



National Rural Network

# NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

## SPOTLIGHT

Joe Melody, National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year 2020 on his family's farm near Bunratty, Co. Clare. The National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year Award recognises a farmer who is farming sustainably by encouraging biodiversity and protecting the environment. See profile on page 4.



## LEADER Programme Update

Activity in the LEADER programme has continued to increase in 2020 and towards the end of the current LEADER programme (2014 – 2020). As of the first week of October, there are over 3,704 LEADER projects approved with a total value of almost €147m. This is an increase of over 400 projects since our last update in the middle of September and an increased allocation of almost €17m.

Additionally, some 430 projects working their way through the approval process which have an additional value of over €23m.

Despite the impacts of COVID, the LEADER Programme has continued to progress as we move to the end of the programme, due to the resilience of the different actors involved in delivering LEADER.

To learn more about LEADER funding, see: [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/)

## Co. Clare Farmer Named NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year

Joe Melody, a dairy and purebred suckler farmer from Bunratty, Co. Clare, was named the 2020 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year at this year's FBD Young Farmer of the Year Awards on the 27th of November.

The award is presented by the National Rural Network (NRN) and aims to recognise farmers who are farming sustainably by encouraging biodiversity and protecting the environment.

Alan Doyle from Co Kilkenny won the award in 2019 and Raymond Langan from Co. Mayo won the inaugural award in 2018.

Biodiversity is threatened by climate change, pollution, development, and habitat loss. Farmers play an essential part in protecting the environment and its biodiversity by farming sustainably, and sustainability will soon be a key driver for every management decision made on farms.

The RDP 2014-2020 provides funding for the protecting and enhancement

of biodiversity through the provision of funding and grants made available under Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the form of Agri-environmental Schemes which boost farmland nature and halt species decline. For more information on biodiversity and the RDP visit [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity/](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity/)

Congratulating Joe, Philip Farrelly of the NRN 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 manner that protects and enhances the environment. Joe was awarded the 2020 National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year due to his passion, commitment, and enthusiasm for sustainable farming. He is farming in a manner which respects nature, ensuring the land is properly cared for and that the habitats within it are protected and maintained." See page 4 for a profile the winner, Joe Melody.

# NRN Campaign Celebrates Impact of LEADER Programme

**LEADER IMPACT CAMPAIGN 2020: WINNING ENTRIES**

**The Forge Project, Churchill, Co. Kerry**

THEME 1: Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation

**The Dynamics Violin Project, Dundalk, Co. Louth**

THEME 2: Social Inclusion

**Environmental Workshop Series, Ballyboughal, Co. Dublin**

THEME 3: Rural Environment

Logos: National Rural Network, LEADER Community-Led Local Development, An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail Department of Rural and Community Development, The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, Ireland's European Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union.

LEADER has been the main programme to support bottom up economic and social development of rural communities in Ireland since the 1990s. It is unique in that it does this by supporting community-led local development (CLLD), whereby projects are developed and implemented at a local level with the support of LEADER.

At the beginning of September, the NRN launched a LEADER Impact Campaign which aimed to celebrate the impact of the LEADER Programme on rural communities across Ireland.

The campaign asked participants, who have received funding from the current LEADER Programme (2014-2020), to tell their story of how LEADER has impacted their community, enterprise, organisation or local environment by creating their short video. Categories were aligned with the themes of the current LEADER programme namely - Theme 1: Economic Development, Enterprise & Development and Job Creation, Theme 2: Social Inclusion and Theme 3: Rural Environment. There was one winner per theme.

Winners were decided via a public vote system which ran for four weeks. With almost 6,000 votes cast over this period, the three winners were announced as The Forge Project by Spa Fenit Community Council in Churchill, Co. Kerry (Theme 1 - Economic Development, Enterprise & Development and Job Creation); The Dynamics Violin Project with the Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland in Dundalk, Co. Louth (Theme 2: Social Inclusion) and the Environmental Workshop Series with the Ballyboughal Hedgerow Society, in Ballyboughal Co. Dublin (Theme 3: Rural Environment).

