

Name of Rural Network

National Rural Network



Contact Details

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Mission statement and strategic objectives of the Rural Network

The aim of the National Rural Network (NRN) is to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP). Specific objectives are grouped under three work programmes. Firstly, the network aims to promote synergies across the axes and measures of the RDP in Ireland, as well as between the Irish Programme and the EU. Secondly, performance information will be strategically managed and coordinated in order to ensure evaluations and decisions are informed by accurate, comprehensive, accessible and timely information. Finally, the network will provide technical support and training to Local Action Groups (LAGs) and other rural stakeholders. This incorporates a strong focus on identifying and disseminating 'best practice'.

Participants in the Rural Network

NRN membership is open to any organisation with a direct interest in Irish agriculture and rural development and more specifically to those who are involved in delivering measures under the RDP. This includes state, private and civil society organisations, which represent the interests of the agricultural, environmental, rural development, business and community sectors. Specifically, this includes LAGs, social partners, government departments (including both the Paying and Managing Authorities) and rural-based representative organisations.

Network Structure

The NRN delivery body - the Rural Development Support Unit (RDSU) - is a research and development unit, based at the Tipperary Institute. The RDSU was awarded the contract to manage and deliver the activities of the NRN in Ireland, building on the Institute's previous experience serving as the National Network Unit for Leader+ in Ireland. The RDSU operates as a contractor, delivering network services under the auspices of the Managing Authority (the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food). The RDSU team currently consists of four members of staff; these are a unit director, the network project manager, a dedicated ICT manager and a network coordinator. The team also includes a PR and publications specialist and an agricultural economist on a contract basis. The RDSU will build on the successful approaches and practices it developed in delivering the Leader+ Network. In particular, it will build upon its competence in the development and application of technology in networking and communication; in accessing, compiling and analysing information; as well as generating reports and information updates.

The network is governed by a Coordinating Committee which acts as the board, and involves representatives from the Managing Authority (MA), Paying Agency and 23 NRN members. The Committee is chaired by the Director of the RDSU.

Network Management

The RDSU prepares and submits annual action plans to the Coordinating Committee for approval. This committee involves representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Department of Department of Environment, Community and Local; the RDSU; and core stakeholders from major rural development organisations. The Coordinating Committee provides additional inputs to the action plan and ensures that stakeholders' viewpoints are integrated in subsequent network activities.

Four Working Groups - comprising key stakeholders and focused on strategic issues within thematic areas - support the work of the Coordinating Committee, providing support on their areas of expertise and representing specific areas of interest. Groups meet six times per-year, including a stakeholder conference. Working groups can choose how to discuss and collect information on their assigned topic, e.g. through meetings open to all interested parties, by invitation only or through the provision of external experts. Stakeholders can also promote their interests within the network through its communication tools.

A Steering Group has been established to monitor and evaluate the impact of the rural network, comprising representatives from the above Ministries, RDSU and key stakeholders. Meeting bi-annually, the group will assess the activities delivered against action plan priorities and indicators. They will also discuss the activities for the following months and focus on developing 'best practices'.

Cooperation interests of the Rural Network

The RDSU will actively promote co-operation with networks from across the EU, in terms of all measures within the programme. Under axis 3 and 4 of the programme these specifically relate to the measures involving the Leader themes, namely diversification into non-agricultural activities, support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises, encouragement of tourism activities, basic services for the rural economy and population, village renewal and development, upgrading of the rural heritage and training and skills.

Under axes 1 and 2 of the programme, cooperation with the agricultural community, on issues which were highlighted in the 'Common Agricultural Policy Health Check' - such as climate change, renewable energy, water management and biodiversity - will be promoted.

Network Budget for the period 2007–13:

Network budget	€	Budget breakdown	€
Total network funds	2 750 000	Work plan resources	2 180 000
National co-finance	1 375 000	Network running costs	570 000
EAFRD	1 375 000	Others (if appropriate)	-