



# Developing Community Farming Projects, Cill Ulta

 Cill Ulta, County Donegal

## Cill Ulta (LAN Ctr)

Cill Ulta (LAN Ctr) in Donegal Gaeltacht is a tomato growing enterprise supplying the Dublin early markets. When the price of oil increased in the 1980s, the enterprise was no longer profitable and the glasshouses were abandoned. In the late 1990's, Lárionad Acmhainní Nádúrtha (LAN), a non-profit with charitable status, was formed to use and revive the site.

The site now includes 9 production poly-tunnels, 1 acre of glasshouse, an apiary and production fields. LAN now operates as Cill Ulta, a Centre for Sustainability, promoting food sovereignty, sustainable energies, farm-to-fork research, Irish agricultural heritage and craft, and the Irish language.

## EIP-AGRI project, Cúlra Créafóige (Cultivation Renewal Programme)

In 2017, Cill Ulta began the process of bidding to realise a 5-year EIP-AGRI project, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) and the EU - called Cúlra Créafóige.



The project focuses upon abandoned land parcels and works with landowners to investigate the crop and market potential of growing. Cúlra Créafóige uses modern, scientific versions of heritage practices so all farming activities are carried out in support of local biodiversity. Cúlra Créafóige works with a panel of internationally renowned ecologists and national bodies to monitor indicator species, and provides training in sustainable agriculture practices, biodiversity monitoring methods and cottage enterprise.



## Interview Questions and Responses

### How did your community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

Following the formation of Lárionad Acmhainní Nádúrtha (LAN), its key objective was to use and revive the existing farm site in Cloughaneely. By collectively working with local community groups, sports clubs, churches, businesses and individuals, Cill Ulta brought community members together to become a testbed via the Cúlra Créafóige (Cultivation Renewal Programme) project.

### How did you decide upon a single project idea?

Cill Ulta, working in partnership with external partners, as identified that moving away from intensive farming and diversifying as a future opportunity for improving biodiversity and quality of locally grown food, utilising their experience in horticulture over three decades. They participated in the 5-year EIP-AGRI project, named Cúlra Créafóige.

### Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects?

There has been very little opposition to the Cúlra Créafóige project. This has been achieved through working closely with local farmers and landowners through face-to-face public engagement and using expertise of a strong Board of Directors to build consensus with external funding agencies.

### How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

The project manager, Eithne Nic Lochlainn delivering Cúlra Créafóige, has approached managing the project in a highly collaborative way, identifying when to approach other members of the Cill Ulta community and others for expertise when necessary. For example, a member of the Cill Ulta Board is a solicitor by profession and deeply understands financial reporting processes for EU projects.

Regular meetings are organised between the project partners to ensure robust ongoing management of the project.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

### How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans? How have you managed that process?

The approach to project management has currently stood the test of time. Eithne has to be able to adapt and revise plans accordingly through a continuously iterative process in collaboration with farmers, landowners and project partners. Eithne has strong project management skills with over 30 years of experience in community projects and managing EU funding.

### How did you identify a funding need?

The community became aware of the EU funding opportunity through the network of existing project partners who were involved in developing the Hen Harrier Pilot Project (see <http://www.henharrierproject.ie/>).

To develop successful projects of this type requires experience of working to identify funds and building strong partnerships, alongside identifying closely related funds and putting in a dedicated resource for this process.

Registering with events through funding bodies, sharing the vision of your community with potential funders and horizon scanning through desk research was key for identifying EU funding.

### How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

Bidding for EU funding is a full-time requirement which requires a deep understanding of how funding competitions are structured. As a long-established community organisation with existing capacity, Cill Ulta was well placed to undertake the bidding process in collaboration with partners in an Operational Group.

### Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project?

Access to expert and technical advice is critical for the Cúlra Créafóige project, with partners including Pobal, Údarás na Gaeltachta, SEAI, Donegal ETB and University College Dublin.

These partners were identified through existing industry and academic networks of Cill Ulta.

The funders of the project, EIP – AGRI, allowed Cill Ulta to purchase equipment and undertake the manual activities themselves and were flexible to allow Cill Ulta to hire resources appropriately.

### What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

Many EU and nationally funded projects are funded 6 months after the project begins, often requiring 6 months of expenses to be claimed. Therefore the submission of expenses to EU and national level bodies is an important process and can create barriers for smaller community organisations, who often require bridging finance for launching projects similar to projects.

Providing dedicated paid or unpaid resource to manage the claim submission process is critical for overcoming this potential barrier.

### Has the project team managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

Cill Ulta has managed to remain true to the original project vision and the establishment of a well organised Operational Group with a strong project leader has enabled this to occur.

In addition, building consensus with local farmers and landowners has been key for the success of the project which has been driven by local expertise of Cill Ulta and project partners.

### What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

There is no “one-size-fits-all” method for communicating the benefits on sustainable farming to communities, however ensuring the community and farmers clearly understand the benefits of the project is important.

For community groups aiming to create a similar project, it is important to obtain community buy-in through careful messaging in person with potential landowners.

### What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

Undertaking weekly management meetings from the outset of the project and establishing open lines of communications is key between project partners.

Ensuring that any language barriers between project partners are overcome at project launch is also important for successfully delivering projects involving local, national and international partners, such as Cúlra Créafóige.

### What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your group as you moved through the different phases of the project?

It is critical to identify local or regional expertise that can inform and support the community project. For communities, becoming members of organisations such as IrBEA is important for networking with producers, academic experts and consultants interested in knowledge exchange.

The project partners and the board were critical sources of advice and guidance for the project, alongside the internal staff at Cill Ulta as an established community organisation.

## Key contacts

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## Links

**Organisation Website:** <https://cillulta.ie/pages/who-we-are>

**Project Website:** <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/c%C3%BAIra-cr%C3%A9af%C3%B3ige-cultivation-renewal-programme>

**YouTube (Project Overview):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFByZcrKZvE>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/CulraCreafoige/>