



Teagasc Euragri Webinar #2 on Rural Entrepreneurship in Delivering Sustainable Farming and Food Systems

Teagasc hosted the second of three Euragri 2024 webinars highlighting some inspiring stories of farm entrepreneurship on April 25, 2024. The 80-minute webinar can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEbWxRwlgVs&t=2791s>. The series aims to highlight and demonstrate the role of entrepreneurship in delivering Sustainable Farming and Food Systems.

The webinar showcased three inspiring examples of entrepreneurship. One from County Kerry involved integrating tourism into the farming enterprise (<https://knockcarrighouse.com/discover/your-hosts/>) to secure the farming family's future. The second example was developing a cheese-making enterprise to add value to the farm's high-quality dairy herd output in County Galway (<https://kylemorefarmhousecheese.com/>). The third was an agritech example in Country Limerick, where two brothers developed a sheep crate to make handling the animals more straightforward, faster and safer for man and beast (<https://www.cotteragritech.com>). Barry Caslin, Teagasc's Energy & Rural Development Specialist, outlined the wide-ranging support available to rural entrepreneurs in Ireland.



Noelle Casey described the journey that started in 2009 when she and her husband-to-be, Paudi, wanted to secure a future for themselves and their family on Paudi's small farm in one of Ireland's famous tourist destinations, Killarney. The dairy and beef operations were not enough to be economically sustainable for a family. In 2009, Noelle's experience in the

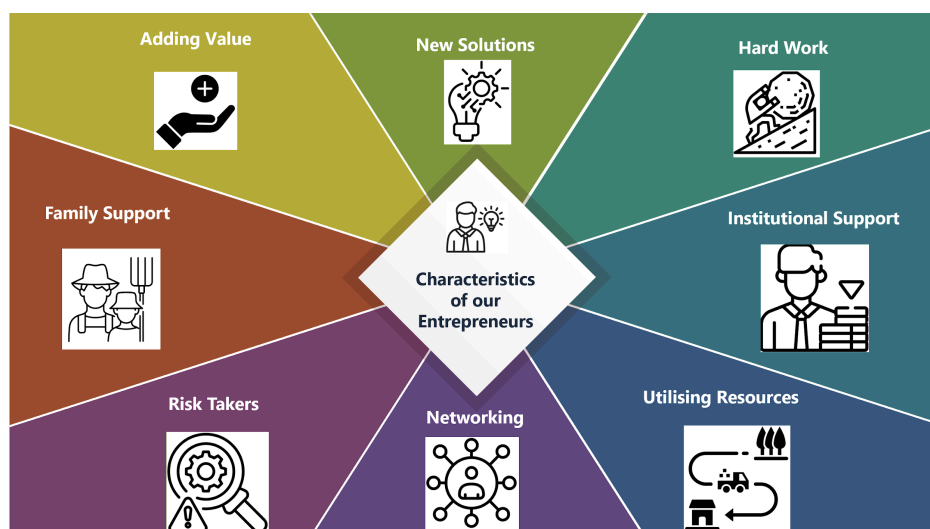
hospitality sector led them to explore and plan a future around self-catering holidays - before Airbnb became as well-known as it is today. The idea represented the optimal use of their combined resources and skills. The new enterprise evolved slowly, not without risks. Noelle had a keen market awareness of people's needs for nature in an increasingly fast-paced world: to secure shelter from the storm of life.

Teresa Roche left Ireland to work and travel abroad for 14 years before returning to the family dairy farm in County Galway. She was inspired by the enterprise diversification she saw in New Zealand, particularly those developed by Maori women. On her return home, Teresa looked for what value could be added to the top-quality milk produced on grass by her parents' pedigree cow herd. She saw a market potential for a type of Swiss cheese and went to Switzerland to learn how to make it. On her return, she began nine years of very hard work developing the now successful Kylemore Farm Cheese brand that has secured a sustainable future for the family farm and contributes to the local community.

Nick Cotter is a sheep farmer and, with his brother Jack, developed the Cotter Crate to simplify sheep farmers' lives in handling their flock. It makes routine animal handling, weighing drenching, and parasite management more manageable and safer. Nick emphasised the importance of the support they received from their parents, entrepreneurs in their own right, in starting up. He also acknowledged the financial support they received from Enterprise Ireland and the mentorship and education from the UCD Accelerator Programme. A critical part of their success was working with 20 farmers in Ireland and the UK to co-design the crate. It involved two years of hard work and over 80,000 km of travel.

Barry Caslin described a range of supports available to those with ideas for farm and new rural development enterprises. They include Incubator Programmes, the new Teagasc Bia Incubator Campus and UCD's Agtech Programme. He said that the wide range of support can confuse new start-ups and suggested that the Teagasc Option programme might be a good starting point.

Mark Gibson, Teagasc, Head of Outreach and Innovation, moderated the webinar. He highlighted some of the characteristics displayed by the three participating entrepreneurs.



All three entrepreneurs highlighted the value of the Irish support systems available. Mark asked them what additional support was required to promote more rural development entrepreneurship. Interestingly, they identified that they were part of exciting times, on good paths, and had some new innovations in the pipeline. However, there is a need for entrepreneur education programmes, better test facilities for ag-technologies, low-cost loans, and a review of planning and grants around the conversion of traditional farm buildings.