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By Email To: CAPStrategicPlan@agriculture.gov.ie

Re: LEADER Funding proposed for the 2023 to 2027 Programme Period.

I write on behalf of IRD Duhallow regarding the allocation of €180 million for the LEADER programme as part of the indicative CAP measures for the period 2023 to 2027. IRD Duhallow wishes to make the following submission on the indicative LEADER allocation of €180 million, which marks a continued decline in support for Rural Communities
through LEADER over the course of the last two successive governments. The LEADER Programme was set at 10% of Pillar II and exceeded €420 million - CAP period 2007-2013. Then was cut significantly to 7.5% of Pillar II or just €250m from 2016 to 2020. The indicative allocation of €180 million points to another very significant cut to just 5% of the CAP Rural Development Programme. LEADER has been thus decimated over the course of the last decade. **IRD Duhallow is requesting the LEADER Fund be increased to at least €389m to support the rural economy and communities as we come through COVID and Brexit challenges and face into the impacts of climate change.**

The impact of this on IRD Duhallow has been devastating, where our budget fell from over €10m in the 2007 to 2013 programme to just €2.4m in the current 2016 to 2020 (4 years) programme and if the €180m remains in place we are destined for a LEADER budget of not much with €1.6m for the 5 years which would amount to roughly €300,000 per annum, about enough to part fund no more than 3 or 4 projects in any one year in an area with 46 active communities. IRD Duhallow wishes to point out further, that because we represent an area that covers part of two large counties, Cork and Kerry, we along with the other LEADER companies in these counties, have had cuts to LEADER of over 70% in the last programme, which has challenged our very existence and financial sustainability. It should be noted that our Duhallow region at the same time is larger than Louth, Leitrim, Carlow, or Longford. **We are therefore asking that at least €7m per Local Development Company/ LEADER Group for the period of the LEADER programme equating to €1m per annum is made available in LEADER 2023 to 2027 to ensure the sustainability of the 35 Rural Development Companies in Ireland. Additional budget per head of capita etc. can be calculated on top of this base figure for larger areas.**

For 30 years in Duhallow as in communities across the Country, LEADER has been a driver and innovator for rural development as well as ambassador for the European Funds impact on rural people. It is extremely disappointing to see how funding for the Programme has diminished significantly over recent Programmes, falling from 10% of the CAP Pillar II to 7.5% in the last programme and proposed to be cut once again to just 5% of CAP Pillar II. Incidentally 5% is the **minimum** a member state can allocate to LEADER by the European Commission, while most progressive countries are allocating 10% of their Rural Development fund to LEADER.

LEADER has been the life blood of rural communities and businesses, building capacity and social capital, developing social and cultural facilities, rural tourism attractions as well as providing sustained targeted support to rural enterprises and initiating environmental and biodiversity projects. LEADER has brought the concept of a living countryside, sustainable and strategic rural development, and improved quality of life for all rural dwellers. The continued erosion of the LEADER programme's foundation structures as well as funding will deprive rural communities of critical capacity building supports and funding for vital enterprise, tourism, environment, and community-led development. **Independent Local Action Groups are central to LEADER and must be prioritised during this programming period as set out in the Programme for Government.**

IRD Duhallow calls on the Minister for Agriculture Food & Marine Charlie McConalogue and Minister for Rural & Community Development Heather Humphries to revisit the allocations under CAP to ensure that the LEADER Budget is increased to €389 million for the 2023-2027 period. The increase can be achieved if the maximum exchequer co-funding rate of 80% is provided.

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Chairperson

[redacted]