



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 – 2020:

2023 Annual Report - Summary

1. Overview

The Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme (WGRC-RDP) 2014-2020 was a 7-year investment Programme funded by the Welsh Government and the European Union ('EU') through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development ('EAFRD').

The Wales RDP was adopted on the 26 May 2015 and amended six times; the final modification was adopted by the EC in November 2023. This amendment was the final adjustment to the Programme. It solely focused on the financial aspects, to ensure the optimal/complete utilisation of the funds.

The Wales-wide Programme supported a wide range of activities designed to increase the sustainability and resilience of Wales's natural environment, land-based sector, food businesses and rural communities.

A budget of up to €977.31 million was agreed for the Wales Rural Development Programme. This was made up of approximately €651.6 million of EU money and €325.7 million from the Welsh Government domestic budget.

Most activities supported through the Programme were delivered through 'schemes' and can be broadly grouped by the following themes.

	EU Budget	Total Budget	EU Spend	Total Spend
Human and Social Capital Schemes (including Farming Connect support)	€ 142.31	€ 256.66	€ 151.19	€ 261.72
Investment Schemes (such as the Sustainable Production Grant)	€ 83.58	€ 127.78	€ 79.50	€ 128.66
Agri Environment-Climate Schemes (Glastir)	€ 356.87	€ 472.77	€ 354.71	€ 474.42
Local Development Schemes (including LEADER)	€ 46.17	€ 75.44	€ 46.54	€ 75.54
Other Activity (such as Wales Rural Network)	€ 22.66	€ 44.66	€ 23.76	€ 44.83
Total available under the Programme	€ 651.59	€ 977.31	€ 655.70	€ 985.16

Each scheme delivered within the Rural Development Programme was allocated an indicative budget. Targets were set on what was expected to be delivered over the programme lifetime. The targets were monitored throughout the year by the Welsh Government. The progress towards the targets is included in the annual implementation report sent to the European Commission (EC). This monitoring ensures that money is

being spent in line with Welsh Government and stakeholders expectations. A copy of these reports can be found [here](#).

2. Evaluation

Evaluation was a key part of the Programme to help assess the effectiveness of the Programme and to identify areas where improvements could have been made. A number of [guidance documents](#) were published to support this work.

The Strategy team commissioned a mid-term evaluation of the **Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Services Scheme, known otherwise as Farming Connect** in 2018. This involved two phases of fieldwork and the full report was published in March 2021.

A mixed methods approach was employed. A desk-based review was conducted, Interviews/workshops were held with beneficiaries, and an online survey was run to provide sectoral perspectives on the services offered. A series of intervention-specific focus groups also took place.

The evaluation experienced delays due to low response rates to the online survey. The evaluation contractor was given more time to address this. Fieldwork started in February 2023 and has now completed.

The **evaluation of the Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS)** was awarded in late 2019 and incorporated annual reporting milestones. To assess the environmental outcomes of the scheme, the evaluation used secondary data analysis at project level monitoring and evaluation activity. The evaluation also made use of the environmental data captured by the Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring and Modelling Programme (ERAMMP). The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach including longitudinal case studies of projects, surveys of actors involved in collaboration, and interviews with stakeholders.

This first phase of fieldwork provided insights into the processes of SMS. The second phase of fieldwork in 2021 involved stakeholder interviews, project interviews and case study interviews and a web survey. The first interim report was published in November 2021 which provided a process and Theory of Change evaluation of the scheme.

A second draft annual report was delivered in June 2022 which included a survey of project leads. The response rate to this survey was below the target required to be able to make robust inferences from the data. The Strategy team worked with the contractors to modify the evaluation methodology for the survey element, to increase both the response rate and the diversity of respondents (to include project partners and staff). Due to delays associated with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the evaluation contract was extended to June 2023 to assess the outcomes and impacts of projects that have been delayed.

The final phase of fieldwork commenced in November 2022 and has involved interviews with a representative sample of beneficiaries (considering funding window and geographical location) and stakeholders focused on outcomes and impacts and case studies with projects. A modified online survey which utilised a snowball approach was launched in November 2022.

The final report was delayed as the report Quality Assurance stage highlighted some issues that the contractor needed additional time to address.

The final evaluation report has now been completed and is awaiting publication. All scheme and programme evaluation reports relating to the Rural Development plan can be found on the Wales Rural Network webpage. [Evaluation; Research & Guidance | Business Wales - Business Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

The procurement of an evaluation of **the tourism schemes offered through the RDP** (Micro Small Business Fund - measure 6.4, the Tourism Amenity Investment Scheme - measure 7.5, and the Regional Tourism Engagement Fund and the Tourism Product Innovation Fund - both measure 16.3) was delayed due to Covid-19 and the impact on the tourism sector specifically. The specification was revised, and a smaller-scale evaluation was commissioned in Spring 2022 comprising a mixed method approach.

Fieldwork started in early 2023 with a sampling framework considering the scheme geographical region, funding round, the value of the grant offer, and the organisation type of the lead partner (private, public or third sector). An online survey of funded projects was conducted. Interviews were held with funded projects, users/visitors, and local and regional stakeholders. Case study visits were conducted with funded projects. A survey of unsuccessful applicants was not included due to consensus from the steering group regarding the robustness of data (e.g. accuracy of recall given the period that has passed). The final report was published in August 2023.

An evaluation of the capital investment **SPG scheme** was commissioned in 2022, it focused on assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of implementing the scheme, the outcomes, impacts achieved, and value for money.

The inception meeting was held in October 2022, and the Theory of Change report was delivered in January 2023. The evaluation adopted a mixed method approach, comprising two surveys of successful and unsuccessful applicants to the scheme respectively, in-depth interviews/focus groups with a sub-sample of successful applicants, Welsh Government and Stakeholder Interviews, an analysis of project level documentation and data including business plans. Fieldwork commenced early 2023 and is now complete.

The final report is in the Quality Assurance stage and will be published during 2024.

Farm Practice Survey has been commissioned to answer the Common Evaluation Questions defined by the European Commission that are required as part of the 2024 ex post evaluation of the WGRC-RDP. The findings will provide evidence on the activities, outcomes and impacts of the suite of Glastir schemes. The contract for the survey was

awarded in May 2023. The survey samples 600 farms that have taken part in the Glastir scheme.

An Interim report was submitted in December 2023, with a second Interim report scheduled for April 2024.

Published Evaluation Reports in 2023 include:

- Farm Business Grant
- Tourism Schemes
- Timber Business Scheme
- ENRaW Interim Report. The final evaluation report will be published in March 2024
- LEADER
- European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Interim Report. The final report will be published in early 2024.

Strategy Team research work under development

- **Ex post evaluation.** The Strategy Team are currently preparing the specification for the procurement of the programme-level ex post evaluation. This work is still ongoing. The report is due to be finalised towards the end of 2024.

All published research and evaluation reports can be found on the [Wales Rural Network website](#).

3. Programme Progress

Since late 2015 a total of €985.2 million has been paid out under the Programme, with €197.6 million paid during 2023 alone. This represents 100.8% of the Programme allocation. The EAFRD element of the Programme funding €651.6m was fully drawn down by 31 December 2023.

To ensure the EAFRD was fully optimised across the various Measures, the Programme adopted an over programming policy, with claims paid more than the Measure level allocations. Welsh Government is aware that spend will be capped at the EAFRD Measure level allocation and have made provision for this from WG domestic budgets.

The Pillar 1 transfer funding element of the Programme (€288.2m) was fully drawn down by 31 December 2023.

RDP Wales 2014-2020			
Measure	Total EAFRD Allocation €	Total EAFRD Requested €*	Total Public €*
1	€ 56,481,316	€ 56,856,108	€ 107,083,673
2	€ 8,599,596	€ 8,599,596	€ 16,225,652
4	€ 129,951,373	€ 130,083,136	€ 174,584,920
6	€ 3,369,893	€ 3,450,078	€ 6,509,581
7	€ 11,830,206	€ 11,850,448	€ 22,361,728
8	€ 26,044,398	€ 26,331,869	€ 41,586,567
10	€ 241,655,026	€ 242,318,597	€ 343,175,357
11	€ 31,888,354	€ 32,025,629	€ 37,224,581
16	€ 83,438,976	€ 85,737,079	€ 138,408,391
19	€ 34,659,715	€ 34,688,281	€ 53,175,328
20	€ 23,671,310	€ 23,759,331	€ 44,828,927
Grand Total	€ 651,590,163	€ 655,700,152	€ 985,164,705

* Figures include any adjustments to the Final Accounts

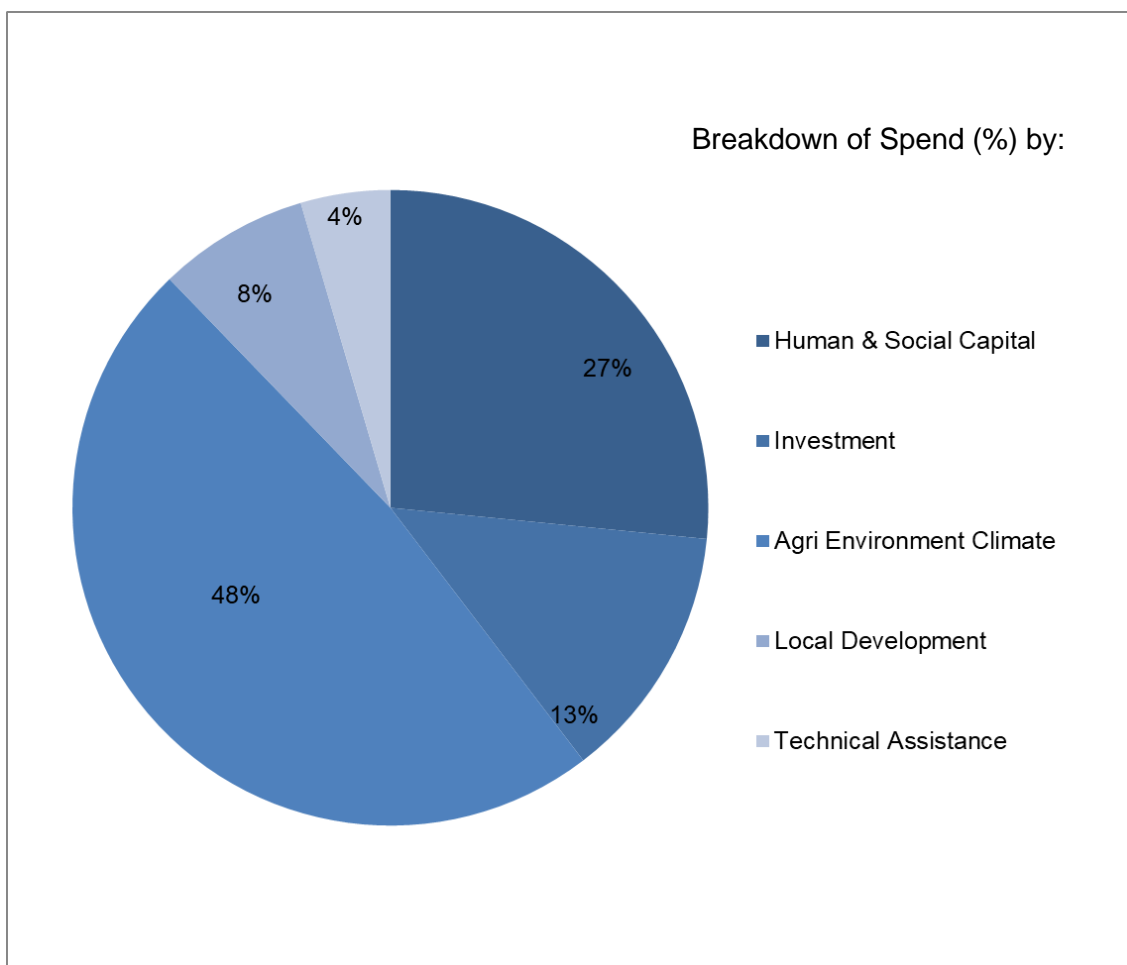
RDP Wales 2014-2020		
Priority	Total EAFRD Requested*	Total Public Requested*
Priority 2	€ 45,269,946	€ 75,728,609
Priority 3	€ 72,787,505	€ 124,811,520
Priority 4	€ 354,991,680	€ 476,560,035
Priority 5	€ 40,361,414	€ 66,750,225
Priority 6	€ 118,530,276	€ 196,485,389
TA	€ 23,759,331	€ 44,828,927
Grand Total	€ 655,700,152	€ 985,164,705

* Figures include any adjustments to the Final Accounts

The 2023 N+3 target for the Programme was met in advance of the end of the Programme.

By the end of 2023 some key achievements delivered through the Programme included:

- A total of 104,288 participants received training, across a total of 76,711 training days.
- There has been 3,062.86ha of new woodland created.
- 134,156 people have benefited from improved services, infrastructures, and IT infrastructures.
- 5,061ha supported through Glastir Woodland Management, along with 1,538.36ha of woodland restocked through the Glastir Woodland Restoration Scheme.
- 46 projects were funded through the European Innovation Partnership.



Further information on the individual schemes delivered through the Programme can be found below and by following the web-links for each scheme.

4. Human & Social Capital Schemes

Training and advice delivery contracts (Knowledge Transfer and Rural Business Advisory Scheme) were delivered through [Farming Connect](#). Farming Connect was central to supporting the delivery of other areas of the Programme. It formed the main mechanism for delivering an integrated package of knowledge transfer, advice and innovation support targeting rural communities within Wales.

