



NRN NEWS

connecting communities, growing our future

SPOTLIGHT

John McAuley from Mullingar entered this winning photo in the NRN's 2017 Biodiversity Photo Competition.

The caption, "Nice dinner in these hedgerows", perfectly captures the competition's biodiversity theme.

See page 3 for more.



€12m for 12 EIP-AGRI Projects

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed T.D. has announced the 12 projects selected from Open Call 1 of the EIP-AGRI (European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability) initiative. Approximately €12m has been allocated to these new projects, funded under Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

These successful EIP-AGRI projects were developed by Operational Groups, which bring together actors such as farmers, researchers, advisors and agri-businesses to identify innovative solutions to particular challenges facing the agriculture, food and forestry sectors. Minister Creed explained that the exciting range of competitively selected projects 'align well with our RDP and national priorities particularly on environmental sustainability' and 'address challenges such as biodiversity, profitability and sustainability, and will harness the creativity and resourcefulness which is the hallmark of Ireland's rural sector'. There have been two

Open Call rounds and the following projects have been selected to go to project stage under Open Call 1:

Blackstairs Farming Futures in Carlow/Wexford; Biodiversity Regeneration in a Dairying Environment (BRIDE Project) in Cork/Kerry; Caomhnú Arann on the Aran Islands, DANU Farming Group countrywide; Duncannon Sustainable Farming in Wexford; Enable Conservation Tillage in Leinster; Biomass To Biochar in Limerick/Clare; Conservation of Breeding Curlew in Ireland based in Galway/Midlands; A Sustainable Agricultural Plan for the MacGillycuddy Reeks in Cork/Kerry MOPS (Maximising Organic Production Systems) in Westmeath; Ovi Data in Cork/Kerry and Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme (SUAS) in Dublin/Wicklow.

More information, including a short overview of each project, can be found in the February NRN members' e-bulletin and viewed on www.nationalruralnetwork.ie



On the 8th December, the National Rural Network held an information seminar on the EU Life Programme in The Sheraton Hotel, Athlone. The EU LIFE programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. The aim of the seminar was to promote the LIFE Programme and how Irish projects have contributed to the protection and sustainability of the Irish environment.

For more information about EU LIFE Programme Information Seminar and to access the presentations visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/news

In safe hands: transferring the family farm from one generation to the next



Leo Morrissey on this farm in Garrafine, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

Intergenerational family farm transfer is a complex and highly topical issue. Twenty seven year-old Leo Morrissey is a young farmer from Garrafine, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway; Recently upon obtaining a Level 6 Certificate in Agriculture (Green Cert), he went through a successful farm transfer process with his parents and his brother John. Dr Shane Conway, Researcher with the NRN and NUI Galway recently spoke to Leo about his experience.

Leo says the his parents laid down an “exceptional foundation” for him and his brother John. “A division of the farm was arranged to what was felt was the best going forward” following open and honest discussion between family members in January 2015.

The next step involved Leo setting up a herd number. Leo explains: “I then set about applying for a new herd number, purchasing stock to meet stock level requirements and had discussions with my agricultural advisor regarding my Basic Payment Scheme. Overall the process was straightforward, with good legal advice and open-minded family members being critical to the smooth transition. I found my dealing with the

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to be informative and straightforward. All the department staff I spoke to were helpful and assisted greatly in my entry into farming”.

Leo also took advantage of the grant-aid funding available to him under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II) - Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme, as he set about establishing his farm enterprise.

“Towards the end of 2015 when I first began farming independently I had zero stock of my own, no sheds or machinery and minimal fencing. I was lucky to have my land base however which is the hardest part for any new entrant into farming. When TAMS II was announced I applied for 4000 meters of sheep fencing along with associated gateways. I qualify for a 60% grant aid on this project and feel it is going to set a solid foundation for my enterprise going forward. I found the TAMS II application process straightforward, with documents regarding my farm and qualifications submitted online. I’m glad to say I have the project started with no regrets and hope to be finished by Autumn 2018. I think after doing the maths and weighing up the benefits that it is an excellent opportunity seized,” explains Leo.

A longer version of this case study can be found in the Farm Viability and Competitiveness section of the NRN website: www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/viability



Dr Shane Conway and Leo discussing on-farm infrastructure funded by TAMS II

Photos competition puts biodiversity in the frame

John McAuley from Mullingar scooped first place in the NRN 2017 Biodiversity Photo Competition. John submitted a very attractive image of a Wren appearing from a hedgerow with herbage in its beak. John recalls how when was young, he spent his summer holidays in the countryside climbing trees, checking birds' nests, trying to identify eggs and keeping an eye on the birds coming and going from the nests. 'I couldn't believe one of my photographs won a competition, I was delighted the image told the correct story'. John exclaimed 'the wren had appeared from the hedgerow with the herbage in its beak, I loitered about to see where she would go to next but she refused to moved, as if she knew she was been watched and wanted to protect the location of her nest,' said John.

