COUNRYSIDE SERVICES LIMITED - AGRI-FOOD CO-OPERATION SCHEME

**INFORMATION NOTE -- Self Employed Specialist Mentors**

**Register of Specialist Mentors (Agri-Food Co-Operation Scheme**)

The Register of Specialist Mentors is being established to identify self-employed specialist mentors with the required skills and experience, who can work on their own initiative to contribute to the delivery of the Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme. The Register will be established from March 2019 and retained for up to 5 years.

**1. BACKGROUND**

**1.1 GENERAL**

Countryside Services Ltd (CSL) is a wholly owned commercially independent subsidiary of the Ulster Farmers Union and has been in operation since 1998 to provide a range of information, commercial and professional services to the farming and rural community.

CSL have been awarded the contract by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to support DAERA in delivery of the Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme. The scheme is now open for applications and is expected to run for a maximum of five years.

**1.2. The Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme (AFCS)**

The scheme will support new co-operative initiatives that lead to more effective and sustainable supply chains and help agri-food businesses become more sustainable and competitive.

The Scheme is part of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and is jointly funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and DAERA.

The AFCS recognises that the sustainability of a supply chain relies on adding value to the customer and generating a profit for each business in the chain.

The scheme also 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.

**1.3 Group Eligibility**

Applications will be welcomed from groups of individuals and/or groups of businesses in the agri-food sector co-operating with partners within their respective supply chains to address an identified need in an eligible sector.

Groups must consist of at least two or more businesses operating within the one supply chain. The lead applicant must be a farmer / producer with a Category 1 or 2 Business ID.

Applicants can be newly formed or existing groups.

The proposal must address needs in an eligible sector.

The proposal must align with the AFCS priorities / challenges.

* To improve market information/knowledge flow allowing producers to make more robust production decisions and to become more responsive to changing market conditions
* To acquire/share knowledge to introduce novel practices / processes – to improve resource efficiency
* To improve product specification and/or marketing (including setting up and promoting food tourism initiatives that are consistent with NI tourism strategy) – to add value to NI agricultural and horticultural produce

The supply chain must be within one of the following eligible sectors:

Red Meat

Pig Meat

Poultry Meat

Eggs

Milk & Milk Products

Potatoes

Horticulture (including flowers, fruit and vegetables)

Cereals

Local food in tourism / artisan foods

The proposed supply chain project must have a strong marketing / supply chain integration component and should add value to the supply chain and demonstrate potential economic benefits.

The project should not impact adversely on other businesses in the sector nor have a negative environmental impact.

Support will not be provided for the continuation of existing activities. Existing Groups will, however, be eligible if developing new markets for an existing product or developing and marketing new products.

**2. REGISTER OF SPECIALIST MENTORS (Agri-Food Cooperation Scheme)**

**2.1 Roles and Responsibilities.**

Specialist individual Mentors will work to provide expertise to groups on a range of subject areas linked to group structures and supply chain development. They will be individually assigned by the Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme Contract Manager on a short term basis to address specific needs of groups. They will work in support of the Group Facilitator, to meet the needs of the group.

Areas of expertise currently being considered include –

Business and Management Structures

Marketing including e marketing and social media

**Quality Assurance Systems**

**Others will be added and advertised as the need is identified by participating groups**

The current competition is targeted solely at appointing Specialist Mentors in Quality Assurance / Quality Assurance Systems.

**2.2 Essential Skills, Knowledge and Experience**

Applicants seeking registration will be required to provide evidence of ;

* their knowledge, skills and experience related to the specialist mentoring areas identified above and on the Registration Form (Part C 1); and
* experience of mentoring (or advice) in group or individual situations; and
* their ability to make effective use of IT for communication, presentation and programme delivery; and
* a high level of communication skills, appropriate to farmers and SMEs.

**Where registration is being sought by an organisation then they must provide separate applications for each individual who will be delivering the service. Assignments will be allocated to specific individuals not organisations.**

**2.3 Remuneration.**

Individuals or organisations wishing to be considered for inclusion on this Register must indicate their charge – out rate in £ per hour and £ per day.

In all cases, payment will be made in arrears on the basis of Invoices submitted to the Lead Applicant by the individual contractor.

They are based on a notional 7.5 hour working day and all rates should be exclusive of VAT, but indicate whether VAT will be charged.

Please note: travel and personal expenses are unpaid.

Associates will, as self employed individuals, be required to meet all legislative requirements relating to their activities and carry relevant insurance and professional indemnity cover**.**

**2.4 Registration.**

Those associates considered by a panel, on the basis of the information provided on the Registration form, to meet the requirements specified in this Information Note will be placed on the register of Specialist Mentors – Quality Assurance (Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme).

In the event of a large number of applicants being received, Countryside Services Ltd reserves the right to identify a restricted number of Specialist Mentors who best meet the specifications outlined in Section 2.2 above and who will be placed on the Register of Specialist Mentors. This selection may involve an interview, if this is considered necessary by the selection panel appointed for this purpose. The number of Specialist Mentors on the register may change in line with delivery requirements.

Those who are successful in being placed on the Register will be advised by letter. There is no guarantee that registration as an Associate will result in an award of work assignments.

**3. Assignment.**

A delivery specification will be established by the applicant group working with the Group Facilitator and the Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme Programme Manager.

The Specialist Mentor who best meets the delivery specification will be offered the appointment.

**4. Engagement Processes.**

Where an associate has been selected for an assignment they will be provided with details of the work involved. A Letter of Authorisation will be issued to the Specialist Mentor by the AFCS Programme Manager and signed by both the mentor and the Group Lead Applicant , before any work is undertaken.

**5. Further Information and Registration Forms are available from:-**

[www.countrysideservices.com](http://www.countrysideservices.com)

or by contacting:

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