

## Farm to fork ingenuity feeds Neighbourfood

**We talk to women forging innovative businesses in rural Ireland. Mairead Guinan from [Neighbourfood](#) is passionate about the effects good, local food has on your body – and the environment.**

Mairead Guinan grew up on a farm, studied microbiology and worked in quality improvement for healthcare, so knows the effects good, local food has on your body – and the environment.

She started Neighbourfood Tullamore as she believes in people eating ‘real’ food from local growers to improve their health, the environment and support the local economy.

As a concept, Neighbourfood, which started in Cork in 2018, is simple. You shop online for local products and pick them up on a specific day at a local venue.

The producer gets 80pc of sales, while Neighbourfood and Mairead receive 10pc each, so it raises all boats. It also gives producers access to a wider customer base, without having to invest in an online platform.

### Food for thought

After stints in Australia and Switzerland, Mairead worked in Dublin in quality improvement for healthcare. She moved back to her family farm on the outskirts of Tullamore in late 2016.

She worked with a construction company and a recycling firm before deciding to go it alone. Mairead completed a Start Your Own Business course with her local LEO and opened Neighbourfood Tullamore in October 2020.

One of the benefits of the Covid pandemic is that people want to buy and support local. But while being local, Mairead’s business is now connecting with a global audience and has had orders from people in Australia, the US and beyond ordering for friends and family.

Mairead found ACORNS was a great way to connect with other farm-based businesses and found that the honest sharing of good and bad news was extremely helpful. She feels that the entrepreneurs are cheerleaders for each other and are stronger together.

ACORNS is a Government-supported programme designed to support [early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland](#) through a peer learning approach.

Women in rural Ireland with new businesses or at least with well-developed ideas are being invited

to join [ACORNS 7](#). The ACORNS programme is designed to support early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland through a peer learning approach. Thanks to the support of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the voluntary contribution of time by Lead Entrepreneurs, there is no charge for those selected to participate.

“I’ve participated in many courses and ACORNS is one of the most practical, delivering both connections and doable changes to improve any type of business. It’s inspiring and heart-warming to see the innovative approaches nationwide. The Lead Entrepreneurs have a wealth of expertise and experience shared with grace and real honesty. They also instill a belief in yourself that you can start and run a successful business because they have – ‘If you can see it, you can be it’.

“I thoroughly recommend the programme and commend the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for their continuing support. I would love to see the rural women who were caught in long commutes being targeted to set up their businesses and benefit themselves and the local community.”

Mairead is currently in negotiations about opening a second location and hopes to add staff members as demand increases.

The call is now open for applicants for ACORNS 7 and 50 female entrepreneurs from across the country will be selected to participate. Anyone interested in receiving an application form ahead of the September 10, 2021 deadline for ACORNS 7 should [register their interest here](#)

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