EMERGING TRENDS: COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMING BETWEEN MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Frank Brewer¹, Seamus Lillis²

¹Professor
Michigan State University
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
East Lansing, Michigan
Phone: 517-355-6580 x 204    Fax: 517-353-4981
E-mail: brewerf@msu.edu

²Consultant in Community Development and Doctoral Candidate
Department of Agribusiness Extension and Rural Development
University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland
Phone: 353-18-367-051    Fax: 353-18-367-607
E-mail: slillis@tinet.ie

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe and document the methods, funding, and impact from collaborative initiatives between Michigan State University, The Republic of Ireland, including University College Dublin, Teagasc (the Irish Extension Service), and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland.

Underlying successful multi-country programs are threads that blossom, prosper, and build upon each other. One of those threads is the realization that all parties can learn from each other, and benefit from cooperative programming. Through the many visits to and from Michigan State University, the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland from 1990 to the present, the importance of agriculture and rural development to all three economies and the desire to learn from each other has built the base from which cooperative programs have emerged.

This cooperation has lead to hundreds of university faculty, students, community leaders, and agribusiness representatives traveling to and interacting and learning from each other while building lifelong linkages. These programs of outreach and scholarly activities have built upon their success and opened doors for additional programs and cooperation. Although no large grant was ever generated, together, these programs have generated over one million dollars of funding from the participants and a multitude of interested sponsors.
INTRODUCTION

As his term in office drew to a close, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote a letter to the British ambassador in Washington. He wished to acknowledge a debt to an unusual Irishman, Horace Plunkett. He wrote:

"...My old friend Horace Plunkett, whom I saw on his periodical journeys to America, kept me informed of the Irish agricultural situation and the movement for better living on the farms of Ireland. We Americans owe much to Ireland and to Plunkett in the task we have been trying to do in the United States, and before I leave the presidency I want to acknowledge our debt and to send through you, my thanks for the help we have had..."

(Irish Homestead 29 May 1909)

Sir Horace Plunkett, second son of Lord Dunsany, founded Ireland's Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, the antecedent of Ireland's two current agricultural departments, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in Dublin, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland (DARD). He had also founded their advisory or extension services. The debt arose out of his sharing of his insights and expertise.

In the 1990’s, interaction continues between the U.S., the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland. A continuing trend in the development and execution of research, extension and academia programs is that of multi-country collaboration for mutual benefit. The following case study outlines initiatives and impact of scientific cooperation between the Republic of Ireland including University College Dublin (UCD), Teagasc, which incorporates the Irish Extension Service, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland, and Michigan State University, USA.

From the many visits to and from Michigan State University, the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland by program participants, faculty and administration during the 1990's, the importance of agriculture to all three economies and the opportunities to learn from each other has been understood and appreciated. The differences between U.S. and European Union Common Agricultural Policy approaches to higher education, rural development, and extension delivery offer a wide agenda for learning and sharing from each other's experiences.

This paper examines the development, cooperation and impact of initiatives between MSU and the two administrations on the island of Ireland.
Michigan State University's relationship with the DARD and other Northern Ireland institutions, such as Queens University in Belfast and relationships with the Republic of Ireland with the University College Dublin, University College Cork, National University of Maynooth, and Teagasc has been based on successful joint initiatives during the past decade. This has allowed Michigan State University to serve as a catalyst and enjoy the trust of agencies in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland while not carrying a perception of belonging to one tradition or the other. These programs of outreach and scholarly activities have built upon their success and opened doors for additional programs and cooperation. The following are examples of successful cooperative initiatives and funding for those programs.

- **Starting in 1991**, the first major joint initiative was that of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland eight-week Agribusiness Enterprise Development Training Program of Young Irish Executives with Michigan and Midwest businesses. Seventeen participants from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland participated, including Paddy McGinn, who is now the CEO of the Ireland Peace and Reconciliation Program. The program was funded through a EU grant. Their mission was to seek out products or services with a successful track record in the United States and see how that might be extended to Ireland on a mutually beneficial basis. From this program at least two companies entered into joint operating agreements and several became business associates leading to increased sales.

  Building upon the success of the young Irish Executive Program, a 1992 visit to Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Teagasc, and University College Dublin by Michigan State University Vice Provost Poston, Extension Director Gail Imig, and Dr. Frank Brewer of the Institute of International Agriculture was undertaken. From these meetings potential educational initiatives and linkages were jointly developed and the following programs originated.

- **In 1993**, a self funded Professional Development Study Tour to Ireland and Northern Ireland was completed by 31 MSU Extension professionals. The Irish Extension Service, Teagasc, and the DARD hosted the MSU staff. These participants provided a linkage and knowledgeable base to host visitors from Ireland to Michigan and help conduct joint programs with Irish counterparts. From this visit, additional seeds were sown for collaboration, particularly in rural and community development projects. Rural community development, at that time, was relatively new to Ireland. The debt to Plunkett was being reduced! During the study tour, at a stop in Sligo, Ireland, Seamus Bergin, one of the Young Irish Executives who had participated in the 1991 program, asked MSU Extension staff to present a seminar on rural development extension programs in the U.S. More than 250 Irish community members in the Sligo and Moy Valley area came to meet the MSU delegation and participate in the program.