Farming Connect, the Knowledge Transfer & Innovation Programme 2007-2023, (“the Programme”) concluded on 19 March 2023. The Programme provided a strong and widely recognised platform of support to help the farming industry.

The principal component of the Programme was ‘strategic knowledge transfer’ and this was the primary support mechanism for the agricultural industry in Wales. The contractors delivered training and advice on new technologies and production techniques to the Welsh farming industry. The aim being to enable them to diversify, improve business viability and access new markets for their products and services as well as supporting them to become more resilient and sustainable. Several relevant strategic documents and action plans have influenced the development and focus of the Programme. These and other emerging strategies, priorities, action plans and legislation continue to be key drivers for activity and setting the strategic direction for the new Programme, which commenced on 1 April 2023.

The Farming Connect Scheme covered a number of different interventions from vocational training to demonstration activities and information actions to management exchanges and farm visits alongside the advisory services offered.

The Agri Academy brought together individuals making their way into the agricultural industry in Wales, giving them the inspiration, confidence, skills and contacts, they needed to become future rural leaders, professional businesspeople and aspiring entrepreneurs. During the Programme, Farming Connect supported 155 participants through Agri Academy.

Through the skills programme, individuals were able to access up to 80% funding for completing short, accredited training courses on key topics. To access the training courses individuals had to complete an online Personal Development Plan - this helped identify individual as well as business needs; together with the training courses, to help them to become more efficient, skilled, and profitable. Furthermore it helped to identify a mechanism by which to strengthen or introduce new skills to the business. This support resulted in 7,934 instances of completed accredited training, covering 90 courses .

Case study:- An ambitious and focused new entrant, who was also an assistant manager at a 450-cow dairy unit near Fishguard, engaged in training courses through Farming Connect to further his commitment to his personal learning and development. “I see

working in agriculture as a career not merely a job, so extending my skillset is helping me progress quicker.”

[Click here for more information about his experience.](#)

Up until 19 March 2023, the Farming Connect Demonstration Network had supported 30 Demonstration farms and had recruited 214 Focus sites. The sites promoted innovation and new technology available for farmers and foresters and provided a practical platform to demonstrate how t new technology/technique could be implemented at farm/forestry level.

Up until 19 March 2023, 978 events had been hosted on the demonstration network with 14,088 attendees.

Click [here](#) for an example of a demonstration farm project.

Case study:- Winter wheat was sown following the peas and beans at Pantyderi, to help assess residual nitrogen fixed by the legume crop, nitrate sensors being developed as part of an Innovate UK project at the John Innes Centre, Norwich, were placed in the soil at 15cm depth along with temperature and moisture sensors. Data was collected and transmitted every two hours via a LoRaWAN gateway on the farm. An app was developed so that all parties could view the results.

At installation, sensor data results showed that soluble nitrate levels were 2 to 3 times higher than would normally be expected as a soil basal level, and there was no evidence of a subsequent drop in levels representing leaching or denitrification over winter. Advice given was to allow the soil nitrate levels to drop by around 20% before the application of any nitrogen fertiliser.

Work is continuing to refine the robustness of the sensors further for application in field conditions. It is recommended that they should be replaced in the soil every 6 months as the norm.. The application of LoRaWAN connectivity to regularly harvest and transmit such data has worked well and the process has withstood field and extreme weather conditions with no significant problems.

Another initiative under Farming Connect, Agrisgôp, was a fully funded action-learning programme, which brought together forward-thinking, like-minded individuals from farm and forestry businesses at a local level. They worked together in groups of 6-10, group members. During the process they acquired new management skills, gained confidence, accessed specialist information, explored and developed viable futures for their businesses. Based on the concept of action learning, Agrisgôp provided opportunity to progress skills and build confidence. This , assisted the development of ideas and opportunities to move businesses forward.

205 groups facilitated by local Agrisgôp leaders were established across Wales during the programme period resulting in 1,529 meetings taking place to develop and share information aiding knowledge transfer .

The scheme also encouraged management exchanges and farm visits.

It conceded, spending time visiting other businesses could be a valuable way to discover improved methods of working and demonstrate best practice in action to take new ideas to innovate individual enterprises. Groups received funding to support a study visit within the UK for up to 4 days. 48 groups have undertaken visits to a variety of destinations including Scotland, Yorkshire, and the West Midlands. Topics of interest included diversification, personal development, and goat farming.

The Farming Connect Advisory Service provided a range of subsidised, independent, confidential, and bespoke advice to farm and forestry businesses. Available on a one-to-one basis the individual advice element was up to 80% funded and group advice 100% funded up to a maximum of €1,500. .

