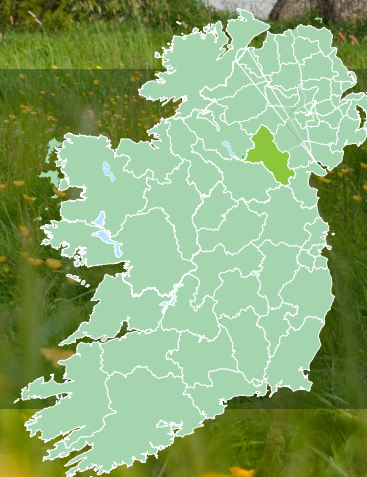




Monaghan

Ireland



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Introduction

County Monaghan is a mainly rural county in Ireland (shown in dark green in the diagram). It is part of the Border Region and is in the province of Ulster. Monaghan County Council is the local authority for the county. According to the 2016 census, the county had a population of 61,386 people. It is the fifth smallest of the Irish Republic's 26 counties in area (1295km²) and fourth smallest by population, with only 37% of the County's population living within an urban area.

Despite its peripheral border location, Monaghan has a long and proud tradition in the development of unique indigenous industry and as a hub for innovation in business and agriculture nationally.

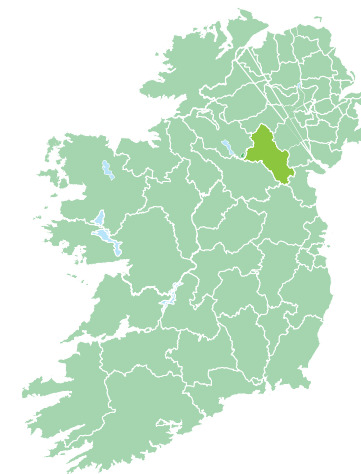
In recent years the county has become more diverse and is now home to a significant population of newly-arrived immigrants. Some have fled from wars and persecution, but most arrived to pursue a better life in Ireland and to work, live and study in the county. In 2016, new communities of non-Irish nationals now comprise 11% (6,122) of the population of the county.

County Monaghan's agricultural base is characterised by relatively small farm holdings, but is well supported by a vibrant agri-food sector and major companies operating in the county with a strong emphasis on the export market.

It is bound by Counties Cavan, Meath, Louth, Armagh, Tyrone and Fermanagh. It is strategically located on the Donegal/Derry – Dublin corridor, adjacent to the M1 corridor and has strong links to Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. The County is predominantly rural with a quality drumlin landscape interspersed with wetlands and woodlands.

Despite having the second smallest average farm size in the country, averaging at 23.3 hectares, agricultural output from the county's 4,565 farms is relatively high at €351 million with an export value of €483 million, representing the 7th highest nationally, (IFA Farm Directory 2015 – Data Sources – CSO, DAFM, Board Bia).

Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic present significant uncertainty, and common threats which are likely to impact all the Irish counties adjacent to the border in a similar fashion. Whether Brexit will materialise as an economic shock for the Irish economy, as suggested by many, only time will tell, but most commentators agree that whatever the scale of the impact, the 6 Irish southern border counties are likely to be disproportionately impacted.



Priority issues

On the positive side, some believe that significant structural dislocations of the scale of Brexit and Covid-19 can also yield initially unforeseen opportunities. Whatever the eventual impact of Brexit and Covid-19 and the uncertainty that they create on an already economically and socially vulnerable Border Region, opportunities for Monaghan's rural communities to proactively take the initiative to prepare for this uncertainty need to be seized by both hands.

This is where a focus on regional innovation comes in. A variety of approaches at County level are traditionally used through the LEADER Programme to stimulate and support the rural economy and communities. LEADER staff act as an "innovation broker" helping to discover and facilitate bottom-up initiatives within their respective geographic areas, helping to refine innovative ideas, and provide support for finding partners and funding.

(Vision statement)

Based on the highly innovative PoliRural approach, project sharing and learning best-practice from other regions, the overall ambition is to explore the potential of non-traditional entrants to enter farming in County Monaghan. The project research will explore the motivation and potential for such new entrants into the farming sector and what supports they need to effectively become a farmer or to work in the farming sector.

Expected outputs

The aim is to create a new support service, "I want to be a Farmer", for non-traditional entrants to farming and looking at what supports they may need to effectively become a farmer or to work in the farming sector. This service will be targeted at:

- (a) Irish people without a farming background;
- (b) New community members who may be interested in pursuing a career in farming;

- (c) People who have immigrated to Ireland from other countries (many from Eastern European countries), mostly young people and some of whom already have a farming background.

Expected impact (qualitative):

There is currently no such support service in Ireland or even policies to do so, so a direct impact will be new non-traditional entrants into the farming sector in County Monaghan, and a best-practice service that can be adopted and affect policies in other regions and EU Member States.

