



# NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

## SPOTLIGHT

Thomas O'Connor with ewes and newborn lambs on his family's farm in Co. Kildare. Thomas takes part in several RDP schemes, some of which rolled over earlier this year, including the Sheep Welfare Scheme, TAMS II and the Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP). See page 6.



## €70 million Transitional LEADER Programme

On Friday, April 9th, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, announced details of the Transitional LEADER Programme 2021-2022.

- Local Groups can apply for funding immediately.
- Funding allocations for the 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs).
- Ground-Up approach of LEADER, a key plank of Our Rural Future, Ireland's new Rural Development Policy.

The headline allocations:

- €65 million to support locally-led rural development projects across 29 LAGs.
- €3 million to support the LEADER Cooperation measure which encourages rural areas to work together on collaborative projects.
- €2 million to prepare for the next LEADER Programme.

Commenting on the new programme, Minister Humphreys said: "If the pandemic has taught us anything it is to think outside the box so if you have an innovative idea that can make a real difference in your community then pick up the phone and contact your local LEADER company today."

More details on funding allocations can be found <https://bit.ly/2RINKs5>.

## Rural Stakeholders Have Their Say on Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

On 25 January 2021, the National Rural Network hosted an online workshop on the European Commission's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) in the EU.

The online LTVRA workshop provided an important opportunity for Irish stakeholders to have their say on the current opportunities and challenges for rural areas, the different policies implemented in rural areas, the aspirations for rural areas in 2040 and the actions needed for these to materialise.

The workshop was aimed at anyone with an interest in our rural areas, including farmers, consumers, the agri-food sector, rural enterprises, local authorities, civil society organisations, rural youth, local action groups and academics. In total, 120 participants attended the online workshop.

David Lamb, from the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), provided an outline of how the workshop outputs will feed into

the European Commission's long-term vision planning. Attendees participated in eight interactive breakout sessions and addressed a number of themes, including climate change and quality of the environment, social inclusion, infrastructure and services, income, work, basic goods, digital technology, and governance. Participants identified the biggest gaps between where rural communities would like to be in 2040 and where the current trends suggest they may end up. They then identified the types of action needed to fill the gaps and achieve their rural vision.

Feedback from the groups, along with other interactive methodologies, was harvested and fed into the ENRD's collation of feedback from across the EU. The next stage in the process is Rural Vision Week 2021- Imaging the future of Europe's rural areas, took place from 22-26 March. This interactive event included high-level presentations and discussions, a marketplace, workshops and 'fringe' activities.

## New 'Multi-Actor Perspectives' and 'Rural Voices' Publications



of two new publications, produced by the NRN team at NUIG, comprising of all EIP-AGRI and Farm Viability and Competitiveness guest blogs featured on the NRN website over the past 4 years. The EIP-AGRI booklet, entitled 'Multi-Actor Perspectives', details the thoughts and opinions of 16 experts in the field of agricultural productivity, sustainability and innovation on the benefits and potential of the multi-actor approach embedded in the EIP-AGRI initiative in helping to build bridges between research and practice in the agriculture sector. The Farm Viability and Competitiveness guest blog publication, entitled 'Rural Voices', features 12 key personnel in the rural realm highlighting current and emerging issues that have the potential to positively influence the needs of Irish agriculture and rural communities. Matters of concern highlighted within Ireland's RDP such as generational renewal, digitization in farming, women in agriculture, rural entrepreneurship, farm investment and young farmers are featured within. The 'Multi-Actor Perspectives' booklet can be freely viewed/downloaded here: <https://bit.ly/3rYhkXj>, while the 'Rural Voices' publication can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/3d2l05Q>

A key objective of the National Rural Network is to maximise the beneficial outcomes of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) here in Ireland by bringing it to the lives of as many researchers, farm advisors, agri-businesses, farmers and rural communities as possible through our various communication platforms. Our latest RDP dissemination endeavour comes in the form

## National Farming for Nature Ambassador Nominees 2021

The nominees for this year's Farming for Nature Ambassador Awards 2021, proudly supported by the National Rural Network (NRN), have recently been announced. Now in its fourth year, this national initiative is now made up of an active network of over 40 inspiring Ambassadors located across Ireland, who are inspiring many other farmers to take simple measures to enhance nature on their land and in their community. The 48 successful nominees for this year's award who are going that extra mile for nature include farmers from dairy, beef, sheep, poultry and pig farmers. These nominees manage a wide range of valuable habitats on their farms including species-rich grasslands and heaths, wetlands, woodlands and hedgerows. Nominees for this award are currently being interviewed by the Farming for Nature team before

a final shortlist of Ambassadors are visited by a panel of judges. This judging panel, which includes Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway and the NRN, will then collectively decide on this year's list of Ambassadors by late summer 2021, before a cross-section of farmers are selected for inclusion in the Farming for Nature's Public's Choice Award 2021.

The Farming for Nature initiative, sponsored by Bord Bia, was developed in 2018 by a group of heritage enthusiasts based in the west of Ireland. Jim Cronin, a horticulture and suckler farmer from Bridgetown Co. Clare was announced as the winner of this award last year. The full list of nominees for the Ambassador Awards 2021 can be found on the Farming for Nature website. Please see: <https://www.farmingfornature.ie/nominees/>

## LEADER Programme: Sligo Centre for Independent Living – Community Hub Project



The hub has a range of spaces which allow people to engage in different activities (Image source: SCIL)

The Sligo Centre for Independent Living (SCIL) was set up in 1996 by a group of individuals with disabilities who aim to promote maximum independence for all with physical disabilities and to support their inclusion and empowerment within their communities. As part of their work, the SCIL provides and manages Personal Assistant (PA) services to individuals with a range of disabilities including physical and sensory disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and enduring mental illness, among others. Over the years, through their work, the SCIL noticed that many of its members were finding it very difficult to integrate into their community, despite a desire to do so. In direct response to this, the SCIL established the community hub project to create a space for all members of the community to meet and engage.

### Activities

In developing this space, the SCIL had the vision that it would be a space for everyone, including the bereaved, the lonely, those with disabilities, able people, cool people, older people, young people and for those who feel they have no labels at all, to meet each other and be able to engage while breaking down barriers between different sectors of the community.

***"This project is about seeing community members as resourceful and worthwhile individuals who can contribute to the overall fabric of their community"*** Maria Mulligan, CEO, SCIL

While SCIL had some core funding to support the project, they realised that they did not have sufficient funds to deliver it to the standard required and so they sought out LEADER funding. To design the hub, SCIL engaged with several third-year Interior Architecture and Design students from Sligo

Institute of Technology, a professional interior architect and an accessibility consultant to create a warm, welcoming, fully accessible place for all members of the community.



The hub is fully accessible for all (Image Source: SCIL)

### Results

This project has resulted in the creation of Ireland's first of its kind community hub, called Number 45 based on High Street in the heart of Sligo town. The hub is fully accessible for all and has a range of spaces that allow people to engage in different activities. These include comfortable seating areas, crafting areas and a 38m<sup>2</sup> soundproof space for drama, music or other such projects. The hub also has a small outside space for some horticultural projects.

While Number 45 is still relatively new, and has experienced closures due to COVID19, once up and running this hub will improve the health and wellbeing of all its guests by providing a space for physical and social interactions. To read the full case study visit: <https://bit.ly/3k214Ce>

# TAMS II Providing Funding for Renewable Energy – Solar PV



Solar panels in the roof of agricultural buildings

Renewable energy is energy created from resources that can be replenished naturally, like wind, solar, and water. Fossil fuels continue to be the dominant energy source in Ireland. In 2019, 87% of all energy use came from fossil fuels (seai.ie). Fossil fuels include oil, natural gas, coal, and peat.

Energy can add significant costs to production. Within the dairy sector, heating, cooling, and milking account for up to 75% of electricity demand. Pigs and Poultry farms have significant heating costs; 80-85% of energy demand is in the form of heat created from kerosene or electricity use. In Ireland, energy use accounts for ca. 5% of total Agricultural emissions. In March 2019, the then Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD introduced on-farm renewable energy investment items eligible for grant aid through the following Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II) measures: Animal Welfare and Nutrient Storage Scheme (AWNSS), Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (YFCIS), Organic Capital Investment Scheme (OCIS), and Pigs & Poultry Capital Investment Scheme (PPCIS).

TAMS II included solar photovoltaic (PV) Installation and LED lighting for all farms as part of the government's broader drive to position Irish agriculture as a global leader in sustainability.