The Advisory Service was delivered by eight “lead” companies, selected and approved by Farming Connect.

Up until 12 March 3,249 instances of 1:1 and 6,027 instances of Group advice were completed and claimed. .

The Farming Connect programme is a large programme with wide delivery platform delivering several interventions under numerous themes to all sectors of the industry. All the published Farming Connect case studies can be found on the following webpage: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/news-and-events/case-studies>

Additionally Advisory services to aid Glastir delivery were supported, along with other Knowledge Transfer and Information Scheme activities. These included grant-aided projects for sectorial and industry led, bottom-up initiatives targeting agriculture, forestry, food, other rural SMEs and land managers.

EIP Wales is the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity & Sustainability, which aims to bring a range of people and organisations together to develop innovative solutions, to benefit the wider industry in Wales and the EU. EIP was a new approach to support the development of research and innovation in agriculture and woodlands in Wales. In Wales, EIP was launched in January 2016 and applications were, invited from Groups interested in solving common problems. In August 2017, Menter a Busnes were awarded the contract to run the EIP Wales programme which involved the management and facilitation of every stage from enquiry through to awarding project contracts and execution of the successful project.

A total of 46 projects have received EIP Wales funding, meeting the contract target.

Within the 46 projects, there were 265 Group Members, comprising of 237 farmer members, 11 SME, 11 NGO's, 14 Research Institutes, and other members from the agricultural and forestry sector. 40 of the project groups accessed support of an Innovation Broker. Approved projects can be found on the [Farming Connect website](#).

Six beef and sheep farmers from across Wales trialled the use of GPS tracking collars to help manage their sheep and cattle grazing on mountains and conservation land. In both 2020 and 2021. The farmers tested the collars on three grazing environments during their primary grazing season. The ability to locate cattle and sheep across different extensive environments was of significant benefit to the participants. This project also helped demonstrate that livestock tracking can allow for improved control of ecosystem services, resulting in a better understanding of how to improve the ecosystem service offer associated with upland and fenland management. More information on this project, can be found [here](#).



European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Wales celebrated six years of funding on-farm projects with a conference to mark the culmination of the programme. The EIP Wales programme ended in March 2023 but a leading figure in Welsh agriculture, Professor Wynne Jones OBE, told the conference at Gregynog Hall that its success had highlighted the value in its 'bottom up' approach in future research, which he described as "priceless. EIP Wales celebrates the success of farmer-led research | Farming Connect (gov.wales)

An independent interim evaluation of the EIP programme was delivered between March 2021 and January 2022. It principally used theory-based evaluation techniques to review, test and refine the assumed connection (i.e. the theory/intervention logic) between activities undertaken by EIP Wales and the anticipated outcomes and impacts looking at engagement, application process, and effectiveness of project dissemination.

An independent final evaluation of the EIP programme has been commissioned to assess the implementation and impact of EIP Wales. This report is yet to be published.

The [Cooperation & Supply Chain Development](#) ('C&SCD') scheme supported collaboration and was designed to achieve transformational change, support the

development of new products, practices, processes and technologies in agriculture, forestry and food sectors. To date the C&SCD has led to 378 cooperation operations being supported. -

Supported under measure 16.4, **Cywain** offered seamless provision for growth-oriented food and drink businesses, bringing together the successes of previous Cywain projects and the Fine Food and Drink Cluster. The Cywain project began in June 2018 and came to an end in 2023.

Looking at the 2018-2023 project, Cywain supported:

- start-ups (businesses under two years of age) and small businesses that demonstrate growth potential
- account managing SMEs and offering targeted interventions
- businesses of all sizes that want to cluster together and collaborate or establish groups of special interest to address specific business issues that affect the growth of their business and the sector.

The 2018-2023 period was a significantly challenging period for SME's and continues to be in 2024, but notably the impact of Brexit, the Global Covid-19 pandemic and more recently rising costs on businesses was particularly challenging. Despite this, with Cywain's support many food and drink producers were able to flourish and develop.

Cywain clients have provided many positive testimonials for positive impact of the support received through the Cywain scheme.

Examples of projects supported under Cywain are [here](#).

Financial support offered through the [Sustainable Management Scheme](#) ('SMS') was to help start up and facilitate new collaborations through to landscape-scale ambition. It coordinated actions and input from several parties to achieve lasting benefits across our communities.