Each of the winners will receive a €200 One4All gift voucher and will be featured as a case study with the NRN. The NRN would like to congratulate the winners and thank all of those who entered the campaign. All the entries can now be viewed on the newly developed NRN LEADER Impact Campaign See [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/storyboards](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/storyboards)

# EIP-AGRI Vlog Series Helping to Foster Social Innovation at Local Level



The National Rural Network have stepped up our efforts to help foster creativity, stimulate knowledge exchange and boost innovation in agriculture and interrelated fields by producing the 2nd episode of our Video Blog (Vlog) series on farmers who are participating in Ireland's 23 EIP-AGRI projects located throughout the country. The latest Vlog features Cyril Ó Flaithearta from the Caomhnú Árann Project who explains how this farmer-centred, locally-led project is

managing the habitats of the Aran Islands to maximise their agricultural and ecological output, and also how it is making a difference at farm and community level by

bringing about a collaborative spirit and social inclusion on the islands. This Vlog is just one of a number of multi-method communication strategies, tuned towards encouraging social innovation and inclusiveness at local level, being implemented by the NRN to maximize the success of the objectives set out in Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. As the European AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) concept highlights that innovation is a social process, more bottom-up or interactive than top-down from science to implementation, these Vlogs are an important tool in helping to create innovative ecosystems within the farming community.

You can view the video on the NRN's YouTube Channel: [www.youtube.com/pR2SrSfb2xk](http://www.youtube.com/pR2SrSfb2xk)

# Farming for Nature Ambassadors and Public Choice Award 2020

The Farming for Nature initiative, now in its third 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. This year, sixteen farmers were selected as Farming for Nature 'Ambassadors' 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 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. A cross-section of the Ambassadors was also selected for inclusion in the Farming for Nature's Public's Choice Award. Members of the

public were encouraged to view specially-commissioned short films depicting the work of these eight Ambassadors, and then vote for their favourite one. Following incredible enthusiasm and buy-in and from the public to support this award, Jim Cronin from Co. Clare was announced as the winner at this year's Burren Winterage School. The NRN are delighted to have supported this award which showcase 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 information visit <http://www.farmingfornature.ie>

## Profile: Joe Melody, National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year 2020



The NRN recently caught up with Joe Melody who was named the National Rural Network Biodiversity Farmer of the Year at this year's FDB Young Farmer of the Year Awards on the 27th of November.

Joe and his father farm 360 acres in a Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Registered Partnership near Bunratty in County Clare. Around 260 acres of the farm is used for the purebred suckler cows, their calves, and rearing the dairy replacement heifers. Joe is an active participant in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS), where habitats such as Low Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP) and Traditional Hay Meadows (THM) are preserved.

*"I take pride in embracing my role as a custodian of the land and protecting the environment..."*

He is passionate about biodiversity and is aware of the importance of maintaining these habitats for birds and wildlife, "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 Joe.

The farm borders the Shannon estuary with over 3km of riverbank. The riverbank is immersed in reed bed that intersperses with salt marsh, all of which need to be grazed and managed to allow the habitat and its ecosystem to thrive. The riverbank is carefully managed to encourage winter nesting birds such as wild geese and swans, also a measure within Joe's GLAS plan.

The remaining 100 acres are used for the dairy enterprise. A grassland management plan ensures cows spend the maximum amount of days at grass throughout the grazing season. A targeted nutrient management plan is in place; measuring and recording grass growths are actions central to ensuring the milking platform is farmed efficiently and in a sustainable manner.

"While farming the land, I take pride in embracing my role as a custodian of the land and protecting the environment," says Joe.

Joe was selected as NRN Biodiversity Farmer of the Year from the semi-finalists for this year's FDB Young Farmer of the Year Award. The announcement was made during an online awards ceremony for the FDB Young Farmer of the Year Awards on 27 November.



