



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

Over 80 delegates attended a LEADER and the Rural Environment workshop organised by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the NRN held in the Radisson Hotel, Athlone on 20 April 2018. The LEADER Programme has played a key role in maximising the potential of environmental actions that contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas throughout Ireland and the EU. *Continues on page 8...*



New Biodiversity Award Announced

The NRN and Macra na Feirme has announced the addition of a new Biodiversity Award to the 2018 FBD Young Farmer of the Year competition. The aim of this new award is to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity in the farming community. Agriculture relies on biodiversity in many ways: bees pollinate crops, earthworms build soil fertility, bacteria and soil biota breakdown nutrients and birds and insects keep plant disease and pests in check. *Continued on page 8...*

Irish NRN Strategies presented at the ENRD Communication Workshop

The Irish NRN's communications work was recently on show at a workshop for NRNs from across Europe held in Prague in the Czech Republic on 1 June. The workshop was organised by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) to coincide with the 11th NRN meeting. James Claffey, NRN Manager, and Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway attended both of these events on behalf of the NRN.

The workshop brought together over 70 representatives of Network Support Units dealing with rural development communications from across the EU to discuss ways of promoting networking opportunities and to improve communication activities at both the national (NRN) and European (ENRD) levels. This event reflected the ever-increasing need for communications-related peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing among NRNs. Workshop participants shared the strategies and tools they use

to communicate with their target audiences. This allowed delegates to learn from each other's past experiences and take stock of successful and inspiring examples that can be adopted by all NRNs. Dr Conway presented on the Irish NRN's digital communication strategies and methods. The ENRD also produced and distributed three leaflets detailing the various communication efforts carried out by Ireland's NRN to those in attendance at this event. These leaflets featured the Irish NRNs 'Interactive Map of Irish LAGs', the 'LEADER and the Rural Environment Project Database' and our 'Young Trained Farmer Case Study'. Ian McCafferty, Head of Social Media with the European Commission - DG AGRI also presented various social media strategies that all the NRNs can employ. For more information, see www.enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-nrn-communication_en

Farming for Biodiversity: Results-Based Schemes

In November 2017, the European Commission (EC) proposed a new approach to deliver the common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which focuses on performance against objectives and targets. The EC outlines details of this results-based approach in a report entitled *The Future of Food and Farming*. The new approach will provide EU member states with the flexibility to set their own objectives and targets and would lead to a more results-oriented CAP after 2020.

European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, has previously said that, while 30 percent of direct payments are linked to greening, a one-size fits-all approach does not work. Results-based schemes are therefore likely to be a prominent feature of CAP after 2020.

The EU-funded Results-based Agri-Environment Pilot Scheme (RBAPS) is developing and testing results-based agri-environment schemes (AES) in Ireland and Spain. Results-based AES link payment levels to the quality of the environment and biodiversity produced on farms. Higher payments go to farmers producing higher quality environmental outputs such as plants, wildlife, clean air and water.

RBAPS have been working on a pilot project in three regions: County Leitrim, the Shannon Callows floodplain and in the Navarra region of Spain.



The pilot project recently held its 'end of project' seminar in Athlone on 22 June. The seminar focused on lessons learnt from the pilot projects in Ireland and Spain and how AES can be designed to reward farmers for the quality of biodiversity on their farmland.

Throughout the project, ecologists worked in partnership with participant farmers to enhance biodiversity on their farms. Indicators based on evidence are used to measure the overall outcomes.

These indicators are specific to each location. Ecologists explain the indicators to farmers and outline effective wildlife management options for their habitats which will enhance biodiversity. Results-based payments give farmers the flexibility to



use their own initiative on how to best manage their land and their livestock. The payments incentivise farmers to manage habitats on their land. Delegates at the seminar heard how participant farmers in County Leitrim are developing an appreciation of biodiversity and see it as a valuable product. Francis Fox, a participant in the Leitrim pilot scheme, spoke positively about his participation in the scheme and he described the scheme as "practical and fair". Francis outlined how the scheme had helped to develop his knowledge of biodiversity. Before entering the scheme, he was aware that he had many plant species on his farm but he could not identify all of them. After receiving the training provided as part of the scheme, and following consultation with the project ecologists, he now feels more confident identifying plants on his farm. Results-based payment schemes are giving farmers a sense of pride and are helping to build trust and positive relationships between farmers and ecologists. Farmers gain a sense of ownership and are advised on concrete measures they can take to protect and enhance biodiversity on their farms.

