The innovations and lessons of EIP-Agri projects in Ireland

A compendium to inform the next RDP as set out by the projects themselves

This document was compiled by EFNCP with support from the Heritage Council
Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of either organisation

Blackstairs Farming Futures

Location

Contact details

Declan Dempsey
declan@dempseyagri.ie
087 9051062

Objectives as officially set out

The objectives of the project to be carried out by the participating Farmers and the BFF Project Team are:

- To ensure the delivery of the European Innovation Partnership Locally Led project as set out in the application to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- To oversee the governance and management of the Blackstairs commonages of Counties Carlow and Wexford.
- To maintain and improve the commonages through the conservation, restoration or enhancement of the environment and natural habitats of the commonages
- Undertake any other action within the law which is necessary to achieve the objects including promoting public access

Underlying reason for proposing the project

Research carried out for the Blackstairs Farming Group in 2015 confirmed a c. 50% reduction in farm holders under the age of 44 in Electoral Districts surrounding the Blackstairs Mountains. Data on farm viability indicates a high proportion of unsustainable farms in the Blackstairs area. This combination of an aging farmer population and low farm incomes pose a threat to the achievement of favourable status of the semi-natural habitatsand associated species in the Blackstairs Mountains SAC. The project objective is to adopt innovative approaches to add value to the Blackstairs hill farming system whilst simultaneously improving habitat condition.

Summary of main project activity

- Developing a Results Based Agri-Environment Payment Scheme for upland habitats and commonage land
- Developing an effective commonage governance model for Ireland
- Trialling habitat management for red grouse by commonage farmers in the Blackstairs
- Ensuring wider community engagement in the environment, culture and tradition of farming in the uplands

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

Grazing Management Plans are being developed to ensure that improvements in the ecological status of the commonages are not eroded into the future.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

A Results Based Payment Scheme approach engaging farmers in the delivery of eco-system services has been implemented successfully in the Burren (IRL) since 2010 and there are positive early results from the RBAPS project in Leitrim (IRL) and Shannon Callows (IRL)-These projects focus on grassland which is privately owned. This project proposes to adapt the results based approach to the delivery of eco-system services to (i) upland habitats and (ii) to land farmed as commonage, through the development and implementation of a Locally-Led Results Based Agri-Environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS) in the Blackstairs Mountains.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

- In Dartmoor, UK and in some other areas with commonage land across the EU, structures exist to support effective commonage management. Learning from existing models, this project proposes to develop and implement governance structures
    - between farmers at commonage level,
    - between commonages and
    - between commonage farmers and other stakeholders,

  to support communication, cooperation, decision-making and collective action in the development and delivery of the other innovations.
- Engaging the wider community in the environment, culture and tradition of farming in the Uplands, building on the success of the annual Hill Farming Showcase organised by the Blackstairs Farming Group initiated in August 2016 to coincide with Heritage Week.
- A new inter-agency initiative, The Blackstairs Fire Watch (BFW), was put in place to help stop the illegal burning on Blackstairs Mountain. John Griffin NPWS (OG) led this initiative and it is being supported and implemented by the farmers of the Blackstairs commonages. This initiative has already proved to be very successful this year, (2020) in preventing fires developing into large wildfires on the Blackstairs. The benefits of this programme are already becoming evident even in the short period of time it is up and running.
- The feasibility of developing a communal flock is currently being explored by one of the commonages.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

On Boleybrack Mountain in Co Leitrim (IRL), a Red Grouse Habitat Management Plan has been implemented by a local gun club to manage the mountain for red grouse conservation. These measures are being adapted and trialled for use by hill farmers in the Blackstairs.

Most difficult challenges

The management of conflict within the groups has proved to be a significant challenge. Due to the nature of collective ownership a fundamental requirement to the future success of this project is collaboration among the shareholders. This collaboration and collective governance is the foundation on which this project has been developed. While the development of the nine groups has not met without some difficulties the vast majority have been resolved and all groups are functioning satisfactorily.

Commonages come with "baggage" and this has proved to be a significant factor in the implementation of previous commonage plans. Existing and future disputes have the potential to derail individual plans within the project. The vast majority of conflicts have been resolved thus far, however it should be noted that in selecting the commonages for inclusion in the scheme local knowledge was a valuable resource. This had the advantage of minimising potential conflict.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

- KT: A KT programme specific to upland farming; both within and across EIP's.
- GLAS: The core elements of collective governance and the results-based payment system can in theory be incorporated into GLAS. Significant effort would be required on many commonages in order to form the governance structure. If there is a cap on payments per holding, this may only work where participation in the commonage management plan is mandatory as otherwise shareholders may select perceived easier options on lowland. The grazing plan is common to both this project and GLAS with ultimately the same goal. It would be difficult to generate a standard area-based payment for e.g. bracken clearance similar to the GLAS payment structure (for example hedgerow laying). The complementary actions are costed on actual hours worked rather than a standardised figure as used in GLAS to calculate payment rates.
- TAMS: Capital investments such as fencing could be included in a TAMS scheme with higher payment rates to reflect the difficult nature of the terrain (similar to the island rate at present). Grants for temporary fencing and satellite fencing systems (for bovine) have the potential for inclusion. It may be more difficult to include grants for improvements in roadways, as they are difficult to standardise.

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

The four elements of the project could be translated into a stand-alone scheme:

- The results-based payments system is a combination of habitat score and complementary actions designed to enhance the future habitat score. A unique set of

complementary actions can be designed to meet the challenges presented by each individual commonage (selected from existing measures or pre-approved alternatives).

- The governance model is based on a mix of top down and bottom up. This model has the potential to operate effectively on the majority of commonages although commonages with significant pre-existing conflict may prove a greater challenge.
- Habitat management for red grouse can be modified to targeted species in the region. This is reflected in the results-based payments system.
- Wider community engagement forms a core part of this project, but it is not clear how this might be costed or into which measure it might be incorporated - this requires further study.

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

This project could be expanded to all commonages (see details included in (b)).

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

(Left intentionally blank)

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- Development of grazing management plans for all the participating commonages.
- Investigating the potential of introducing a results-based payment scheme for water quality on some/all commonages and introducing a water quality management training programme for commonages.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- A best practice guide for formation of the commonage groups
- Training for the operational group involved in developing the project would be very beneficial. This has been a steep learning curve for the members of the Blackstairs Farming Group (BFG). The members have contributed a significant quantity of time and effort which far exceeds the economical remuneration received. Training would greatly reduce the "trial and error" element of this project.
- A centralised office which can provide backup and support to the various projects.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

The inclusion of the shareholders in the development of the Commonage Management Plan has given a real sense of ownership and purpose to the project. The fundamental principle is that this project is farmer led. The lead operational group partner consists of farmers. This approach has distinct advantages to previous schemes which have sought to conserve and enhance upland ecology. The participants have engaged with the scheme with an energy and enthusiasm not seen with previous schemes. This is reflected in the numbers which have joined the scheme with near full participation on many of the commonages. There are emerging signs that the BFF EIP has delivered real and tangible results both to the ecological status of the participating commonages but also to

the members and communities involved. Crucial to this has been the Commonage Governance Model developed.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

Obtaining the various permissions in the required timeframe to carry out elements of the plan has proved a challenge. This has been exacerbated by Covid 19. Changes in personnel within the Department of Agriculture have also contributed to this issue. Providing agreed specified timelines for responding to requests would facilitate management of the project.

BRIDE Project

Location

Contact details

Donal Sheehan
donalsheehan1000@gmail.com
087 2292880

Objectives as officially set out

- Explore an innovative implementation of a results-based approach for biodiversity on intensively managed farmland.
- Develop, implement and assess innovative options to restore, preserve and enhance farmland habitats.
- Improve communication and dissemination on the contribution Irish farmers can make in the conservation of biodiversity in Ireland.
- Facilitate the creation of a market-based demand for the supply of ecosystem services from farmers to the agri-food industry.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

- Improve biodiversity in an intensive farming landscape
- Improve our farming image
- Create a template that could reform the CAP and be replicated nationwide.

Summary of main project activity

Rewarding farmers for environmental improvements based on results and effort

How did the project innovate?

The project was developed by 2 farmers and an ecologist. The farmers knew the previous problems with agri-environment schemes and why biodiversity was still declining and it was a matter of designing a project that farmers would buy into but where biodiversity improvements would be delivered.

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

It became clear from an early stage that the administration to carry out RBP's was costly and time-consuming and there was a need to ensure that funding was paid to where the improvements

needed to be made – at farmer level. To this end, a mobile phone app is now at development stage and it is hoped to roll this out to farmers in time so that farmers themselves will eventually score their own farms with the project spot checking for accuracy and verification. The design of scorecards to simplify scoring, yet ensuring high ecological integrity is a key part of RBP's.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

The Project team were keen to focus on the goal at all times – improving biodiversity – previous schemes were focussed on improving a farmer's income with a secondary consideration being environmental improvement. The BRIDE focuses on the latter with supplementing a farmer's income being based solely on results achieved. All Results-based payments are incentive driven with higher quality scores getting higher payments and poor quality habitats or pesticide application getting an "autofail".

The Project pays up to €2000 per farm in capital funding. This covers 100% of most costs but to encourage farmers to match the funding themselves, only small amounts are fully funded e.g. 100m of new hedgerow is funded but more than that and the farmer should contribute to improving biodiversity on their own farms and will appreciate something more when they pay for it themselves.

A farmer suggested measure was included to give the farmer a sense of ownership of their plan and this was taken up by several farmers. In one example a farmer was allowing his livestock access to the river for drinking water, this was going on for many years and as is often the case, started a long time ago when the farmer had perhaps 5-10 animals and the increasing number over the years didn't ring any alarm bells. When we suggested fencing off the river from livestock, the cost issue was mentioned as a factor but when we offered to subsidise the improvement he readily agreed. €200 towards the cost of providing piping and troughs, was agreed, which was only a token gesture on our part but it was the catalyst needed to remove almost 100 livestock from drinking from the Bride river.

Training and knowledge transfer is not paid for as it was felt that this gave out the wrong message (a bad habit and sending out the wrong signal!) and so farmers attend all training days and farm walks at their own expense.

Although, we have not given out the scoresheets from this year's habitat assessments yet to the farmers, several have enquired as to what they achieved. The scoresheets and the highlighting of lower marks and where improvements can be made will be a significant driver in biodiversity improvement and other environmental issues.

Target species payment **- a** list of species, that have been lost or are at present threatened in the Bride valley, was drawn up and a payment of €100 per confirmed breeding of the species on a farm is given each year. This token payment incentivises the farmer to retain the species, through suitable habitat management, for the duration of the project. It is only paid on species where farmer effort and management can contribute to the breeding success of the species.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

We have already aligned 3 farmers with the primary school in their local area. This was to be rolled out further this year so that all primary schools in the Bride valley catchment would have a BRIDE farmer available for a school biodiversity farm walk. Unfortunately, this was hampered with the Covid lockdown and restrictions but we hope to reignite this initiative at a future date. There are 10 primary schools in total in the catchment area.

A BRIDE Farm Habitat Management Guidelines book was produced to help farmers manage their habitats to ensure they maximise their quality scores to achieve higher quality payments.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

The project is based on a Dutch model whereby farmers came together to safeguard the breeding success of ground nesting birds. As the BRIDE is farmer driven, particular care was taken to learn from and build on, the successes and failures of previous agri-environment schemes, especially from a farmer's viewpoint.

We also follow the Burren Programme's policy of "calling a spade a spade" – if the farmer does a poor job, the payment is lower or perhaps no payment is given. This is in contrast to previous agri-environment schemes where payments were given out with very little evidence to show any improvements because of whatever measure was implemented. This relates to previous point of getting money out to farmers as an income supplement first and foremost and not for environmental improvement.