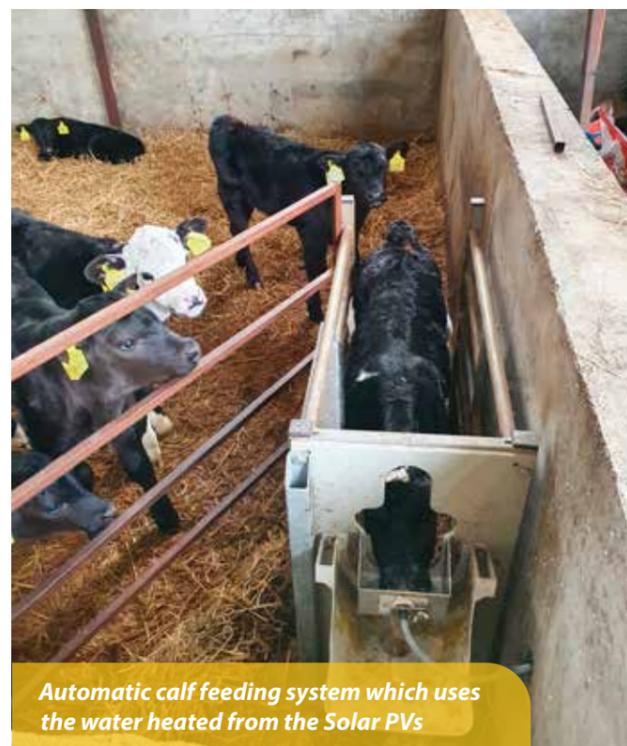
## About the Solar Photovoltaic (PV) System

A Solar Photovoltaic (PV) System consists of several solar panels/ modules mounted onto a roof of an agricultural building, and these are connected to the electrical circuit of the building. During daylight, the solar panels are exposed to light; this generates direct current (DC) electricity which is converted in an inverter to alternating current (AC) electricity that provides power.

Grant aid is available for solar PV systems up to 11kWp. For roof-mounted solar PV systems, planning permission is required where the area of panels on a roof exceeds 50m<sup>2</sup> or 50% of the total roof area whichever is the lesser. As a rough guide, planning permission is generally not required on up to 8kWp Solar PV panel array system on a roof, however, the issue of planning permission should always be verified on a case by case basis. With regard to battery storage, grant aid is available for battery storage capacity up to 6kWh. An energy survey completed by the installer will determine if a storage battery is recommended.

## Potential Opportunities for Solar PV Renewable Energy

Research suggests that the average energy use on a dairy farm equates to between 16,000 - 18,500 kWh; the inclusion of Solar PV can mitigate up to 32% of energy use, potentially saving approx. 5,000 kWh/year or up to €710.



Automatic calf feeding system which uses the water heated from the Solar PVs



Inverter and battery system linked to the energy source of the agricultural building

The NRN met with Dairy Farmer Johnathan Fennell from Co. Laois to investigate how his investment in Solar PV panels has enhanced efficiencies on his farm. Johnathan is farming with his father & uncle operating a 125 dairy cow herd and a calf to beef system. Johnathan installed Solar PV panels on the farm in March 2020 through the TAMS II Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme (YFCIS) and received a 60% grant rate on the investment. Efficiency is a priority for Johnathan on his farm, "I am always looking for new ways to become more efficient. Embracing new technologies such as Solar PV without grant aid is a difficult decision as the payback period is much longer, I probably would not have considered it a feasible option. However, the grant-aid available under the YFCIS scheme significantly reduces the payback period, making the technology a viable option which also reduced my electricity bill".

Johnathan installed twenty-four panels on the roof space of his farm buildings. All twenty-four Solar PV panels cover approx. 40m<sup>2</sup> of roof space. To further enhance the investment, two battery storage units were installed to store up to 8kWh of energy. The energy stored in the battery units is used to offset energy usage at times of peak consumption, excess energy is used to operate the water

heating units and their timers. Water heating accounts for up to 23% of energy use on dairy farms. Alternative Energy Ireland (aei.ie) was used to install the panels, local representatives carried out initial consultations and provided recommendations on how best to utilise the panels on the farm.

The total cost of installation was in the region of €15,000-€20,000 before the TAMS II grant, however after claiming the grant aid and VAT back, the actual cost was almost €7,000. Since installation, the reduction in electricity use on the farm is reflected in lower energy bills. On average, bi-monthly electricity bills are reduced by over €200, indicating a payback period of 5 years.

Jonathan said, "With the success of the panels to date, I would consider installing more in years to come," recommending that other farmers with a high reliance on electricity to consider applying to TAMS II to make a similar investment.

The NRN would like to thank Johnathan for taking the time from his busy Spring schedule to participate in this case study.

