



# NEWSLETTER

Connecting communities,  
growing our future.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL INNOVATION



The 2024 Agricultural & Rural Inspiration Awards

## Irish Project Success at Prestigious EU Awards

Two innovative projects proudly represented Ireland as finalists in the EU CAP Network's Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) 2024 on December 4th. Both nominated by CAP Network Ireland, the LEADER supported Galway Wool Co-op and Farm Carbon EIP, were among only 24 finalists selected from over 100 entries across Europe.

At the event, held in the Théâtre du Vaudeville in Brussels, the Galway Wool Co-op was singled out as a 'Highly Commended Project' in the 'Socio-Economic Fabric of Rural Areas' category. In 2019, the Galway Wool Co-op was set up to restore the cultural integrity of native Irish wool and establish niche market opportunities domestically and internationally. Funding received under the LEADER programme in 2021 towards the development of a website (which acts as the Co-op's E-commerce Marketplace and Trading Platform), as well as promotional materials, has enabled them to have a countrywide impact. The Co-op has connected growers with buyers interested in preserving this rare wool in Ireland, resulting in a substantial increase in the base price of wool from €0.20 to €2.50 per kilogram. By harnessing the goodwill of growers to draw wool from throughout Ireland, a newly created community now works

diligently together to bring awareness to the consumer of the variety of applications for strong wool.

In the competitive 'Environmental Protection' category, Farm Carbon EIP reached the final six. This two-year pilot project sought to increase farmers' income through innovative farming practices like paludiculture and restoration of hedges, ponds and other farm habitats. Farm Carbon adopted a three-stage process: (i) baselining participating farm habitats across the key environmental pillars of biodiversity, carbon and water quality; (ii) implementing measures to improve environmental performance in these areas for all farm habitats; and (iii) measuring the subsequent improvements. Large areas of on-farm peatland and other habitats were restored, upgraded and/or created because of actions undertaken as part of this project.

Find out more on the EU CAP Network website or by scanning the **QR Code** below:



## Bioeconomy in Action Booklet 2024

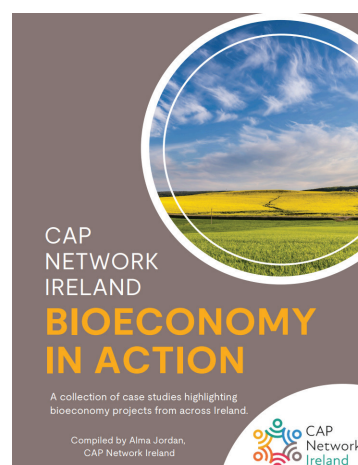
October 2024 saw the launch of our 'Bioeconomy in Action' booklet. The booklet features a collection of case studies highlighting bioeconomy projects from across Ireland. It is a resource aimed at engaging communities, farmers, local enterprises, and entrepreneurs, by breaking down complex ideas into practical examples.

Bioeconomy is a new approach to utilising products, services, wastes and side-streams from sectors such as agri-food, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, more sustainably. It offers opportunities to reduce GHG emissions in the agri-food system by replacing fossil-based resources with biological ones, from biofertilisers and biopesticides, to new food sources, bioplastics and textiles, and biological waste management. It is a key element in our transition to climate neutrality. The bioeconomy brings exciting new employment opportunities to rural Ireland. Ireland has a nature-based economy built on a strong agricultural sector and there is a huge potential to capitalise on growth in this area.

There is currently a lot of hard work taking place to develop the bioeconomy in Ireland, and CAP Network Ireland is working in partnership with the agricultural sector, rural communities, industry and the bioeconomy research community to highlight the steps taken to date.

For example, take the 'CircBioCityWaste' project from our booklet, co-funded by the EPA and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, with academic partners MTU, UL, TU Dublin and industry partner Glanua. This project will demonstrate the 'end-of-waste' approach and how it is possible to efficiently utilise urban waste as feedstock to produce a range of biobased products, such as bio-stimulants, biofertilisers, and soil conditioners. This model allows for producing indigenous bio-based fertiliser, providing employment and economic return, while maintaining agricultural productivity, and helping agriculture to transition to a low carbon model.

View/download the booklet on the CAP Network Ireland website or by scanning the **QR code below**:



## LEADER Programme: How to Apply Guide

CAP Network Ireland recently produced a new publication entitled '2023-2027 LEADER Programme: How To Apply Guide'. This publication outlines the LEADER programme funding process, including the LEADER themes and sub-themes, the key stages involved, rates of funding and application requirements.

