



NEWSLETTER

Connecting communities,
growing our future.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL INNOVATION



From left to right: Alistair Prior (EU CAP Network), Daniel Bennett (CAP Network Ireland), Marie Duffy (Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht), Juha-Matti Markkola (Finnish Rural Network) and James Claffey (CAP Network Ireland).

LEADER Capacity Building Workshop Takes Place in Athlone



On June 10th, CAP Network Ireland, in collaboration with the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG), hosted a LEADER capacity building workshop at the Athlone Springs Hotel, Co. Roscommon. This half-day networking event brought together Chief Executives and Chairpersons of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and their Implementing Partners (IPs) involved in delivering the LEADER Programme across rural Ireland.

Opening presentations were given by Daniel Bennett from CAP Network Ireland, Marie Duffy from DRCDG and Alistair Prior from the EU CAP Network.

Following the presentations, participants took part in two interactive breakout sessions. Topic 1 was on 'The Added Value of LEADER'. Juha-Matti Markkola (Finnish Rural Network) presented on the subject of 'how other EU Member States capture added value'. He outlined Finland's step-by-step approach to demonstrating LEADER's impact at both local and national levels.

Participants expressed an interest in examining whether a similar framework or guidance model should be developed in Ireland to capture LEADER's added

value more effectively and in a practical, simplified manner. Additionally, the benefits of using case studies to demonstrate the added value of LEADER was also discussed.

Topic 2 was on 'Delivering Your Local Development Strategy'. This session focused on practical experiences in implementing local development strategies under the 2023-2027 LEADER Programme. The experience of staff members in delivering strategies, the level of local engagement, as well as the trust that has been built with communities, were seen as critical to the success of engaging those considered hard to reach. The importance of simplifying the scheme, increasing the involvement of younger people, and the recruitment of volunteers were also highlighted by participants.

To conclude the workshop, MC James Claffey (CAP Network Ireland) outlined plans for future capacity building workshops aimed at building on the day's discussions and outcomes. A Summary Report of the event will soon be made available on the CAP Network Ireland website, where you can also find more information on the LEADER programme. **Scan the QR Code above.**

CAP Network Ireland Campaign Highlights Measurable Actions for Nature by Farmers

CAP Network Ireland's recent social media campaign, entitled 'There's more to the story...', highlighted the environmental progress being made by the agricultural sector.

In addition to producing our food, farmers in Ireland have been busy making quantifiable contributions to restoring the natural environment through support from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The social media campaign featured statistics released by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) that illustrate how the farming community's ongoing efforts are paying off in terms of measurable benefits to the environment.

Statistics From The Campaign Included:

- Agriculture in Ireland has seen a 4.6% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 2022 and 2023.
- 6300km of watercourses are now being protected by farmers in the ACRES Scheme, which is approximately 17 times the length of the River Shannon.
- There are now approximately 5000 farmers participating in the Organic Farming Scheme in Ireland.
- 2400km of hedgerow is being planted by farmers in the ACRES Scheme, which equates to the distance from Dublin to Kiev.
- 97% of farmers in Ireland are now in the Eco-Scheme with 79% of them having allocated 10% of their land as 'space for nature'.



Visit the CAP Network Ireland website or **scan the QR Code** to read more about the campaign.

The campaign generated almost 1.6 million impressions over eight weeks. It ran across CAP Network Ireland's social media platforms and featured on the Agriland website and social channels. A dedicated campaign webpage provided visitors with a link to the CAP Network Ireland website, giving them the opportunity to explore the work of the CAP Network and read the stories of some of the individual farmers contributing to these statistics.

Agri-Science Project Officer at CAP Network Ireland, John Murphy, feels that *"While further action across all sectors is necessary if Ireland is to meet its climate action targets, reverse biodiversity decline, and restore its natural environment. This campaign presents some positive news from the agricultural sector."*

"It demonstrates that farmers in Ireland are now showing a commitment and willingness to engage and be part of the solution. Statistics are emerging that show, with the right approach and key supports under the CAP Strategic Plan, agriculture can be part of the solution, and that individual farmers in Ireland can play a key role in restoring our natural environment."

Spotlight on Innovation in Agriculture

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, which hold a solution to a challenge facing Irish agriculture or be a best practice or process which helps achieve CAP objectives. CAP Network Ireland has recently published three Innovation Spotlight interviews. These can be viewed on our website and YouTube channels. **Read about our latest Innovation Spotlights below:**



Breeding Waders:

CAP Network Ireland's Sarah Glascott spoke with Owen Murphy, Senior Project Manager of the Breeding Waders EIP project. The project aims to secure existing Breeding Wader populations and support population recovery through landscape management and policy development. Speaking about the project, Owen Murphy said: *"We're trying to put measures in place that will protect these birds. They nest on the ground so they're extremely vulnerable to any land use change."* The project will establish connections with landowners, stakeholders and communities to foster a comprehensive understanding of the Breeding Waders' requirements within the landscape. By recognising, valuing, and protecting these species, the EIP-Agri project is promoting a range of ecosystem services that are of benefit to the whole of society.

PhyterBerry:

Dr. Steve Collins, founder of PhyterBerry, spoke about growing aronia berries in the hills near Bantry in West Cork. This Innovation Spotlight interview highlighted a potential diversification route for Irish farmers. Creating successful products using aronia berries would open up huge potential for many rural Irish farmers, especially those on marginal land, and those looking to diversify away from carbon intensive practices of sheep and cattle farming. Dr. Steve Collins is keen to speak with farmers that might be interested in growing aronia berries.

CODECS:

CODECS stands for maximising the CO-benefits of agricultural Digitalisation through conducive digital ECoSystems and is a 4-year Horizon Europe project. The aim of the project is to *"improve the motivation and the capacity of European farmers to understand and adopt digitalisation as an enabler of sustainable and transformative change"*. As part of our Innovation Spotlight series, CAP Network Ireland's Sarah Glascott spoke with CODECS' Project Coordinator Gianluca Brunori to learn more about how the project can help identify priorities and policy tools to build conducive digital ecosystems.

If you're interested in taking part in the Innovation Spotlight series or if you would like to learn more about the projects above and watch the full interviews, scan the QR codes below:



Breeding Waders



PhyterBerry



CODECS



Olivia and Joe Morrissey

CASE STUDY

Accidentally Becoming a Rural Hub

Olivia and Joe Morrissey

Joe and Olivia Morrissey are dairy farmers in Rostellan, Co. Cork who have made significant changes in recent years. With no opportunity to expand, they decided to try something different. They reduced their herd size and began selling directly to customers through Rostellan Farm Shop. Olivia participated in the ACORNS programme in 2021 and recently received LEADER funding to purchase marketing materials and food processing equipment. The farm is registered in the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) and the Eco-scheme.

Farm Diversification

"I was thinking of something at the end of the garden initially," laughs Olivia, "but the more ideas that I was having about what I was going to be selling, I decided we needed to do something with the buildings."

An old calving house was selected for a farm shop with an adjoining small milk processing facility and carpark. "People thought we were insane," Olivia remembers. "We couldn't get finance from the banks because they could not understand what we were trying to do or how it was going to make money." Luckily 2021 was an exceptionally high milk price year which enabled them to invest in the farm shop.

Joe is happy to continue milking the cows but admits that selling the milk direct to their customers is the most profitable part of the dairy enterprise. *"The economics don't lie,"* he says emphatically. In 2024, they sold over 35,000 litres of milk through the shop.

ACORNS: Support for Rural Female Entrepreneurs

The ACORNS programme is celebrating 10 years supporting early-stage rural female entrepreneurs and mentored Olivia when she developed her ideas in 2021.

"It was fantastic because it helped give me the confidence to figure out how to start the business and grow it," says Olivia, who is grateful for the support she received.

"The mentors understand the needs you have trying to juggle a family while trying to be heard by a bank. Whatever needs you might have, there is someone there who has the expertise to help you with it. I absolutely loved it."

"We couldn't get finance from the banks because they could not understand what we were trying to do or how it was going to make money."

A Busy Start and Building a Community Hub

The shop opened in August 2022 to coincide with the local Feast Festival. *"We opened with a farm tour. It was mid-week, and we said to ourselves 'would anyone come to it?'"* remembers Olivia, *"but over 100 people arrived for the tour on that first day...and we haven't closed since."*

The shop is open 7 days a week selling their milk through an automatic milk dispenser and in the form of butter and fudge. They sell their own range of baked goods and deli products alongside many products from local producers.

The shop employs 10 staff members, 5 of whom are full-time. Joe is glad that the dairy farm can now also afford a full-time worker. *"My body is not as worn out at this time of year (calving season) as it used to be."*

The shop has become a local hub and Olivia believes this business model can be replicated all over the country. *“What we’re doing could be scaled up everywhere and do something for communities, provide more food security for the nation, and provide jobs. It seems to attract people from 0 to 100. The local yoga classes come up here after class for coffee and sit down for a chat.”*

“Older people come here to meet because they might be on their own. The Men’s Shed also come for coffee and on Sunday mornings, the women’s Gaelic football team come after training. Never did we think that this is what we were creating.”



“What we’re doing could be scaled up everywhere and do something for communities.”

Advising other farming families considering diversification, Joe says, *“Don’t be afraid of the hard work...if it pays off, you’ll be more confident about its ability to generate income rather than just (relying on) farming.”* Olivia agrees *“Don’t copy anybody else because people appreciate something different and will keep coming back to you.”*

Planning for the Future

Another shed is now earmarked to become a space to host events. *“Nearly every week we have a farm tour. It seems like agri-tourism is where a lot of business is going to come from (in the future). Tourists want the real Irish experience; something that is the real deal such as a place like ours, a working farm, and they are willing to pay for it.”*

Further financial support is currently being sought through LEADER towards buying projectors, demonstration tables and a seated tractor-drawn trailer.

Olivia believes that entrepreneurial rural women with innovative ideas now have the supports required to help succeed: *“Especially for women to be able to bring another income into the farm business. If you open your mind, no matter what you are interested in, there are opportunities to (create) and grow a business.”*

To explore our other farmer case studies, visit the CAP Network Ireland website by scanning the QR code below:



‘Irish Farmers Can Lead The Way’: Agriculture and Climate Change Conference

On June 5th, CAP Network Ireland attended the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine’s (DAFM) conference on Climate Change in Agriculture, held in Dublin Castle. The day focused on highlighting the latest research and development efforts underway in Irish agriculture, aimed at tackling climate change and fostering more sustainable production systems.

Minister for Agriculture, Martin Heydon and An Taoiseach Micheál Martin opened the event. Addressing the over 500 delegates, they noted the importance of coordinated action towards sustainable development in the agricultural sector and recognised the current actions being carried out nationally to reduce emissions in agricultural systems.

An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin said: *“The transition to climate-smart agriculture does not need to be a burden. It is a chance to safeguard what matters most – our land, our water, our food, our planet and our future. It is a chance to show that climate action and agricultural excellence can go hand in hand, and that Irish farmers can lead the way.”*

Throughout the day, experts shared valuable insights on different aspects of climate considerations in agriculture. The introductory sessions explored the current status of and trends in agricultural emissions with speakers from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Maynooth University, Ireland’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and The New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries. Consumer and market trends were also discussed with updates from Bord Bia on customer expectations and industry insights from Carbery.

Research in agricultural science and technology to mitigate landscape emissions was also highlighted. Delegates heard presentations from researchers on innovations that reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions on farmland, as well as sustainable land management strategies. The event concluded with a panel discussion by national policymakers, climate advisors, and industry representatives. This panel also featured farmer representation from Edwin Thompson, the Teagasc/FBD Environmental Sustainability award 2024 winner for reducing on-farm greenhouse gas emissions.