Most difficult challenges

Changing farmers' mindsets – biodiversity doesn't do uniformity! Farmers have become moulded to having uniform grasslands and cereal crops, coming from farming with monocultures. Changing farmer's mindsets to tolerate having a more balanced way of farming, where manicured hedgerows and sprayed field margins become a thing of the past.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc)?

(See below for model preferred)

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

- The template for the project from start to finish could now be rolled out on a national basis. We have developed scorecards for all habitats and have combined the scorecard with the BMA rating of each farm to give a combined payment for both the quantity and quality of all habitats on the farm.
- However, rather than have a national brand like REPS or GLAS, a suite of locally-branded implementations could be rolled out in any other area e.g. Blackwater REPS Scheme, Nore REPS Scheme, Boyne REPS Scheme etc. etc. This would be a national scheme but just a local name to it so that the landscape-type buy-in that is needed for any environmental scheme to make it successful. This would give better local buy-in (the peer pressure to be in rather

than not in the scheme) and a certain pride in wanting to make a success of their local environment scheme, it would also create friendly competition and perhaps a faster increase in environmental improvement

- A Land Management Payment (LMP) could be paid to all farmers from Pillar 1 as part of their BPS or through an Ecoscheme in the next CAP. This could be paid out on the basis of their BMA, i.e. the % area of the farm under natural habitats. At present a farmer's BPS is paid on the basis of an averaged figure got from 20 years ago that bears no resemblance to what is required in the current time. This payment would be to all landowners to manage their land for biodiversity, water/air quality and carbon sequestration and I would suggest a figure of €500/ha based on results. The payment at the moment is based on the cropping area of the farm and this is a duplicate payment as farmers are already getting paid from this area through sale of milk, beef cereals etc. whereas there is no value put on the natural habitat area of the farm for ecosystem services. The BRIDE puts a financial value on this part of the farm as would the LMP.

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

The BRIDE Project could be modelled by any other catchment area in the country with tweaks to take into account different geographical habitats and species and different payment rates depending on the goal to be achieved.

Different habitats can be found all over the country but their management and best practice in improving them should be the same everywhere.
Hedgerows should have the same management in Cork as in Donegal. Wet grasslands, species-rich grasslands etc. etc. likewise. Scorecards and best practice in managing for different habitats should be combined from all the EIP's that have them and replicated on farms nationwide, regardless of being in a scheme/EIP or not.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

(Left intentionally blank)

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

- All farms should be mapped to identify their BMA (Biodiversity Managed Area). We need to have a baseline so that Irish Ag Inc. can showcase the positive changes needed to be seen in the coming years.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- Developing an app that will allow farmers do the scoring annually and so make RBP's cost effective.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- Agricultural advisers need to be trained up in how to advise on the ecological aspects of a farm and identify best practice on other aspects of environmental improvement e.g.

improving water quality and lowering a farms carbon footprint. The focus from all advisers in an intensive farming area is still on maximising food production at all (environmental usually) costs.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

- Because all habitats have a value and are included in the BMA, the Project addresses the problematic issue of land eligibility/ineligibility. Scrub is included as part of the BMA and receives a quality payment but it is a much lower payment than the previous habitat which may have been biodiversity-rich grassland, wet grassland or marsh. Therefore, the incentive for the farmer is to retain it as a premium habitat such as the aforementioned and receive the higher payment rather than allowing it revert to scrub and receive a lower payment. Likewise if invasive species take over the parcel of land this becomes an autofail and no payment is received.
- Farmers should apply to be selected onto an environmental scheme – it shouldn't be a case of ringing up an adviser and getting them to fill out a form. The BRIDE created a selection criteria list where the farmer had to choose from several boxes to accumulate points to gain entry. The result was farmers "bidding" to secure a place with a guarantee of high quality entrants that wanted to be part of the project for the right reasons. It also resulted in participants leaving that weren't "suitable" for the project.
- All farmers were delighted where measures were contracted out by the Project team rather than the farmer having to do it themselves e.g. the new hedgerows were sourced and planted by contractor. We encouraged the farmer to use this service as we had control over the correct species and planting criteria being carried out. If the farmer chose to do it, the quality of the plants would be cheap and cheerful and the job would be only half done. All the farmer had to do was show the contractor the location.
- Bird boxes were allocated on the basis of species present and suitability for species rather than giving out boxes willy-nilly. Suitable locations were also identified for the different species on the different farms. This led to more successful outcomes.
- Bird and bat boxes were made and designed specifically for the project. These were more costly than an off the shelf brand but were much more robust and easier to clean out which will be cheaper and more user friendly in the long run.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

- Give out the money in tranches of €10,000 before submission of a budget with checks on the money spent rather than trying to budget for everything up to 3 months ahead.
- The Project team should have the responsibility of allocating money – there has to be oversight and checks and balances but not taking us by the hand completely.

Caomhnú Árann

Location
Aran Islands, Co Galway.

Contact details
Patrick McGurn
patrick.mcgurn2@gmail.com
083 1550855

Objectives as officially set out
- Examine innovative management techniques to both maintain, and bring sites, to favourable condition by addressing the threats of land abandonment, undergrazing, intensification, loss of traditional management systems and associated loss of knowledge. The main tools will be an outcome based, simplified priority habitat scoring system. The scoring system will be linked to remote sensing to reduce the administrative cost of the project and to increase farmer involvement.
- Examine non-subsidy methods of improving farm income to address the issues of land abandonment and increased intensity of farming practices which degrade the conservation status of priority habitat. This will include:
    - Examining innovative ways to deliver phosphorous supplementation targeted to most at risk cattle, rather than pasture based fertiliser which is likely to degrade the species rich attributes of the priority habitat; and
    - Seeking to monetise the value of the species-rich grasslands as a material resource of seed for regeneration and remediation of degraded habitat in other areas;
- Improve the conservation status of 1,500 hectares of priority habitats
- Enhance understanding, appreciation and engagement of all the key stakeholders with the conservation of priority habitats on the Aran Islands.

Underlying reason for proposing the project
Caomhnú Árann follows on from a previous project AranLIFE, an EU co-funded LIFE project, the main reasons for proposing the project were to continue the work achieved by AranLIFE and fulfil the

commitment to have an after-LIFE project. Underlying both projects however, the driver was the lack of suitable measures within present agri-environment to protect specific habitats.

Summary of main project activity

The aim of the project is to examine and develop innovative methods of habitat improvement and conservation, in part by addressing labour intensity of conservation and improvement measures, and in part by addressing low farm income levels.

- Develop a simplified habitat scoring system to enable:
  - Farmers to self-assess the habitat status of land;
  - Efficient and effective methods for assessing and auditing farmer self-assessment;
- Develop remote sensing tools for habitat scoring, work targeting, work monitoring and assessment, and auditing;
- Examine low labour intensity methods of priority habitat management; e.g. drone delivery of micro dosage herbicides;
- Examine innovative methods of improving farm income to stem the flow of land abandonment on the islands:
  - Methods of targeted phosphorus delivery to manage chronic low level phosphorus in cattle;
  - Seed harvesting from the islands' species rich grasslands; and
- Demonstrate the best management techniques for the sustainable management of priority habitats, through the maintenance of optimal grazing on the Aran Islands.

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

A major element of Caomhnú Árann's work is the use of remote sensing, using existing aerial photography and multispectral imagery from drones to both assess habitat condition and use it as a means of determining habitat quality which can be incorporated into an outcome based agri-environment scheme.

A second element of the Caomhnú Árann project is to improve the overall efficiency of the cattle enterprise and look at alternative markets for the other services delivered on the farm. Previous work on the project has highlighted mineral deficiency in the grazing swards, particularly phosphate, so the project is developing methods to ensure phosphate availability without habitat degradation (supplying phosphate as a fertiliser is the simple method of meeting animal needs but this reduces plant diversity). Caomhnú Árann is also looking at the suitability of the islands farming system to develop commercial supplies of native seeds for future sales and other future income support to the farmers.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

Linked with the remote sensing, Caomhnú Árann are developing a simplified results-based scoring system, based on a one to five scale that is targeted towards farmer self-assessment and the farmers knowledge of the field at different stages of the year, rather than a set of parameters that build up a score. This will reduce overall administrations costs for future schemes as the farmers can score their own land, yet still reflect the quality of the habitat and enable improvements in habitat quality.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

Whilst not directly innovation, a local team working directly with the farmers, with associated habitat management workshops, public events and education visits within the school is an important part of the project, differing greatly from the approach of main stream agri-environment measures.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

(This section intentionally blank)

Most difficult challenges

To date Covid-19 has been the most difficult challenge faced as it has impacted directly on our work programme, prevented travel to the project area for a longer period than on the mainland and reduced the availability of remote sensing data needed for the project.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

It would be difficult to incorporate our actions into the current RDP measures. Some of the knowledge transfer could be incorporated into KT groups and Caomhnú Árann have used this platform where required. Items like construction of rain catchers could be included into TAMS with a basic size, specification and cost. At present the most similar option under GLAS is the Low Input Permanent Pasture option which is used widely by the farmers, but this is for a low quality grassland habitat and does not reward the management of grasslands of higher quality from a biodiversity perspective.

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

Any of Caomhnú Árann's grassland measures could be incorporated into a national measure. Within any agri-environment option there could be recognition of a range of grassland habitat qualities (which reflect the 1-5 score) and a suite of supporting non-productive investments that allow enhancement works such as scrub control and the provision of raincatchers.

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

Caomhnú Árann feels the simplified approach towards an outcome based agri-environment scheme could be rolled out to any grassland area. All grasslands are continuum along a spectrum and with the use of broad bands, different grassland types can easily be fitted into one of the categories.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

The use of technology, apps in the field to upload information directly, simplified farm plans, percentage payments regarding farmer input, so where there is less environmental gain the farmer contributes at a higher level.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

A KT approach more targeted at the conditions of the islands with a higher level of biodiversity information included.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

We are still working on the remote sensing, multi-spectral imagery and farmer assessment, which whilst promising is still at the early stages.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

Whilst we feel our approach could be rolled out at a wider level, the local approach with a project team on the ground is a very important aspect of the project and more important than the specific procedures used. Local approach allows greater flexibility within a project, ensures the farmers have a greater understanding of what is trying to be achieved and also ensures greater pride within the farming community of what is on their land. So in the island situation, with over 75% designated land, a project team to deliver an agri-environment measure (be that action or results based) will always be the best approach.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

The development of a simplified broad scoring system that fits the different grassland types into a series of quality bands and which the farmer can use to guide management within the farm.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

Our engagement with DAFM to date has been very positive, through initial meetings, answering queries and the projects general payment structure.

Cúlra Créafóige

Location

Contact details

Veronika McNulty and Erin Gonseth
laneipculra@gmail.com
074 918 0994

Objectives as officially set out

- To re-activate and ensure small farm cultivation is profitable and self-sustaining
- To determine best sustainable crop cultivation practices for local soil conditions
- To increase the parish's eco-tourism potential
- To provide access to expert knowledge of ecology and sustainable agriculture to the parish
- To enthuse the local youth and generate interest in working the land with sustainable methods
- Increase farm viability, corncrake habitat creation, tourism and micro-business opportunities

Underlying reason for proposing the project

- To start a local discussion amongst landowners/farmers of the potential use and profitability of marginal lands which were cultivated in some cases into the 1970s
- Prevent further loss of biodiversity due to decline of cultivation in the region, in support of local (corncrake-focussed) SPAs.

Summary of main project activity

- Bringing lands back into cultivation which have been left to go dormant. Landowners give the project permission; project formulates and implements a cropping plan based on local weather, landowner preference, ecological benefit, soil conditions, and market prospects.
- Monitoring soil characteristics and field ecology; landowners/participants/applicants are encouraged to join in on data collection

- Formal training in ecology and regenerative farming practices
- Summer youth work experience project in conjunction with LAN Ctr and Údarás na Gaeltachta. This project draws 5-10 youths aged 15-18 to the project per year and provides them with experience in crop husbandry, ecological monitoring, agricultural heritage, and cottage industry.
- Market research for the crops under investigation to facilitate a circular economy and ensure the maximum economic viability of any given crop, great energies are put into finding and establishing possible local markets – specifically in the niche and craft sector.
- Associated cottage industry is also supported with training provided to the participants where needed (i.e. food safety, sustainable egg production, growing and feeding fodder crops).

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

(Left intentionally blank)

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

(Left intentionally blank)

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

- Providing free training to participants in ecology – awareness, identification, and recording – ensuring a closer connection between participants and the biodiversity which supports them
- Providing free training to participants in associated cottage industry – working with a farm-to-fork mentality and the understanding that value added to crops results in a higher profit margin and therefore greater economic stability.
- Facilitating a youth work experience – to introduce local youths to sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices, ecology and ecological monitoring, local agricultural heritage, and the richness of agricultural terminology in the Irish language

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

- We are using heritage cultivation techniques in a region dominated by animal husbandry – re-investigating region-specific heritage crops and their modern and craft markets, looking to stimulate the economy and support the creation of cottage industry via a circular economy.
- Using a regenerative and whole-systems approach is central to the project's ethos and approach.

Most difficult challenges

- Emphasis by national policy on techniques which might work for lowland, large-scale farming, but which do not serve upland and disadvantaged agricultural lands i.e. emphasis on animal husbandry.
- Inspiring genuine participation from the landowners in the project and overcoming their scepticism. Some have fallen into the subsidies cycle where they are simply looking to see

what they can get out of the project with no input. w methods and techniques can be at odds with everything they've done in the past – it can be difficult to convince participants of the benefits of trying regenerative and sustainable methods. While the project has received permission to proceed as it sees fit on the lands in the project, winning over the support and enthusiasm of the locals takes much time and energy

- Combating gender stereotypes in modern agriculture – unfortunately suggestions from women are still not often given due consideration
- Modern agricultural mindset of the environment being something humans have a right to take advantage of rather than to take care of – i.e. the typical agricultural practices which have developed since the green revolution and which actually serve to deplete the natural resources of the land
- The loss of knowledge, skills, and machinery which was once widely available in the region. As cultivation died out, cultivation machinery was sold or left to rot; the knowledge of how to operate and/or fix the machinery died out; and the cultural knowledge of how and when to work the lands has been lost.
- Sourcing agricultural machinery suitable to regenerative agriculture, namely smaller and lighter which will have less of a detrimental impact on the soil structure. Modern machinery is produced for use on low-land and prime agricultural fields and so is far too large to be sustainable on upland and small plot industry.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

- Mandatory, yearly, free ecology and soil health dynamics training for agricultural workers to increase awareness. Training top-ups, per say, on the soil-food web interaction, how soil management affects crop nutritional value, awareness of how wildlife co-exists (e.g. don't shoot all the raptors or the rat population will sky-rocket). Attendance at these courses could result in a higher stipend, etc. In terms of scale of effort in its research and training budgets, Teagasc invests in dairy systems and perennial rye grass regimes; the funding for small farm crop potential is pitiful and may prove, over time, to be unjustified socially and economically.

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

(Left intentionally blank)

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

- Further investigation of methods to support upland and disadvantaged farmers in enterprise diversification – especially those located within SPAs and SACs, Gaeltachtaí, and other west coastal areas. National policies are entirely too focused on lowland, prime agricultural enterprises. Active considerations need to be put into place for agricultural renewal in disadvantaged areas. We suspect that average agricultural payments per Gaeltacht farm, are far lower than the national average, reflecting the small marginal farmlands there.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

- Annual farm inspections – as used in Organic certification or the Bord Bia Sustainable Horticulture Scheme could be hugely beneficial to ensure ALL farms comply with nitrates, animal husbandry, SPA legislation, etc. Current oversight is typically reactive rather than proactive.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

- Mandatory, annual ecology and biodiversity training
- Agricultural production training focusing on niche market products and cottage industry – financial supports for further education in beekeeping, organic egg production, farm-scale diversification, etc.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- benefits of shortening the animal husbandry supply chain i.e. cultivation of fodder crops on farm rather than importing feeds, composting animal waste for application to cultivation rather than application of slurry to grasslands, etc.
- benefits for using smaller machinery which causes less damage to soil structure and initiates less erosion
- roll-out of region-specific crop growth and market analysis – focussing on niche markets and cottage industry
- roll-out of local youth work-experience program pairing youths with local regenerative agriculture, farm ecologists, and cottage industry entrepreneurs

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- Network of approved ecologists who specialize and are knowledgeable in regenerative agriculture
- Further research into crops, markets, and region-specific needs
- Network of local youth work-experience program facilitators and trainers.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

- We need to flip the narrative so that diversified farm enterprise, sustainability, and regenerative agricultural practices are no longer the exception, but rather the norm.
- Regenerative agricultural methods, diversification, food sovereignty, and shortened supply chains must be emphasized across all national and European schemes if we are to save the biodiversity and ecology of our land and make our economy robust enough to survive in the face of climate change and the ever-changing political atmosphere.
- To keep population in disadvantaged areas, and to ensure the land is not left to waste, it is crucial to introduce the youth to regenerative agriculture and ecology. Only by supporting small farms and cottage industry, to show them that it is possible to remain on the land, will we ensure that another generation of Irish youth does not disappear to the cities.

- Policies are inherently written with a focus on large agriculture (e.g. minimum hectares in a claim). However this drives the cost of agriculture through the roof for small scale farmers as it become more and more difficult to source appropriately sized equipment, small batches of lime, etc. A stimulus is required to make production or importation of small scale regenerative agricultural equipment viable so that purchase of such will be economically feasible for marginal farmers – increasing cultivation efficiency (i.e. currently farmers would need to visit the land 5 times for harvesting, weed-killing, ploughing, harrowing, seeding, rolling vs. visiting the land 2 times for harvesting and no-till seeding).

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

- A more organized approach to reporting – 2 weeks or even a month's notice of a major update being due during the height of harvest or planting season is not conducive to completing the actual on-the-ground works and/or providing a comprehensive report.

Farming Rathcroghan EIP

Location

Contact details

Petra Kock-Appelgren
Petra@farmingrathcroghan.ie
086-1704113

Objectives as officially set out

- Manage the Rathcroghan farming landscape – an area of national and international archaeological significance - in a sustainable way, with a focus on the delivery of good archaeological condition;
- Increase awareness and recognition amongst the local community, the general public and tourists of the significance of Rathcroghan as a farmed archaeological landscape and of the central role of farmers in caring for the Rathcroghan living landscape.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

The project was proposed to target a number of issues present in Rathcroghan – the decline of archaeological quality, a lack of knowledge of how (and lack of willingness to) manage archaeology properly, interference by tourists, etc.

It is also intended as a platform to tackle socio-economic issues in the area such as inability to obtain planning permissions for residential (and occasionally agricultural) buildings, which makes it difficult for younger people/families to establish themselves and makes generational farming more difficult.

Another important aspect was to re-instate a sense of community in the area and a sense of pride of the archaeology, instead of a hindrance and obstacles to profitable farming enterprises, by bringing the local farmers together and working alongside them.

Summary of main project activity

- Developing and testing innovative management solutions to sustain the area as a viable farming landscape in harmony with its rich cultural and ecological assets.
- Testing and implementing best farming and archaeological practice to monitor, manage, maintain and enhance the ancient cultural landscape in an environmentally and ecologically friendly way.
- Providing archaeology expertise locally to support the pro-active management of the archaeological landscape by the resident Rathcroghan farming community, through engagement with key stakeholders.

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

As part of the project current agricultural recommendations and archaeological recommendations are adapted and trialled to produce integrated best practise guidelines, that are simple, effective and can be used in practise by farmers. These include:

- Grazing of monuments: Protecting grass cover on archaeology by the use of lighter stock and short, weather dependent grazing periods.
- Practical methods of monument grass recovery: farmer interventions that range in intensity depending on the extent of damage, but still allows for agricultural use of the land parcel.

In addition, the project is developing equipment suitable for farmer use in archaeological areas. This equipment is non-ground intrusive and once suitably trialled will be pre-approved by the National Monument Service for use on/near archaeology.

- A resting frame for grass recovery of minor archaeological damage (up to 2 m^2) is currently being trialled in a) young cattle and b) older cattle, and will shortly be trialled in sheep pastures.
- Non-ground intrusive temporary fencing is currently being developed as part of the project, for use in short term restriction of grazing of monuments, for instance during wet ground conditions or for grass recovery on large sections of archaeological damage.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

As part of the project we are actively interacting with another state body outside DAFM, the National Monument Service. As part of the annual farm plan development, the project will issue notifications of archaeological works or request for Ministerial Consent of works near National Monuments to the National Monument Service. These will be part of the farm plan and approved by both NMS and the farmer before project works begin.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

Farming Rathcroghan is distributing project equipment for short term actions to project farmers. These are currently owned by the project/company and lent out to farmers for the length of the action. The project is actively pursuing other methods of the shared equipment, on a community-owned or co-op basis.

In order to engage local farmers in Rathcroghan that could not be offered a project position, all those farmers that fulfil the project criteria was offered a so called 'training position' where they are welcome to join in on all project training and KT events and will receive a payment for attending at least two of these per year.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

One of the main premises of Farming Rathcroghan is to reward good archaeological management through result-based payments. We are adapting proven result-based scorecards from other projects to incorporate archaeology-based scores in the farm payments.

Most difficult challenges

As we are currently in the early stages of the project, the most difficult parts have been the administrative side of the project and to develop procedures that are approved by DAFM, where the instructions have at times been quite vague.

There are also quite a few measures that we would like to incorporate to promote archaeological and ecological quality of farms. However, these are currently not being pursued due to the risk of these areas being deemed 'ineligible' for BPS despite positive impacts on nature and archaeology and little to no impact on farming area or productivity.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

These would be suitable for GLAS (or a similar Agri-Environment Scheme):

- Short grazing rotations in parcels containing archaeology, or adapted "strip grazing" for parcels containing archaeology where they would only be grazed for a few hours or a day at a time.
- Restriction of machinery traffic in fields or parts of fields with archaeological sites.
- Use of umbilical slurry spreading in parcels containing archaeological sites.

