



# Branching Out

A Guide to Farm Diversification in Ireland

Practical Insights and Inspirations  
for Farm Diversification

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## Foreword

Dear Farmers and Family Members,

Welcome to this comprehensive guide on farm diversification. In an ever-evolving agricultural landscape, the need for diversification has become increasingly apparent. As farmers and family members, you understand the challenges and opportunities that come with managing agricultural enterprises.

This booklet serves as a vital resource, providing essential support and guidance to those embarking on the journey of diversification. Whether you're considering branching out into new ventures, exploring alternative revenue streams, or adapting to changing market dynamics, this guide is tailored to meet your needs.

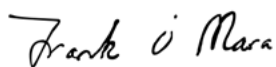
Farm diversification is not just about income improvement, it's about securing a sustainable future for your farm and family. By diversifying your operations, you not only mitigate risks but also unlock new avenues for growth and prosperity. From agri-tourism to specialty crops, from renewable energy to value-added products, the possibilities are vast and varied.

However, navigating the complexities of diversification can be daunting. That's where this booklet comes in. Whether you're seeking advice on legal considerations, tax planning, financial management, or marketing strategies, you'll find valuable information within these pages.

Furthermore, we recognise that farm diversification isn't just a business endeavour, it's a deeply personal journey that impacts families and communities. That's why this booklet isn't just for farmers—it's for all family members who play a vital role in the success of agricultural enterprises. Whether you are a spouse, child, or sibling, your support and involvement are integral to the diversification process.

In essence, this booklet is more than just a guide—it's a roadmap to resilience and prosperity. Diversification builds on the resilience of farmers and their families, who have always embraced innovation and adaptation in the face of challenges.

So, as you embark on your diversification journey, remember that you're not alone. You have a wealth of resources and support at your disposal, including the insights contained within this booklet. Together, let's embrace the opportunities that diversification brings and build a brighter future for agriculture and rural communities.



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**Prof Frank O'Mara**  
Director Teagasc

## Contents

Introduction to Farm Diversification in Ireland .....	5
Diversification .....	7
What is farm diversification? .....	7
Critical Factors in Farm Enterprise Diversification.....	8
Planning Permission.....	9
Staff and Training .....	10
Tax Considerations .....	10
Regulatory requirements with Food.....	10
Marketing and Branding .....	10
Financial Planning .....	11
Liability and Insurance: .....	11
Emerging Trends in Agricultural Diversifications.....	13
Mainstream Diversification Options:.....	14
Organic Farming .....	14
Forestry .....	15
Agri-tourism .....	16
Farm Stays or B&Bs: .....	16
Camping or Glamping Sites: .....	16
Shepherd Huts.....	16
Developing a Dog Training / Field Area.....	20
Farm and Forest School Programmes .....	22
Farmers' Markets .....	23
Foraging.....	24
Flower Cultivation.....	25
Equine Livery .....	26
Maize Experience.....	27
Meat Boxes.....	28
Providing Office Space.....	30
Pet Boarding.....	31
Pick Your Own (PYO) .....	32
Raising Rare Breeds .....	33

Renewable Energy .....	34
Rural Skills .....	35
Snail Farming .....	36
Soft Play Areas .....	37
Social Farming .....	38
Speciality Crops .....	39
Storage .....	40
Vending Machines – (Direct selling of milk) .....	41
Viticulture .....	42
Wedding Venue .....	43
How much do diversified businesses earn from diversified enterprises? .....	45
What is a relatable diversification .....	46
Tax Planning .....	46
How to get started with farm tourism .....	47
Self help finance guide for farmers considering diversification .....	48
Farm diversification: making a success of it .....	50
Supports for Farm Diversification .....	51

# Introduction to Farm Diversification in Ireland

The agricultural landscape in Ireland is facing significant challenges, including low income and profitability for many farm enterprises. To address these issues, diversification has emerged as a vital strategy. 'Branching Out' is designed to serve as an essential resource for farmers considering diversification options to enhance their farm's economic viability and sustainability.

## Teagasc Commitment to Rural Development and Farm Diversification

Teagasc, through its Rural Economy Development Programme (REDP), is at the forefront of supporting and promoting farm diversification in Ireland. The Teagasc Statement of Strategy outlines the organisation's commitment to sustainability, innovation, and economic development within the agricultural sector.

The Teagasc strategy recognises the low income and profitability challenges facing many farm enterprises. To combat these issues, Teagasc has outlined strategies to assist producers in improving their returns. One such strategy is exploring and supporting diversification options through advisory services. These services aim to identify suitable diversification opportunities for farmers, helping them to enhance their income streams and build more resilient farm businesses.

Diversification not only helps in improving farm income but also encourages entrepreneurship in rural areas. Teagasc support for farm diversification is aligned with its broader mission to foster innovation and sustainability in the agricultural sector. By encouraging farmers to diversify, Teagasc helps rural entrepreneurs to stimulate rural economies, create new business opportunities, and ensure the long-term viability of Irish farms.

Explore our comprehensive Rural Development information series on farm and off-farm diversification, as well as available support for farmers. Visit [www.teagasc.ie/RuralDev](http://www.teagasc.ie/RuralDev) for more details.

## **Branching Out**

A Guide to Farm Diversification in Ireland

## Diversification

Farming can be one of the most highly pressurised and demanding sectors to work in. However, one thing farmers have continued to demonstrate for centuries is their resilience and desire to keep the nation fed while coming up with novel and ground breaking ways to support their families.

Many farming businesses in Ireland have now diversified in some way, with more and more farmers looking at alternative incomes streams in a bid to bolster their enterprises for the future. Finding ways to generate new revenue streams for a business may seem like a complicated and overwhelming prospect for some farmers.

Yet, farm diversification has proved to be an important asset for many businesses in the agricultural sector over the years and the trend shows no sign of halting any time soon. Often, it takes just one key moment for a farmer to generate an idea, which can lead to life-changing opportunities, which not only benefit themselves, but their communities as well.

A farm diversification can also create jobs and boost the economy, both locally and nationally. For a farm business, aside from the additional income a new venture can bring, it can also increase job satisfaction, as well as the community spirit of working together to reach an end goal for customers and, in turn, spark repeat orders or visits.

This guide will look into the diversification trends farmers and landowners can take advantage of now and in the future and the financing options available to bring them to fruition. From how to capitalise on the staycation boom in your area, to putting on a music festival or setting up a campsite on your land, we look at what you need to consider and how to make your plans a reality.

## What is farm diversification?

Farm diversification is an initiative taken to expand a farm business with a new revenue stream. It can be as simple as offering bed and breakfast facilities to opening a farm shop. The end goal of any farm diversification is to bring in additional revenue to the farm business and is why farmers are increasingly demonstrating entrepreneurial flair to branch out their businesses.

While there is a risk to diversification, the long-term benefits could help to sustain a farm for generations to come. Farm diversification refers to the strategy employed by farmers to expand their agricultural operations beyond traditional activities like crop cultivation or livestock rearing. It involves venturing into additional non-traditional or alternative enterprises to generate supplementary income or add value to the existing farm business. Farm diversification aims to reduce dependency on a single source of income while maximising the utilisation of available resources and assets.

This strategy can take various forms, including:

1. **Agri-Tourism:** Opening the farm to visitors for activities such as farm tours, educational workshops, farm stays, recreational activities, or agritourism experiences.
2. **Value-Added Products:** Processing farm produce into value-added goods like jams, cheeses, wines, artisanal products, or organic skincare items, adding value before selling them.
3. **Renewable Energy:** Installing renewable energy sources like solar panels, wind turbines, or biomass production on the farm to generate additional income through energy sales or cost savings.
4. **Alternative Enterprises:** Diversifying into non-traditional enterprises such as beekeeping, aquaculture, agroforestry, or niche crop cultivation to supply new markets.
5. **Direct Sales and Marketing:** Selling products directly to consumers through farm shops, farmers' markets, online platforms, or community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives.

6. **Leisure and Recreation:** Offering leisure services like holiday accommodation, event hosting, or recreational facilities to generate income from non-agricultural activities.
7. **Collaborative Initiatives:** Participating in cooperative ventures, joint marketing initiatives, or community engagement projects with other farmers or local communities.

Farm diversification aims to enhance the economic sustainability of farms by creating additional revenue streams, reducing risks associated with fluctuations in traditional markets, and responding to changing consumer demands. It often requires careful planning, market research, investment, and adaptation to new challenges but can significantly contribute to the resilience and long-term viability of farming operations.

## Critical Factors in Farm Enterprise Diversification

Farm families should first sit down together to conduct a thorough audit of their resources. This includes identifying the skills that each family member possesses, evaluating the potential of existing equipment, buildings, and infrastructure, and considering the suitability of their location for diversification. Additionally, it is beneficial to observe what diversification activities other families in the area are successfully undertaking.

Farmers' venturing into entrepreneurship display considerable diversity, all exploring ways to expand their business beyond conventional farming practices. It comprises a range of farms, from some of the largest in the country to smaller ones with less than a hectare of land. These individuals have been exploring various forms of diversification, from typical options like glamping to more innovative ventures such as on-farm restaurants and vending machines. However, farmers should carefully consider the type of enterprise they choose. It is crucial to be committed for the long haul. A successful diversification will require a daily devotion to your chosen pursuit, year after year.

### Key Considerations:

1. Begin by focusing on your passions – that's your starting point
2. Examine the motive behind diversifying. Is it purely for financial reasons? Evaluate whether it's the most effective use of your time and resources.
3. Assess the selected enterprise. Consider its compatibility with the location, your skills, and the competitive landscape, avoiding fixation on a single idea.
4. Consider alignment with your farming operation. Explore the possibility of commencing at a modest scale before expanding.
5. Gain insight into your potential clientele and their regional preferences. Tailor your approach, potentially leveraging social media instead of conventional methods
6. Comprehend the goals of each family member. Consider and respect diverse viewpoints and schedule regular family gatherings to deliberate on this matter.
7. Contemplate establishing a target date to conclude your decision-making process regarding diversification. Streamline choices and engage in targeted and focused research.

### Frequent Pitfalls:

1. Assuming certain jobs are someone else's duty. Assume control and engage fully in the project.
2. Not securing backing from pivotal stakeholders. Their endorsement, including builders, relatives, and regulatory figures, can profoundly influence your project's trajectory.
3. Not doing comprehensive research. Venturing into new markets demands a profound understanding; dedicate time to grasp the intricacies of the industry.
4. Not allocating a sufficient focus to budgeting. Refrain from initiating a project with an overly large-scale and subsequently altering the project size repeatedly.
5. Not ensuring that the core farming operations receive due attention during expansion. Conduct routine meetings to uphold a balanced distribution of resources.

# Considerations When Planning a Farm Diversification

Venturing into diversification requires distinct skills and resources, often differing from those of the core farming business. Effective diversification should complement the existing farm by enhancing cash-flow, increasing profits, and minimising volatility. However, ventures beyond core farming can demand substantial time and financial resources, potentially affecting the farm business. Hence, it is crucial to meticulously evaluate every aspect of a project before committing, and seek advice.

## Planning Permission

Understanding the planning options is fundamental. A diversification project utilising existing farm buildings will likely necessitate full planning permission for a change of use. Assess whether existing farm buildings can be utilised or if new construction is necessary. Careful attention is required to avoid crucial restrictions that might require a complete application and risk rejection. Development cannot commence until the local planning authority provides written determination on prior approval requirements. Importantly, any physical alterations to a building's appearance will mandate full planning permission. If the project does not fall under permitted development, ensuring the site's suitability for the proposed development is crucial. Moreover, assessing designations such as environmental habitat zones, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's), areas with archaeological features (Sites and Monuments registrar), Special Protected Areas (SPA's) and areas of outstanding natural beauty is vital to prevent setbacks before project initiation. Traffic generated by the development is a significant consideration in obtaining permission, sometimes requiring a traffic survey.

## Legal Considerations

Choosing an appropriate business **legal structure** for the new enterprise is critical. For instance, if the diversification project extends beyond farming

activities, deciding on its entity—be it a sole trader, partnership, or limited company—and its integration with the farming business to allocate land and buildings for its use is essential. Forming a limited company in certain food processing ventures can shield the original farming business from potential financial health risks and provide tax-efficient employee incentives through share options. Additionally, whether formal or informal, a partnership agreement, specifying roles and the business's potential termination, is crucial.

Seeking legal advice is crucial to ensure compliance with regulations, protect against potential liabilities, and facilitate a smooth project implementation. Here are legal considerations and advice for such initiatives:

Create **legally binding contracts** and agreements for various purposes. These include lease agreements for land use, contracts with suppliers or vendors, partnership agreements if collaborating with others, and employment contracts for staff.

Understand and adhere to various **legal and regulatory requirements**. This might involve health and safety standards, environmental regulations, building codes, food safety regulations (if applicable), and any industry-specific licensing or permits.

Review **title deeds** to land or property and ensure that there are no restrictive covenants or legal restrictions that could hinder the diversification project. Get consent from lenders or other relevant parties if required.

Protect any unique branding, product names, or innovations associated with the diversification project through trademarks, copyrights, or patents if applicable.

In case of conflicts or disputes, establish mechanisms for **dispute resolution** or seek legal advice on how to handle potential disputes.

It is crucial to involve skilled legal experts or solicitors well versed in agricultural and business law to effectively navigate these legal aspects and ensure adherence to all legal obligations. Given that each diversification project may entail distinct legal considerations, seeking personalised legal counsel is vital for achieving success.

## Staff and Training

Employing staff for the new enterprise requires compliance with National Minimum Wage<sup>1</sup> (NMW) requirements and fulfilment of employer responsibilities for workplace pensions<sup>2</sup>. Classifying workers correctly—seasonal, workers, or employees—holds significance as it determines their rights<sup>3</sup>. Providing written terms of employment within one month of an employee's start date, as per legal requirement<sup>4</sup>, and consulting while altering contractual terms are obligatory.

## Tax Considerations

Understanding the implications on tax reliefs like Agricultural Relief<sup>5</sup> and Business Relief<sup>6</sup> is vital, as diversification might affect these reliefs. Expert advice can ensure projects like solar or wind farms do not compromise tax relief eligibility. Properly structured projects can lead to tax refunds in the first year of the venture. Detailed business plans should be presented to accountants and other stakeholders to assess tax implications and secure financing.

Consult with tax professionals to understand tax implications related to the diversification project. This includes income tax<sup>7</sup>, property tax, Pay Related Social Insurance PRSI<sup>8</sup>, Value Added Tax VAT<sup>9</sup>, Universal Social Charge USC<sup>10</sup>, Capital Gains Tax CGT<sup>11</sup> and any tax reliefs or incentives available.

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- 1 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment-rights-and-conditions/pay-and-employment/case-study-minimum-wage/>
  - 2 <https://pensionsauthority.ie/employers/>
  - 3 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment-rights-and-conditions/>
  - 4 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment-rights-and-conditions/contracts-of-employment/contract-of-employment/>
  - 5 <https://www.revenue.ie/en/gains-gifts-and-inheritance/cat-reliefs/agricultural-relief/what-are-the-conditions-for-agricultural-relief.aspx>
  - 6 <https://www.revenue.ie/en/gains-gifts-and-inheritance/cat-reliefs/business-relief/index.aspx>
  - 7 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money-and-tax/tax/income-tax/how-your-tax-is-calculated/>
  - 8 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social-welfare/irish-social-welfare-system/social-insurance-prsi/>
  - 9 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money-and-tax/tax/duties-and-vat/value-added-tax/>
  - 10 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money-and-tax/tax/income-tax/universal-social-charge/>
  - 11 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money-and-tax/tax/capital-taxes/capital-gains-tax/%23:-:text=The%20standard%20rate%20of%20Capital%20the%20chargeable%20gain%20you%20make>

## Regulatory requirements with Food

There are numerous sources of information around food production in Ireland. Entrepreneurial artisan food producers can gain knowledge of the key regulatory requirements and compliance standards from the following organisations:

### Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)<sup>12</sup> :

The FSAI website provides comprehensive guidance, regulations, and resources for food businesses, including artisan producers. They offer information on food safety, labeling, hygiene, and compliance with food laws.

### Department of Agriculture Food and Marine (DAFM)<sup>13</sup>:

The DAFM website may contain regulations, guidelines, and support for food producers, especially regarding agricultural practices, quality standards, and relevant legislation.

**Local Enterprise Office (LEO)<sup>14</sup>:** Your local office can provide guidance and support for small food producers. They often offer workshops, training, and information on compliance requirements.

**Teagasc<sup>15</sup>** The Teagasc website has resources, training courses and articles related to food production, quality, and regulations for small-scale producers.

**The Health Service Executive (HSE)<sup>16</sup>:** Check the HSE website for health and safety guidelines applicable to food production businesses.

**Bord Bia (Irish Food Board)<sup>17</sup>** and the Irish Food Writers' Guild<sup>18</sup> might offer resources or publications on food regulations quality standards and supports for small businesses<sup>19</sup>.

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- 12 <https://www.fsai.ie/home>
  - 13 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/31ea3-dafm-approved-establishments/>
  - 14 <https://www.localenterprise.ie/Find-Your-Local-Enterprise-Office/>
  - 15 <https://www.teagasc.ie/food/food-industry-development/>
  - 16 <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/enviro/opening-a-new-food-business/>
  - 17 <https://www.bordbia.ie/farmers-markets/?pageId=462165&query=&pageSize=12&pageNumber=1>
  - 18 <https://www.irishfoodwritersguild.ie>
  - 19 <https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/events/past-events-presentations/speaker-presentations-2022/upports-for-local-small-and-micro-food-businessesproducers-for-dafm/>

**Food and Drink Ireland (FDI)**<sup>20</sup> is the main trade association for the food and drink industry in Ireland.

**Enterprise Ireland**<sup>21</sup>: EI provide information and support for food-related businesses, including regulatory requirements and standards.

**Local Authorities**<sup>22</sup>: Sometimes, local councils provide guidance and resources for food businesses, including information on local regulations and permits.

## Marketing and Branding

Establishing a brand and image that embodies the business's ethos is crucial. Effective marketing through websites, social media, and targeted advertising is essential to create awareness about the offerings. Challenges like seasonality, perishability, and stock control necessitate a different approach compared to primary farm produce sales, affecting cash flow.

## Financial Planning

Developing comprehensive business plans for banks, conducting thorough market research, and creating detailed financial projections are essential. Anticipating risks and planning for contingencies is crucial to avoid budget overruns and unplanned expenses. Rigorous financial analysis should include stress-testing budgets to evaluate break-even points under different scenarios.

Always seek professional advice and thoroughly scrutinise legal, financial, and operational aspects to ensure the success of a diversification project.

## Liability and Insurance:

Assess potential liabilities associated with the diversification initiative and consider appropriate insurance coverage to mitigate risks.

Review and update existing insurance policies. Determine if your current coverage includes the new activities or if additional coverage is required for the diversification venture.

Some diversification activities may require specific insurance policies. For instance, agritourism ventures might need special public liability coverage for visitors. Engage with insurance providers or brokers experienced in agricultural diversifications. Seek their advice on appropriate coverage and any specific insurance requirements related to the new venture.

Implement adequate risk management measures to mitigate potential liabilities. This could involve improving safety protocols, warning signs, employee training, etc. It is important to regularly review insurance coverage and risk management strategies as the diversification project evolves or expands. Ensure that coverage remains appropriate and sufficient.

Maintain meticulous records related to safety measures, employee training, maintenance logs, visitor agreements, etc. These records can be invaluable in case of any liability claims. Keep yourself updated on any regulatory changes or new laws that might affect liability and insurance requirements for agricultural diversifications.

You can find an insurance broker<sup>23</sup>, which specialises in agricultural insurance. The Irish Insurance Federation<sup>24</sup> offers insights and resources on insurance policies and requirements for diverse businesses. There are a number of leading insurance providers and their websites often includes information on agricultural insurance. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC)<sup>25</sup> has information that explains how different types of insurance work. Teagasc the Irish Agricultural and Food Development Authority provides advice and information for farmers on varying aspects including insurance considerations<sup>26</sup>.

20 <https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/industries/food-and-drink/food-drink-ireland>

21 <https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/sectors/food-and-beverage>

22 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/942f74-local-authorities/%23county-councils>

23 <https://brokersireland.ie>

24 <https://www.insuranceireland.eu>

25 <https://www.ccpc.ie/consumers/money/insurance/>

26 <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/diversification/insurance-tips/>



# Emerging Trends in Agricultural Diversifications

# Mainstream Diversification Options:

## Organic Farming

Organic farming presents a diversification opportunity for Irish farmers, focusing on sustainable agricultural practices that exclude synthetic pesticides and fertilisers. By adopting organic methods, farmers can contribute to reducing national greenhouse gas emissions through improved soil health, carbon sequestration, and decreased reliance on fossil fuel-based inputs.

### Environmental Benefits:

**Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Organic farms tend to have lower stocking rates and this in turn leads to reduced methane levels at farm level. As chemical fertilisers are prohibited, this results in a significant reduction in Nitrous Oxide emissions from organic farms.

**Biodiversity:** Numerous studies across Europe have demonstrated that organic farms have higher levels of biodiversity, up to 30% higher in many of these studies. Lower stocking rates, reduced fertiliser and pesticide usage all contribute to increased biodiversity above and below ground.

**Water Quality:** Reduced stocking rates results in reduced quantities of slurry and farmyard manure on-farm. Coupled with the elimination of chemical fertilisers, means a reduced risk of loss of nutrients to water on organic farms

### Economic Opportunities:

**Premium Markets:** Organic products often command higher prices, offering farmers access to premium markets and potentially increasing their income.

**Consumer Demand:** With growing consumer awareness and demand for organic products, farmers can tap into an expanding market segment.

**Grants and Support:** The Organic Farming Scheme offers rates of up to €350/Ha for livestock farmers and up to €800/Ha for horticultural growers. Capital grants such as TAMS and OPIGS offer 60% grants to organic farmers for capital projects.

### Steps for Transition:

**Consider and investigate:** Familiarise yourself with the regulations surrounding organic farming. Attend organic farm walks and speak to organic farmers/advisors to assess if organic farming is a viable option for you and your farm.

**Certification:** Obtain organic certification from the recognised bodies to market products as organic and access premium markets. <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/steps-to-organic-conversion/organic-certification-bodies/>

**Conversion:** All organic farms have to undergo a conversion period. For most farmers this is typically a 2 year conversion period. Once the conversion period has elapsed, produce from the farm can then be sold into organic markets.

For more information on organic farming in Ireland and support available, visit the Teagasc Organics website. Teagasc Organics (<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/>)





## Forestry

A forestry enterprise offers excellent diversification opportunities for Irish farmers, focusing on the establishment and sustainable management of trees for timber, biodiversity enhancement, water quality and carbon sequestration. By integrating trees and forests into their land use, farmers can contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhance the ecological, aesthetic and economic value of their farms.

### Environmental Benefits:

**Carbon Sequestration:** Trees absorb carbon dioxide, helping to mitigate climate change by reducing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

**Biodiversity:** Forests provide habitats for a wide range of flora and fauna, enhancing local biodiversity and creating more resilient ecosystems.

**Soil and Water Protection:** Trees can help prevent soil erosion, improve soil structure, and protect water quality by reducing runoff and filtering pollutants.

### Economic Opportunities:

**Timber Production:** Forestry can provide a sustainable source of income, initially through attractive annual premia and later through the sale of timber and wood products, which are in demand for construction, furniture, and energy.

**Non-Timber Products:** Farmers can also incorporate non-timber products such as mushrooms, berries, and medicinal plants, adding additional income streams.

**Recreational and Agri-Tourism:** Forested areas can be used for recreational purposes, such as hiking, bird watching, wellness and educational tours, attracting visitors and creating agri-tourism opportunities.

### Steps for Transition:

**Funding and Support:** Explore whole farm planning on how forestry options can fit into the farming mix and also available grants and financial support for afforestation and sustainable forest management from government programmes. **Planning and Design:** Develop a comprehensive forestry plan that includes tree species selection, planting design, and management practices suited to the local environment and land conditions.

**Sustainable Management:** Implement sustainable forest management practices to ensure long-term productivity, health, and ecological balance of the forested areas.

For more information on forestry as a diversification opportunity and available support, contact your local Teagasc forestry staff and visit the Teagasc Forestry website. (<https://www.teagasc.ie/crops/forestry/>)

### Teagasc Fact Sheets on Farm Diversification and Renewable Energy

Teagasc provides a comprehensive range of fact sheets on its website, covering various aspects of farm diversification and renewable energy. These fact sheets offer valuable information and practical guidance for farmers looking to diversify their operations and explore new income streams. Topics include organic farming, forestry, agritourism, renewable energy, and more. Each fact sheet is designed to help farmers make informed decisions, understand potential benefits, and implement effective strategies for sustainable and profitable diversification.

For detailed information, visit the Teagasc Rural Development Factsheets. (<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/diversification/rural-development-factsheets/>)



## Agri-tourism

Irish farmers have several agritourism options available to diversify their income streams and attract visitors seeking authentic rural experiences. Here are some common agritourism options and key considerations for farmers:

### Farm Stays or B&Bs:

Providing accommodations on the farm, such as bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodations, self catering or farm stays, allows visitors to experience farm life, enjoy the countryside, and participate in agricultural activities.

Considerations:

- Developing comfortable and attractive lodging facilities.
- Complying with regulations and safety standards for accommodations.
- Offering farm-related activities or experiences for guests.

### Camping or Glamping Sites:

Offering camping or glamorous camping (glamping) experiences on the farm can attract nature enthusiasts and families seeking outdoor adventures.

Considerations:

- Developing camping facilities, amenities, and sanitation.
- Ensuring compliance with camping regulations and safety standards.
- Providing recreational activities or natural attractions.

Key considerations for farmers venturing into agri-tourism include; understanding their target audience, complying with regulations and safety standards, investing in infrastructure and amenities, providing quality experiences, marketing effectively, and ensuring excellent customer service. Additionally, seeking advice industry associations can provide valuable guidance in developing successful agritourism ventures.

### Shepherd Huts

**Cost:** A basic 12-foot hut featuring a bed and fully insulated wood burner costs €15,000 with a higher spec and more spacious four-birth model costing €35,000. This comes kitted out with a kitchen, wood burner and bathroom.

**ROI:** Completely dependent on location and how busy bookings become. On average they rent for between €100-200/night<sup>27</sup>.

**Key considerations:** Location is crucial and so is placement. The more serene and peaceful the setting the better. Guests also need access to toilet and shower facilities.

While they are moveable, most people do not move them once erected – and once electricity and water is connected to the hut, it ceases to be mobile. Therefore, most local authorities will insist on planning approval. Public liability insurance is also necessary.

**Further info:** Caravan and Camping Parks [https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2\\_Develop\\_Your\\_Business/4\\_Quality\\_Assurance/Caravan\\_and\\_Camping\\_Classification\\_Matrix\\_1.pdf](https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Your_Business/4_Quality_Assurance/Caravan_and_Camping_Classification_Matrix_1.pdf)



<sup>27</sup> all prices are 2024



## Alcoholic Drinks



Farmers can diversify their operations by producing alcoholic drinks as part of their farm-based enterprises. This diversification strategy involves utilising agricultural produce to create various alcoholic beverages. Here are several examples:

1. **Brewing Beer or Ale:** Farmers can cultivate barley, hops, or other grains and use them to produce craft beer or ale. Establishing a microbrewery on the farm can cater to local markets or tourists interested in craft beverages.
2. **Wine Production:** Some farms diversify by growing grapes and producing wine. See viticulture below. Climate and soil conditions in certain regions of Ireland may support grape cultivation for winemaking.
3. **Cider Making:** Utilising apples or other fruits grown on the farm to produce cider is another option. Apples are commonly used in cider production, and many farms have successfully established cider-making businesses.
4. **Distillation of Spirits:** While it involves regulations that are more stringent and licensing, some farms venture into distilling spirits such as whiskey, gin, or vodka. This requires compliance with legal requirements and quality standards.

