

RURAL REPORT:

News from the Rural Network for Northern Ireland



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Sharing Practice Visits

Part of the remit of the Rural Network for Northern Ireland is to co-ordinate practice visits locally and nationally. Each visit seeks to increase awareness of the variety of projects and solutions that exist to tackle issues encountered in rural areas, with the aim of extending this knowledge at a local level.



Sharing Practice: Forestry; Food and Community Visits.

Northern Ireland to Host First UK National Rural Network Event

The UK National Rural Network will hold its first rural development networking conference, hosted by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland, in the Holiday Inn, Belfast on Wednesday 10th & Thursday 11th March 2010.

More information available at www.uknationalruralnetwork.org.uk/connecting-policy-to-practice-uk-rural-development-networking-conference

Forestry, Food and Community

The first in a series of study visits saw 13 Local Action Group (LAG) members visit 3 projects previously funded by the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme during the period 2006-2009. These visits sought to increase awareness of the breadth of projects that the Programme previously funded and to highlight the opportunities that exist within the current Programme.

The first visit took members to woodland established by Mr. Ted Loughran, adjacent to the Navan Fort, Armagh. This visit represented an Axis 2 (Environment & Countryside) type project.

The second visit was facilitated by Glen Tender, based outside Gilford and represented an Axis 1 (Farming & Food) type project. Glen Tender is an award winning brand of NI Aberdeen

Angus beef, set up by 3 local farmers.

The third visit took place at The Lodge, Castlewellsan which represented an Axis 3 (Rural Life) type project. The Lodge is a mansion house situated on the main street of Castlewellsan which was renovated by Castlewellsan Regeneration Ltd into a building for community use operating as a social economy project.

For more information on these projects and visits go online to www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

Show and Tell

A further feature of the 'Sharing Practice' programme is the coordination of 'Show and Tell' events. Show and Tell events take place in one location and offer participants the opportunity to see a project in action whilst also benefitting from a range of other speakers and guests.

One 'Show and Tell' event took place with a focus on the Social Economy. Ten LAG members attended the Millennium Centre, Loughgiel, Co. Antrim to witness at firsthand how this group operated and the services they provided to the community. Organised in conjunction with the Social Economy Network, presentations were also provided by the Social Entrepreneurship

Programme and Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT).

A further 'Show and Tell' took representatives of the Village Renewal and Development Thematic Working Group to the Co. Antrim village of Toomebridge. Members heard about the experiences of this village to transform it into a thriving rural area which now offers a good base for business, provides services for its local community, has rejuvenated its environment and is tackling issues of community relations.

Each visit has proved to be very successful and feedback has been very positive. Participants benefit from seeing projects in action, whilst listening to challenges and



achievements from those living and working in rural areas.

More visits will be organised over the coming months and details will be made available online at www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk



Village Renewal & Development

A Village Renewal & Development Thematic Working Group has been established engaging Local Action Groups (LAGs) from across the 7 Rural Development Clusters.

This Thematic Working Group is designed to provide an exchange of

information on approaches to Village Renewal and to assist in identifying good practices capable of delivering benefits to rural Northern Ireland.

Chair of the Group, Bob Adams of the GROW South Antrim LAG said: "This group provides opportunities

for all 7 LAGs to meet and to learn from each other's experiences and to witness village renewal in action. We have already visited Stewartstown, Toome and Hillsborough to hear at first hand the challenges and opportunities of village life. One

of the outcomes of the Group is to hold a Village Renewal seminar to enable the learning gained from participating on the Group to be shared even wider and we look forward to that in the coming year".



Supporting the Farm Family – Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership Rolls Out Measures

The Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership, a consortium led by Countryside Services Ltd is working with the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) and AI Services Ltd to deliver a number of measures under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. These measures include:

SUPPLY CHAIN

The Supply Chain programme supports farmers to improve the rewards from their supply chain. It provides expert guidance and financial assistance for the formation and development of new and existing groups with a focus on marketing. Groups of farmers with partners further along their respective supply chains in the common agri-food, horticulture, forestry and renewable energy sectors are eligible to apply.

T: 0845 026 7538
E: supplychain@countrysiderural.co.uk

BENCHMARKING

The Benchmarking programme aims to improve the business management and decision making process on farms in the following sectors: Dairy, Pig, Beef and Sheep, Crop and Horticulture. Establishing clear physical and financial criteria common to each farm within a sector allows owners and CAFRE Development Advisors to assess individual performance. Analysis of the data should inform target setting, budget development leading to improved profitability and overall business competence.

T: 0845 026 7537
E: benchmarking@countrysiderural.co.uk

FOCUS FARMS

The Focus Farms programme aims to contribute to the creation of a more competitive agriculture industry through the provision of farmer-led training. The 55 Focus Farms selected to participate in the scheme are commercial farms that aim to demonstrate good farming practice; modern technology; innovative farm methods and on-farm research through farm walks, discussion and follow-up mentoring. Focus Farms have been across a range of enterprises to include Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs, Arable, Commercial Horticulture, Organic, Renewable Crops, Diversification and Environmental sectors.