John runs a charity called Tanzanian Heavenly Homes, which he set up to help some of the elderly living in the poorest of conditions in East Africa, to have a comfortable and clean home, to see out their later years. John visits the local primary schools, exhibiting his nature photos from both Ireland and his work and travels in Africa, raising awareness to Irish children of the importance of biodiversity and how biodiversity is very different in each country. You can view John's work at www.jmccauleyphotoservices.com.

Second prize went to Richard Duff a Farmer from Co. Laois, who submitted an extraordinary photo of a crab spider engulfing a dung fly. Richard farms 150 commercial heifers. He flushes top performing cows for his clients and implants the embryos into his herd of commercial heifers, selling back the in-calf heifers. Richard is a GLAS participant and the actions chosen that most complemented his enterprise were Wild Bird Cover, Low-

emissions slurry, low input permanent pasture and placed Bird and Bat boxes.

Richard expressed his enthusiasm for nature and photography and vowed to capture all 34 species of butterfly in Ireland. Thus far he has captured 32, and he has yet to find the Purple Hairstreak and the Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Richard commented that 'taking pictures of what you see and trying to identify what you've captured is a great way to learn about and increase your knowledge of Biodiversity'. You can follow Richard Duff on Facebook to view his amazing images - Search: Richard Duff, Portlaoise.

Third-place went to Rob Coleman a tillage farmer from Castlemagner, Mallow, Co. Cork for a stunning image of a earthworm making a cast, captioned "the unsung hero'. Rob is an advocate member of BASE Ireland (Biology, Agriculture, Soil and Environment Ireland) which is a farmer organisation based on the principles of Conservation Agriculture. Rob explains: "the primary objective of the organisation is the development of a sustainable, farmer led and profitable farming practice". Rob and his farther farm all their land via minimum tillage for the last 15-20 years. He is a participant in GLAS with Minimum Tillage chosen as his main action. "It sends a very positive message that unseen biodiversity - such as the earthworm in my photo - is recognised as an integral link in the vast chain of biodiversity".

The NRN have categorised all the entries and created brief videos for you to view. Please check out www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/biodiversity to see all the photos. We look forward to your participation in our 2018 Photo Competition which will run from September to October this year, new theme to be revealed later this year.



Aoife Smith (NRN) presenting the overall winner, John McAuley from Mullingar, with his certificate



Second prize went to Richard Duff a farmer from Co. Laois with Aoife Smith (NRN)



Rob Coleman, a tillage farmer from Mallow, Co. Cork took third-prize

The Burren Winterage Weekend 2017

The fifth annual Burren Winterage School took place from the 26th-28th of October 2017 in the village of Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare on the northern edge of the Burren. Attending the Burren Winterage Weekend means having conversations - lots of interesting conversations!



The seasonal movement of livestock and people between summer and winter pastures - is synonymous with the Burren

For thousands of years, Burren farmers have marked the end of summer by herding their cattle onto “winterage” pastures in the limestone uplands where they spend the winter grazing. This seasonal movement of livestock between summer and winter pastures - is synonymous with the Burren and is key to the survival of the region’s famous flora and fauna. For cattle, lying on this rock is like being on a storage heater for the winter - the limestone slowly gives up the warmth it has collected over the summer months. The cattle respond by grazing and fertilising these pastures when most flowers are dormant, enabling the Burren’s renowned complement of flowers and insects to flourish in the summer. A perfect conversation!

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) funds the Burren Programme which invests in Burren farmers, their land and livestock. The Winterage School is a vibrant and culturally-rich community-led initiative, coordinated by Burrenbeo Trust, and supported by local groups, businesses and the community.

The conference brings together farmers, scientists and public servants to break down barriers and share perspectives and ideas on sustainable pastoral land management. And this is where the interesting conversations begin! In between the presentations on all sorts of conservation issues, one can catch up with old friends and make new ones. The Winterage School is about people coming together to learn more, to exchange new ideas, to enjoy being with like-minded people.

