

## Irish – Welsh partnership blooms

We are familiar with Ireland being referred to as the 'Celtic Tiger', and Welsh farmers know all about the strengths of the Irish livestock sector. But the role of horticulture in the Irish economy is less well known. This is surprising given that in terms of gross agricultural commodity output, horticulture is positioned third after cattle and milk, and currently employs 18,500 people across the food and non food areas. While domestic consumption is important to the sector, exports are also strong with some £70 million of mushroom and £10 million of non-food horticultural products (i.e. nursery stock, cut foliage, bulbs, flowers and Christmas trees) are exported annually. Many of these exports travel through Wales on their way to their final destinations in the UK and beyond.

One option for the Welsh horticultural sector to benefit from the increased demand for horticultural products across the EU is to join forces with its Irish cousin so that together they can supply more and bigger markets. This is the thinking behind a new Interreg project, funded by the EU and WDA, which is being led by the Welsh College of Horticulture working within CALU (Centre for Alternative Land Use). Professor Gareth Edwards-Jones, Director of CALU says 'We are used to seeing foreign players and coaches in our domestic rugby and football teams where they help our homegrown players improve their skill levels, maybe we can do the same by joining with the Irish horticulturalists, hopefully to our mutual benefit'.

The new project will try to develop clusters of horticultural businesses across Wales which can supply similar types of produce. These will then be introduced to similar clusters in Ireland with the hope that joint marketing and sales will develop. Given that much of the Irish produce passes through Welsh ports and along Welsh roads, the logistics of joint initiatives should be relatively straightforward.

If you are interested in being part of this project please contact CALU for more details: e-mail [calu@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:calu@bangor.ac.uk), tel 01248 680450.