Farming on Irish Machair

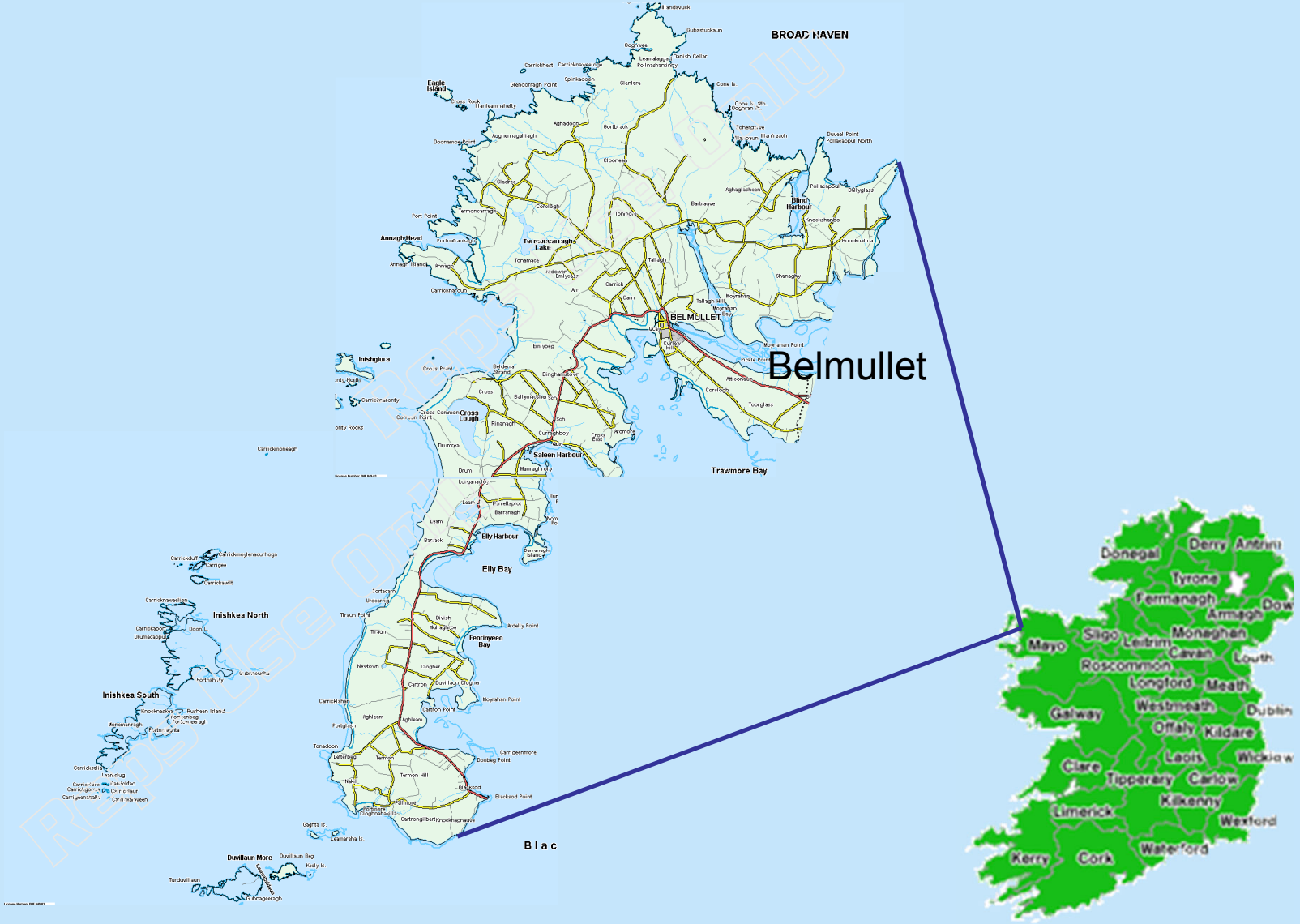
- an example -

Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo

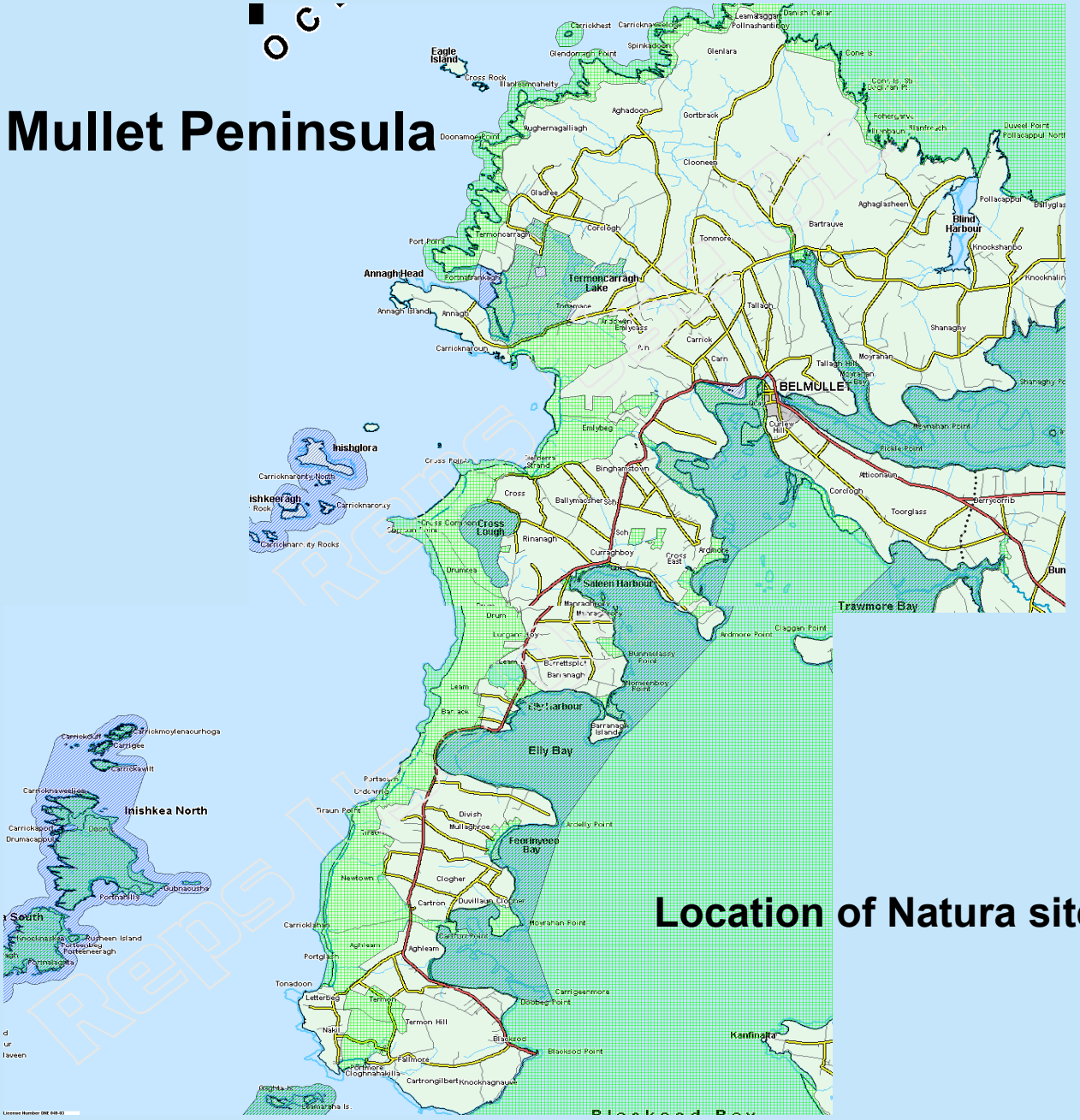
'The Irish team'

Natura & RDP Seminar, Uists, Scotland. June 2006

The Mullet Peninsula



The Mullet Peninsula



Location of Natura sites (SPA & SAC)

Fixed Dune & Machair

In Ireland, Fixed Dune & Machair are Annex I habitats under the EU Habitats Directive (1992)

Criteria to define Irish machair:

