

WINTER NEWSLETTER

December 2023

Irish Rural Link

LATEST NEWS

- Annual Conference
Tuar Ard, Moate
October 2023;
- Information Day
Buswells Hotel Dublin
October 2023
- Meals on Wheels
Network Conference
Tullamore
November 2023
- New CAP Network
- EU Projects News
- FarmPEAT,
Connecting
Communities with
Peatlands



Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann



IRL AGM & Conference

The conference explored the decline in income of rural families and the challenges they face in meeting energy, food and transport costs with Guest Speakers, Hannah Boylan – Vincentian MESL Research Centre – Adequate Income for Rural Ireland & Ruth Buggy – SEAI – Grant Supports to Reduce Energy costs. Special Guest Speaker: Teresa Canavan Rural Action NI – Shared Island Civic Society Space

The conference was attended by IRL members and local community groups along with Applied Social Studies Students from Moate Business College and Transition Year Class 2023 from Moate Community College

IRL Annual Information Day on Rural Services, Buswells Hotel.

The aim of the event was to allow TD's and Senators to drop in to the event and talk with some of the service providers that were in attendance on the day to discuss the work they do in rural areas, the challenges they face but also how their services are allowing people to remain living in rural areas and reducing isolation and social exclusion. Over 40 TD's and Senators dropped by throughout the day to speak with service providers and hear about the work and projects of IRL



IRL Annual Information Day on Rural Services, Buswells Hotel.





The National Meals on Wheels Network – a network of meals on wheels providers across Ireland hosted its 2nd Annual Conference – “Meals In The Community” on Thursday 23rd November in the Tullamore Court Hotel.

The conference was an opportunity to bring providers and other key stakeholders together to share information, gain knowledge and discuss practically how the service can continue to be embedded as an essential frontline community service into the future.

Speaking about the conference, Seamus Boland, CEO of Irish Rural Link said: “This conference highlighted the important role Meals on Wheels plays in the delivery of health and social care in the community. Funding from the HSE for the full-time coordinator has allowed the network to grow and be a stronger voice for the service as well as being a support for providers and a platform for them to share learnings and information”.



Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler TD said: *“Supporting older people to live in their own homes, with the correct wraparound supports, is a clear focus of mine. The triangle of supports – of home care, day care and meals on wheels – is an essential part of ageing in place. The network of meals on wheels providers working across Ireland each day are so important, supporting 116,000 clients so far this year. For most, this is so much more than a hot, nutritious meal and it is a social connection with the community. I would like to sincerely thank all those who give so freely of their time, many of them volunteers, to provide this essential service.”*



Demand for Meals on Wheels has been increasing for many years and increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 2.7 million meals have been delivered to 120,000 service users so far this year.

With an ageing population, demand is expected to continue to increase in the coming years. Meals on Wheels is more than just a meal. It also helps reduce isolation and loneliness with a social element to it. Meals on Wheels aligns with many of the objectives of Sláintecare – the Government’s healthcare framework – providing health and social care in the community and allowing people to age in their own home.



The conference was officially opened by Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler, T.D. Speakers on the day included; the Assistant National Director Services for Older People Change & Innovation, Health Service Executive; Fiona McCafferty-Jones Truagh Spirt, Monaghan who spoke about their service, how they operate, the challenges they face and how they overcome them.

A Conversation Salon workshop took place in the second half of the conference. This allowed providers to discuss their challenges and solutions; funding and additional income streams, staffing and volunteering.



Rural Action and Irish Rural Link announced a new joint initiative which was launched on Wednesday 18th October at 9.30am in Buswells Hotel by Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, Micheál Martin. This initiative is funded under the initial round of the Irish Government's Shared Island Civic Society Fund.



'Synergy: Rural Collaboration Project' will bring the two organisations together to consider current issues facing rural communities and more importantly to collaborate and devise possible solutions to address the issues identified.



Irish Rural Link (IRL), the national network representing the interest of rural communities hosted a seminar on youth volunteerism in the Scdul Enterprise Centre, Ballybane, Galway in July.

The seminar, entitled 'Youth and Student Volunteerism for Charities and Social Enterprises' is part of the Beyond NEET project, a one-year project funded through the Erasmus+ programme. IRL are partner with Uniao das Mutualidades Portugauesas (UMP).



The project works with young people who are Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET), to support them to engage with volunteering in their community. The project aims to open opportunities for young people to be able to be professionally integrated, initially in volunteer programs and, later, in civil society organisations that associate with this initiative.



The seminar showcased the work undertaken by IRL as part of the project and the results of a survey and workshops with young people over the past year. The seminar also heard from speakers from the Galway Volunteer Centre, Foróige, Boardmatch Ireland and the Be Alive Volunteering Programme in University of Galway

IRL's partner on the project, UMP Portugal also attended the event with President of UMP, Luís Alberto Silva, outlining the impact of the project in Portugal and what differences and similarities they encountered in their work. The Mayor of Galway City, Cllr Eddie Hoare spoke about the importance of volunteering and how it can be a way young people can participate in their community and discover their passions.

The seminar was a unique opportunity for the education, youth, community, charity and social enterprise sectors to come together to exchange views, share experiences and explore the potential for more collaboration through student volunteerism. Younger and student volunteers play a very important role in charities social enterprises and other community organisations. This is a great chance to explore the potential role of student volunteerism for your organisation.

A very special thank you to all the students, their teachers, coordinators and managers of Youth Reach Galway and Galway Community Training Centre who participated in the project survey and workshops and who also attended the seminar as well as baking all the lovely treats for the tea break and lunch, and in the process raising 630 Euro for the local Hospice. Some of the students also spoke with Galway Bay FM on the day and you can listen back to the interviews [here](#)

A manual is currently being developed as part of the project to support those working in the sector and will be published in September. You can stay up to date on the project on <https://beyondneet.mutualismo.pt/>



Project Co ordinator Mary Keyes Cornally with members of UMP & Seamus Boland CEO IRL

Over the last few months, the FarmPEAT team has been busy scoring farms and sharing our work with the farming community, the public, and other agri-environmental projects. We were delighted to join Teagasc's stand at the National Ploughing Championships to discuss peat soils with farmers from all over Ireland.



A few weeks later, we held a more local Umeras Community Day where Eddie Smyth showed us the proposed Peatlands Park at Umeras Bog and Dr. Louis Gilet shared his work with the RePEAT Project on using the Bog Commission maps to identify present-day peatlands on agricultural areas.



Cultural heritage then came to the forefront at the Irish Peatland Society trip where we joined a visit to the Corlea Trackway (built in 148 BC) and the Celtic Roots bog oak studio. The human story of Ireland's bogs is an important theme in our Love Your Wellies competition, where we encourage young people to dive into their local history. The trip then explored natural heritage at Cloneydonnin Bog - with samples of soil cores and sightings of Marsh Fritillary caterpillars on Devil's-bit scabious!

The team has attended and shared our work at events such as the Kildare Biodiversity Conference, Irish Rural Link's Information Day at Buswell's Hotel, the DAFM's Agri-Climate Conference, the GO-GRASS conference in Germany, Tales & Tastes of the Bog in Kells, the ICOSA Farmers' Meeting in Tullamore, Peatland Finance Ireland's workshops, and a workshop about fen and bog restoration at Trinity College Dublin. We also gave talks about FarmPEAT to students from the University of Galway and to horticultural students visiting Cloncrow Bog.



On the project farm side of things, we finished scoring plots for 2023, an eddy covariance flux tower was installed at one of the farms as part of NASCO, and we held a joint farmer and steering group day in Co. Roscommon. After a project update from the team, our panellists spoke about reducing peat wastage, calculating emissions from drained agricultural peat soils, and bridging the gap between farmers, research, and policy.

During our group workshop, farmers commented on more extreme weather and wet conditions making it harder to harvest crops, save fodder, and graze livestock—leading to lost income and more poaching, livestock housing and feeding. Potential actions to reduce peat soil emissions included raising the water table, reducing excessive stocking rates, changing crop types, not planting trees on them, and not liming them.

The groups agreed that longer, higher and more stable payments in agri-environmental schemes are needed. We wrapped up the day at Seamus Fallon's farm where dams have been installed and piezometers help us understand any changes in the water table. In late November, the team visited four neighbouring farmers in Roscommon to explore options for raising the water table. These discussions build the farmers' confidence in the action of installing dams in drains, and trust that reputational risk and unintended impacts will be mitigated.

From January to April 2024, we invite primary and secondary school students to get creative and join our Love Your Wellies Competition! During this time, FarmPEAT will also be hosting class field trips and virtual workshops about bogs and farmed peat soils. More details here: <https://www.farmpeat.ie/resources-1>

Since September, the Connecting Communities with Peatlands project has been working on building the capacity of community peatland projects to develop their knowledge and skillsets for engaging the public in peatland conservation and recreation.

As part of our Peer-to-Peer mentoring programme we hosted a knowledge exchange with Abbeyleix Bog Project for the five communities participating in the programme. During the exchange, the mentee groups received a guided tour of Abbeyleix Bog from a volunteer with the Abbeyleix Bog Project. The mentees learned about the development of the project over time, and what the group in Abbeyleix have learned in the years that the project has been running. Mentees gained an insight into a community-led peatland restoration project, as well as the activities the volunteers do to raise local awareness about the bogs biodiversity, as well as the actions they take to monitor and record species living on or around the bog. This has motivated the mentee groups to incorporate actions of citizen science into their bog projects



We have continued to deliver training courses and workshops to peatland communities in the Midlands. In September we rolled out an online 8-week course on Digital Folklore, Stories and Mapping with artist and folklorist Michael Fortune. 14 communities participated in the course, and learned digital skills to create short films on their mobile phones to tell the stories of their peatlands. People with a range of IT skills participated in the course, and found it very useful. Groups are now using what they have learned to improve their content for social media, as well as incorporating it as part of their trails and walkways. A screening of short films took place in the Esker Arts Centre in Tullamore on 9th December.



Some communities participated in a short media training course to equip them with the skills to promote their peatland projects in local press and on radio with communications expert Kathleen O'Meara. In this course they learned how to write a press release and how to manage being interviewed on radio about the topic of peatlands. This was an excellent exercise for community groups who are now prepared to get their key messages across to the public and to address the issues of turf cutting and burning and the closure of peat power electricity generators in the region and the cessation of peat harvesting by Bord na Móna.

We are in the final stage of production of two field guides for bog plant identification and raised bog condition assessment, as well as a Sphagnum Moss identification guide. These guides are simple and easy to use, weather-proof, and will be useful for all communities engaged with raised bogs in the Midlands.

Project Coordinator, Aoife Kirk, also presented the on the importance of community engagement in peatland conservation at the Heritage Ireland Summit in Trinity College and at a Community Tourism Workshop in Longford held by the Community Wetlands Forum.



IRL Chairperson & CEO Longform Women's Link Tara Farrell, Lead Partner on the DEW Project with Dara Calleary, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and Brendan Mulry Project Officer IRL

Irish Rural Link have continued to be involved in European Union Erasmus + Projects in 2023. Irish Rural Link have been involved in two interconnected projects in the area of Digital Entrepreneurship which have ran throughout this year.

The 'DEW' Project – 'Digital Entrepreneurship for Women' two- year project aimed to develop a digital entrepreneurship training programme for the European female entrepreneur. The project aimed to meet their specific digital enterprise training needs in navigating the pandemic and the much-changed business landscape thereafter. Engagement in upskilling and investment in digital training is essential for female led businesses. The project found that interpersonal 'soft skills' training such as communications, enterprise development and leadership skills delivered in a flexible and applied manner are every bit as important as technical knowledge for digital enterprise success. The tested 'DEW Training Toolkit' also resulted in a set of key recommendations to 'gender proof' policy development, which it is hoped will influence decision making in the coming years. <https://www.dewproject.eu/>



DIGITAL STORIES FROM THE PEATLANDS

Esker Arts Centre | Tullamore

12PM, 9TH DECEMBER
Admission Free and All Welcome



**NEW WORKS MADE BY
EUGENE DUNBAR, KK KENNY,
CATHY WHELEHAN, MONICA DOLAN
CATHERINE MOLLOY, CIARA EGAN,
FIONNUALA MCKENNA, FRANCES
HOLOHAN, SHANE HYNAN
AND JOHN WALSH.**

Event hosted by
artist/folklorist
Michael Fortune



Kindly Supported by



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Supported by the Just Transition
Fund & the Carbon Tax Fund

The 'Micro 2 – Enhancing Digital Entrepreneurship for Micro Enterprises in Rural Areas in a Post Pandemic World' project builds on the work of the first Irish Rural Link 'Micro' Project which concluded in 2018., Micro 2 is exclusively focused on servicing the specific Digital Training Needs of European rural micro enterprises. Digital Entrepreneurship training offered through this project aims to help rural micro enterprises make the most of this opportunity and others in the new digital economy. Rural micro social enterprises are also in focus. The digital learning from the 'Lough Ree Access for All' is included as an inspirational case study. Extensive Pilot Testing of the Micro 2 Training Offering will commence early in the new year.

Both project training offerings are designed to be easily accessible by the busy rural entrepreneur or would be entrepreneur. It is freely available for learners and organisations with a rural enterprise training purpose through the website. <https://www.digitalmicro2.eu/index.php>



MICRO 2 Partner meeting in April 2023

CAP Network Ireland

Irish Rural Link (IRL) in partnership with ERINN Innovation and Munster Technological University (MTU) successfully tendered to deliver Ireland's CAP Network earlier this year. James Claffey, Daniel Bennett, Evelyn Slevin, Paddy Malone and John Murphy represent IRL on this project.

CAP Network Ireland champions sustainable agriculture and rural development. It is a national network dedicated to maximising the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 for rural stakeholders. Members of the network include farmers, advisors, researchers, rural communities, agencies and other interested stakeholders. Through the provision of up-to-date information, case studies, publications, events and training, CAP Network Ireland strives to promote networking, innovation and funding opportunities under the CSP.

Visit the CAP Network Ireland website: capnetworkireland.eu

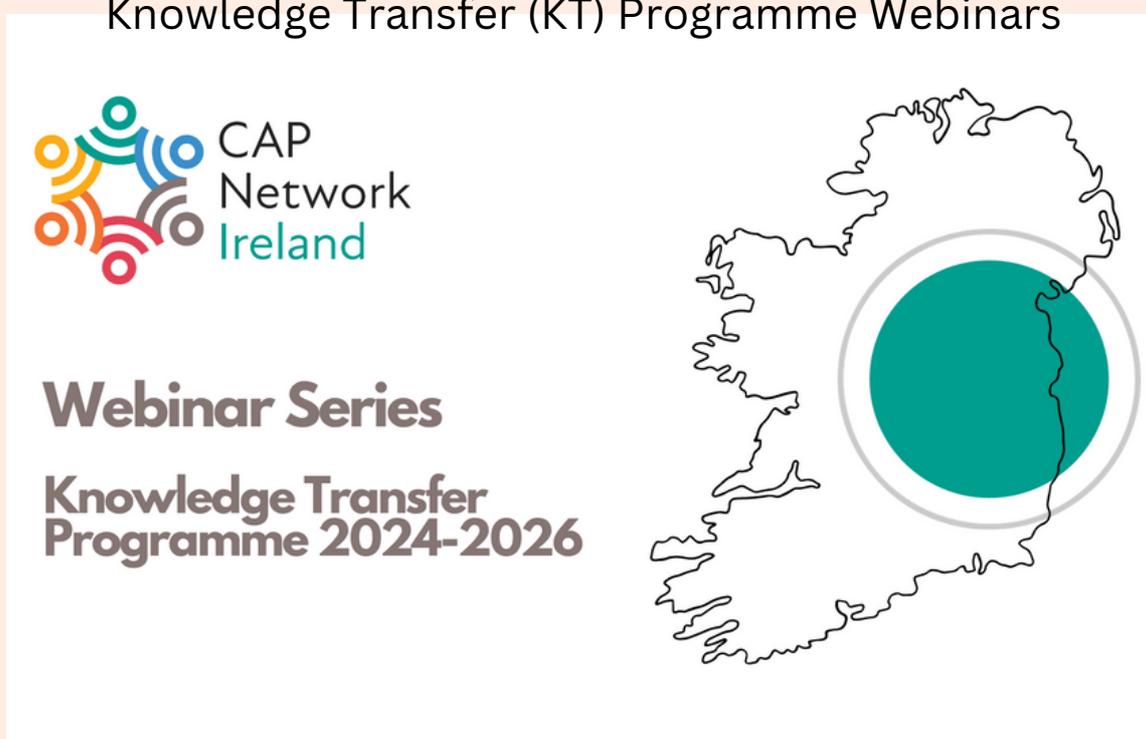
Launch at the National Ploughing Championships



James Claffey (IRL), Sarah Glascott (ERINN), and David Barry (MTU) from CAP Network Ireland pictured with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Charlie McConalogue TD and Corina Roe (Principal Officer CSP Division DAFM) at the National Ploughing Championships

CAP Network Ireland was delighted to participate in its inaugural National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, Co. Laois from the 19th-21st September 2023. The team were set up in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) tent for the three days. As part of the Network's launch, they were delighted to have the opportunity to meet and interact with Minister Charlie McConalogue TD and Minister of State Pippa Hackett. Visits to the CAP Network Ireland desk were plentiful and many took the opportunity to sign up to the network to stay informed on the latest Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) news and innovations taking place within the agricultural and rural sectors.

Knowledge Transfer (KT) Programme Webinars



CAP Network Ireland, in conjunction with DAFM, successfully facilitated four Knowledge Transfer (KT) Programme online regional webinars in October of this year. With over 300 in attendance, the goal of these workshops was to provide guidance and additional information on the KT programme. This is a three year programme for farmers, delivered by a network of approved KT Facilitators, which aims to foster knowledge exchange and innovation between advisors, farmers and other stakeholders, in turn playing a crucial role in helping farmers meet current and future challenges in their areas.

A key focus of the new KT Programme 2024-2026 is on the inclusion of, and spotlight on 'Local Needs'. To address this, presentations from CAP Network Ireland, DAFM, and guest experts focused on providing substantial support and resources on how best to approach and deliver a Local Needs Programme.

More information on the KT Programme webinars, including a range of presentations and recordings of the event, can be found on the CAP Network website.

CAP Network Ireland membership is free and open to anyone interested in learning more about the CSP or who wishes to become more actively involved in rural innovation and sustainable agricultural development in Ireland. You can sign up here: capnetworkireland.eu

SAOLTA

The Saolta Showcase event 2023 for Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in the Adult and Community Education (ACE) Sector took place in the Dunamais Arts Centre in Portlaoise on Friday November 10th in collaboration with Saolta's strategic Partners; Development Perspectives (the lead partner), Irish Rural Link, The Adult and Community Education Department of Maynooth University, Cork Education and Training Board, Concern, and Aontas, funded by Irish Aid, and hosted by RTE presenter, Emer O'Neill.

Over a hundred people signed up to the event with input from the Minister of State for International Development and Diaspora, Minister Sean Felming, on his insightful experiences in global development issues.



The event hosted a multitude of Saolta's work from throughout 2023, all of which is geared towards embedding the GCE into the ACE sector across the Island of Ireland.

Keynote speaker, Director of the Centre for Lifelong Learning, Dr Leo Casey, spoke on the principles of Learning, Schooling, and Education, what they mean to us as a society and culture, and how they impact and are impacted by Lifelong Learning.

A rich and insightful panel discussion on the GCE in the ACE sector took place and can be viewed here.

The Saolta Programme Manager, Nick Doran spoke about the different elements of the programme available to the ACE sector such as the Training of Trainers and the Saolta Star Awards. We also got to honor the great contribution to the consortium by, Michael Doorly, Suzanne Kyle, and Michael Kenny



representatives from the consortium and beyond, James Claffey (IRL), Declan Markey (Maynooth university) Tara Farrell (Longford Womens Link, Chairperson of IRL board), Sinead Morgan (Concern), Mike Lyons (Cork ETB).

The Saolta Showcase 2023 highlighted the continuing work of the Saolta partnership in applying the principles of GCE to a rapidly changing interdependent and unequal world.

The Saolta Showcase 2023 was about displaying the work being carried out towards this goal in the ACE sector.



Global Citizenship Education is a lifelong educational process which aims to increase public knowledge and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live. By challenging stereotypes and encouraging independent thinking, global citizenship education helps people to critically explore how global justice issues interlink with their everyday lives. (Irish Aid)



A huge thankyou to the whole Saolta Team and all who attended on the day.



Irish Rural Link would like to wish all our members and followers a very Happy and Joyful Christmas & Peaceful New Year. Thank you for your support in 2023 and look forward to working with you all again in 2024.