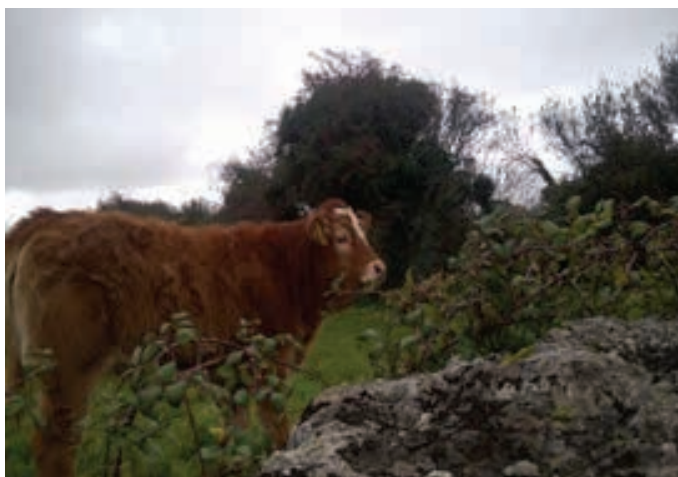
Two DAFM officials gave presentations- Secretary General Aidan O’Driscoll paid tribute to the flagship achievements of the Burren Programme and reiterated the Department’s commitment to fostering sustainable farming practices and Ronan O’Flaherty, Principal Officer, gave a presentation on European Innovation Partnerships which are being introduced in his division. Dr Maura Farrell and Shane Conway made presentations on behalf of the National Rural Network and NUI Galway.

A group of Burren farmers met with the first set of farmers from the Hen Harrier Project and had a conversation about their experiences and the benefits of being part of such a scheme. This is the first of the new EIP schemes to be rolled out and it was gratifying to see an initiative which was spoken about at this event two years ago, now being born and ready to take flight.

On Friday night, conference delegates and the local community attended an open evening with food and music. Local school children had painted pictures showing cattle munching flowers and strolling up hillsides. Aidan O’Driscoll presented several Origin Green Farming for Conservation Awards and we were then entertained by the brilliant Ballyvaughan Ukulele Orchestra.



From left to right: Brendan Dunford (Burrenbeo Trust), Fergal Monaghan (HHP), Caroline Sullivan (HHP), Michael Cunningham, Denis Hayes, Maura Farrell (NRN/NUIG), P.J. Conroy, Jack Lynch, Ronan O Flaherty (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) and Aidan O Driscoll (Secretary General of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine).



Cattle in the Burren – a symbiotic relationship.

Patrick, a Burren farmer, spoke of his sense of awe when he is in the landscape of the Burren: "When you look across the valleys, you get a sense of the breadth and depth of our human story in these hills. There are graves up there that are older than the pyramids of Egypt. To be part of that symphony of life, to be part of that conversation is as good as it gets".

On Saturday, delegates visited a food fair and an innovation event. This was followed by a farm walk on one of the beautiful Burren farms. Minister Michael Creed happened to be in the area, he joined the walk, and the weather continued to be extraordinary. Of course there were more conversations on the past, the present and the future. The traditions of the Burren are a gift from the past, but there is now a sense of a clean slate on which we can all begin to write afresh and write a new story about a future - and the new EIP schemes will write their own stories. As Brendan Dunford, of the Burren Programme, said "farming today is retaining options for tomorrow".

On Sunday the festival finished with the annual community-led cattle drive up into the centre Burren with hundreds of people following the cattle to their warm winter grazing grounds. During another conversation, somebody said that "one of the most beautiful couplings in the world would have to be people and place". Indeed!

Sources: DAFM, NRN & Burrenbeo Trust

Hedgerows: the wildlife “hotels” and “motorways” of our countryside



Cavan Dairy Farmer Vincent Smith

Ireland’s hedgerows consist of Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Gorse, Holly, Dog-rose & Bramble. Other species supported by hedges include native and non-native trees such as Ash, Hazel, Beech, Elder and Willow and climbing plants such as honeysuckle and Ivy.

Hedgerows act as “hotels” and “motorways” for wildlife to safely travel, hunt, feed, nest and live throughout the countryside.

In 2014, The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established that hedges covered 3.9% of the Irish landscape. The Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS) facilitated the establishment of some 10,000km and rejuvenation of a further 3000km of hedge. Hedgerows also play their part in the combat against climate change.

‘Carbon Sequestration by Hedgerows in the Irish Landscape’ EPA 2014, indicated that hedges have a significant sequestration potential depending on hedgerow type and density.

In the recent GLAS scheme ‘laying of new hedgerows’ was a very popular action with a total of 2,144 applicants choosing the measure in GLAS. At a minimum 21,440kms of new hedgerow should become established, earning farmers a pool of €79,328 each year of the scheme providing only the minimum amount of 10m of hedgerow required is planted.

The NRN paid a visit to Cavan Dairy Farmer Vincent Smith. Vincent had submitted a successful GLAS1 application and was keen to exhibit the work he had completed. The GLAS actions chosen on Vincent’s farm were ‘Planting new hedgerows’, ‘Low input-permanent pasture’ and ‘protecting water courses from Bovines’.

The max payable under GLAS1 for hedgerows is 200m @ €3.70/m planted. Vincent has successfully planted 220meters of new whitethorn hedgerow.

The hedgerows were planted in multiple locations on his farm, along road ways and on the banks of a drain. Vincent commented ‘it was hard work getting the all 1,320 whips planted, I was glad to see the last one be put into the ground, its great now you can see the growth after the summer, pruning is the next job on the list.’