Since its inception in 1991, the LEADER programme has played a key role in supporting communities and enterprises in rural areas throughout Ireland. Based on the 'bottom-up' approach to rural development, which empowers local communities to actively participate in decisions affecting their area, the programme has supported projects across a diverse range of themes during this period. The current 2023-2027 LEADER Programme, which is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, and co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the EU under the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), will continue to have a sizeable impact in every corner of rural Ireland.

It is our hope that anyone planning to invest in their own business or community project will find this guide to be a useful resource and that it will be a springboard for the development of new and innovative projects right across the country.

Through our work, CAP Network Ireland will continue to develop resources, such as this one, to increase awareness and engagement with the programme.

View/download the guide on the CAP Network Ireland website or by scanning the **QR code below**:







Joe Kelly

## CASE STUDY

# Going Organic in the West of Ireland

## Joe Kelly: Organic Horticulture and Beef Farmer

Joe Kelly is an organic horticulture grower and beef farmer near Claremorris in Co. Mayo and has participated in various iterations of the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) over the years. His produce never leaves the county of Mayo and therefore has an extremely low food miles footprint. His customers are hotels and restaurants in Castlebar, Westport and Kiltimagh.

## The Benefits of Switching to Organic Farming

Switching to organic farming with support from the Organic Farming Scheme has helped a 36-acre farm with heavy soils in the west of Ireland to become a viable enterprise for Joe to make a living.

The farm now has two acres of crop rows and poly-tunnels for organic vegetables, and the rest is devoted to beef cattle or to habitat under the new Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES). Most of the new habitat created on the farm will be in the form of hedgerows.

Joe also works two days a week in Westport as a masseuse and he is a registered Social Farmer with Social Farming Ireland. He has hosted participants who are engaged with various kinds of social services and want to experience farming life. While these diverse income streams keep Joe busy, they also contribute to the financial resilience of his farm.

## Horticulture in the Blood

Joe first seriously considered organic farming over ten years ago. "A friend of mine had been talking about organics for years," Joe remembers, "within a week of the scheme opening, I was signed up, while the friend took another year before he signed up!"

Organic farming turned out to be a perfect fit for Joe, and he has never looked back. "And then I was in heaven," says Joe, "because I knew, no sprays, no chemical fertilisers. You have to use manure, use your ingenuity and use your own way of figuring out what is the best way."

## The Benefits of Organic Farming

He has seen a lot of positive changes on his farm over the years since switching to organic farming. "I no longer have to worry about paying out for sprays and fertilisers. I no longer have to worry about runoff into waterways. The insects and the bees around the place are in the prime of their health. The honey that I get from my honeybees doesn't have a bit of poison in it," he states proudly.



To read Joe's full story on the CAP Network Ireland website, simply scan the **QR Code** below:



# The CAP Network Ireland Innovation Hub

The CAP Network Ireland Innovation Hub is working to support the development and sharing of innovative ideas and solutions to ensure the economic, environmental and social sustainability of farming and of rural areas.

It's an initiative which aims to accelerate the uptake of knowledge. The team are currently running three thematic pilots and have been interviewing people and projects to source knowledge with the potential to address key challenges facing the agricultural sector.

We are also running an Innovation Spotlight series to highlight and promote sustainable innovations that may

hold solutions to challenges facing the agricultural sector in Ireland.

To learn more about the work of the Innovation Hub or for more information about AKIS, visit the CAP Network Ireland website or scan the **QR code below**:



## Thematic Knowledge Transfer Pilots

As part of the work of the Innovation Hub, the CAP Network Ireland team are currently running three thematic pilots. The aim of these pilots is to help identify key, actionable knowledge outputs and innovations which hold potential solutions to challenges facing thematic areas/sectors of Irish agriculture or to help achieve strategic objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan.

Through our Horticulture Pilot and Organics Pilot, we have been identifying innovative and scalable knowledge through interviewing people and projects from Ireland and abroad to highlight the aspects of their research, policies or initiatives that might hold solutions to challenges facing these sectors in Ireland.

