her customer base.

"I wouldn't have been able to get going, rural funding is vitally important for alternative enterprises off farms..."

Impacts & Results

These pieces of equipment have had a substantial impact on the enterprise. For example, the PH-meter, data box and probe are all used to meet food certification and food quality standards. Over 1,500 litres of fresh morning milk is used to make one batch of cheese and on average Teresa produces 5 tonnes of cheese per annum. To ensure this is of suitable and safe quality these pieces of equipment help to monitor quality and safety. For example, the PH-meter is used to check the acidity of the batch, while the data box and probe detects and collects all the data from the milk and feeds this directly to the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) to help monitor any discrepancies in the batch, to ensure product safety and to provide evidence for any product claims.

When Teresa initially started selling her wheels of cheese, she wrapped them in cheese paper with her label as packaging. However, as time moved on she realised that she needed to turn to vacuum packing to increase her customer base and make her cheese exportable. Many chefs and outlets require products to be sealed and vacuum packed for hygiene reasons. Furthermore, the labelling scales allow Teresa to weigh out her cheese and include labelling details such as weight, origin, and nutritional values.



Image: NRN

Conclusion

These pieces of equipment have allowed Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese to become more streamlined in the cheese making process and have allowed it to access a number of new markets. While Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese is still relatively new, it has already picked up a number of awards including two gold awards in the Artisan Cheese Awards in the UK for the best rind and best hard cheese two years in a row and a bronze award in the newcomer cheese category for the Cais awards in 2018, as well as the 'Best New Business 2018' from Galway LEO.

Since its establishment, Teresa has also been able to employ 3-part time assistant cheese mongers and has since looked at developing other aspects of the business including on-farm cheese tours.

To learn more about Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese see www.kylemorefarmhousecheese.com



Image: NRN

Pearl Mussel Project Goes Digital



Image: NRN

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the Pearl Mussel Project EIP-AGRI Operational Group have stepped up their efforts to help stimulate knowledge exchange and boost farmer-led innovation within their project by holding virtual meetings with participating farmers on the Zoom video conferencing service. This form of online communication is being used to ensure that safe social distancing protocols are met and acts as a way to maintain contact with the different project stakeholders. The project's initial online project meeting resulted in 18 project participants logging on to view presentations from Assistant Project Manager, Dr Derek McLoughlin and Catchment Officer, Mary McAndrew providing updates on the latest programme developments. The full 20-minute online video of the presentations can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/31WuydD>.

Most recently, Project Manager, Dr Patrick Crushell, held a Zoom meeting with 38 new and prospective Pearl Mussel Project participants.

Dr. McLoughlin explains that the project is delighted that this digital initiative 'can reach farmers that may be otherwise quite isolated'. He adds that 'nothing replaces meeting farmers in a group setting but our videos keep everyone up to speed and they can watch the content back in their own time'.

The Pearl Mussel Project's inspiring online knowledge transfer and exchange tools will continue to be developed over the next few months given the current situation, along with a number of other innovative digital measures to communicate with farmers. As innovation is a social process, more bottom-up or interactive than top-down from science to implementation, this locally tailored, 'farmer-sensitive' approach towards fostering innovation, supporting modernisation and enhancing knowledge flows between research and practice at local level will ultimately

lead to greater farmer engagement in the project. Indeed, the European AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems) ecosystem recognises the fundamental importance of such measures not only for stimulating innovation at farm level, but also in strengthening social inclusiveness within the farming community. More information about the practices and principles of AKIS can be found at <https://bit.ly/38FI2eZ>

The Pearl Mussel Project is a pilot EIP-AGRI agri-environment programme that seeks to improve the quality of watercourses to benefit the endangered freshwater pearl mussel. It is locally adapted, results-based and focuses on the top eight freshwater pearl mussel catchments in Ireland. This project, which has a budget of €10million, is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. More information about the Pearl Mussel Project and the other 22 Irish EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects can be found in a booklet produced by the NRN team at NUI Galway entitled GRI: Ireland's Operational Groups 2019. For more information see <https://bit.ly/3falmoN>



Pearl mussels (image NRN)

The Smart Villages and Rural Towns Movement



Image: NRN

Smart Villages, and Smart Rural Towns in an Irish Context, are communities that build on, and enhance, their existing strengths and assets through creative thinking, and by embracing innovation, to create desirable places for rural people to live and work.