Farmers considering alcoholic beverage production as a diversification option should consider several factors:

- **Regulations and Licensing:** Alcohol production is heavily regulated. Farmers must obtain the necessary permits, licenses, and comply with local laws and regulations governing alcohol production, distribution, and sales.
- **Market Research:** Assessing market demand, consumer preferences, and competition is crucial. Understanding the target market and the niche the farm-produced alcoholic beverages can fill is essential for success.
- **Infrastructure and Equipment:** Establishing a production facility, procuring equipment for brewing, fermenting, distilling, bottling, and ensuring adherence to quality standards are vital.
- **Marketing and Distribution:** Developing a marketing strategy to promote the farm-produced beverages, identifying distribution channels, and building relationships with retailers, restaurants, or local markets is key to reaching customers.
- **Financial Planning and Risk Management:** Conducting thorough financial planning, understanding production costs, pricing strategies, and managing risks associated with alcohol production.

Alcoholic beverage production can be a rewarding diversification strategy for farmers, but it requires careful planning, adherence to regulations, quality control, and a clear understanding of the market to succeed.



## Allotments

Allotment rentals can be a viable diversification option for farmers. Allotments are small parcels of land rented to individuals or groups for gardening, typically for growing vegetables, fruits, flowers, or herbs for personal consumption or small-scale commercial purposes. Renting out allotments on a farmer's land can offer various benefits:

1. **Additional Income Stream:** Renting out allotments can generate extra income for farmers by utilising underutilised or surplus land.
2. **Community Engagement:** Allotments foster community engagement by providing local residents or gardening enthusiasts with access to land for gardening activities.
3. **Diversification of Land Use:** It allows farmers to diversify land use without compromising their primary agricultural operations, enabling them to generate income from otherwise unused portions of their land.
4. **Promotion of Sustainable Practices:** Allotments promote sustainable agriculture, encourage self-sufficiency, and support environmentally friendly gardening practices.
5. **Supporting Local Produce:** Allotment rentals contribute to the production of local, fresh produce, promoting healthier food choices and reducing food miles.
6. **Educational Opportunities:** Farmers can offer workshops, training, or educational sessions on gardening, organic farming, or sustainable practices for allotment holders, adding value to the service.

Before implementing allotment rentals, farmers should consider several factors:

- **Legal and Regulatory Considerations:** Ensure compliance with local zoning laws, land use regulations, and tenancy agreements when renting out land for allotments.
- **Infrastructure and Management:** Assess the availability of water, fencing, parking, and other necessary infrastructure for allotment users. Develop a plan for managing and maintaining the allotments.
- **Market Demand and Pricing:** Conduct market research to determine demand, set rental prices, and understand the needs of potential allotment renters.
- **Agreements and Contracts:** Establish clear agreements or contracts outlining terms, responsibilities, and expectations for both parties to avoid misunderstandings.

Allotment rentals can be a rewarding diversification option, fostering community engagement, supporting local agriculture, and generating additional income for farmers. However, careful planning, adequate infrastructure, legal compliance, and effective management are essential for successful implementation.





## Composting

Composting can be a valuable diversification option for Irish farmers. Composting involves the decomposition of organic materials such as kitchen scraps, yard waste, manure, and crop residues to produce nutrient-rich compost that can be used as a soil amendment or fertiliser. Here are some reasons why composting can be a beneficial diversification venture for farmers in Ireland:

### 1. Utilisation of Organic Waste:

- » Farmers can repurpose agricultural residues, animal manure, and other organic waste generated on the farm into compost. This reduces waste and contributes to sustainable farming practices.

### 2. Soil Health Improvement:

- » Compost serves as an excellent soil conditioner, enhancing soil structure, moisture retention, and nutrient levels. It promotes healthier plant growth and increases crop yields.

### 3. Reduced Need for Chemical Fertilisers:

- » Incorporating compost into soil reduces the reliance on chemical fertilisers, promoting natural and organic farming methods.

### 4. Value-Added Product:

Farmers can sell compost or composting services to other farmers, gardeners, landscaping businesses, or local communities, generating an additional income stream.

### 5. Environmental Benefits:

- » Composting contributes to waste reduction, lowers greenhouse gas emissions, and aids in carbon sequestration, aligning with environmentally friendly farming practices.

### 6. Diversification of Farm Revenue Streams:

- » Introducing composting as a service or product diversifies the farm's revenue streams, reducing dependency on traditional income sources.

### 7. Support for Sustainable Agriculture:

- » Embracing composting aligns with sustainable agriculture practices, promoting soil health and biodiversity, and reducing environmental impact.

However, farmers considering composting as a diversification option should consider certain factors:

- **Infrastructure and Equipment:** Evaluate the need for composting facilities, equipment, and proper management systems to handle organic waste efficiently.
- **Market Demand and Distribution:** Assess the local market demand for compost and determine potential customers or distribution channels for selling compost products or services.
- **Regulations and Compliance:** Familiarise yourself with regulations, standards, and best practices related to composting, waste management, and selling compost products.
- **Education and Outreach:** Educate customers, other farmers, and the community about the benefits of compost and the importance of sustainable soil practices.

Composting can be a sustainable and environmentally beneficial diversification option for farmers in Ireland, contributing to soil health, reducing waste, and creating opportunities for additional income.

Further information [www.cre.ie](http://www.cre.ie)





## Developing a Dog Training / Field Area



Developing a dog training or field area can be a viable farm diversification option for farmers, especially those who have suitable land and an interest in dog-related activities. This endeavour can cater to various needs and interests, such as dog training, agility courses, field trials, or even hosting dog-related events. Here is why it could be a successful diversification:

1. **Utilisation of Available Space:** Farmers with ample land can designate a portion for dog training, exercise, or events without significantly affecting existing agricultural operations.
2. **Increased Revenue Streams:** Offering dog-training facilities, agility courses, or hosting events can create additional income streams for farmers.
3. **Diversification of Services:** Farmers can diversify their offerings by providing dog training services, field trials, or organising events catering to dog owners, trainers, and enthusiasts.
4. **Community Engagement:** Establishing a dog training area can attract local dog owners, trainers, and enthusiasts, fostering community engagement and potentially attracting visitors from surrounding areas.
5. **Utilising Agricultural Skills:** Farmers often possess skills in land management, which can be beneficial in setting up and maintaining dog training areas, agility courses, or fields.

However, to successfully develop a dog training area as a diversification option, farmers should consider the following:

- **Market Research:** Assess the demand for dog training facilities or events in the local area or among specific communities of dog owners. Understand the preferences and needs of potential customers.
- **Facilities and Amenities:** Develop appropriate facilities such as fenced areas, agility equipment, training tools, seating areas, and possibly facilities for dog owners (e.g., parking, restrooms).
- **Regulations and Permits:** Understand any zoning or local regulations concerning the use of land for dog-related activities. Obtain necessary permits or approvals.
- **Promotion and Marketing:** Implement a marketing strategy to promote the facilities or events. Utilise online platforms, local advertising, and collaborations with dog-related organisations to attract customers.
- **Safety and Liability:** Implement safety measures and protocols to ensure the safety of dogs and visitors. Consider liability insurance coverage to protect against potential risks or accidents.

Developing a dog training or field area as a farm diversification option can be an innovative way to utilise farm space, generate additional income, and engage with the community, provided it aligns with local regulations and there's sufficient demand in the area.



## Events

Hosting events on a farm can be a rewarding diversification option for farmers. It offers an opportunity to utilise the farm's facilities, scenery, and open spaces to organise various types of events, attracting different audiences. Here are some event hosting options for farmers:

1. **Farm Tours and Open Days:** Offering guided farm tours or organising open days allows visitors to experience agricultural activities, interact with animals, and learn about farming practices.
2. **Educational Workshops and Classes:** Conducting workshops or classes on topics like sustainable farming, gardening, animal care, or rural crafts can attract enthusiasts seeking hands-on learning experiences.
3. **Agri-Tourism Events:** Organising agri-tourism events such as harvest festivals, farm-to-fork dinners, or seasonal celebrations displaying local produce, food, and culture can draw local communities and tourists.
4. **Special Events and Festivals:** Hosting special events like farmers' markets, music festivals, craft fairs, or themed events (e.g., pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms) can attract diverse crowds.
5. **Weddings and Private Functions:** Offering the farm as a venue for weddings, receptions, or private events allows couples or event planners to utilise the scenic countryside for special occasions.

To successfully diversify into event hosting, farmers should consider the following:

- **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Evaluate existing infrastructure and determine any additional facilities needed to host events comfortably (parking areas, restrooms, seating, etc.).
- **Promotion and Marketing:** Develop a marketing strategy to promote events using social media, local advertising, event websites, or collaborations with event planners and local tourist boards.
- **Regulations and Permits:** Understand and comply with local regulations, health and safety, zoning laws, and obtain necessary permits or licenses for hosting events on the farm.
- **Customer Experience:** Focus on providing a positive customer experience, ensuring safety, cleanliness, hospitality, and engaging activities to attract and retain visitors.
- **Financial Planning:** Conduct financial assessments, budgeting, and pricing strategies to ensure profitability and sustainability of hosting events on the farm.

Farmers venturing into event hosting should carefully plan and tailor events to meet the interests of their target audience while highlighting the unique aspects of their farm. It can be an excellent way to generate additional income, promote agricultural education, and engage with the local community and tourists.





## Farm and Forest School Programmes



Diversifying into providing farm and forest school programs can be a rewarding venture for farmers. Farm and forest schools offer educational programs that combine learning with outdoor experiences, connecting children and individuals with nature, farming practices, and rural life. Here's how farmers can explore this diversification option:

1. **Utilise Farm Resources:** Farmers can leverage their agricultural knowledge, land, animals, and natural surroundings to create educational experiences for children and adults.
2. **Outdoor Education Programs:** Develop educational programs that integrate farming, nature exploration, gardening, animal care, and sustainable practices. Offer structured sessions or workshops on various aspects of farm life and the environment.
3. **Farm Visits and Tours:** Provide guided farm tours, allowing participants to learn about farming activities, interact with animals, explore nature trails, and experience hands-on activities like planting or harvesting.
4. **Forest School Activities:** Utilise woodland areas on the farm to conduct forest school activities such as nature walks, wildlife observation, bushcraft skills, storytelling, and outdoor play.
5. **Educational Workshops:** Organise workshops focusing on topics like environmental conservation, biodiversity, agriculture, and rural skills. Invite educators or specialists to conduct sessions.
6. **Seasonal and Themed Programs:** Offer themed programs aligned with seasons or specific agricultural activities, such as apple picking in autumn, lambing season in spring, or seed planting in summer.
7. **Collaboration with Schools or Groups:** Partner with schools, educational institutions, or youth groups to offer tailored programs, field trips, or outdoor learning experiences.

When diversifying into farm and forest schools, farmers should consider the following:

- **Safety and Regulations:** Ensure a safe environment for participants and comply with regulations related to child safety, health, and educational standards.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Assess the need for facilities, shelters, restroom facilities, and other amenities to accommodate participants comfortably.
- **Qualified Staff or Educators:** Employ or collaborate with educators, instructors, or staff with experience in outdoor education, child development, or environmental education.
- **Promotion and Outreach:** Develop marketing strategies to reach out to schools, parents, community groups, and educational networks to promote farm and forest school programs.

Farmers diversifying into farm and forest schools can offer valuable educational experiences, foster a connection with nature, promote agricultural understanding, and create additional revenue streams by providing unique outdoor learning opportunities.



## Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets provide an excellent opportunity for farmer producers to sell their goods directly to consumers, thereby adding value to Irish farm supply chains. These markets create a direct link between farmers and consumers, allowing farmers to showcase and sell their produce, livestock, artisanal goods, and value-added products directly to the public without intermediaries.

Here are some ways farmers' markets add value to Irish farm supply chains:

1. **Direct Sales:** Farmers' markets enable farmers to sell their products directly to consumers, bypassing traditional distribution channels. This direct-to-consumer approach often allows for higher profit margins and provides consumers with fresh, locally sourced products.
2. **Building Relationships:** Farmers get the chance to interact directly with customers, fostering relationships and establishing trust. This connection helps in understanding consumer preferences, gaining feedback, and adapting products accordingly.
3. **Showcasing Variety:** Farmers' markets allow producers to display a wide variety of goods, including fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meats, baked goods, honey, preserves, and crafts. This variety appeals to consumers seeking local and diverse offerings.

4. **Promoting Local Economy:** By supporting farmers' markets, consumers contribute to the local economy. Farmers retain a larger share of the retail price, promoting sustainable agricultural practices and ensuring economic viability for small-scale producers.
5. **Educating Consumers:** Farmers' markets offer opportunities to educate consumers about farming practices, sustainability, seasonal produce, and the benefits of buying locally. This educational aspect enhances consumers' understanding and appreciation of agricultural products.
6. **Encouraging Sustainability:** Selling directly at farmers' markets reduces transportation and packaging, promoting sustainability by minimising the carbon footprint associated with food distribution.

Overall, farmers' markets play a vital role in adding value to Irish farm supply chains by providing a platform for direct sales, fostering relationships between farmers and consumers, promoting local products, and supporting sustainable agriculture while contributing to the local economy.

Here is a list of Irish Farmers Markets: <https://www.bordbia.ie/farmers-markets/?pageId=462165&query=&pageSize=12&pageNumber=1>





## Foraging



Farmers can diversify by providing their lands for foraging activities. Foraging involves the gathering of wild edible plants, herbs, mushrooms, or other natural resources from the land. Allowing individuals or groups to forage on their land can be a sustainable diversification option for farmers, offering several benefits:

1. **Utilisation of Natural Resources:** Farm lands often harbor diverse ecosystems with wild edible plants, herbs, mushrooms, or berries. Allowing responsible foraging can utilise these natural resources.
2. **Diversification of Income:** Farmers can charge foraging fees or offer guided foraging tours, creating an additional revenue stream without significant impact on agricultural operations.
3. **Eco-Tourism and Nature-based Activities:** Foraging activities attract nature enthusiasts, eco-tourists, and individuals interested in exploring and learning about wild foods and natural habitats.
4. **Promotion of Biodiversity:** Encouraging responsible foraging practices promotes biodiversity conservation and appreciation for natural ecosystems on the farm.