This scheme resulted in direct action on managing natural resources across Wales delivering against the approach and principles laid down in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 & the Well-being of future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The purpose of the SMS was to support collaborative landscape scale projects delivering nature-based solutions to improve the resilience of our natural resources and ecosystems in a way that also delivers benefits to farm businesses and the health and well-being of rural communities. To achieve this it required a collaborative approach with projects developing proposals with a two-three-year delivery phase. Action delivered through SMS projects enhanced biodiversity; improved green infrastructure; sustained better land and water management and importantly, facilitated climate change adaptation and mitigation at a landscape scale.

Enabling collaboration at the right scale (be that site, regional, catchment landscape or ecosystem) and the right locations was vital to tackling issues and maximising benefits.

At the end of the delivery period, June 2023, evidence demonstrated that the actions had contributed to: increased Carbon Sequestration, increased Biodiversity, improved natural flood risk management, soil health & water quality. There was also an increase in tree planting and management of existing woodlands which supported the commitments to the national forest. All the actions contributed to the wider need for Climate Change adaptation and to improve our Ecosystem Resilience through the sustainable management of our natural resources.

An example of this is the [Pennal](#) 2050 project. The project – Pennal 2050 – is an ambitious long term strategic plan to build a resilient and sustainable environment and rural community based on a landscape scale collaborative community partnership of more than 40 partner landowners, community groups, environmental organisations, farming unions and local businesses including the tourism, leisure, health, farming and recreation sectors and Natural Resources Wales.

The plan is centred on addressing several local challenges including better coastal and upland catchment flood management and alleviation; improved water/river quality; enhanced biodiversity and habitats; improved access provision; increased employment, tourism, and health opportunities; strengthen of economic and social resilience.

Working together as a community and drawing on local expertise and involving across the community the project aims to tackle the key threats in the Dyfi catchment area.

The [project](#) was recognised as the best of its kind in Wales during the End of Programme celebratory event held in 2022.

5. Investment Schemes

The **Sustainable Production Grant** ('SPG') was a capital investment fund to improve the economic and environmental performance of farms. Grants represent a maximum 40% contribution. By the end of 2023 a total of 549 applications had been approved through seven rounds.

Case study: [Gate Farm Presaddfed](#), through SPG investment converted Gate Farm from a dry stock farm to a dairy farm and included investment in a feed pad, slurry storage, milking parlour, cow tracks, water troughs and cattle handling facilities. The investment included resource saving devices. The aim was to increase farm profitability from a carbon efficient farming system.

The **Farm Business Grant** ('FBG') provided a financial contribution towards capital investment in equipment and machinery that had been pre-identified as offering clear and quantifiable benefits to farm enterprises. Farming business must have attended a Farming Connect 'Farming for the Future' event to be eligible to apply for the Scheme. 4,412 applications were received through nine rounds of FBG by the end of 2023.

The **Timber Business Investment Scheme (TBIS)** offered financial support for forest owners to enhance forestry potential. 72 projects under the TBIS umbrella were delivered during the programme's lifetime.

TBIS, [SLT Unmanaged Woods Project](#) aimed to improve economics of working steep woodlands and forests.

[Llwyndrain Woodland](#) received funding via the Timber Business Investment Scheme. The project and investment provided the necessary infrastructure to support and scale the specialist cell tree nursery to meet demand in a shorter timescale compared to organic growth.

The **Food Business Investment Scheme (FBIS)** offered financial support for capital investments in food processing equipment. FBIS supported 124 businesses with over £182m of eligible project costs, in Wales.

Fablas Ice Cream, an investment via the Food Business Investment Scheme, allowed the business to purchase plant and equipment to improve the efficiency and capacity of its manufacturing base. This resulted in its retail and wholesale capabilities to increase in line with the existing demand.

The Rural Business Investment Scheme - FOOD (RBISF), a capital investment scheme, aimed to support projects that offered clear and quantifiable benefits to the food and drink industry in Wales. The £3.2m scheme was open to existing and start up micro & small food and drink processors and manufacturers throughout Wales.

This is a capital investment scheme for food and drink processing or manufacturing activities currently not eligible under the Food Business Investment Scheme. The maximum grant for an individual investment project is 40% of the total eligible cost with a maximum of £50,000 for any individual investment project.

RBISF aims to support food and drink processors and manufacturers with capital investment support for projects which offer clear and quantifiable benefits to the food and drink industry in Wales.

A further window of this scheme was opened in 2021, as part of the Covid 19 recovery suite of schemes.