- **In 1994**, 12 MSU department chairpersons and academic advisors in the College of Agricultural and Natural Resources tasked to develop undergraduate student exchanges completed an
academic studies visit to Ireland. From this interaction, a Student Scholar Exchange between Michigan State University - College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Northern Ireland Agricultural Colleges, and the Republic of Ireland, UCD and UCC was finalized. The presidents of UCD, UCC, the Minister of Agriculture in Northern Ireland and MSU Vice Provost Fred Poston signed joint agreements on behalf of their institutions. An MSU overseas study program for undergraduates begins.

The following year, the Deans from the Faculty of Agriculture from University College Dublin, University College Cork, Queens University of Belfast, and the Chief Agricultural Officer in Northern Ireland visited MSU at Vice Provost Poston's invitation to develop additional joint initiatives and to expand the student scholar exchanges. Michigan State University starts overseas study immersion program of one semester study at cooperating locations. Over 150 MSU students have since participated in short term and immersion programs. Likewise, students from Ireland study 1-2 semesters at MSU with no tuition cost charged to these students by host institutions.

1996, Irish American Partnerships provides funding for tripartite rural and economic development leaders program in Ireland and at MSU. County and academic leaders met in both Ireland and Michigan to study and work together. Two training workshops were conducted where all three groups visited successful projects and learned how each group was approaching work in rural and community development.

In 1997, MSU Extension conducted a Rural and Community Development Study Tour to Ireland and Northern Ireland for Michigan community leaders. Participants paid their own expenses to participate and brought ideas back to the U.S. to use in their communities. On this occasion, the MSU party was divided out and each participant was allocated an Irish partner with whom they might share experiences, build networks, and plan future exclusive collaboration.

In 1997, Dr. Stephens, the Principal of Loughry College of Agriculture and Food Technology from Northern Ireland, one of the DARD schools, travels to MSU to receive MSU Outstanding International Alumni Award for his joint work with MSU.

In 1998, Michigan State University and the Michigan food industry conducted a two-week training program in Michigan for 30 food and drink business executives from Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Food and Drink Council provided funding for this training. These Northern Ireland professionals extensively interacted with Michigan food industry businesses, the MSU Food Science and Packaging department and interacted on emerging trends and leadership approaches in the U.S. and European markets.

A $400,000 joint endowment fund is established at MSU with CANR and DARD funds to strengthen student exchange programs between UCD, UCC, MSU and Northern Ireland Universities. MSU funds originate with a donation of farmland, which was sold to fund this program. All students from the three countries receive a $1,500 travel scholarship from this fund to cover the costs of their airfare and other expenses at the host locations. This allows students to travel overseas and attend classes at no additional cost from attending school at their host university.
Short-term assignments and sabbatical leave by CANR faculty provide industry assistance to food manufacturing, agriculture production and packaging firms in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Several faculty in the Food Science and Packaging Departments have participated. Northern Ireland has assigned quite a few of its academic faculty to study at MSU, to develop curriculum, and to start the first packaging degree program in Northern Ireland. Additional joint programs have taken place with the equine industry and agribusiness.

MSU Vice-Provost Dr. Poston, the first person outside of Ireland, was invited to present the commencement address to graduates of Loughry College in Northern Ireland.

In 1998, a three-year US/Ireland Cooperation Program in Agricultural Science and Technology was jointly awarded to University College Dublin and Michigan State University to research the role of the rural community development practitioner.

In 1999, Michigan State University provides technical specialists to conduct a cross border country community development workshop in Derry City for cross community leaders from both traditions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The cross border conference was funded by the Programme for Peace and Reconciliation as part of the Peace Talk initiative. Participants reflected on their practice, shared expertise, linkages, and insights and fine-tuned action plans for each of their communities.

In 2000, W.K. Kellogg Foundation grants $34,000 to Michigan State University to develop a community leadership program in a rural community in the Republic of Ireland focusing on communities living along a 30 mile pilgrim route to Croagh Patrick, which is some 4,000 years old. This project originated out of the cross border workshop in 1999.

In 2001, for the first time, it was possible to locate an MSU undergraduate student in the Tóchar Valley on a credited assignment to work as a training resource for youth. A parallel placement of an Irish student is being considered.

**Educational Importance**

These programs and exchanges began in times that were less auspicious than today's, when there was severe civil disorder in Northern Ireland. All parties were in for the long haul and recognized the central role of community development in the harmonization and improvement of community relations, not only within Northern Ireland but also between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Ireland, being an island, and virtually the only island member of the European Union, can feel isolated. MSU visits help confirm Irish approaches and celebrate their successes.

Although no large grant was ever generated, together these programs initiatives have generated over $1
million of funding, allowed hundreds of people including: administrative, faculty, community leaders, agribusiness representatives and students to travel to Ireland or the U.S. and to learn from each other while building lifelong linkages. Every year since 1992 there has been an MSU student tour to both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland with a focus on gaining an understanding of Ireland's Agriculture north and south and its diverse communities. Many students, faculty, and business representatives have visited on farms and in industry in both the U.S. and Ireland and have personally and professionally benefited from this collaboration and cooperation.

The MSU contribution has impacted most in rural development. Community development had not been an issue for extension agents in Ireland until about 15 years ago. MSU's contribution was primarily its longstanding experience and expertise. It helped train practitioners and affirmed their work.

References


