

HNV-LINK PROJECT: REVIEW OF THE VISIT OF THE FRENCH DELEGATION TO BURREN IN IRELAND

BURREN WINTERAGE SCHOOL / GORT & KINVARRA (COUNTY OF GALWAY) – 25-28 OCTOBER 2018



Financement Horizon 2020
de l'Union européenne
(accord de subvention n°696391)

SUM-UP OF THE CROSS-VISIT:

As part of the European HNV-Link project, a French delegation traveled to Ireland at the end of October for 4 days to learn about a programme to support pastoralism in the Burren (County of Galway, south of Connemara). In this territory, farms have been supported for almost 20 years to maintain or develop pastoral practices which are positive for the entire territory. The Causses and Cévennes delegation was made up of an Aubrac cow farmer from Mont-Lozère, agri-environment project managers from the Cevennes National Park, the Regional Conservancy of Natural Areas and the Interdepartmental Alliance of Causses and Cevennes. The delegation participated in many activities planned during a national conference on the agri-environment (organized by Teagasc, a national authority dealing with rural development) or as part of the "Burren Winterage School" (annual event that aims to celebrate the pastoral activities, the richness of the landscape and the biodiversity that depends on it). Varied testimonies, public animations like the national prize "Farming for nature" or the winter cattle drive transhumance, and discussions with breeders and technicians encountered during field visits allowed to understand the large dynamics within the Burren territory.

REASONS OF A VISIT OF BURREN:

The french delegation visiting the Burren aimed to deal with different questions :

- how do the agri-environment schemes work with a results-based payment approach?
- how pastoral farms achieve nowadays an economic equilibrium? what is the place of subsidies, in comparison with the sale of products?
- is the administrative set-up of the agri-environment measures simplified to favor the involvement of the breeders?
- is the support of breeders with the agri-environment measures planned on long time steps in order to maintain their membership?
- how is the CAP apprehended by breeders? is the consideration of pastoral areas satisfactory?
- what is the value of livestock by-products (eg wool)? are there structured economic sector for this?
- how to create positive dynamics on the scale of territories beyond administrative measures?
- how to maintain dynamics of exchange on a European scale? what to do after HNV-Link project?

SYNTHETIC PROGRAM:

- Thursday, October 25, 2018

National Conference on Agri-Environment (Themes: CAP, Climate Change, Burren Program, Innovation European Projects - PEI, Water Quality). Presentation materials: <https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2018/national-agri-environment-conference-.php>

- Friday, October 26, 2018

Field visit for the presentation of the Burren Program and the Hen Harrier project

- Saturday, October 27, 2018

Burren Winterage School Conference (Themes: CAP, brexit, climate change, HNV-link, sociology). Presentation materials:

<https://www.burrenwinterage.com/copy-of-burren-winterage-school-2>

Awarding of the national prize "Farming for nature" in the presence of the Vice-President of the European Parliament

- Sunday, October 28, 2018

Public event around the winter cattle drive transhumance

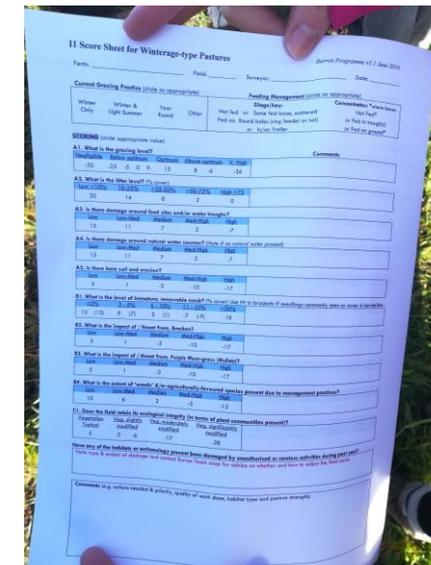


LESSONS LEARNT:

Despite some differences with the Causses and Cévennes (grassland resources very important on the pastures and meadows), it was found great similarities in the problems experienced by these two different territories. The challenge is to convince and help the breeders to re-graze some pastures by restoring or developing some practices. Specific measures have been set up for volunteer Burren breeders financed by the second pillar of the CAP (equivalent of the MAEC in France). The particularity is that these aids are not linked to the means implemented but are proportional to the environmental quality achieved on the courses (Result Based Payment Scheme: RBPS). Regular technical support is provided to the breeders, so they are able to observe the evolution of the flora of their pastures. Breeders are very motivated by the improvement of their practices, allowing an increase in the subsidy affected and a true recognition of the good work implemented.

In parallel with these financial measures, a local association contributes to the appropriation by the whole population of the stakes of this territory. Inhabitants are well aware of the services provided by breeders and their pastoral practices for the whole territory. Many volunteers help raise awareness among schoolchildren and general public but also to rebuild the many walls that line the meadows and pastures.

The project HNV-link also aims to federate the various sites to defend and assert proposals for pastoralism to the European political authorities for the next CAP. For instance, during this trip, the French delegation, together with the Irish representatives of the Burren, the Swedish and Romanian delegations, were able to develop tracks for new project or partnership, and to speak on this topic with the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mairead McGuinness, present at one of the events of the Burren Festival.



DIFFERENCES HIGHLIGHTED:

During the meetings with the Irish actors, it could be noticed that approaches based on the system scale of farms (as developed on the territory of the Causses and Cévennes and promoted in particular by the LIFE+ project Mil'Ouv) were not particularly used in Ireland where approaches are centered on the plots (meadow on the one hand, pastures on another). More generally, it seems difficult to obtain from breeders information on their operating system, under cover of a desire for confidentiality at this level.

The accompaniment of the breeders that we were able to observe was carried out by advisors coming from associative organisms and ecologists. Although more needs to be done to integrate production and conservation on farms, there seems to be a collaboration between public authorities (Teagasc for instance) and private agricultural advisors. In addition, no agricultural professional organization (OPA) could be met (functioning and structure of the profession look like very different than France).

Another important difference noted: local authorities (elected officials and technicians) were almost missing during these 4 days devoted to the conservation of pastoral areas and rural development. Territorial animation and carrying of such projects seem to be delegated to associations created for this purpose and supported by the competent State services and population. In contrast to France, quality appellations seem not to play an essential role in the identity of territories and on agricultural practices. The signs of recognition of a certain origin or quality (AOP, label, AB, etc.) and the link between territory, breed and products was not addressed by our interlocutors in a context of a production mainly focused on export.

Finally, the issues related to the maintenance of herbaceous resources in Ireland seemed to us quite different from the Mediterranean context of the Causses and Cévennes, although the issues of drought, fire risk, climate change, encroachment by invasive woody species were mentioned.

CONCERNING THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS VISIT:

Participating in such a national and local event dealing with agri-environment topics was a chance. This made it possible to understand the specific context of Ireland, to meet many actors while avoiding over-soliciting our local partners. An interrogation remains on the fact that during such event are especially valued the interesting actions and conclusive results. It may be interesting to know more difficult topics and unsuccessful actions. Finally, the proposed busy program may have also limited direct and small group discussions with some local actors.

A big thank you to various actors mobilized to welcome our delegation, in particular: Burren Programme, BurrenBeo and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology teams.