T: 0845 026 7536
E: focusfarms@countrysiderural.co.uk

FARM MODERNISATION

The Farm Modernisation programme offers support to farm businesses to modernise their holdings and improve their production techniques by providing financial support for plant, machinery and equipment. Support is also available through the Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme (METS) which aims to encourage uptake of slurry spreading distribution systems. The Programme will re-open in Spring 2010.

T: 0845 026 7535
E: modernisation@countrysiderural.co.uk

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION CONTACT

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97 Moy Road, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone BT71 7DX. Tel: 0845 026 7533
Email: info@countrysiderural.co.uk or Website: www.countrysiderural.co.uk



FARM FAMILY OPTIONS

Farm Family Options is a programme of support designed to help the farm family take a step back, assess their current position, plan for the future, and turn that plan into a reality. The scheme has two elements:

Agricultural Business Mentoring:

An experienced agricultural business mentor will provide free and confidential one-to-one support, helping the farm family look at their options and identify opportunities for the farmer, their family, and their farm business. Areas considered include: farm business improvements; effective use of time; off-farm income; making the most of existing skills and training for new ones; career change; greater financial stability, and succession and retirement.

An Action Plan will be developed and a grant of up to £250 towards financial or legal advice is also available.

Skills Training:

The Skills Training element of the scheme will support the development of both on farm and off-farm work-related skills, through the provision of financial assistance and guidance on training and development opportunities. Funding of up to £1,000 per family member is available to support attending one or more training course, and an associated training allowance of up to £250 per farm family member is also available.

This programme is currently open for application
T: 0845 026 7534
E: options@countrysiderural.co.uk



Branching Out

The Forest Service is receiving more enquiries from landowners than ever before. Recent increases in grant rates seem to have renewed an interest not only amongst farmers, but rural dwellers who wish to make use of the land under their ownership or tenure by creating woodland.

Those who have inherited land, for example, or retiring farmers who no longer wish to work the land are waking up to woodland creation.

Woodland is a low maintenance, long-term land use which provides a solution for remote or unproductive fields. It can also bring shelter to residential areas and provide recreation and educational opportunities when opened up to the community.

The Forest Service offers grant assistance for the establishment of woodlands on areas of 0.2 hectare (1/2 an acre) or greater under the Woodland Grant Scheme. In addition, the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme pays an annual premium on areas of 1 hectare or more as a means of compensating for any agricultural income foregone.

For more information contact 028 9076 5391



Focus on Local Delivery:

Axis 3 of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme

Local Delivery... Delivering for Rural Dwellers

The 'Quality of Life' measures of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (2007-2013) are being delivered locally through a 7 Council Cluster model. The 7 Council Clusters cover all of rural Northern Ireland and will administer £100 million in funding over the programme period. In this edition we focus on the progress of 4 of the 7 Clusters. For more information on all 7 Clusters please visit the Rural Network website for links to each of the Local Action Groups established www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk. We will bring further updates on the remaining 3 Clusters in our next edition.

SWARD Celebrates £2m Support to Rural Communities

Minister Michelle Gildernew MP, MLA celebrated the issue of £2million funding under Axis 3 'Quality of Life' of the Rural Development Programme (RDP), awarded by South West Action for Rural Development (SWARD) to project promoters under Farm Diversification and Business Creation.

Speaking at the launch the Minister said: "One of the Rural Development Programme's greatest qualities is that it allows us to support small business creation and development. Such enterprises help sustain and grow rural communities and often provide a badly needed boost. One of my high hopes for 2010 is that the Rural Development Programme will

play a key role in assisting rural businesses to take advantage of the expected economic recovery in the coming year."

The cluster which covers Cookstown, Dungannon & South Tyrone, Magherafelt and Fermanagh will soon be inviting further applications to the Programme. For further information please log on to www.sward.org.uk

GROW First On The Ground

GROW South Antrim became the first Local Action Group to award funding for farm diversification and business creation & development under the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NI RDP) 2007-2013 with a visit from

Minister Michelle Gildernew MP pictured here at the launch of The Soccer Shed, outside Ballyclare. To find out more visit the GROW website: www.growsouthantrim.com or contact the GROW office on 028 9448 1311.



£1 million of Rural Development Funding awarded to Rural Businesses in the North West

Arc North West has approved £1 million of funding to successful applicants in the North West area. The partnership, led by Omagh District Council, is the body responsible for rolling out Axis 3 of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRD) 2007-2013 across the

four Council areas of Derry, Limavady, Omagh and Strabane. This initial investment of £1 million will support a range of farm diversification projects under Measure 3.1 Diversification into Non Agricultural Activities of the Northern Ireland Rural Development. These financial

assistance grants range in size from small scale investments of £2,000 and £3,000 to the maximum grant available of £50,000.