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

An Agri-Archaeological scheme would certainly be possible and implementable for farms that have archaeological sites. This could involve actions or incentives such as:

- Reduced stock on archaeological sites
- Grazing archaeological sites with lighter weight cattle (or sheep)
- Short duration, targeted grazing periods on archaeological sites
- Use of umbilical system and floatation tyres for slurry spreading
- Restricted out-wintering and supplementary feeding on archaeological sites

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

Farming Rathcroghan covers just under 40% of the Rathcroghan area at the moment. Further expansion of the project would ideally include the ability to accommodate the entire Rathcroghan area, and the option of including other farms with highly significant archaeological sites outside of Rathcroghan.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

The gradual expansion of the Burren Programme and the Aran Life/ Caomhnú Árann as they built increasing momentum, and where whole farm environmental approaches were taken while dealing directly with specific issues.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

A nationwide education campaign targeted towards farmers with archaeological sites, with best-practice guidelines for farming archaeological sites. There are over 40,000 ringforts alone in Ireland, many of which are on farmland, so there is a need to promote sustainable farming of all archaeological sites.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- The project equipment developed by the project is currently being trialled.
- Protocols for active repairs on archaeological sites will be developed in collaboration with National Monument Service. This is, however, only suitable as a measure under the guidance of and overseen by a licensed archaeologist.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- Support from DAFM, National Monument Service and Office of Public Works essential to ensure a streamlined roll-out with suitable processes in place regarding archaeological works and measures.
- Adjustment of eligibility rules to avoid conflict with best archaeological practice

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

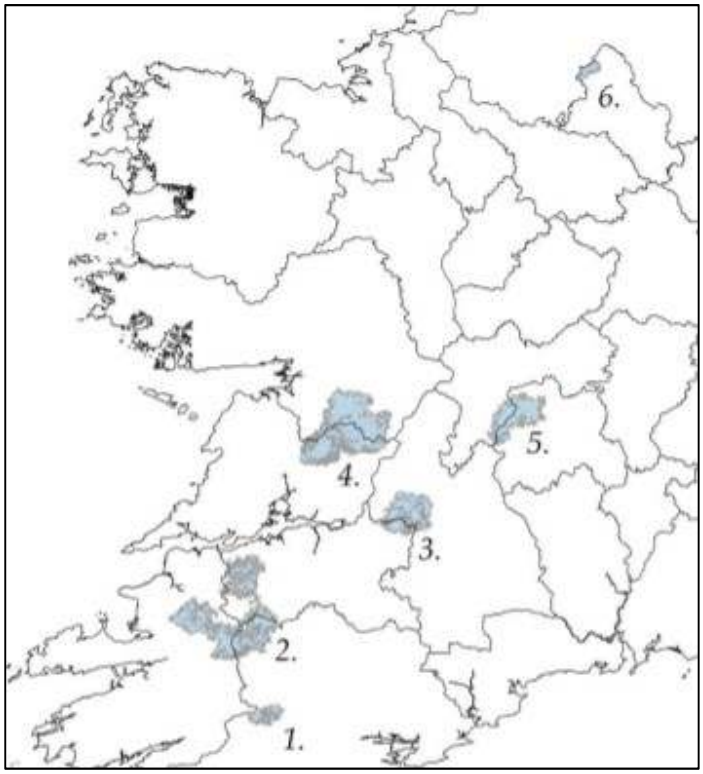
- The importance of individualised advice and locally-targeted incentives.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

- Clear guidance of administrative processes, particularly regarding required processes and materials for payments, audits etc.

Hen Harrier Project

Location



Contact details

Fergal Monaghan
Fergal.monaghan@henharrierproject.ie
087 6058670

Objectives as officially set out

The project aims to sustain viable Hen Harrier (HH) populations in an economically and socially sustainable model by recognising and valuing ecosystem services as an output from the farm. To achieve this, the project will pursue the following objectives:

- Ensure the sustainable management of HNV farmland in the most important areas for HH, with an emphasis on providing habitat for HH and other wildlife that share this landscape;
- Promote a stronger socio-economic outlook for upland areas;
- Develop an effective model for future sustainable management of HH areas;
- Foster positive relations through locally-led solutions between communities and the relevant Government Departments.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

Response to Request for Tender

Summary of main project activity

- Design and Operation of hybrid Results Based Agri- Environment Scheme
- Landscape level operations including Hen Harrier monitoring, nest protection and fire resilience

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

- Innovation in scheme administration including the development of an app for collecting data and sophisticated data bases for collating data from over 19,000 fields
- Co-design with industry and farmers of bovine feed blocks to address nutritional deficits in upland forage, specifically Molinia
- Development of a data sharing system where field level management advice can be shared with advisors
- Introducing geo tagged data to place the advisor/ assessor in or very near the field at the moment of assessment. This reduces audit risk and enhances the control of public funds in a results-based programme
- Development of Partially automated Screening System to enable the screening and approval of very large numbers of supporting actions
- Wildfire Risk Assessment of Bog/ Heath fields
- Design and installation of strategically sited network of fire ponds to increase the effectiveness of airborne and terrestrial fire-fighting operations throughout the SPAs. This will reduce fire-fighting costs and minimise the impact on wildlife and farm and forestry assets from wildfires

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

- Innovation in scheme design including results-based agri-environment style payments and the introduction of a Hen Harrier payment giving farmers a stake in Hen Harrier nesting at a local and regional level

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

- Using data to identify and direct training needs
- Creation of a Video Manual of high-quality training videos on relevant topics that can be directed to relevant advisors/ participants at seasonally appropriate times of the year
- Development of Nest Protection Management System allowing for the control and deployment of nest protection resources
- Collecting information on local field names and using this to refer to fields within the programme using the farmers own terminology

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

(This section intentionally blank)

Most difficult challenges

- Land Eligibility - Important habitats, particularly around nest sites, being deemed ineligible for payment with consequent pressure on the farmer to improve them. Existential issue in the medium term.
- Screening and payment systems for supporting actions (now largely resolved) by in-house development of PASS (Partially Automated Screening System)

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

- Wildfire Risk Assessment
- Linear Strips of Wild Bird Cover
- App for certifying delivery of actions
- Multi-purpose ponds

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

Hen Harrier Project takes a holistic view of the multiple issues affecting Hen Harrier conservation. Roll out of individual elements at farm level as opposed to landscape level schemes may have little impact.

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

Hen Harrier Project takes a holistic view of the multiple issues affecting Hen Harrier conservation. Roll out of individual elements at farm level as opposed to landscape level schemes may have little impact. Roll-out of a variation of the current program (adapted to be compatible with a mainstream role in other areas important for Hen Harriers would be desirable.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

All of the following could be incorporated into the HHP:

- road and track maintenance, as in the McGillycuddy Reeks.
- Grassland Assessment and Remote Sensing, as in the Aran Islands
- Certification of actions by farmer, as in Pearl Mussel Project. These could be incorporated into HHP.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

- Funding for the fire ponds network should be sought from outside of the CAP. The beneficiaries of these public goods, i.e. Local Authorities, forestry owners and their insurance companies should take over the cost of upkeep.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- Everything is continually being assessed and updated. Fire ponds development is still underway and involves multi actor input, e.g. Fire Services, Aer Corps, DAFM, Coillte, NPWS,

Water Safety Ireland. Mob grazing for Gorse management still has a lot of work to do before it will be ready for further roll out.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- The necessary supporting infrastructure is now largely in place, and is essential to the implementation of the approach. The core infrastructure could serve multiple projects involving a much larger number of famers. It is being underutilised in the current model.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

- The next RDP must allow for schemes which give farmers the opportunity to be recognised and rewarded for the delivery of public goods. We need focussed bespoke schemes that can address specific issues at a catchment/ landscape level. General schemes applied nationally underperform and are more of an income support measure than solutions oriented agri-environment schemes.
- What is needed for Hen Harrier conservation and for any new programme's species focussed upland schemes is an integrated landscape level approach. Schemes where a farmer joins selects options from menu and proceeds through a scheme completely independently of local variables and without consideration of landscape level issues such as predators/ habitat fragmentation/ wildfire risk, will not work. Where the objective is a mobile species or an aquatic ecosystem, the programme must operate at a catchment/ landscape level. Schemes that are restricted to the footprint of the participating farm cannot deal with the complexity involved. In the HHP the contribution of Hen Harrier monitoring and nest protection, actions that exist outside of farm contract are essential.
- Innovation is ongoing; projects should be able to invest in innovation at farm or landscape level either directly or through a micro grants facility.
- Land must be considered eligible where it is managed to deliver the objectives of the CAP, including biodiversity and carbon capture/storage; it must not be restricted to a narrow definition of conventional agriculture. If this is not done, many, perhaps all, climate action and biodiversity schemes will fail to achieve their objectives.
- Develop an Integrated Landscape Model where local teams interact with other landscape level stakeholders. This should include an exploration of funding mechanisms (even at quite a small scale) that may exist outside of the CAP.
- Move away from rigid prescription-based schemes which do not consider changing circumstances at farm or landscape level or permit the correction of simple errors. We need to look beyond the farm and consider how we can help address problems at the landscape level. What we need in these areas has to be more than a scheme.
- There is a need to address the role of farm advisors in a results-based programme. Training and upskilling are required but perverse incentives for advisors to prioritise numbers of clients over quality of service must be addressed. Advisors could make or break a results-based project. The risks inherent in the present structure have to be addressed. The model where the farmer pays the advisor and is reimbursed is not ideal and may have to be revisited.

All EIP type projects but particularly the smaller ones suffer from excessive admin cost per participant. This is unsustainable in mainstreamed schemes. A new structure is needed to allow locally adapted/ focussed schemes to operate. This is needed to address

- High per capita administration costs in particular high staffing participant ratios
- Duplication of effort
- Inefficient allocation of resources
- Multiple and diverging procedures (these would create Byzantine complexity for DAFM)
- Audit risk from multiple data collection and collation systems
- Risk of dual payments (with each other and with National Schemes)
- Integration with DAFM schemes and systems
- Narrow Skills base in management teams - inevitable with the small project teams in place
- Lack of resilience in management structure, loss of corporate knowledge if a key staff member leaves
- Standardising the nature of the role of the farm advisor- minimising private transaction costs
- Standardisation of costing for capital items

For results-based programmes the only solution is a superstructure containing all of the locally focussed projects. As a minimum this would support projects by

- Maintaining a common IT system including Apps and databases that have a common structure for transfer of data with DAFM
- Ensure a standard system for screening proposed supporting actions, making recommendations to DAFM and seeking consent for individual actions
- Assist in managing the relationships with other stakeholders, e.g. Local Authorities, Coillte, Bord na Mona, NPWS etc.
- Provision of back office support-communications, HR/payroll, legal, large scale procurement, technical support on specialist issues, e.g. archaeology, civil engineering, hydrology, ornithology
- Co-ordinate the sharing of skillsets between projects
- Facilitate short term lateral transfer of staff to meet operational requirements of projects

Individual projects would remain operationally independent, but their scorecards would have a shared structure but fine-tuned for local requirements. The individual teams could draw on the specialist support they need and could access short term labour resources from the larger group. DAFM would deal with a single set of procedures, data would be collected in a similar manner, data bases would have a common structure, payments for capital items would be standardised, costings for results-based actions would be calculated using comparable methods. Training for advisors could be simplified as individual programmes would share many components. This streamlining would allow project teams to focus on scheme delivery at a local level. This would lead to a considerable reduction in the admin overhead as staff: participant ratios would increase dramatically. In addition administrative resilience would be improved as the short term lateral transfer of personnel would be possible due to the standardisation of many procedures.

Synergies with relevant DAFM schemes would be developed in the design stage.

All projects should deal with 1,000 – 2,000 participants except where there is a demonstrated reason why scaling up is impractical or undesirable, e.g. Aran Islands.

There is a need to manage the transition from the EIP structure to mainstream structure very carefully. Simply commencing a procurement procedure after the EIP contracts cease is not adequate as project teams will dissipate if there is a gap in employment or uncertainty about individual future prospects. This risks a significant loss of corporate knowledge and would weaken any successor scheme. Not having a project team in place for a transition period would weaken the prospects for developing synergies with proposed DAFM schemes.

To address this there should be a period where existing EIP contracts overlap with management contracts for EIPS that are selected for continuation as a mainstream program within the RDP. Where DAFM decide on continuing individual programmes there would be an opportunity for project teams to tender for (and get a decision on) for the new roles. They could then finalise EIP operational commitments while contributing to developing synergies with DAFM schemes during their design phase, to developing a relationship with the shared services superstructure and preparing for scaling up project delivery. During this phase they could also develop the terms and conditions of the new scheme, familiarise themselves with the new aspects of their relationship with DAFM (and each other), contribute to advisor training, recruit and train additional staff and promote the new scaled up programme to potential participants.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

- Reform land eligibility rules. There is a serious issue with DAFM inspectors making comments about land management that are in direct conflict with the aims of the project. Training on extensive agriculture, conservation grazing, the role of scrub and wetlands should be provided to these staff.
- Allow a farmer to participate in a single agri-environment scheme incorporating the Hen Harrier Project actions/payments. Almost 90% of Hen Harrier Project participants are also in GLAS with the same land and ostensibly for the same purpose. This results in mixed messages, double funding risks and two sets of public and private transaction costs. This system should be replaced with a transferrable single scheme model where a farmer could migrate to a higher-level scheme and take their funding with them.
- When calculating the ‘administration’ cost of a higher-level scheme, the rationale should discount the value of services supplied to stage agencies and the cost of landscape level interventions from the admin cost. Hen Harrier Project supplies Hen Harrier monitoring data to NPWS and for their article 17 reporting DAFM for forestry licensing purposes. For accounting purposes the cost of this should not be considered as administration. Likewise nest protection and other landscape interventions should not be classed as scheme administration costs. Simplistic comparisons of the Hen Harrier Project implementation costs with GLAS are skewed in favour of GLAS and do not consider the wider set of deliverables from the Hen Harrier Project.