For more information on the RBPAS project, see www.rbaps.eu

Connecting and Restoring Natural Habitats in North-West Cork

RaptorLIFE is a four and a half year project led by IRD Duhallow that aims to bring local communities together to better manage upland and freshwater habitats within the Duhallow area. It is an ambitious project in terms of both scale (a large project area joining two Natura 2000 sites) and political sensitivities. For this reason, the project has concentrated on building effective partnerships with the local community and statutory authorities.



Local school children with a young buzzard

RaptorLIFE is implementing a range of actions to improve awareness and restore habitat for hen harrier, merlin and other upland species in the Stacks to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle Special Protection Area (SPA). The bulk of the actions are trialled on six demonstration farms that collectively cover an area of 300 hectares. The conservation actions include heather regeneration through controlled burning and mowing, rush control, improvement of existing hedgerows, removal of wilding conifers, and the control of invasive plant species. Small mammal trapping and farm bird surveys undertaken throughout the project will provide quantifiable data on the densities of potential prey items pre-and post treatment. Outside the demonstration farms, RaptorLIFE are working with Coillte and the Forest Service to create a riparian foraging corridor, free of conifers, which will connect the SPA with the Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC at the source of the Blackwater. RaptorLIFE has been working with the county councils to treat invasive plants on the road network, with over 100km of roadside treated for knotweed thus far.

RaptorLIFE is also implementing a range of actions to improve awareness and restore habitat for Atlantic salmon, brook lamprey and other freshwater species

in the Blackwater River SAC. RaptorLIFE has been working in partnership with local farmers to improve the health of the Owentaraglin and upper Blackwater rivers through bankside fencing. IRD Duhallow offers farmers with land adjoining these rivers free bankside fencing and alternative livestock drinking sources. Since June 2016, RaptorLIFE has erected 23.5km of new fencing and 82 cattle drinkers, with more lined up at no cost to landowners. As an added incentive, landowners in the GLAS agri-environment scheme receive payment for the fencing work done by IRD Duhallow.

In addition to the fencing, RaptorLIFE is helping to protect riverbanks through the planting of native trees on eroding bends, and treating invasive weed species that are creating erosion and biodiversity problems on the riverbanks. To date, RaptorLIFE has used herbicide to treat knotweed on 25km of riverbank, and Himalayan balsam has been manually removed from over 80km of riverbank. All of these actions are helping to keep silt and nutrients out of the rivers, creating better habitat for our freshwater fish and the freshwater pearl mussel.

For more information please see
www.duhallowlife.com/raptor-life.

Reviving Rare Breeds in Donegal

Farming began in Ireland around 4,000 BC with the domestication of goats, sheep, cattle, pigs and the cultivation of a primitive form of wheat and barley. Evidence of agricultural settlements and enclosure has been found from that period onwards.

As agriculture advanced and progressed throughout the ages, so too did the variety of plants and animals farmed. Traditionally in Ireland farms were self-sustaining small holdings. With the introduction of new genetics and more efficient breeds of animals over time some of Ireland's indigenous species were lost to extinction, others are on the brink of extinction. Efforts have been made to revive these traditional species and some are still farmed today.

The Irish Moiled (or Moiles), is a rare breed of cattle which is a small hornless breed usually red in colour, speckled with white and having a white line across their back. The name Moile is derived from the Gaelic language and related to the distinctive dome or mound on top of the head.

The Irish Moiled is a very docile and reliable milk or suckler cow and can have a life span of up to 20 years. The Moiled were a very popular breed in Ireland in the 1800s, but by the end of that century specialised breeds like the Shorthorn, a cow similar in size, took over in popularity. In the 1970s the Moiled was on the brink of extinction with only two small herds known to exist throughout Ireland. Today the Moiled still survives and is one of our rarest and most distinctive cattle breeds.



An Irish Moiled cow



The NRN met with Donegal farmer Mark Mc Connell at the Irish Rare Breeds conference in Mulranny in May, and at the recent Flavours of Fingal Agricultural Show. Mark and his family breed Irish Moiled cattle and they also keep Old Irish goats and traditional Irish poultry. Mark has a keen interest in the history and the preservation of Irish breeds and is committed to the revival of a traditional breed of cattle which were once nearing extinction.

Mark chose to keep Moiled because of their place in Irish heritage, and the availability of artificial insemination (AI) straws for breeding. He farms 14 acres and keeps six breeding cows and three stock bulls.

