

**Countryside**

Services

# AGRI-FOOD CO-OPERATION SCHEME

**WOULD YOU LIKE SUPPORT FOR YOUR  
AGRI-FOOD BUSINESS?**



## WAYS IN WHICH THE AFCS FUNDING CAN HELP

- The scheme recognises the difficulty producers face in finding the time to devote to co-operation activity and in identifying the expertise and resources necessary to progress joint initiatives. The purpose of the scheme is to help overcome these barriers.
- The scheme will give like-minded businesses within the agri-food sector the opportunity to work together to explore ways of improving returns from the supply chain.
- The AFCS will not provide capital funding for new technologies/equipment. Facilitators can direct groups to other sources of funding e.g. the Food Processing Grant.
- The scheme is made up of two stages. In the first stage, eligible applications will be provided with a facilitator to help you:
  - take a critical look at your options and develop a business plan and associated action plan which will then take forward a new idea, product, practice, process, or technology that could lead to a new product on the market, a more efficient way of getting an existing product to market or enhance the operation of the supply chain to help the group better meet market requirements.
  - Design a strategy for the development of your group, including a Co-operation Agreement identifying the experience and skills which individual members bring to the group, individual roles within the group and any known training or development needs to fulfil those roles.
  - At the second stage, the business plan, action plan and co-operation agreement will be assessed and if successful, funding will be awarded to implement the action plan, including training requirements. Support will bring the group to the stage where they are confident and capable of adopting new supply chain arrangements. The scheme encourages both horizontal and vertical partnership working with other players in the development and establishment of short supply chains and local markets. The type of group established as a result of the scheme will depend on the needs and objectives of the group members.
- Co-operation support will use innovative methods to help:
  - increase turnover / profitability / efficiency savings
  - improve knowledge and skills base
  - improve market capabilities/performance
  - improve logistics, reduce distribution costs
  - take costs out of the supply chain
  - increase the sharing of resources
  - improve supply chain integration and knowledge of the workings of a supply chainThis can be done by:
  - forming groups, clusters, other co-operative arrangements
  - reviewing performance/benchmarking
  - improving communications and knowledge exchange within the supply chain
  - animation i.e. marketing – promoting the group to other potential group members
  - creating food hubs / shared facilities
  - increasing the use of local food as part of tourism mix
  - promoting/developing local/new market opportunities and routes to market
  - research new market opportunities
  - adoption of new technologies

# SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO EACH GROUP



## FACILITATION

Expert help with business planning, funding, business development, and market research.

Up to a maximum of 50 days, within the following limits:

First stage facilitation - 5 days maximum.

Post application support – 5 days per month or 25 days per year for a maximum period of two years. The level of facilitation will be determined as part of the action plan.



## SPECIALIST MENTORING

More specific support for the group: eg quality assurances, e-commerce and marketing.

80% of eligible costs - 75 hours maximum over a 2 year period, or a maximum of £5,000



## TRAINING

To develop the skills of group members

100% of costs to a maximum of £5,000 per group



## STUDY TOURS

To develop the skills of group members

100% of eligible costs to a maximum of £3,000 per group.



## CO-OPERATION SUPPORT

Development of group structures and co-operation activities

50% grant up to £2,500 per group. Examples of co-operation support are costs associated with the development of group structures and co-operation activities e.g. legal or financial advice.



## OTHER BUSINESS TOOLS

Management information systems, surveys, websites, logos, and promotional material.

80% of costs (excluding travel & subsistence) to a maximum of £15,000 per group – business tools may include Management Information systems, market intelligence, surveys, websites, logo design, promotional material to increase the profile of the group and increase membership, value chain analysis by all or some of the group members.

## ELIGIBILITY

Lead applicants must have a category 1 or category 2 Business ID and must be in the agri-food, horticulture or food tourism sectors.

## HOW TO APPLY

Please visit our website to download an expression of interest form and accompanying guidance notes.

# CASE STUDIES

## Case Study 1

A group of growers in the apple industry came together to market their products and to develop linkages with the processors, retailers and the wider food industry to create new supply chains for their product.


They recognised the growth in artisan food products and following some basic research they identified an action plan for marketing. The group availed of specialist mentor support to create a brand for their products and to produce marketing tools which include display stands for food shows, online marketing including a website and finally printed materials to distribute at events.


The group quickly recognised the tourism potential of the apple industry as a whole such as cider producers, restaurants and hotels and created strategic linkages with this wider supply chain to make the product the central focus of a tourism destination project and thereby creating new markets and ultimately consumers of their products.


This project has had a lasting impact on the industry and continues to grow. The supply chain which these growers created meant that they could fully take part in Year of Food and Drink, promoting their quality produce, their region and how the consumers can access their products. Local outlets embraced the message and began to work with the growers as they had created a professional marketing campaign which they could all become a part of.



**WATCH THIS CASE STUDY VIDEO  
ON OUR WEBSITE**

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## Case Study 2

Pork production has developed on a mass scale in recent years but one group of farmers decided to go the opposite way and began rearing outdoor pigs. This is a trend in the South of England but there are regions of NI suited to this also. This group worked with an artisan farm shop which could butcher on site also.

The group was working on a small scale so needed business advice on how to upscale their production capacity in order to provide a steady supply to its customers. They also required assistance in creating the supply chain to processors and consumers across the province and possibly then further afield.

The group availed of business mentoring on the costing of the production process in order to establish a price point for their products, this would then influence the market they would target. This financial appraisal process was essential for all members to ensure that their investment was sound and would yield an economic return. Following from this, the group realised they would be targeting high-end restaurants and farm shops as their products required a premium price. The resulting marketing strategy was facilitated by the programme and followed up with study tours for the group to meet other high-end food producers in order to gain invaluable information on this niche market.

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