

Your guide to
North/South and cross-border
AGRICULTURE
co-operation

24 April 2007



About Border Ireland

Border Ireland is the first online information system to focus upon improving the understanding of North/South and cross-border issues on the island of Ireland.

The rationale behind Border Ireland is the significant growth in cross-border co-operation over the past 20 years on the island of Ireland and the fact that this has produced an ever increasing amount of uncoordinated and fragmented information. In 2003, with EU Peace Two funding, the Centre for Cross Border Studies initiated the development of Border Ireland to be an online searchable database of cross-border information produced by EU funding programmes (INTERREG, Peace and LEADER), government departments in both jurisdictions, semi-state bodies, academic institutions, libraries and charitable foundations.

Border Ireland was launched in March 2006 by the Irish Minister for Finance, Mr Brian Cowen TD, who said:

This website will be the keystone for information provision that will enable us all to meet future challenges, be they economic, social or educational. I would encourage everyone who wishes to benefit from a cross-border approach to their activities to make use of this invaluable website.

By March 2006 Border Ireland had captured information on 3,168 North/South and cross-border activities and 1,229 publications across a range of sectors including agriculture, community development, culture, economic development, education, environment, health, tourism, training and transport. Border Ireland has documented cross-border work involving 3,967 contacts (individuals and organisations) and 19 different sources of funding. This information is constantly updated and new links between activities, publications and organisations are always being added.

About Border Ireland Briefings

In order to better disseminate information on cross-border co-operation the Border Ireland team are releasing a series of sectoral updates, beginning with Transport in February 2007 and followed by Tourism and Economics in March 2007. Twenty briefings on sectoral co-operation will be issued monthly up to June 2008. Forthcoming briefings include

- Renewable energy;
- Agriculture;
- Entrepreneurship; and
- Tourism.

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Overview

The economic importance of agriculture to the 'island economy' generally and the two economies, North and South, separately, has been declining in recent years. Comparison of statistics for 2005 showed that agriculture, forestry and fishing accounted for 2.0% in the South and 1.3% in the North of total Gross Value Added. However, as a source of employment and in social terms the sector remains a crucial one as 6.1% of the Southern and 4.1% of the Northern labour market were employed in agriculture in 2005.

The gradual decline in the economic importance of the sector is reflected in the fact that the hospitality industry, North and South, produces higher levels of Gross Value Added and employs more people. The common challenges faced by farming and fishing communities on both sides of the border have meant that cross-border relations in this sector have been marked as much by competition as by co-operation. In the food and dairy cooperatives and meat industry takeovers rather than joint venture were the order of the day in the 1990s.

However, the shared challenges also made agriculture a sector with great potential for further North/South co-operation. And so, in 1998, agriculture was chosen as one of the six areas where common policies and approaches are to be agreed in the North/South Ministerial Council but implemented separately in each jurisdiction. The main areas identified for agriculture co-operation are the promotion of joint researches and strategies on animal and plant health, joint implementation of EU rural development and environmental schemes and joint work on agriculture negotiations in the WTO talks and the reform of the EU's Common Agriculture Policy. Finally, there was a remit to expand the work of the inter-departmental cross-border rural development steering committee which had been operating since 1995.

This inter-governmental co-operation has continued at a steady but slow pace since 1999. The issue of animal health and the need for an all-island strategy dealing with issues such as animal movements or protocols to deal with diseases became headline news in 2001 with the Food and Mouth outbreak. A Strategic Steering Group and nine working groups have been established to tackle both research and implementation issues in the animal health area. The same approach has also been taken with developing co-operation on plant health research and strategies. In the other areas of work there has been more of a review and information exchange approach on issues such as the nitrates directive which was discussed by Ministers as recently as 11 July 2006.

In the area of rural development intergovernmental co-operation has produced some more concrete results. The steering committee has had responsibility of commissioning two reports since 2000 and acting on one of these to shape the implementation of INTERREG IIIA funding.

Focusing on the border

The rural border region continues to be over-dependent on agriculture. Both North and South, statistics for the border counties show higher rates of the population working in agriculture than elsewhere on the island.