However, farmers considering land use for foraging should consider the following:

- **Regulations and Permits:** Check local regulations and obtain necessary permits or permissions for foraging activities on the farm.
- **Guidelines and Rules:** Establish guidelines for foragers to ensure responsible and sustainable practices. Educate participants about respecting the land, not disturbing wildlife, and only harvesting what's safe and permitted.
- **Safety and Liability:** Ensure participant safety by identifying potential hazards on the land and addressing them. Consider liability insurance coverage for participants engaging in foraging activities.
- **Education and Information:** Provide information about the types of plants or resources available for foraging and possibly offer guided tours or educational sessions led by knowledgeable individuals.
- **Environmental Impact:** Monitor and manage the impact of foraging on the ecosystem to prevent over-harvesting or damage to sensitive habitats.

By allowing responsible foraging on their lands, farmers can create a mutually beneficial arrangement that not only generates additional income but also promotes sustainable land use, ecotourism, and appreciation for natural resources and biodiversity.

**Further information:**

Wicklow Wild Foods <https://wicklowwildfoods.com>





## Flower Cultivation



Diversifying into flower cultivation can be a lucrative and rewarding option for farmers. Growing flowers offers various opportunities, including:

1. **Cut Flower Production:** Cultivating flowers specifically for the cut flower market can be profitable. Popular flowers like roses, lilies, tulips, sunflowers, and others are in demand for floral arrangements, events, and retail.
2. **Specialty or Niche Flowers:** Growing unique, specialty, or indigenous flowers that have high demand due to their rarity or distinctiveness can be a niche market opportunity.
3. **Herbaceous Perennials or Bulbs:** Cultivating perennial plants or bulb flowers such as daffodils, dahlias, or peonies can provide recurring sales as these plants regrow each season.
4. **Value-Added Products:** Using flowers to create value-added products like dried flower arrangements, potpourri, or floral crafts can expand sales potential.
5. **Direct Sales or Farmer's Markets:** Selling flowers directly to consumers through farmer's markets, roadside stands, or online platforms can generate income and build customer relationships.
6. **Landscaping or Garden Design:** Collaborating with landscape designers or garden centers to supply flowers for landscaping projects or garden installations can be a profitable avenue.

However, farmers considering flower cultivation should consider the following:

- **Market Research:** Identify demand for specific flowers in your region or target market. Understand consumer preferences, seasonal trends, and local floral businesses.
- **Infrastructure and Equipment:** Assess the need for greenhouse facilities, irrigation systems, storage, and transportation arrangements to maintain the quality of cut flowers.
- **Growing Conditions:** Ensure suitable soil quality, climate conditions, and proper care practices required for different flower varieties.
- **Marketing and Branding:** Develop a marketing strategy to promote flowers, including branding, packaging, and creating appealing displays to attract customers.
- **Logistics and Distribution:** Plan for efficient transportation, packaging, and timely delivery of flowers to maintain freshness and quality.

Starting a flower cultivation venture requires planning, investment in resources, and understanding the market dynamics. However, with proper research, suitable growing practices, and effective marketing strategies, flower farming can be a profitable and aesthetically rewarding diversification option for farmers.



## Equine Livery

Providing horse livery facilities can be a viable diversification option for farmers, especially those with suitable land and an interest (and knowledge) in equestrian activities, husbandry and horse welfare. Equine livery service involves offering stabling, grazing turnout, care, and sometimes additional services for equines owned by individuals or businesses. Here is why it could be a successful venture:

- 1. Utilisation of Available Space:** Farmers with adequate land and suitable facilities (stables, exercise paddocks (be careful here – turnout zones as opposed to pasture turnout are often not nitrates compliant), maybe just note grazing areas) can use this space to offer equine livery services.
- 2. Additional Revenue Stream:** Providing livery services generates income from boarding fees, equine care, and possibly additional services such as training, grooming, or exercising. Sometimes specialist services like foaling are offered, or competition schooling and/or coaching.
- 3. Diversification of Services:** Farmers can diversify their offerings by providing different types of livery services, such as full livery (providing full care for the equine); part livery which usually involves a split in care between the livery provider and the equine owner, with no exercise included; or DIY livery (where owners care for their own equines, but use the facilities).
- 4. Equestrian Community Engagement:** Livery facilities attract horse owners, riders, trainers, and equestrian enthusiasts, fostering community engagement and possibly attracting visitors from surrounding areas.
- 5. Utilising Agricultural Skills:** Farmers often possess skills in animal husbandry, land management, and facility maintenance, which are beneficial for managing livery operations.

However, farmers interested in offering equine livery services should consider the following:

- **Facilities and Infrastructure:** Assess the need for stables, grazing areas, riding/exercise arenas, and other amenities required to provide suitable care and accommodation for equines.
- **Legal and Insurance Considerations:** Understand legal requirements, liability insurance, and necessary permits or regulations related to operating a livery business.
- **Staff and Expertise:** Employ or collaborate with knowledgeable staff or equine professionals to ensure suitable husbandry, welfare management, and overall management of the facility.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Develop a marketing strategy to attract equine owners, such as advertising locally, participating in equestrian events, or utilising online platforms.
- **Customer Service and Care:** Focus on providing excellent customer service, maintaining clean, bio secure and safe facilities, and ensuring the well-being of equines under care.

Providing livery services can be an effective way for farmers to diversify their income streams while utilising their land and agricultural expertise. However, it requires careful planning, proper facilities, adherence to regulations, and a commitment to providing quality care for the equines. It is important to note that specific individual needs of equines may need to be catered to relative to age, body condition, health status, temperament, and exercise needs.

It is important to have a very clear 'agreement' with owners from the outset which clearly outlines the expectations/ responsibilities/ costs to be covered by each party including an exit clause – if the relationship breaks down. Clear guidelines/ rules/ expectations are necessary to have clear parameters and a means to release a client.





## Maize Experience

Farmers can diversify their operations by offering maize experiences, often referred to as "maize mazes" or "corn mazes." These attractions involve creating intricate mazes within maize (corn) fields and offering visitors an entertaining and interactive experience. Here is how farmers can consider this diversification option:

- 1. Attraction Creation:** Farmers can design and create mazes within their maize fields using various patterns, themes, or shapes, making it an engaging and fun experience for visitors.
- 2. Seasonal Entertainment:** Maize experiences are often seasonal attractions, especially during the harvest season or around autumn/fall. Farmers can capitalise on this by offering timed events or activities.
- 3. Family-Friendly Entertainment:** Maize mazes attract families, school groups, and tourists seeking enjoyable outdoor activities. Additional features like games, challenges, or educational elements within the maze can enhance the visitor experience.
- 4. Additional Activities:** Farmers can complement maize experiences with additional activities such as pumpkin patches, hayrides, farm tours, or concessions, further increasing visitor engagement and revenue.
- 5. Event Hosting:** Hosting special events within or around the maize maze, such as seasonal festivals, themed nights, or team-building events, can attract diverse groups and increase footfall.
- 6. Educational Opportunities:** Incorporating educational aspects within the maize experience, such as teaching about agriculture, maize cultivation, or local history, can add value and interest for visitors.

However, farmers considering maize experiences should consider the following:

- **Design and Maintenance:** Designing the maze layout, pathways, and maintaining the maze throughout the season requires planning and regular upkeep.
- **Safety Measures:** Ensuring safety for visitors by providing clear pathways, adequate signage, supervision (if necessary), and emergency exits within the maze.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Effective marketing through various channels, such as social media, local advertising, and partnerships with tourism agencies, is crucial to attract visitors.
- **Logistics and Operations:** Managing ticketing, parking, facilities (restrooms, refreshments), and staffing for visitor services during peak times.
- **Weather Considerations:** Maize experiences are outdoor activities, so weather conditions can impact visitor turnout. Having contingency plans for adverse weather is essential.

Offering maize experiences can be an exciting and profitable diversification option for farmers, attracting visitors, creating seasonal entertainment, and utilising farm spaces creatively. Successful implementation involves creativity, attention to visitor experience, safety considerations, and effective marketing strategies.





## Meat Boxes

Farmers can add substantial value to their cattle production systems by engaging with a local butcher to process their animals and subsequently selling the meat directly to customers through meat boxes or similar arrangements. This approach, often referred to as "farm-to-table" or "farm-to-fork," offers several benefits:

1. **Quality Control:** Working with a butcher allows farmers to ensure high-quality processing and cuts that meet their standards, potentially leading to premium-quality meat.
2. **Traceability and Transparency:** Customers increasingly value knowing the origin of their food. Direct sales through meat boxes allow farmers to highlight the traceability and transparency of their products, fostering trust with customers.
3. **Profit Margin:** Selling directly to consumers can result in higher profit margins compared to selling through traditional supply chains.
4. **Customer Relationship:** Direct sales create a direct connection between farmers and consumers. Farmers can communicate their farming practices, animal welfare standards, and sustainability efforts directly to customers.
5. **Customisation and Variety:** Farmers can offer customised meat boxes with various cuts, portions, or combinations to meet customers' preferences.

However, farmers need to consider several factors when pursuing this diversification option:

- **Butchering Facilities:** Ensure access to suitable butchering facilities or establish partnerships with local butchers equipped to handle animal processing according to legal and health standards.

- **Regulations and Compliance:** Adhere to regulations governing meat processing, labelling, hygiene, and sales to ensure compliance with food safety standards.
- **Packaging and Distribution:** Invest in appropriate packaging, refrigeration, storage, and transportation to maintain meat quality and ensure safe delivery to customers. Proper refrigeration is crucial for both storage and distribution to preserve the freshness and safety of the meat.
- **Marketing and Sales:** Develop a marketing strategy to promote meat boxes, including online sales platforms, social media, farm websites, or farmer's markets to reach potential customers.
- **Customer Service and Feedback:** Provide excellent customer service, gather feedback, and continuously improve offerings based on customer preferences and suggestions.

Engaging a butcher to process cattle and selling meat directly to customers through meat boxes presents an excellent opportunity for farmers to add value to their products, strengthen customer relationships, and diversify revenue streams. However, careful planning, compliance with regulations, and effective marketing strategies are essential for success in this endeavor.





## Natural Burial Grounds

Farmers in Ireland can diversify their operations by offering natural burial grounds on their land. Natural or eco-friendly burial grounds provide environmentally sensitive alternatives to conventional cemeteries, allowing for more natural decomposition and land conservation. Farmers considering this diversification option should keep the following points in mind:

1. **Land Suitability:** Assess if the farm has suitable land for a natural burial ground, considering factors like landscape, soil conditions, accessibility, and legal regulations regarding burials.
2. **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** Familiarise yourself with the legal requirements, zoning regulations, and environmental laws related to establishing and operating a burial ground on farmland.
3. **Environmental Considerations:** Natural burial grounds aim to minimise environmental impact. Farmers need to consider conservation measures, landscaping, and maintenance practices that support ecological preservation.
4. **Infrastructure and Amenities:** Provide necessary facilities like parking areas, access paths, and possibly a designated area for ceremonies or remembrance services, ensuring a respectful and comfortable environment for families and visitors.
5. **Community Engagement and Marketing:** Engage with local communities, funeral directors, and eco-conscious individuals. Effective marketing strategies can include highlighting the ecological benefits, serene surroundings, and respectful burial options.
6. **Perpetual Care and Maintenance:** Plan for the ongoing maintenance and perpetual care of the burial ground, ensuring the site remains well kept and respectful for families visiting their loved ones.



7. **Sensitive Approach:** Recognise the sensitivity and emotional aspects surrounding burials. Create a compassionate and understanding atmosphere for families during their bereavement.
8. **Financial Sustainability:** Consider the financial aspects, including pricing models, revenue streams, and operational costs associated with establishing and maintaining the burial ground.

Developing a natural burial ground on a farm can provide a meaningful and environmentally friendly service while diversifying revenue streams. However, it requires careful planning, compliance with regulations, sensitivity to families' needs, and a commitment to maintaining the site's ecological integrity and serenity.



## Providing Office Space

Farmers can diversify their operations by repurposing their buildings or land to offer office space. This type of diversification involves leasing or renting out farm buildings, sheds, barns, or unused spaces to businesses, freelancers, or entrepreneurs as office spaces. Here is how farmers can consider this option:

1. **Adapting Farm Buildings:** Transform existing farm buildings or unused spaces into office units, meeting rooms, or co-working spaces. Renovations may be needed to make the area suitable for office use.
2. **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Ensure necessary facilities like electricity, internet connectivity, heating, parking, and amenities required for office use are available and in good condition. Additionally, check eligibility for grants to restore or repurpose old buildings, which can enhance your infrastructure and reduce costs.
3. **Lease or Rental Agreements:** Establish lease agreements or rental contracts outlining terms, rental periods, services included (if any), and maintenance responsibilities.
4. **Target Market:** Identify potential tenants such as start-ups, small businesses, remote workers, or professionals seeking flexible office spaces.
5. **Amenities and Services:** Consider offering additional amenities or services such as shared facilities, meeting rooms, Wi-Fi, printing services, or access to communal areas to attract tenants.
6. **Marketing and Promotion:** Develop a marketing strategy to promote the office spaces through local advertising, online platforms, or collaborations with real estate agencies or business networks.
7. **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** Ensure compliance with local zoning laws, building regulations, safety standards, and any necessary permits or licenses required for renting out office spaces.
8. **Financial Viability:** Determine the financial viability of this diversification, considering costs associated with renovations, maintenance, utilities, and potential income from rentals.

By diversifying into offering office spaces, farmers can utilise existing infrastructure, generate additional income from underutilised spaces, and tap into the growing demand for flexible office solutions. However, they should carefully plan, consider tenant needs, and ensure necessary amenities and legal requirements are met to offer attractive and functional office spaces.