For more information of biodiversity visit [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity/](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity/)

## Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) EU Event



The European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), together with the EIP-AGRI Service Point held an online seminar entitled 'CAP Strategic Plans: the key role of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in Member States' from the 16th to 18th of September 2020. This event was dedicated towards the development of national AKIS strategies as part of the CAP Strategic Plans post 2020. The AKIS concept links a diversity of actors, such as farmers, agricultural educators, researchers, farm advisors and other rural economy extension

personnel, to promote mutual learning and generate, share and utilise research, agriculture and rural economy related technology, knowledge and information. The EIP-AGRI 'interactive innovation model' facilitates such collaboration and knowledge co-creation between various stakeholders through multi-actor Operational Group projects to make the best use of complementary types of knowledge (e.g. scientific, practical, organisational, etc) in place based settings. In Ireland, 23 Irish EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway at the National Rural Network, presented how lessons learned from Ireland's existing EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are helping to build future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) interventions in an Irish context on the final day of this seminar. Dr Conway highlighted the importance of Ireland's locally-led, farmer-centred, results-based approach towards EIP-AGRI in helping to bring about an innovative culture at farm level. This event also had Irish representatives from DAFM and Tom Kelly and Mark Gibson from Teagasc. The full programme and presentations from this seminar can be found here: <https://preview.tinyurl.com/akisevent>

## 18th NRNs' Meeting Discusses Long Term Vision for Rural Areas Consultation

The 18th NRN meeting co-organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the rural networks of Flanders and Wallonia took place online on Thursday 22nd October 2020. The meeting explored how NRNs have responded to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and the lessons learned for future networking. Participants also discussed the role NRNs could play in promoting stakeholder engagement and contributing to the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA).

The European Commission has committed to developing a long-term vision for rural areas. A consultation process is now underway to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders and European citizens are heard when developing the vision. Paul Soto from ENRD outlined that NRNs can play a key role in the consultation process by promoting the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas toolkit, acting as a central collection point, synthesising results and sending them to

ENRD, and hosting or supporting consultation events.

In the afternoon discussion, participants discussed how communications methods have changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic especially digital methods. During breakout sessions, NRNs described new communications methods they are exploring to reach stakeholders and the lessons learned. NRNs are currently using communications methods such as webinars, hackathons and LEADER television shows to engage stakeholders. These methods allow rural networks to reach a wider audience but concerns were raised about individuals who don't have access to online forms of communication. Participants believe that traditional forms of media remain critical for stakeholders not to be excluded.

To learn more about the 18th NRNs meeting, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/nrnmeeting18>

# Water Quality and Agriculture

The Water Framework Directive governs all water policy and management of our watercourses. The directive aims to achieve 'good status' for all waters. The pressures that agriculture places on the environment are well known, and various actions have been implemented at EU level, national policy level, and locally to address them.

The Nitrates Directive was introduced in Ireland in 1991 to protect water quality by reducing nitrates' pollution. Ireland's first Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) came into operation in 2006. Giving effect to the Nitrates Directive and supported by successive national regulations, the NAP was designed to prevent pollution of surface waters and groundwater from agricultural sources and protect and improve water quality.

## Nitrates Regulations

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is the lead authority for the Nitrates regulations (SI 605 2017). The purpose of these Regulations is to give effect to Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme for the protection of waters against pollution caused by agricultural sources. The set of measures in these regulations provides a basic level of protection against possible adverse impacts to waters arising from the agricultural sources.

## Nitrates Derogation

Some farmers avail of nitrates derogation, which provides farmers with an opportunity to farm at higher stocking rates, above 170 kg livestock manure nitrogen/ ha, subject to additional conditions designed to protect the environment.