Our third pilot is focused on innovative knowledge from past Operational Groups. EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are groups of people with complementary knowledge

who co-create practical solutions for agriculture, forestry and rural communities in an innovation project. These Operational Groups are created in response to a funding call launched by DAFM. We have been working to identify key knowledge outputs from completed projects in the themes of 'General Health & Safety' and 'Farm & Community Biodiversity' to identify potential solutions to challenges facing these areas in Ireland.

For all three thematic pilots, we are working closely with the knowledge owners, other experts in the field, multipliers of knowledge through a strategic methodology to enhance wider uptake, application, and transfer of high potential knowledge and innovations in the thematic sectors which could have a positive impact for Irish agriculture. For more information, visit the CAP Network Ireland website.

## Innovation Hub Thematic Knowledge Transfer Pilots

The Innovation Spotlight is an initiative by CAP Network Ireland to highlight and promote sustainable innovations that may hold solutions to challenges facing the agricultural sector in Ireland.

Innovations may be those relevant to supporting the objectives of a specific scheme or strategy in Ireland, that hold a solution to a challenge facing Irish agriculture or be a best practice or process which helps achieve the CAP objectives.

Since the launch of the Innovation Spotlight series, we have interviewed Agri Data Analytics and DeliSoil. To watch the video interviews with these innovators, visit the Innovation Hub on our website.





# AKIS Actors in Ireland

AKIS stands for Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System. The word “AKIS” includes farmers, advisors, researchers, and anyone working in Agriculture and the Rural Economy.

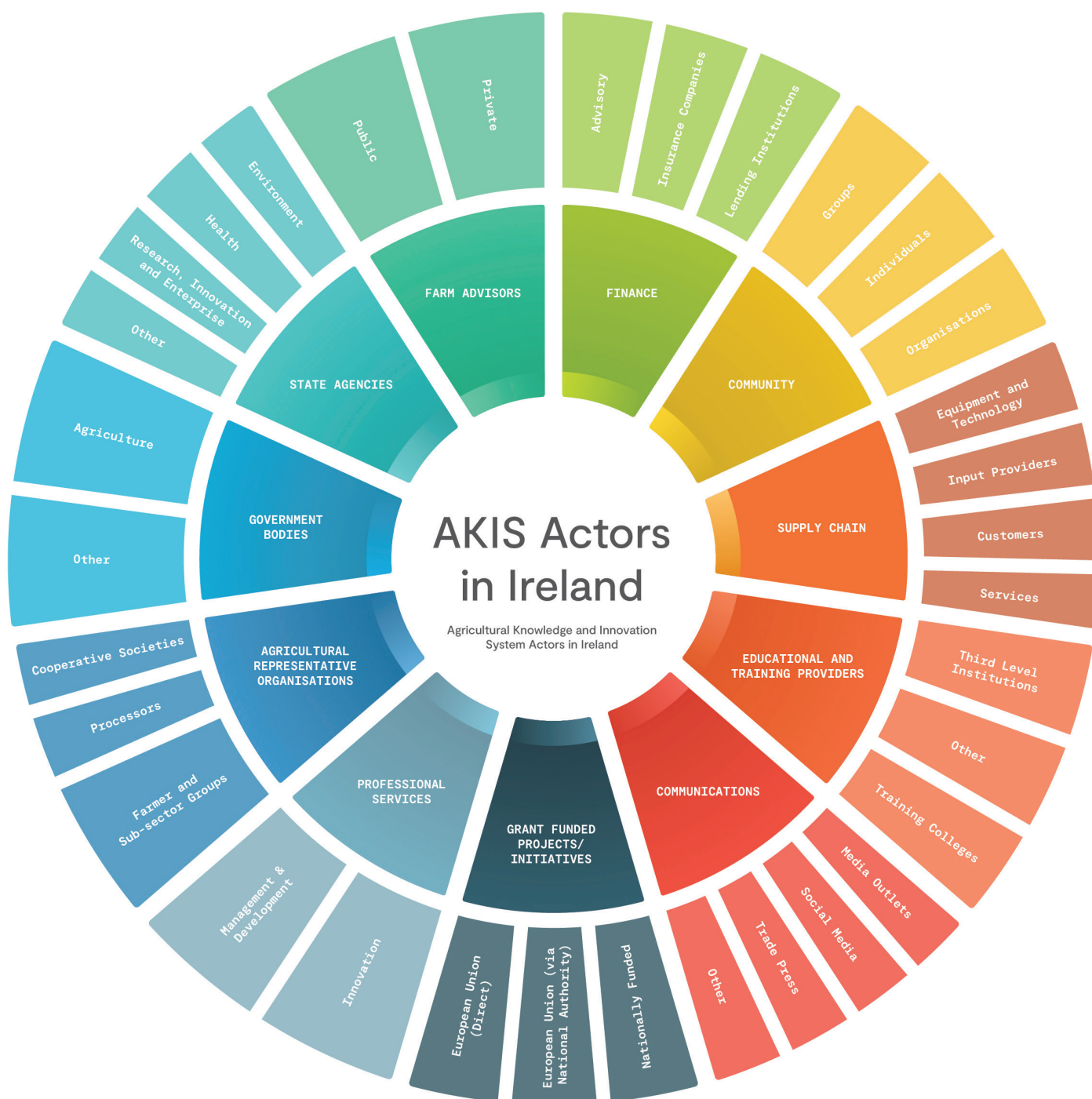
AKIS is the combined organisation, knowledge flow, integration and interaction between people, organisations and institutions that produce, disseminate and use knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated activities in rural areas.