- **A coastal sandy plain with a more or less level surface**
- **A significant proportion of shell fragments producing a lime-rich soil**
- **Grassland vegetation with a low frequency of sand-binding species**
- **A history of human interference, principally through grazing**
- **A moist, cool, oceanic climate**

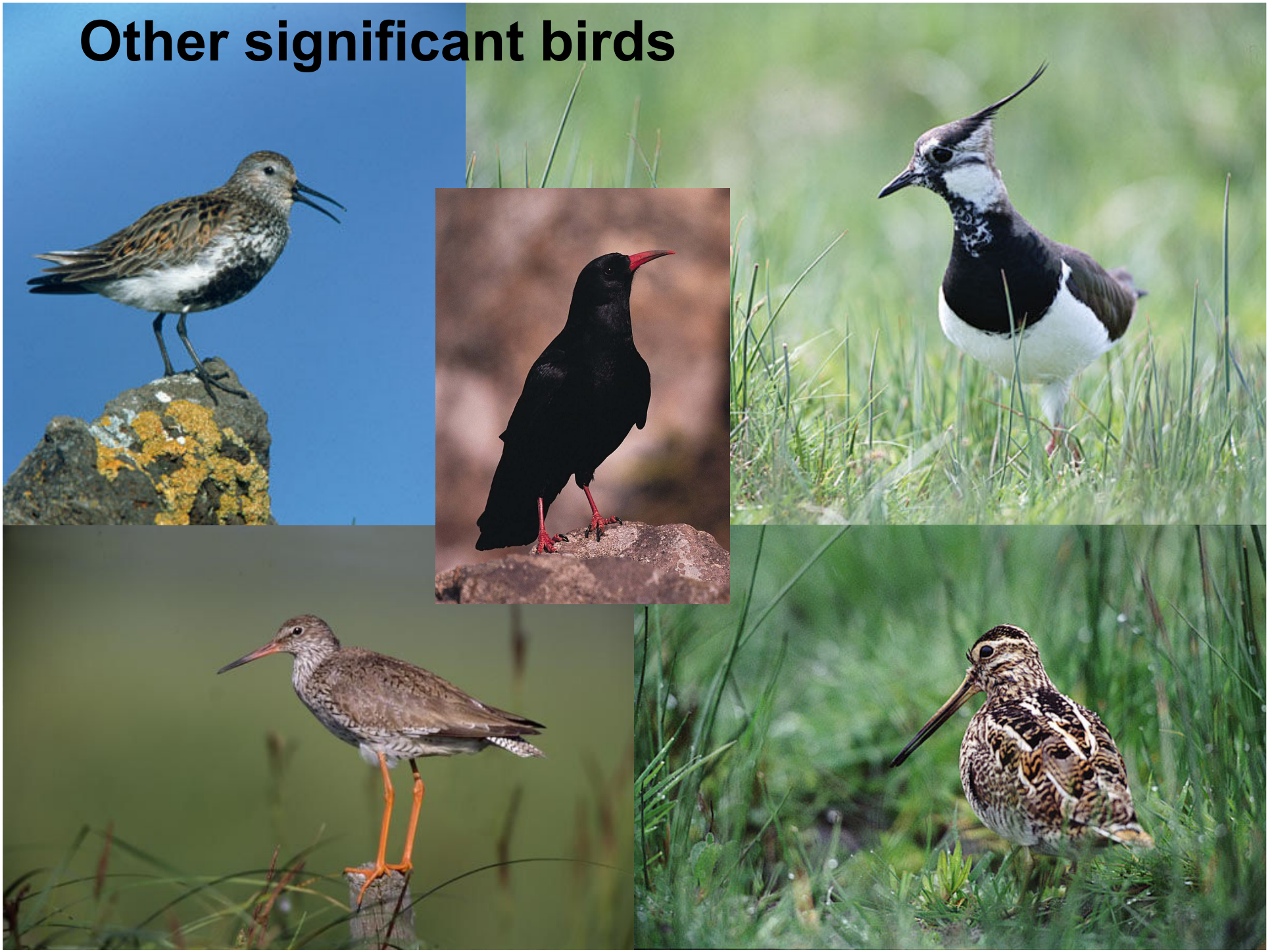
It is unique in that is considered a natural landscape that is the product of cultural activities

