THE BURREN: LOCAL PROBLEMS, LOCAL RESPONSE, LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Michael Davoren
The Burren is a unique karst limestone landscape in the west of Ireland. It covers around 720km$^2$. 

THE BURREN
Agriculture is the dominant landuse in the area with 85% of the region privately owned agricultural land. The area has a very high proportion of land designated as Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection area (Natura 2000).
BIODIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURE

The biodiversity of this area is integrally linked to the management of the farms.
Not least because of a system of winter grazing in the Burren uplands.
Cattle are outwintered on ‘winterages’
Benefitted to flora of those areas as kept scrub under control
Labour intensive practice that young farmers were moving away from.
Suckler and beef production is the dominant farm type. Some dairy and sheep farming also occurs.
Agri-environment: The Rural Environment Protection Scheme

Nutrient management, tidy up farm and yard, stock-proof boundaries...

..and to review the role of agriculture in the Burren and so refine the scheme
Undergrazing/Abandonment

*HC Report, 2007: Scrub levels currently 15-20%, increasing c. 1% per annum*
Intensification, specialisation, mechanisation..
Developing and implementing best practice for access provision…
Improving water supply
Restoring internal walls
Targeted removal of encroaching scrub

PULLING

HERBICIDE WIPING

BRUSH-CUTTER
Promoting sustainable grazing systems - flexible, not prescriptive
(using ‘grazing days’ per field)
e.g.
Field 1: 700 GDs (0.10 LU/ha)
Field 2: 1800 GDs (0.35 LU/ha)
Field 3: 1400 GDs (0.45 LU/ha)

1,800 GDs equals 32 cows for 2 months, 16 cows for 4 months
... anytime between Sept & April (incl.). Light, late summer grazing also allowed at c.25% of
the winter stocking rates.

Grazing at these targets levels minimises feeding costs while keeping the winterage in best
conservation and agricultural condition: A double dividend!
Sustainable feeding solutions - Relevant, Practical alternatives

CurrentLIFE Concentrate Ration

- 20% Rape seed
- 30% Irish pulp
- 39% Wheat
- 7% Sugar cane molasses
- 2% Magnesium oxide
- 1% Sodium chloride
- 1% pre-calf mineral

UFL = 0.9% per kg fed

Crude Protein = 14% per kg fed

All ingredients were sourced from non-GM feeds. All Irish grown except Molasses (binding agent)
KEY PRINCIPLES OF BURREN SCHEME

Open to all farmers: targets Natura 2000 sites and undesignated areas of Annex 1 habitat.

Programme participation voluntary but competitive

Payments calculated on the basis of work done

Farmers contribute to the cost of any capital works on their land.

Rewards past positive management and incentivises improvement in habitat quality.
### KEY INNOVATIONS

**Payment for production of high quality Annex 1 habitats**

Eligible limestone grassland and associated habitats on the farm mapped and assessed by a trained farming for conservation. The conservation status of the grassland habitat in each field scored on a scale of 0 to 10 (no payment where silage feeding).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per hectare payment</th>
<th>Class 10</th>
<th>Class 9</th>
<th>Class 8</th>
<th>Class 7</th>
<th>Class 6</th>
<th>Class 5</th>
<th>Class 4</th>
<th>Class 3</th>
<th>Less than Class 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 40 hectares</td>
<td>€100</td>
<td>€90</td>
<td>€80</td>
<td>€70</td>
<td>€60</td>
<td>€50</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-80 hectares</td>
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<td>€40</td>
<td>€35</td>
<td>€30</td>
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<td>€20</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-120 hectares</td>
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<td>€17.50</td>
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<td>€12.5</td>
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</table>
The Impact of all Project Actions are Monitored:
Agricultural (Bloods, conditions, forage, fodder, etc)
Environmental (Water, soils, ecology, scrub treatments etc)
Socio-economic (Income, costs, time etc)
The future custodians of the Burren… …fostering pride & ownership