In 2020, there were approx. 7,000 derogation applicants, making up 5% of farmers, farming 10% of agricultural land, and 20% of livestock in Ireland. New measures for all derogation applications were introduced on 1st January 2020 to target water quality. These include:

- Compulsory liming programme to improve nutrient utilisation of soils;
- Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) to prevent runoff;
- A reduction in crude protein in concentrate feed for grazing stock to reduce excess phosphorus in the diet;
- New grass reseedings must include clover to reduce chemical N applied to the sward,
- Training programme to adopt best practice nutrient use efficiency and management and the protection of water.

## DAFM Support to Water Quality

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) supports and protects water through a variety of schemes and programmes at national and local scale.

- Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) - The ASSAP programme is in place

with the support & co-operation from DAFM. DAFM announced the roll-out of an innovative collaboration between Government and industry delivering 30 new 'Agricultural Sustainability Advisors' to work with farmers across the country. These advisors oversee the implementation of a Programme aimed at encouraging sustainable farming, while meeting stringent water quality requirements on over 5,000 farms nationwide.

- The Agricultural Catchment Programme (ACP) – The ACP is a programme funded by DAFM and promotes better water quality and supports the production of high-quality food. It has been in operation for nearly ten years with ACP staff working with 300 farmers across six catchments in Ireland. Phase 4 of the programme commenced in January 2020 and builds on the gains and experiences from earlier phases. Overall, evidence from the ACP indicates that supporting farmers, through technical advice, to make better decisions regarding how they manage nutrient applications is likely to be the single area with the greatest potential to improve outcomes for water quality on Irish farms.
- Currently Pillar 1 of the CAP sets down baseline standards of protection for water through cross-compliance standards and the Good Agricultural and Environmental Standards (GAECs).
- The Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) is the largest scheme with a budget of €1.4bn with 50,000 participating farmers. It is Ireland's third such agri-environmental scheme and is a more targeted design prioritizing actions which target the preservation of priority habitats and species, sustainable management practices and traditional farming practices.
- The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS). A suite of seven measures are available under TAMS II. The measures provide grants for capital investment in physical assets to assist the Irish agriculture sector to respond to a range of policy challenges.
- Waters of LIFE DHPLG LED Integrated LIFE project - DAFM is an associated beneficiary in the project and will provide staff time and €100,000 funding annually.

## Common Agricultural Policy – Rural Development Programme

Funding is provided through the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 to encourage farmers to implement measures that protect waterways through schemes such as GLAS (Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme). In GLAS, which commenced in 2015, participants could choose measures to protect water quality. The results of these measures are:

- all of the 48,400 currently active GLAS

participants have a Nutrient Management Plan to target fertilizer use on farms.;

- Over 14,700 km of watercourses are protected from bovines;
- Over 22,400 ha's annually are in GLAS Catch Crops to prevent nutrient leaching;
- Over 4,400 farmers are spreading slurry via Low Emission Slurry Spreading to prevent runoff; and,
- Over 200 farmers have implemented riparian margins to create a buffer strip between their land and watercourses. (Information from May 2020, DAFM).

The European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-Agri) also supports local communities to implement novel innovations to enhance water quality in specific areas. Results-based EIP-Agri projects which aim to protect or enhance water include the Mulkear EIP, Allow Project – Duhallow Farming for Blue Dot Catchments, Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme, and the Pearl Mussel Project, to name a few.

In 2018, the government implemented a new strategy that involved a collaborative approach to facilitate

water quality improvements. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identified priority catchments from across the country where water status is 'at risk' from agricultural and non-agricultural pressures. The ASSAP – Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advice Programme, works with farmers to provide a free and confidential advisory service to improve water quality. It is a collaboration between Teagasc Sustainability Advisors, Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), and Dairy Co-ops.

The NRN met with Teagasc Sustainability Advisor Donal Kennedy and his client Mr. Galligan to discuss the ASSAP programme and recommended measures. "The ASSAP programme is a great initiative. I was not aware that the watercourses locally were at risk. Changing farming practice such as leaving a wider buffer zone, up to 10 meters, when spreading slurry is a priority action on my farm," said Mr. Galligan.

There are many policies, programmes, schemes, and measures that farmers and communities implement to protect water quality. If you would like further information on water quality programmes or projects, see [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie).