Fixed Dune & Machair

Botanical Diversity

Annex I Birds

Other significant birds



Invertebrate Diversity

Irish survey of ‘sandy sites’

As part of Irelands monitoring obligations under the EU Habitats Directive, NPWS are surveying every dune/machair site in Ireland

The main aims of the survey are;

- To assess the current conservation status
- To establish the area of the total national resource of each habitat
- To develop a monitoring programme for Irish sand dune habitats (including machair)
- Establish a database for monitoring purposes

This survey is currently being carried out on the Mullet Peninsula

Traditional farming systems on Irish Machair

- Open Commonage
- Extensive grazing with cattle/sheep

- No artificial nutrients applied
- Agreed grazing regime (numbers and period)

Evolution of farming on Irish Machair

- Sub-division of the Machair commonage
- CAP Livestock Headage and Premiums
- Intensification of grazing
- Nutrient improvement
- Sub-optimal management

Threats to the Machair

Threats to the Fixed Dune

Other threats

- Non-participation in agri-environmental schemes
- Lack of knowledge/bad advice
- Poor infrastructure
- Inappropriate Development
- Enforcement

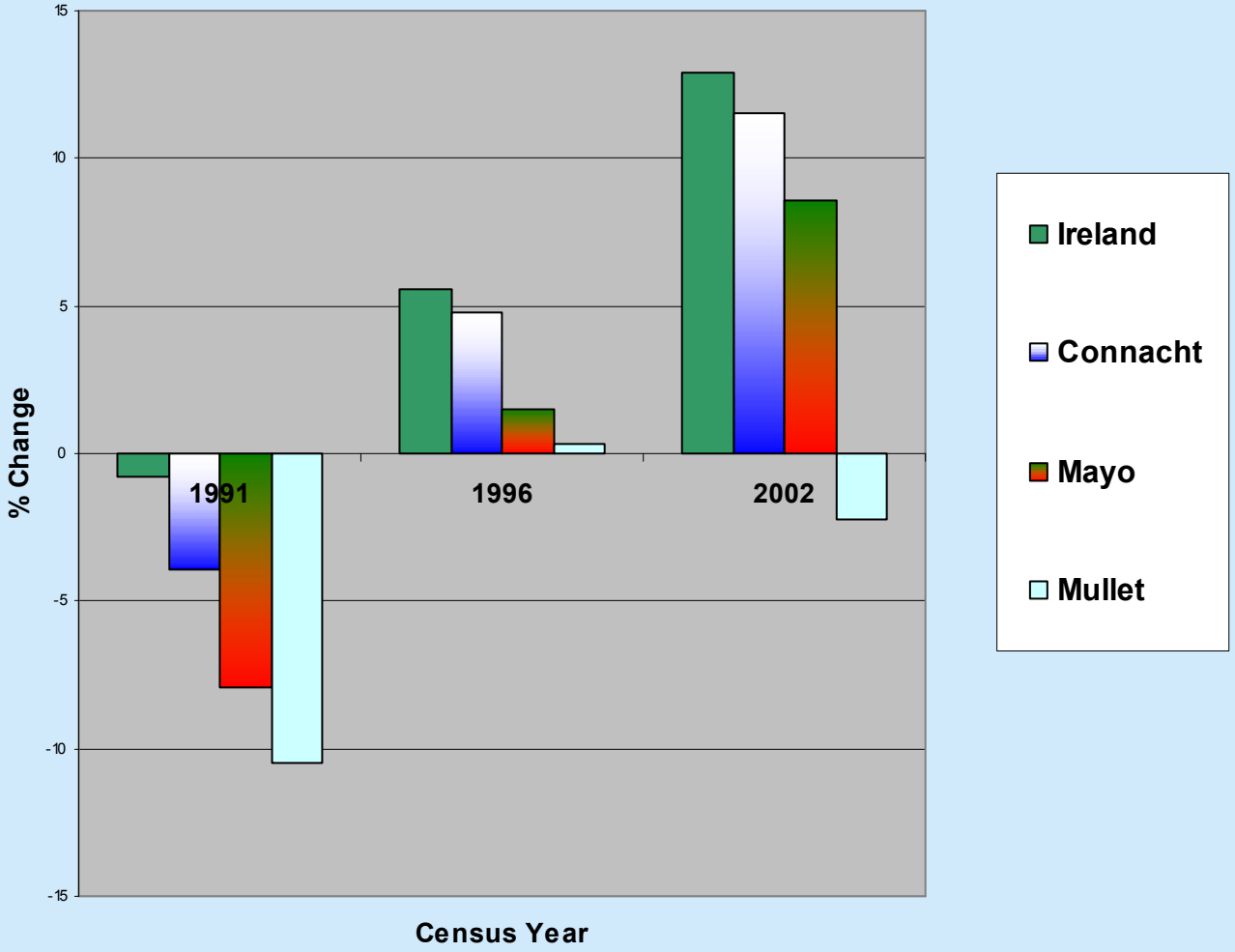
Conservation Policy Measures

- Habitats and Birds Directive Legislation
- Single Payment Cross Compliance
- REPS and NPWS agri-environment plans
- EU Termoncarragh Life Project
- Corncrake grant scheme
- Direct Ownership

