



CAP
Network
Ireland

NEWSLETTER

Connecting communities,
growing our future.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL INNOVATION



James Claffey, Sarah Glascott, and David Barry from CAP Network Ireland pictured with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue TD and Corina Roe (Principal Officer, CSP Division DAFM), at the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, Co. Laois.

Ministerial Foreword:



I am committed to delivering a fair, farmer-friendly, and well-funded Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) is worth nearly €10bn to farm families for the period 2023-2027. Rolling out the plan is a key priority to help support family farms through

direct income support and a series of schemes to support farmers to address climate and environmental challenges. Farmers have demonstrated both a willingness and eagerness to engage in the new schemes available through the plan, that support best practice and innovative techniques.

In these changing times, I am committed to supporting farm families to learn from each other and share the skills and knowledge that come from generations of innovation and improvement of farming techniques. There is a key role for new "CAP Network Ireland" to support these activities throughout the lifetime of the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

The Network, co-funded by my Department and the EU, is dedicated to supporting rural development and innovation across Ireland. I know that its membership, from farmers, advisors, researchers, and rural communities, are ready to engage. Its work to promote

networking, innovation, and funding opportunities under the CSP will bring the right people together. This is an important aspect as the transition to a sustainable food system as outlined in our national Food Vision 2030 requires all actors to engage together.

I believe the focus of the Network on fostering innovation in agriculture, the development of new techniques, and the wider sharing of existing skills and practices will provide a key support to family farms and rural communities. I have seen through the interest in the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) and European Innovation Partnership Schemes (EIPs) that empowering rural communities through a locally led approach will accelerate this transition, while generating local employment and environmental action. The Network through its link with the European Network provides a great opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and research and best practice at national and EU level.

The Network will also support the development of new and exciting initiatives through the innovation hub. I look forward to seeing the initiatives that will come from the farm families of Ireland over the coming years. I assure you of our continued support in the times ahead.

Thank you,

Charlie McConalogue

Introducing CAP Network Ireland



CAP Network Ireland strives to bring Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 to life. The new CAP supports agriculture and

communities in making a much stronger contribution to the goals of the EU Green Deal.

The Network presents a once in a generation opportunity to drive cultural change and new holistic thinking in agriculture to achieve the changes we need as a society and a sector.

Our mission is to nurture connections, spark innovation and present funding opportunities within Ireland's CSP.

We champion sustainable agriculture and rural development.



What is CAP Network Ireland?

- We are a national network dedicated to supporting sustainable agriculture, rural development and innovation across Ireland.
- Our members include farmers, advisors, researchers, rural communities, agencies and other interested stakeholders.
- Our role is to increase involvement of all stakeholders in implementing Ireland's CSP.

We cover four main areas:



Research

We collect, analyse and share examples of activities carried out under the CSP.



Communication & Networking

We promote opportunities for sustainable agriculture and rural innovation, facilitate peer learning, knowledge exchange and stakeholder engagement.



Management & Implementation

We assist the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine (DAFM) with monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the CSP.



Innovation Hub

We run an Innovation Hub to identify innovative knowledge of relevance to effective CSP implementation and help facilitate collaboration between stakeholders to encourage the application and uptake of innovation.

The CAP Network Team

CAP Network Ireland is a partnership between three organisations. The Network combines the experience of **Irish Rural Link** (IRL) in leading and delivering the previous National CAP Network (NRN) from 2016–2022, the expertise of **ERINN Innovation** in knowledge management and transfer, event organisation and dissemination/communication and the competencies and reach of **Munster Technological University** (MTU) in the agricultural and rural space.

CAP Network Ireland is a member of the EU CAP Network, an international forum for sharing knowledge and information about agriculture and rural policy.

For more information about CAP Network Ireland, visit our website: capnetworkireland.eu



Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann

CAP Network membership is free and open to anyone interested in learning more about the CAP Strategic Plan or who wishes to become more actively involved in rural innovation and sustainable agricultural development in Ireland.

Members will:

- Receive up to date information about CAP from a source you can trust.
- Have access to the latest information and insights related to CAP funding, training and networking opportunities in Ireland.
- Be part of a growing national network of stakeholders working in sustainable agriculture and innovation.





Rory O'Reilly

Case Study: Thinking outside the box

Rory O'Reilly: Organic Beef Farmer

Rory O'Reilly lives in south Co. Galway with his wife and 4 children. He is an organic suckler beef farmer who has found innovative ways to make a living from heavy marginal land while also protecting its ecology. He has developed a new market for beef from his herd of 42 cattle by selling directly to his customers via a box scheme at Loughmountain Farm (loughmountainfarm.ie).

Coming Home to Farming

Rory grew up on the farm where he lives today. Even when he emigrated to the USA in 1994, he always had the intention to return to the farm someday. *"I always knew that I wanted to come back. That was my one promise to myself when I was leaving, if it ever got down to where I only had the price of the ticket, I'd be home,"* he explains.

"I always knew I wanted to farm, always loved being on the farm, always loved being outdoors. It took longer than I expected to get back but when the time came, we took the jump. It hasn't always been easy but now we're making it."

Rory returned with a young family in 2010 when his father became too elderly to manage the farm on his own. He had a plan in place to commit to beef production and sell the produce directly to his own customers. In 2014 he sold his first box of beef.

Going Organic

Converting to organic farming had always been the plan for Rory. Even before joining the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS), he was avoiding chemical sprays and was limiting his use of chemical fertilisers. He began the certification process with the Organic Trust in 2015 and sold his first certified organic animal in 2018. Rory's focus on low input and self-sufficient farm management has helped his business to cope with the recent inflation in input prices. He was already avoiding the use of concentrate feeds because there was an abundance of grass across the farm waiting to be utilised. To facilitate that grass utilisation year-round, Rory invested in roadways so that during the winter months the cattle can go out to graze but come in to lie down when they want. He feeds silage to the cattle in the shed during the winter but because he does not have enough lie back area in the shed, he strip grazes the paddocks over the winter.

"I've never had a bother from inspections about poaching and because I leave the gate open, the cattle always have access to outside, more often than not they will spend the night outside. Unless it's a really hard night then you'll find them in around here [the shed]."

Developing a New Market

The cattle born on the farm are usually sent to the butcher between 22 and 28 months of age. This usually happens in May after being at grass in the springtime and have put on enough flesh. A couple of heavier animals are carried over the winter as well. Thanks to his box scheme market, he does not need to rear his cattle to the usual 300kgs – 350kgs range. Instead, he can finish his cattle between 240kgs and 260kgs. Many modern customers do not have the necessary knowledge or cooking facilities to deal with large cuts of meat.

“With a big animal, the steaks are too big, with fat animals, you’re losing a lot to waste. Up to 40 kilos could be trimmed off and I don’t have a market for that waste.”

The meat is presold before the animal is slaughtered and processed. *“I have it set up that way so I don’t have to store any meat on the farm.”* The nearest organic butcher is Michael Healy in Banagher, Co. Offaly who processes Rory’s animals. *“I’ll bring an animal up to him, he’ll hang it up for 21 days. Then I’ll go up to him and box the animal up and then take it to the courier or deliver it myself on the way home.”*

His main market is selling to households all over the country. He does all his direct sales and marketing through social media. He now has a very impressive website (loughmountainfarm.ie) with information about

the farm, the produce and suggested recipes. Interested customers generally ring him to order a box of beef. The boxes can be shipped to anywhere on the island of Ireland. He sells two different types of 10 kilo boxes. *“One has steaks and one doesn’t basically. I find that is a good balance to get rid of all the animal,”* he says.

He currently has up to 200 customers. Some will buy one box of beef or a side of lamb in a year and others could buy 4 or 5 boxes in a year. *“The main thing is, they keep coming back,”* says Rory, *“on the beef side of things, the customer is the most valuable asset there is. It’s very hard to get them. It’s very easy to lose them. So the ones that come back, you treat with kid gloves and do everything you can for them.”*

Sustainability and Profitability

Sustainability and resilience are the two words that come to mind when considering what Rory O’Reilly has achieved. His extensive production system provides resilience against rising input costs. Developing his own market for his beef provides financial stability. His involvement in various agri-environment schemes over the years has helped him to put measures in place, such as fencing off waterways, to protect the ecology on his farm and in the surrounding area. For customers of Lough Mountain Farm, the best part is that they can consume high quality beef products safe in the knowledge that they are contributing to the sustainability of a family farm that has environmental protection at the core of all its managerial practices.

For more information about [ACRES](#) or the [Organic Farming Scheme](#), visit gov.ie or scan the QR codes below.

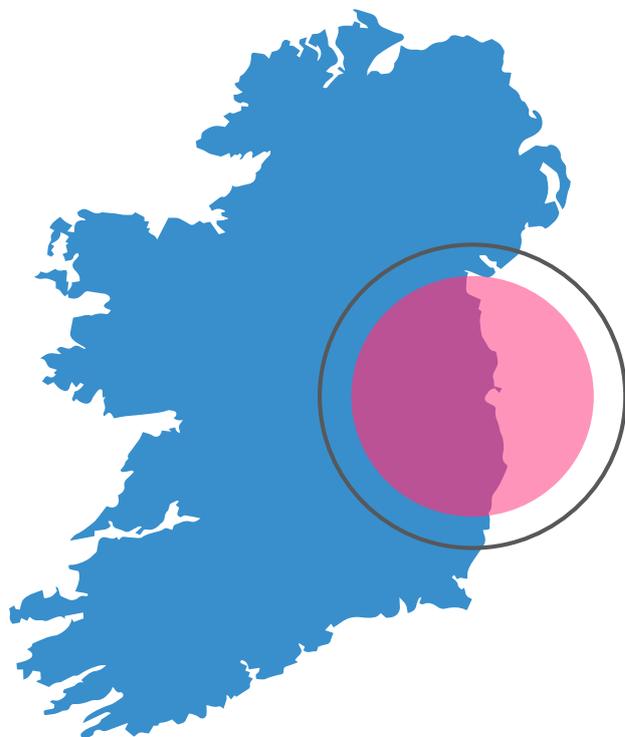


Cattle shed and new roadway

CAP Network Ireland Successfully Facilitates Four Knowledge Transfer (KT) Programme Online Regional Webinars



Webinar Series Knowledge Transfer Programme 2024-2026



CAP Network Ireland, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), recently completed the facilitation of four online regional webinars to provide guidance and information on the Knowledge Transfer (KT) programme. The KT Programme intervention is included in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

This training was delivered to KT group facilitators who were in the process of forming their farmer discussion groups and schedules at the time. These groups will participate in eight workshops, four of which need to specifically be based on local needs, something the KT training helped to address.

Presentations from CAP Network Ireland, DAFM, and guest experts focused on providing substantial support, resources, and guidance on how best to approach and deliver a Local Needs programme.

CAP Network Ireland provided guidance on the process of analysing and delivering local needs interventions. The attendees learned about various methods that can be used to identify specific issues in their local area. These included everything from focus groups and surveys to finding the required data in reports published by state bodies. It was highlighted that there are a wealth of data available from sources such as the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Regional Assemblies,

the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Local Authorities, etc.

Many of the speakers shared good practice gathered from existing projects across the country on how they identified the relevant farmers in a local area. They shared helpful tips on how to consult with farmers to achieve buy in from the start of these projects. The speakers also shared examples of how they maintained farmer engagement throughout the lifetime of these projects. Examples were shared from across a large variety of projects. These included improving water quality in local catchment areas, to the protection of specific species, to a research project on women in agriculture. All very different topics but with similar principles when assessing local needs and engaging stakeholders.

These were followed by a break-out session, giving attendees the opportunity to provide key insights and feedback from their own unique experiences and knowledge gained.

The time and contributions from everyone involved was invaluable, and the wealth of knowledge and guidance shared on how to achieve successful results was greatly appreciated.

Visit capnetworkireland.eu for more information.

2nd National Networks Meeting Held in Poland

The 2nd National Networks Meeting, co-organised by the CAP Implementation Contact Point of the EU CAP Network and the Polish National Network took place in Leszno, Poland on the 20th – 21st September 2023. The meeting facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges between National CAP Networks and other key rural actors from across the EU on the involvement of Pillar 1 stakeholders in CAP Network activities.

An interactive session was organised to explore ways to enhance communication and engagement between National CAP Networks and specific agri-food stakeholders, including farmers, farmer organisations, environmental NGOs, researchers, producer organisations and advisers. The CAP Network's vital role in providing a platform for the exchange of

good practices by connecting relevant stakeholders and disseminating innovative project activities and outcomes, was highlighted. A blend of online and offline engagement with Pillar 1 stakeholders was considered to be the most effective means of streamlining communication.

A working session was also held to discuss the EU CAP Network's Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards 2023 (ARIA). Daniel Bennett, Researcher with the CAP Network Ireland Team, was invited to share his experiences engaging with the 2022 edition of the awards – in which 'Broadband 4 Our Community', Ireland's first community-owned fibre broadband network based in Co. Kilkenny, was the winning entry in the Digital Futures category.

The agenda and a range of presentations from the meeting can be found on the [EU CAP Network website](#) or scan the [QR code](#).



The 2nd National Networks Meeting brought together participants from 25 Member States – Source: EU CAP Network

EIP-AGRI Project Event with FARMPEAT

On 23 October, FarmPEAT brought together their Steering Group and project farmers for a day of learning and knowledge-sharing at Moore Community Hall, Co. Roscommon, in an event attended by CAP Network Ireland. The FarmPEAT team gave updates on their farmers' payments, supporting actions, and results-based scores; their soil analysis and greenhouse gas survey; recent engagement with other projects and communities; and the school workshops and winners of the 'Love Your Wellies' Competition.

This led to an interesting panel discussion about the characteristics, hydrology, and policy of agricultural peat soils. Issues elaborated on included how building dams on drains can reduce peat wastage by raising the water table, how emissions from drained agricultural peat soils are calculated in Ireland's greenhouse gas inventory and how to bridge the gap between farmers, research, and policy.

In a workshop that brainstormed answers to climate change questions, farmers commented that more extreme weather and wet conditions is making it harder to harvest crops, save fodder, and graze livestock. This is leading to lost income and more poaching, livestock housing and feeding. Potential actions to reduce emissions from peat soils included raising the water table, reducing excessive stocking rates, changing crop types, not planting trees on them, and not liming them. The groups agreed that longer, higher and more stable payments in agri-environmental schemes are needed to incentivise farmers to take many of these actions.

Participants wrapped up the day by visiting project farmer Seamus Fallon's land, where plastic and peat dams have been installed to slow the flow of water. Another project farmer, Daniel Curley, demonstrated how he measures the water level in piezometers and the importance of accurate hydrological data to measure baselines and results was discussed.

For more information about FarmPEAT, visit farmpeat.ie



CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) Monitoring Committee Study Trip

CAP Network Ireland is a member of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) Monitoring Committee which meets at least once annually to review any issues affecting the CSP achieving its targets. The most recent meeting of this committee took place in Co. Wicklow on Thursday, 12 October 2023. The day began with a visit to an ACRES Cooperation Project (CP) site in the Sally Gap. Led by Fergal Monaghan, ACRES Leinster, and guided by ACRES CP advisers, participants were given a demonstration on peatland scoring and were provided with a unique opportunity to assess these areas themselves with the aid of a scorecard. They were also shown how drone footage assists with the scoring process. In the afternoon, a plenary session for committee members was led by Sharon Murphy, Assistant Secretary General, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

As part of this, an engaging presentation was given by Michelle Kearney (DAFM) on the overall approach to ACRES. This was followed by an interactive discussion in small groups, centred around a number of key questions. CAP Network Ireland was highlighted as a key vehicle in communicating the accomplishments, and indeed challenges, of ACRES to the public, policy makers, farmers and farm bodies into the future. For more information on ACRES, visit gov.ie or scan the [QR code below](#).



2023–2027 LEADER Programme Update



The LEADER programme operates a locally led, bottom-up approach to rural development and plays an important role in supporting communities and enterprises by progressing job creation, social inclusion and environmental projects.

€180 million has been made available for LEADER for the 2023–2027 period. LEADER funding throughout rural Ireland is delivered by Local Action Groups (LAGs), which are partnerships of public and private entities from a defined geographical area. LAGs are responsible for projects in accordance with the Local Development Strategies they develop themselves.

To keep updated on the LEADER programme, visit the Department of Rural and Community Development at gov.ie or scan the [QR code](#) below.



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☎ 090-6482744



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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
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