Key takeaways from the conference included:

1. Sustainable Food Systems are a global issue, and Ireland needs to be at the forefront.
2. Solutions for climate change require optimism and collaboration.
3. There is no ‘silver bullet’ or single solution to climate change in agriculture. The wealth of research we have needs to be transferred to farmers to make change. More needs to be done.

This conference was a great opportunity to learn about research efforts and innovations being developed to make our production systems more climate friendly.

CAP Network Ireland is working to promote sustainable solutions to issues facing the agricultural sector as part of our Innovation Hub. **Learn more by scanning the QR code below:**



EU Corner: CAP Network Ireland in Europe

Improving the Position of Farmers in a Supply Chain Workshop, Rouen, France

This 'Innovation in Logistics' workshop in Rouen, France, organised by the EU CAP Network, aimed to identify technological and organisational approaches for farmers to reduce costs, boost efficiency, and meet sustainability and consumer demands, through short food supply chains (SFSCs).

It also explored logistical solutions to empower farmers, improving their market position and income. Promoting networking among innovative agricultural projects and identifying practical research needs to bridge knowledge gaps were also key objectives, ultimately supporting sustainable food systems.



Thematic Group on Valuing Farmers' Wider Contribution to Society, Brussels, Belgium

This EU CAP Network Thematic Group (TG) examined existing negative narratives and misconceptions surrounding agriculture, discussed the wider contributions of farmers to society, and collected innovative ideas for recognising these important, additional contributions.

Potential strategies involving financing, communication, education, and support structures were proposed to raise the profile of farming and attract new farmers to the profession.

Partnering for Innovation with Impact in Agriculture and Rural Areas Brokerage Event, Brussels, Belgium

This event in late-April aimed to facilitate the exchange of experiences and insights on the preparation of high-quality proposals for the Horizon Europe calls for Cluster 6, with a focus on the involvement of EIP-AGRI OGs in Horizon multi-actor projects (MAPs) and enhancing cooperation possibilities for EIP-AGRI projects in the future.

The event highlighted innovations stemming from Horizon and EIP-AGRI OG projects, and provided an opportunity for networking and promoted alternative funding opportunities.

Thematic Group on Effective Approaches for Simplification within the CAP, Brussels, Belgium

The 1st meeting of this Thematic Group (TG), held in early April, had the aim of finding appropriate measures to reduce the administrative burden and ensure simplification in the implementation of the CAP. This TG is part of a broader European Commission consultative process to simplify the CAP following farmer protests in 2024. The 2nd meeting will be held in Brussels in June.

Visit the EU CAP Network website for more interesting insights by scanning the QR code.



Farmers sign up to CAP Network Ireland at BISS Clinics in 2025

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) held 16 in-person Farmer Clinics across the country between the 1st of April and the 8th of May 2025. These clinics were organised to assist farmers with their applications to the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) and other area-based schemes.

CAP Network Ireland attended a number of these clinics to raise our profile amongst the farming community and to encourage farmers to join the Network.

The CAP Network Ireland team were present at clinics in Limerick, Trim and Clonmel. These clinics were well attended, and the CAP Network Ireland team were delighted that farmers continue to recognise the value of joining our network. Most farmers were eager to receive regular information and updates about the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 through the CAP Network Ireland e-Bulletins and social media posts.

These BISS clinics continue to be a very useful medium for farmers and officials to interact and deal with any issues that farmers may have about their application.

Visit the CAP Network Ireland website for more information on BISS or scan the QR Code below.



CAP Network Ireland Events Calendar

The world of agriculture and rural development moves quickly; it's easy to miss out on important upcoming events.

The CAP Network Ireland Events Calendar, launched recently, contains details of both national and international events, as well as important scheme deadlines.

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



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Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
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Co-funded by
the European Union

CAP Network Ireland is co-funded by the European-Union and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027.