

Challenges and opportunities in

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Now that the economic crash is behind us, people are seeking opportunities improve their household income. This article presents some of the opportunities available to farm families.

Challenges

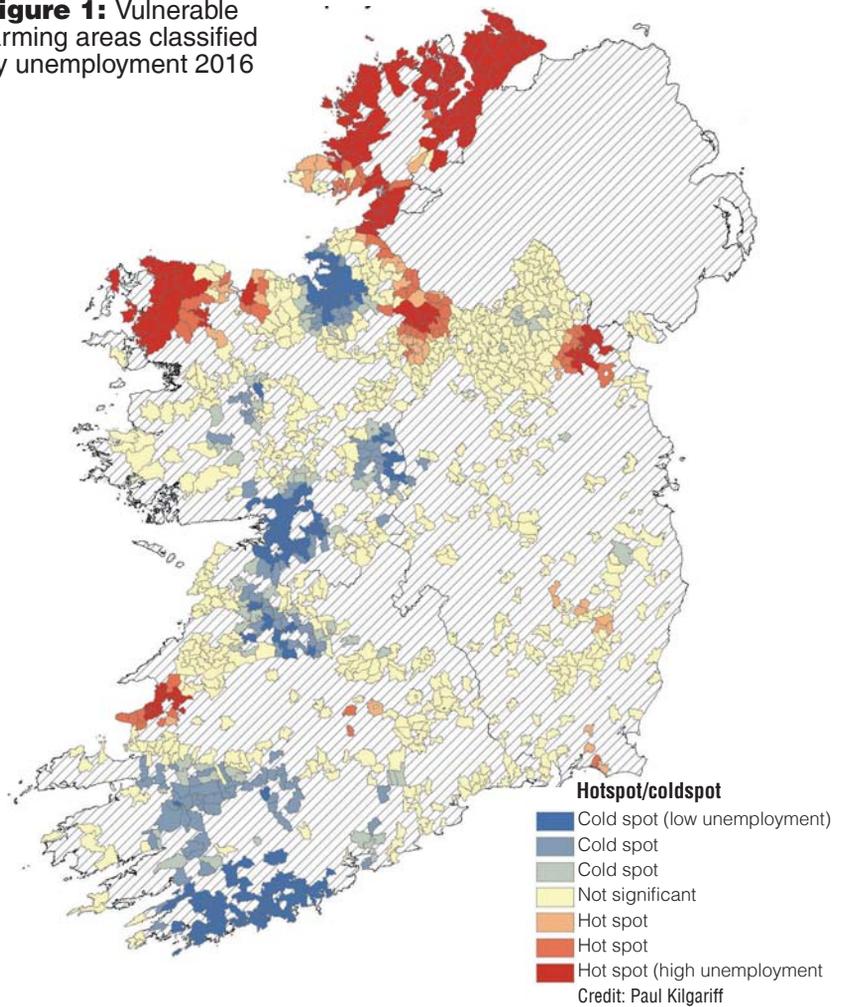
Impact of the crash: the impact of the economic crash was greatest outside of the main cities. Concern around the increasing divergence between urban and rural areas led to the establishment of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) to investigate the effect of the crash and the economic potential for recovery in rural Ireland.

The CEDRA 2014 report highlights the effect on rural areas. Unemployment increased by 192% compared with 114% in urban areas, with the largest declines in small and medium sized towns. The report noted that construction-related employment for farmers and rural dwellers disappeared almost overnight, with employment in rural areas remaining concentrated in declining sectors.

Urban and rural recovery

- Since 2011, the economy has seen significant recovery. Recent data made available by the Central Statistics Office has allowed researchers in Teagasc and NUI Galway to study how the economic recovery has affected urban and rural areas. The main points of the report (O'Donoghue, C, Kilgarriff, P, & Ryan, M (2017) *The Local Impact of the Economic Recovery*, Teagasc, Oak Park) are:
- Since 2012, employment growth has been localised in Dublin (16% growth in employment) and in surrounding regions (midlands 19.3%; southeast 18.2%). At the other extreme, economic activity in the border was still 32% lower than peak levels. Household income per person in 2014 had improved most in Dublin, increasing by 5% relative to 2011, with the next highest improvement of 3.9% in the southeast. However, in both the west and the border area, average disposable incomes were lower than in 2011.
- The 2016 census shows that Ireland is still a very rural country with 36% of the population living in cities, 34% living in rural towns and 30% in the

Figure 1: Vulnerable farming areas classified by unemployment 2016



countryside and there is clear evidence that the recovery is progressing at different speeds in urban and rural areas.

• One of the areas of concern arising from the research report is evident when we map the areas of low employment opportunities, as we see that these areas coincide with areas where farm income is also low. From Figure 1, we see that the greatest challenges exist in the west and north-west, in marginal farming areas with low employment opportunities due to the distance from rural towns.

In summary, the gap in household income in Dublin relative to the rest of the country has been widening. The lowest growth occurred in the west (6.1%) and live register statistics indicate that, in general, the unemployment rate tends to be higher in rural towns than the cities and is higher again in the most remote rural areas.

Education levels tend to be lower in rural areas with a higher share of graduates in the cities. However, ru-

ral towns are young places with more under-15s living there than in the cities, due in part to the large migration to these towns during the last boom.