For further information on Axis 3 funding available through ARC North West telephone 028 8225 0202 or email arcnorthwest@omagh.gov.uk

Agnew Engineering Offered First Rural Development Grant

The first offer of funding under the new NI Rural Development Programme for the Ards, Banbridge, Down and North Down areas, has been made to Agnew General Engineering near Gilford.

The funding has been awarded by the Down Rural Area Partnership (DRAP) under the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.

For further information on the Partnership and funding please contact Ards Business Centre on 028 9182 0748



Become a Member



Membership of the Rural Network for Northern Ireland is open to everyone involved in the development, management and implementation of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme.

To date we have 75 registered members. The purpose of the membership is to enable the sharing and use of good practice and experience; and to support the coordination and communication across the different axes of the programme.

Membership is Free and Benefits include:-

- Access to Network meetings, events, training and information seminars
- Involvement in Network consultations regarding the effective delivery of the Rural Development Programme
- Opportunities to participate in thematic working groups on specific programme areas
- E-newsletter – members will receive a free monthly newsletter with Programme updates.
- Monthly Hard Copy Bulletin.
- Regular updates on upcoming events
- Opportunities to participate in a range of Local, National and European networking events
- Access to a members only section of the website where registered users will be able to:
 - Access Messages, files, and other data that are of general interest to those involved in the Programme - including good practice resources; EU and DARD Programme Guidelines
 - Utilise What's New and Network Discussion Boards
 - Submit News Stories

For more information visit: www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

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Focus on Social Farming

What is Social Farming?

Social Farming is the practice of offering family farms as a form of social service. It is being used in many countries as an alternative way of offering social services to people that need supported living arrangements. It creates the opportunity to provide services within rural areas and also offers the opportunity to re-connect farmers with their community and share their skills and experience. In Social Farming, the farm remains a working farm at its core but invites people to participate in the activities

of the farm. In return, the farmer is rewarded for the provision of the service. Social Farming services have been used by a wide range of people, including people with mental health difficulties and people with disabilities (intellectual, physical and sensory). It also includes people availing of drug/ alcohol rehabilitation services and prisoner rehabilitation services while social farming can also provide services for older people as well as therapeutic/ quality of life activities for children.



Farmers Who Care

"Social farming has great potential in Ireland" says Aideen McGloin of University College Dublin (UCD) (part of the UCD SoFar team compiling a list of individuals and groups in Ireland involved in social farming and analysing its potential as a rural development enterprise).



"Many farmers have a natural inclination towards this sort of work because they look after – nurture – animals and the land. They enjoy farming and can see the benefits of it for themselves, so they can also see the benefits for others".

The Bottom Line

The National Care Farming Initiative UK (NCFI), based at Harper Adams University College, Shropshire, has revealed that a single care-farm operation could generate an average revenue of £52,517 per farm per annum.

Real Life

Liam Tobin and Aidan Murphy programme co-ordinator and farm manager, respectively, at Belmont Park in Waterford - a 162-acre commercial dairy farm run by the Brothers of Charity Services. This social farm's clientele are all people with intellectual disabilities, from Waterford and South Kilkenny. Aidan Murphy says: "Our service users are involved in all the normal daily activities on the farm. At the

moment, that means helping with the calving, feeding and bedding the calves, milking, and so on. Some of our clients are able to drive, so they can do a bit of topping or bring meals to cattle in the field." Aidan finds it very fulfilling to see people acquiring new skills. "When they learn how to do an activity, even over a long period of time, you can see from the look on their face what they've got out of it.

That's the kind of satisfaction that attracted me to working in this area." Activities are geared to the person's ability. Liam Tobin added: "We train our staff to understand the issues that may come up for our participants and what may drive their anxiety. If you understand that, you can do a lot of proactive work that will alleviate this anxiety and help them to remain engaged in the agricultural activity."

Contacts

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Additionally, a 'Farming for
Health Community of Practice'
has an informative website at:
www.farmingforhealth.org

There is also a EU funded scientific
network called COST Action on
Green Care involving 23 countries:
www.umb.no/greencare

Social Farming in Northern Ireland and Ireland

The term 'Social Farming' is not one readily known or initially understood in Northern Ireland and Ireland. In the Europe it has taken the support of government, through co-ordination of national support centres and support from the Rural Development programmes to realise the development of Social Farming. In the UK, a collaboration between a

number of organisations has led to the establishment of the National Care Farming Initiative (NCFI www.ncfi.org.uk) which acts as a network to promote and co-ordinate Social (Care) Farming initiatives and support the development of the practice and policy on a UK level. There are currently 95 practising Social Farms around the UK registered on the NCFI website, however

this is likely to be a significant under-estimate of the real figure. In the UK, additional regional organisations are emerging to focus development at the regional level e.g. Care Farming Scotland (<http://www.carefarmingscotland.org.uk>) and in the West Midlands www.cfwm.org.uk

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