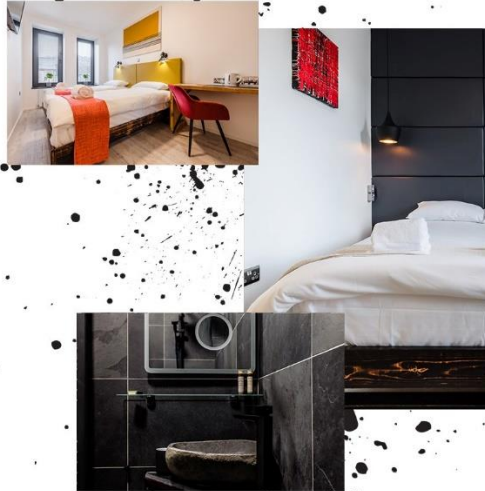
During the programme period, a total of 35 businesses were supported via this scheme.

Micro Small Business Fund (MSBF) - an investment fund targeting eligible capital investment projects in the tourism sector in Wales. Regrettably for reasons related to the Covid pandemic, it has not been possible to complete the scheme as expected. The scheme was suspended as a result and a decision was taken in February 2021 not to pursue any new cases. The Micro Small Business Fund (MSBF) was available for micro to small size businesses with fewer than 50 FTE employees and 51 projects were approved totaling just under £4.8m.

VW Hotel Bistro Ltd t/a Cardiff Arms Hotel Bistro - The project received money from the Micro Small Business Fund to convert a derelict large building (known as the Cardiff Arms) on the corner of the high street, Bute Street, and Cemetery Road in the centre of Treorchy into a 4 Star boutique style Inn.

The project related to the delivery of the second phase of their business plan, with the creation of 16 bedrooms with a mix of double and family rooms and family apartments. In total there were 12 standard double bedrooms for 24 guests, 2 family rooms for up to 8 guests and 1 family apartment with 2 bedrooms which could cater for another 12 guests providing overall accommodation of 44 bed spaces.

This project total was £353k and resulted in creating 15 FTE jobs, £210k private sector leverage.



Rural Business Investment Scheme (NonAgri)

This was a new investment scheme to aid Covid-19 economic recovery, the RBIS (Non-Agri) covered capital investments costs and supports projects in Wales that contributed to one or more of the following:

- a) the diversification of the rural economy,
- b) the development of the supply chain for natural products,
- c) increasing the productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness of rural businesses.

Up to £50,000 grant was available to existing and start up non-agricultural enterprises.

Throughout the programme lifetime, there have been two open application windows for this scheme. Thirteen projects were supported and completed under two funding windows.

Nomadic Washrooms were successful in their application for Rural Business Investment Scheme Funding. The project enabled the business to grow by expanding the fleet of bespoke, luxury shepherds hut toilet and shower trailers for hire to clients organising weddings and events across Wales and the rest of the UK. Investing in five new Shepherds Hut toilet/shower trailers has allowed the business to expand and meet the continued demand for these bespoke facilities.

6. Agri Environment Schemes

GLASTIR was a family of related schemes in Wales that supported sustainable land management. Glastir is designed to deliver outcomes at a farm, forest, and landscape level in a cost-effective way. It paid for the delivery of specific environmental goods and services aimed at combating climate change, improving water management, maintaining, and enhancing biodiversity.

Glastir is administered by the Welsh Government with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) supporting the delivery of some elements of the scheme.

The scheme included all Glastir Advanced contracts, relevant Glastir Entry elements, all Glastir Commons agreements and all current Glastir Organics contracts were extended to 31 December 2023, to aid the transition between current schemes and the new land management schemes post Brexit.

The **Glastir Advanced** Scheme delivered targeted financial support to farmers and land managers to deliver the agreed objectives, to deliver environmental improvements for a range of objectives including habitats, species, soil, and water.

Glastir Advanced contract holders who's initial 5-year contract ended on 31 December 2022 were offered a renewal, whilst those whose contract has previously been renewed were offered an extension until 31 December 2023. Rural Payments Wales (RPW) issued 2069 contract offers worth €25.3m, of which, 2048 accepted worth €25.3m (£24.7m).

Under the **Glastir Small Grants Scheme** land managers and farming businesses could benefit from maximum funding of up to £7,500 for capital works under three themes: Carbon, Water and Landscape & Pollinators.

The **Glastir Organic Scheme** supported farmers to convert to organic production or maintain organic farming practices. There were three windows to apply for this Scheme under the 2014-2020 Programme. Although this Scheme was closed and no further windows were planned during this Programme, annual extensions to 31 December 2023 were offered to existing contract holders.

The Welsh Government offered 469 contract extensions worth €3.80m to eligible Glastir Organic beneficiaries to 31 December 2023. 456 beneficiaries accepted an extension offer worth €3.68m.

Glastir Commons was made available to applicants who held rights on common land and who had joined together to establish a Grazing Association. It was also available on unenclosed land used by multiple graziers concurrently which had the characteristics of common land (e.g. unenclosed upland, rough grazing etc.). Glastir Commons Contract

holders committed to options either based on managing stocking levels or the selection of a closed winter period.