The NRN and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) are participating in a European

Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Thematic Group on Smart Villages, which explores innovative ways of creating more vibrant, sustainable and attractive rural areas. The 12th Thematic Group meeting took place on the 2nd of June 2020, in the form of a webinar. Participants were given the opportunity to learn from and exchange ideas from various Member States for supporting Smart Villages in the future CAP Strategic Plans and other EU Funds. Dymphna Harney from the DRCD presented 'Ideas for supporting Smart Villages in Ireland' in the next CAP programming period at this meeting. Background documents, presentations and images from this webinar can be found on the ENRD website: <https://bit.ly/30sg6t5>

A new two and a half-year 'Smart Rural Project', supported by the European Commission (DG AGRI), has also recently been launched. This project aims to promote and inspire villages to develop and implement smart village approaches and strategies across Europe. More information about this project can be found on the Smart Rural Project website: <https://www.smartrural21.eu/>

4th Meeting of the Bioeconomy and Climate Action in Rural Areas Thematic Group

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the fourth meeting of the Thematic Group on Bioeconomy and Climate Action took place virtually on 28th April 2020. The meeting was organised by the European Network for Rural Development in collaboration with the Walloon Rural Network. The meeting was especially targeted at National Rural Networks, RDP Managing Authorities, Local Action Groups, researchers and any stakeholders involved in bioeconomy value chains or rural bioeconomy initiatives.

This meeting of the thematic group discussed how climate change mitigation could be made economically viable and attractive for rural actors. The meeting explored methods on how to recognise and remunerate rural actors for their climate efforts, for example through public schemes such as those supported by the CAP / Rural Development

Programmes. The Walloon National Rural Network as host highlighted three case studies related to the bioeconomy and climate action during the event, which was followed by discussions with participants.

Since the thematic group's creation in September 2019, it has discussed the opportunities to increase the rural bioeconomy's contribution to climate change mitigation, approaches to promote and upscale mitigation practices, and ways of tracking and demonstrating rural bioeconomy activities' contribution to climate change mitigation.

For more information on the bioeconomy and climate action in rural areas thematic group and its 4th meeting, please visit: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/greening-rural-economy/bioeconomy_en

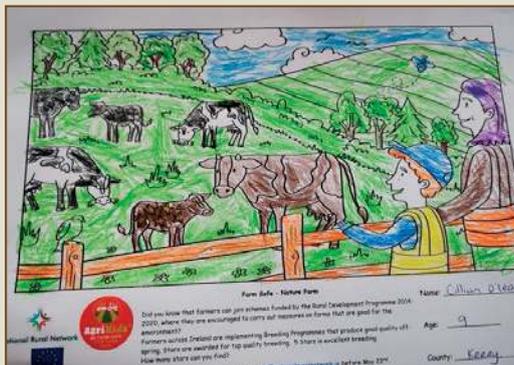
Safe Farm – Nature Farm Colouring Competition

The National Rural Network recently teamed up with AgriKids for a colouring competition to help raise awareness among children of how farmers protect the environment and keep wildlife safe. We invited children between the ages of five and 12 years to colour in one of three pictures depicting the following topics: farming for nature, water quality and farm and animals and the environment. The judges chose three winners (see right) from over 400 quality entries.

AgriKids is a farm safety educational platform with the ethos to engage, educate and empower children to be farm safety ambassadors. For more information visit www.agrikids.ie.



Shannon McCrossan, Co. Donegal



Cillian O'Leary, Co. Kerry



Sheena Crampton, Co. Offaly

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Rialtas na hÉireann
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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas