

RURAL REPORT:

News from the Rural Network for Northern Ireland



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Northern Ireland Host 1st UK National Rural Network Conference

The first UK National Rural Network (UK NRN) Conference was held in March, attracting 190 delegates and featuring speakers from Scotland, Wales, England and Ireland as well as the European Network for Rural Development. The conference was designed to bring together the key delivery stakeholders to enable the sharing and networking of practice, with the ultimate objective of helping to ensure that the programmes can make a real and tangible difference to rural life and rural people.



(Pictured Right) Speakers at the Inaugural UK National Rural Network Conference



Dumfries & Galloway

Martin McDonald from the Rural Network NI participated as an independent expert judge for the Dumfries and Galloway Rural Awards 2010 which were announced at an award ceremony on November

12th. Projects supported by the Dumfries and Galloway LEADER programme were eligible to apply. The Rural Network NI intend to highlight some of the winning projects as case study examples to share practice across the regions.

Wales Network Conference

The Wales Rural Network held its first conference in October 2010. Tracey McNally of the Rural Network for Northern Ireland delivered the keynote address. During the event workshops were held on the themes of Renewable Energy; Sustainable Tourism; Local Products; Environment & Land Management. For more information on the event visit www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk



Guide on North-South Co-operation



Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development Michelle Gildernew and Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs in the south Pat Carey launched the Cross Border Co-operation Project Guide which offers advice to Local Action Groups undertaking joint cross-border co-operation projects. The publication is now available from the Rural Network or by download on www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

Rural Network At Leader Conference

Martin McDonald representing the Rural Network for Northern Ireland was the key speaker at a recent Scottish Leader Conference in Aberdeen. The event, which was

attended by around 100 representatives from LEADER LAGs, was hosted by Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group. Martin provided an overview of the LEADER approach

in Northern Ireland, its history, current context, achievements and barriers. For further details on the conference and to view speaker presentations visit www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

EU Rural Co-operation Fair

The Cooperation Fair, which was held September in Edinburgh was attended by 270 delegates from 23 member states. Those attending included 6 Northern Ireland LAG members as well as Rural Network NI staff. The two day event was organised



by the Scottish National Rural Network in partnership with the European Network for Rural Development (EN RD).



Countryside
Agri-Rural
Partnership



Farm Family Options Programme Reopens

The Farm Family Options Skills Training Programme has reopened for applications. The scheme is already supporting over 1000 farm family members to enhance their skills or learn new ones and is open to farmers, their spouses/partners and children aged 17 or over and offers financial support of up to £1,250 per farm family member.

A variety of courses can be supported including many short courses offered by local Colleges or

other private training providers, which are Qualifications & Credit Framework Level 3 or below can be considered. Some vehicle and plant courses are also eligible and agri-related courses which are LANTRA, DEFRA or DARD approved are also welcomed. Potential courses can be identified through course-finder websites. These can be accessed through 'useful links' on the Farm Family Options – Skills Training webpage www.countrysiderural.co.uk/farmfamilyoptions/skills.php.

Pictured with Minister Gildernew is Kirsty McMullan, a young mother from a farming family, who is keen to see what the Programme has to offer and how it can help enhance her skills.

The Programme will close on January 14th 2011. For further information on the Programme and to request an application pack please contact the Farm Family Options Team on 0845 026 7534, email options@countrysiderural.co.uk or visit www.countrysiderural.co.uk



New Fermanagh Forest Walking Routes

A series of walking routes have been officially opened within the Fermanagh forests.

DARD Forest Service and Fermanagh District Council, two of the main partners in the development and operation of the Marble Arch Geopark, have been working together for the past two years in developing the trails which are now in place in Ballintempo, Carrigan, Belmore, Big Dog and Ely Lodge. Fermanagh District Council chairman, Stephen Huggett said: "We hope that schools, youth groups, communities and individuals take the time to explore these walking routes and learn about the unique and amazing landscapes that form the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark." The Forest Service 'Recreation and Social Use of Forests Strategy' was published in 2009. Copies of the strategy can be downloaded from www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

Case Study: Hazel Encourages Families To Get 'On Course'



Hazel McKeown
with Jodie & Kylie

Hazel McKeown, a busy mum from Eskra, Co. Tyrone, is one of the previous recipients of a Farm Family Options Skills Training Grant and is encouraging others to grasp the opportunity to improve their skills.

Hazel, whose husband Winston, runs the family farm, previously worked outside the home but is now raising her five children while assisting her

husband with the farm business. "I already managed some aspects of the administration, including farm records, using a computer but I heard that VAT returns could now be completed online so I decided to go back to study to learn how to do that and other useful book-keeping skills", says Hazel.

Hazel undertook OCR Level 1 Book-Keeping and OCR Level 2 Computerised

Accounts with a local accredited training provider. She found the courses so beneficial that she intends to do more in the future. "I would encourage anyone from a farm family who would like to improve their skills to undertake training to apply for this grant" says Hazel, "It has already been a great benefit in dealing with the day to day running of the business".

Hazel has advice for anyone concerned about complicated form filling in applying for the grant "The form was easy to complete, the staff in RDC were great to deal with and the assistance with course fees really helped". Hazel felt the training suited her as it was easily slotted into family life "Other stay at home mums assisting on the farm should consider training in this way as it has kept me in touch with up to date technology and improved my skills" she commented. As a result of her experience she is encouraging those farm family members who are eligible and have training in mind to apply for the grant, "Applying for the grant and achieving success with the course has really boosted my confidence in assisting with the business. Who knows what I'll do next!!" laughs Hazel.

EU Commission outlines blueprint for Common Agricultural Policy post 2013

The European Commission has published a paper on CAP entitled 'The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) towards 2020 - Meeting the food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future'. Commenting on the paper EU Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner Dacian Ciolo commented, "The CAP is not just for farmers, it is for all EU citizens - as consumers and taxpayers. It is therefore important that we design our policy in a way which is more understandable to the general public and which makes clear the public benefits that farmers provide to society as a whole". For more information see http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm



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.

GROW-ing Their Own

With an increasing number of people growing their own fruit and vegetables, Ian McFall, saw a gap in the market for private allotments available to rent.

Ian was awarded funding of just over £6,000 from GROW South Antrim under Measure 3.1 – Farm Diversification to prepare the site, improve road access, create pathways and car parking and to install a water connection. Commenting on his grant Ian said, "People are more and more interested in where their food

comes from and what goes on their families' plates for dinner. There is also the health benefit of getting out into the fresh air, taking time away from work and being active. It is a chance for families to spend time together and for children to have fun and learn about gardening and nature too. The grant gave me the opportunity to capitalise on the increasing popularity of allotments and continue farming alongside running the allotment business."



Pic: Newtownabbey Times

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 118 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

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 is part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.



SWEET SUCCESS FOR SOAR

Crilco Confections Ltd is a family business, which has been trading since 1974 in Flagstaff on the outskirts of Newry.

It was awarded funding under Measure 3.2 'Business Creation and Development' and will receive £50,000 through SOAR Local Action Group to buy a new sweet packing line. The new

machine will allow the business to speed up production and develop new packaging styles to meet the growing demands of existing and new customers. The machine will create new local employment in the South Armagh area and the business will grow the export potential of its product range.



Lagan Project set for Winners Enclosure

Lagan Rural Partnership has approved funding of up to £1.4 million for 54 projects which will drive forward the social and economic potential of rural communities in Lisburn, Castlereagh and Belfast.

One of the grant recipients is Jim Allen of Moira Equestrian Centre who received a total of £13,500 of financial support under the Farm Diversification measure 3.1 enabling him to set up a facility to school horses and ponies and develop a first class, safe training course. Jim commented: "Without the financial support from the Lagan Rural Partnership, this project would not have been possible. Now the local community has the opportunity to train to reach the British Eventing standards, right on their doorstep." To find out more about the Axis 3 Rural Development Programme



in the Lagan Rural Partnership area and to receive an application pack, please contact Melissa Cunningham at 028 9250 9489 or

melissa.cunningham@lisburn.gov.uk. Alternatively, an application pack can be downloaded from: www.laganruralpartnership.com



Village Renewal at the Forefront of Rural Development

Village Renewal & Development Thematic Working Group

The group was established to enable Local Action Groups access and consider the experiences of others to inform their focus on best practice in village renewal.

Formed in September 2009 the group comprised representatives of the 7 Local Action Groups in Northern Ireland. Group members were Bob Adams (nominated as Chair) and Henry Cushman of GROW (South Antrim); Mary Loughran and Majella Murphy (SOAR); Angus Carson and Pat Ward (Down Rural Area Partnership); Patsy Bradley and Edna Walmsley (North East Region); Wilbert Mayne and Francie Molloy (SWARD); Pat McDonnell and Brenda Morris (ARC North West); Margaret Tollerton, James Tinsley, Barrie Elkin and Henry Philips (LAGAN).

Supported by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland which provided a secretariat role the group was tasked with researching and sharing existing and new approaches and good practices to village development and encourage their wider use

The work of the group comprised a total of 7 meetings over the course of the year. The approach taken by the group comprised a series of facilitated meetings using a range of approaches, including discussion papers, information

sharing, guest speakers and study visits in order to identify best practice in Village Renewal and the development of Village plans across Northern Ireland.

'Bottom up' Working

Each LAG hosted a Best Practice study visit for the group as follows; Toome (GROW); Broughshane (North East Region); Stewartstown (SWARD); Dromore (ARC); Markethill (SOAR), Killyleagh (DRAP) and Hillsborough (LAGAN).

The integration of relevant study visits into the meeting schedule was deemed as very beneficial allowing participants to get a 'feel' for grassroots development and gain insights into good practice. The group was able to learn from the experiences of others in the delivery of previous Village Renewal programmes, village planning and consultation exercises, and future trends in the role of villages within the broader rural community.

Sharing Learning

On 13th September over 50 delegates from Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Local and Central Government attended a targeted seminar in Killyleagh, Co. Down. The event was held to highlight the work of the



Village Renewal and Development Thematic Working Group and launch the group Village Renewal Report.

During the seminar delegates heard presentations of representatives from two of the study visit 'good practice' villages; Broughshane in Co. Antrim and Dromore in Co. Tyrone, and also listened as Catherine Corcoran, a Rural Development expert from Tipperary Institute discussed her work on Integrated Village Planning.

Following the formal presentations delegates, guided by members of the Killyleagh Development Association (KDA), were taken on a detailed tour of Killyleagh; a village which has seen a huge amount of social, environmental and economic development since

KDA and other groups in the town made their village development a priority more than 16 years ago.

It is now hoped that all Local Action Groups will apply the learning from the Thematic Working Group's work of the past year in their own areas and encourage the effective delivery of village renewal and development actions.

The Village Renewal & Development Thematic Working Group Report & Case Studies is available from the Rural Network or by download www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk

Nurturing villages with GROW funding

The GROW Local Action Group has moved ahead to develop individual Village Masterplans for Toomebridge, Doagh and Whitehead. The draft Masterplans are due to be finalised by January 2011 following public consultation and display. It is then anticipated that the villages will apply for funding to implement aspects of the plan.

Funding has also been awarded to employ a Village Renewal Facilitator to provide hands-on support to rural villages across the LAG area including Templepatrick, Parkgate, Ballynure, Ballyrobert and Cogry/Kilbride. The facilitator is now in post and will help bring forward and

develop Village Plans for these areas.

As Crumlin already had a Council village Masterplan in place, it was able to start implementation straight away, and Antrim Borough Council has been awarded funding of £230,000 to carry out a Village Enhancement Scheme. This scheme will involve removing the old overhead electricity cables and poles, installing new street paving and street furniture, such as bins and hanging baskets and undertaking a programme of tree planting. There will also be traffic management improvements on Main Street.

Local Action Group Chair, Cllr Vera McWilliam, said, "This is an opportunity to carry out major improvements in our



villages, to develop them for both the local community and businesses. With significant funding available to implement actions coming out of the Masterplans, I look forward to seeing villages across South Antrim benefit to become revitalised, building on the vibrant rural community which is already there."

If you are interested in finding out more on Village Renewal or any other aspect of the GROW Local Action Group, please contact the GROW office on 028 9448 1311 or visit www.growsouthantrim.com



What Is A Thematic Working Group?

The concept of Thematic Working Groups was developed by the European Network for Rural Development as a mechanism for researching and sharing existing learning and experiences on specific themes across the EU with the aim of improving the effective delivery of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 and informing the development of future programmes.



How Much Is Available?

Measure 3.5 of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 focuses on Village Renewal and Development. Under the measure the 7 LAGs have responsibility for allocating approximately £12m in funding to village renewal projects across

Northern Ireland. The measure will support activity and capacity-building that enables residents of villages and surrounding areas to create a vision for the area; ensure the area's potential is achieved; and for actions which the local community has ownership for. It may include the formulation of an integrated action plan to define the role of the village and to fully develop the potential of the rural area.