Opportunities

On a positive note, employment has increased in the agriculture, construction, technical, industry and hotel and food sectors and many of these opportunities are located in rural areas. Teagasc is working with rural development and training agencies to improve farm viability and quality of life in rural areas.

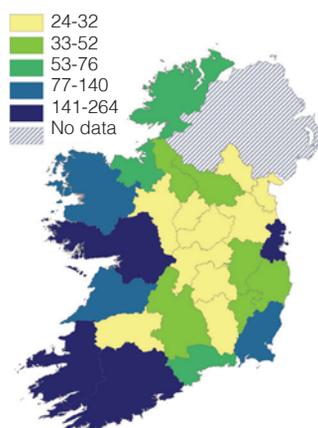
The Teagasc farm management and rural development department runs an annual programme of events in conjunction with rural agencies to help farm families to avail of opportunities for on- and off-farm diversification and training opportunities for off-farm employment. This information is all available on the Teagasc rural development website: www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev

Since 2011, over 1,500 farm families have availed of regional Teagasc op-

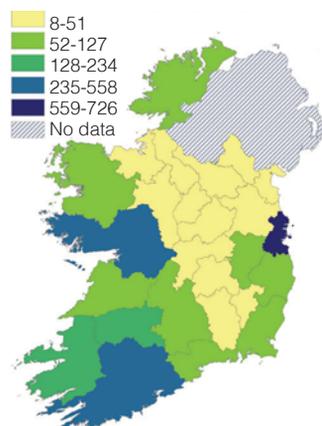
rural Ireland

Figure 2: Domestic and foreign tourist spend by county

Millions (€) Domestic tourist income 2015



Millions (€) Foreign tourist income 2015



tions workshops covering a range of diversification opportunities including tourism, food, organics, goats, forestry, renewable energy and much more. Tourism is seen by farm families as having the greatest potential with a high proportion of foreign and domestic tourism spend in rural areas that may not have other employment or income opportunities.

Figure 2 shows the high proportion of tourist spending along the west coast, in particular.

In 2015, Teagasc produced a very useful and user-friendly *Handbook on Rural Tourism*, which is distributed at Teagasc Options workshops and can be downloaded from the Teagasc Rural Development website.

There is also growing interest in developing artisan and farm food businesses, particularly in strong tourist areas. In recent years, the Teagasc Rural Development Unit teamed up with the Food Programme and agencies such as Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Fáilte Ireland, to provide food product development and food production

USEFUL LINKS

- www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev
- <https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/news/2017/impact-economic-recovery.php>
- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/options-programme/>
- <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2016/Rural-Tourism-Booklet.pdf>
- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/expand-your-horizons/>

Organics

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/>

Equine

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/equine/>

Renewable energy

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/energy/>

Goats

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/goats/>

Other diversification opportunities

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/rural-development/diversification/>

Household budgeting

- <http://interactive.teagasc.ie/Open/HouseholdBudget>

Coping with pressures of farming

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Coping-with-the-pressures-of-farming.pdf>

Start a new business

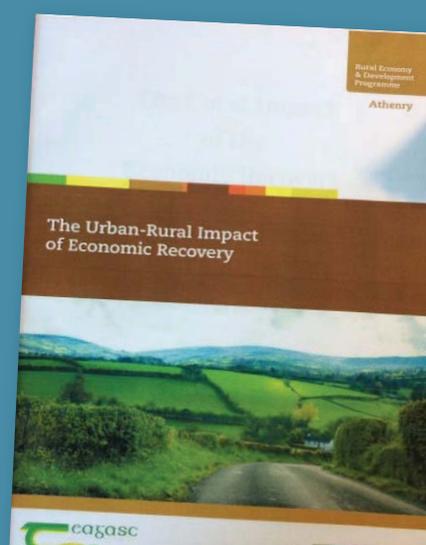
- <https://www.opt-in.ie/entrepreneurship>

Collaborative farming

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/farm-management/collaborative-farming/>

Succession and inheritance

- <https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/farm-management/succession--inheritance/>



training courses.

Also on the food front, Galway and the west of Ireland has been designated as the European Region of Gastronomy for 2018. Teagasc and Galway County Council are two of the four key partners leading this designation, working closely with Galway City Council and GMTI.

In addition, a new food centre will be built at the Teagasc campus in Athenry.

The BIA Innovator Campus CLG, supported by Teagasc and Galway County Council, which has been awarded funding as part of the Enterprise Ireland Regional Development fund, will create more than 360 jobs in over 40 businesses across the west of Ireland, providing much needed facilities to help the food industry in the west.

A range of facilities will be available to businesses across the western corridor including short-term-use innovation laboratories, incubation hubs for longer stages of product development and high-potential startup

units for businesses getting off the ground.

Many rural agencies also provide training, up-skilling and financial supports to farm families. The Expand Your Horizons seminars, organised by Teagasc and the National Rural Network, brought these agencies together in 26 rural locations in 2017 to provide information to farm families. It is now clear that the Food Wise 2025 strategy for the food sector and initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way for tourism, can deliver for rural areas.

The establishment of a Department for Rural and Community Development, the appointment of a senior minister and the rollout of the Action Plan for Rural Development and the regional Action Plans for Jobs, are also positive developments. However, more concentrated efforts are required particularly in the west and northwest, where private sector job creation efforts and opportunities are substantially more challenging than in the rest of the country.