## Pet Boarding



Pet boarding can be a viable diversification option for farmers or family members seeking to expand their business ventures. Offering pet boarding services involves accommodating and caring for pets (such as dogs, cats, or smaller animals) while their owners are away, providing a home-like environment, exercise, feeding, and sometimes additional services like grooming or training. Here's how it can be a valuable diversification:

1. **Utilisation of Space:** Farmers often have ample space that can be converted into kennels, animal enclosures, or pet-friendly areas suitable for pet boarding.
2. **Additional Income Stream:** Providing pet boarding services generates income from pet owners looking for reliable and caring accommodation for their animals.
3. **Seasonal Demand:** Pet boarding can see increased demand during holiday seasons or when pet owners travel, providing opportunities for consistent business throughout the year.
4. **Complementary Services:** Farmers can offer additional services like grooming, training, or veterinary care (if qualified) to further enhance the value proposition for pet owners.
5. **Customer Loyalty:** Building relationships with pet owners can lead to repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals, enhancing customer loyalty.

However, there are several considerations for those interested in pet boarding as a diversification option:

- **Facility Preparation:** Prepare appropriate and safe facilities for housing, feeding, and exercising animals. Ensure compliance with regulations and standards related to animal care and welfare.
- **Animal Handling Expertise:** Familiarity with animal care, behaviour, and health is essential. Adequate knowledge in handling different pet species and their specific needs is crucial.
- **Insurance and Liability:** Consider liability insurance coverage to protect against potential risks or accidents involving boarded pets.
- **Marketing and Customer Service:** Develop marketing strategies to reach pet owners, including online presence, referrals, or partnerships with local veterinary clinics or pet-related businesses. Focus on providing excellent customer service to build trust with pet owners.

By offering pet boarding services, farmers or family members can utilise their space, care for animals, and create an additional income stream while providing a valuable service to pet owners. Successful implementation involves proper facilities, animal care expertise, legal compliance, and customer-oriented practices.



## Pick Your Own (PYO)

Farmers can diversify their operations by offering a "pick your own" (PYO) experience. PYO farms allow customers to personally harvest fruits, vegetables, or other produce directly from the farm fields. This approach can be an engaging and enjoyable activity for customers, providing them with a connection to the farm and fresh, locally grown produce. Here's how farmers can consider this diversification option:

1. **Crop Selection:** Identify suitable crops for PYO, such as berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries), apples, pumpkins, or vegetables (tomatoes, peas), based on local demand, seasonality, and the farm's capabilities.
2. **Field Accessibility and Amenities:** Ensure easy access to the fields, designate picking areas, and provide adequate signage, parking, paths, and possibly rest areas for visitors.
3. **Customer Experience:** Create an enjoyable and family-friendly experience by offering activities like hayrides, farm tours, petting zoos, or picnic areas alongside the picking areas.
4. **Educational Opportunities:** Use the PYO experience as an educational opportunity by informing visitors about farming practices, crop cultivation, and the importance of locally grown produce.
5. **Pricing and Payment:** Establish transparent pricing per unit or weight for the produce picked. Determine payment methods and logistics for handling transactions.
6. **Marketing and Promotion:** Develop a marketing strategy to attract customers, including advertising through social media, local events, farm websites, or collaborating with community organisations.
7. **Safety and Regulations:** Ensure adherence to health and safety regulations, including hygiene standards, signage for picking guidelines, and possibly providing containers or bags for harvesting.
8. **Customer Service:** Focus on providing excellent customer service, guidance, and assistance to visitors during their picking experience. Customers generally become aware of customer service only when it either exceeds or falls short of their expectations. If customer service meets expectations, it often goes unnoticed.

Diversifying into a PYO operation allows farmers to engage directly with consumers, offer a unique farm experience, and generate additional income. However, successful implementation requires planning, attention to visitor experience, crop management, marketing efforts, and compliance with regulations to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for visitors.





## Raising Rare Breeds

Raising rare breeds of livestock can be a viable diversification option for Irish farms. Rare breeds often possess unique characteristics, historical significance, or genetic diversity that make them valuable for conservation purposes, specialty markets, or agricultural education. Here are reasons why rare breeds can be a diversification option:

1. **Conservation of Genetic Diversity:** Rare breeds often carry genetic traits that have been lost in more commercial breeds. Raising these breeds can contribute to preserving genetic diversity within livestock populations.
2. **Specialty Markets:** Some consumers and niche markets seek out products from rare breeds due to their distinct flavors, textures, or historical significance. This could include meat, wool, dairy products, or specialty items.
3. **Agricultural Education and Heritage:** Raising rare breeds offers opportunities for educational initiatives, farm tours, and engagement with schools or heritage projects, fostering appreciation for agricultural diversity and heritage.
4. **Adaptability to Local Conditions:** Certain rare breeds may be better suited to specific environmental conditions or traditional farming practices, making them valuable for sustainable agriculture and resilience in local farming systems.
5. **Livestock Diversity on Farm:** Raising multiple breeds diversifies livestock portfolios, potentially reducing risk from diseases or market fluctuations affecting a single breed.

However, farmers considering raising rare breeds should take into account the following factors:

- **Market Demand:** Assess the demand for products derived from rare breeds in local or niche markets to ensure profitability.
- **Breeding and Management:** Understand the breeding characteristics, nutritional requirements, and specific management practices for each rare breed to maintain their unique traits.
- **Conservation Efforts:** Consider participating in conservation programs or collaborating with breed societies to support the preservation of rare breeds.
- **Costs and Returns:** Evaluate the costs involved in raising rare breeds, including breeding, feeding, healthcare, and potential returns from the sale of products.
- **Legal and Regulatory Considerations:** Comply with regulations related to the breeding, sale, and movement of rare breeds, including any specific requirements for conservation efforts.

Raising rare breeds can offer farmers an opportunity to diversify their farming operations, contribute to conservation efforts, access niche markets, and showcase agricultural heritage. However, thorough research, careful planning, and understanding market dynamics are essential for success in this diversification venture.





## Renewable Energy

Renewable energy can be a viable and profitable business option for Irish farms. Farms in Ireland have been increasingly diversifying into renewable energy production due to various incentives, favourable conditions, and the country's commitment to renewable energy targets. Here are several reasons why renewable energy is a viable business option for Irish farms:

1. **Supportive Policies and Incentives:** The Irish government offers various incentives and support schemes for renewable energy production, including: Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH)<sup>28</sup>, The Small Scale Electricity Scheme (SRESS) file<sup>29</sup>, The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS)<sup>30</sup>, Community Energy<sup>31</sup>
2. **Abundant Renewable Resources:** Ireland has significant renewable energy potential, particularly in wind, solar, and biomass energy due to its favourable climate conditions and geographic location.
3. **Diversification of Income:** Renewable energy production, such as wind turbines or solar panels installed on farmland, can generate additional income through selling electricity or licencing the land to developers or renewable energy projects.
4. **Reduced Energy Costs:** Through microgeneration supports, farmers can benefit from reduced energy costs by generating their electricity from renewable sources, leading to long-term savings on electricity bills.
5. **Environmental Stewardship:** Investing in renewable energy aligns with sustainable farming practices, contributes to reducing carbon emissions, and demonstrates environmental responsibility.
6. **Rural Development:** Renewable energy projects can stimulate local economies, create employment opportunities, and contribute to rural development.

However, there are considerations for farmers considering renewable energy ventures:

- **Initial Investment:** Setting up renewable energy infrastructure involves initial capital investment. Farmers need to assess financial feasibility and access financing options.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Familiarise yourself with regulations, permits, grid connection requirements<sup>32</sup>, environmental impact assessments, and planning permissions<sup>33</sup> associated with renewable energy projects.
- **Technical and Maintenance Requirements:** Renewable energy systems require maintenance, monitoring, and occasional repairs. Farmers should ensure they have the expertise or access to technical support for system upkeep.
- **Site Suitability:** Conduct feasibility studies to determine the suitability of the farm for renewable energy production, considering factors like wind speed, solar irradiance, or biomass availability.

By leveraging renewable energy options, such as wind, solar<sup>34</sup>, or biomass, Irish farmers can diversify their income streams, contribute to sustainable energy production, and potentially achieve long-term economic benefits while supporting environmental goals. However, thorough planning, understanding regulations, and financial assessments are crucial before venturing into renewable energy projects.

Further info <https://www.seai.ie/>



28 <https://www.seai.ie/business-and-public-sector/business-grants-and-supports/support-scheme-renewable-heat/>

29 [https://www.caslin.ie/Downloads/294200\\_8563e54d-1264-44db-93fe-f382a73a67bc.pdf](https://www.caslin.ie/Downloads/294200_8563e54d-1264-44db-93fe-f382a73a67bc.pdf)

30 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/36d8d2-renewable-electricity-support-scheme/>

31 <https://www.seai.ie/grants/community-grants/overview/>

32 <https://www.seai.ie/publications/Community-Toolkit-Grid-Connection.pdf>

33 <https://www.seai.ie/publications/Community-Toolkit-Planning-Process.pdf>

34 <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/6ab0f-solar-capital-investment-scheme/>



## Rural Skills

As a farmer, many of the niche skills you use on a daily basis are in high demand. Hands-on skills are impossible to learn solely from books, and are far more successfully learnt in a hands-on environment. Why not consider running courses on your farm?

From animal husbandry, animal basics and lambing, to shearing, hedge-laying and dry stone-walling, there are a huge range of courses you could offer to new entrants, smallholders, young farmers and school children. Running rural skills training courses on a farm can be a viable and rewarding diversification option for farmers. This kind of initiative not only generates additional income but also utilises the farmers' expertise and resources to educate and train individuals interested in various aspects of agriculture and rural life. Here is how it can be implemented:

- 1. Identify Areas of Expertise:** Farmers often possess a wealth of knowledge and skills in various agricultural practices, animal husbandry, horticulture, land management, sustainable farming, and more. Identifying specific areas of expertise that align with the farmer's knowledge-base is essential.
- 2. Develop Course Curriculum:** Design comprehensive training courses based on identified rural skills. These courses can cater to a diverse audience, including aspiring farmers, hobbyists, individuals interested in self-sufficiency, or those seeking knowledge in specific agricultural techniques.
- 3. Infrastructure and Facilities:** Assess existing farm infrastructure and facilities that can be utilised for training purposes. This may include classroom spaces, demonstration areas, farm buildings, agricultural machinery, or dedicated training zones.
- 4. Qualified Instructors and Resources:** Employ qualified instructors, which may include the farmer themselves or other experts in the field. Gather resources such as training materials, tools, equipment, and teaching aids necessary for effective training sessions.
- 5. Course Offerings:** Offer a range of courses that could cover topics such as organic farming practices, livestock management, crop cultivation techniques, beekeeping, agricultural machinery operation, rural crafts, and more.
- 6. Marketing and Promotion:** Develop a marketing strategy to promote the training courses. Utilise various channels such as social media, local community networks, agricultural organisations, and online platforms to reach potential participants.
- 7. Legal and Administrative Considerations:** Ensure compliance with regulations, obtain necessary permits or certifications required for running training courses, and establish clear administrative processes for registration, payments, and record-keeping.
- 8. Networking and Collaborations:** Collaborate with local educational institutions, agricultural associations, or government programs to enhance credibility, attract participants, and expand the reach of the training courses.
- 9. Feedback and Improvement:** Gather feedback from participants to continuously improve the quality and relevance of the courses. Adapt the curriculum based on the changing needs and demands of the audience.





## Snail Farming

Snail farming, also known as heliciculture, can potentially be a viable diversification option for Irish farmers. However, there are several considerations to explore before venturing into snail farming:

1. **Market Demand:** Evaluate the market demand for snails in Ireland. While snails are a delicacy in some cuisines and have gained popularity in niche markets, it's crucial to assess whether there's sufficient demand to sustain a snail farming business.
2. **Climate Suitability:** Consider Ireland's climate and whether it's suitable for snail farming. Snails thrive in mild and moist conditions, so the local climate needs to be conducive to their growth and reproduction.
3. **Regulatory Compliance:** Research and adhere to regulations regarding snail farming, including permits, health standards, and any legal requirements related to producing and selling snails for human consumption.
4. **Infrastructure and Environment:** Set up appropriate infrastructure, including housing or pens that provide suitable temperature, humidity, and protection from predators. Also, consider the land available for snail farming and ensure it is free from pollutants or chemicals that could harm the snails.
5. **Feeding and Care:** Understand the dietary needs of snails and ensure they have access to a proper diet, which typically consists of fresh fruits, vegetables, and greens. Additionally, knowledge of snail health and care is crucial to prevent diseases and maintain their well-being.

6. **Marketing and Sales:** Develop a marketing strategy to sell snails to potential buyers, such as restaurants, markets, or directly to consumers. Building relationships with potential clients and promoting the nutritional value and uniqueness of snail products could be essential.
7. **Financial Viability:** Conduct a thorough financial analysis to determine the feasibility and potential profitability of snail farming. Assess investment costs, ongoing expenses, and expected revenues to ascertain if the venture would be economically viable.

While snail farming can offer diversification opportunities, it is essential to approach it with careful planning, research, and consideration of the local market and environmental factors. Farmers interested in pursuing snail farming should conduct a feasibility study, seek advice from experienced snail farmers or agricultural experts, and evaluate all aspects before investing in this niche farming venture.

### Further info:

Bord Bia Snails in Europe <https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/news/food-alerts/overview-of-the-market-for-snails-in-europe/>

Global Snail Market <https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/insights/publications/global-snail-market-overview/>



## Soft Play Areas

Introducing a soft play area can be a potential diversification option for Irish farms seeking to attract families and provide additional entertainment and recreational activities. A soft play area typically consists of indoor play equipment made from soft materials, offering a safe and fun environment for children to explore and play. Here's why it could be a viable option:

1. **Family-Friendly Attraction:** A soft play area appeals to families with young children, offering an indoor entertainment option, especially during inclement weather or colder seasons.
2. **Increased Visitor Engagement:** By offering diverse activities such as petting zoos, adventure playgrounds, or soft play areas, farms can attract a wider range of visitors, extending their stay and potentially increasing spending on-site.
3. **Diversification of Services:** Adding a soft play area diversifies the farm's offerings beyond traditional agricultural experiences, catering to a broader audience.
4. **Revenue Generation:** Entry fees or charges for accessing the soft play area can generate additional income for the farm.
5. **Customer Retention:** Providing entertainment options for children can encourage families to return to the farm, fostering customer loyalty.

