

ReFarm Launches: A New Model for Sustainable and Scalable Farming for Nature in Ireland

October 22, 2024



Today marks the official launch of ReFarm, a groundbreaking initiative aimed at making farming for nature a sustainable and scalable practice in Ireland. Launched by Pippa Hackett, Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity, ReFarm offers businesses a unique opportunity to support nature-positive actions on Irish farms, while complying with new EU sustainability reporting directives.

Spearheaded by Dr. Brendan Dunford, founder of Burrenbeo Trust, and Anke Heydenreich, an impact investor, ReFarm is a collaborative effort between Trinity College Dublin, Burrenbeo Trust, and local and international organizations. The project has already begun funding the creation of wildlife ponds on Irish farms, a practice that will continue throughout its five-year lifespan to address biodiversity and climate challenges.

Trinity College Dublin will spearhead a research program exploring long-term funding structures for businesses looking to invest in nature-positive actions on Irish farms. ReFarm has successfully secured over €1 million in seed funding from a diverse group, including RWE Ireland, John Paul Construction, CIE Tours, BiOrbic, Community Foundation Ireland, and Trinity Business School.

Welcoming the ReFarm project **Pippa Hackett, Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity**, said: 'Two thirds of the landmass of Ireland is farmland, so it's only by working with farmers that we will achieve positive outcomes for biodiversity at scale. ReFarm is a hugely exciting project, not only in that it leverages private finance to complement public subsidies – which is going to be critical in the coming

years in tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies – but also because it is underpinned by the expertise of Burrenbeo Trust and Trinity College Dublin.’

Brendan Dunford and Anke Heydenreich commented, ‘If we are to reverse the emergency and improve biodiversity then farmers are key. Not only do they account for 70% of Irish land-use, they also have an inherited passion and knowledge of nature. In many cases they have grown up side-by-side with plants and animals, and are now watching as many of them disappear. We believe Project ReFarm has the potential to be a game-changer in terms of connecting private capital with farmers to invest in nature.’

Prof Jane Stout, Professor of Botany and VP For Biodiversity & Climate Action, and Prof Martha O’Hagan, of the School of Business, Trinity College Dublin, added: ‘70% of land in Ireland is owned by farmers. Engaging with farmers to restore biodiversity on their farms has the greatest potential for positive change. At the same time businesses want to invest in nature. ReFarm brings together the farming community and private sector investors to provide critical funding for farmers to restore nature on their land, and a mechanism to scale this up.’

Peter Lefroy, Offshore Development Head for Ireland and UK West, commented ‘RWE Renewables Ireland is proud to be an industry partner in ReFarm. RWE is committed to become climate neutral by 2040 with research and innovation central to this goal. Our collaboration will further refine our pledge to promote collective learning and knowledge transfer for the betterment of our portfolio and industry. Building on our contribution to reduce Ireland’s dependency on fossil fuels, RWE is excited to contribute, in a meaningful way, to both world-leading research and measurable actions to maximise the resilience of Ireland’s ecosystems’.

Liam Kenny, Managing Director, John Paul Construction, added “John Paul Construction is delighted to be supporting ReFarm in this exciting sustainability initiative that will improve biodiversity and support local farmers to ‘Farm for Nature’ across the country in a positive and scalable manner. This approach aligns with our own core values of Respect, Excellence and Teamwork.”

Stephen Cotter, CEO, CIE Tours commented, “CIE Tours proudly supports ReFarm, an important initiative focused on researching and developing ways to preserve Ireland’s beautiful rural landscapes for future visitors.”

Denise Charlton, CEO, Community Foundation Ireland added: ““ReFarm marks a unique coming together of biodiversity expertise through researchers and farmers to provide a much-needed lifeline to our nature and wildlife. Community Foundation Ireland recognises the vital importance of this partnership approach and is proud to offer strategic support. Timing is important as the crisis is urgent. At the Foundation we look forward to the work ahead and using our connectivity to a network of hundreds of communities already taking biodiversity action to further increase awareness and to knowledge share.”