

## Rise of women entrepreneurs from rural Ireland

**There has been an increase in the number of women entrepreneurs across Ireland and a new call is going out for early stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland to take part in an Irish Government programme called [ACORNS](#).**

ACORNS (Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-ups) is a highly successful development initiative funded by the Department of Agriculture under its Rural Innovation and Development Fund to support female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland, who wish to start and develop new businesses or have recently started a business.

Over 200 female entrepreneurs have taken part in ACORNS to date and 50 new participants are being sought for ACORNS 5.

Any woman with a new business based in rural Ireland — or an idea for a new venture they want to get off the ground — can get more information and register their interest at <http://www.acorns.ie/>. There is no charge for participation.

### **From acorns to tall trees**

“The ACORNS programme is a tremendous opportunity for early stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland to help them realise their ambitions,” said the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Michael Creed, TD.

“I would urge those who have recently started or are about to start a new business to apply to participate in this exciting initiative, as it is an opportunity not to be missed. Each year, the participants give an overwhelming endorsement of the role ACORNS has played in supporting them to start and develop their businesses.”

According to Paula Fitzsimons, founder and managing director of Fitzsimons Consulting, which developed the ACORNS initiative, on average, 850 women are starting a new business every month in Ireland. The rate of nascent female entrepreneurs in Ireland is now ranked fifth across Europe.

“In most countries more men than women are early-stage entrepreneurs. This is also true in Ireland. However, the ratio in Ireland continues to narrow and now stands at 1.6:1 (men to women early stage entrepreneurs) as more women plan and start new businesses,” Fitzsimons explained.

In June, [ThinkBusiness reported](#) how each month between 800 and 1,000 women start a new

business in Ireland.

“The ACORNS programme is critical to assist this growing body of female entrepreneurs to get their businesses off the ground and on the road to success. I am delighted that the opportunity is being offered once again thanks to the support of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the contribution of the voluntary Lead Entrepreneurs.”

ACORNS is based on peer support and collaborative learning. Each participant will have the opportunity to learn from successful female entrepreneurs or ‘Lead Entrepreneurs’.

Acting in a voluntary capacity, these Lead Entrepreneurs will share their insights and experience with the group and help the participants to address the issues and challenges they face in progressing their businesses. They also act as role models, illustrating by their actions that it is possible to start and grow a successful business in rural Ireland.

This year, the Lead Entrepreneurs are: Alison Ritchie, Polar Ice, Laois; Anne Cusack, Critical Healthcare, Westmeath; Anne Reilly, Paycheck Plus, Louth; Caroline McEnery, The HR Suite, Kerry; Deirdre McGlone, formerly Harvey’s Point Hotel, Donegal; Eimer Hannon, Eimer Hannon Travel, Meath; Mary B. Walsh, Ire Wel Pallets, Wexford; and Triona MacGiolla Rí, Aró Digital Strategies, Galway.

In addition, Monica Flood, formerly Olas IT – a Going for Growth Lead Entrepreneur – will facilitate an ACORNS Plus round table for previous participants, who are committed to growing their businesses.

Past participants in ACORNS have increased exports and job creation. Between them they have a combined turnover of €2.3m so far, up 43pc over the six-month-long programme cycle. 13 participants became exporters for the first time and 19 additional employees were hired, with 26 companies planning to hire additional staff this year.

*Pictured (above) at Longueville House in Cork are: (l-r back row) Lead Entrepreneur Mary B. Walsh of Ire Wel Pallets (Wexford) and past participant Caitriona Considine of Moher Cottage (Clare); (l-r front row) Past participant Emily Brick of Athena Analytics (Kerry); Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; and programme director Paula Fitzsimons of Fitzsimons Consulting.*

Written by [John Kennedy](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com) ([john.kennedy3@boi.com](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com))

Published: 14 August, 2019