

ACORNS

Accelerating the Creation Of
Rural Nascent Start-ups



www.acorns.ie



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Who qualifies for ACORNS?

- ✓ **Female entrepreneur living in a rural area as defined by CEDRA.** (All areas of the country outside the administrative city boundaries of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford).
- ✓ **She must have recently set up a new business,** which she owns or part owns, or must be actively planning a new venture and have a clear idea of what she wants to achieve.
- ✓ **There is no restriction on the sector in which the new business is focused.**
- ✓ **She must plan to become an employer within three years.**

- ✓ Was piloted in 2015/ 2016. Just completed 10th cycle
- ✓ More than 3 applications each year for every place available
- ✓ Based on peer support and philosophy of confidentiality, collaboration.
- ✓ Focus on the achievement of goals and milestones.
- ✓ Over 550 have been supported through a cycle.

ACORNS cycle

- ✓ Structured six month programme, incorporates 2 residential elements
- ✓ Free to participants, thanks to the support of Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- ✓ Focused on round tables of peers, facilitated by voluntary Lead Entrepreneurs
- ✓ Approximately 8 participants on each round table
- ✓ Lead Entrepreneurs are central to the selection of participants
- ✓ Feedback continuously collected



LEAD ENTREPRENEURS

**All are volunteers who have successfully started and grown
businesses in rural Ireland**



Alison Ritchie
Polar Ice, Laois



Caroline Reidy,
The HR Suite, Kerry



Eimer Hannon, Hannon
Travel, Meath



Geraldine Jones,
Skin Formulas,
Tipperary



Larissa Feeney,
Kinore, Donegal



Mary B. Walsh,
Ire Wel Pallets,
Wexford



Triona MacGiolla Rí,
Aró Digital Strategy,
Galway

Outcomes are extremely positive over the 10 cycles – on average after each cycle participants report:

- ✓ 50% more sales generated,
- ✓ 25% more employed
- ✓ Number of new exporters,
- ✓ Reduction in psychological isolation,
- ✓ Increase in confidence and motivation,
- ✓ Strong network created, with over 300 past participants actively engaged in the ACORNS Community

Outcomes of ACORNS 10 (52 Participants)

- ✓ Participants recorded an increase of €1.5m over the six months to €4.3m
- ✓ There were 8 new exporters over the cycle
- ✓ There were 15 more employed by the participants at the end of the cycle
- ✓ 96% reported they made a decision for their business and 100% felt nearer to achieving their ambitions. 100% would recommend participating in ACORNS to others.

ACORNS Community

- ✓ All participants, who have successfully completed a cycle, are invited to join the ACORNS Community, at no cost to them
- ✓ If trading, they are offered an opportunity to have their profile professionally written and to be involved in PR campaigns
- ✓ Invitations extended to Further Development round tables, topic based workshops and to annual Community Forum
- ✓ Those that wish to further grow their business are invited to compete to participate on ACORNS Plus and ACORNS Plus Review round tables

Recognised at European and National Level

- ✓ Named runner up in European Promotion Enterprise Awards 2018, Investing in Entrepreneurial Skills
- ✓ In January 2025, the Director was invited by the Ambassador of Ireland to the Netherlands, Ann Derwin, to speak in The Hague as part of their St. Brigid's day programme
- ✓ ACORNS has been included as a Good Practice on the Interreg Policy Learning Platform.
- ✓ The Director served as a member of the CAP Consultative Committee having been invited by the Assistant Secretary, DAFM

- ✓ Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine has supported ACORNS every step of the way
- ✓ Find out more on website www.acorns.ie, download the brochure and see the [three minute video](#)

