

Ireland: Rural Development Plan

Country profile:

- Agriculture: 62% of Ireland is agricultural land, less favoured areas constitute three quarters of it.
- Agricultural employment: 3.3%
- The agri-food sector accounts for 8% of GDP & 10% of exports (mostly beef & dairy)
- Competitiveness: High level of farm fragmentation, need to facilitate structural change, high agricultural land prices, need to support a vibrant & consumer oriented agricultural sector
- Environment: considerable natural resources & biodiversity, disease free status, high level of success & participation in previous agri-environment schemes, public support for the multifunctional role of agriculture, risk of land abandonment.
- Rural Areas: declining importance of agriculture, pressure from urbanisation, outmigration, strong tourism & cultural identity, experienced in the Leader approach, dynamic population, low ICT uptake, need to create alternative employment sources.

Chosen strategy corresponding to the profile:

Primary emphasis on the environment and land management (notably the continuation of the existing agri-environment scheme) and a secondary emphasis on the competitiveness of the agri-food sector and the quality of life/diversification in rural areas.

The total financial allocation for the Irish Rural Development Programme for 2007-2013 is **€ 4 298 753 800**, of which **€ 2 339 914 590 is financed by the EAFRD** (European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development).

Axis	Total public (in €)	% of EAFRD contribution	EAFRD (in €)	Share %
Axis I	482 000 000	50%	241 000 000	10%
Axis II*	3 385 298 800	55%	1 861 914 340	80%
Axis III*	-	-	-	-
LEADER	425 455 000	55%	234 000 250	10%
TA**	6 000 000	50%	3 000 000	
Total	4 298 753 800		2 339 914 590	100%

* Axis 3 and LEADER implemented together in the Irish programme

**TA stands for technical assistance for the implementation of the programmes.

Aims:

The Irish Rural development Programme aims:

- To support the development of the Ireland's rural areas whilst upholding the principles of sustainable development and to support agriculture in its provision of public goods;
- To enhance the environment & biodiversity, in particular building on the success of current environmental measures;
- To mitigate the effects of climate change and protect Ireland's natural resources;
- To ensure a competitive agri-food sector by boosting innovation, added value & consumer focus;
- To address structural problems in the agricultural industry and the need for on-farm capital investment;
- To address local needs & boost the quality of life in rural areas & promote the creation of micro-enterprises.

To meet these aims:

The main priorities for **Axis 1** are to create a strong and dynamic agri-food industry, to modernise agricultural holdings and to facilitate structural change through support for young farmers and early retirement. Further the funds under this axis should be used to support training related to agri-environment schemes.

The main focus of **Axis 2** is the protection of the environment and environmentally friendly farming techniques, support to prevent land abandonment & the protection of landscape features.

These include:

- environmentally friendly farming methods to enhance biodiversity
- suitable farming systems to preserve the rural landscape
- the protection of the environment on agricultural land and in areas of high nature value/Natura 2000 and
- support for the maintenance of traditional landscape features such as stone walls and farm buildings, as well as archaeological sites on farmland.

Axis 3 and 4 will focus on the creation of employment opportunities and diversification of rural areas using the Leader method. Initiatives under these axes will support diversification into non-agricultural activities, micro-business creation and development, tourism activities, basic services for the economy and rural population, village renewal and development, conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage, skills acquisition and training.

See also: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm