

# **An investigation into farmers' engagement with a European Innovation Partnership – A case study of the Farming Rathcroghan Project European Innovation Partnership in Co. Roscommon**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rathcroghan is an archaeological landscape of major significance located in County Roscommon. However, Rathcroghan and its surrounding communities are experiencing socio- economic decline. In 2019, The Farming Rathcroghan Project European Innovation Partnership (EIP) was awarded funding to be implemented as part of the EU Rural Development Programme.

The objective of this research study was to gain a greater understanding of the farmer participants of this EIP regarding their characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, influences and needs. The design and delivery of effective knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange techniques along with improved farmer engagement will be improved by acquiring a greater understanding of participants, thereby, helping the EIP achieve its objectives. A case study design and mixed methods approach were used for data collection from 39 Rathcroghan farmers, which comprised of a questionnaire and an informal interview.

The study determined that farming in Rathcroghan is strongly associated with pride, an emotional attachment and family tradition. Nonetheless, it is also linked with restriction and frustration with bureaucracy. It was established that there is a strong desire among participants to get involved and engage with the EIP. The interactive, bottom-up, multi-actor nature of the EIP appeals to the participants in a positive way. It has generated a sense of confidence among participants that their voices will be heard and that further opportunities will be created. However, negative apprehensive attitudes exist mainly deriving from past experiences with agri-environmental schemes and regulatory governing bodies.

Participants outlined that the fundamental objective for the EIP's Operational Group should be to develop a strategy that will utilise existing assets and create a sustainable and viable livelihood option for current farmers, but especially for the next generation in the area. Recommendations and considerations to help the Operational Group and agricultural extension services to make optimal decisions were concluded from research findings.