There were 180 **Glastir Commons** contract holders whose existing contract ended on 31 December 2022 were offered an extension until 31 December 2023. 177 contracts covering 114,798.35ha of land accepted an extension. All eligible contracts were offered an extension to December 2023. 178 accepted the offer. The extended contracts were worth €6.1m.

Glastir Woodland Creation ('GWC') supported land managers who wished to create new woodland and/or manage existing woodlands. GWC paid contract holders a €941.18 (£800.00) contribution towards Registered Glastir Woodland Planner's fees to develop a verified woodland creation plan.

The **Glastir Woodland Restoration (GWR)** scheme under Measure 8.4 (support for restoration of damage to forests from forest fires and natural disasters and catastrophic events) supported the re-stocking of larch woodlands that had been infected or threatened by the fungal pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*.

The **Forest Monitoring & Risk Management Scheme** was delivered by Natural Resources Wales supporting monitoring, mitigation, and prevention of harmful results from current tree and woodland environment pest or disease outbreaks.

7. Local Development Schemes

LEADER was a form of Community-Led Local Development ('CLLD') which had a focus on innovation. Across Wales 18 Local Action Groups ('LAGs') covering eligible rural wards in 21 Local Authority areas were in action. Each Local Action Group developed a Local Development Strategy ('LDS') that set out the opportunities and challenges in their area and explained what actions they intended to take to exploit opportunities and meet some of the challenges.

Throughout the lifetime of the programme, the LEADER projects achieved the following:

- 75 supported LEADER projects that led to a further 54 co-operation projects (47 inter-territorial and 7 trans-national);
- 56 jobs through supported projects;
- 102 jobs safeguarded;
- 14,670 stakeholders engaged;
- 92,967 participants supported;
- 312 feasibility studies;
- 282 networks established;
- 69 community hubs;
- 3,460 information dissemination / promotional and/or marketing actions

Delivering under the LEADER Implementation measure (19.2), the [Achieving better biodiversity compensation with added benefits for all](#) aimed to develop a new innovative approach to aid economic development in Neath Port Talbot and to help halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity in Wales.

Local developers, local landowners, local communities were involved and it was the intention to promote the approach, if successful as best practice regionally so the wider community may benefit.

The final report set out several recommendations on how the new approach to biodiversity compensation to offset losses to development could be delivered in Neath Port Talbot (NPT). These include financial and legal mechanisms, methods for delivery and full details of suggested proposals for several pilot sites.

The final report recommendations have been utilised and built upon in the preparation of a biodiversity compensation scheme. Details have been included in the emerging NPT biodiversity and geodiversity supplementary planning guidance. Information on Wales Local Action Groups and for copies of the supporting Local Development Strategies for the areas are available on the Wales Rural Network ('WRN')

[pages](#). You can also find examples of LEADER projects through the [interactive map](#) on the WRN webpage along with contact details for each of the Local Action Groups in Wales. **Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF)** offered financial support for LEADER local action groups and other community organisations.

[Connected Anglesey](#) is funded under Sub measure 7.3 of the Rural Community Development Fund, support for broadband infrastructure, including its creation, improvement and expansion, passive broadband infrastructure, and provision of access to broadband and public e-government. The project(s) worked with clusters of households and the private sector to find creative and practical ways to bring superfast / ultrafast broadband to residents and businesses.

8. Wales Rural Network

The Wales Rural Network ('WRN') provided networking and engagement of stakeholders, to share information, best practice and experience across Wales, UK, and Europe. The Network made a significant contribution to the Programme by adding value to the funding available, and publicising activity funded through the Programme.

The WRNSU's role has continued to evolve during 2023, particularly with the continued expansion of the website which now includes details of 1,729 projects and over 140 case studies. [News and events | Business Wales - Business Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

Throughout the programme period the WRNSU role evolved, a greater emphasis on promoting learning from best practice through digital improvements, strengthening and developing local supply chains and building capacity in communities through the stakeholder engagement activities and the promotion of the RDP funded projects to increase resilience and meet the climate change emergency, Further information on our work can be found on the WRN web pages;

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/>

To ensure we were as inclusive as possible we increased our knowledge platform profiles to all members of society social media with a presence on both Facebook and Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/WalesRuralNet> and <https://www.facebook.com/walesruralnet>

More information on the work of the Wales Rural Network can be found at:

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/>



9. Further Information

More information on the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme (WGRC-RDP) 2014-2020 can be found at:

[Rural grants and payments | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](#)