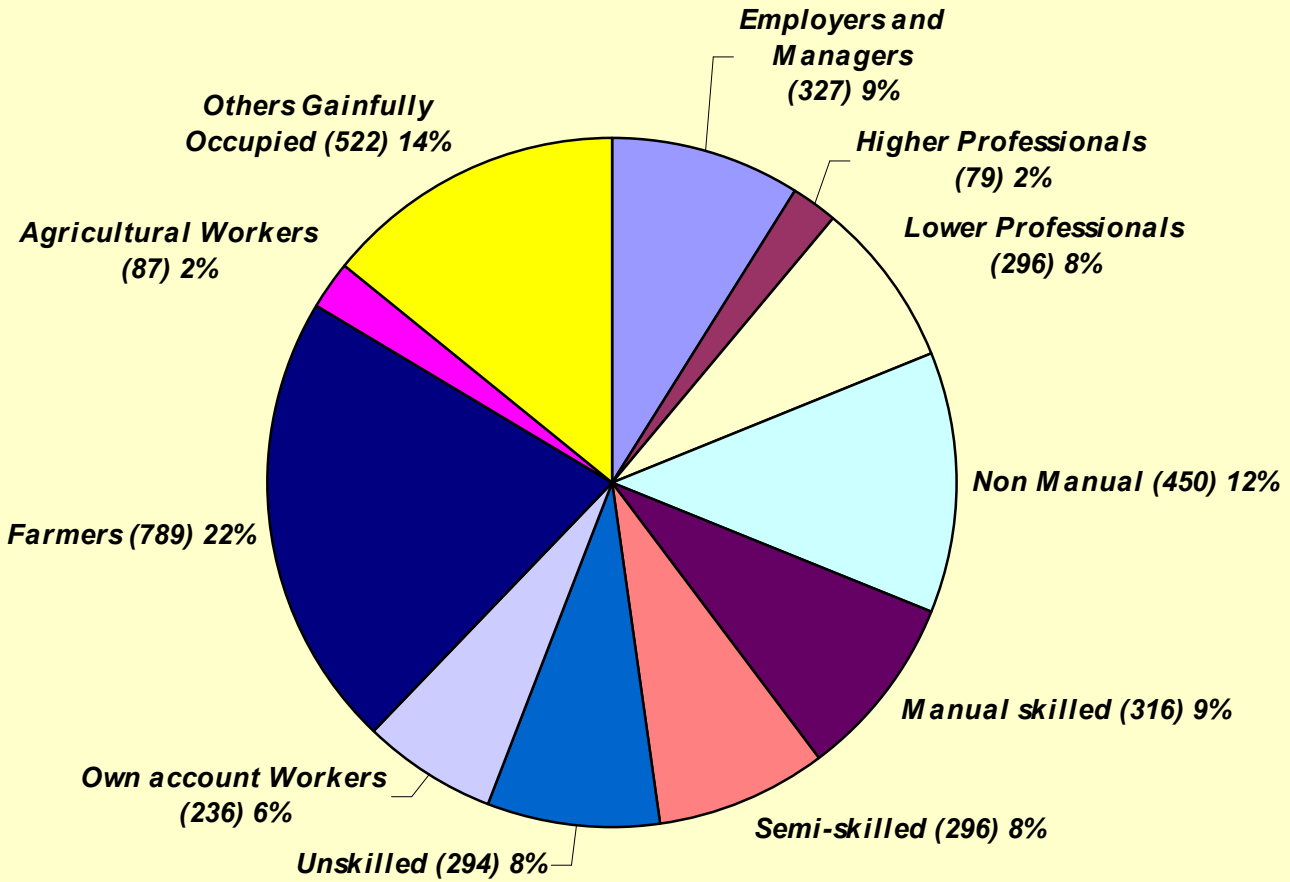
Threats to the Rural Communities

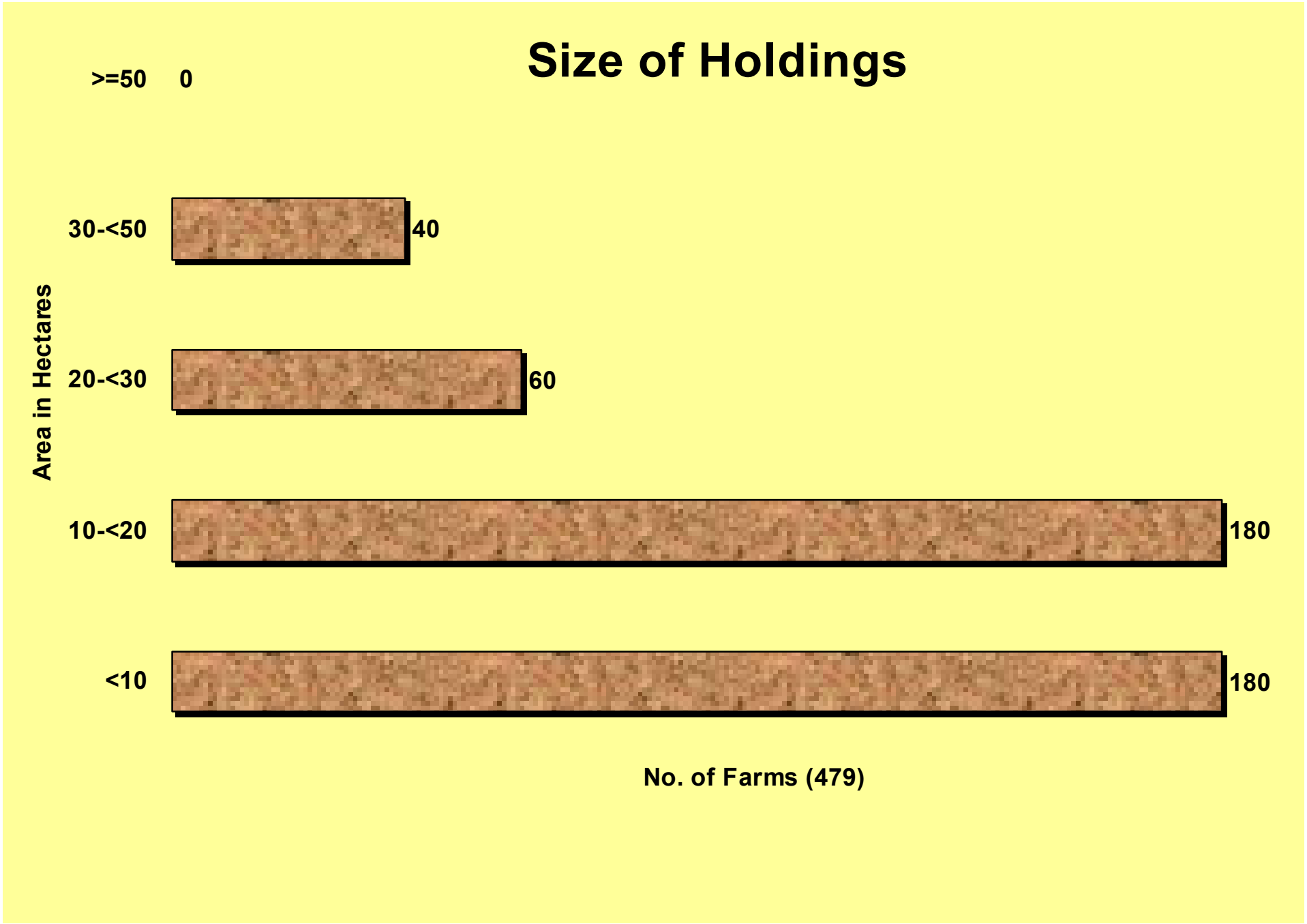