Inishowen Uplands

Location

Contact details

Henry O' Donnell, Project Manager
henryodon@gmail.com
086 2670742

Objectives as officially set out

This project aims to improve the economic sustainability of farming High Nature Value (HNV) land in Inishowen through the implementation of a range of innovative measures which also deliver on environmental sustainability by increasing biodiversity, improving water quality and combating climate change.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

The ultimate aim is to increase farm profitability to ensure that the farming activity that is carried out is contributing to overall household income, not a drain on it.

Summary of main project activity

- Integrate suitable broadleaved woodland into their improved land at pre defined locations to best improve the hydrology of the area.
- Strategical planting of hedgerows and coppicing and continous managment of existing hedging at landscape level to create biodiversity corridors.
- Plant trees and hedges to provide shelter belts, which has been shown to improve daily liveweight gain in livestock.
- Incorporate clover and apply lime to build soil fertility to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers.

- Trial red clover swards for silage production to reduce feed costs.
- Create ponds with dual purposes of habitat creation, flood mitigation, and on farm water supply.
- Trail alternative legumes more suitable for marginal soils for grazing and forage.
- Trial a series of experimental grazing regimes with cattle , where sheep are traditionally grazed, to establish ideal mix and density for optimum management and production of biodiverse upland vegetation.
- Plan for scrub management if necessary.
- Locate temporary fencing to achieve required grazing outcomes.
- Prescribe wetland restoration where suitable areas identified to slow water flows and alleviate flooding in lower catchments.

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

- Provide a best practice management template to increase farm profitability.
- Demonstrate that adopting a whole farm approach which addresses both the economic and environmental aspects of the mountain upland and improved lowland on the farm will lead to better long-term outcomes.
- Demonstrate that economic returns can be improved by using measures such as agroforestry, diverse swards and climate smart innovation which also simultaneously deliver on environmental public goods.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

(This section left intentionally blank)

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

(This section left intentionally blank)

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

(This section left intentionally blank)

Most difficult challenges

- Getting farmers convinced to try new innovative measures
- Getting DAFM to modify their eligibility criteria.
- Having enough support staff to enable proper measurement of results
- Overcoming the time lags between investment and return in the case of agroforestry. With agroforestry, the returns are more long term and not as obvious to the farmer. The long term returns in terms of increasing resilience, reducing costs, increasing output, production of a crop of timber etc. are huge. The returns in terms of water quality, carbon sequestration and nutrient capture can in fact be very significant.
- CAP eligibility rules in the case of agroforestry. Current DAFM regulations on land eligibility actually prevent this activity on farms.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

All of these measures could be developed into modules in national environmental schemes with some further developing and with a list of qualifying parameters in place if there was a will to do so:

- Ponds
- Agroforestry
- Diverse swards
- Red clover
- Cattle on the uplands

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

(Left intentionally blank)

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

- The introduction of the cattle on the uplands would be a measure only suitable to locations with a similar geography to Inishowen and would probably benefit from a wider trial in the Inishowen area as there is still a lot of work to be done to package the measure before we could roll it out in similar uplands around Ireland.
- DAFM will probably say that diverse swards are not fully proven for widespread adaption and would need further local adaptation before a roll out, though we would not necessarily agree
- We would see the ponds being part of a drainage management measure which we intend to flesh out a bit more over the next year

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

(Left intentionally blank)

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

- The upland cattle, diverse swards and red clover swards can be demonstrated to have a financial return to any farmer once implemented. They stand on their own merits and have already been adopted by farmers outside our project.
- Agroforestry, as long as time lag and eligibility factors are addressed (see above). Some farmers are carrying out this activity outside the scheme, although not too many for the reason stated above.
- Ponds can be a solution for farmers for water supply and start the conversation about water quality and much more.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- All the measures are still being developed and improved at this stage, but no more so than measures in REPS, AEOS and GLAS. Our measures with the ethos of improving farmer returns will give a different perspective to farmers joining a scheme where carrying out a

measure to a high standard gives a financial return in terms of productivity or reducing costs as well as being subsidised to carry out the measure in the first place. The returns for the paymaster and ultimately EU objectives will also be greater.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

- Reporting to DAFM could be standardized in terms of financial accounting and should be based on the calendar year
- Scheduling of progress reporting should be set out at the start of the project and not in an ad hoc basis.
- Templates could be provided for standard procedures for example, procurement procedures, recruitment procedures, farmer payment procedures etc.
- Provide a forum for similar EIP projects to engage and share experiences and knowledge

MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP Project

Location

Contact details

Patricia Deane, EIP Project Manager
Phone: (087) 2031034 Mobile:(064) 6624607
E-mail: pdeane@skdp.net
www.macgillycuddyreekskerry.com

Objectives as officially set out

The project aims to improve the sustainability and economic viability of farming in the MacGillycuddy Reeks, through the development of practical, achievable actions and innovative solutions in order to improve the conditions of the habitats of the Natura 2000 area, in close conjunction with the landowners/farmers in the area.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

The identified need for the project arose from ongoing dialogue (through the MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum) with the farmers and the landowners in the MacGillycuddy Reeks who felt very strongly that they needed support to continue farming in the area, due to the constraints of the SAC designation and the high level of recreation which has a significant impact on their farming practices and is having a major impact on the condition of the land. Many farmers felt that people who didn't own the land were deriving a greater income from the land than the farmers and landowners themselves, and there was and still is great uncertainty about the future of farming in this area with few young farmers being interested in continuing the traditions of upland sheep farming, as it is not economically viable. When the open call came from DAFM inviting project proposals ALL of the interested parties (through the auspices of the MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum - from farmers, recreational users, local development company, NPWS, local authority, community groups etc.) agreed a submission should be made.

Summary of main project activity

The main project activities include:

- Results based habitat assessment of participants' land, all of which supports peatland habitats of high nature conservation value, to encourage farming approaches which conserve and improve the condition of these habitats;
- Controlled grazing to improve the condition of habitats by managing sheep numbers and/ or introducing cattle;
- Treatment of bracken using different techniques (spraying, cutting and trampling) where it is invading farmland and habitats of high nature conservation value;
- Treatment of rhododendron using the stem treatment where it is invading farmland and habitats of high nature conservation value;
- Path maintenance works to maintain recreation footpaths passing through private and commonage land in good condition, and to prevent path migration which would lead to erosion of farmland and sensitive habitats; and

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

- The placement of water barrels/ troughs and where necessary the use of a ram pump to fill them to ensure water is available on site in areas where bracken is to be sprayed and where cattle are to be grazed. Access to water was found to be a limiting factor in carrying out these actions on a number of sites.
- A demonstration event of the use of a 'Robocut' to help manage dense vegetation on high ground, as an alternative to controlled burning.
- Manufacture of a 'ram pump' to allow for water to be brought to difficult sites for bracken treatment and livestock.
- Linking issues and solutions on land parcels e.g. hand cutting dense mature heather on a land parcel and bringing it to another land parcel to support new growth after bracken treatment
- The development of an app for carrying out and collating of landowner ranger surveys.
- Site specific annual work plans are created for each site/land parcel, taking constraints into account, in conjunction with the farmers so the plan works for them as well as focussing on improving the ecological outputs.
- Work plans are revised on an annual basis providing an opportunity to review all elements and to make small changes to improve the effectiveness of actions based on previous years learning and experience and in response to changes in ground conditions. This flexibility allows for a quick response in addressing issues on the ground.
- Establishment of trained local collective groups to support farmers in carrying out labour intensive tasks.
- Adapting existing scorecard for assess peatland habitats

Innovation in grants and payments

- The introduction of an administration payment to participants to cover their time for completing paperwork, regular liaison via phone or meetings with project staff, sharing on information/ experience with other participants and the public. This payment rewards the time and commitment that participants give to the project.

- Claiming payments from DAFM as work is carried out to motivate and support works to continue.

Innovations centred on social/ educational/ organisational aspects

- Establishing a 'collective group' (group of local farmers/ people) for the treatment of rhododendron and bracken that participants can call upon to assist them or to carry out work on their behalf. This has been extremely beneficial as many participants would not have been able to complete the work on work on their own. The group has provided huge social networking benefits facilitating people in the rural community to work together in groups, reducing the impacts of rural isolation and contributing positively to mental health and wellbeing, as well as supporting local economic development. This is more sustainable as skills developed remain local and can be easily transferred.
- Introduction and facilitation of a 'B&B' system which allows participants to borrow suitable breeds of cattle for summer periods to graze their land. This removes the need for farmers to make a long-term investment/ commitment and addresses issues or housing cattle during winter periods.
- A Landowner Ranger Initiative to raise awareness amongst recreational users of the sensitive nature of the habitats in the MacGillycuddy Reeks and the role of active farming in maintaining them, as well as providing information on safety and good code of conduct while visiting these areas (e.g. no dogs, leave no trace etc.).
- The project's local approach has allowed the project team to determine the training needs of participants and has allowed participants to upskill in areas which are relevant and useful to them such as:
    - Manual handling training
    - QQI Level 5 Handheld (pesticide) knapsack training
    - Practical rhododendron treatment training
    - Path maintenance training
    - Landowner ranger training
    - Habitat awareness training
- Visits to local national schools to raise awareness of the importance of the uplands and the eco-system services they provide to us as a society. Critical to engage with young people to help them understand the need for management of these kinds of landscapes.
- Habitat training with participant farmers- we organised workshops whereby the farmers could be shown how the results based habitat scoring system works, a discussion on why the land is designated as a Special Area of Conservation and why controlled grazing is needed.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area

- The introduction of cattle (to largely sheep grazed area) for controlled grazing to improve the habitat condition of the peatland habitats, to control the purple moor-grass and gorse in particular.
- The control of bracken by trampling with cattle.
- Using the stem method for the treatment of rhododendron (technique developed in Killarney National Park).

