

'Top Ten' Programme provides £500m for Rural Economy

Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Michelle Gildernew MP MLA, announced European Commission approval of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme (RDP) back in July.



The new programme is worth over £500 million and is comprised of fourteen separate measures aimed at improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, improving the environment and the countryside and contributing towards the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the

rural economy.

The Minister said "I am delighted to announce this significant investment in our rural areas. In particular I am very pleased that our programme is not just the first programme across these islands to be approved, but is in the top ten of all programmes to be approved so far by the European Commission."

The Minister went on to thank the European Commission for its work in making approval a priority, adding "Today's announcement represents

recognition by Europe of how important rural communities are to the fabric of this region." She added "My priority now is to see this funding is made available to rural areas as soon as possible. One such example is a second 2007 Less Favoured Area (LFA) payment to farmers in disadvantaged areas, where I know funds are badly needed. I am pleased to confirm that a balance will be paid. It will be a priority for me to make sure we get this money out as soon as is practically possible."

The new programme will be delivered by DARD and a range of external delivery bodies.

The Axis 3 of the New programme contains the following Quality of Life measures and NIRWN will keep you up to date on when the Programme is open for funding applications:

- ◆ Diversification into non-agricultural activities
- ◆ Business creation and development
- ◆ Encouragement of tourism activities
- ◆ Basic services for the economy and rural population
- ◆ Village renewal and development
- ◆ Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage
- ◆ The Axis 1 measure is Farm Family Options.

Budget and Programme for Government 2007/2010

The Budget and Programme for Government for 2007-2010 has been announced by OFMDFM and is now available for comment. The deadline for responding to the Consultation is 4th January 2008. NIRWN will be making a response but due to the tight deadline there will be no time to organise a consultation session. In the Programme for Government women as a group are not mentioned, although it does contain a commitment to the Gender Equality Strategy. The priorities are older people, ethnic minority groups, those with disabilities and children and young people. NIRWN would urge everyone to let OFMDFM know what they believe are the key issues for women that should be included in the Programme and resourced in the budget by emailing pfgbudget@nics.gov.uk

Women in Rural Communities - The Rural Development Programme 07-13 will provide opportunities for women in agriculture and rural development and NIRWN will be working with groups to ensure assistance and information about available funding and training is circulated. We will also be consulting with groups on a range of rural community issues over the next few months.

Community Planning and the rural community development policy will be large areas of work in the new year, and again the voices of rural women are integral to creating an effective policy that changes the things we need changed - the agenda must be set at community-level and so consultation around this will be commencing soon.



NIRWN Staff and Directors would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year

Other News

The Rural Women's Manifesto: NIRWN has been working with a number of agencies and individuals to draw up a Rural Women's Manifesto. The purpose of the Manifesto is to help decision makers be aware of what is important to rural women thus helping them consult more effectively with them. We are looking forward to launching the Manifesto in the New Year and would like to thank all those who were involved in its formulation. Date and details to follow.

Rural Women's Positioning Paper: We are also working on a positioning paper which we hope will help the rural women's sector become a sustainable and long term resource to rural women. Again a lot of people have been involved in helping us to draw up the document and we will be launching this also in the New Year. In the meantime if you have any comments you might like to make then please do not hesitate to get in touch.



NIRWN Website: Thanks to the Women's Centres Regional Partnership, NIRWN, as one of the lead partners have been resourced to develop a new website. Given today's reliance on the web for information we are delighted at this development. The site is currently under construction and we hope to be live shortly. The address is www.nirwn.org.uk so you can check on our status. If you have anything you would like to include on the website we would be delighted to facilitate this or you can link with us by calling Paula on 02886769191 who will ensure this happens. We are very excited about this development as we feel it offers a great opportunity for rural women to link with one another across Northern Ireland.

Ministerial Interest in Rural Women - The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle Gildernew, has to date been very interested in and supportive of rural women and the particular barriers they face in their lives. For this interest we would like to thank the Minister. She is dedicating resources to two main areas in relation to women—childcare and domestic violence. NIRWN are working with the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Forum set up by the Minister to create a Rural Childcare Strategy which will hopefully be completed by March '08. Work or intentions around Domestic Violence have not yet been made clear, but we assume this will be upcoming work for the next political year.

Rural Women in Decision-Making - This area concentrates not only on women and political decision-making but also on the importance of rural women being involved in all aspects of community life. We are currently:

- ◆ running a second 'Get on Board' course in Ballyclare to help women get onto decision-making boards
- ◆ monitoring the representation of women on government appointed bodies
- ◆ encouraging and building awareness around the need to gender balance all public bodies
- ◆ lobbying for continued and extended resources for women's training in leadership
- ◆ highlighting ways that women would like to influence and effect change within their communities

Furthermore we are currently working in partnership with other women's agencies to influence the formulation of a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights protecting and promoting women in society to international standards set by 1325 and CEDAW, international conventions which the UK government has signed up to but still fails to provide legislation to protect the rights of women.

We are currently working alongside the PSNI in a Womens Advisory Panel and we will be looking for PSNI crime statistics to be disaggregated by gender to provide figures in respect of violence against women.



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