However, farmers considering a soft play area as a diversification option should consider several factors:

- **Space and Facilities:** Evaluate available indoor space and the feasibility of installing soft play equipment, ensuring compliance with safety standards and regulations.
- **Safety and Maintenance:** Ensure the safety of play equipment, regular maintenance, hygiene standards, and adherence to safety guidelines for child-friendly spaces.
- **Target Market and Marketing:** Understand the local market and demographics to gauge the demand for a soft play area. Implement effective marketing strategies to attract families and promote the new attraction.
- **Operational Considerations:** Plan for staffing requirements, operational hours, ticketing, and customer service to manage the soft play area efficiently.
- **Financial Viability:** Assess the investment costs, potential returns, and ongoing operational expenses associated with establishing and maintaining the soft play area.

Implementing a soft play area can diversify the farm's offerings, enhance the family-friendly appeal, and create a new revenue stream. However, farmers should conduct thorough research, ensure compliance with safety standards, and carefully plan the implementation to ensure the success of this diversification option.





## Social Farming

Social farming can be considered a diversification option for Irish farmers. Social farming, also known as care farming or green care, involves using agricultural resources to provide social, educational, or therapeutic services for individuals with specific needs. This practice brings together the farming community and individuals seeking support, often from vulnerable or marginalised groups. Here is why it can be a viable option:

1. **Social and Health Benefits:** Social farming programs offer participants opportunities for social interaction, skill development, and therapeutic engagement through activities on the farm, contributing to improved mental health and well-being.
2. **Community Integration:** It promotes social inclusion by integrating individuals who may face challenges due to disabilities, mental health issues, social isolation, or other vulnerabilities into a farming community.
3. **Utilisation of Farm Resources:** Farmers can utilise their agricultural resources, such as farm settings, animals, gardening activities, and nature surroundings, to facilitate therapeutic or educational interventions.
4. **Diversification of Farm Activities:** Integrating social farming activities diversifies farm operations beyond traditional agricultural practices, offering a different kind of service to the community.
5. **Government Support:** Social farming initiatives may receive support or funding from government agencies, healthcare providers, or community organisations involved in social care and well-being programs.

However, farmers considering social farming should take into account the following considerations:

- **Training and Expertise:** Farmers may need training or guidance in areas related to social care, communication skills, understanding participant needs, and risk management.
- **Collaborations and Partnerships:** Building collaborations with healthcare providers, social service agencies, or community groups is essential for referrals, funding, and ensuring appropriate support for participants.
- **Legal and Ethical Considerations:** Complying with regulations, safeguarding policies, confidentiality, and ethical considerations regarding participant well-being is crucial.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities:** Ensure the farm has appropriate facilities, accessibility, safety measures, and equipment to accommodate participants' needs.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Implement evaluation methods to assess the impact of social farming activities on participants' well-being and continually monitor and adapt programs as needed.

Social farming can offer a rewarding opportunity for farmers to contribute positively to the community, provide support services, and diversify their farm activities. However, successful implementation requires careful planning, collaboration with relevant stakeholders, and a commitment to the social and emotional well-being of participants.

### Further info:

Social Farming Ireland <https://www.socialfarmingireland.ie/>





## Speciality Crops

Speciality crops can be a valuable option for farm diversification, especially for farmers looking to expand their product range and tap into niche or high-value markets. With growing consumer interest in low gluten or gluten free cereals and many supermarkets having special diet sections, there is increasing opportunity for producers to diversify into alternative cereals. Speciality crops refer to non-traditional or unique crops that often have specific characteristics, flavours, or uses, appealing to consumers seeking distinct or gourmet products.

### Speciality grains and pulses

Minor cereal and grains – With growing consumer interest in low gluten or gluten free cereals and many supermarkets having special diet sections, there is an increasing opportunity for producers to diversify into and minor oilseed crops such as Crambe, Echium, Camelina other options include heirloom vegetables, medicinal herbs, or microgreens. There are also speciality grains and pulses with cereals such as Buckwheat, Rye, Emmer and Spelt, which can offer various niche health benefits. There are some essential oil crops such as lavender, peppermint, rose and rosemary although the less favourable conditions at harvest in Ireland limit production potential.

Here are reasons why speciality crops can be a diversification option:

1. **Unique Market Demand:** Speciality crops cater to niche markets with specific tastes, health benefits, or culinary uses that may not be met by conventional crops. Examples include exotic fruits, oilseed rape and linseed.
2. **Higher Profit Margins:** These crops often command higher prices due to their uniqueness, quality, or limited availability, potentially leading to increased profitability compared to commodity crops.
3. **Diverse Product Offerings:** By adding speciality crops to their product range, farmers can diversify offerings, attract new customers, and differentiate themselves in the market.

#### 4. **Local and Sustainable Appeal:**

Speciality crops produced sustainably or organically can attract consumers interested in supporting local agriculture, biodiversity, or eco-friendly practices.

5. **Value-Added Products:** Some speciality crops can be used to create value-added products such as jams, sauces, infused oils, or artisanal goods, expanding revenue opportunities.

However, there are considerations for farmers exploring speciality crops:

- **Market Research:** Conduct thorough market research to identify consumer demand, trends, and potential buyers for speciality crops in the local or regional market.
- **Crop Suitability:** Assess the suitability of the farm's soil, climate, and resources for cultivating speciality crops. Consider factors like growing conditions, pest control, and crop management.
- **Expertise and Knowledge:** Obtain necessary expertise, training, or guidance in cultivating, harvesting, and marketing speciality crops, as they may require specific cultivation practices.
- **Risk Management:** Diversifying into speciality crops involves risks such as market fluctuations, changing consumer preferences, or limited market access. Farmers should have strategies to mitigate these risks.
- **Market Access and Distribution:** Plan for effective marketing, distribution channels, and access to potential buyers, whether through farmers' markets, specialty stores, online platforms, or direct sales. Dehulling and processing can be challenging as machinery may need to be adjusted, and small quantities can be a barrier for larger processors.

Speciality crops can offer farmers an opportunity to diversify their agricultural activities, cater to unique consumer preferences, and potentially achieve higher profitability. However, successful cultivation and marketing of speciality crops require careful planning, market understanding, and a commitment to meeting specific consumer demands.



## Storage

There are numerous reasons self-storage offers a benefit to many people. They might be moving home, transitioning after a divorce, needing to store extra business supplies, or maybe they simply do not have room for large or bulky items such as bikes, lawnmowers, caravans or even boats at their home.

Does your farm have a secure area? Is there space for storage containers? Self-storage might be an option for you to consider as a diversification idea. Self-storage or rental space options for Irish farmers involve providing storage units or spaces on their farm premises for individuals, businesses, or other farmers seeking storage solutions. This business model allows farmers to utilise extra space on their property to generate income by offering secure storage facilities. Here is a detailed description of these options:

1. **Storage Units or Spaces:** Farmers can allocate a portion of their farm buildings or unused land for the construction or installation of storage units. These units can vary in size, ranging from small lockers to larger garage-sized spaces, catering to different storage needs.
2. **Secure and Controlled Access:** Ensuring security measures such as gated access, surveillance cameras, security personnel, or key-code entry systems helps provide a secure environment for storing customers' belongings.
3. **Varied Storage Options:** Offering a range of storage options suitable for different needs, such as climate-controlled units for sensitive items, vehicle storage for cars, boats, or farm machinery, or outdoor storage space for larger items.
4. **Flexible Rental Terms:** Providing flexible rental terms such as short-term or long-term leases allows customers to rent storage space according to their requirements, providing convenience and accommodating varying storage needs.

### 5. Marketing and Customer Service:

Implementing effective marketing strategies to promote the storage facilities to the local community, businesses, or other farmers. Providing excellent customer service and responsive management helps attract and retain customers.

### 6. Legal and Insurance Considerations:

Ensuring compliance with local regulations, zoning laws, and obtaining necessary permits for operating a storage facility. Additionally, having insurance coverage to protect both the farmer and the renters' stored items is essential.

### 7. Maintenance and Upkeep:

Regular maintenance and upkeep of the storage units or spaces to ensure cleanliness, structural integrity, and functionality. This includes pest control, repairs, and landscaping around the storage areas.

### 8. Pricing Structure:

Determining competitive pricing based on market research and considering factors such as location, unit size, amenities offered, and local demand.

Offering self-storage or rental spaces on farms can serve as an additional revenue stream for farmers, utilising their existing resources and providing a valuable service to the community. It is essential to conduct thorough market research, assess the feasibility, and develop a solid business plan before venturing into this type of enterprise.



## Vending Machines – (Direct selling of milk)

Direct selling of milk via vending machines can be a diversification option for farmers or family members in Ireland. This method allows farmers to sell fresh, unpasteurised or pasteurised milk directly to consumers, providing convenience and access to farm-fresh products. Here are reasons why it can be a viable diversification:

1. **Value-added Sales:** Selling milk directly through vending machines adds value to the product by offering consumers fresh, locally sourced, and possibly organic milk, which can attract customers seeking high-quality, unprocessed dairy products.
2. **Consumer Convenience:** Vending machines provide convenient access to fresh milk, allowing consumers to purchase the quantity they need at any time of the day, bypassing traditional retail channels.
3. **Direct Customer Interaction:** Direct sales through vending machines enable farmers to establish a direct connection with consumers, sharing information about farming practices, animal welfare, and product quality.
4. **Diversification of Revenue:** It offers an additional revenue stream for the farm, potentially increasing profitability compared to selling milk through conventional distribution channels.
5. **Differentiation in the Market:** Offering unpasteurised or pasteurised milk via vending machines caters to consumers seeking alternatives to processed dairy products, distinguishing the farm's offerings in the market.

However, farmers considering milk vending machines should consider several factors:

- **Regulatory Compliance:** Ensure compliance with health and safety regulations, milk hygiene standards, vending machine requirements, and necessary permits or licenses related to selling unpasteurised and pasteurised milk.
- **Quality Control:** Maintain strict hygiene standards and regular sanitation of vending machines to ensure the freshness and safety of the milk.
- **Equipment and Maintenance:** Invest in reliable vending machines and ensure proper maintenance to prevent malfunctions or contamination issues.
- **Marketing and Communication:** Develop marketing strategies to promote the vending machine, inform consumers about the product, and highlight the benefits of farm-fresh, unpasteurised and pasteurised milk.
- **Customer Education:** Provide clear information about the product, including any risks associated with consuming unpasteurised and pasteurised milk, to ensure informed consumer choices.

Direct selling of milk via vending machines can be a successful diversification strategy, offering fresh and differentiated products to consumers while providing an additional income source for the farm. However, farmers must carefully navigate regulatory requirements, ensure product quality, and effectively communicate the benefits of farm-fresh, unpasteurised and pasteurised milk to potential customers.

### Further Information:

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland <https://www.fsai.ie/business-advice/running-a-food-business/caterers/vending-machines>





## Viticulture



Viticulture, the cultivation of grapes for winemaking, is gradually gaining traction among some farmers in Ireland. While Ireland's climate is not traditionally associated with wine production due to its cooler and wetter conditions, there has been an increasing interest in exploring viticulture and wine production in recent years.

### Several factors contribute to this trend:

1. **Climate Change:** Ireland's climate has been experiencing some changes, including milder temperatures and longer growing seasons. Certain areas, particularly in the southeast and southwest regions of Ireland, are being considered more favorable for grape cultivation due to these changes.
2. **Research and Experimentation:** Agricultural researchers and some farmers have been experimenting with grape varieties that are more suited to cooler and wetter climates. This includes growing grape varieties specifically developed for these conditions, known as cold-climate or hybrid grape varieties.
3. **Innovation and Technology:** Advances in technology, such as polytunnels and other protective structures, aid in creating more favorable microclimates for grapevines. These innovations help mitigate some of the challenges posed by Ireland's climate.

While the wine industry in Ireland is still relatively small compared to traditional wine-producing countries, there has been a notable increase in interest and experimentation with viticulture. Some farmers have successfully established small vineyards and are producing limited quantities of wine for local consumption or niche markets.

However, the production scale and overall commercial viability of viticulture in Ireland are still evolving. The challenges related to weather, disease resistance, and economic viability remain significant factors for those considering or already involved in grape cultivation for winemaking.



## Wedding Venue



Transforming land or repurposing old buildings into wedding venues can be a lucrative diversification option for farmers. This venture allows farmers to utilise their scenic landscapes, rustic charm, and spacious settings to cater to couples seeking unique and picturesque locations for their weddings. Here is how farmers can develop a wedding venue diversification:

1. **Venue Renovation:** Repurpose existing farm buildings, barns, or historical structures into charming event spaces suitable for ceremonies, receptions, and gatherings. Renovate or restore these structures to create an appealing aesthetic.
2. **Landscaping and Amenities:** Enhance the farm's surroundings by landscaping gardens, outdoor seating areas, and ceremony sites to provide beautiful backdrops for weddings and photo opportunities.
3. **Facilities and Infrastructure:** Ensure the venue has essential amenities such as adequate parking, restroom facilities, catering areas, and access to electricity for lighting and entertainment.

4. **Customisation and Services:** Offer flexibility for couples to personalise their weddings by providing space for different wedding styles, themes, or cultural ceremonies. Consider providing or partnering with vendors for catering, decoration, and other wedding services.
5. **Accommodation Options:** Consider offering on-site accommodation options like guesthouses, cottages, or glamping sites for the wedding party or guests who wish to stay overnight.
6. **Event Management and Coordination:** Provide event management services or collaborate with wedding planners to assist couples in organising and coordinating their special day.
7. **Marketing and Promotion:** Develop a marketing strategy targeting engaged couples through wedding fairs, bridal shows, social media, and partnerships with wedding-related businesses.
8. **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** Ensure compliance with local regulations, licensing, permits, and zoning requirements related to hosting events and operating a wedding venue.

