



## **Summary of Recommendations**

1. It is Irish Rural Link's view that rural development can only be properly served if it is separated from supports for agriculture. Irish Rural Link believes future rural development policy must take on board the diverse nature of rural areas (both economically and socially) and the fact that support for agriculture alone is not in the best long term interest of rural communities.
2. Future rural development funding programmes need to be much more sector neutral and focus on job creation and the long-term sustainability of the rural economy instead of subsidising declining sectors.
3. Irish Rural Link states there must be 46% co-funding from the exchequer in line with agriculture to bring the LEADER funding up to 283 million.
4. IRL strongly argues for a farm advisory service voucher to be introduced to allow low income farmers to access information while also improving their standard of living.
5. Capital investment schemes need to involve a renewable energy section to combat the increase of production on the environment.
6. A social inclusion monitoring system needs to be introduction for the RDP, in order to gauge if the programme is a success in terms of reducing social exclusion.
7. A part of the RDP needs to focus on retaining and increasing the population of young people in rural areas as it has significantly declined in recent years due to lack of job opportunities.
8. IRL recommends strongly the simplifying of much of the bureaucracy which surrounds the programme.

## **Introduction**

Irish Rural Link welcomes the opportunity to make the following submission on the Rural Development Programme for Ireland (RDP) 2014 – 2020. The stakeholder consultation for the RDP is embraced at a local level as rural development is an inclusive process with many stakeholders. Ireland has received 2.19 billion or 313 million per year over 7 years to deliver a new Rural Development Submission under Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy 2.037 billion has been allocated to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The remaining 153 million of the EU funding is allocated to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government for the delivery of measures via the LEADER mechanism.

It is disappointing that this figure represents a significant reduction in the monies available in comparison to the previous programme and depending on the level of co-financing from the exchequer may reduce the level of funding available for rural development to a scale where it will not have the impact necessary to improve the economic and social well being of rural areas.

Currently Ireland's unemployment figure is at 12%, with unemployment in the regions up to as high as 14.3% in the Border, Midlands and Western Area<sup>1</sup>. All other economic data, which includes housing demand, emigration and migration figures demonstrates that there is a widening gap between large areas of population and the smaller towns and villages. Equally data emanating from farm incomes is showing signs of dis-improvement. The need to generate employment along with the wider economic and social activity is now paramount given the threat to public investment in services.

**IRL is pleased with the six priorities areas for rural development. These priorities are as follows**

- fostering knowledge transfer and innovation
- enhancing competitiveness of all types of agriculture and enhancing farm viability
- promoting food and non-food chain organisation and risk management
- restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems

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<sup>1</sup> Border, Midlands and Western Assembly (2010) Socio Economic Data. Available on website- <http://www.bmwassembly.ie/region/indicators.html>

- promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy
- promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas

It is Irish Rural Link's view that a focus on these headings will improve the social and economic well being of rural areas. The historic nature of CAP has been to create an environment that produces enough food in the EU and as a consequence the sustainability of farming. The wider requirements of rural areas and their communities demand that the economic and social infrastructures allows people not directly involved in agricultural production are necessary if sustainable rural areas are to survive.

## **Social Inclusion**

### **Social Exclusion - Definition**

The process whereby certain groups are pushed to the margins of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, low education or inadequate life skills. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and little chance of influencing decisions or policies that affect them, or of bettering their standard of living.

### **What are the factors of social exclusion?**

- Lack of money or other resources
- Discrimination against particular groups or categories of people
- "Physical" barriers such as a lack of transport or the absence of services/facilities in an area
- Lack of confidence to participate in society
- Lack of skills/qualifications which may be needed for social and economic participation

Other definitions.

- “People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.” Government Definition 1997.

**Applied to rural areas, social inclusion is characterised under the following headings**

**Poverty:**

Rural Poverty as has been stated by numerous studies is often invisible in comparison to obvious urban decay, which can demonstrate obvious signs of the effects low income. The cost of living in rural households is generally €100 per week higher than their urban counterparts (Vincentian partnership and Irish Rural Link Study 2010). The Teagasc farm income survey continuously shows that average farm income which ranges from as low as low as €17k to 23€ per anum, is a long way behind the average industrial income of €34k. It is obvious that many farms depend on outside income and this need points to the ability of the LEADER programme to deliver.