## Participation in Multiple RDP Schemes Improves Efficiencies on Farm



Thomas with his low emissions slurry spreading (LESS) machinery

In December 2020, the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) announced the rollover of several schemes within the Rural Development Programme (RDP 2014-2020), which ensured continuity of farm payments in 2021. The rollover applied to the main farm schemes, including Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS), Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC), Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP), Sheep Welfare Scheme (SWS), the Organics Framing Scheme (OFS) and the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II).

Income to farmers from participation in schemes provide an opportunity for farmers to improve current farming practices, become more efficient and protect and enhance the biodiversity on their farms.

Thomas O'Connor a young farmer from Co. Kildare welcomed the news that scheme payments would continue for 2021. Thomas is a full-time young farmer, farming over 240 acres comprising of tillage, sheep, sucklers and beef to finish. Completing the Green Cert in Kildalton in 2010, a registered farm partnership was established between Thomas and his parents.

As an active participant of the Sheep Welfare Scheme, which helps farmers go beyond the relevant mandatory standard to enhance the standards of animal welfare in the Irish sheep flock, 'Lameness Control' and 'Scanning' were selected for this farm. The level of lameness within the flock affects the flock performance, body condition score, thrive and may lead to other issues.

"We have almost 300 ewes on the farm. Scanning allows accurate feed supplementation to the flock pre-lambing. Ewes are divided into batches, those expecting single, double and triplet lambs, knowing what your ewes are expecting can reduce feed costs; A ewe carrying a single lamb does not have

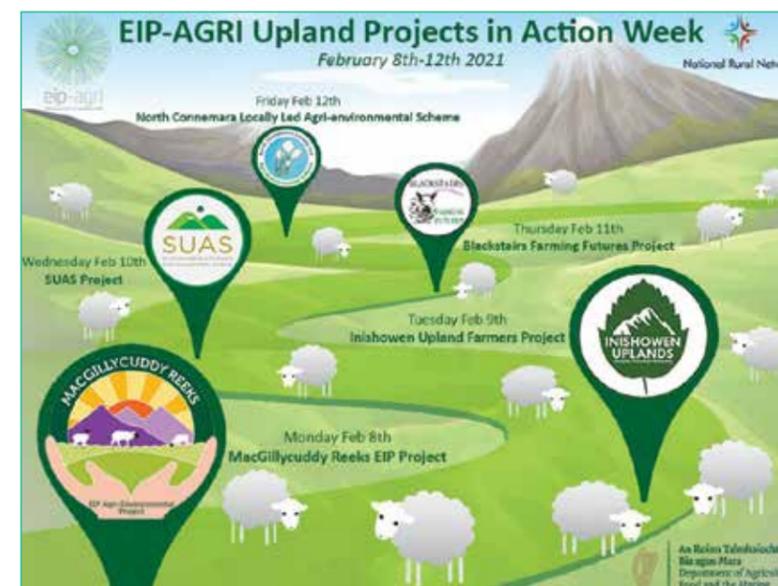
the same energy requirements as a ewe carrying double or triplet lambs."

Thomas is also a participant of the Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP), which aims to lower the intensity of GHG emissions by improving the quality and efficiency of the national beef herd while improving the genetic merit of the national beef herd. The scheme has allowed farmers to build and use a star rating index to select their replacement stock and breeding animals. Animals are awarded stars for desirable traits such as milk yield, calving difficulty, docility and feed intake. "Participation in the BDGP scheme has helped maintain the most desirable genetics within my herd, which averages a 5-star rating."

Following a successful application to the TAMS II Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (YFCIS) in Autumn 2019, Thomas received a 60% grant towards the purchase of retrofitted Low-emission Slurry Spreading Equipment (LESS). LESS equipment is used to apply livestock slurries to land in a more environmentally friendly way than conventional slurry spreading methods. Thomas availed of the retrofitting option, swapping his splash plate for a dribble bar attachment. The total cost of the retrofit was approximately €12,000, however, after claiming the grant aid and VAT back, the actual cost incurred was almost €5,000. "Not only is the nitrogen in the slurry better utilised which reduces emissions, but the response from the grass in terms of grass growth is also much quicker than using a splash plate. I can allow livestock to graze the grass earlier than with the splash plate because the grass leaf is not soiled with slurry."