"The breed went down to about 30 cows in the early 1980s, so they are all closely related. It is important to match certain bulls to certain cows. There are six Irish bulls available through AI at the moment," says Mark. Mark is a part-time farmer and works with the ESB. By keeping three stock bulls for breeding, it keeps the



An Irish Moiled cow

The meat from the Moiled and other primitive breeds with marbling is described by Mark as having a better taste than commercial breeds. Stepping away from intensification methods, farming these rare breeds would mean producing less and getting a higher price for produce, but the establishment of the market is key to this success.

The Moiled cattle thrive on grass; the cows all rear their calves while maintaining a good condition themselves. "The moiled cow will have no trouble going back in calf. The harder you keep the cow, the less fat on them, the more likely they are to go in calf versus commercial cattle where you have to maintain certain weights with concentrates."

Mark also encouraged the idea that native rare breeds should be recognised in future schemes. "The Clodoir sheep, Bo Riabach cattle, Bo Fianna cattle, Old Irish goats and of course Old Irish game fowl are entrenched in our heritage and their recognition will go a long way to helping the survival of these native animals". Mark commented that while progress is slow, it is important to get the message of rare breeds conservation into the public domain. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine acknowledgement of some of the rare breeds through the GLAS Scheme is a step in the right direction.



Mark exhibited his year-old Moiled bull at the Flavours of Fingal County Show on Saturday 23rd June. The bull was awarded second place.

genetic pool varied within his herd. He participates in the GLAS scheme and has chosen the Rare Breeds action as part of his GLAS plan. Under the GLAS scheme Mark receives €200 per livestock unit (LU) per year for a max of 10 LUs.

He stated that "although the €200/LU is a help, and by featuring Rare Breeds as part of the scheme it has perhaps got people thinking about Rare Breeds, the development of a market is the only way to encourage the farming of these animals."

Mark is chairman of the Rare Breed Society. He says the development of a market is key to raising awareness of rare breeds. "Anyone farming these rare breeds is only farming them in small numbers, as it is probably not viable to farm them in large numbers. The development of a market for the produce, where farmers are paid a premium is the key to viability."

LEADER NEWS: LEADER and the Rural Environment Workshop

On 20 April, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the NRN hosted a workshop on LEADER and the Rural Environment to help build capacity amongst members of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners under the Rural Environment theme of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020.

Workshop attendees' awareness and knowledge of the three sub-themes of this particular theme (Protection and Sustainable use of Water Resources, Local Biodiversity and Renewable Energy), were enriched by the informative presentations by three key note speakers with expertise in each area, followed by examples of project initiatives funded under each sub-theme.

Dr Fran Igoe, from the Waters and Communities Office, spoke about the role of LEADER and its function in the protection and sustainable use of water resources, while Rosemary Sweeney, presented the Inishowen Coastal Explorers Programme as a project example funded under this particular sub-theme. In relation to the potential of LEADER and the enhancement of local biodiversity, Dr Alex Copland, from BirdWatch Ireland, provided attendees with an overview of this sub-theme, followed by an example of a project in Wicklow by Bryan Fennell, from County Wicklow Partnership. Phil Walker from Econcertive then spoke about the innovative nature of the LEADER Programme in relation to the development of renewable energy in rural areas. A talk by James Duffy, from Leitrim Development Company, about a project in this area in Co. Leitrim followed Phil's presentation.

Each sub-themed session was followed by a breakout session, where workshop delegates explored possible project ideas funded under the Rural Environment LEADER theme. Posters, produced by Dr Shane Conway and Dr Maura Farrell on behalf of the NRN, promoting 12 projects funded under this particular theme, were also on display at this workshop. A new, user-friendly interactive database of these project examples, graphically displayed on a Storyboard platform, was added to the NRN website following this event: www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader.

Showing the Added Value of LEADER Through Evaluation



Laura Jänis (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland); Teresa Marques (European Commission DG AGRI); Deirdre Garvey (Irish NRN) and Juha-Matti Markkola (Finnish NRN)

Hundreds of communities across Ireland have benefited from the LEADER programme, but evaluating the results and impacts achieved can be a complex process. Does the LEADER approach to rural development deliver 'added value', or could the same the results be achieved otherwise? Is it about 'attribution' or 'contribution' or both? How do we embed quality improvement as an ongoing process for all involved in a LEADER group? These were some of the fundamental questions addressed at a workshop attended by the Irish NRN in May in Helsinki, Finland.