- Using the experience of the Kerry LIFE project to identify areas for the installation of silt fences/traps.
- The results based payments system for encouraging and improving habitat conditions has been well received by all farmers participating in the project, as it is seen as fair and easy to understand

Most difficult challenges

- The MacGillycuddy Reeks is the highest mountain range in Ireland, the terrain is rocky and steep making farming this land very challenging, with many tasks (from gathering sheep to treatment of rhododendron and bracken) and access being incredibly difficult, labour intensive and time consuming to complete. The farmers believe that there does not seem to be an understanding of these challenges by DAFM and that the focus seems to be on production, instead of prioritising, protecting and improving biodiversity and ecosystem services in this kind of landscape.
- The age profile of the farmers in the area, with an ageing population and very few younger farmers continuing the traditional farming practices.
- Upland farming is unviable in its present form, when dependant on production alone.
- Not having all neighbouring commonages included as participants (due to budget constraints) can create issues such as overgrazing and then requires additional works such as 'herding' to be undertaken. A whole area approach would be a solution to this.
- Managing stocking densities for the benefit of the Annex habitats was challenging as there is a need for stocking densities to be reviewed on a more regular basis to allow for Annex 1 habitats to recover and/or be maintained in a favourable condition. Coupled with this is the need to provide a longer term project with sufficient incentives available for farmers to make the necessary changes to their herd numbers.
- Obtaining permission to undertake certain actions i.e. allowing cattle onto commonages to carry out short term controlled grazing took time. More flexibility required on site specific issues.
- Understanding of and criteria around land eligibility rules and how upland areas differ is challenging.
- 'Calendar farming' should be reviewed.
- Having to re-apply each year for the derogation for the use of Asulox.
- Lack of site specific management plans to take account of constraints in each area.
- The time setting up the project initially and gathering baseline data e.g. habitat assessments.
- Trying to keep the budget spend in progress in the midst of a global pandemic is challenging.
- The short time frame of the project is challenging as the farmers themselves need a longer term project to change their systems to manage and improve habitats rather than focussing on productivity.
- The appropriate treatment of rhododendron requires a long term project commitment to ensure it is managed and adequately eradicated. Short term treatment will not be as effective.
- Recreation is an enormous challenge also, with visitor numbers increasing annually. This is causing path migration and damage to the habitats where paths have not been restored.
- Sheep are not able to grazing where they normally would and move into adjacent land. Dogs chasing sheep is also challenging.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

- Information delivered to farmers on issues such as succession and taxation issues should be rolled out to all farmers.
- Options focussed on upland areas only

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

- A new Uplands Measure could be rolled out nationally, through locally-led team, to develop site specific plans, including results based habitat payments to include input from farmers and commonage groups and allow for verification of actions

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

- All the measures of the current project could be expanded to cover the entire MacGillycuddy Reeks area of 10,000ha of Natura 2000 HNV farmland, with additional measures for scrub control and grassland measures.
    - Continuing to identify and delivering training and facilitating labour support (in terms of the 'collective group') to assist participants in treating bracken and rhododendron would be most effectively carried out by the project team working the geographical area.
    - Continuing to develop site specific annual workplans,
    - Mapping the extent of bracken and rhododendron, identifying areas and methods suitable for treatment, and carrying out treatment without having adverse impacts on sensitive habitats requires individual site assessments which can be most effectively carried out by the project team working in the geographical area.
    - Similarly, individual site assessment to determine sites and sections of sites which would benefit from controlled grazing (sheep and cattle) can be most effectively carried out by the project team working in the geographical area.
    - The training and monitoring of landowner rangers and individuals undertaking path maintenance works would also be most effectively delivered by a local team working in a particular geographical area where this action is required.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

- Similar database systems to those in use by some of the larger projects would be extremely useful for the smaller projects to allow them to manage their data in the most efficient way.
- The whole farm approach of the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel project

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

- Perhaps development of local groups to treat invasive species
- Targeted training for farmers upland areas, focussing on the habitats they have

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- All innovations could be rolled out on a larger geographical scale, but need the local support, advice, engagement and motivation to carry out the work.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- Additional funding to allow for a small increase in staff and increased number participants/ land area to be taken into the project
- Having baseline habitat mapping undertaken prior would be beneficial

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

- Many of the heath and bog habitats, which are protected habitats located in designated sites, are in unfavourable condition and face a variety of pressures and threats. A dedicated agri-environmental scheme which identifies conflicting agriculture and nature conservation polices and develops new polices and strategies to address this could go a long way to improving the quality of these habitats. Particular consideration should be given to review and regular monitoring of appropriate grazing levels on these sites. A local base is vital to support and motivate farmers to undertake required actions. Upland areas are challenging places in which to work, and these areas would benefit from a dedicated uplands project, taking account of site specific constraints.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

- Templates for policies, terms and conditions etc.
- Share templates e.g. layout of financial returns for participants they find useful from other projects,
- Share documents such as Conflict of Interest forms, Data Protection forms and have the same template for all projects.

Mulkear EIP

Location

Contact Details

Carol Quish, Project Manager
Carol@Mulkeareip.com
083 1044609

Objectives

The key objectives are to:

- Develop a collaborative approach with all relevant stakeholders to identify water quality concerns in the catchment.
- Undertake detailed whole Farm Assessments for all participating farmers to identify water quality risks on the farm.
- Implement on-farm mitigation measures designed to improve water quality and restore habitats with co-benefits for farm biodiversity.
- Devise a results-based payment scheme for farmers.
- Deliver catchment sensitive farming discussion groups with participating farmers.
- Communicate with the wider Mulkear community via a community based outreach programme.

Reason for Proposing the Project

To demonstrate that a catchment-sensitive farming approach will help restore water quality in the catchment.

Project Activities

- Work collaboratively with project partners (LAWPRO, ASSAP, Local authorities, co-ops etc.) to collectively identify key water quality concerns in the Priority Action Areas in the catchment.
- The project will assist 60 local farmers to address the pressures from agriculture which are impacting water quality on their farms.

- Pilot bespoke mitigation measures in both upland and lowland areas in the catchment.
- Compile Diffuse Pollution Mitigation Plans for each participating farmer.
- Deliver training to all participating farmers in the format of Discussion Groups.
- Roll out an Environmental Education Programme to schools in the catchment.
- Develop an outreach programme based on local water quality, local biodiversity and riparian management

Project Innovations

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

(Left intentionally blank)

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

- Funding will only be provided where the farm risk assessment demonstrates a need for a particular type of measure. This approach moves away from the limitations of 'one size fits all' which applies to current environmental schemes in this country.
- Results Based Payments: This innovation will reward farmers in proportion to the environmental outcomes they provide and the value of the service delivered.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

- Digital Story Telling Initative (DSTI) will record the local farmers as they partake in catchment sensitive farming practises.
- Establishment of an annual River Champion awards scheme.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

(Left intentionally blank)

Most difficult challenges

(Left intentionally blank)

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

(Left intentionally blank)

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

(Left intentionally blank)

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

(Left intentionally blank)

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

(Left intentionally blank)

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?
(Left intentionally blank)

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?
(Left intentionally blank)

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?
(Left intentionally blank)

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?
(Left intentionally blank)

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?
(Left intentionally blank)

North Connemara Locally Led Agri-Environmental Scheme (NCLLAES)

Location

The NCLLAES is based around two special areas of Conservation in North Connemara, the Twelve Bens/Garraun complex and the Maum Turk mountain ranges.

Contact details

Project Manager: Joseph Mannion
Phone number: 087-1009713
Email: J.mannion@forumconnemara.ie
Project Ecologist: Cathy Connelly
Email: C.Connelly@forumconnemara.ie

Objectives as officially set out

The NCLLAES was set up to increase the viability of farming in North Connemara. By increasing the viability of the farm, the ecology of the area will be protected by the farmer.

The viability of farming in North Connemara is reducing due to socio economic reasons. In recent years the farm incomes have reduced in comparison to other industries meaning farmers have off farm jobs, thus reducing the time that they have to carry out animal husbandry and beneficial land management practices such as scrub removal. In the past, the older people in the families passed on the agricultural knowledge that they had obtained with years of experience to the younger people who were able to carry out the more physically demanding jobs on the farm. The NCLLAES is incentivising farmers to carry out traditional practices while incorporating new innovative ideas which aim to improve the viability of the agriculture and ecology of the farm.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

The NCLLAES has been set up to ensure the long-term viability of the agricultural community in Connemara. The area is home to many important habitats, including upland blanket bog, grasslands and mountain heath, which are being managed by local farmers. Farmers have carried out conservation and improvement measures of these habitats for generations and have shaped the area to what is seen today. As the income for these individuals is minimal in comparison to the works that are being carried out, the scheme will pilot a programme in which individuals are rewarded for creating positive outcomes for the biodiversity on their farm.

The NCLLAES is being administered by FORUM Connemara CLG, a rural development company which is involved in numerous programmes in the community, catering for the needs of young people, people with disabilities, the elderly, local businesses and unemployed people. An agricultural/ecological scheme covers a large area of Connemara, and a large section of the community. The NCLLAES will use the experience obtained from 30 years of rural development programmes in FORUM to increase the support network for the participants of the scheme, some of which may not have been catered for previously.

Summary of main project activity

The project area is made up of many different habitat types and varied farming enterprises. In acknowledgement of the varied habitats, terrain and farming practices in the project area, there are a number of initiatives which will aim to improve and enhance the quality of the habitats within the area:

- An issue experienced by the project team was the lack of availability of up to date habitat information relevant to the way in which the area is farmed. The first step of the scheme was to survey the land belonging to the participants in order to identify the quality of the habitats and to identify issues which may impact the habitats. From these surveys, improvement or conservation plans will be created which will include measures aimed to maintain or improve the land parcels from an ecological perspective.
- The most predominately farmed animal within the project area is the Blackface Connemara/Mayo mountain sheep. This animal is seen as an ecological tool which can ensure the protection of the important biodiversity seen within the project area. One of the scheme initiatives incentivises farmers to ensure that their flock is as productive and healthy as possible and also explores ways in which to increase the marketability of the animal.
- Another initiative in the NCLLAES is group management initiative. Knowledge transfer groups will be trialled in order for farmers to get together to share ideas and to increase their network within their own communities. This initiative also aims to bring farmers, who mostly work on their own, together in an informal setting.
- The uncontrolled spread of rhododendron is a problem in many areas in Ireland. It is an invasive alien species which is also toxic to livestock and negatively impacts the growth of native flora. Growing and spreading in the area, it has colonised many locations in the project area and has greatly reduced the biodiversity as it outcompetes native plants. The NCLLAES has an initiative which will train farmers on best practice techniques to control and remove rhododendron growing on their farms. The scheme also aims to raise awareness of the problems posed by rhododendron by circulating information about the plant amongst the general public.

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

The NCLLAES is looking into different technologies which may make the work on mountainous terrain easier for farmers. Some of these technologies work well on lowlands and may need to be adjusted to work on mountainous areas.

Some of the technologies being used and considered are:

- A GPS application which farmers can use on their phones to record information on their farm which will aid with animal and land management
- Tag recording equipment
- Drone technology for ecological surveys and animal management
- Unobtrusive fencing technology (GPS fencing)
- Electrocution of invasive species as a control method

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

Another part of the NCLLAES project is the collection of information on farming practices and the quality of the habitats in the area. Where a farmer's practices are seen as being ecologically beneficial to the area they farm, these actions will be incentivised by the NCLLAES. This will allow farmers to be rewarded for work that they do that has a positive impact on the ecological and agricultural integrity of the land.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

The NCLLAES is involved with numerous levels of educational institutions in the project area from primary to third level. The scheme has carried out numerous projects to show the students the importance of the area where they live and the way the agricultural community protects those areas. These individuals may be future farmers or policy makers and will make up a key part of the community in the future.

The project is involving the local community in different areas around biodiversity and nature. Through social media the project team have been able to spread awareness of the scheme, biodiversity in the area and best practice techniques for controlling invasive plant species. Increasing the community involvement in the project through these methods is seen having long term benefits.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

(Left intentionally blank)

Most difficult challenges

Covid 19 and the restrictions have affected many aspects of the scheme such as the surveys, group management meetings and training. There is a possibility of putting these meetings online but it is seen as a last resort. Some participants would struggle with the new technology and others would not have as much involvement as they may have in physical meetings. As such this initiative is to be postponed until it is safe for physical meetings to take place.