A key aim is to better connect science and practice and to boost knowledge exchange and innovation. This will

benefit European farmers and foresters, their advisors and rural communities.

A successful AKIS will ensure actors have the training and skills to be more responsive to societal challenges such as climate change and sustainable food systems and to the growing information needs of farmers, rural economy actors, advisors, researchers and other agri-food system and bioeconomy stakeholders to address these challenges.

Visit the CAP Network Ireland Innovation Hub to learn more about AKIS in Ireland.



## FarmPEAT EIP End of Project Conference

The FarmPEAT EIP end of project conference was held in Athlone on the 24th of October. This project has worked to deliver a locally led, innovative, results-based farm scheme for farmers who manage lands surrounding some of Ireland's finest remaining raised bogs.

The opening address by Minister of State, Senator Pippa Hackett from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine was followed by presentations from the project team; Caroline Lalor, Laura Daly, Bernie Duffy, and Katie Smirnova, who explained how effective and regular communication of research with farmers and landholders worked best to persuade them to change their management practices.

After lunch, four participant farmers; Brian Sheridan, Fearghal Sullivan, Ray Brennan, and John Lawlor explained how water table management had not significantly impacted their farm management practices but reminded the conference that payment to farmers in this way was essential if they were to continue to deliver these environmental services.

The final discussion was chaired by Dr Derek McLoughlin. Dr Catherine Farrell, Dr Shane McGuinness, Dr Caroline Sullivan and Philip Blackwell explored ways to blend public and private finance to provide co-benefits for

farms, biodiversity, climate and water in the future.

Learn more by visiting the FarmPEAT project website or by scanning the **QR Code** below:

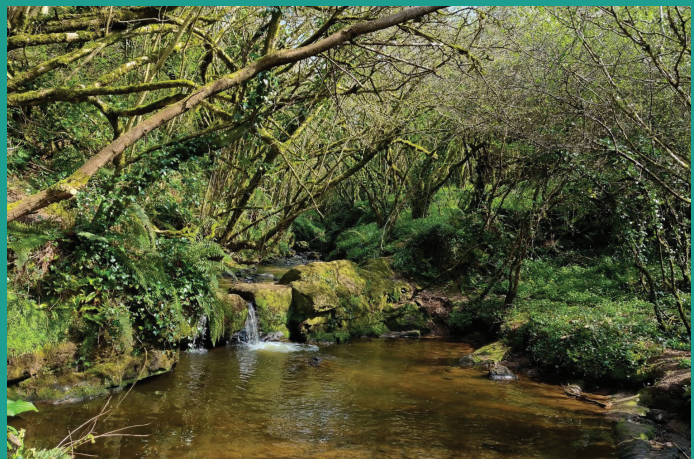


## Waters of LIFE Project Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting

The Waters of LIFE Integrated Project (IP) is a €20 million project co-funded by the European Union LIFE programme and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The objective of the project is to support the implementation of measures to protect and enhance High Status Waters and the work of the Blue Dot Catchments Programme.

The latest Waters of LIFE Project Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting was held at the Midlands Park Hotel in Portlaoise on the 19th of November. Irish Rural Link was in attendance alongside representatives from a broad spectrum of relevant organisations.