The aim of the seventh Good Practice Workshop of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development was to provide a forum for the discussion and exchange of experiences from across EU Member States. The workshop brought together 68 representatives from 24 countries including people from NRNs, Managing Authorities, LEADER groups and evaluators in order to promote a greater understanding of how the added value of LEADER can be observed and assessed at both the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and Local Action Group (LAG) levels. An excellent 'lived experience' input from a Finnish LAG and LEADER group showed that even in a small organisation, quality and evaluation could be mainstreamed as part of the culture. Three further case studies from Italy, Germany and Denmark explored the reality that LEADER evaluation has to measure 'perspectives' as distinct from 'absolute acts'. Enhanced social capital, Improved (public) governance and enhanced results and impacts were identified very important LEADER-specific outcomes of value. The event was hugely oriented towards practical workshops and participant involvement which contributed to shaping a common understanding of the added value of LEADER.

Enabling Farmers for the Digital Age: EIP-AGRI Service Point Workshop

Digital technologies in agriculture not only help European farmers to produce more with less, thus contributing to their livelihoods, they also address the wider sustainability challenges lying ahead for the agricultural sector, as well as helping to combat climate change. Although the digitisation of the farming sector has many benefits, barriers to realising its full potential across Europe still remain however.



An EIP-AGRI Service Point workshop was held in Jurmala, Latvia on 26 and 27 April to highlight the significance of, and challenges involved in, achieving the necessary digital transformation of agriculture across Europe; to help generate safe, sustainable and quality food. This event entitled 'Enabling farmers for the digital age: the role of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)' was organised in cooperation with the Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre. Dr Shane Conway, Researcher at NUI Galway and with the NRN, attended this workshop on behalf of the network. Dr Tom Kelly, Director of Knowledge Transfer at Teagasc, and Ethan Cleary, Agricultural Technology Policy and Innovation Executive with the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), made up the rest of the Irish contingent participating in this event.

The main purpose of this workshop was to explore and strengthen the role of AKIS (with a particular focus on the integrated role of advisory services and national and regional rural networks) in supporting the use and understanding of digital technologies at farm level. Inge Van Oost, Policy Officer with the European Commission - DG AGRI, introduced the AKIS concept to workshop attendees by explaining that it links a diversity of people - such as farmers, agricultural educators, researchers and extension personnel - to promote mutual learning and generate, share and utilise agriculture-related technology, knowledge and information.



A carousel of innovative examples and practices from across the EU were presented over the two days, to help inspire advisers and other AKIS actors in attendance from across the EU to embrace the potential of a digitised and data empowered farming sector. Breakout sessions at the workshop also allowed participants to confront this topical issue, by networking and exchanging experiences on how knowledge and innovation can be harnessed from various sources to help make the transition to digital agriculture possible at farm level. Delegates also identified and shared effective tools and innovative methods on how advisors can communicate digitisation opportunities to farmers, especially in small and medium-sized farms, across all sectors. An exploration into how AKIS connections can be strengthened, and indeed transformed to meet digitisation challenges in agriculture, through better performance, support and in particular advice to farmers on the ground, was also undertaken. More information about this workshop can be found on the EIP-AGRI Service Point website: www.ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-workshop-enabling-farmers-digital-age

...continued from page 1

Commenting on the announcement of the new Biodiversity Award, Macra na Feirme National President James Healy said, "We are delighted with the addition of the National Rural Network Biodiversity Award to the FBD Young Farmer of the Year competition. As an organisation that represents young farmers, we place the utmost importance on sustainable farming and practising farming methods that improve biodiversity. This award will recognise our young farmers who are going the extra mile to secure our farms and environment for future generations."

The National Rural Network Biodiversity Award will demonstrate how farmers can incorporate biodiversity enhancements on their farms, e.g. retaining existing hedgerows, planting new hedgerows, maintaining buffer strips at field margins, fencing of watercourses and allowing birds and bats to nest in farm buildings and crop rotation.

Commenting on the National Rural Network Biodiversity Award, Philip Farrelly from the National Rural Network said, "Farmers play a major role in maintaining and managing biodiversity. They are the custodians of the land and the environment and their actions play a key role in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. Farmers have to be able to demonstrate it is possible to produce food sustainably while meeting the needs of the environment. The National Rural Network believes the inclusion of the biodiversity award in the FBD Young Farmer of the Year competition will raise farmers' awareness of biodiversity." For more information on the new award visit www.macra.ie.

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

For more information visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

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Once you have joined, you will receive monthly email updates on the RDP, the LEADER initiative, best practice case studies and more.

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