To note : Nitrates Derogation applicants (as defined under Statutory Instruments 605 of 2017, 65 of 2018, 40 of 2020) are no longer eligible to apply and receive approval for LESS equipment. Furthermore, applicants farming at or above 170 kgs/N per hectare (as defined under Statutory Instrument 529/2020) in the year of application or the preceding year, will not be eligible for approval after 15 April 2022. Applicants farming below 170 kgs/N per hectare continue to be eligible for LESS equipment

## EIP-AGRI Upland Projects in Action Week 2021



The National Rural Network continued their ongoing efforts to help stimulate knowledge exchange and boost innovation in agriculture and rural areas by running an 'EIP-AGRI Upland Projects in Action Week' from the 8th to 12th of February 2021. This successful initiative highlighted the background, aims, activities and lessons learned to date of Ireland's five Upland EIP-AGRI Operational Group Projects (MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP Project, Inishowen Upland Farmers EIP Project, SUAS (Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme) Project, Blackstairs Farming Futures (BFF) Project and North Connemara Locally Led Agri-environmental Scheme) funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. These projects are bottom-up, led by farmers who are passionate about the future of farming and the environment in their communities. This communication strategy employed by the NRN team at NUI Galway embraced the ethos of the European AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems) concept, by not only promoting the benefits of the collaborative focus of these projects, in which a diverse range of interested parties can work together to realise innovation in agriculture but also by creating a better connection with, as well as trust in, the EIP-AGRI initiative as a whole amongst the NRN's far-reaching and wide-ranging audience interested in agricultural and rural affairs. A full recap of Upland EIP-AGRI Projects featured as part of this awareness week can be found on the NRN website. See <https://bit.ly/3d2NSv2>.

### 19th NRN Meeting – Trans-national Cooperation

The 19th NRN meeting, which took place online on the 11th of February, was co-organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the Luxembourg Rural Network focusing on the topic of Transnational Cooperation (TNC). Representatives of all NRNs across the EU, including Dr. Teresa Hooks from the Irish NRN, were in attendance along with representatives from some Local Action Groups (LAGs). The topic of TNC projects, how future CAP networks may take form, and the progress on the EU Long Term Rural Vision (LTRV) were discussed. Firstly, examples of TNC projects from Luxembourg were shown through a 'virtual fieldtrip', while discussions on TNC led to examples of how to broker relationships between LAGs. The need to have matching eligibility rules and timelines for TNC projects was also deliberated, along with the difficulties experienced for TNC projects and the difficulties of establishing TNC projects throughout COVID. TNC was also considered in relation to EIP Agri projects who, in the next CAP, will be established to address all nine CAP objectives including Ensuring a fair income for farmers; Increase competitiveness; Rebalance the power in the food chain; Climate change action; Environmental care; Preserve landscapes and biodiversity; Support generational renewal; Foster vibrant rural areas; and to Protect food and health quality. Progress on the EU LTRV was also reviewed along with upcoming Rural Vision Week (March 22nd to 26th) which will showcase the outcomes of the EU wide consultation. To view presentations and materials from the meeting see: <https://bit.ly/3kftWXQ>.

# Celebrating 30 Years of the LEADER Programme in Ireland

Since its inception in 1991, the LEADER Programme has been the mainstay of rural community development here in Ireland, providing local actors with the necessary resources and support to enable them to actively engage and direct the local development of their area. The most recent LEADER budget allocated to Ireland for example, funded through Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP), provided €250 million in financial aid to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural communities, up to the end of 2020.

Most recently, the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) announced the allocation of €70 million to LEADER Programme until the end of 2022 as part of the two-year Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) transition period. This support, co-funded by the European Union, will provide rural communities and local enterprises throughout Ireland with an opportunity to respond to emerging challenges in their area by supporting measures that provide employment and job creation, as well as promoting the value of social capital and environmental protection.

The LEADER Programme has remained fully operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with all Local Action Groups (LAGs) and their Implementing Partners (IPs) located throughout the country continuing to deliver much-needed support and assistance to their local communities.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) will be celebrating such efforts and the success of the LEADER Programme in Ireland by launching a new LEADER Project Case Study booklet highlighting 72 inspirational LEADER project examples located throughout Ireland, over the next few weeks. This booklet details the main aims, objectives and background of the selected LEADER project examples to help future applicants see what is possible through LEADER's community-led approach to rural development, particularly as they prepare to rebuild, redevelop and reenergize as part of Ireland's Covid-19 crisis recovery response. All 29 Irish LAGs and their respective IPs are represented in this publication.

For the latest news of the forthcoming publication, and to access an extensive range of information about the LEADER Programme visit [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader)

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

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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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