

A BLOSSOMING REGION

OPERATING OUT OF CLONAKILTY, WEST CORK LEADER CO-OP IS IRELAND'S LARGEST LEADER ACTION GROUP.



↑ Richard Murphy of Shellfish de la Mer

In 2001, the group set itself an ambitious development plan which envisaged a spend up to €15 million of public and private money to 2006. "We define our strategy as the use of regional identity for competitive advantage," says Ian Dempsey, the group's chief executive. West Cork LEADER Co-op aspires to turn West Cork's long renowned appeal into a tool for enterprise and community development and has come up with a truly innovative approach: regional branding.

With a long association to West Cork, the Fuchsia flower has been chosen as the symbol of origin and quality for the food, tourism and craft products of the region and reflects positive local characteristics. Producers and providers, sanctioned to use the Fuchsia logo, must adhere to strict quality criteria and are subject to an annual review.

SHINING STARS

180 businesses in total are working together as part of the West Cork Regional Branding Initiative, offering tremendous strength in the diversity of talent and experience. It includes many star performers, such as the Lodge & Spa Hotel at Inchydoney Island and Durrus Cheese, which has won three gold medals so far this year, including the top prize at the World Cheese Awards.

Businesses, like Shellfish de la Mer (2004 Seafood Exporter of the Year) and Irish Yogurts Ltd (Tesco Irish Food Producers' Small Producer Export Award

2003), have achieved astonishing growth and become major employers in their localities.

The regional branding initiative was used as a lever in the initiation of the West Cork Technology Park at Clonakilty in 2000. Employment in the Park is growing steadily at around 100 jobs per annum.

QUALITY IS KEY

West Cork LEADER Co-op places tremendous emphasis on this quality of life argument and this year piloted an innovative study, in conjunction with the Waterford and Cavan Monaghan LEADER groups, to develop Ireland's first regional quality of life index. The study, undertaken by economists Jim Power and Chris Johns, revealed that West Cork is 10% above the national average for quality of life. "We recognise that enterprise and community development has performed strongly in West Cork and are proud to have played our part in that", concludes Ian Dempsey, who is confident of the contribution the Co-op will continue to play in the development of the region.



For further information on any of the above companies, contact West Cork LEADER at (023) 34035 or visit, www.westcorkleader.ie