Developing a wedding venue diversification leverages the farm's natural beauty and heritage, offering couples an idyllic and memorable location for their celebrations. This venture can generate additional revenue, especially during wedding seasons, and contribute to the local economy while preserving the farm's authenticity and charm. However, it requires careful planning, investment in infrastructure, marketing efforts, and ensuring a seamless wedding experience for couples and their guests.



## Wellbeing Tourism

Irish farmers can diversify their land use to incorporate wellbeing tourism initiatives, leveraging the natural beauty, tranquility, and rural landscapes available on their farms. Wellbeing tourism focuses on providing experiences that promote relaxation, health, and personal rejuvenation. Here are potential opportunities for farmers:

- 1. Wellness Retreats or Workshops:** Organise wellness retreats, workshops, or classes focusing on activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness, or holistic therapies in serene and natural settings on the farm.
- 2. Nature Trails and Eco-Tourism:** Develop walking trails, nature paths, or eco-tourism activities, allowing visitors to explore the farm's scenic beauty, forests, lakes, or wildlife, promoting wellness through nature immersion.
- 3. Spa Facilities or Wellness Centers:** Establish wellness facilities like spas, saunas, or massage centers using natural resources available on the farm, such as thermal springs or herbal treatments.
- 4. Accommodation Options:** Offer accommodation options like glamping sites, eco-lodges, or sustainable cabins, providing guests with an opportunity for a restful and immersive farm experience.
- 5. Farm-to-Table Experiences:** Host farm-to-table dining experiences, showcasing locally sourced, organic produce, and meals prepared on-site, promoting healthy and mindful eating.
- 6. Educational Programs:** Conduct educational programs on sustainable living, organic farming, or healthy lifestyle practices, engaging guests in hands-on experiences on the farm.
- 7. Fitness and Outdoor Activities:** Introduce fitness programs, adventure activities, or outdoor sports that encourage physical well-being and enjoyment of the farm's natural surroundings.

- 8. Mindful and Creative Retreats:** Offer creative retreats, artistic workshops, or mindfulness sessions leveraging the tranquil environment of the farm.

However, farmers considering well-being tourism should consider the following:

- **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in necessary infrastructure, amenities, and facilities to provide a comfortable and enjoyable experience for visitors.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Develop effective marketing strategies targeting wellness-focused audiences, using online platforms, social media, and collaborations with wellness organisations or travel agencies.
- **Guest Experience and Services:** Ensure exceptional guest experiences by providing quality services, knowledgeable staff, and tailored programs that align with the wellness theme.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Comply with health and safety regulations, licensing requirements, and any necessary permits for hosting wellness-related activities.

By diversifying into wellbeing tourism, farmers can attract a different demographic of visitors seeking relaxation, nature immersion, and health-focused experiences. This diversification can complement traditional farming activities, generate additional income, and showcase the farm's natural assets and rural charm to a wider audience.





## How much do diversified businesses earn from diversified enterprises?

The earnings or revenue generated from diversified enterprises on farms can vary significantly based on several factors, including the type of diversification, scale of operations, market demand, management practices, location, and the specific enterprise's profitability. Therefore, providing a specific or average earning figure for diversified businesses on farms can be challenging and varies widely.

The earnings from diversified enterprises can range from modest additional income to substantial profits, depending on various factors:

1. **Type of Diversification:** Different diversification ventures yield varying levels of income. For instance, enterprises like agri-tourism, value-added products, renewable energy installations, or specialty crop cultivation might have different profit margins.
2. **Market Demand and Pricing:** The demand for the products or services offered by diversified enterprises significantly affects earnings. Enterprises catering to niche markets or offering unique, high-quality products often command better prices and potentially higher earnings.
3. **Scale and Efficiency:** The scale of the diversified enterprise and its efficiency in operations and management play a crucial role. Larger-scale ventures with efficient production, marketing, and cost management tend to generate higher earnings.

4. **Location and Access to Markets:** Proximity to markets, distribution channels, and access to consumers affect the revenue potential. Enterprises located in areas with high consumer demand or tourist traffic might earn more.
5. **Seasonality and Trends:** Seasonal variations or changing consumer trends can influence earnings. Some enterprises might have peak seasons where earnings are higher.
6. **Costs and Investment:** The initial investment, ongoing costs, and maintenance expenses for diversified enterprises affect profitability. Enterprises requiring substantial investment might take longer to generate significant returns.

It is essential for farmers engaging in diversified enterprises to conduct thorough market research, feasibility studies, and careful financial planning to estimate potential earnings realistically. While some enterprises may provide a steady supplementary income stream, others might become the primary source of revenue for the farm, depending on their success and market demand.

Additionally, it is recommended, for farmers to track their earnings and expenses closely, adapt strategies based on market feedback, and continually seek ways to optimise their diversified enterprises to maximise their earning potential.

## What is a relatable diversification

If you ever come across the term 'relatable diversification', it will likely be your bank manager or funder saying it. It is a way of capitalising on farm visitors and extending their visit time by boosting the offering with a whole experience.

A relatable diversification refers to a business expansion or venture that is closely connected or relevant to the existing operations, skills, or resources of an individual or entity. It involves branching out into new areas or activities that leverage existing expertise, assets, or customer base in a way that makes the transition understandable or logical to stakeholders and customers.

In farming or agriculture, a relatable diversification could involve expanding into areas that complement or build upon existing practices. For instance:

1. **Value-Added Products:** Developing products directly related to the farm's produce. For example, a dairy farm might diversify into cheese or yogurt production, utilising their milk production to create value-added dairy products.
2. **Agri-Tourism:** Opening the farm to visitors for activities like farm tours, educational workshops, or experiences related to the farm's activities (e.g., pick-your-own fruit experiences, farm stays).
3. **Renewable Energy Generation:** Installing solar panels or wind turbines on the farm's land to generate renewable energy. This could be seen as a relatable diversification for a farm looking to diversify income streams while utilising available land.
4. **Direct Sales and Farmer's Markets:** Selling produce directly to consumers through farmer's markets, farm shops, or online platforms. This diversification involves direct marketing to consumers but relies on the farm's primary produce.
5. **Small-Scale Processing:** Processing farm produce into goods such as jams, sauces, or dried fruits. Utilising surplus or seconds to create processed goods can be a relatable diversification strategy.

Relatable diversification strategies often leverage existing knowledge, resources, and infrastructure, making them easier to comprehend and implement. They aim to minimise risks associated with entering entirely new markets or industries by building upon the established strengths and capabilities of the farm or business.

## Tax Planning

When a farmer diversifies into an alternative business income stream, several taxation considerations must be taken into account in Ireland. Here are key aspects to consider:

- **Income Tax and Corporation Tax:** Different income streams might have different tax implications. Income generated from the farm's primary agricultural activities might be subject to specific agricultural tax relief schemes, while income from diversified activities could fall under standard income tax or corporation tax rules.
- **VAT (Value Added Tax):** Depending on the nature of the diversified business, VAT obligations might apply. Certain products or services may be subject to VAT, and the farmer needs to register for VAT if their turnover exceeds specific thresholds.
- **Capital Gains Tax (CGT):** Selling assets as part of diversification, such as land or equipment, may trigger CGT liabilities if the sale results in a capital gain. There might be exemptions or relief available for certain assets.
- **Stamp Duty:** Purchasing land or property for diversification purposes could incur stamp duty. However, specific reliefs or exemptions might apply, depending on the circumstances.
- **Employment Taxes:** Hiring employees for the diversified business could involve various employment-related taxes, such as PAYE (Pay As You Earn) and PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance), which need to be correctly managed and accounted for.
- **Tax Allowances and Reliefs:** Depending on the nature of the diversification project, certain tax allowances, reliefs, or incentives might be available. For instance, energy-efficient investments

or specific agricultural diversification schemes might qualify for tax relief.

- **Record Keeping and Reporting:** Maintaining accurate records of income, expenses, sales, and purchases related to the diversified business is crucial for tax purposes. Compliance with reporting requirements to Revenue (Irish tax authority) is essential.
- **Professional Advice:** Seeking advice from a tax advisor or accountant specialising in agricultural taxation is highly recommended. They can provide tailored guidance on tax planning, compliance, and strategies to optimise tax efficiency while diversifying the income stream.

It is important for farmers diversifying their business to be aware of the tax implications associated with these ventures. Understanding and managing tax obligations can significantly affect the profitability and success of the diversified enterprise. Seeking professional advice and staying updated on tax regulations and incentives are crucial steps in effective tax planning for diversified income streams.

## How to get started with farm tourism

Many of the most popular farm-based tourist attractions started as small, back-to-basic campsites operated under permitted development and grew from there. This is probably the quickest and easiest form of diversification and one of the cheapest. They are easy to operate and can generate great returns.

The great thing about starting small like this is projects can be self-funded, with no need to spend time filling in complicated paperwork applying for grants or incurring any debt. Then, by reinvesting some of the capital, farmers can gradually progress in different directions. That might be planning permission for glamping, a farm shop, investing in animals for families to pet or developing a food brand from the produce they grow - the list is endless.

Starting a farm tourism project in Ireland involves careful planning, understanding regulations, creating unique experiences, and ensuring a positive visitor experience. Here are steps to get started:

### 1. Research and Planning:

- » Identify the specific aspects of your farm that can be appealing to tourists. This might include natural beauty, unique landscapes, agricultural practices, livestock, or historical significance.
- » Research similar farm tourism projects in Ireland or indeed abroad to understand what works, target markets, and the types of experiences offered.

### 2. Legal and Regulatory Considerations:

- » Understand zoning laws, planning permissions, and regulations related to hosting visitors on farms. Consult local authorities or agricultural agencies for guidance.
- » Obtain necessary permits or licenses required for running a tourism operation on your farm.

### 3. Infrastructure and Facilities:

- » Develop necessary infrastructure such as parking areas, visitor reception spaces, restroom facilities, and paths or trails for guided tours, if applicable.
- » Ensure safety measures are in place, especially if offering activities involving animals or machinery.

### 4. Unique Experiences and Activities:

- » Determine the experiences you will offer. This could include farm tours, agricultural workshops, animal feeding or interaction sessions, nature trails, or farm-stay accommodations.
- » Consider creating themed experiences or seasonal activities to attract visitors throughout the year.

### 5. Marketing and Promotion:

- » Develop a marketing strategy targeting your desired audience. Utilise online platforms, social media, tourism websites, and local marketing channels to promote your farm tourism offerings.
- » Collaborate with local tourism organisations, accommodations, or travel agencies to attract visitors.

**6. Customer Experience and Hospitality:**

- » Focus on providing a positive visitor experience. Offer hospitality, good customer service, and engaging activities to ensure guests leave with a memorable experience.
- » Consider offering local produce or farm-related products for sale as souvenirs or additional revenue streams.

**7. Networking and Collaborations:**

- » Build relationships with local businesses, attractions, and tour operators. Collaborate to offer combined packages or referrals, enhancing the overall tourism experience in the region.

**8. Financial Planning and Pricing:**

- » Develop a business plan outlining start-up costs, operational expenses, and revenue projections. Consider pricing your experiences competitively while ensuring profitability.

**9. Feedback and Adaptation:**

- » Gather feedback from visitors and use it to improve and adapt your offerings. Continuous improvement is key to maintaining and growing your farm tourism project.

Starting a farm tourism project requires dedication, creativity, and a thorough understanding of both the agricultural and tourism industries. It is essential to create unique and authentic experiences while ensuring compliance with regulations and providing excellent customer service to attract and retain visitors.

## Self help finance guide for farmers considering diversification

As changes in farming policy continue to impact on the industry, with reductions in support payments and a new focus on reducing carbon on-farm, many farmers are considering how they can diversify their income streams to support their businesses in the future.

There are various types of finance available to farmers in Ireland seeking to diversify their operations. Here is a guide outlining the types of finance commonly accessible:

**1. Agricultural Loans:**

- » **Agricultural Finance Providers:** Numerous financial institutions, including banks and credit unions, offer agricultural loans tailored to farmers. These loans may cover diversification projects, equipment purchases, or working capital needs.
- » **Microfinance Loans:** Some agencies or microfinance institutions such as Microfinance Ireland or the Local Enterprise Offices may provide smaller loans specifically designed for agricultural diversification projects, with less stringent requirements compared to traditional lenders.

**2. Government Grants and Schemes:**

- » **Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM):** DAFM offers various grant schemes supporting farmers in diversification efforts. Examples include the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) and the European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) funding for innovative agricultural projects.
- » **LEADER Funding:** Administered by Local Action Groups, LEADER funding supports rural development, including farm diversification initiatives, through grants or low-interest loans.

### 3. Equity Financing:

- » **Investment Funds or Angel Investors:** Farmers can seek equity financing by attracting investors or venture capitalists interested in agricultural diversification projects. This involves offering ownership stakes in return for funding.

### 4. Crowdfunding and Peer-to-Peer Lending:

- » **Crowdfunding Platforms:** Farmers can utilise crowdfunding platforms to raise capital by presenting their diversification projects to a large audience online, inviting contributions or investments.
- » **Peer-to-Peer Lending:** Platforms connecting borrowers directly with lenders offer an alternative way to secure financing by borrowing from individuals or groups.

### 5. Agricultural Co-operatives:

- » **Co-operative Financing:** Agricultural co-operatives sometimes offer financial support or credit facilities to their members for diversification initiatives. These entities focus on supporting farmers' needs and interests.

### 6. Regional Development Agencies and Initiatives:

- » **Regional Development Funds:** Some regional development agencies or initiatives provide financial support to farmers undertaking diversification projects, contributing to local economic growth and innovation.

### 7. Tax Incentives and Reliefs:

- » **Tax Credits and Incentives:** Explore available tax incentives or reliefs offered by the government to support agricultural diversification. These might include tax credits for renewable energy installations or other qualifying projects.

### 8. Community and Local Initiatives:

- » **Community Funding Sources:** Farmers can explore local initiatives, community grants, or partnerships that support rural development and diversification projects.

Before pursuing any finance option, farmers should assess their needs, prepare a comprehensive business plan, and consider the costs, terms,

interest rates, and eligibility criteria associated with each financing method. Seeking advice from financial advisors, or agricultural consultants can assist in determining the most suitable financing option for specific diversification endeavours.

Seek professional advice as early as possible and from whatever source is available, such as accountants or solicitors and never forget to discuss with family.

While not exhaustive, typically, funders will be looking to satisfy themselves on the following:

- Have planning approval and permissions been considered and approved?
- Funders will typically require sight of these depending on the project size.
- If you are looking at re-purposing or erecting a new building, has this been costed and competitively quoted?
- Does the venture require licensing and if so, is it in place?
- What corporate structure will the venture take, such as a new limited company?

## Ensure you have a coherent and well thought out business plan

Typically, banks require a comprehensive business plan. Regardless of the venture's size, a detailed business plan allows lenders to assess the commercial viability of the investment.

When crafting your plan, imagine the reader to have no prior knowledge of your business but assume expertise. Create a concise summary page outlining your venture, funding requirements, and repayment strategy.

Additionally, address the following crucial points in your plan:

- Highlight the uniqueness of your venture, emphasising location advantages or nearby attractions.
- Analyse the local competitive landscape thoroughly and incorporate this assessment into the business plan.

- Detail your marketing strategy beyond the generic inclusion of social media. Specify the platforms, content strategy, and rationale behind your choices.
- Avoid overly optimistic financial projections; lenders may interpret inflated numbers sceptically. Be transparent about assumptions and the research underpinning these figures.

Remember, a well-crafted business plan not only presents your venture but also demonstrates a deep understanding of the market and a realistic approach to achieving success.

### **Know what the lender wants**

Anticipate and prepare for scrutiny of your financial figures. These numbers are yours, and a comprehensive understanding is crucial. Challenges from funders serve as a litmus test for the robustness of your financial projections. To instil confidence in lenders, your business plan should demonstrate the following:

- A meticulously considered and extensively researched proposition.
- A balanced funding proposal that distinctly outlines your investment in the new venture.
- Contingency Plans B and C, delineating alternative strategies if the projected business levels are not met.
- A clear path outlining the repayment of their investment and the projected timeframe for this return.

Remember, thoroughness in addressing these aspects not only strengthens your proposal but also builds credibility and trust with potential funders.

## **Farm diversification: making a success of it**

The success of farm diversification relies on several key factors that contribute to its effectiveness. Here are some "secrets" or essential elements often observed in successful farm diversification:

### **1. Thorough Research and Planning:**

- » Conduct comprehensive market research to identify viable diversification opportunities.
- » Plan meticulously, considering financial implications, market demand, and feasibility studies before implementing any new venture.

### **2. Utilisation of Existing Resources:**

- » Leveraging existing farm resources, such as land, equipment, and expertise, to minimise costs and maximise efficiency in diversification ventures.

### **3. Understanding Target Markets:**

- » Tailoring diversification efforts to meet the needs and preferences of the target market.
- » Adapting products or services based on consumer feedback and evolving market trends.

### **4. Innovation and Uniqueness:**

- » Offering unique and innovative products or experiences that differentiate the farm from competitors.
- » Embracing creativity and embracing new technologies or techniques to stand out in the market.

### **5. Strategic Marketing and Promotion:**

- » Implementing effective marketing strategies to create awareness and attract customers.
- » Utilising various channels, including social media, local markets, or collaborations with tourism agencies, to reach a broader audience.

**6. Adaptability and Flexibility:**

- » Being adaptable to changing market conditions, consumer preferences, and unforeseen challenges.
- » Willingness to adjust strategies or diversification plans based on feedback and evolving trends.

**7. Financial Management and Risk Mitigation:**

- » Sound financial planning, including budgeting, cost control, and managing financial risks associated with diversification initiatives.
- » Developing contingency plans to mitigate potential risks and navigate uncertainties.

**8. Engagement with Local Community and Stakeholders:**

- » Collaborating with the local community, tourism boards, or industry partners to enhance visibility and support for diversified ventures.
- » Involving stakeholders and seeking their input can lead to increased support and sustainability.

**9. Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:**

- » Regularly assessing the performance of diversification initiatives against set goals and benchmarks.
- » Constantly seeking ways to improve, innovate, and refine the offerings based on customer feedback and market trends.

Successful farm diversification often combines these elements, emphasising a blend of innovation, strategic planning, adaptability, and a deep understanding of the market and consumer behaviour. Flexibility and a willingness to learn and evolve are key to long-term success in diversified farm ventures.

## Supports for Farm Diversification

### LEADER

LEADER (Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale) is a rural development initiative in the European Union, including Ireland, designed to support various initiatives aimed at enhancing the economic and social development of rural areas. LEADER plays a significant role in supporting on-farm diversification by providing funding, guidance, and resources to farmers looking to diversify their farming enterprises.

The role of LEADER in supporting on-farm diversification includes:

- 1. Financial Support:** LEADER provides funding for rural development projects, including on-farm diversification initiatives. This financial assistance helps farmers cover costs related to infrastructure development, equipment purchase, marketing, and other expenses associated with diversification projects.
- 2. Expert Advice and Guidance:** LEADER facilitates expert advice and guidance to farmers interested in diversifying their farming activities. This guidance may involve consultations on business planning, feasibility studies, market research, and the implementation of diversification strategies.
- 3. Training and Skills Development:** LEADER offers training programs, workshops, and educational opportunities for farmers to acquire new skills and knowledge required for successful on-farm diversification. This includes training on agri-tourism, alternative crops, value-added products, sustainable agriculture practices, and more.
- 4. Networking and Collaboration:** LEADER creates networking platforms where farmers can connect with other diversification entrepreneurs, experts, and stakeholders. This networking fosters knowledge sharing, partnerships, and access to potential markets for diversified farm products or services.

5. **Support in Regulatory Compliance:** LEADER assists farmers in understanding and complying with regulations, permits, and legal requirements relevant to their chosen diversification activities. This guidance ensures that farmers meet necessary standards and regulations.
6. **Promotion and Market Access:** LEADER helps farmers with the promotion and marketing of diversified farm products or services. This support includes guidance on branding, marketing strategies, and accessing markets for their diversified produce.

Overall, LEADER serves as a valuable resource for farmers seeking to diversify their on-farm activities. Through financial assistance, expert guidance, skill development, networking opportunities, and support in navigating regulations, LEADER contributes significantly to the success of on-farm diversification initiatives in rural areas. Farmers interested in diversification can explore LEADER programs and initiatives available in their regions for potential support.

## **Irish Local Development Network and Local Action Groups**

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) and Local Action Groups (LAGs), which are often represented by Local Development Companies (LDCs), play a significant role in supporting farm diversification initiatives in Ireland. These organisations typically offer a range of supports, guidance, and resources to farmers looking to diversify their farming enterprises. The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) acts as a coordinating body for Local Development Companies (LDCs) that are involved in the delivery of LEADER supports and initiatives in Ireland.

Some ways in which ILDN and Local Action Groups may assist in farm diversification include:

1. **Advice and Consultation:** Providing expert advice and guidance to farmers interested in exploring diversification options. This could involve consultations to discuss business plans, market research, and the feasibility of diversification ventures.
2. **Training and Workshops:** Offering training programs, workshops, and seminars on topics related to farm diversification, such as agri-tourism, alternative crops, value-added products, renewable energy, and more.
3. **Access to Funding and Grants:** Assisting farmers in accessing funding opportunities or grants available for diversification projects. This might include information on available LEADER supports and assistance with applications and advice on eligibility criteria.
4. **Networking and Collaboration:** Facilitating networking opportunities where farmers can connect with other diversification entrepreneurs, experts, and relevant stakeholders. This networking can help in knowledge sharing, partnerships, and accessing potential markets.
5. **Support in Regulatory Compliance:** Assisting farmers in understanding and complying with regulations, permits, and legal requirements relevant to their chosen diversification activities.

These organisations are crucial in supporting rural development, fostering innovation, and helping farmers explore new avenues to diversify their farming enterprises, thereby contributing to the sustainability and growth of rural communities. Farmers interested in diversification can reach out to ILDN or Local Action Groups in their respective areas to explore available supports and assistance for their diversification initiatives.

Contact my Local Action Group<sup>35</sup>  
Irish Local Development Network<sup>36</sup>

## **Local Enterprise Offices**

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in Ireland play a role in supporting diversification in agriculture and the development of new rural enterprises. While their primary focus is on supporting small businesses across various sectors, including agriculture and rural development, LEOs offer assistance, advice, and funding supports to farmers and rural entrepreneurs looking to diversify or start new enterprises in the

<sup>35</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/6797/ec3bae053af64564aa1bb3dcd0c80b5a.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> <https://ildn.ie/directory/>

agricultural sector. The LEOs do not support core-farming enterprises but may support new business opportunities, which are not supported by the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine (DAFM).

Here are ways in which Local Enterprise Offices support diversification in Irish agriculture and the development of new rural enterprises:

- 1. Advice and Mentorship:** LEOs provide expert advice, guidance, and mentorship to farmers seeking to diversify their agricultural activities. They offer support on business planning, market research, feasibility studies, and the development of new enterprise ideas.
- 2. Training and Workshops:** LEOs organise training programs, workshops, seminars, and educational events tailored to farmers and rural entrepreneurs interested in diversifying their agricultural ventures. These sessions cover various topics, including business management, marketing strategies, financial planning, and innovative agricultural practices.
- 3. Financial Assistance:** LEOs offer financial supports, grants, and funding schemes for eligible farmers and rural entrepreneurs looking to diversify their agricultural enterprises. These supports may cover costs related to infrastructure development, product development, marketing, and more.
- 4. Networking and Collaboration:** LEOs facilitate networking opportunities where farmers and rural entrepreneurs can connect with other business owners, industry experts, and potential partners. Networking events enable knowledge sharing, partnerships, and collaborations beneficial for diversification initiatives.
- 5. Business Development Supports:** LEOs provide assistance in developing business plans, accessing markets, identifying growth opportunities, and navigating regulatory requirements for new agricultural enterprises.
- 6. Innovation and Technology Support:** LEOs offer guidance on adopting innovative technologies and sustainable agricultural practices that can enhance the productivity and competitiveness of diversified agricultural ventures.

Local Enterprise Offices play a significant role in supporting diversification in Irish agriculture by providing a range of advisory, training, financial, and networking supports to farmers and rural entrepreneurs aiming to start or expand new enterprises within the agricultural sector. Farmers interested in diversification can contact their local LEOs to explore available supports and resources tailored to their specific needs.

Local Enterprise Office Contact Details:  
Find my Local Enterprise Office<sup>37</sup>

## Teagasc Farm Business Options Programme

### Aim

- To give individuals a good understanding of how to turn an idea into a viable business
- To provide a mentor for individuals on their idea and assist in the completion of a business plan
- To introduce individuals to other agencies/parties who may be able to offer tangible

This training is aimed at all farmers or family members considering how to improve farm income or with a particular interest in the topics covered in the workshops. The Farm Business Options programme will be tailored to demand. Potential topics include:

- Assessing your enterprise
- Developing your idea
- Food enterprise possibilities
- Energy crops
- Forestry
- Renewables
- Organic opportunities
- Rural Tourism
- Marketing and direct selling

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37 <https://www.localenterprise.ie/Find-Your-Local-Enterprise-Office/>

- A business plan - the basics
- Applying for grant aid
- Family farm finance
- Business supports
- Succession

## Method of Delivery

The programme consists of a series of workshops covering a wide range of topics. Guest farmers who have successfully diversified will speak at each workshop. Teagasc specialists will also be in attendance to answer questions. Visits to farms with successfully diversified farm enterprises are a vital aspect of the programme. Participants will also have the opportunity to network with local development and training agencies. The programme also incorporates networking with local agencies such as the Local Enterprise Office, Local Development Companies, Education and Training Boards and Intreo.

## Course Registration and Fees

Workshops are free of charge but prior booking is essential. There will be a small fee for buses to farm walks. Contact your local Teagasc office to express your interest. A list of Teagasc Options Coordinators is available<sup>38</sup>.

## Further Information

For further information contact your local Teagasc office or visit <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/options-programme/>

## Citizens Information

Citizens Information<sup>39</sup> offers a range of supports for entrepreneurs and individuals interested in starting their own business. Some ways in which Citizens Information supports entrepreneurs include:

1. **Information Provision:** Citizens Information provides comprehensive information on various aspects of starting and running a business in Ireland. This includes details on legal requirements, regulations, permits, taxation, funding options, and business planning.
2. **Guidance on Business Structures:** They offer guidance on different business structures available in Ireland, such as sole trader, partnership, limited company, etc. This guidance helps individuals understand the legal and financial implications of each structure.
3. **Regulatory Compliance:** Information is provided to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements relevant to specific industries or sectors. This includes guidelines on licenses, permits, health and safety regulations, and environmental obligations.
4. **Financial Advice:** Citizens Information provides information on financial matters related to setting up and managing a business. This includes advice on tax registration, accounting procedures, managing cash flow, and accessing financial support or grants available for businesses.
5. **Employment and HR Advice:** For those businesses intending to employ staff, Citizens Information offers guidance on employment laws, HR practices, employment contracts, and obligations as an employer.
6. **Online Resources and Workshops:** They may provide access to online resources, guides, and workshops designed to educate entrepreneurs and aspiring business owners on various aspects of entrepreneurship and business management.
7. **Referral Services:** In some cases, Citizens Information can refer individuals to specialised agencies, business support organisations, or government departments that offer specific assistance for startups or businesses in particular sectors.

Find my local Citizens Information Office  
<https://centres.citizensinformation.ie>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/rural-economy/organics/KT-Options-Co-ordinators-2024.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/types-of-employment/self-employment/starting-a-business/>