At the start of the scheme there was very little up to date habitat information at farm level. Collecting this data has been time consuming but is very important as improvement/conservation plans need to be made based on what is seen on each farm. A longer scheme would have allowed for information collection prior to the commencement of the scheme. Future EIP schemes would benefit from an extra year at the beginning in which information is collected and surveys completed.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

Areas of the NCLLAES that can be rolled out to a national scheme are:

- Actions surrounding the Blackface Sheep. The actions are being specifically tailored to support farmers that are actively farming their hills. Actions which benefit the flock through simple but effective management techiques will have the benefit of supporting farmers who farm the hills in an ecologically friendly manner and also benefit the health and profitability of the hill flock.
- Rewarding farmers for increasing the biodiversity on their farm through vegetation management or other methods
- Create supports for farmers with important pollinators such as bee hives.
- Incentivise farmers to create pollinator friendly habitats
- Control and removal of invasive species at farm level

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

Previous schemes have created plans that can be rolled out nationally. The postive aspect of the EIPs is that areas are surveyed before an action is carried out. This allows for a more specific and managebale approach to a problem that may be addressed at a local level.

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

The NCLLAES uses different methods and actions that are beneficial to the specific ecology of the project area. There are no clear boundaries in the habitats at a farm level. In some cases, 2 or 3 different habitats/soil types can be seen in a field while on a commonage/hill side there could be a mosaic of habitats. As such, a bespoke plan needs to be created for each specific farm with the flexibility to change as necessary. This type of approach may be difficult to transfer to a wider project but would work if project area is expanded.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

Other EIPs have carried out effective works which can be used in the NCLLAES or a similar project in the future. These schemes are pilots and as such should be trialling different actions to see what works best on different types of farms. Many parts of other schemes could work in the NCLLAES such as the habitat payments utilised by the Pearl Mussel and Hen Harrier projects and the new commonage management groups created in the SUAS project. Training of local individuals to be hired by farmers to carry out scrub removal from the Reeks project is among other actions seen as being easily transferable to the NCLLAES.

Having numerous similar projects working in different locations simultaneously is a huge benefit to the overall EIP model. A creation of a network of so many people all working to a similar goal has created a large pool of knowledge and expertise. Being able to use this network as a resource has benefitted the newer EIPs such as the NCLLAES. This model would benefit any future projects.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

(Left intentionally blank)

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

(Left intentionally blank)

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

Farmers are the main part of these types of environmental schemes. Having easy access to the administrators of the scheme is beneficial for the farmers to ensure they are carrying out the actions correctly. A reduced level of administration for the farmer has also been seen as a benefit.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

Consultation with farmers and other stakeholders from the beginning of any future environmental schemes gives ownership of the scheme to those who live and farm locally. This will ensure the long-term success of any measure introduced. A positive working relationship between the project team and the local area is beneficial for both the project and the participants.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

The DAFM have been very supportive in the roll out of these projects and it will be very beneficial to the viability of agriculture and farming in High Nature Value areas to take any findings into consideration when drawing up any future ecological schemes.

Pearl Mussel Project

Location

Contact details

Dr Patrick Crushell
info@pmproject.ie
064 6640685
www.pearlmusselproject.ie
Twitter: @pearl_mussel

Objectives as officially set out

The Pearl Mussel Project aims to design and implement a voluntary results-based agri-environmental scheme with farmers that will help protect the endangered freshwater pearl mussel, as well as benefiting the wider environment. The project has the following specific objectives within eight priority fresh-water pearl mussel catchments in Ireland:

(i) Protect and enhance the conditions of the freshwater pearl mussel rivers and local environment by maintaining & improving natural habitats (such as wetlands, grasslands, and bogs) through an incentivised results-based approach;

(ii) Deliver an opportunity for farmers in eight priority catchments to earn an additional income from their land. Farmers will receive a score for the delivery of a defined environmental result, with higher scores being rewarded with higher payments;

(iii) Provide sustainable benefits for biodiversity and river ecosystems, while supporting the rural farming economy.

(iv) Raise awareness and enhance understanding of environmental issues at the local level through farmer participation in the programme together with community outreach and education.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

To test the development of a results-based agri-environmental programme aimed at delivering improved outcomes for an extremely sensitive aquatic target species.

Summary of main project activity

- Developed a partnership between farmers, farm advisors, researchers, statutory agencies, and the project team to work towards delivering the project.
- Design of results-based programme which included developing approaches to: farmer recruitment, participation, advisor training, deciding result indicators, methods of assessing results (scoring), payment model, supporting actions and annual work plans, verification and auditing, monitoring, payments, advisor training, and farmer training.
- Administer the implementation of the Programme to include work on the above aspects of the Programme.
- Community outreach and education.

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

- Adaptation to deliver demonstrable water, carbon and biodiversity benefit.
- Whole-farm approach to scoring and payments. Inclusion of all on-farm habitats into the scoring system.
- Development of whole-farm scorecard.
- In-house development of integrated data management system for a results-based programme.
- Development of scorecard app for advisors.
- Development of supporting action app to enable farmers to submit payment claims directly.
- Development of digital training resources for farmers and advisors.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

- Application of results-based approach to water target which is now transferable to many other targets.
- Payment approach which is both whole-farm and one where the lowest scoring plots use up the highest payment levels, i.e. targeting problem first to give maximum incentive to change.
- Weighting of whole-farm result ensures that farmers are incentivised to improve problem areas on the farm.
- Floodplain payment, farmers are rewarded for maintenance of active floodplain, payment is related to floodplain quality.
- Non-linear relationship between score out of 10 and payment e.g. payment intervals vary to increase incentive to achieve higher scores.
- Incentivise actions on low scoring commonages by adapting whole-farm approach to commonages leading to a commonage unit score.

- Develop bespoke solutions to commonage by implementation of rehabilitation plan.
- Process supporting action claims quarterly.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

- Development of interactive online story map and associated activity pack for schools.
- Collective delivery of supporting actions on commonages by shareholders, e.g. Bundorragha where issues giving rise to low scores have been addressed by a group of shareholders.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

- Various supporting actions including drain-blocking, in-ditch wetlands etc.
- Development of Local Advisory Groups for each catchment
- Collaboration with Rural Social Scheme (RSS) to take a catchment-wide approach to controlling Rhododendron. RSS have taken responsibility for Rhododendron in public areas, whereas private landowners are availing of the PMP supporting action for Rhododendron control on their lands.
- Providing environmental expertise to farmers to enable smooth processing of Activities Requiring Consent, provision of Natura Impact Statement, representing farmers at meeting with environmental authorities where previously such meeting would have been fraught or avoided, assistance with planning permission, felling licences, etc.
- Highly experienced team in peatland restoration available to provide good practice to farmers.

Most difficult challenges

- Understanding of data management system operated by DAFM and the timely transfer of spatial data from DAFM to the project.
- Interfacing with the wide range of actors within the target areas.
- Dove-tailing with previous LIFE project.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS , etc.)?

- The PMP Whole farm score card could be adapted and be applied across all schemes, e.g. GLAS.
- PMP Supporting Actions could be fully delivered through measures such as TAMS, including water protection measures and drain-blocking etc.

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

- Overall programme is suited as national measure suitable for large areas of the west of Ireland and the uplands. We believe that the framework could be easily adapted to other targets and landscapes.

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

- Current programme could be readily rolled out in similar west of Ireland catchments.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

- Co-operative approach of completing supporting actions as used in Reeks EIP would be attractive to treatment of invasive species.
- Herbal leys of Inishowen, sheep health in North Connemara.
- Simplicity of Caomhnú Árann scoring system.
- Other RBAPS projects could benefit from the inclusion of a whole-farm assessment similar to PMP to ensure inclusion of water quality as a deliverable and provide wider applicability in terms of roll-out.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

- Supporting Actions of PMP could be associated with the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advice Programme (ASSAP) programme currently in operation in Ireland in Priority Areas for Action (PAA) under the Water Framework Directive. Currently ASSAP don't have any budget to deliver actions on farmers but solely deliver advice on good practice to farmers whose current practice may result in risks to water quality.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- Approach to sheep dipping requires further refinement.
- Approach to rhododendron and invasive species control requires further refinement.
- Carbon accounting on whole-farm

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- Data transfers between the DAFM and the Project team.
- Development of further expertise to deliver such programmes in potential roll-out areas.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

- Neither the current GAEC nor, in our view, the proposed amendment to it, is sufficiently robust for high water quality catchments. In many cases historical activities such as drainage has caused the damage and gives rise to the constant deterioration of the function or quality of the catchment. Much of 'conditionality' focuses at site specific damage, e.g. poaching, damage to watercourse, etc., rather than system or landscape level damage such as a historically drained and reseeded peatland that on a site basis doesn't result in current issues, but on a landscape / catchment basis does. In many cases the overall landscape ecosystem is broken. Proposed biodiversity and landscape GAECs don't address this.
- Within the PMP, lands that do not contribute towards the long-term health of the catchment do not receive payment. This is an example of a framework that captures the ecosystem-based approach. As far as we are aware, this is the only model that has the capacity to halt further declines in the combined services of water quality, biodiversity and carbon.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

- The timely transfer of spatial data relating to participant BPS. Explore the potential for spatial BPS data to be shared as an online feature service with the project team.

Protecting Farmland Pollinators

Location

The project is working with 40 farmers in Kildare and neighbouring counties.

Contact details

Saorla Kavanagh
skavanagh@biodiversityireland.ie
+353861407889

Objectives as officially set out

- To test the effectiveness of a range of pollinator measures across farmland of different types in the Irish context and to identify those that are most beneficial to pollinators and that are most cost-effective for the farmer.
- To test the impact of these pollinator measures on broader biodiversity.
- Based on the pollinator measures, to develop a simple farm-scale scoring system that uses a habitat matrix approach to quantify how pollinator-friendly the entire farm is.
- To develop a simple results-based payment method that encourages and assists farmers in attempts to improve their whole farm pollinator score. Using the information on the effectiveness of each pollinator measure, an innovative and scientifically rigorous farm-scale scoring system will be developed that uses a habitat-matrix approach to quantity how pollinator-friendly the entire farm is as a land parcel.
- To enable all farmers to understand how pollinator-friendly or not their farm currently is, what simple, low-cost actions they can take to change this, and to work towards improving

their whole farm for pollinators and other biodiversity in a measurable way that does not impact on productivity.

Underlying reason for proposing the project

To develop a mechanism that encourages farmers to make their farm more pollinator friendly in a way that is measurable and will not impact on productivity.

Summary of main project activity

This project is about small actions that will allow biodiversity to coexist within a productive farming system. We want to encourage all farmers to provide small wildlife habitats, in terms of food, safety, and shelter, on their farms for pollinators.

The Protecting Farmland Pollinators Project aims to develop a whole-farm pollinator scoring system and to identify the management practices on Irish farmland that have the most benefit for pollinators. The farmland pollinator score is based on the five criteria and will help farmers to understand how pollinator friendly their farm is, and what simple, low-cost actions they can take to work towards improving their score in a way that does not negatively impact on productivity.

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

The project is about farmers and scientists working together to figure out how best to improve biodiveristy on farmland without negatively impacting productivity. It emcompasses the whole farm and includes a range of habitats on the farm including “non-farmed land”. A whole-farm pollintor scorecard has been developed. It is hope that the scorecard can be completed by each farmer within 10 minutes once appropriate training has been provided.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

Farmers are rewarded for the pollinator friendly habitats present on the farm. It is up to the farmer if he or she would like to take further action to help pollinators. Any action that is taken is measured on the whole-farm pollinator scorecard and is rewarded using a results-based payment. The score is easily calculated, easily understood and easily improved. Success can be reliably measured by improvements in overall score. This could be used universally, as it would enable **all** farmers to understand how pollinator-friendly or not their farm currently is, what simple, low-cost actions they can take to change this, and to work towards improving their whole farm for pollinators and other biodiversity in a measurable way that does not impact on productivity.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

A monthly farming newsletter and an annual/biannual farm family newsletter are published. A WhatsApp group exists for the participant farmers and their families. A guidance document will be made available to the participant farmers by Spring 2021.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

A "nudge" approach is being used to slowly make all farms more biodiversity friendly. Much like the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, the power is in the widescale implementation – lots and lots of people doing a little.

