

## Funding still available for new projects

Countryside Services is managing the Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme on behalf of DAERA. The scheme offers groups of farmers and food producers the opportunity of developing a new project idea in collaboration with others in their supply chain.

£30,500 of support along with 50 days Facilitation is available under the scheme to help bring the project to fruition as well as enriching each group member's skill set.

The scheme has seen applications from a diverse range of producers – from small regional food businesses wishing to collectively market their goods – to groups of farmers getting together to further a novel idea which will aid their supply of product to market. With an increase in the 'buy local' ethos, there has also been interest from those seeking support for on-farm vending operations.

One group currently availing of support is the Lough Neagh Artisans group, which was established to allow artisans situated within a 10-mile radius of the lough to work collaboratively, linking local producers under the one umbrella.

Lead applicant Eimear Kearney explains: "Prior to Covid, we were enjoying an influx of international visitors to Lough Neagh who enjoyed authentic experiential food tours and products from our artisans. When we saw the Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme advertised offering £30,500 to groups of producers, we applied as it offered us the right type of support to market our new group.

The funding that we have received so far includes branding and design of the group logo, social media training, China-ready training in preparation for the return of our international guests, website design and group photography. We have found the scheme invaluable, especially with the added benefit of having the Facilitator allocated to the group to keep us on track."

Some of the group members have just returned from a Study tour, funded through the scheme, to Northern Italy to learn about producer-led tourism and to identify best practice and customer experience from groups of foodies already established in the artisan sector in another geographical region.



Pictured: Group members Gerry Darby, Eimear Kearney & Bronagh Duffin on study tour in Italy.

Eimear continues "The study tour has been hugely beneficial to the group, with various links established with Italian Food Tour providers to work collaboratively to further develop our food tourism offering here at Lough Neagh.

The group members also gained valuable insights into the workings of an established food destination and how food tourism can be developed to benefit the local economy."

For the Christmas season, Lough Neagh Artisans have produced Christmas hampers offering a collection of produce supplied by the group's members and marketed under their collective.



*Luxury Christmas Hamper*

To view the hampers and for more information about the Lough Neagh Artisans group, please visit [www.loughneaghartisans.com](http://www.loughneaghartisans.com)

The Agri-Food Co-operation Scheme is open for Expressions of Interest until 30th April 2022.

For Expression of Interest forms, please call 02887788207

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

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