A cost of 0.45c per whip was incurred by Vincent for purchase of the plants. When asked why Vincent chose to plant on the bank of the drain Vincent replied ‘it’ll help strengthen the bank and reduce the risk of run-off from the land into the stream.’

Vincent told the NRN of how the coppicing measure was undertaken on his farm under REPS, he stressed that the benefits of coppicing are fantastic and that he coppices a section of hedgerow each year, ‘the regrowth and density of the hedgerows maintains the livestock proof barriers around the farm, and a richer denser hedgerow grows back for the wildlife to live on and forage.’

Spotlight on trends and challenges for rural development



From left to right: Tony McCusker (Chair, Rural Development Council), Teresa Canavan (Chief Executive, Rural Development Council NI), Seamus Boland (NRN), Gail Merriman (RDP Community and Co-operation Schemes Manager, Welsh Government), Stephen Hall (Government Statistician in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, DEFRA), Professor Sarah Skerratt (Director of the Rural Policy Centre at Scotland's Rural University College), Susan Grieve, (European Network for Rural Development), Catherine McCallum OBE (Director of Rural Affairs, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).

On the 14th and 15th November 2017, the National Rural Network attended the first UK Rural Development & Networking Conference in Belfast. The event was designed to explore the meaning of 'Rural' across the UK by looking at the key characteristics of each region consider how UK's Rural Development Programmes (RDP) are contributing to the development of rural areas across the UK and identifying current priorities and examples of RDP projects in action.

The National Rural Network's Seamus Boland and James Claffey both presented on Ireland's perspective of rural and how its Rural Development Programme aims to develop rural areas and enhance the lives of rural communities. Delegates from Ireland took this opportunity to network with their counterparts from across the UK and begin to develop LEADER co-operation projects. Conference delegates selected a thematic workshop to participate under the themes of: Sustainable and Inclusive Communities; Enterprise

and Employment; Land use; Environment and Rural Economy; Infrastructure and Connectivity. These workshops allowed delegates to share their experiences, discuss the challenges and trends relating to the theme, and agree recommendations or actions that could help the Rural Development Programmes better address the issues or opportunities identified.

The National Rural Network has a regular exchange of information with each of the UK Networks to ensure consistency, create synergies and avoid duplication while enhancing the RDPs of the respective countries. This exchange of information will continue throughout the lifetime of Ireland's Rural Development Programme with further conferences to take place.

To view the full conference report and pictures from the event visit: www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk/news-and-events/news/Spotlight-Focuses-on-Rural-Development

National Rural Network holds Advisory Subcommittee Meetings

Throughout the final quarter of 2017, the National Rural Network's Advisory Subcommittees met under the themes Biodiversity and Environmental Challenges, Climate Change, EU LIFE, Viability of the Farming Community and LEADER. The purpose of the NRN Advisory Subcommittees is to support the effective engagement of the NRN with the Rural Development Programme (2014-2020).

The NRN held these meetings at study visit sites across Ireland that have been involved in the RDP 2014-2020. These study visits allowed the committee to meet some of the beneficiaries of the programme and gain an insight into the impact at local level.

At these meetings, the NRN provided an update on the work undertaken since the previous meeting highlighting the increased reach to its target audience. The impact of the NRN's social media was acknowledged, and it was suggested that more of a focus on traditional forms of media should be emphasised in the future. These meetings were also used as an opportunity for the NRN to present actions to be included in their 2018 Action Plan while seeking advice and recommendations from subcommittee members. For more information visit www.nationalruralnetwork.ie

Agri-Innovation Summit 2017



Attending the Agri-Innovation Summit 2017: (Left to right) Dr. Tom Kelly, Teagasc; Alistair Prior, Head of Network Support Unit, NRN Scotland, Dr Maura Farrell NUI Galway/NRN and Mark Gibson, Teagasc

The annual Agri-Innovation Summit was held in Lisbon last October and hosted over 500 people from the farming community, rural businesses, start-ups, RDP managing authorities, national rural networks, researchers, advisors and NGOs from all over Europe.

The summit was initiated as a joint venture by a Portuguese Consortium, the Portuguese Government, the EIP-AGRI network and the European Network for Rural Development. The event raised awareness of innovative opportunities for agriculture and rural economies and sought to identify how such initiatives could be supported under on-going Rural Development Programmes and via Horizon 2020 research projects. The summit also provided essential information and generated excellent ideas on EU innovation policies for agriculture and rural areas after 2020. The Irish NRN was represented by Dr Maura Farrell, who spoke as part of the final wrap up panel on the last day of the summit.

For more visit www.aislisbon2017.com

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 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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T: 090 - 6482744

E: info@nationalruralnetwork.ie

W: 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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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas