

Coughlan Launches Eur 3 Billion Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS 4)

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan T.D., today launched the EUR3 billion Rural Environment Protection Scheme to protect the rural landscape, increase biodiversity and improve water quality. The new Scheme was approved at the EU's Rural Development Committee on 24th July as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme after long, detailed and challenging negotiation with the European Commission.

The latest version of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme, REPS 4, runs until 2013 and encourages farmers to enhance the environment through a range of actions including reduced use of fertilisers and pesticides contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions as well as improved water quality. The scheme also assists in maintaining existing hedgerows and planting new ones, growing crops to provide food for wild birds and preserving traditional breeds of animals.

"For generations, farmers and farm families have been the keepers of Ireland's rural landscape and rural environment," Minister Coughlan said. "Modern farmers are very conscious of their responsibility for this heritage and they want to maintain it and pass it on to future generations. REPS helps them to do so. While the payments are made directly to farmers, the benefits are for society as a whole."

The Scheme is co-funded by the EU and the Irish taxpayer and Minister Coughlan highlighted the record level of funding - some EUR3 billion - provided for REPS over the seven years 2007-2013 (more than EUR400 million on average per year). She said that the Government's commitment was clearly evident in the provision of EUR1.6 billion in national funding - up by EUR850 million from the national allocation in 2000-2006.

In line with the social partnership agreement, Towards 2016, all payment rates, including those for Natura 2000 designated land, are increased by 17% compared to REPS 3. This means that the average REPS farmer will get EUR7,220 a year in REPS 4, while a farmer with 55 hectares will qualify for over EUR10,000.

Minister Coughlan said: *"I am particularly pleased that the European Commission was able to accept my proposals for a mixed grazing measure which will benefit sheep farmers. I had also been anxious to extend REPS to the more intensive farming sectors, including dairying, and I am very happy that this will now be possible under REPS 4."*

REPS was first introduced in 1994 and has gone through a number of revisions, with each one increasing the emphasis on pro-active measures by which farmers have protected and improved the environment. REPS 4 continues this trend.

When REPS 3, the last version of the Scheme, closed to new entrants in December 2006 there were over 59,000 farmers taking part. Thousands more are expected to join REPS 4 and Minister Coughlan said she was pleased that many farmers who have been waiting for the opportunity for some time will now be afforded the chance to do so.

8 August, 2007

Rural Environment Protection Scheme - Basics and Contacts

What is REPS?

REPS (Rural Environment Protection Scheme), is a Scheme designed to reward Farmers for carrying out their farming activities in an environmentally friendly manner and to bring about environmental improvement on existing farms.

The objectives of the Scheme are to:

- * Establish farming practices and production methods which reflect the increasing concern for conservation, landscape protection and wider environmental problems;
- * Protect wildlife habitats and endangered species of flora and fauna;
- * Produce quality food in an extensive and environmentally friendly manner.

How much €€€€€€€€€€ will a farmer receive?

- * REPS annual payment of €200 per hectare for the first 20 hectares, €175 per hectare for the next 20 hectares, €70 per hectare for the next 15 hectares and €10 per hectare for the remaining hectares.
- * REPS annual payment of €242 per hectare for eligible Commonage land, Natural Heritage Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas up to a maximum of 40 hectares. €24 per hectare is payable per hectare for areas above 40 hectares and under 80 hectares, €18 euro per hectare for areas above 80 and under 120 hectares and €5 per hectare for areas over 120 hectares.
- * Additional payments may be made for participating in Supplementary Measures such as Organic Farming, LINNET, Rare Breeds, Traditional Orchards, Riparian setaside and Corncrake. Full details of the Supplementary Measures are available in The Farmer Handbook (download Adobe Acrobat file 1.9MB)

Participants in REPS must

- * Carry out their farming activities for a five year period in accordance with an agri-environmental plan prepared in accordance with the Scheme document and agri-environmental specification.
- * Have a plan, specific to their own farm, prepared by a Planning Agency approved by the Department of Agriculture and Food.

* Comply with eleven basic measures as follows:

- o *follow a farm nutrient management plan prepared for the total area of the farm;*
- o *adopt an appropriate grassland management plan for the total area of the farm;*
- o *protect and maintain all watercourses and wells;*
- o *retain wildlife habitats;*
- o *maintain farm and field boundaries;*
- o *cease using herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers in and around hedgerows, lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, except with the consent of the Minister;*
- o *protect features of historical and/or archaeological interest;*
- o *maintain and improve the visual appearance of the farm and farmyard*
- o *produce tillage crops: without burning straw or stubble; leaving a specified field margin uncultivated where no nutrients or sprays are applied;*
- o *become familiar with environmentally friendly farming practice,*
- o *prepare, monitor and update agri-environmental plan and keep such farm and environmental records as may be prescribed by the Minister.*

How does a farmer apply to join REPS?

A farmer may apply to join REPS by submitting an application form and accompanying farm agri-environmental plan to the local Agricultural and Environment Structures Office (AES).

How does a farmer have an agri-environment plan prepared?

The Department of Agriculture and Food have approved a number of Planners to prepare plans. A list of approved Planners is available from local AES Offices and on the Departments WEB site. The farmer may select a planner of his/her choice.

To ensure that your application is dealt with in a speedy manner you should:

- * *Become fully familiar with the terms and conditions of REPS 3 before filling out application form*
- * *Complete all forms carefully, accurately and legibly*
- * *Provide accurate and comprehensive information*
- * *Provide all necessary supporting documentation*
- * *Check that all applications are fully complete and signed before submission*
- * *Ensure applications are submitted to arrive in sufficient time i.e. before closing date*
- * *Obtain proof of posting*

Some Facts about REPS in Ireland

From 1994 - 1999 (REPS 1)

- *45,500 farmers participated in REPS 1
- *Approximately 33% of the utilisable agricultural area is being farmed under REPS guidelines;
- *Over €1.04 billion has been paid to farmers in REPS 1 (to June 05).

From 2000 - 2006 (REPS 2)

- *24,576 participating in REPS 2 (June 2005)
- *19,907 participating in REPS 3 (June 05)
- *Over €521 million has been paid to farmers in REPS 2 (to June 05).
- *Over €129 million has been paid to farmers in REPS 3 (to June 05).
- *the number of REPS farmers is to grow to in excess of 50,000 by the end of 2005;

REPS is co-financed 75% by the EU and 25% by the Irish Exchequer.

Where can you get further information about REPS?

Further information regarding REPS may be obtained from your local AES Office or by contacting REPS Section, Department of Agriculture and Food, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford. Telephone 053 63400 or Lo-call 1890 200 509.
Contacts in REPS Head Office, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford

REPS

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/>

Organic Farming In Europe

http://www.organic-europe.net/country_reports/ireland/default.asp

REPS

<http://www.teagasc.ie/advisory/environment/reps.htm>

The Organic Food Market: An Opportunity for Ireland?

<http://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2002/ruraldev2002/paper11.htm>

Potential of Organic Tillage in Ireland

<http://www.teagasc.net/publications/2007/20070131/ntc2007paper07.htm>

Irish Organic Farmers And Growers' Association

<http://www.iofga.org/>