

Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

Tuesday 20/05/08

Today, Éamon Ó Cuív T.D., Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will launch the LEADER elements of the new Rural Development Programme at a reception in European Union House at 2.30pm.

Under the Programme, funding of E425.4 million will be provided, almost treble the amount available in the last Programme (2000-2006), and the largest ever package for rural development. The funding will be channelled through Local Action Groups to support and facilitate the continued development of rural communities all over Ireland.

Advertisements will appear in all the national newspapers as well as the Irish Farmers' Journal, and Foinse over the coming days, calling for proposals from Local Action Groups to administer this funding. They will be asked to submit business plans for their local areas that will be evaluated by independent evaluators.

Each of these groups will distribute funding to community groups and individuals in rural areas for the range of activities to be funded under this Programme. These activities are varied and include, diversification into non-agricultural activities, support for business creation, encouragement of tourism activities, basic services for the economy and rural population, village renewal and development, conservation and upgrading of rural heritage and training and information.

Announcing the funding, **Minister Ó Cuív** said: *"I am delighted to announce the commencement of the selection process for Local Action Groups to deliver the LEADER elements of the new Rural Development Programme. The level of funding available has increased significantly since the last Programme, as has the percentage of grant funding in many cases, particularly for community activities. For example, in some cases, the rate of aid for capital projects has increased from 50% in the last Programme to 75% under this new Programme. This will give community groups and individuals in rural areas more flexibility in making their valuable contributions to the continuing development of rural Ireland."*

Michael Ludlow, Chairman of Comhar Leader na hÉireann, thanked the Minister and Department staff for securing funding levels for this Programme that will allow LEADER groups to continue to contribute in a meaningful way to the development of Rural Ireland. *"Recent independent analysis has shown that LEADER companies in Ireland have attracted 5 times the public funding provided under the last Rural Development Programme. It is our pledge to the Government and to our rural constituencies to continue to maintain this level of funding and efficiently manage a potential 1.7 billion investment in rural Ireland over the next 5 years,"* he said.

Rural Development Policy in the EU promotes sustainable development in Europe's rural areas addressing economic, social and environmental concerns and is an increasingly important component of the Common Agriculture Policy. In this context the European Commission approved the Irish Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 in July of 2007.

The programme is divided into 4 Axes and co-managed by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Axis 1 and 2) and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht (Axis 3 and 4). Axes 1 and 2 provide funding for improvement of the agricultural sector, environment and the countryside. Axes 3 and 4 provide funding for projects under the broad heading of Quality of life in Rural Areas and diversification of the rural economy.

Axes 1 and 2 of the Programme (on-farm measures) are the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Axis 1 deals with Competitiveness and Axis 2 with improving the environment and the countryside.

Axes 3 and 4 contain the funding available for the delivery of LEADER-type activities, which at E425.4m is almost treble the funding of E150m for the previous LEADER round. This additional funding is a realisation by the Commission of the need for greater funding for rural development to be allocated to non-agricultural supports. Axes 3 and 4/LEADER-type funding now accounts for 10% of the E.U. funding for rural development under Ireland's Programme.

The focus of Axis 3 of the Programme is on quality of life and diversification and the Government has decided that the measures it contains will be delivered using the LEADER methodology. This Axis is relevant to all rural dwellers, including farmers, particularly in view of the growth in part-time farming. The challenges in the wider context include the provision of alternative and suitable employment opportunities for people living in rural areas and a range of services that people now want and expect locally. In the Programme, actions centred on the wider rural community such as the development of rural enterprises based on local natural resources, tourism, village enhancement and environmental initiatives will be delivered in a manner that addresses these challenges and complements on-farm measures. The measures in the Programme remain consistent with the 1999 White Paper on Rural Development and its commitments relating to the economic and social well-being of rural communities.

Of the E425.4 million, E234 million will come from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and E191 million from national exchequer. The Programme will be delivered through the LEADER approach, an innovative 'bottom up' approach that encourages rural areas to explore ways to become or remain competitive, to make the most of their assets and to overcome whatever challenges they may face. This approach is community driven and is managed through the Local Action Groups that will be chosen through the selection process being launched today.

Ensuring the Future - A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland

(the White Paper on Rural Development, 1999) (544 kb)

<http://www.pobail.ie/en/RuralDevelopment/NationalRuralDevelopment/file,2185,en.doc>

Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (approved 24th July 2007) (5,763 kb)

<http://www.pobail.ie/en/RuralDevelopment/EURuralDevelopment/file,8494,en.doc>

14.05.08 Statement in the Seanad during a debate on Rural Development

<http://www.pobail.ie/en/MinistersSpeeches/htmltext,9061,en.html>