

LEADER Capacity Building Workshop: Summary Report

Strengthening LEADER delivery and exploring the programme's role in supporting Ireland's expanding bioeconomy

On the 27th of November 2025, CAP Network Ireland, in collaboration with the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG), hosted a LEADER Capacity Building Workshop in Tullamore, Co. Offaly. The event focused on strengthening LEADER delivery and exploring how the programme can support Ireland's expanding bioeconomy. It brought together key stakeholders involved in delivering the LEADER Programme across rural Ireland.

This short summary report presents an overview of the key discussion points.



OPENING PRESENTATIONS

The morning opened with a presentation from **Daniel Bennett** (CAP Network Ireland), who provided an overview of the network's key activities, before moving on to elaborate on its recent engagement with the LEADER Programme.



Participants then heard an update from **Marie Duffy** (DRCDG) on several aspects of the 2023–2027 LEADER Programme, including progress on project approvals to date and the Department's active engagement with key LEADER stakeholders. This was followed by a presentation from **David Donnelly and Declan Harty** (DRCDG) who delivered a detailed presentation on LEADER Inspections.



Questions were raised from the floor and addressed by the DRCDG before the session moved into a short networking break.

GUEST PRESENTATIONS

The day continued with presentations focused on the theme "LEADER and the Bioeconomy".

1. **Matthew Halpin** (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) highlighted practical examples from Ireland's growing bioeconomy and outlined how LEADER can support emerging opportunities in this area.



2. **Seán Finan** (Irish Bioenergy Association - IrBEA) directed attendees to a range of useful resources available through the association to support LEADER organisations.



3. **Fiona Kelleher** (AmuGreen) introduced the MyGug anaerobic digester, an innovative solution that converts food waste into energy, demonstrating its contribution to the circular economy and lowering energy costs.



All presentations are available to view on the CAP Network Ireland [website](#).

INTERACTIVE TABLE DISCUSSIONS

A short brainstorming and networking session then offered those in attendance the chance to exchange ideas on advancing bioeconomy projects in rural communities and on strengthening LEADER's support at local level more effectively.

This section outlines the key takeaways from the session under four headings.

Current Funding Experience & EOIs

Bioeconomy-related projects have been funded across successive LEADER programmes, though experience varies by sub-regional area.

- Funded or ongoing examples include:
 - Biomass initiatives.
 - Wool and timber processing projects.
 - Community based bioeconomy training.
 - Feasibility studies and equipment to maximise local resource use (e.g. brash-to-chip).
- Many areas have experienced a recent increase in bioeconomy-related EOIs. Some of these have been considered too early-stage or insufficiently developed to progress to funding.

Opportunities

- There is strong and growing interest in bioeconomy innovation at community and local enterprise level.
- Significant potential for:
 - Community-scale solutions (e.g. anaerobic digester such as MyGug).
 - Mobile and shared-use equipment (e.g. mobile biochar units).
 - Projects that maximise local waste streams and underutilised resources.
- Clear demand for education, training, and awareness-raising on the bioeconomy among project officers, community groups and local businesses.
- Opportunities for LEADER to:
 - Support early-stage development and feasibility work.
 - Integrate bioeconomy actions into Smart Villages initiatives.

- Support networking, regional learning events, and peer-to-peer exchange between LAGs.
- Potential for stronger collaboration with external expertise (e.g. Teagasc, Irish Bioenergy Association, CAP Network Ireland).

Barriers & Challenges

- Knowledge and confidence gaps among project officers when assessing bioeconomy proposals.
- Difficulty in:
 - Proving technical feasibility and long-term viability of novel or “blue-sky” innovations.
 - Accessing reliable expertise to evaluate emerging technologies.
- Funding structure challenges, including:
 - Perception of LEADER as too small-scale for bioeconomy projects.
 - Minimum project thresholds conflicting with small but viable innovations.
 - Other funding sources offering higher grant rates.
- Regulatory, planning, and compliance issues, particularly for infrastructure-based projects.
- Community-level challenges:
 - Limited buy-in without a clear local champion.
 - Resistance to renewable energy or biomass-related projects in some areas.
 - Bioeconomy not always a priority for community groups (e.g. sports clubs).

Potential Enablers & Supports

- Clearer definitions and examples of eligible bioeconomy projects supported by LEADER.
- Early-stage supports (e.g. animation, mentoring, feasibility funding) to help EOIs mature.
- Stronger cross-sector and inter-LAG collaboration to share learning, reduce risk, and build confidence.



Participants expressed strong enthusiasm for future collaboration.

GOOD PRACTICE PRESENTATION

The event concluded with a presentation from **Roisin Lennon** (Create Green, and Offaly Local Development Company) who gave an engaging overview of this LEADER supported initiative, which assists creative, food and farming businesses to grow sustainably. Create Green was a finalist in the EU CAP Network’s Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) 2025 in Brussels.



The full event agenda, presentations and a gallery of images can be found [here](#).