Recent demographic and economic trends

Population Decline

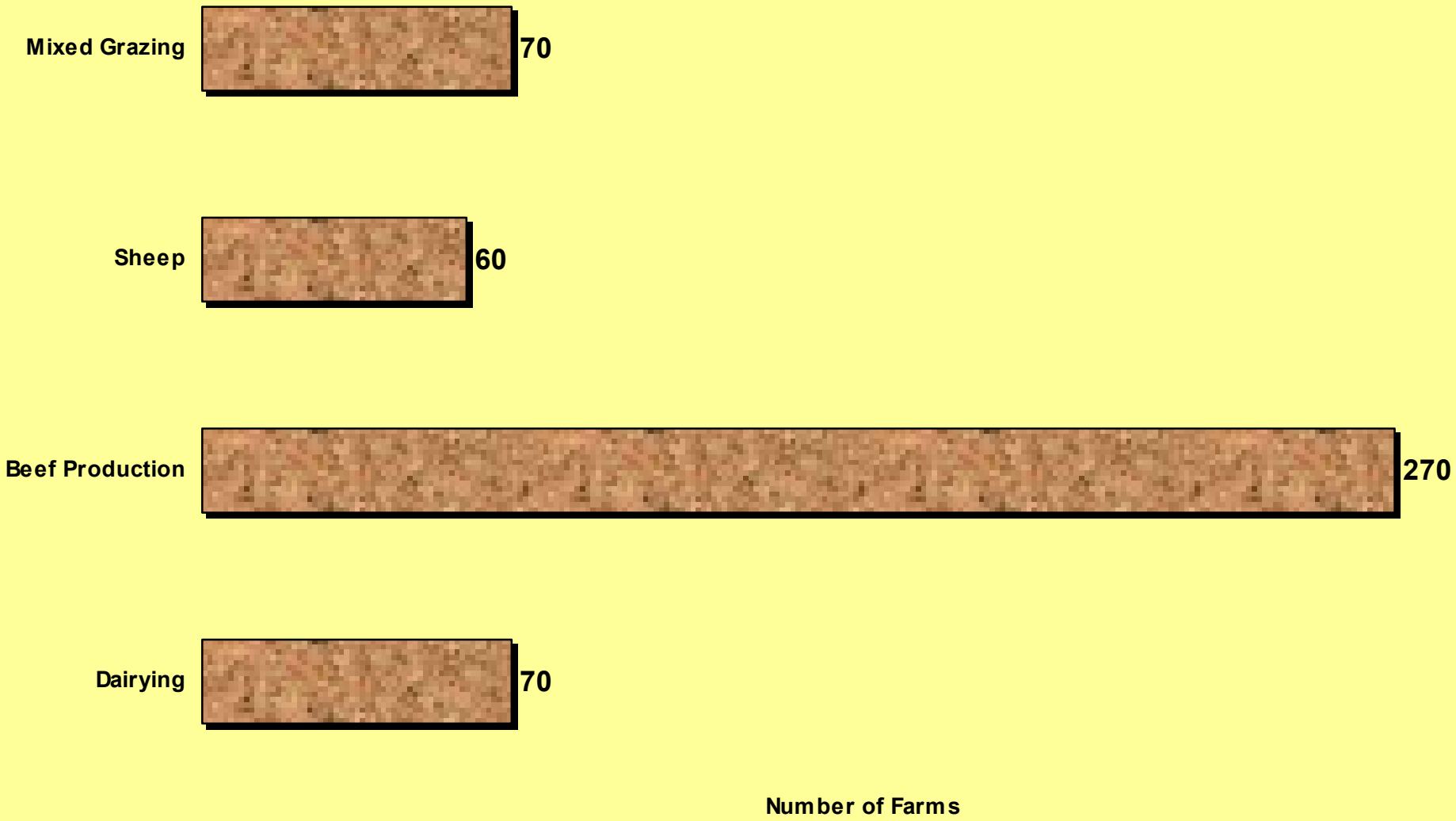


Occupations

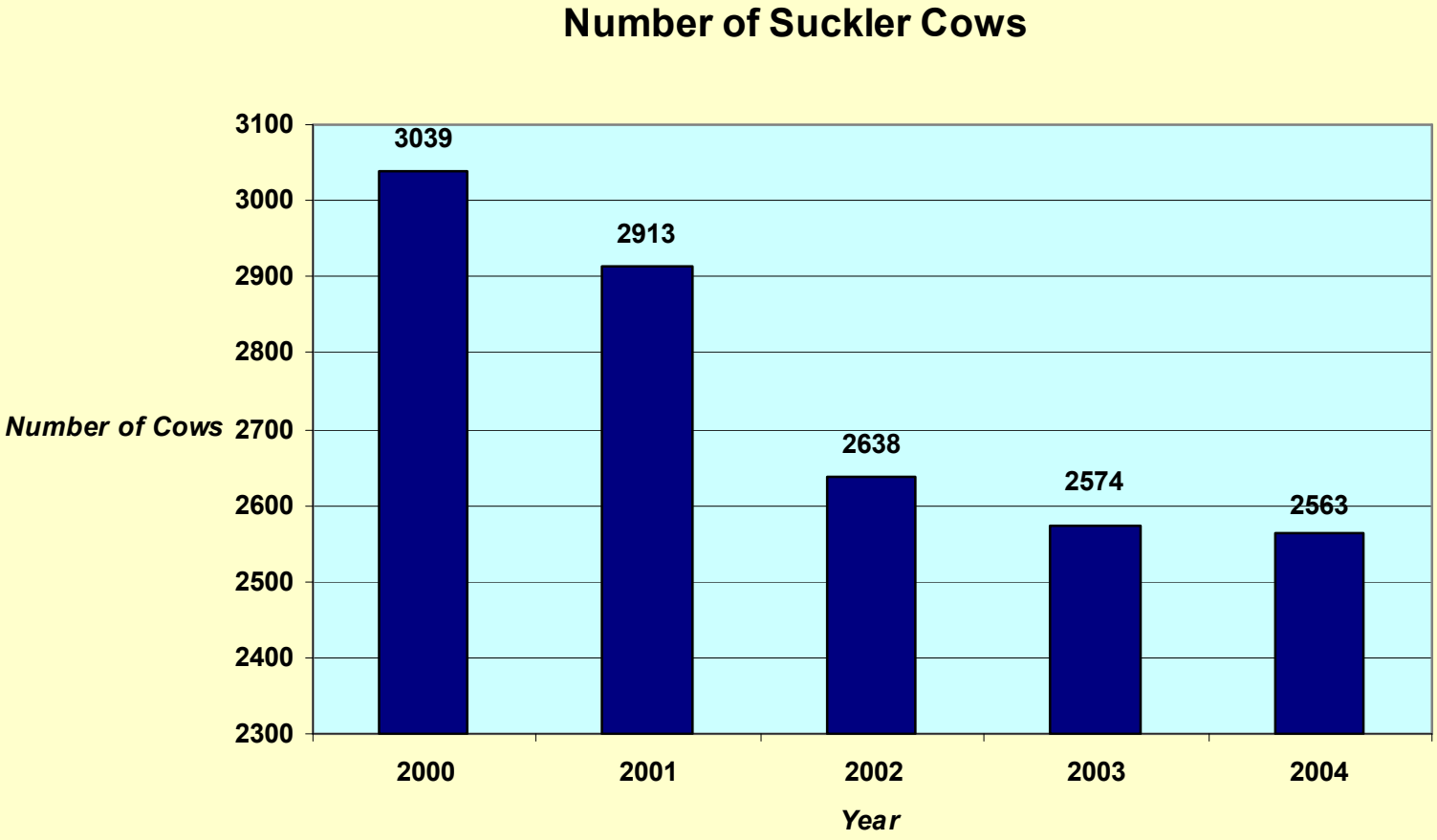



Size of Holdings
>=50
0
30-<50
40
20-<30
60
10-<20
180
<10
180
Area in Hectares
No. of Farms (479)

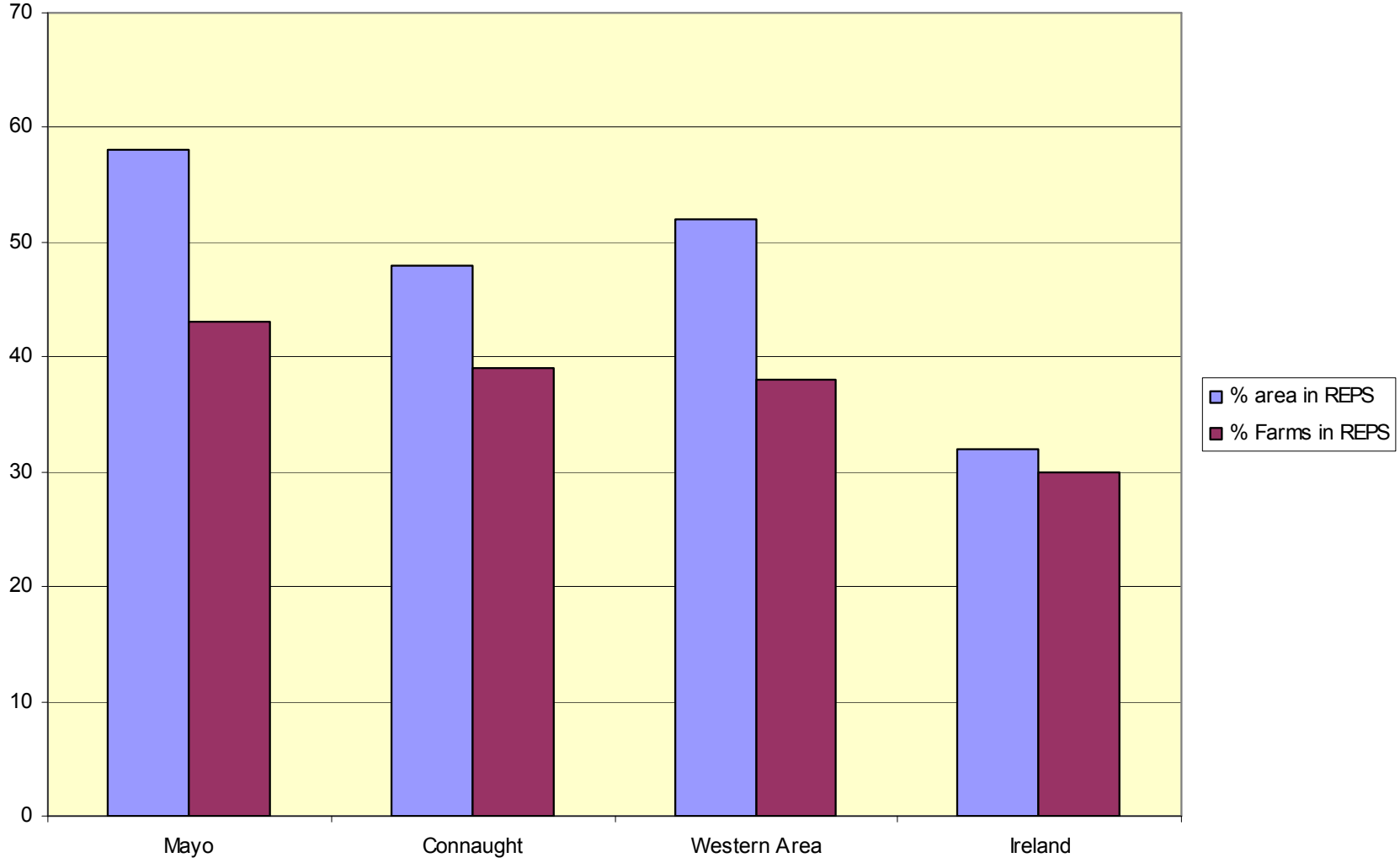
Farming Systems



Decline in Livestock Numbers



Uptake of REPS



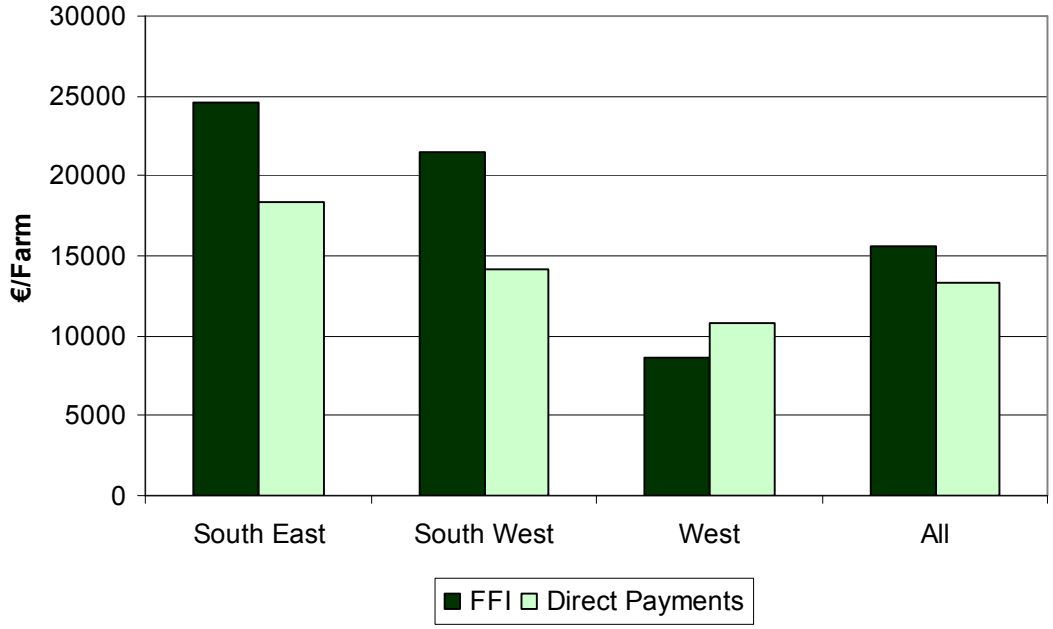
Direct Payments on the Mullet Peninsula

- Average SFP/Farm €2,623
- Area Based /Farm €1,905
- REPS payments /Farm €4,000

Income Viability

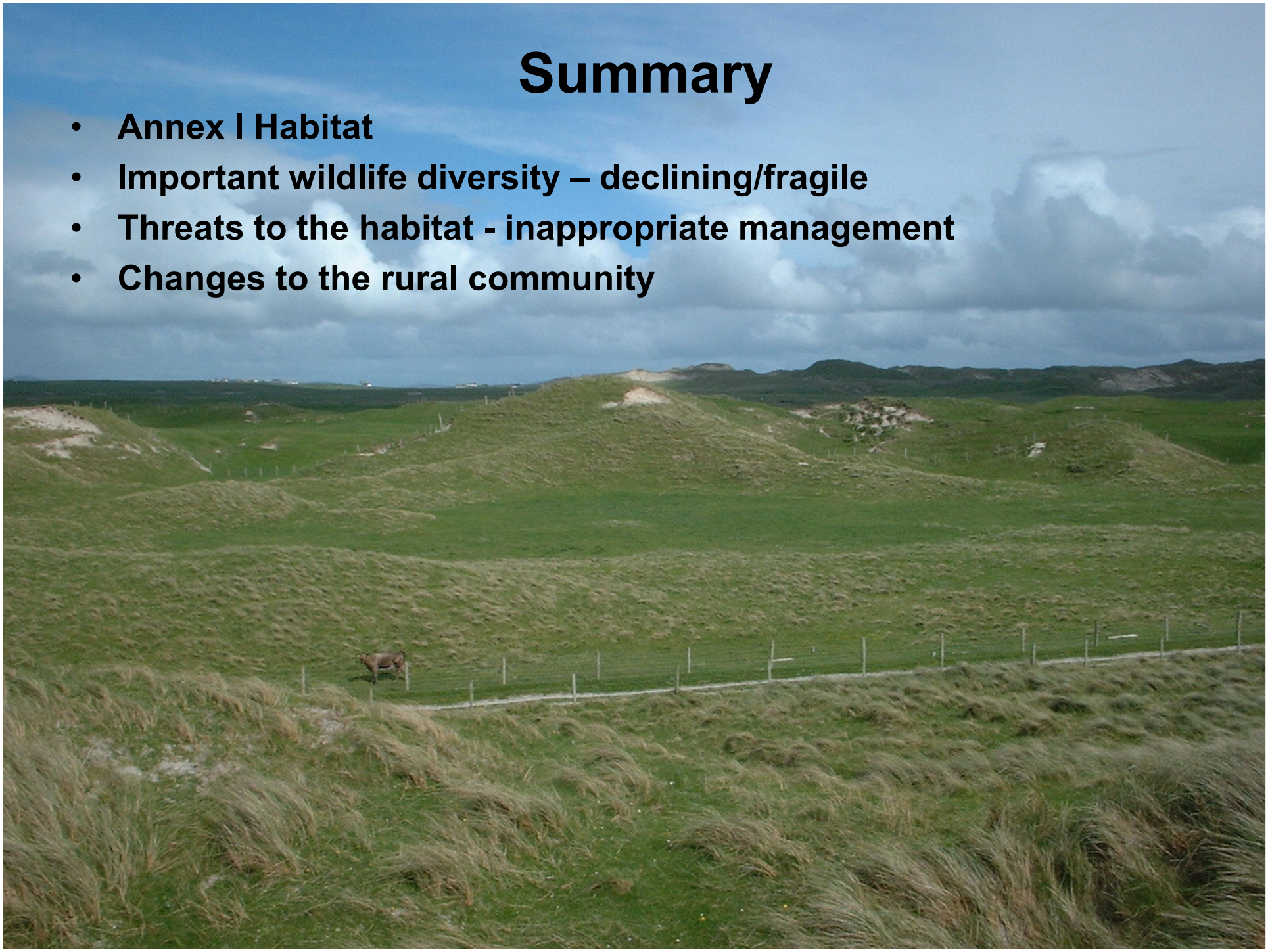
Direct Payments vis-a-vis Family Farm Income

Figure 3: FFI, Direct Payments/Subsidies by Region - 2004



Summary

- Annex I Habitat
- Important wildlife diversity – declining/fragile
- Threats to the habitat - inappropriate management
- Changes to the rural community



What future?