

PARTICIPATING FARMERS VIEWS ON THE EIP

A criticism of research conducted in most sectors is that information has a tendency to stay exactly where it is generated and not trickle down to the end users. In order to combat this problem and to ensure that agriculture remains innovative, competitive and sustainable the EU Commission launched a programme called the European Innovation Partnership or EIP–Agri for short.

EIP's aim to bring farmers, researchers, organisations and industry together to work on specific identified problems, and to develop solutions in a faster manner. These solutions can be replicated in other regions if relevant. This is an exciting development and one that has proved to be very popular since it was introduced in 2012.

In Ireland the European Innovation Partnerships Initiative (EIP) under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) is a new co-operation measure under Article 35(1) of the regulation. These locally led schemes promote local solutions to specific issues and involve the establishment of Operational Groups (OG) to develop ideas, or take existing ideas/research and put them into practice by being hands on in terms of working towards the resolution of a practical problem. To date in Ireland there have been two competitive calls for EIP projects.

The EIP-AGRI brings together innovation actors (farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, NGOs, etc) and helps to build bridges between research and practice. Together they form an EU-wide EIP network. EIP OG can be funded under the



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Food and the Marine

RDPs, are project-based and tackle a certain (practical) problem or opportunity which may lead to an innovation. The OG approach makes the best use of different types of knowledge (practical, scientific, technical, organisational, etc.) in an interactive way. An OG is composed of those key actors that are in the best position to realise the project's goals, to share implementation experiences and to disseminate the outcomes broadly. There are 11 organic growers on the MOPS EIP project, being run by the Irish Organic Association, and they form a central part of the OG. Twelve months since the start of the project the OG growers outline their experiences of being involved in an EIP project.

Information on the European Innovation Partnership initiative can be accessed on the Department website at DAFM - European Innovation Partnership or by contacting eip@agriculture.gov.ie

Projects developed under the EIP initiative are developed by Operational Groups which will be funded under Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020.

JANET POWER



**Janet Power and Jenny Watkins
from Gorse Farm**

We are small specialised organic growers based in Co. Wexford. So far it has been very interesting to be part of this dynamic project and we are very excited to see how it will progress over the next 2 years. Compared to other growers on the project we are relatively new to organic growing, and therefore to get input from the OG has been very beneficial as collectively there is a huge resource of knowledge among growers, and it is great to have both access and input to that collective knowledge.

OLIVER KELLY



Being part of the MOPS project is a great way to network with other organic growers. It has made me stop and evaluate many parts of my business and see where changes and improvements need to be made. It has also made me look at each crop on an individual basis and see if they are profitable for me to grow or if I need to look at growing other crops. Having access to the Field Data Collector and the crop agronomist has also been really useful for me.

PATRICK FRANKEL



For me it is great to get an opportunity to have people visit my farm and give an analytical opinion of what I am doing. We have the Field Data Collector coming to the farm every month and then the agronomist at certain times of the year, so having that additional input is great. Working with the agronomist on the cropping plan and managing it on a monthly basis has generated a lot of new information which is farm specific and really practical. We also operate a What's App group which is a great way to sell crops to other members of the OG as it increases farm revenue and reduces waste.

EMMET DUNNE



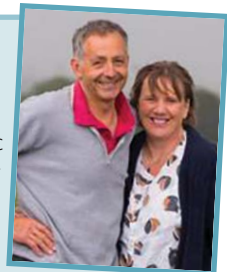
For me as a grower you are so busy growing and running a business that you often become absorbed in your farm. Meeting and getting to know the other growers on the MOPS project over the last twelve months has been very important as there is a lot of shared knowledge and exchange of information. Also, if you are running low on a crop to supply to the market it is great to know you can source product from the other OG members to ensure continuity of supply.

LOUISE RANKIN



For us at Moyleabbey it has been a really positive experience to be part of the MOPS project. It has resulted in greater cohesion between the farm and business management as it is given us a bigger picture of what is going on at the farm and shone a light on what is working and what may need tweaking. It has allowed us to streamline things ranging from production to selling and has allowed us to become more organised and focused more on planning which in turn has allowed the business and farm to operate in a smoother manner. It has given us the chance to reflect and make changes which have been very useful.

DESMOND & OLIVE THORPE



We have been organic farmers for over thirty years however there are always new things to learn. Like any business it is good to step back and evaluate what you are doing, and farming is no different. Some enterprises on the farm are far more profitable than others and it is good to know how the different aspects of the farm are performing. MOPS has made us do this and it has certainly improved how we record information about the business. The Green Manure Trial is taking part on our farm and it is really interesting to see the results of the trial and how it is impacting on the soil fertility in the trial area.

PADRAIG FAHY



As a grower who operates in a range of markets from direct sales to supplying the major retailers MOPS has enabled me to focus on the needs of the market. It has also indicated the future trends and growth areas and what crops are in demand which influences your farm cropping plan. I have really enjoyed the videos made on the 11 farms it is a really practical way to learn more about organic growing and how different growers do things. It is great to access the analytical information from the project such as the soil & plant tissue crop analysis, the use of the refractometer as a quality assessment and also the climate data specific to our farm. Working with the agronomist to implement our tailored cropping plan has been hugely beneficial.

DEIRDRE O'SULLIVAN



Even though we have been growing organic vegetables for a long time being involved in the project has really opened up our eyes to lots of things. For starters it is interesting to know the sheer scale of what the market is looking for in terms of organic fruit and vegetables and the possibilities that exist out there, not only for the MOPS growers but for lots of growers. Having the soil and tissue sampling has been fantastic as it has taken some of the speculation out of growing which is always nice. All of us at Nurney Farm are really taking on board aspects of the cropping plan designed with the agronomist but also other things like crop presentation and quality management which are essential for all of our markets.

KENNETH KEAVEY



Here at Greearth Organics we are really benefiting from the data about the soil and plants collected on the farm. As we have a particular interest in climate change it is amazing to have the climate monitors on site to record data both for indoor and outdoor production. We have enjoyed working with the crop agronomist and have revised our cropping plan based on this input. As we deal directly with the consumer quality is hugely important to us, to that end using the refractometer and brix system has been very educational and improved our awareness about quality assurance which is essential for our business.

NICK CULLEN



One of the most interesting aspects of being part of MOPS is the opportunity to really analyse what is going on with your crops, in terms of yields and monitoring them more closely and also with the detailed nutrient analysis both for specific plants and the soil. It gives you scope to monitor what you are doing on the ground and see if you need to make changes to become more efficient and ensure maximum production capacity is reached.

VINCENT GRACE



As a grower it can be hard to grow and run a business so for me being part of MOPS has really allowed me to organise the crop selection for the farm and fine tune my growing skills by working to a farm specific cropping plan. The crop plan in conjunction with the data from crop and tissue analysis is very useful in terms of organic management of soils and crops on my farm.