Most difficult challenges

Categorising farmland hedgerows. For example, when should a hedgerow be defined as a treeline? Trying to find suitable measures for high intensity farmers whose sole income is reliant on farming.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

- Measuring and rewarding farmers for the quantity of biodiversity friendly habitats on the farm. Some of these habitats could include:
    - Flowering hedgerow maximum cut once every 3-5 years with a 1.5-2m margin fenced from grazing or untilled
    - Flowering hedgerow maximum cut once every 3-5 years with a 1.5-2m understory fenced from grazing or untilled
    - Flowering hedgerow cut once every 2-5 years with at least 0.5m margin fenced from grazing or untilled
    - Flowering hedgerow cut once every two years (no margin)
    - Pollinator-friendly field margin
    - Pollinator-friendly flowering trees
    - Native wildlife meadow (maximum cut once a year)
    - Species-rich sward (herbal ley) allowed to flower
    - Clover pasture allowed to flower
    - Mixed species sward allowed to flower
    - Non-farmed areas (e.g. around gates, field margins, lanes) unmanaged to allow grass and wildflowers to grow naturally
- Farmers could also be rewarded for not using pesticides under the following headings:
    - Eliminated herbicides, fungicides and insecticides from whole farm
    - Eliminated herbicides, fungicides and insecticides from whole farm excluding livestock
    - Eliminated insecticides and fungicides from fields (measured per ha)
    - Eliminated insecticides from tillage crops
    - Eliminated herbicides from whole farm
    - Herbicides – spot spray only as opposed to blanket spraying using a boom sprayer
    - Herbicides - only used on crops and not used to "tidy-up" the farm

Having a range of different measures offers each farmer the flexibility to improve the score in their own way over time.

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

- Using a results-based payment system.
- Rewarding farmers for what they have on the farm already.
- Rewarding farmers for the quality of biodiversity friendly habitat on the farm, not just the quantity. Quality can be easily included in national measure. For example, the number of plant species per hectare of bird cover mix. This can be easily measured checking receipts or by photographic evidence. Quality can be brought in by careful definition of the management actions in our scoring systemWhat could be rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

What could be rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

To demonstrate the applicability of the approach to all farmland across the county, the project involves 40 farmers from across beef, dairy, mixed and tillage, with a range of low to high intensity within each farm type.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

Inishowen Uplands EIP: Diverse swards, red clover.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

Site visits from ecologists within the Department, online biodiversity training and peer to peer farming training. Farmers are eager to learn more about biodiversity.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

All scorecard measures were surveyed between May and September 2020. Once the data analysis is complete the scorecard will be based on scientific evidence and each action can be scored using evidence-based practice. For example, determining which landscape feature is more beneficial for pollinators clover pasture or mixed species sward.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

Infrastructure is already in place within the Department.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

- Incorporating a wide range of landscape features that benefit biodiversity, which can include 'unfarmed' land. For example, some farm roads are havens for biodiversity.
- Rewarding farmers for all biodiversity rich habitat on their farm and for maintaining this habitat.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

Not applicable

Sustainable Upland Agri-environment Scheme (SUAS)

Location

Contact details

Declan Byrne
(087)7839872
Declan.suas@wicklowuplands.ie

Objectives as officially set out

The objective is to explore and evaluate a practical "on the ground" scheme to address the complex agricultural, environmental and socioeconomic challenges associated with the land management of commonages and farms in the Wicklow/Dublin uplands (i.e. develop a suitable scheme to support the management of the uplands).

Underlying reason for proposing the project

The project proposed evolved from local research, coordinated by Wicklow Uplands Council, which identified the poor to bad conservation status of the uplands, and the upland farmer's attitude, understanding and responses to it. This pilot project aims to develop a blueprint for agri-environmental schemes with new innovations to address the land management of uplands including commonages.

Summary of main project activity

- The development of Commonage Groups (CG) to facilitate the management of commonages
- Develop appropriate grazing systems for the hills. As the hills are not fenced, we are exploring how to regulate sheep grazing across multiple land parcel areas. Also, as there are

both overgrazing and undergrazing issues on the same commonages, we are looking at controlling grazing to work around this.

- We are promoting farmers to have split flocks, with dedicated hill sheep for providing appropriate grazing management on the hills. Farmers are very positive towards this system and they are free to have more productive stock on their lowland areas.
- Assess current measures for the management of upland habitats. Test out the current measures available in terms of practicality, effectiveness, cost/benefit analyses, limitations and barriers (including terrain and prevailing weather conditions, etc.)
- Develop alternative farmer inspired solutions for the management of the uplands, and assess as above.
- Development of capacity in terms of knowledge and knowhow among farmers through training and discussion. We are also working with contractors where farmers are unable or unwilling to carry out measures themselves.

How did the project innovate?

Innovations in practical techniques and technologies

- The project has allowed farmers to carry out controlled burning through; training, provision of equipment & safety equipment, identifying suitable areas based on habitat management plans, and working with local agencies to get all the necessary permits and approval.
- We have looked at cutting/mulching or vegetation as an alternative to burning. We used various types of machines to see what results they produce, where they can operate and what the costs of this work are. We also looked at doing this work by hand with brushcutters & chainsaws and how practical it is in terms of costs and Health & Safety.
- We have developed Health & Safety Guidelines for working in the uplands.
- We have facilitated the introduction of cattle for the control of bracken on two sites and also used a bracken bruiser as an alternative to herbicide use.
- We have used various techniques for managing stock grazing on the uplands; including the use of feed buckets, managing small areas of vegetation to attract livestock and paid shepherding of sheep.

Innovations in grants and payments (doing things differently from existing schemes or paying for different things)

- We are currently working on trying to develop a results based payment system to work in tandem with our current measures based system. We feel that a combination of the two together is what is needed for upland areas and especially commonages.
- We are working with commonage groups to develop mechanisms to ensure that the financial rewards are directed to those farmers who are actually delivering the required management.

Innovations centred on social/educational/organisational etc. aspects

- The development of Commonage Groups (CG's) for the management of commonages has never been tried in Ireland before. While versions operate in other countries, some with legal basis & structure, there is no history of formal management of commonage land in Ireland.
- Carrying out a habitat survey to determine the current condition of the habitats and using this as a basis for developing management plans with the farmers. These plans have clear objectives to

improve the upland habitat quality while the farmer involvement ensures it is practical and achievable on the ground.

- We are educating farmers in upland habitat management by walking their upland areas with the project ecologist and then working with the ecologist to develop management plans. We are trying to change the traditional attitudes of farming the uplands as being solely for the production of sheep meat to one where habitat management is of equal or higher importance.

Activity not in itself innovative, but trying out innovations from elsewhere for the first time in the EIP area (if simple to say, where were they from?)

(Left intentionally blank)

Most difficult challenges

- The rules for land eligibility are a major issue in driving farmers' actions in the uplands. The current rules are pushing the destruction of some of our habitats and are at odds with some of the restoration and remediation works our farmers are currently carrying out.
- Upland areas are unfenced with mosaics of habitats running through them over very large areas, including multiple ownership/management units. It is not possible to work with individual LPIS areas in isolation from surrounding areas, so we need all the commonages and privately owned areas that adjoining one another to all follow a single plan.
- There is a lack of direction in the management objectives for our uplands. There is no clear plan or objective as to exactly what we want up there, so it is impossible for farmers to manage them when we can't tell them what to manage for.
- Where issues have been identified, there is a lack of knowledge and support to address the issues. There are 4 government departments with responsibilities for issues in our uplands, but there is no collaboration between them and none on their own have the ambition or resources to tackle any of the issues we have brought to their attention.
- Farmers are happy to work with us in the expectation that this work will help to deliver agri-environmental payments into the future. Their attitudes towards the environmental protection usually comes second to the financial viability of their farms, and we have accepted that this is ok, provided the schemes in place deliver the management required.

Informing the next RDP

What could be transferred simply and in isolation into measures similar to the national ones in the current RDP (GLAS, TAMS, KT Groups, BGDP, AWS etc.)?

- The uplands are a distinct habitat type and physically separated from the lowland areas of the farm. If we are interested in protecting and improving upland habitats, they should be in a separate scheme to the lowlands. Otherwise we end up with lowland and upland measures competing with each other up to some maximum farmer payment. Similarly, lowland habitats and measures should not be excluded from support due to having upland or commonage area.

What could be transferred into a new national measure unlike those currently in operation?

- The use of commonage Groups for the management of commonages.
- The development of management plans through habitat assessment by an ecologist/qualified person followed by discussions with the farmers who will be responsible for carrying out the

work. This will lead to appropriate plans that will deliver actual habitat improvement with a high chance of success due to the high level of farmer involvement in developing the plans. It is a change from the top down approach we are used to but still retains a level of expertise in there to drive habitat improvement.

- Development of landscape level plans for the hills, with clear objectives and recommendations for individual areas that farmers or commonage groups can then work towards. These would be best carried out at mountain range level, e.g. Wicklow/Dublin Mountains, Blackstairs, Cooley Mountains, etc.
- Most of the management issues & measures required are similar in all the upland areas in the country (with some local modification or refinements). Grazing management including timing and grazing patterns will vary but the need for these plans is common to all upland areas. So one upland scheme could be developed for the whole country, with capacity for minor modifications to accommodate regional variance.

What would be best rolled out by expansion of the geographical (or other) scope of the current project?

- The main advantage of expanding existing EIP Projects is that there is local acceptance and buy-in already there. A national scheme could incorporate a regional element for administration and providing support to farmers based on existing EIP geographical areas which would harness this buy-in to give national-scale impact.

What would be best rolled out by approaches you have seen used in other projects with the same or similar targets and what would make them work in this context?

- The use of app based recording could be used for any schemes being rolled out.

What could be rolled out independently of new 'schemes' (though perhaps benefitting from KT or training activity)?

- For upland areas, we need to target our training and KT activities around the management requirements of the various upland areas, which can best be done by keeping it within the same scheme. If it is within the same scheme, you can target the KT support to those who actually need it and not just create an income potential for farmers to attend training that they never actually intend using. If you spread it out to other schemes, there is likely to be the development of generic training & KT to cater for multiple schemes and actions (eg. GLAS courses covered all measures regardless of whether any course participants had actually signed up for these measures or not). Alternative sources of funding could be used to support the KT, but it should be directed by the management requirements of an upland scheme.

Which innovations are still in the process of development or testing and which do you feel you could not roll out with confidence yet?

- We have started working on a hybrid results and action based payment system for upland farmers, to maintain current habitat condition as a minimum and to give a real incentive to deliver actual habitat improvement.
- We are working with our current participants to explore the option of payments for commonages being made to the commonage groups. The members of the commonage group will then agree the distribution of work, grazing and money to ensure those who are doing the most work get the appropriate compensation. This will mean that the commonage groups can

deliver management and payment systems that best suit their own particular needs and challenges.

What supporting infrastructure would be essential to the successful roll-out of your current successes (as per a-e above) or to address challenges you anticipate during roll-out?

- The administration involved in collecting data and recording farmer activities to draw down payments is a huge burden on a relatively small project. This could be streamlined with support from the Department, especially if the app based recording being used by some of the other projects could be made available and modified.
- There would need to be capacity building of facilitators to support commonage group formation and operation.
- There would need to be a more streamlined format developed for carrying out baseline surveys on which to base management plans and also habitat scores, to avoid excessive resources being used up with exhaustive surveying.

Are there any other lessons which you think emerge from the project and should be used to inform the next RDP?

- The upland areas are vast wide open areas, and we need to plan at landscape level initially, with all government departments involved in setting out our objectives and targets for these. When we have these high level plans, we can then work with individual commonages and private owners to deliver what is appropriate for their areas.

What could DAFM do to improve the overall efficiency of the running of your project?

(Left blank)