**Lack of opportunity to improve farming methods or re-skill;**

For many people living in rural areas, the opportunities to switch to different forms of employment are limited. The reduced opportunities to examine new skills, mainly because of the limited resources available to adult education bodies. There is a clear need for LEADER to work in close cooperation with education and skill based organisations with a view of creating opportunities to generate greater inclusion of people in rural areas.

**Rural isolation; Lack of social interaction; Mental Health;**

All of these are intrinsically linked. Recent suicide figures show a disproportional number of suicides occurring in rural areas. Threats to social outlets such as the village pub, shop, or other place where people can meet tend to marginalise people and increase the level of exclusion.

With proper use of community stimulation and using models developed by Irish Rural Link in conjunction with Carnegie and the Plunkett foundation, rural communities could through LEADER assistance establish entities such community co-ops to drive new services, particularly within the caring field.

### **Social Inclusion Monitoring/Evaluation;**

Of the outset of this submission, Irish Rural Link would like to put forward the recommendation that the following measures should be monitored and evaluated in terms of social inclusion. We would suggest that this monitoring could be conducted through desk research as to not incur further administration costs that would take away funds from other measures. Without this monitoring and evaluation there will be no method of gauging the success or failure of the Rural Development Programme 2014- 2020. In terms of the agricultural measures, it is recommended that the success of the measures is evaluated in terms of its uptake among low income farmers and farmers who are involved in farm assist, rural social scheme, small farmer assistance etc. Through this process it can be seen that the marginalized members of people in rural areas are not being excluded from the RDP. It is only through research like this that conveys a high uptake of low income farmers to the scheme that will deem the RDP 2014-2020 an overall success.

In the previous programme, there was not such an indicator allowing us the opportunity to gauge the impact it had on those who are often excluded. It is suggested that an independent organisation like Irish Rural Link is asked to conduct the desk based evaluation as they can form an independent evaluation of the success or failure of the RDP to incorporate social inclusion measures. It is not the case that only some of the measures in the RDP could be monitored but all the measure could and should be evaluated with a social inclusion aspect. In the case of the LEADER mechanism the evaluation should include that the funding has benefited the larger community and have a lasting effect.

### **Sector Bias**

All future rural development funding programmes need to be much more sector neutral and focus on job creation and the long-term sustainability of the rural economy instead of subsidising declining sectors. It is recognised that agriculture represents a large proportion of the rural community but the rural residents not directly involved within agriculture need to be considered and have their views voiced for rural areas to reach their full potential. It is the

view of Irish Rural Link that rural residents that are not directly involved within agriculture are unfairly been excluded from support aimed at rural areas and communities. The significances of rural areas has never been so evident but its significant does not solely rely on agriculture. Rural communities have an importance role to play when it comes to environmental sustainability, renewable energy, tourism etc. The most isolated of rural areas are being forgotten about leaving its residents marginalized in terms of support and funding.

A background note circulated to the Department's Consultative Committee on CAP post 2013 states "Ireland's view is that the core purpose of rural development policy is to support farmers in developing their productive capacity while securing the environment and ensuring the well-being of the wider rural society." While we accept the core thrust of this, we are strongly of the view, that the future rural development policy must take on board the diverse nature of rural areas (both economically and socially) and the fact that support for agriculture alone is not in the best long term interest of rural communities. Future rural development policy must offer an opportunity to build a truly resilient rural economy. The concentration of funding going into farming, thereby not going into the wider rural community is a significant issue.

### **Environmental Importance of RDP.**

Indeed the recognition by all institutions that the protection of the environment is now of paramount importance is evidence that supports for all job creation opportunities in rural areas are properly organised and that skills essential to the promotion of environmental measures are retained in rural areas and are such that the complement developments in the wider agricultural arena.

Future rural development policy must emphasise how to address the issue of climate change. Irish Rural Link believes that supporting rural communities to develop energy cooperatives is an example of how this can be achieved while harnessing local assets. It is also believed for environmental protection to be achieved, environmental education need to become a priority. It is only through education can environmental protection be understood and a larger scale.

### **Submission Structure**

To provide organisation to this submission, it will be structured around the proposed measures identified in the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 Consultation Paper (Outlined in the next page). The focus of submission will surround making these

measure more socially inclusion. IRL will provide their evaluation of the proposed measure while also suggesting further measures that could be included to make them more inclusive for all the residents of rural areas and the wider community. The measures outlined in the consultation paper are outlined in the following paper.

## **1. Agri-Environment Climate Measures**

- a. (i) The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (GLAS)
- (ii) GLAS +
- b. The Organic Farming Scheme
- c. Targeted output based local agri-environment projects

## **2. Areas of Natural Constraint**

- a. The Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

## **3. On Farm Capital Investments**

- a. Proposal for a TAMS II Scheme incorporating a number of strands
- b. Targeted Young Farmers Capital Investment Support

## **4. Knowledge Transfer Measures** (incorporating European Innovation Partnership, Knowledge Transfer Groups, Continued Professional Development for Advisors, and Targeted Veterinary Advisory Service)

## **5. Support for Collaborative and Quality Focused Measures**

- a. Support for Collaborative Farming
- b. Artisan Food Cooperation Schemes
- c. Support for Quality Schemes

## **6. Targeted Support**

- a. Support to the Beef Sector
- b. Support for Island Farming

## **7. LEADER**

- a. Proposed areas of support using the LEADER model

## **1. Agri- Environment Climate Measures**

### **A) (i) G.L.A.S. (Green Low- Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme)**

Irish Rural Link welcomes any measures like the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (G.L.A.S) that will improve the environmental sustainability of the rural landscape. This has never been more important as we set out to increase production to meet the targets set out by Harvest 2020 and the abolishing of the Milk Quotas in 2015. The delivery of information about the scheme to the most isolated of farmers is crucial to the success of this scheme. How will it be achieved? To access the greatest number of participations in the scheme, farmers in isolated regions need to be informed about the benefits to them and the environment. One of the methods of achieving this could be through advisers who could work from a list of payments made to these farmers. Low income farmers might not be able to afford the initial cost of an advisor to complete the application process so an allowance needs to be made in their case; the introduction of a farm advisory service voucher could be a method of reaching low income farmers (see measure 4 Knowledge Transfer). This would allow the farmers excluded by income to participate in the scheme causing a larger effect of the environment.

IRL would also recommend a get out clause be introduced to this scheme for farmers as circumstances can dramatically change over five years. It would be restricting for individuals to enter a five year contract and could prevent them from changing enterprise if the opportunity became available. Payment of 5000 euro might not be enough for some farmers in areas with large areas of commonage land who would have to complete a great deal of work to quality for the scheme which would not be a worthwhile incentive for some farmers. I.e. fencing around watercourses. The G.L.A.S schemes needs to be implemented as soon as possible as farmers gear up towards the end of the quotas in 2015 and towards Harvest 2020 in order for the environmental effects of the increased production to be monitored and controlled.

### **Recommendation**

**IRL proposes the introduction of a farm advisory service voucher in order to maximize the number of participates from low income farms.**

**The success of the G.L.A.S should be measured in terms of participation levels among low income farmers.**

## **B) Organic Farming Scheme**

IRL encourages the commitment to increase the level of organic farming in Ireland and recognises that Ireland has a distance to grow before it can be compared to other European Countries who on average have an organic production level of 5.7% compared to Ireland's 1.1 %. The current level of financial support for organic farming needs to remain in place for Ireland to try and compete with other European Nations. Farmers need to become more informed about organic farming and the funding that is available for them if they change enterprise. One of the ways this could be achieved is through feasibility studies offered to farmers. A feasibility study would provide farm families with a clear indication of the financial benefits of organic farming on their land. A feasibility study could be of major benefit to low income farm families, it could provide them with an option to alter the enterprise and increase their standard of living. For organic farming to achieve it's targets there needs to be an increase in the demand for organic products, this demand needs to come from an increase in marketing and awareness of the benefits of organic foods for the consumer.

### **Recommendation**

**The use of LEADER funding for feasibility studies to educate farmers on the economic and environmental effects of converting to organics.**

**Form knowledge transfer groups formed by advisory services to inform more individuals about organic farming.**

## **2. Areas of Natural Constraint**

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme (ANCs) [Formerly known as LFA/DAS]**

IRL is embracing the maintaining the level of support to disadvantaged areas and believe this support is vital for the sustainability and maintaining of the countryside. This scheme is becoming of increased importance due to climate change especially in coastal areas where they receive the worst weather conditions. With the support provided by this scheme can cause regional balance across Ireland. Regional balance is of vital importance to support the disadvantaged farmers who operate on less production incentive land but are just as important when it comes to the maintenance of a viable rural society. The use of such areas could be used to combat against climate change.

## **Recommendations**

**Needs to be an introduction of a full advice and training programme plus economics supports aimed at areas of natural constraint.**

**Needs to be a commission formed to further study areas of natural constraints, similar to the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA).**

### **3. On Farm Capital Investments**

#### **A) Name of proposed Scheme- Targets Agricultural Modernisation Scheme II.**

Irish Rural Link as an organisation understands the need to meet the targets set out in Harvest 2020 and encourages the support directed at new entrants into the sector but we have to express a need for caution when it comes to investing heavily in one sector and in farmers incurring big levels of debt. As can be seen from the past an over reliance on one sector can produce short term positive effects but can have a standing negative impact on the sector as well as on the wider economy. The negative effect of investing a large amount of infrastructure in one sector does not only have a negative effect on the economy but can have a negative impact on the environment by the construction of the infrastructure and by the increase in production.

#### **Farm Safety Investment**

IRL purposes one of the areas of investment needs to be farm safety. Infrastructural development needs to consist of handling equipment for animals as animal numbers increase farm accidents numbers are also likely to increase.

The number of farm accidents has risen over the past decades; this can be contributed to the increase in machinery. One of the proposed measures is to provide funding for slurry storage and low emissions spreading equipment with this comes raised risk of farm accidents. IRL argue with the additional infrastructure and slurry equipment comes the need for enhanced education and training around farm machinery and animal handling. As livestock and machinery were identified as the two biggest killers on Irish farms with livestock and machinery related injuries making up 44% of the total numbers.

Irish Rural Link with the support of the Health and Safety Authority have undertaken a pilot farm safety mentor programme involving farmers as drivers of change fostering best practice

on Irish farms. The pilot area consisted of the four counties of Cavan, Meath, Longford and Westmeath. The initiative involved the selection, training and mentoring of a number of farmers or dedicated individuals with a background in farming who can demonstrate a strong passion for farm safety. A FETAC level 6 was delivered free of charge to the successful applicants. The participants were mentored over a 12 month period with them committed to undertake a number of farm safety focused activities utilising the innovative ideas and communications skill learnt at the training. The training allows the successful candidates to become social entrepreneurs, ambassadors, change agents and exponents of farm safety at a local level in their own catchment area. IRL propose that this mentoring programme should be introduced nationally to have a wider effect.

### **Renewable Energy Capital Investment**

Irish Rural Link is disappointed at the lack of renewable energy infrastructure proposed in this scheme. With the proposed rise in production introduces a raised demand for energy, this conveys the need for renewable energy sources on large production farms. IRL proposes that as part of this scheme grants should be made available for the construction of renewable sources for example solar panels, wind turbines etc. With investment in renewable energy,

There is potential for job creation in the manufacturing, construction and maintenance allowing more individuals to become involved.

### **Farm Water Management Plans**

Water is an increasing cost to farmers and obligations under the Water Framework Directive reinforce the need for farms to make the most efficient use of water possible. Farming's intensive use of water has implications for the water reserves of the wider community. Farms have large areas of roofed sheds and concrete yards and there is significant scope to harvest, collect and recycle the water from these, enabling it to be used in farm activities or - if suitably treated - as high quality drinking water. In light of this we as an organisation would suggest the following measure.

### **Conservation of rainwater**

The objectives of such a scheme are:

- To conserve water.
- To make farms more self sufficient in terms of water usage.

- To create employment in rural areas

Under this proposal farmers would be required to prepare a Water Management Plan and supports would be supplied similar to the present Farm Waste Management Scheme. Supports would be available to farmers to assist them in developing the water conservation plan. Assistance would also be available towards the implementation of that plan over a period of time.

The plan should set out the development of systems to harvest rainwater as part of the overall plan to reduce the farm's use of water. An applicant farm's Water Management Plan would be required to outline ways rain and waste water will be collected and reused efficiently.

Increasing numbers of farmers relying on non-farm income and farmers tend to be employed at the lower skilled end of the employment spectrum which further exacerbates their exposure to the economic downturn.<sup>2</sup> Data shows that farmers that work outside of the farm are typically employed in the sectors most affected by the recent economic slowdown such as the construction. The employment opportunities in developing the plans and physically upgrading farmyards to maximise their water efficiency in this proposal goes some way to addressing this issue.

### ***Farm Energy Plans***

Water is related to the large amounts of energy used by farms and it is useful to examine the conservation of energy and water together. Supports could also be provided to allow farmers develop Energy Management Plans. Farmers availing of these supports would be required to be spent on more energy efficient plant and machinery and on making farm buildings more energy efficient

The Water and Energy Management Scheme would have the following outcomes:

- It meets the needs of addressing climate change.
- It combines water and energy efficiency with job creation in the development and implementation of farm Water and Energy Management Plans. It will engage rural people with skills in the construction sector and allow small holders to continue

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<sup>2</sup> Teagasc (2008), "An examination of the contribution of off-farm income to the viability and sustainability of farm households and the productivity of farm businesses",  
<http://www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/rerc/downloads/Final%20Report.pdf>

supplementing their income from outside farming. It is an example of the wider rural economy benefiting from smart investment in farms.

- It reduces farmer's exposure to high energy costs, the possible introduction of water charges and the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

In terms of implementation it would be useful to talk to Teagasc with a view to establishing their ability to be part of the implementation process.

### **Recommendations**

**Need to be ordination between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltachta who are conducting a study on Energy and Domestic Fuels with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine.**

**Grants need to be made available for farm safety equipment as well education on how to use slurry equipment**

**There is a need to introduction the farm safety mentoring programme at a national scale as outlined above.**

**A focus needs to be put on the introduction of grants for renewable energy projects on farms; in order to address climate change and the effect agriculture has on it.**

### **B) Targeted Young Farmer on Farm Capital Investment Support**

There is a need to support young farmers as they are needed to retain population levels and maintain the rural landscape. The need to maintain the levels of young people in rural areas has never been as important as massive numbers of young people have emigrated due to lack of job opportunities and viability in agriculture. IRL welcomes support like this with the aim of retaining rural populations by providing them with job opportunities. A younger population density is needed in a declining sector such as agriculture to bring innovative new ideas which will improve the viability of farms. These new entrants bring fresh ideas around diversifying into alternative enterprises such as organic farming and forestry as well as new energy efficient production methods. These proposed areas identified in the Consultation Paper are again too focused on the dairy sector and on the abolishing of the Milk Quota in 2015. Young entrants need to be educated in farm diversification that can benefit the wider rural economy and not just the individual. Farm diversification can not only be economically

beneficial but it can also be environmentally and socially beneficial. Less intensive methods of farming are less harmful to the environment while also providing a social aspect through a shorter food chain. This allows consumers to become more familiar with where their food is being produced and allows the farmers to meet people on a regular basis reducing the risk of isolation and mental health issues.

## **Recommendation**

**An emphasis needs to be placed on training young farmers to be able to change enterprise due to market demands**

### **4. Knowledge Transfer Measures**

Irish Rural Link would agree that knowledge transfer groups (as known as discussion groups) are a hugely effective tool in developing the knowledge base and foster best practice and innovation but knowledge transfer groups can have a far greater social influence than an economic influence. In a report published by Teagasc on the evaluation of discussion groups, farmers stated that they looked to the discussion groups as a social outlet. This conveys the message that knowledge transfer groups fulfil a social aspect for some farmers and that they go towards reducing the increasing problem of rural isolation leading to problems such as mental health issues. The benefits of knowledge transfer groups both economically and socially can be seen so the next stage is to increase the numbers involved in order to achieve these benefits. One of the ways this could be achieved would be increase awareness through greater advertising such as in the local marts and newspapers like the Farmers Journal.

Like the other measures in the consultation paper, the priorities identified are again too much focused on production with the aim meeting the targets set out by Harvest 2020. There needs to be a greater spotlight put on knowledge transfer regarding environmental improvements. Farmers need to be advised on production methods that are less harmful to the environment while still meeting Harvest 2020 targets. Knowledge Transfer Groups could provide a forum for farmers to learn the financial benefits of converting to renewable energy sources. Like the need for environmental knowledge transfer, knowledge transfer groups could be used more efficiently towards encouraging farmers into alternative methods of farming. As can be seen from the title of the knowledge transfer groups, they are largely focused around the beef, dairy and sheep industries. As this is a Rural Development Programme, there needs to be more on an emphasis placed on the up skilling of rural residents and not just advisors and

farmers. Programmes such as Benefit 4 need to receive more support in the future in order for them to reach more people especially those in isolated areas as they not only provide training and education but also provide a setting for individuals to meet and socialize.

A proposal that IRL would like to suggest is the introduction of a farm advisory service voucher possibly 50% either to be issued annually or bi-annually. With the introduction of this voucher a larger number of individuals would be able to gain advice and development their enterprises as well as reducing rural isolation among the farming community especially individuals who would not be able to afford a farm advisor with out this voucher. The introduction of a farm advisor service could also benefit other schemes such as the Agri-Environment Climate Measure as it will inform more farmers and help them with the application process. The introduction of a farm advisory service voucher would go a long way towards reducing social exclusion in rural areas as it would present low income farmers with the opportunity to develop new skills and improve their standard of living.

### **Recommendations**

**Continuation of knowledge transfer groups for their social benefits but need to be aimed more at low income farmers.**

**Introduction of a farm advisory service voucher to enable more farmers to benefit from advisory services.**

## **5. Support for collaborative and quality focused measures**

### **A) Support for Collaborative Farming**

Irish Rural Link acknowledges the economic benefits of partnerships but we feel their social benefits are far greater. As can be seen in research carried out by Almas (2010) in Norway, social effects such as flexibility, time off, more leisure time, holidays, better social and family life were seen as the greatest benefits to farm partnership. Collaborative Farming can also play a vital role in rural sustainability. It is widely recognized that as one man or sole operated farms are a threat to the sustainability of rural areas. Collaborative farming acts as a solution to the succession problem in Ireland and retaining population levels with the aim of overall rural sustainability. Partnerships make farming a more attractive job opportunity for new entrants to join agricultural industry. According to Loblely (2009), farm families spend 90% of their income in the local economy so maintaining farm levels is important for the

long term sustainability of rural areas and their economies. Due to the prospect of increased profits of collaborative farming, farm families would be able to spend more in the local economy which could fuel local businesses in the area. With the improved social lifestyle provided by collaborative farming it can go some way towards reducing rural isolation and in turn mental health issues such as depression.

Like previous parts of this consultation paper this sector is largely focused on the dairy sector and does not acknowledge the potential of collaborative farming in other industries. As indicated by Bogue (2012) the highest number of partnerships lie in the dairy sector, we feel the support for collaborative farming should incorporate measures to encourage the formation of alternative partnership such as organics and forestry. In terms of the proposed structure and costing of the scheme, it is believe that 400 new partnerships is an unambitious target set out by the department and that the proposed grant of 2500 euro for admin /legal costs does not go far enough as the start cost of partnership can be a stumbling block in the process. The figure needs to be at least doubled in order for it to act as an incentive.

## **Recommendations**

**More funds need to be made available for the formation of partnership as the proposed 2500 euro would not be enough of an incentive**

### **B) Artisan Food Co-operation Scheme**

Irish Rural Link encourages the support directed at the Artisan Food sector and emphasis this is a sector of the rural economy with potential for growth and creation of employment. For this sector to reach its full potential there needs to be improve awareness and marketability of locality and niche category products. An awareness campaign needs to become a part of this scheme to increase demand of Artisan products. Alternative enterprise like artisan foods need to be encouraged due to a large proportion of farms being unviable considering the fact that 95% of farms in Ireland are relying on subsidies for them to survive.

## **6. Targeted Support**

### **A) Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP)**

IRL welcome this scheme as it will help suckler farmers remain viable as they are one of the least profitable enterprises. The sustainability of their enterprises is important for the maintenance of the rural landscape as well as maintaining the beef sector which remains one

of our most important industries for exports. We as an organisation encourage any scheme like this which improves the quality and traceability of our food sector in order to increase demand not only national and international. Programmes like this are of vital importance in terms of improving our image for quality and safe food around the world.

### **B) Support for Island Farming**

There is a common acknowledgement that islands are in need of support if they are to survive. The support is of fundamental importance as they play a central role in the preservation of the landscape and ecosystems. Islands are also crucial in terms of our tourism industry which is imperative to our national economy. Island agriculture is facing increasing difficult conditions due to climate change.

### **Recommendations**

**There should be a formation of a special LEADER programme set up for islands.**

## **7. LEADER Measures**

The Department of Environment, Community and local Government is to be allocated 153 million (7% of Pillar 2) for the delivery of the LEADER mechanism which will come under priority 6 of promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas set out in the framework for design. A 46% co-financing of this figure would bring the budget to 283 million. IRL feels that this should be the minimum budget that should be allocated. IRL is campaigning for an increase from 7% to 10% of the Pillar 2 budget as well as a 50% co-financing agreement which would provide a budget of 438 million in line with the previous Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. With the allocation of this budget, there could be real investment provided in rural areas to help with job creation, biodiversity, environmental protection etc. Irish Rural Link is extremely disappointed at the realisation that the co-funding from the exchequer is going to be even less than 46%. We feel again that this is conveying the message that rural development does not hold as much importance for policy makers as agriculture. IRL welcomes that there is flexibility between the proposed measures which would allow the transfer of funds into the LEADER mechanisms but this still falls a long way short of the 425 million allocated in the previous Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. Rural Development is of imperative importance when it comes to rural sustainability. The importance of the LEADER mechanism for rural sustainability is illustrated by the National Rural Network who stated that “LEADER encourages population retention by assisting local communities to undertake a range of

social, cultural and economic intervention”. In this report, it can be seen that the LEADER mechanism goes a long way towards repairing the imbalance caused by regional funding of the Common Agricultural Policy.

With the decrease in LEADER funding estimated at around 42%, there needs to be an emphasis placed on quality projects that will have a lasting effect on rural areas in contrast to producing projects that are focused on spending the funds. As well as producing new quality projects under this programme, there needs to be emphasis placed on the continued development and diversification of previous projects under the last programme to allow the projects to achieve their full potential. The maintenance of a “bottom up” approach is crucial to develop projects that best advance rural communities as communities know themselves what is needed in their area. Rural Ireland is a very diverse, integrated and divergent place which does not allow policy to be universal due to this projects need to be centred around what is needed in that particular area. In the past projects have been too individual and did not have a community effect, for future effects we would proposed that LEADER projects co-ordinate together in order to help towns and villages develop and not just the individual projects themselves.

The areas that have been identified as having potential from the perspective of enterprise development and job creation are artisan foods, renewable energy, marine, social enterprise and creative industries. We would largely agree with these potential areas but it is important that these areas are properly supported and not just through LEADER funding. These are sectors that will benefit the whole of Ireland and not just the rural for this reason funding for these sectors should also be provided through other schemes such as the Artisan Food Co-operation scheme and the on farm capital investments scheme.

### **Bureaucracy**

Through consultation with our members nationally the application for LEADER funding was identified as a drawback of the last Rural Development Programme. Members argued that there was too much administration involved in the process. Members are appealing for a standard application form nationally that will allow the applications to be largely understood as well as making the process more social inclusion allowing more communities to draw up an application. Another suggestion that was purposed was to stage the application process, allowing the organisations more time to complete the application as well as continuing their general duties.

## **Recommendations**

**There needs to be 46% co-funding from the exchequer to bring the LEADER funding up to 283 million euro.**

**In this RDP, there needs to be an emphasis placed on quality projects that have a lasting effect and that benefit the entire community rather than individual projects.**

**The bureaucracy of the application process needs to be amended with the introduction of a national standard application form**

## **Conclusion**

The real weakness of the previous Rural Development Programme is the less than satisfactory resources available to the wider rural community. Yes we have in farming terms improved the agricultural infrastructure and managed to at least retain a farming population despite the high numbers that have left the land. However without the supports provided by the variety of RSS, TUS and FAS schemes, County Enterprise Boards, and Enterprise Ireland, it is highly unlikely that we would have any type of rural economy or social infrastructure in existence. The LEADER programme has contributed hugely to rural improvement but invariably because the budget has always been small in relation to the overall programme this contribution has been unable to significantly strengthen rural communities to the point where they could be termed truly sustainable.

The challenge will be to manage supports provided by the LEADER mechanism with those of national schemes so that rural development is future proofed in terms long term of sustainability.

## **Rural Link the Organisation**

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 300 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

***'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'***

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.

- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

***'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty***