

# WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

DRIVING CHANGE  
UNDER IRELAND'S  
CAP STRATEGIC PLAN



CAP  
Network  
Ireland

SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE  
AND RURAL  
INNOVATION

2026 Edition



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



# FOREWORD



As Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, it is a great privilege to introduce this edition of the CAP Network Ireland Women in Agriculture booklet, published during the 2026 International Year of the Woman Farmer.

This publication celebrates the invaluable contribution of women to Irish agriculture and rural communities. While women have always been central to farming in Ireland, their achievements have too often gone unrecognised. By sharing these inspiring stories, we are helping to increase the visibility of women across the sector and ensuring that young women and girls considering a career in agriculture

have strong role models whose example they can follow.

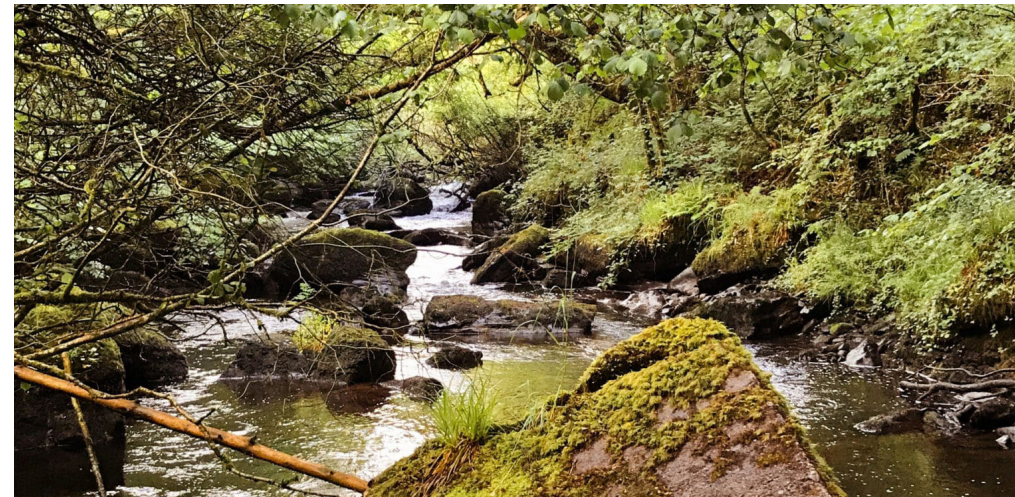
The 2026 International Year of the Woman Farmer provides a unique opportunity to recognise the leadership, innovation and resilience of women farmers, fisherwomen and foresters, while also highlighting the importance of creating an agricultural sector where women are visible, valued and supported. I am particularly pleased to acknowledge Carina Roseingrave, Ireland's International Year of the Woman Farmer Ambassador, whose dedication and advocacy are helping to champion women in farming both nationally and internationally.



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*"The stories featured reflect the diversity, resilience, and innovation that are hallmarks of Irish agriculture. From family farms to agri-enterprises, from education to environmental stewardship, these case studies show women embracing challenges, seizing opportunities, and shaping the future of the sector in meaningful ways."*

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This second edition, produced by CAP Network Ireland, showcases the diversity of women working across Irish agriculture and demonstrates how Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan continues to support greater participation, leadership and opportunity. I sincerely thank all the women who have shared their experiences so generously, and CAP Network Ireland for once again producing this important publication.

Together, we can continue building a farming sector that reflects the full talent and diversity of Irish agriculture, inspiring the next generation of women farmers and ensuring they can see a future for themselves within this great sector.

Martin Heydon T.D.  
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

*Martin Heydon*





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CAP Network Ireland would like to sincerely thank all the women who engaged in the creation of this publication; for their full participation, time, and honesty in telling us about their lives in the world of agriculture, farming and entrepreneurship.

Thank you to John Murphy for his dedication in interviewing the participants, and for his time and effort in compiling and editing the case studies. Special thanks to Paddy Malone for leading this publication's design and for bringing this final publication together.

Thanks to Chloe Delmon, Alice Yap, Matthew Curry, and Elisa Goode for their assistance in this production.

Thanks to the CAP Network Ireland team for their assistance and encouragement in promoting and finalising this booklet.

For readers, this booklet offers:

**Visibility & Recognition:** Showcasing the often underappreciated contributions of women, and bringing their stories to the forefront of national conversation.

**Inspiration & Role Models:** Sharing real-life journeys that encourage the next generation of women to see agriculture as a space where they belong and can thrive.

**Policy Relevance:** Demonstrating the impact of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan supports, and providing policymakers with tangible evidence of progress and opportunity.

**Diversity of Experience:** Highlighting women from different regions, enterprises, and backgrounds, reflecting the richness and adaptability of Irish farming.

**Momentum for Change:** Positioning the sector as forward-looking, resilient, and inclusive, strengthening Ireland's international reputation for sustainable agriculture.





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# INTRODUCTION

## Women in Agriculture in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP): Celebrating Leadership, Innovation and Achievement.

Women have always played a vital role in Irish agriculture – as farmers, workers, and custodians of land and community life. While their contributions were once less recognised in formal settings, they are now increasingly acknowledged and supported through progressive policy and practice.



Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plan 2023–2027 reflects this positive momentum. Aligned with EU priorities for a more sustainable and inclusive rural economy, the CSP recognises that gender equality is essential to the sector's future viability.

By promoting access to knowledge, tailored supports, and leadership opportunities, the CSP empowers more women to step into roles of ownership, innovation, and influence. This approach enriches farming, rural enterprise, and community development across the country – ensuring that Irish agriculture benefits from the full talents and perspectives of its people.



### Key Points:

- Women now hold nearly 13% of farm ownership roles, with many more actively involved through shared farm management and rural enterprise.
- The CSP includes targeted support under the Women in Agriculture Measure, such as tailored training and knowledge transfer initiatives.
- Women are increasingly engaged in diversification, agri-tourism, climate-smart practices, and value-added enterprises.
- Supporting women strengthens succession planning, rural resilience, and economic sustainability.
- Under TAMS 3, women can avail of a higher grant rate of 60% for new equipment, farm buildings, enterprise development, and more.

The women featured in this booklet are helping shape a dynamic and inclusive future for agriculture – from running productive family farms to launching innovative businesses and mentoring future leaders. Their stories highlight what is possible when knowledge, opportunity, and ambition come together. They reflect not only personal determination but also the power of well-designed policy to unlock potential and drive meaningful change.

These examples provide insight into both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. They serve as a powerful reminder that a truly modern agricultural sector must be inclusive, innovative, and representative of all who contribute to it. Their experiences underscore the value of inclusive policy and the energy women bring to Ireland's evolving agricultural and rural development landscape.







# SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) are committed to supporting the growing number of women choosing to work in the Irish agriculture sector. Various support options are available to Irish women and are funded under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 in partnership with the European Union, and through the national Rural Innovation and Development Fund.

## CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027

### The Women Farmer Capital Investment Scheme

The Women Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (WFCIS) offers investment support specifically for women under the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS 3). Women farmers between the ages of 18 and 67 can avail of increased grant aid within the scheme to encourage new entrants and to provide recognition and gender equality within Irish agriculture. Grant funding of 60% is available up to a ceiling of €90,000.



### Women-only Knowledge Transfer (KT) groups

The KT Programme is a three-year Programme being delivered by a network of approved KT Facilitators, with many women farmers participating and the establishment of women only KT groups is an option supported in the current programme which was not available under the previous programme. The Programme fosters knowledge exchange and innovation between advisors, farmers and other stakeholders to meet current and future agri-food and environmental challenges.



## Rural Innovation and Development Fund

### The ACORNS programme (Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-ups)

The ACORNS programme supports early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland and runs over six months part-time annually since 2015.

Applicants for the current year must be able to demonstrate that they own or part-own a recently set up a new business which has generated sales no earlier than end June 2022 or must be at an advanced stage of planning a new venture and have a clear idea of what they want to achieve. Applicants must also be living in a rural area. These are all areas of the country outside the administrative city boundaries of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.



# OTHER INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

## Gender-Aware Design of Interventions

Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) places gender awareness at the heart of all interventions. From design to delivery, each scheme is reviewed to identify and remove barriers that may disproportionately affect women farmers. This includes examining eligibility criteria, application procedures, training requirements, and communication strategies through a gender lens to ensure greater inclusivity.

## Strengthening Gender Data & Networks

To better support women in farming, the CSP introduces two key measures:

1. Enhanced gender data collection and reporting – All CAP schemes will record and publish gender-disaggregated data, enabling more accurate monitoring of women's participation and outcomes.

2. Greater use of the National CAP Network – The network will be leveraged to increase women's involvement not only as participants, but also as leaders and contributors. Women are encouraged to engage in peer-to-peer learning, network events, and CAP implementation discussions, helping to shape the future of Irish farming.

## European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) with a Gender Focus

The CSP also supports innovation with a dedicated EIP call for projects promoting gender balance in agriculture. One example is Making Farms Work for Women, led by agricultural advisor Claire Brennan, which received €650,000 in DAFM funding. This project explores practical, innovative solutions to address the specific needs of women in areas such as machinery handling and livestock management.



## Food Vision 2030

Ireland's 10-year, stakeholder led, strategy for the Agri-food sector aims to balance economic, social and environmental sustainability under a holistic Food Systems approach. It recognises the importance of gender balance to the long-term sustainable future of the agri-food sector. The strategy includes actions and commitments to promote and improve gender balance at all levels within the sector over the 10-year period of the strategy.



## The National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture

Ireland's first National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture took place in February 2023, bringing together policymakers, farm leaders, and women farmers to address gender imbalance in the sector. Key discussions focused on leadership, visibility, education, sustainability, and the financial and legal barriers women face in farming.

The dialogue resulted in a 12-point Action Plan, launched in January 2024, which sets out concrete measures to improve women's participation and recognition in agriculture.

A dedicated Women in Agriculture hub, a calendar of ongoing events, and research projects have already been implemented, ensuring that this dialogue translates into long-term policy change and meaningful supports for women in farming.



## The Women in Agriculture Working Group

The newly established Women in Agriculture Working Group has been tasked with facilitating and guiding the implementation of the action plan. The group is comprised of a range of representatives from across the sector including Teagasc, Women in Agriculture Stakeholders Group, Dairy Women Ireland, the AgDif Forum, Foresty, Aquaculture, a young female farmer and an agri-solicitor as well as DAFM representatives. The group is working to deliver on the women in agriculture action plan and to increase awareness, recognition and participation of women and young girls in Irish farming and agriculture.





# IYWF Ambassador 2026

## CARINA ROSEINGRAVE



Carina Roseingrave is a farmer from Crusheen, Co. Clare, and **Ireland's International Year of the Woman Farmer Ambassador for 2026**. Carina recently spoke to CAP Network Ireland about her experiences in the role so far.

### What was the journey that led you to becoming the International Year of the Woman Farmer Ambassador for 2026?

*It was Jerry, my brother, who saw it being advertised on Facebook and he said, "You should do that," and I was like "we don't have the time!" But thinking about it further, I thought it could be great because I really, really, truly believe that there is a future in Irish farming and we need to start educating younger people.*

*Paula Fitzsimons from ACORNS also picked up the phone and said, "this is the gig that you need to sign up to," and she has been so good to me and Burren View Farm in setting up my free-range eggs business. I took their advice, I filled up the form and lo-and-behold, I became the ambassador.*

### What are the duties and functions of an International Year of the Woman Farmer Ambassador?

*It's busy! I'm attending events and getting into rooms where I would never have been without being the Ambassador. I was in Brussels and it was really, really educational. It gave me a newfound respect for the work that the MEPs do out there. It's not all talk. To me, what they're doing out there is action and the important part of it is that it is brought back to Ireland and implemented for the betterment of Irish farmers and Irish people in general.*

### What are the key priorities that you want to achieve during your time as Ambassador?

*I want to instill a bit of faith and positivity back into rural Ireland. Yes, farming is a job that is 24/7 but is a very rewarding job. To be out in nature, to understand where your food is coming from, to work with animals is definitely rewarding. But it does involve hard work.*

### How do you see Ireland contributing to the International Year of the Woman Farmer?

*I think we have really put our stamp on it. From being out in Brussels and chatting with the MEPs, they are impressed that the Irish government put forward an Irish IYWF Ambassador. They have a lot of respect for farmers and a respect for women in agriculture.*



### What has been the highlight so far?

*There have been so many. One of the highlights would be milking a cow in Dublin for Bloom Festival. It was just an amazing experience because I was chatting with people who had never seen a cow. Hopefully they went away knowing more about where their food comes from and about the work that farmers do.*

*Another event that was very nice was the Farm Embrace Memorial Service. I did the eulogy for them this year. I met the most amazing people and I listened to stories of people that had gone through trauma. I would never have been in that circle only for being the IYWF Ambassador.*

### What lessons have you learned in your role as IYWF Ambassador?

*I've learned that there are so many women out there who want to be farming but they need support. They need support with physical barriers to farming like having to deal 25kg bags of ration.*

*Another thing I've learned is that so many women are afraid of the mart. They're intimidated to go into the mart to sell their cattle even though it's not an intimidating place. We need to break that mental barrier and it's up to us as women to change our mindset and go in with confidence.*

### What still needs to be done to empower women farmers more?

*There is more to do, simply because it is a new thing where women want to be the forefront of farming. I think that all of the organisations that are set up for women in agriculture are doing an amazing job of bringing groups of women out to farms and teaching them from the bottom up. Empowerment and knowledge are what all the events should be for.*

### If you could introduce one policy or initiative tomorrow that would have a lasting impact for women farmers, what would it be?

*A maternity package because without that, women are going to feel stressed out having kids. I was lucky that Jerry was fine when I had my two girls. He just took it in his stride, but in saying that I didn't get a maternity leave. I was back farming within 2 or 3 weeks again.*

### Who has been the biggest influence on your own leadership journey?

*Well, my granny when we were younger because she would have shown us how to grow vegetables in the garden. From the very beginning, we knew where food came from. She saw tough times but always ploughed on. I think that's where we got our resilience and hard work ethic from. She was always steady and thought things through. She lived to 97. She was an amazing woman.*

### What message would you like to share with young women and future leaders across Ireland who are wondering if they can make a difference?

*Do it, because you can make a difference. I've been in rooms that I would never have been in only for the Ambassador role. And unless you're inside in those rooms. You're not going to make the difference.*



To read Carina's Case Study, please turn to page 42.





## IYWF Photo Competition Winner: Overall + Farming

# GILLIAN SMITH



Location:  
Lifford,  
Co. Donegal



Enterprise:  
Dairy +  
Beef



Participating Schemes:  
BISS



Farm Size:  
222ha  
(550ac)

Gillian Smith grew up on her family farm in Co. Donegal and is now running a 550-acre (222 hectare) beef and dairy farm alongside her husband and children. Gillian is actively involved in agricultural organisations like Aurivo Leading Ladies and serves on the Donegal Regional Advisory Committee of Aurivo and is the vice treasurer of Dairy Women Ireland. She is also the Chairperson of her local IFA Branch. Her family farm also had a milk processing business before it was sold to Donegal Creameries. That background gave her a strong understanding of quality, responsibility,

and the day-to-day realities of farm life. After her father-in-law passed, Gillian stepped up to work with her husband on the farm as she believed she could make a difference.

In 2015 Gillian obtained her own herd number, and this allowed her to lease land, avail of grants and schemes, get entitlements, and become a farmer "in my own right".

The farm is situated on a main road, with hilly, fertile ground on one side and a river on the other that flows



"That background gave her a strong understanding of quality, responsibility, and the day-to-day realities of farm life."

to a river. It presents a challenge for the farm when the river floods periodically, causing the banks to burst. In times of flooding there is significant amount of work to be done: cleaning drains, fixing banking, and repairing fences. All these works are a cost to the farm and a distraction from the main work of running a beef and dairy farm.

Despite Donegal's general transport difficulties, the farm is "really lucky" with two nearby co-ops and a milk creamery only eight miles away, providing a "pretty central setup." A concern for the future of her farm is the potential loss of the nitrates derogation, which could force a change in the farm system. This change in the system could force them to sell their beef animals instead of raising them.

## ...HER DESIRE TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE.



Gillian loves participating in farm related meetings, even if it requires her to drive 3 hours to attend one; as she believes it is a good opportunity to learn and improve the farm. Gillian expresses her desire to inspire the next generation of women in agriculture, and she regularly takes her daughter to meetings to foster her interest.

### Key Learnings:



"I advocate for support for farm women (e.g., childcare) during busy years to ensure that they are not missing out on those years in between and, they're ready to take on leadership roles. I want women to be on an "equal footing in the agricultural world, same as men."





## IYWF Photo Competition Winner: Rural Diversification

# ELAINE CLARKE



Location:  
Clara,  
Co. Kilkenny



Farm Size:  
6ha  
(15ac)



Enterprise:  
Alpacas

Dr Elaine Clarke grew up on a farm in Co. Kilkenny, where she developed an early appreciation for the care and dedication required to look after livestock and run a successful farm enterprise. Along with her husband, Roger, she co-founded Amberly Alpacas almost 20 years ago, where the couple manage a breeding programme for alpacas that focuses on improving genetics, providing education, and promoting high standards of animal welfare.

Elaine is actively involved in the day-to-

day management of the herd, including the care of young alpacas, known as cria. She oversees the animals' health and manages their pregnancies, allowing her and Roger to make informed breeding and management decisions. These decisions include mating selection, genetic analysis, conformation, fleece quality and temperament. Their aim is to ensure that each new generation improves on the previous one.

Elaine is also involved in processing the fleece, deciding how it can be used,



*She takes great pride in showcasing the results of her work and the progress achieved through the breeding programme.*

and identifying whether it can be turned into yarn, bespoke garments or artisan products. Championing diversification in agricultural practice, she recognises the importance of providing women with opportunities to develop enterprises around their own interests and expertise. "Women have always played an essential role in farming, but diversification has helped many become recognised not simply as helping on the farm, but as business partners, innovators and entrepreneurs in their own right", says Elaine.

The alpacas raised by Elaine are exhibited at competitions throughout Ireland. Although Roger serves as a judge for these competitions, the couple avoid creating conflicts of interest with Elaine taking on the responsibility of presenting their animals herself. She takes great pride in showcasing the results of her work and the progress achieved through the breeding programme.

Elaine recognises the important contribution women make to agriculture across Ireland, playing a role in every aspect of farming, including livestock management, financial planning, diversification, education, research and succession planning. However, she feels that their contributions can sometimes go unnoticed.

## CHAMPIONING DIVERSIFICATION



*"The CAP Strategic Plan has recognised that modern farming is about much more than simply producing food. It encourages innovation, sustainability, knowledge transfer and diversification, all of which are important to businesses like ours."*



*Support for education, environmental stewardship and rural enterprise has helped create opportunities for farms to become more resilient and adaptable. It also recognises that many farm businesses now rely on multiple enterprises rather than a single source of income."*





IYWF Photo Competition  
Winner: Sustainability

# BLÁTNAID GALLAGHER



Location:  
Aughrim,  
Co. Galway



Enterprise:  
Sheep  
Multi-enterprise



Participating Schemes:  
ACRES,  
Organics, SIS



Farm Size:  
40ha  
(100ac)

Blátnaid Gallagher is a full-time farmer in Co. Galway running a mixed farm that has over 100 acres and 30 acres of forestry of 4 mixed species of broadleaf and commercial timber which has been in her family for hundreds of years. Her farm enterprise consist of native sheep and ponies. Revenue is generated from the sale of wool, meat and organic forage, along with farm tours and visits from social farming participants twice a week. She is proud to be a representative in FLIARA, a project that has created a European wide rural

innovation ecosystem, which supports women-led innovative practices in farming and rural areas.

Blátnaid has worked in the agriculture industry for over 30 years since graduating from Mount Bellew Agricultural College. She received her Masters in Agricultural Innovation at the National University of Ireland in 2020.

Blátnaid has diversified her grass swards so she can diversify the type of animals on her farm. Diverse swards can also bring in more birds and pollinators to



*"On one hand they're rewarding intensive farming and the agri-industry that promotes it. But then on the other hand they're saying we need to reduce our carbon footprint. Nature friendly farming is one of the most obvious ways to reduce your carbon friendly footprint because there's such a low reliance on imported chemicals into that system."*

the farm. This approach encourages "multi species swards of grass," which are hugely beneficial to biodiversity.

Blátnaid is a staunch defender of farmers against what she perceives as farmer bashing in public discourse, but she is also a critic of greenwashing, especially at a time when many people no longer know where their food comes from before it reaches supermarket shelves. For her, increasing public understanding of farming matters. Consumers need to see the work, care, and commitment behind food production, and farmers need to be heard and respected for the role they play.

Blátnaid advocates for an equal system for everyone, emphasizing that "as an individual, whether you're male or female, you need to be really good at what you do," and that female excellence is a "bonus" for promoting leadership.

"I think that an equal system for everybody would be beneficial and, you know, we're doing that already by encouraging more entrants into agriculture and encouraging those that are in agriculture and are successful in agriculture to show others what they're doing."

## DIVERSE SWARDS BRING IN MORE BIRDS AND POLLINATORS TO THE FARM.



### Key Learnings:



*"I'd love to see more connection around transparency, traceability and supply chain awareness for the consumer in the next iteration of the CAP. That would be my dream."*





## IYWF Photo Competition Winner: Fisheries



# MARY O'BRIEN



Location:  
Tralee,  
Co. Kerry



Group:  
Tralee Bay  
Society Co-Op



Enterprise:  
Fishing

Mary O'Brien is a nurse, mother, and fisherwoman who grew up in a family of fishermen. She decided to pursue oyster fishing as a profession alongside her husband, Alan. Their oyster-fishing enterprise is part of the Tralee Bay Oyster Co-operative, which plays an important role in managing the local fishery.

The co-operative regulates how many boats can fish at a given time, the number of days fishermen and women are permitted to go out, and the designated times for fishing. These decisions are based on several factors, including oyster quality, weather conditions, and

the availability of oysters. Mary notes that the majority of boats are owned by men, highlighting the continuing gender imbalance within the fishing industry.

A central aim of the co-operative is to ensure that oysters are harvested sustainably and are not overfished. The co-op manager, a scientist, calculates the number of oysters that can safely be harvested over the coming years. Members also monitor aquatic life to ensure oyster populations remain healthy and are not adversely affected by predators, including the brown spider crab. Oysters are particularly important to the marine ecosystem because they



*"Her grandmother taught her to pay attention to the world around her and to care for her community. Mary reflects that the contributions of women like her grandmother were often overlooked and underappreciated in the past. Today, she hopes that new policies will recognise and support the women who work behind the scenes and play an essential, yet often unseen, role in the fishing industry"*

help filter and clean the water — protecting them is therefore essential, especially given that oyster populations were fished to the brink of extinction in the 1970s.

Mary also speaks fondly of her grandmother, who instilled in her a deep love for the sea and taught her to pay attention to the world around her and to care for her community. Mary reflects that the contributions of women like her grandmother were often overlooked and underappreciated in the past. Today, she hopes that new policies will recognise and support the women who work behind the scenes and play an essential, yet often unseen, role in the fishing industry.

## MONITORING TO PREVENT OVER-FISHING

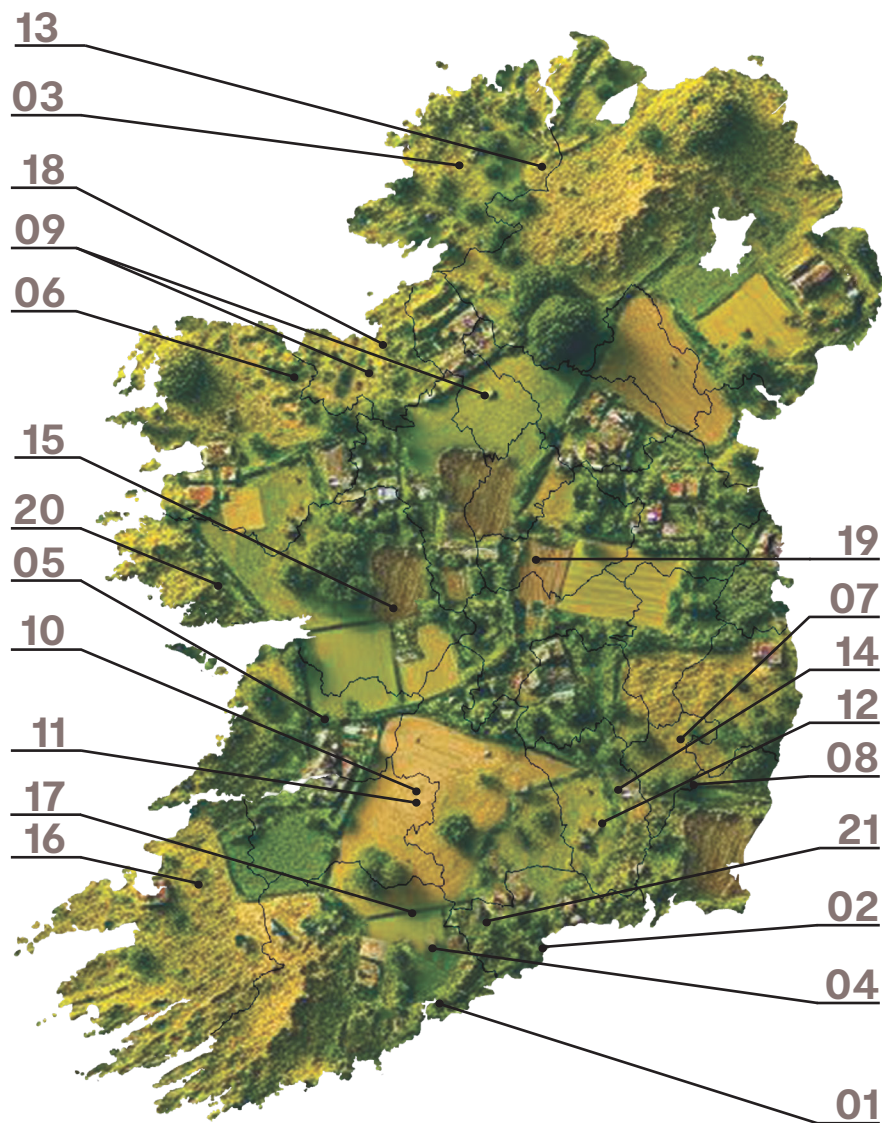


### Key Learnings:



*"Women like my grandmother gave so much to our coastal communities, often without recognition — and that's still true today. I'd like to see policies that formally acknowledge the work women do across fishing, aquaculture, processing, administration, and family-run businesses, because so much of it goes unseen. I also think we need better access to marine biodiversity education, so communities understand invasive species and why it's so important to protect our marine environment. But most of all, I want the stories and experiences of Irish fisherwomen to be documented and celebrated — our knowledge and contribution to these communities deserve to be recognised."*

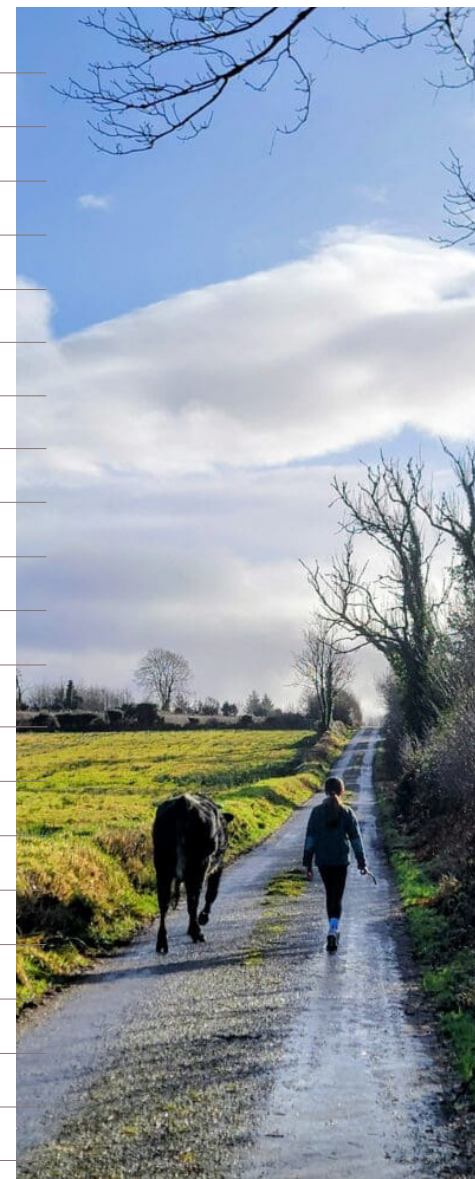




# MAP

## OF CASE STUDIES

|    |                                             |                   |
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| 01 | Olivia Morrissey<br>Page 34 & 35            | Cork              |
| 02 | Máiréad Costin<br>Page 36 & 37              | Waterford         |
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| 21 | Siobhain Hubbard<br>Page 32 & 34            | Waterford         |







# AOIFE LADD



Location:  
Castletownroche,  
Co. Cork



Enterprise:  
Dairy



Participating Schemes:  
BISS,  
TAMS



Farm Size:  
40.5ha  
(100ac)

Aoife Ladd is a dairy farmer in Co. Cork who has been actively involved in her family farm from a very young age. "I got roped in to certain jobs over the years, as one always does on a family farm," she says smiling. By her teen years, Aoife was often milking the herd by herself.

She has been in a formalised Farm Partnership Agreement with her father, John, since 2018. This has made administration of the farm business much easier for her as she could sign paperwork and authorise bank payments in her own right. She has used supports available under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 such as TAMS 3 to make

a series of investments to modernise farm infrastructure and improve the environmental sustainability of her farm.

She is an active member of the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA) and has been attending meetings since she was 15 years old and is a strong advocate for the interests of her industry and local community. "I find it very interesting," she says. She is currently the ICMSA Chairperson for the Mallow area and is also a representative on the national council with a seat on the Business subcommittee.

Aoife represents a new generation of farmers, bringing the same confidence



*"It's great to see more women farming now. Too often in the past there were farms where the son had no interest in it but he got it anyway and it usually didn't work too well. But if I'm honest, I think that we need to encourage everyone into farming, not just females. If I'm somewhere and I'm the only female, I won't even notice."*

and expertise to the boardroom as she does to the milking parlour. She is passionate about representing farmers and helping to shape the future of the sector. "I was in Brussels in 2025 representing the ICMSA. I didn't even realise that I was the only female going until I got to the airport. There was 20 something of us going out to meet with MEPS to advocate for farmers. I just got on with it. It is what it is."

Being a female farmer in a male dominated industry does not bother Aoife. "When I got into farming first, I was going to lots of meetings. I just got on with being the only female there. Even in college in my year of 100, there were only 3 females. I might have gone into discussion groups a bit shy in the past, but if you can't speak openly and honestly in a group, you're in the wrong discussion group."

## A VOCAL ADVOCATE FOR HER INDUSTRY THROUGH THE ICMSA



### Key Learning:



"The introduction of so many income supports under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, like BISS, CRISS, Eco-scheme and many more besides, has meant that ensuring compliance has become more complicated for both farmers and administrators and I would like to see a balance struck in the next iteration of CAP."





# LISA BEGLEY



**Location:**  
Co. Sligo



**CSP Initiative:**  
ACRES CP  
West Connacht



**Role:**  
Project Officer

Lisa comes from a livestock farm in Co. Mayo and continues to help on the family farm in her spare time. Her studies however have taken her on slightly different career path. "I studied agricultural science in University College Dublin and then I studied a Masters in Agricultural Extension and Innovation." She currently works in Co. Sligo as a Project Officer for ACRES West Connacht ([www.acreswestconnacht.ie](http://www.acreswestconnacht.ie)).

It is a role that Lisa finds to be professionally fulfilling. "I come from a long line of farmers. My farming background has provided valuable insight into the vital role farmers play in protecting and enhancing the local environment. In my role as a Project

Officer with ACRES West Connacht, I support farmers across the Ox Mountain region by providing guidance on environmental management and access to funding opportunities through Landscape Actions, helping to address local environmental challenges while promoting sustainable farming practices."

The Agri-climate Rural Environment Scheme is Ireland's flagship agri-environment programme under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 providing sustainable income for 54,000 farmers to enhance and protect the environmental assets on their land. ACRES is a results-based programme with two tracks; ACRES General is open



*"...facilitating actions supporting water quality, habitat & wildlife support, peatland restoration and invasive species treatment."*

to all farmers, and ACRES Cooperation is for landowners based in areas of natural importance such as Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation or areas of high-water quality.

Delivering on ACRES Co Operation in West Connacht can be varied and interesting. "We're currently carrying out scorecard verifications, allowing us to collect real time information on the valuable environmental assets in our area, and identify possible Landscape Actions. We're also doing verifications for landscape actions this year, which is the first time it's happening. Landscape actions are an important part of the role we play in ACRES West Connacht, facilitating actions supporting water quality, habitat & wildlife support, peatland restoration and invasive species treatment."

Lisa is a believer in the importance of income supports like ACRES for keeping farming families on the land in the west of Ireland. "It's an incredible income, rewarding farmers that are farming extensively, protecting the environmental assets that they have. It's also positive to see that schemes such as ACRES is facilitating younger farmers and their families to come back to the West."

## LANDSCAPE ACTIONS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE ROLE WE PLAY..



### Key Learning:



"I would like to see supports for farmers to protect environmental assets on their land to continue in the next CAP. I think there's a positive outlook for the agricultural sector in the future, but income supports such as ACRES need to continue to allow for a sustainable future for the next generation of the agricultural sector."





# REBECCA O'HALLERAN



Location:  
Kenagh,  
Co. Longford



Enterprise:  
Dairy &  
Free-range Poultry



Participating Schemes:  
BISS, ACRES, CRISS,  
ANC & TAMS

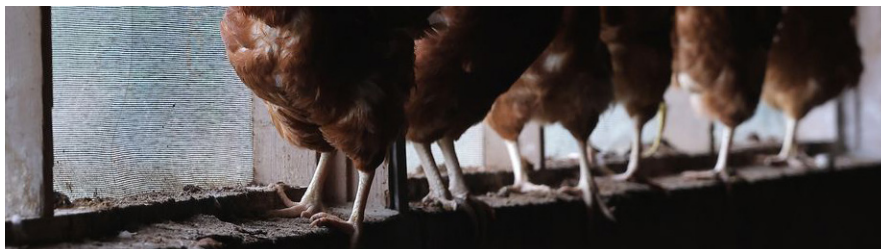


Farm Size:  
81ha  
(200ac)

Rebecca O'Halleran is a young part-time farmer who, alongside her full-time professional role, works on her parents' farm in Kenagh, Co. Longford. She represents a new and increasingly visible generation of women in agriculture. Raised on a traditional beef and sheep farm that also developed free-range egg production, she has witnessed the later transition of the livestock enterprise from beef and sheep into dairy. This transition was made possible through targeted supports such as TAMS funding, while the ongoing development of the farm is supported by a range of schemes under the CSP. Rebecca had not originally intended to pursue a career in farming. However, at the age of 16, a farm accident involving her father saw

her take on increased responsibility in the day-to-day running of the farm. The experience proved decisive, leading her to view farming as a serious career path. In addition, she completed a degree in Business Management, graduating in 2022, and then took up a full-time role with Bord Bia as a Farm Schemes Development Executive. Alongside her job, she remains actively involved in farm work before and after her working day.

A major step toward full-time farming came in October 2024, when she began her Green Certificate to build her agricultural knowledge and qualify for future supports and grants. Rebecca plans to enter into a formal partnership with her parents once she has



*"You see a lot more women in agriculture influencing things on Instagram and I do a bit of posting on Instagram and TikTok myself, just of what we do here"*

completed her Green Certificate, formalising a structure that is already working well in practice. As she explains, "One of us is always here. If my parents have to be away, then I'm at home, and vice versa."

Rebecca describes herself as fortunate to have grown up in a supportive family environment where she was always encouraged to follow her own path. As part of a younger generation of women in agriculture, she sees clear progress and says she is proud to be part of the sector's evolution. In particular, she points to the growing visibility of women in farming, especially through social media platforms.

Another positive development is the expansion of peer support networks, including a women's farming discussion group in the Longford–Roscommon area. She says these groups help farmers of all experience –levels to exchange knowledge, build confidence, and learn from each other.

While she acknowledges that farming brings real pressures, including time demands, labour constraints, weather uncertainty and volatile costs, she remains strongly optimistic. She believes that advances in technology are making farm work more accessible and enabling women to take on every aspect of farm management.

For Rebecca, farming is a career built on continuous learning, "I'll be learning every day for the rest of my life. You'll never have it all learned". With Rebecca bringing motivation, commitment and fresh ideas to the business, the future of the O'Halleran Farm looks secure.

## ...ALWAYS ENCOURAGED TO FOLLOW HER OWN PATH.



### Key Learning:



"I believe that while CAP offers great supports in different payments for farmers I do believe the accessibility for these supports specifically for the likes of TAMS has become more difficult in recent times & from recent experience on our farm at home. It is essential these supports are there for farmers but it's just as important they are realistic and accessible in order to properly support farmers."





## SINÉAD GRIMES



**Location:**  
Connemara,  
Co. Galway



**CSP Initiative:**  
Dúlra Project,  
FORUM  
Connemara CLG



**Role:**  
Project Manager

Sinéad Grimes' career has taken her from more than 25 years in IT to community-led environmental work in the west of Ireland. In 2020, she made the decision to move into community development, looking for work that would bring her closer to local communities. She found that opportunity with FORUM Connemara, where she went on to manage two locally led EIP-Agri projects focused on farm safety and upland agriculture. In 2022, Sinéad took on the role of Project Manager with the Dúlra Project, bringing together her experience in project management with her growing interest in agriculture, communities and the environment.

Dúlra is a community-led nature restoration project delivered by FORUM Connemara in partnership with Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP and Leenane Development Association. The team of 24 works closely with farmers, landowners, local communities and public bodies across Connemara and south Mayo to control invasive rhododendron and restore peatlands, rivers and upland habitats.

The project combines practical restoration with local employment, training and skills development. Teams have mapped extensive areas, treated rhododendron, completed peatland restoration works and supported riparian planting. They are also exploring how low-value wool and biochar could contribute to future restoration work.

As Project Manager, Sinéad leads the delivery of Dúlra, overseeing planning, budgets, reporting, governance, health and safety, training and coordination of the field teams. She works closely with partners and farmers to ensure the work is practical, well managed and delivers lasting environmental improvements.

Alongside Dúlra, Sinéad is involved in PALUS DEMOS, a Horizon Europe project working with farmers in the west to explore paludiculture, or wetter farming, and practical ways to farm wet peatland.

Last year, she returned to education as a mature student, completing a degree in Environmental Management. "Balancing work, study and family was challenging,



*"Through my Farm Health and Safety EIP work, I have met remarkable women farmers. I would like to see more opportunities for women to network, access training and develop leadership, business and entrepreneurial skills alongside their agricultural knowledge."*

but the learning has been invaluable and directly informs my work," she explains.

Her experience through EIP projects, farm safety training and PALUS DEMOS has reinforced her belief that agriculture and the environment cannot be separated. "Farmers are central to protecting biodiversity, water, soil and peatlands," she says.

Looking to the future, Sinéad would like to see CAP supports provide more long-term, practical help for farmers, including support for paludiculture and approaches that allow viable farm businesses to work with wetter conditions, such as cultivating Sphagnum as a crop. She believes these transitions must also recognise the knowledge, effort and long-term commitment required from farmers.

## AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT CANNOT BE SEPARATED



### Key Learning:

"Agriculture and the environment cannot be separated. I would like to see CAP better reward farmers for protecting biodiversity, water, soils and peatlands. I would like to see longer-term, flexible agri-environment funding that reflects the long-term reality of restoration work.

Paludiculture and peatland restoration could be more clearly supported through practical advice, demonstration sites and payment structures that reflect the work, risk and long-term commitment involved, making wetter farming and restoration a genuinely attractive and viable option.





# SIOBHAIN HUBBARD



Location:  
Lismore,  
Co. Waterford



Enterprise:  
Organic Pork and Lamb



Participating Schemes:  
Organic Farming Scheme



Farm Size:  
20ha  
(49ac)

Siobhain Hubbard is an organic pig and lamb farmer near Lismore in Co. Waterford. In a country with a meat industry designed for export markets, her business; Newbard Farm (<https://www.newbardfarm.com/>), has found it increasingly difficult to sell local meat products to a domestic market within the existing meat processing system. Siobhain decided that change was needed and has worked tirelessly in recent years towards the creation of Slí na Feirme, a cooperative of small-scale farmers looking to build small-scale animal processing infrastructure.

Newbard Farm was started in 2021 by Siobhain and her partner Ross and the business now sells over 200 processed pigs per year. Their commitment to high standards and sustainable stewardship

of their farm means that they emphasise quality for the domestic market rather than seeking scale for the international export system. “We can’t look after the land if we keep putting more and more animals on it,” Siobhain says, “that’s why we have been involved with other farmers to bring back local production of meat for the domestic market.”

They are are certified organic farmers and participate in the Organic Farming Scheme under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 in. Newbard Farm now sells all their meat direct from the farm, through farmers markets and online sales. They try to keep sales within a 100km radius to save on the cost of fuel and to keep their food local.

Soon Siobhain identified the lack of



*“We can’t look after the land if we keep putting more and more animals on it, that’s why we have been involved with other farmers to bring back local production of meat for the domestic market.”*

meat processing facilities as the main impediment to the continuing prosperity of her business. “That’s definitely the biggest roadblock in any domestic producers’ path when it comes to processing pork, lamb and beef for local consumption. The processing capacity just isn’t there.” Siobhain, who also works for her Local Development Company, is no stranger to writing applications. In 2024 she led an application to apply to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine’s open call for stakeholder projects for the development of short food supply chains in Ireland.

Thanks to Siobhain’s leadership, the initiative has grown to 160 farmers from across the country looking to join the Slí na Feirme cooperative and with 60 farmers in the southeast with skills, knowledge and capacity to service a domestic facility. A small-scale abattoir is currently being upgraded and soon to be reopened in Mitchelstown, Co. Cork. Two small scale poultry facilities have also reopened in east Cork. “Now we are looking at other facilities and other farmers to upskill to service a meat cutting and packing facility in Dunhill, Co. Waterford,” says Siobhain, “we are hoping to apply for the Organic Capital Investment grant to help build the facility.”

## LACK OF MEAT PROCESSING FACILITIES - THE MAIN IMPEDIMENT.



### Key Learning:



“I would like to see the next iteration of the Common Agricultural Policy support the reestablishment of more local meat processing facilities and supply chain infrastructure across the country. It will not only benefit smaller scale farms but also the local economy.”





# OLIVIA MORRISSEY



Location:  
Rostellan,  
Co.Cork



Enterprise:  
Dairy +  
Shop & Cafe



Participating Schemes:  
LEADER, BISS,  
the Eco Scheme



Farm Size:  
35ha  
(87ac)

Olivia Morrissey and her husband Joe are dairy farmers in Rostellan, Co. Cork who have diversified their farm income by developing Rostellan Farm Shop with a café ([www.rostellanfarm.ie](http://www.rostellanfarm.ie)).

Her participation in the ACORNS (Accelerating the Creation Of Rural Nascent Start-ups) programme in 2021, helped her significantly to develop her thriving business. LEADER funding has assisted the purchasing of marketing

materials and food processing equipment.

They now use the shop to sell their milk through an automatic milk dispenser and in the form of butter and fudge. They also sell their own range of baked goods and deli products alongside a wide range of products from other local businesses. The shop employs 10 staff members, 5 of which are full-time.



*"Never did we think that this is what we were creating," says Olivia. "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."*

Rostellan Farm has become a popular destination for locals and visitors to experience real local food on a working farm. The shop has become something of a hub for their community and for the local economy. Local artisan food producers also sell their baked goods, jams, chocolates, cheeses, vegetables, salad leaves and olives through the shop. Public demand for guided tours of the farm is also growing.

## CUSTOMERS ARE LOOKING FOR THE REAL DEAL; A WORKING FARM LIKE OURS



### Key Learnings:

"The growing need for food security on a world- wide scale is very real. To keep the quality, traceability & sustainability being achieved by Irish farmers – funding is essential. Farmers should be rewarded for their quality production and agricultural practices. Teaching people the importance of supporting their local farmers and buying quality assured products is essential.



Farms & their custodians need to be rewarded to have the ability to create vibrant rural communities from a social perspective, environmental and circular economy. Funding from the common agricultural policy needs to be maintained and ring fenced for agriculture. Extra funding should be directed to fund environmental, tourism and sustainable rural development which are vital to maintain rural Ireland and the future of farming."





# MÁIRÉAD COSTIN



Location:  
Ring,  
Co. Waterford



Enterprise:  
Organic  
Horticulture



Participating Schemes:  
Organic Farming  
Scheme in 2023



Farm Size:  
0.6ha  
(1.5ac)

Máiréad Costin is an organic horticulture grower in the Gaeltacht area of Ring in Co. Waterford. She is the owner of Garraí Mara Organic Veg Farm ([www.garraimara.ie](http://www.garraimara.ie)) and is proud to be joining the growing number of women who are making their living in Irish agriculture.

Máiréad worked as nurse for 20 years before farming came along at the right time in her life. “I was drained and burned out from the health system. I

needed a break from looking after people. I decided to learn to be in nature and heal, and that is where the journey started.”

While she was on a career break, she realised there was the potential to have a business in horticulture. “So, I asked my dad if I could use the ¼ acre that was being left idle behind the house. In 2021 I made the move and set up the business.” she says. The ¼ acre is situated within a dairy farm which is



*“I’ve built up a good relationship with a lot of good businesses in Dungarvan. There are really good restaurants, cafes, bakeries, and health food shops in town. I’ve also been supplying an artisan food supermarket in Waterford City since 2021 as well as a bakery down there. They are all really good businesses to be involved with and that’s what is keeping the vegetables flying out the gap”*

managed by Máiréad’s brother. Máiréad was able to secure an extra acre from her brother to ensure the viability of the business. “In 2021 I officially converted to organic horticulture.” Máiréad is currently certified as an organic grower with the Organic Trust, and she enrolled in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) in 2023.

## CHILDBIRTH CAN LEAVE RURAL FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS VULNERABLE



Máiréad has no regrets about her change of career. “It’s been brilliant. It has been very positive so far,” she says. “It is a fulltime gig. You have to plan your time off and I do plan my time off. I find it is a good quality of life even if you are tied down during the height of the growing season.”

Máiréad celebrated the birth of her first child in 2023 but had to temporarily close her business and leave the Organic Farming Scheme. She is now slowly reopening the business while balancing the demands of family life with a young child.

### Key Learning:

“I would like to see more social supports for female-led farming businesses in the next iteration of CAP, particularly for single-person businesses like mine. Following the birth of my child, I had to temporarily cease trading, due to both the physical demands of farming, the long working hours, and the high cost of childcare. I would like to see more understanding and flexibility within the rules of future CAP income support initiatives for women farmers. The loss in income from my farm after my pregnancy left me in a financially vulnerable position.”







# AILEEN COLLERY



Location:  
Co. Donegal



CSP Initiative:  
ACRES Donegal



Role:  
Project Officer

Aileen started her agri-scientific career in micro and molecular biological testing for pathogens in water and animal products working in specialised laboratories. After graduation, she worked in the Rural Veterinary Clinic in Sydney Australia as a Researcher, before returning to Ireland to carry out her own body of research.

"In recent years, I worked as a Research Specialist on a project that aimed to understand diversification of agricultural practices in Ireland, UK and France. To cut a long story short, this work sparked an interest in how some farmers embrace diversification and how others resist change," Aileen explains."

The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme ('ACRES') aims to deliver significant long-term environmental improvement. In Donegal, 'ACRES Donegal' delivers the ACRES Co-operation Programme. The scheme launched in 2023. Through ACRES farmers have the opportunity to avail of NPIs (Non-Productive Investments). These investments are measures that deliver for environmental assets in Co Donegal. ACRES Donegal are currently introducing LAs (Landscape Actions) which are bigger and more complex in nature and may or may not involve more than one farmer especially on commonages.



*When I read about the ACRES Agri/Environment Scheme I realised that I was in a unique position to use my knowledge and experience to help farmers enter a new way of farming and encourage a change of mindset. I now work at ACRES Donegal as a Project Officer."*

Aileen is responsible for farmer engagement. "To be honest each Project Officer gets involved in all aspects of delivering the scheme to farmers. It's a multi-faceted scheme that requires personnel to be skilled in many different areas such as computing, surveying, public speaking, data analysis and much more," Aileen explains. We have a very high calibre of staff, and each one complements the other, resulting in a great support network. I am particularly focused on delivering group events, one-to-one farmer clinics and small discussion groups that help farmers come together to understand the scheme more. Focusing on how they can benefit from it financially and enhance the environmental assets on their farms."

## HELPING FARMERS ENTERING INTO NEW WAYS OF FARMING



### Key Learning:

"I don't think we can separate out agriculture and the environment. Both go hand in hand. We must not lose sight of the decline in biodiversity."



I would like to see financial support targeted exclusively at women farmers to help with family care, most especially childcare. Ironically, women in farming are highly educated and skilled, but fail to put value on their own contributions to the family farm. It is important to make it easier for women to access their own herd number and to enter farming in their own right."





# ANNETTE KEARNEY



Location:  
Rathcormac,  
Co. Cork



Enterprise:  
Dairy



Participating Schemes:  
BISS and TAMS



Farm Size:  
73ha  
(180ac)

Annette Kearney is in a Formal Farm Partnership with her husband Larry and son Jack. The family have used the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) to invest in expanding their dairy herd and modernise their farm infrastructure. The end of milk quotas and the launch of TAMS funding was the perfect opportunity to expand their dairy herd. Under TAMS 2, Larry and Jack drew down almost all of the funds they were entitled to.

A modern 16-unit milking parlour was built, before supports from TAMS saw the construction of extra cow accommodation with slurry storage. The herd has been increased from 105 to 230 cows. An underpass has been also built under a nearby public road and Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) equipment is now an essential tool in growing grass cheaply and sustainably.



*"A lot of calves have been fed as well as all the bookwork and I'm sure there's many other women in the same situation as I am."*

Looking to the future, the family have availed of Annettes' presence in the partnership. For the first time, she has been able to access 60% grant funding in her own right (with a ceiling of €90,000) through the Women Farmers' Capital investment Scheme under TAMS3 to invest in heat detection collars and automatic drafting facilities. "This was a labour decision that will allow us to bring in relief milkers and not have to rely on them to draft cows for AI because, to be honest, some relief milkers are not knowledgeable enough to do it. So, TAMS3 funding enabled us to take a little break from the farm after the springtime."

## YEARS OF UNSEEN WORK FINALLY BEING OFFICIALLY RECOGNISED



Annette is very happy to finally have her contribution to the farm officially recognised and approves of increased efforts to promote equality in the industry. "It's the first time in 30 years

that I have ever drawn down any funding in my own name. It's nice to be recognised for a lot of unseen work done over the years," she states firmly.

### Key Learning:



"I would like the next CAP to keep encouraging younger women to choose a career in farming. Parents should be incentivised to consider their daughters as their successors. Also, many older women gave up their off-farm careers when they married and had children. They worked fulltime on the farm but now do not qualify for a full state pension in their own name. I would like the next CAP to recognise their contribution to their family farms and not be punished for it when they retire."





## CARINA ROSEINGRAVE



Location:  
Crusheen,  
Co. Clare



Enterprise:  
Dairy, Beef  
and Poultry



Participating Schemes:  
BISS, SCEP, ACRES  
the Eco Scheme



Farm Size:  
141ha  
(350ac)

Carina Roseingrave is a full-time farmer on a mixed farm at the foothills of the Burren in Co. Clare. She and her brother, Gerry, milk 100 dairy cows and manage a herd of 50 pedigree suckler cattle.

In 2020 when Covid struck and her afterschool business was forced to close, Carina decided to buy 50 hens. "We were selling the eggs at home with an honesty box on the side of the road. It has turned into a bit of a business now. I always put posts on Instagram showing me collecting the eggs and people said that it has made such a difference because they can see where the food is coming from."

At the National Ploughing Championships in 2023 a shower of rain forced Carina to take shelter. She found herself in the ACORNS tent and after chatting with the staff, Carina ended up enrolled in the 2024/2025 ACORNS programme.



*"There are pockets of grassland mixed in with the woodland. There are also streams and caves in there. Through ACRES we are currently getting it fenced."*

The ACORNS programme is celebrating 10 years of supporting early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland in 2025. Carina credits the programme for providing her with the assistance she needed to change her farm management practices. "Before ACORNS, I would never have looked at the farm as a business, whereas now I do."

Her suckler herd comprises of pedigree Limousin and Charolais cows and Carina is currently developing a new line of Charolais genetics with the view to breeding 5-star bulls to sell. She intends to apply for 60% support in the Women Farm Capital Investment Scheme under TAMS3 to build a modern shed for the herd.

## PEOPLE LIKE TO SEE WHERE THEIR FOOD IS COMING FROM



[instagram.com/burrenviewfarm](https://www.instagram.com/burrenviewfarm)

Her suckler herd also protects biodiversity in a 28 ha ancient woodland on the farm by continuing the ancient practice of controlled grazing to ensure certain flora species avoid extinction. "You have to let it be grazed, otherwise it will go wild," explains Carina.

### Key Learning:



"Farming is a wonderful career that gives me flexibility around raising my kids and I'm out in the fresh air. But it wouldn't be sustainable without CAP supports and they must remain in place in the next round."

I would like the approval process for applications to speed up in the next CAP. Particularly when there is an identified health and safety issue on your farm, but you must wait 6 to 12 months for approval on investment supports to buy the equipment to fix it."





# CLAIRE BRENNAN



**Location:**  
Ballina,  
Co. Mayo



**CSP Initiative:**  
Making Farms  
Work for  
Women EIP



**Role:**  
Project Lead

The “Making Farms Work for Women” project aims to foster a sustainable and inclusive agricultural community in North Mayo, by empowering women farmers and encouraging the next generation of female agricultural leaders. The initiative seeks to address the underrepresentation of women in farming roles and enhance their involvement through innovative practices and solutions, training, and community support. The project will commence in September 2025 and run for three years.

Claire is an Agricultural Advisor in Co. Mayo, who oversees the Queen Maeve & Grainne Uaile Knowledge Transfer (KT) discussion group, the only all-female discussion group registered with the Knowledge Transfer Programme 2024–2026. Claire consulted with her group participants before successfully writing her funding proposal under the Gender Equality EIP project stream.

Claire explains the rationale behind the project. “One of the streams of the project is to tackle the day-to-day heavy weight challenges, lugging 25kg feed bags, moving feed troughs, lifting

50kg fertiliser bags into a spreader. We want to come up with solutions using tool design, robotics and innovative technology for those problems. We want to ‘lighten the load’ and make it safer and more enjoyable for women working on farms,” she says.

“Many female farmers from the Northwest have sheep because they are easier to handle although still have handling challenges. Some would like to move to cattle but haven’t worked with them in a while or don’t have the



*“We are going to organise animal handling training to increase their confidence. Explore technology such as grazing collars for hill farmers, rearranging existing shed layouts for maximum ease, installing handling facilities and investigating lighter & easier managed cattle.”*

facilities to manage cattle,” Claire explains. The project will also tackle gender roles within farming families. “We want to organise workshops to encourage the involvement of young girls in farming at an early stage. There is a higher likelihood of girls farming in the future when interest is nurtured at a younger age. There is still a belief bias that the male will be the future farmer & successor, however often the female might be the more natural farmer.”

Claire’s main role as project manager will be to manage recruitment and oversee the various project work streams delivered by the team members.

## MAKING FARMS WORK FOR WOMEN



### Key Learning:

“Income supports are vital for the suckler and sheep sectors and need to continue in the next round of CAP. Anecdotal feedback from single income farmers who apply for the Woman Farmer Capital Investment Scheme under TAMS suggest it’s hard to access credit on their own.

I would like to see more female leaders and stakeholders involved in the delivery of the next round of CAP at National and EU level, and less use of “he/him” “lads” and “dairymen” when officialdom discusses farmers in general.”





# CIARA STANLEY



Location:  
Tullow,  
Co. Carlow



Enterprise:  
Beef + Farm Shop,  
Fashion Brand  
& Embroidery



Participating Schemes:  
ACORNS, BISS,  
the Eco Scheme



Farm Size:  
30ha  
(74ac)

Ciara Stanley and her husband Robert are rural entrepreneurs who have diversified their income streams and to add value to their beef farm. They always raised high quality suckler beef animals but were not getting adequate financial returns. “We always went the commercial route, and we wanted to take back control and get more income. We started with beef boxes, and they proved really popular. We decided to

open a farm shop, and we moved my embroidery business up here,” Ciara explains.

“In between all that, I got the opportunity to buy the clothing brand; Ballybar Ireland. It was all very busy and full on at the time, but we knew that there would be a good relationship between the farm, the shop, the clothing and the embroidery. The country lifestyle market was the market that we wanted



*“I couldn’t recommend (ACORNS) enough, to be honest,” says Ciara. “I made a lot of contacts; it pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me to look at my small business seriously and make it viable.” – participated in ACORNS in 2023.*

visit: [www.coppengaghfarm.ie](http://www.coppengaghfarm.ie)

to hit. Then we decided to add the coffee barn.” For Ciara, quality is a watchword of her business, “The food products we sell must be Irish and of a very high standard.” In 2023 they started selling Wagyu beef through the shop and the demand for this type of succulent and flavoursome meat has continued to grow ever since.

Ciara believes there is a generational a shift happening in attitudes to women in agriculture. “There’s lots of girls around here who are farming and that’s great to see. But having said that, growing up, I would have seen women farming but there was never an official wage, and too many women never got ownership of

## WE WOULDN’T HAVE THESE DIVERSIFICATIONS IF I WASN’T DRIVING IT ON



the farm. It was the male in the family who was always thought of first and women weren’t given the opportunity. I remember when I was younger, I told my family that I wanted to be a farmer,

and they just laughed at me. I do think that it is changing but we need more women in leadership roles for younger women to look up to.”

### Key Learning:



“Continue providing supports for women in farming. Given the opportunity, I think that farms would be more progressive if more women were let go to the forefront. Robert would agree that we probably wouldn’t have all these (farm diversifications) if I wasn’t driving it on.”





## JANET POWER & JENNY WATKINS



Location:  
Bunclody,  
Carlow – Wexford



Enterprise:  
Organic  
Horticulture



Participating Schemes:  
Organic Farming  
Scheme



Farm Size:  
1.21ha  
(3ac)

Janet Power and Jenny Watkins have successfully built up an impressive horticulture business in the foothills of Mount Leinster. Gorse Farm supplies organic salad leaves to SuperValu stores in Co. Wexford and Co. Wicklow. They joined the Organic Farming Scheme in 2023.

While on an internship, Jenny had observed the success of a 'cut and come again' mixed salad leaf horticulture business supplying local supermarkets.



They decided to replicate this business model for Gorse Farm. "We went down to the local SuperValu (in Bunclody) and just presented them with this mixed salad bag," Janet remembers. Their response was immediately positive. "It just continued on from there. It was very straight forward."

Salad production is now the core of the business and provides 80% of their income. Gorse Farm has 5 polytunnels covering 600m<sup>2</sup> of land as well as



*"It is never going to get any bigger, it's as big as it is going to get," Janet says. "There is a lot of routine, we follow a certain formula. It works well for us."*

1500m<sup>2</sup> of uncovered land dedicated to mixed salad and vegetable production. Apparently, they would not be interested even if more land became available. "Maybe if it was flat land," she laughs.

As female farmers, they feel respected by their community for having created and sustained a successful business on a small parcel of land. "We often receive positive remarks, I think most people appreciate the level of work we put into our farm" says Jenny. Jenny and Janet appreciate their luck to have access to land, which is "out of reach for so many other women and young people," says Janet.

## OUR NEIGHBOURS RESPECT US FOR THE AMOUNT OF WORK WE PUT IN



"The fact is that succession is still very much biased towards males & this is something we need to look at as a country."

"I see the value in doing this work," Janet says, "Demonstrating that you can make a living through small-scale

food production. We need small scale food production as an answer to a lot of our problems. We (as a country) could be a lot more resilient, and we need to encourage and support young people to enter the small-farm sector."

### Key Learning:



"We would like to see the value of our contribution as producers of high-quality local food be valued via a scheme based on output/productivity not on the amount of land we have.

We would also like to see support packages for new entrants, particularly youths and women – to provide start-up funding and subsequent support."







## DANA KNEALE & MOLLY O'GRADY



**Location:**  
Sligo & Leitrim



**CSP Initiative:**  
Breeding  
Waders EIP



**Role:**  
Nest Protection  
Officers

Since the 1970s, Ireland's breeding wader populations, including the Curlew, the Oystercatcher and the Snipe, have suffered dramatic declines. The Breeding Waders EIP aims to secure existing Breeding Wader populations and support population recovery through landscape management and policy development. It is a €25 million nationwide project, co-funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Amongst other conservation measures, the project recognises the critical role of nest protection. The Breeding Waders EIP is proud to have recruited Ireland's first two female Nest Protection Officers (NPO), Dana Kneale and Molly O'Grady.

Dana Kneale grew up on the shores of Lough Gara, surrounded by wader birds and a rich tapestry of wildlife inspiring her to follow a career in the protection and conservation of landscapes and species.

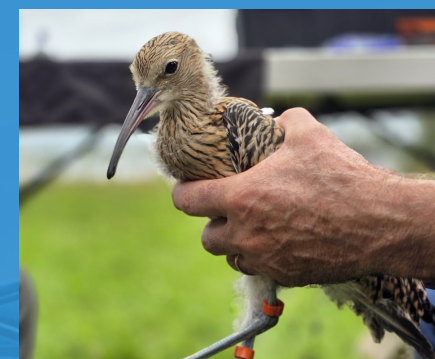


*"joining the Breeding Waders EIP team has been a dream come true, and every day brings new insights".*

For Dana, She has come to understand "how deeply interconnected everything is: when certain flowers decline due to farming or turf cutting, the insects that rely on them also disappear, which in turn affects the birds that feed on those insects. It's a delicate balance, and every element matters".

Originally from Chicago, Molly O'Grady's deep passion for the natural world led her to study Wildlife Ecology. Her career took to the Hawaiian Islands, where she gained extensive experience in managing invasive species.

## IRELANDS FIRST FEMALE NEST PROTECTION OFFICERS



With Irish roots, Molly now brings her global expertise and dedication to conservation to Irish soil, continuing her mission to protect vulnerable wildlife and habitats.

She says that "although separated by thousands of miles, people of the land and sea in any place share the same aspirations" which includes "a sense of safeguarding the land and the species that thrive on it".

### Key Learning:



Dana: "Nest protection is not just a springtime task—year-round efforts are essential to prepare sites, prevent predators in nesting areas, and improve outcomes for vulnerable species. The NPO role could be extended beyond the current seasonal contract."

Molly: "Current nest protection areas are extensive, making it challenging for a single officer to manage effectively. Expanding the NPO team would enhance predator control and strengthen engagement with farmers and landowners."





# MARIAN CLARKE



Location:  
Doon,  
Co. Limerick



Enterprise:  
Organic Horticulture &  
Poultry, Social Farming



Participating Schemes:  
ACRES, BISS,  
Eco Scheme,  
Organic Farming Scheme



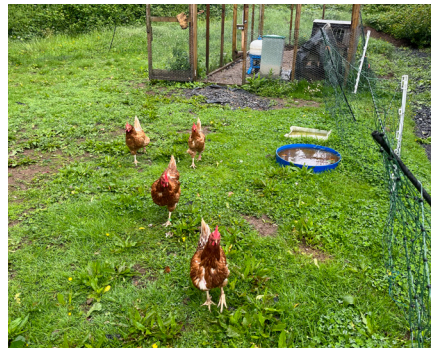
Farm Size:  
13.75ha  
(34ac)

Marian Clarke works as the farm manager of Doon Social Farm. The farm is owned by Ballyhoura Rural Services CLG and has been an active organic farm since 2019. While the farm receives some government support through Pobal's Community Support Programme, grants and the like, it is gradually becoming more sustainable through the sale of its own produce. Certified by the Irish Organic Association (IOA), the farm offers social farming services and wellness programmes for people in the Limerick and Tipperary areas.



Doon Social Farm became registered in 2024 and now benefit from funding under several schemes and programmes available under the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027. These payments are now a crucial source of financial support for the farm. "They're really important," Marian confirms. The farm currently has 2 full-time and 3 part-time staff whose salaries must be covered.

Agriculture has changed a lot since Marian started in the 1980's. "Organics was very much rejected," she says. "It was seen as a fad.. There is an



*"We're always diversifying, trying to pull every bit of money in. It just takes that edge off, knowing that we are going to get these payments. We are in BISS, CRISS, Eco-scheme, ANC, ACRES and OFS. It's a relief as we still have a deficit every year because social farming doesn't pay."*

acceptance now that natural is good, and people are questioning chemical inputs more. When I started commercially growing, there weren't really grants and funding available for horticulture. I think that there is a growing realisation that we need to grow more of our own food, be self-sufficient and have shorter supply chains."

Marian is also delighted to see the supports now on offer to female farmers, and that their role is increasingly recognised by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the wider community. "In the early days, it was very difficult to be taken seriously. Horticulture was associated with floristry. I wouldn't be taken seriously driving a tractor or putting a plough on the back and you would have to be shown, and all that stuff," she remembers. "But it is definitely changing, thankfully. Men and women bring something different to farming, and both are needed on the land. It is well overdue."

## IN THE EARLY DAYS, IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY



### Key Learning:



"I would like to see more support for short supply chain operators that sell at the farm gate and farmers markets in the next CAP with more farm-based biodiversity projects and eco-projects."

CAP should support Social Farming for many different reasons, including: improved health outcomes for farmers and the clients, farm income support, linking food to health for the general population, and linking urban dwellers with rural life."





# MARY BLACKMORE



Location:  
Doon,  
Co Limerick



Enterprise:  
Upland Beef



Participating Schemes:  
BISS,  
ACRES Co.Op



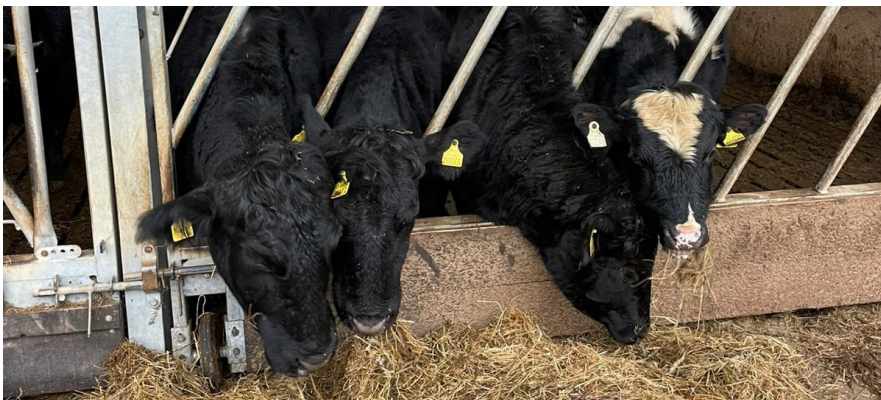
Farm Size:  
12ha  
(30ac)

Mary Blackmore and her husband Jonathan are beef farmers working on the slopes of the Sliabh Feilim hills in Co. Limerick. They bought their farm 18 years ago and both have additional off farm incomes while they continue to meet their repayments. They were very much involved from the beginning in the original Hen Harrier project and are currently participating in ACRES Cooperation (CP).

Mary grew up on a small livestock

farm near Doon in Co. Limerick but had moved to London for work after studying Social Science in University College Dublin. While there, she met Jonathan. They eventually decided to get married and return to Ireland. They both found employment in Limerick City but a desire grew to return to the land in a meaningful way.

They bought 30 acres of marginal land in the locality where they lived. Mary trained and became a qualified young



*"I grew up on a small farm with animals and I was close to nature. I now work in the city in guidance counselling. A lot of our societal problems are a result of, I think, a disconnection between people and nature."*

farmer while raising their young family. Jonathan continued in fulltime employment off farm. Working together, they steadily built their herd of beef cattle. Mary has now returned to full time employment. In their spare time Mary takes care of the paperwork and Jonathan does the physical labour on the farm.

Mary is understandably looking forward to clearing the mortgage in the next few years, especially with their eldest children starting third level education, but she still enjoys farming life. "In the winter I'm interested in the cattle coming home, because for 5 months they'll be with us, and the kids can go up and down (to the shed)," she says.

## DOING IT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



Mary admits that at times they have thought of selling the farm when finances were tight. "But we've managed to sustain it for the next generation so that they can have a connection to the earth under them.

That sounds philosophical but that is my real feeling about it. We are just holders of it before we pass it on again. That is very important."



### Key Learning:

"Education is a big one. Women can bring a unique perspective to animal husbandry and farm management, but it is a very male dominated sector. I would like to see more mentorship available for women in agriculture."





# MAIRÉAD WHITTY



**Location:**  
Thomastown,  
Co. Kilkenny



**CSP Initiative:**  
Farming for  
Water EIP



**Role:**  
Project Lead

As a qualified Civil Engineer, Mairéad spent 19 years working in a variety of roles in Ireland and the UK before joining Kilkenny County Council in 2023. Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils are the lead authorities for LAWPRO and Mairéad was seconded into LAWPRO as the Project Lead for the Farming for Water EIP. "I was delighted with the opportunity to apply my previous project management experience to a project which supports positive change in the agricultural sector," Mairéad says.

The Farming for Water European Innovation Partnership (EIP) aims to improve water quality at local, catchment and national levels. The project is managed by LAWPRO in

partnership with Teagasc and Dairy Industry Ireland (DII) and co funded by DAFM, DHLGH and the EU. "It is advisor led and offers funding of €50 million to farmers to adopt practical measures to protect and restore water quality. It applies a targeted approach which focuses on the areas most in need of improvement." The project was launched in early 2024 and currently has over 4,000 farmers signed up through the Teagasc and Dairy ASSAP team of advisors.

Mairéad oversees a multidisciplinary team of 19, including scientists, IT and communications specialists, finance professionals, and administrative staff. "Together, we have developed the



*"Our project is built on collaboration — working together with farmers to deliver meaningful and lasting environmental improvements,"*

systems and processes necessary to implement the project and support the advisory team," she says. "I manage the day-to-day operations, monitor progress, and report regularly to our oversight committee. I also liaise with project partners through our Operational Group to address emerging issues and coordinate our approach to collaborative opportunities. A key element of the project is showcasing the positive contributions of the agricultural sector."

The CAP has supported this project by providing a portion of the funding required to pay farmers to implement these measures. "A previous review of the ASSAP programme pointed to the lack of funding being a significant blocker and since this funding has been provided, there has been a tremendous level of engagement from the farming community, demonstrating a strong willingness among farmers to rise to the challenge of improving water quality," says Mairéad.

## RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE OF IMPROVING WATER QUALITY



### Key Learning:

"I would like to see continued support for the Farming for Water EIP, ensuring that the valuable learning and knowledge gained are mainstreamed and embedded into policy. I would also like to see stronger integration of nature, biodiversity, and water initiatives, making them central pillars of sustainable agriculture."



Continued efforts are needed to promote greater gender balance through clear, monitored targets—particularly at management and board levels across government departments, state bodies, and private companies. It is also vital to increase education and awareness for women in agriculture who are not herd owners, ensuring they are fully informed about their retirement options and pension entitlements so they can access adequate support in later life."



[illegible][illegible]





CAP Network Ireland is Ireland's National Network dedicated to supporting the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (CSP) for 2023–2027. The network is managed by an independent consortium, operating under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). These include Irish Rural Link (IRL) as coordinator, ERINN Innovation, an SME specialising in research-to-policy transfer, and Munster Technological University (MTU), bringing academic and rural innovation expertise.

CAP Network Ireland's mission is to promote stakeholder engagement, innovation, and knowledge-sharing to ensure Ireland's CSP achieves EU-level objectives on sustainable agriculture, environmental resilience, and rural vitality. We also play a central role in the Agricultural Knowledge & Innovation System (AKIS) Coordination Group.

Membership is free and open to all interested stakeholders: farmers, researchers, advisors, community groups, and all other interested parties.

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