



**An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe
agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta**
Department of Rural and Community
Development and the Gaeltacht

35 years of LEADER – Minister Calleary congratulates groups on reaching significant milestone

The Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary TD, has today (Sunday, 15 March 2026) congratulated LEADER groups all across Ireland for the vital work that has been delivered over the lifetime of the Programme.

The LEADER Programme was launched by the European Commission on this day, 15 March 1991, by Irish Commissioner Ray MacSharry, and once established in Ireland, it has been ever present in rural communities across the country.

LEADER was designed to provide communities with the resources to drive their own local development through a "bottom-up" approach that empowers local partners and communities, with Local Action Groups helping to identify specific needs and directing the development of their areas through Local Development Strategies.

Minister Calleary said:

"The LEADER programme has been a cornerstone of rural development policy in Ireland for 35 years. I want to thank all the stakeholders who have been involved over the years, you should all be very proud of what you have achieved to date. I want to acknowledge former Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Ray MacSharry for his foresight and leadership during his tenure which seen major reforms of the CAP.

"LEADER funding has provided rural communities with the necessary resources to bring about real change in their own local communities, through a community-led local development "bottom-up" approach."

LEADER has evolved through several programming periods and continues today as part of the 2023–2027 LEADER Programme, which is gathering significant momentum now with projects being approved across the country.

To date under the 2023–2027 programme, over 1,000 projects have been approved for LEADER funding of over €50 million, supporting a broad range of enterprises and community groups across rural Ireland.

Minister Calleary added:

“The milestone of over 1,000 projects being approved for LEADER funding under the 2023–2027 programme is an achievement that shows the considerable support from my department and the European Union to rural communities nationwide.

“Grant aid awarded under the LEADER programme has played a critical role in empowering communities across rural Ireland by providing community groups, businesses, and individuals with the required resources to actively direct local development in their areas.

“This has enabled our rural communities to address the specific needs and challenges in their local areas and to become more resilient, while supporting job creation, and improving social and economic wellbeing.”

LEADER into the future

The LEADER programme is funded as an intervention under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and, therefore, the development of the EU regulations relating to the post 2027 CAP, is a matter of significant importance to the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.

Ireland has and will continue to advocate for a well-funded CAP that supports farm viability and resilience, environmental ambition, and rural development measures such as LEADER.

Minister Calleary concluded:

“The development of the CAP post-2027 is a matter of significant importance for my Department. As these EU negotiations progress I will continue to advocate for the LEADER programme to remain a core element of the new CAP framework and for the continued prioritisation of a well funded LEADER programme in the coming years”

Further information about the LEADER Programme is available online via the Department’s LEADER homepage: www.gov.ie/LEADER