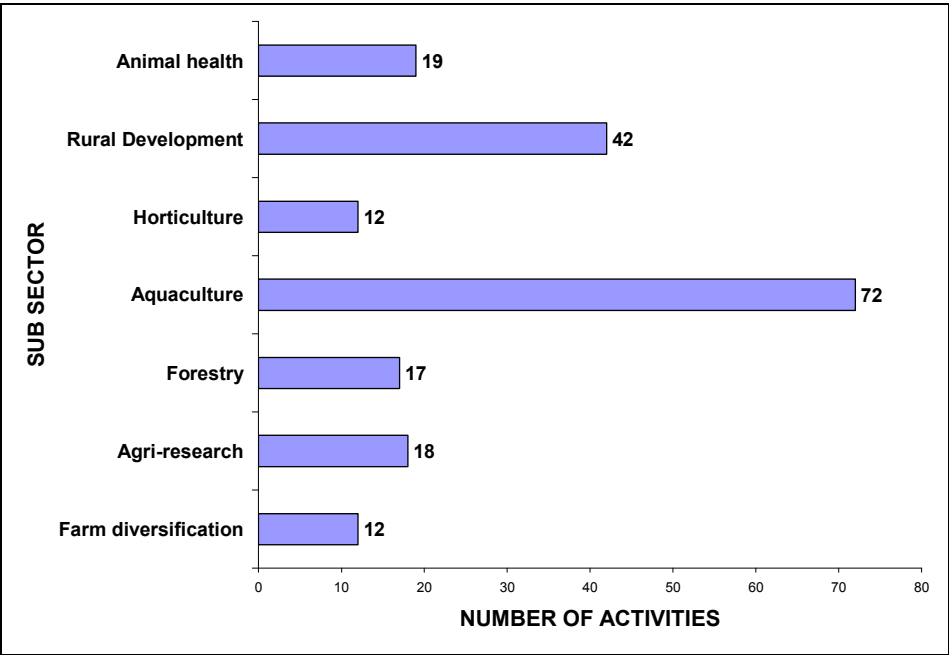
A report by the British Irish Inter Parliamentary Body in 2000 referred to the “significant additional handicaps on farmers on both sides of the border which have seriously retarded the development and modernisation of farming in these areas. Border farmers feel themselves to have been heavily penalised by these factors, and to have been largely forgotten, existing at the edge of consciousness of the administrations in Dublin and Belfast”.

The rural border area faces particular challenges as regards growth, jobs, infrastructure provision and access to services in the coming years. To meet these challenges requires diversification out of traditional farming into new approaches such as agri-tourism, organic farming and eco-tourism and the growth of a stronger, more diverse rural economy.

Activities

There are almost 200 agriculture activities recorded on Border Ireland, which makes 6% of the total number of activities supported by government and cross-border funding programmes since 1982. The 199 activities are divided into seven sub-sectors as shown in the chart below. The most obvious feature is that 60% of all activities falling into the broad agriculture sector come under fisheries and aquaculture or rural development. The first of these covers a wide range of initiatives both on the open sea and on inland waterways and support for the private sector as well as community and public sector interventions in training, environmental clean-ups or the provision of angling facilities.

Chart 1: Breakdown of agriculture cross-border activities, 1985-2005

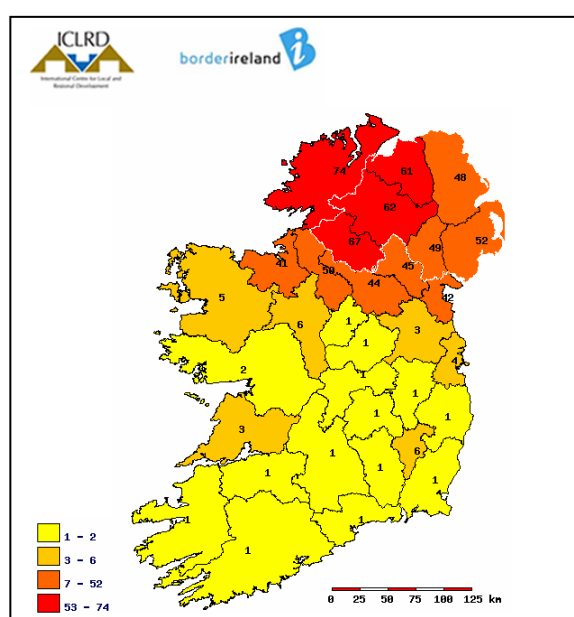


Cross-border co-operation through rural development activity has been a strong theme since the late 1990s. It has involved a wide variety of projects from cross-border networking by the Town of Monaghan Co-op and local farmers’ groups to large scale skills development and rural day-care programmes. The other 40% of activities in the agriculture sector are spread equally among the other sub-sectors. Under animal health have been education programmes as well as efforts to improve quality assurance for sheep or pigs. Forestry activities have

ranged from joining training projects to numerous research projects into topics such as pest control and forestry tourism. Other topics for research in the agriculture sector have ranged from the environmental impacts of fertiliser use to the changing nature of the agri-food industry. The final two areas of work include the relatively new agri-diversification activities and the older horticulture area which has been overtaken by projects in the organic food field.

Chart 2 shows (on an aggregated county basis) where cross-border agriculture activities actually take place with the darker colours indicating the higher levels of such activity in the North-West region.

Chart 2: The distribution of agriculture activities¹



Organisations

There are 105 organisations which fall into the agriculture sector in Border Ireland and have been involved in cross-border co-operation since 1985. These can be divided into the following categories:

- The rare organisation whose rationale is North/South or cross-border work such as the statutory implementation body, The Loughs Agency, the Cross-Border Aquaculture Initiative (CBAIT), the North-West Organic Co-operative and Agri-Link, formed out of joint work between the two professional agri-science associations on the island.
- The various public sector agencies which have a cross-border role or have initiated joint projects with their counterparts from the government departments through to fisheries boards and educational bodies such as Teagasc.
- A larger number of voluntary groups who have become involved, with funding supports, in cross-border co-operation. There is a wide spectrum from LEADER

¹ The Centre is working in partnership with its ICLRD colleagues to develop an INTERREG-funded spatial mapping application which will see Border Ireland information represented visually.

companies to local co-operative societies to farmers' or community organisations with a rural development focus. Examples along this spectrum are Town of Monaghan Co-op and Cookstown Dairy Discussion Group.

- Private sector firms (notably seafood and food processing companies) which have been involved in cross-border measures under the INTERREG or Peace programmes.

Changes over time?

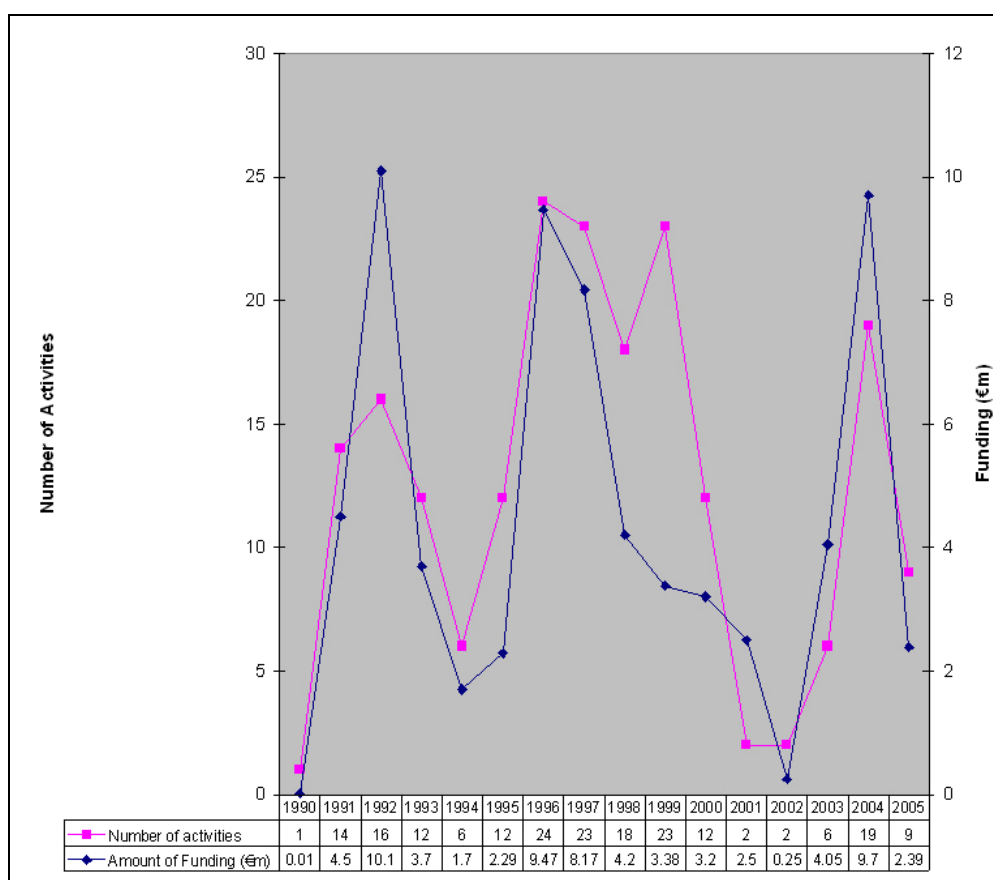
Of the 199 agricultural activities on Border Ireland 149 (or 75%) began before 2000, many of these supported by funding from either of the INTERREG I and II programmes or Peace I. The level of back-to-back projects is lower for agriculture than for some other sectors, such as transport. However, the first two INTERREG programmes did fund almost 50 initiatives and projects that took place on one side of the border only and with no input from the other. Improvements to fisheries, environmental assistance to farms and capital build for rural development associations all fall under this heading.

Before 2000 many of the cross-border initiatives arose from co-operation between government bodies with the various divisions of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the North being strongly to the fore with almost 20 policy research or practical initiatives. Teagasc and the regional fisheries boards were occasional partners in public sector co-operation, more so than the equivalent Department of Agriculture. One €1.9m initiative to produce nutrient management plans for farmers throughout the border region was funded by a Peace I measure to assist public sector co-operation but undertaken separately by the two departments with merely some information sharing during the programme.

Beyond the public sector Peace I supported some seafood processing joint ventures and assisted a cross-border networking programme for rural development associations run by Irish Rural Link and Rural Community Network. This last initiative has proved important for the post-2000 period as it gave rise to North South Rural Voice and an entire Peace II measure dedicated to cross-border community development in rural areas.

Since 2000 the shift in focus for co-operative activities in this sector is towards rural development, aquaculture and agri-diversification. This is driven, firstly, by the continuing challenges of strengthening rural community infrastructure and the drift from farming in the border region and, secondly, the changing priorities of Peace II and INTERREG IIIA funding. Since 2000 there have been specific funding measures (with funding of up to €30m) to support cross-border work in the above areas. The result has been a combination of small grants programmes to encourage community or economic development in rural areas on a joint basis or larger initiatives with budgets running into €1m plus.

Chart 3: Numbers of agriculture activities and funding allocated to the sector, 1985-2005



Research and Strategy

The NGO sector (Co-operation Ireland and then the Centre for Cross Border Studies) was the first to undertake research into the levels of cross-border co-operation in agriculture. Since the 1990s there has been a flourishing of specialised research into animal and plant health or the impacts of agriculture on the environment and the EU reforms on agriculture. A good example of this type of co-operation is the foresight research into the impact on the agriculture sector of the changes in policies and markets which, since 1997, has involved Teagasc, the North's department, several universities and the University of Missouri. The 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease crisis brought the agricultural policies and practices sharply into focus and presented a real opportunity to research the working of cross-border relationships.

In terms of strategy both departments stress that all-island co-operation on animal and plant health remains on their agenda and it hoped that these good intentions will ultimately produce joint strategies. There are signs of more progress being made beyond the central government field where new cross-border approaches are taking shape. There is a tradition of addressing common EU issues on a joint North/ South basis. For example in the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy in 1987 the two agriculture departments co-operated in an attempt to minimise the ill-effects of change on their agri-food industries. It would be interesting to document how the decision made at the November 2000 North/South

Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in agricultural sector format to formalise relations has progressed the regional and cross-border dimensions of agriculture.

Successful cross-border approaches?

Since 2002 there have been several attempts to develop new approaches for cross-border co-operation in the agriculture field. One of these has arisen from the 2002 study of the Cross Border Rural Development Steering Group which recommended pursuing an area-based strategy to deliver part of the INTERREG IIIA measure dedicated to that sub-sector. The desire was for a body which would have a strictly rural development remit alongside a commitment to cross-border management and the delivery of programmes in a practical part of the border region (ie: the North West). A combination of LEADER groups in that area subsequently came together as North West Rural Development to deliver both a new cross-border structure and a series of interventions involving tourism, skills development for women and a 'farm futures' foresight programme.

The success of the area-based cross-border approach is still unproven although early reports have been positive. The same positive tone has been applied with regard to the impacts made by CBAIT and in the delivery of agri-diversification programme for young farmers in the border region. The highest praise has been for the development of cross-border stakeholder groups among industry partners and community organisations who would previously had little or no contact. How much is learned from these new approaches is likely to depend on the sustainability not only of individual projects but of the organisational structures established for their delivery. The continuation of practical cross-border work in these areas, as much as the successful delivery of the much-awaited all-island animal and plant health strategies, will be an acid test for North/South agriculture co-operation.

With a Sinn Fein Minister who has all-island marketing aspirations due to lead the NI Agriculture and Rural Development Department from 8 May 2007, coupled with the expected 'pragmatic' approach of the Ulster Farmers Union, cross-border co-operation in agriculture could develop a whole new lease of life.

Further reading:

Centre for Cross Border Studies, *North/South Co-operation in Agriculture: A Mapping Study* (2000)

Centre for Cross Border Studies, *The Foot and Mouth Disease Crisis and the Irish border* (2002)

DARD (NI) / Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, *Cross-Border Rural Development Co-operation Study* (2002)

Special EU Programmes Body, Operational Programme for Peace III. Annex A. *Socio-Economic Profile of Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland* (January 2007).

Teagasc National University of Ireland, Maynooth, *Rural Ireland 2025. Foresight Perspectives* (2005)