

College: Drumcollogher Community College
Location: County Limerick, REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
Practice: An tIonad Glas Organic College
 Encouraging participation in the emerging market for organic agricultural products

Year Started 1992

Budget IE £40,000 (non-pay); IE £80,000 (pay)

Program Participants 52 FT; 200 PT

College FTE 75 (organic agriculture program only)

Target Sector Agriculture

Staff Size 6 FT

Structure Separate training center affiliated with local college

Key Outcomes Short- and long-term training in organic horticulture
 Helping farmers enter new markets
 Employment, participation, and sustainability

Introduction

Agriculture is the primary economic base of County Limerick and has a long history in this part of the Irish Republic. Farmers in the county raise both livestock and produce. A recent shift, however, is turning more farmers to organic methods as organic crops and livestock command a higher price and receive more attention and demand in the market. To accommodate this shift in demand, organic associations have developed and are supporting the emergence of programs that introduce farmers to and train them in organic methods.

One of the best examples of a college supporting the emergence of organic methods is An tIonad Glas Organic College in the town of Drumcollogher. An tIonad Glas was established in early 1992 to serve a population of (mostly) adult students interested in developing skills relevant to

organic farming and horticulture. An tIonad Glas is the only college in Ireland to offer a full-time course of study in organic farming and attracts regional and international students to its program.

Community Background

Less than one percent of agriculture in Ireland is devoted to organic methods; at the same time the country imports 70 percent of the organic produce it consumes. Clearly, organic products have found a market in Ireland. Yet Ireland lags behind other European nations such as Italy, Austria, and Denmark in its commitment to organic products. Still, An tIonad Glas is attracting students from all over the European Union as well as the United States. A recent partnership with the Italian National College for Biological Agriculture in

| Program focus | Sector specific | Economic condition | Economic base | | | Target populations |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|-----|-----|--|
| | | | Mfg | Agr | Svc | |
| Technical education | Yes | Growing | N/A | N/A | N/A | Dislocated workers, economically disadvantaged |

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Service Area County</i> | <i>Limerick</i> |
| <i>Total Population</i> | <i>500,000</i> |
| <i>Median Household Income</i> | <i>IE £18,000</i> |
| <i>% Below Poverty Level</i> | <i>28</i> |
| <i>% Unemployment Rate</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>% Minority Population</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>% Rural Population</i> | <i>35</i> |
| <i>% High School Graduates</i> | <i>N/A</i> |
| <i>% College Graduates</i> | <i>N/A</i> |

Umbria cements the role that An tIonad Glas is playing to develop and spread organic methods.

Program Description

Drumcollogher Vocational College, the parent institution of An tIonad Glas, leased the initial acreage to An tIonad Glas and continues to sponsor the college. Additional support comes from County Limerick Vocational Educational Council, Ballyhoura Development, Ltd., Drumcollogher Community Council, and private sponsors. The college targets mature or adult students—the unemployed, school leavers, and continuing education students—and is part of the Irish system designed to provide ongoing educational options to all who desire them.

Courses at An tIonad Glas are Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. PLC courses are available to mature students wishing to extend the range of their qualifications and are one of the further education options available in Ireland. Further education is a special range of academics and training in Ireland that is not included within the boundaries of third level, or higher, education. It is administered primarily through vocational institutions and includes PLC courses, apprenticeships, Youthreach (similar to Jobcorps with 2 years work experience and career education), and Community Training Workshops. The National Council for Vocational Awards, established in 1991, plays an important role in monitoring and guaranteeing awards granted for vocational training, at both the second and third levels of the educational system. For An tIonad Glas, a second regulatory body known as the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association also provides oversight to ensure

rigorous training and high achievement levels consistent with the practices and theories of organic farming. Generally, one year of study is required for certification. An additional year qualifies students for a diploma.

While enrolled in the college, students are trained in modules (which allows them to transfer courses to other institutes of technology), such as organic farming, organic production, fruit production, co-operative enterprise, and machinery/engineering. Students also receive hands-on experience in horticultural training as well as internships at organic businesses. Training at An tIonad Glas is based on experiential learning, or learning through doing. Practices include weekly organic collective meetings, the “Enterprise Acre,” land available to students for venture initiatives, work placement, and community involvement. During their second year of study (diploma qualifications year), students are encouraged to develop an enterprise in organic farming or horticulture. Approximately one-third to one-half of the college’s graduates embark on their own venture.

Part of the success of the organic college stems from an increase in the number of local producers wishing to convert to organic methods. To encourage and facilitate this trend, An tIonad Glas runs part-time evening courses and has added coursework in dairy and beef livestock organics.

The college has added a further course in Sustainable Development, which focuses on food in a global, as well as local, context. This course also provides practical solutions to local farmers developing small holdings.

Outcomes

There are currently 52 full-time and 200 hundred part-time students. In addition, weekend seminars regularly attract more than 100 participants, and one-day workshops attract over 200 participants. Approximately one-third to one-half of the college’s graduates embark on their own venture. The Mid-West region of Ireland now contains the largest number of organic producers in the country. One of the producer cooperatives has over sixty farm members.

Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

One of the major strengths of the organic college is its founder and director, who has a long history of interest and training in organic farming techniques. He is demonstrating that organic farming is a practical and sustainable option for rural Ireland. And indeed, converting to organic products with their higher market value has caught the interest of regional farmers.

Another strength is the ability to attract students from throughout the European Union and abroad. And being the only full-time course of study in organic practices in Ireland reduces competition for students as well. The program is based in the town that initiated the first cooperative Dairy Society in Ireland or Britain in 1889. That collective enterprise strategy is being redeveloped to suit today's organic production. This "team based" strategy provides student farmers and growers solutions to machinery costs, as well as labor and marketing challenges.

A significant challenge to continued success and expansion is the introduction of a new economic sector into the region: industry. In the short-term, the college has already lost acreage to industrial development interests. The long-term impact of industrial development has yet to be determined. In response to competition for land, the college is considering moving the program to a permanent site in another village. The move would minimize the potential for future loss of resources (i.e., acreage), but represents a significant cost to the college in terms of moving and establishing organic practices in a new location.

For more information, contact:

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