The Waters of LIFE team reported significant progress since the previous meeting with the continued preparation of catchment management plans and active recruitment of more farmers into the project. Their IT system is now completed and ready for trialling. They also reported that the development of a farmer baseline attitudinal survey and advisor training materials will be completed by the end of 2024. Advisor



training is planned to commence in early 2025. Farm plan preparation will also begin in early in the new year and contracts issued to participant farmers. Training for participant farmers will commence in February and March. Learn more about this important project by visiting the Waters of LIFE project website or by scanning the **QR code** below:



# CAP Network Ireland in Europe

## 7th Meeting of SCAR Strategic Working Group

The Standing Agriculture Committee on Research (SCAR) held the 7th meeting of their Strategic Working Group (SWG) on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in Ljubljana, Slovenia in October.

The two-day event, attended by CAP Network Ireland, took place to discuss the implementation of the CAP AKIS Plan, AKIS for rural innovation and AKIS for co-innovation as defined in the 6th mandate of this working group.

A key focus area of this event was building capacity among farmers, particularly through lifelong learning (LLL).

One of the projects which presented on this topic was AgriFood4Future. This project aims to develop vocational training skills and educational programmes that meet the needs of the “agriculture of the future.”

## Thematic Group on Enhancing Biodiversity on Farmland for Improved Resilience

The EU CAP Network recently organised a Thematic Group on Enhancing Biodiversity on Farmland for Improved Resilience.

The first meeting was held online on the 23rd of September and the 2nd meeting was held in Brussels on the 13th of November.

John Murphy represented CAP Network Ireland at these discussions to share experiences on the required changes in the design, implementation and uptake of initiatives, to upscale the delivery of biodiversity outcomes, and improve the sustainability and resilience of farming.

## EU CAP Network Attends Rural Assembly

The 3rd European CAP Network Assembly meeting took place in Brussels on the 5th of December. The Assembly is the main governance body of the European CAP Network.

Ireland was represented by James Claffey and Cormac McGann from CAP Network Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, respectively.

The meeting reviewed key outputs and activities from the EU CAP Network before breaking into groups to identify priority areas for 2025.

## The 4th National Networks Meeting in Lithuania

Project Manager of CAP Network Ireland, James Claffey attended the 4th National Networks (NN) Meeting in Lithuania in September.

The meeting introduced a new methodology: The Networking Hackathon. This aimed to foster collaboration and the development of innovative ideas and solutions by National Networks.

Participants were divided into teams, each working on specific topics identified. Each team created and presented a proposal to enhance the performance of National Network related activities.

James Claffey's group won the public vote category with their proposal to use social media influencers as ambassadors to promote rural areas as an attractive place to live.

Visit the EU CAP Network website for more interesting insights about the meetings mentioned on this page. You can also find more information by scanning the **QR code**:





## RDP & CSP Monitoring Committee Meeting 2024

The CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) Monitoring Committee meets at least once annually to review any issues affecting the CSP achieving its targets in Ireland. The latest meeting, held on 20 November, also reflected on the progress of the Rural Development Programme (RDP).

As a member of this committee, CAP Network Ireland was delighted to be invited to share an update on the Network's role in supporting the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan. Before the meeting began, we were given the opportunity to exhibit our work to date, which included some of our case studies, infographics and themed publications.



Later in the day, CAP Network Ireland team members Daniel Bennett and Róisín Fitzgerald presented to the Monitoring Committee. Daniel gave an overview of the project, its aims and objectives. In addition, he outlined how CAP Network Ireland adopts a multi-method approach to communication and networking, utilising both online and offline platforms, to reach and connect with our members.

Róisín then spoke in depth about the project's research and innovation efforts. She updated on the Network's innovation hub pilots in horticulture, organics and EIP-AGRI; our innovation spotlight series; and our involvement in the development and dissemination of an AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) map and farmer survey.

Learn more about Ireland's CSP on the CAP Network Ireland website or by scanning the **QR code below**:



## CAP Network Ireland Events Calendar

The world of agriculture and rural development moves quickly, and we can easily miss out on important events that are ongoing. In response to this, CAP Network Ireland has recently launched its own unique Events Calendar.

This online tool, which contains details of both national and international events, as well as important scheme deadlines, is regularly updated and free to use.

A quick scroll of the calendar will bring you up to date on all upcoming events, and will give you information on meeting

themes, organisers, and cost of entry (if any).

Keep up to date with the Events Calendar on the CAP Network Ireland website or by scanning the **QR code below**:



### Connect with us

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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



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