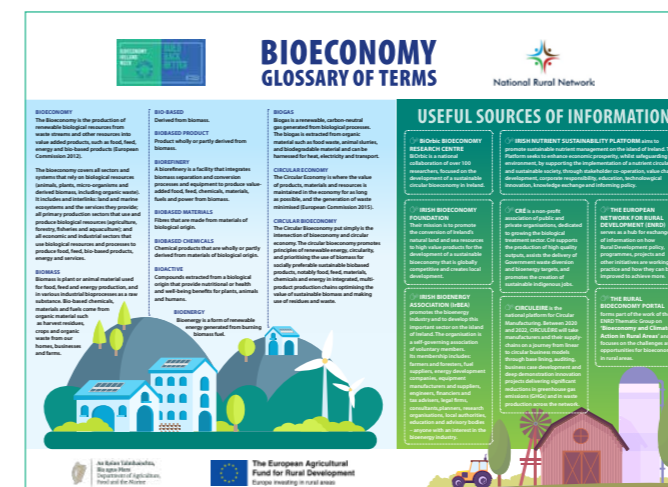
# NRN Publish New Bioeconomy Glossary of Terms

As part of Bioeconomy Week 2020 from 19th to 23rd October, the National Rural Network (NRN) launched a Bioeconomy Glossary of Terms. The Glossary of Terms produced in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) seeks to highlight some of the key terms in Ireland's rapidly growing bioeconomy. The NRN believes this glossary of

terms can act as a resource for individuals who wish to gain an insight into the bioeconomy. The document also contains useful sources of information where you can gain a deeper understanding of the bioeconomy and how to get involved.

The NRN also ran a Bioeconomy Awareness Campaign as part of Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2020 held on 19th to 23rd October. This pioneering initiative provided farmers and rural dwellers with an insight into the types of locally-led bioeconomy projects that the LEADER Programme, as well as the EIP-AGRI initiative, are supporting 'on-the-ground' at farm and community level under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. Such an approach is particularly important as rural areas prepare to adapt, rebuild and re-energize as part of Ireland's COVID-19 crisis recovery response.

The Bioeconomy Glossary is available at [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity-news/bioeconomy-glossary-of-terms-launched-by-the-national-rural-network/](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity-news/bioeconomy-glossary-of-terms-launched-by-the-national-rural-network/)



# The Value of e-learning During the Covid-19 Crisis

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early March 2020 disrupted the way businesses and organisations communicate with their clients and members; the National Rural Network is no different. Organisations had to diversify and change how they communicate; for many, these changes took place through online platforms.

While face-to-face events and meetings were no longer possible, the NRN quickly established a more significant presence online through collaborations and webinars. Since April, the NRN has been supporting weekly webinars in association with Teagasc ConnectED, Dairy Sustainability Ireland, and Food Drink Ireland Skillnet; the webinars aim to raise awareness of environmental and sustainable challenges facing Irish Agriculture, provided a stepwise change

in illustrating the potential of digital communication solutions to deliver farmer and broader industry messages. The webinars have reached over 280 people each week and will continue until the end of the year.

Online competitions helped the NRN extend its reach into the homes of rural communities. In early summer, hosting an online colouring competition in association with AgriKids, highlighting Farm Safety and Farmland biodiversity, received over 400 entries. The NRN also launched a Women in Agriculture Video Series featuring five videos of farmers from different agricultural sectors talking about their farming experiences in contemporary Ireland. This series garnered a lot of positive media attention with over 20 different items, including coverage in local and national print media and radio.

## 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.

See [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie) for more.

# 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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T: 090 - 6482744

E: [info@nationalruralnetwork.ie](mailto:info@nationalruralnetwork.ie)

W: [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie)

**National Rural Network**  
 Unit 2A Moate Business Park,  
 Clara Rd, Moate,  
 Co. Westmeath  
 N37 W9R0  
 Republic of Ireland



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