

## Ireland – innovation example 7

### ADDING VALUE TO HNV FARMING

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- **Location:** Burren Region, Ireland
- **HNV system:** Extensive winter-based grazing of rough limestone pastures by suckler cows.
- **Scale of operation:** Approx. 500 farm families working on c. 30, 000 ha of HNV
- **Timespan:** 2005 - Present
- **Keys to success:** Ensuring farmers are the first to benefit from the increasing recognition of HNV farming in sustaining the landscape; giving farmers the confidence and support to deliver new products and services.



Figure 1

#### Problems addressed by this example

The poor socio-economic outlook for Burren HNV farmers and the limited number of mechanisms through which value is added to the important work of these farmers.

#### Story in a nutshell

A number of mini-innovations have been developed to 'add value' to the HNV landscape, community and economy of the Burren. As part of the BurrenLIFE project, a producers group was established to add value to local beef and lamb: while it no longer exists, its development generated a number of useful lessons and spin-offs, including private direct sales businesses. A database of local workers (with up to 80 listings, mostly local farmers) was also developed and made available to Burren farmers who are unable to carry out conservation works themselves due to age, infirmity or off farm work for example. Some of these workers have joined forces to work together on Burren farms. As part of the Burren Programme, a traditional Burren gate was identified as being very fitting for use when upgrading walls and gates under BurrenLIFE - three local businesses now manufacture and install these gates. Arising from the success of the Burren programme, a large number of study groups visit the region: these are increasingly hosted by local farmers who provide lunches and guided tours, affirming the Burren's potential as a 'learning landscape'. Additional initiatives are planned with the expansion of the Burren Programme.

#### What did 'adding value' achieve for HNV farming?

- Establishment of a Beef & Lamb producers group
- Mini-businesses including farmer-led walks, farmhouse catering, production of farm gates
- Establishment of a Database of workers to support farmers in HNV farming



Figure 2



### *Achievements*

Since 2005 a significant investment has been made in the development of AES to support HNV farming in the Burren. During this time a number of smaller innovations have also been instigated and supported to try to add value to HNV farming systems, including:

- A Beef & Lamb Producers Group (2007-2010) which has led to some offshoots in private meat sales
- A Workers Database (80 listings) of available labour to support HNV work in the Burren
- The production of a traditional Burren gate, now made by three local suppliers
- The development of 'learning packages' for study groups which include farmhouse lunches and farmer-led walks across the land.



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**

### *Economics of HNV farming*

The initiatives have contributed to the economy of HNV farmers and to the social opportunities available to these farmers (by interacting with visitors, customers and other farmers).

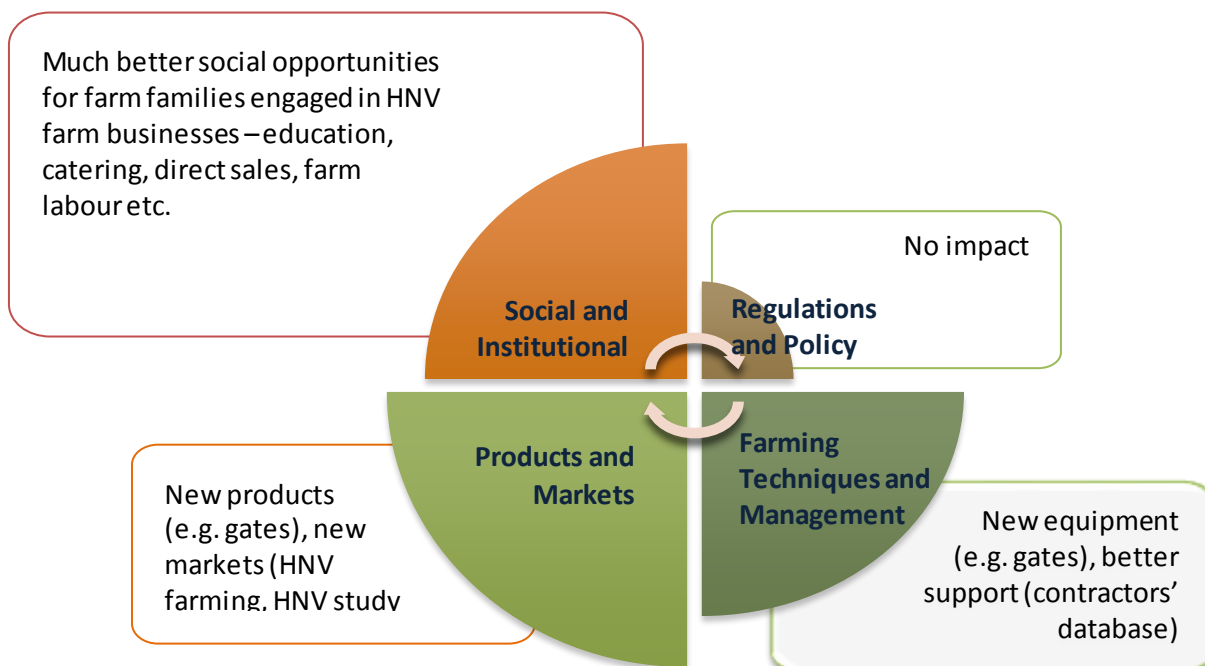
### *Maintaining or improving HNV values*

The Workers database has helped address key labour shortages in the HNV landscape while training offered to these workers has helped improved outcomes for nature. Traditional Burren gates have enhanced the visual appeal of the Burren and helped improve stock management and thus natural values. Farmer's engagement with tourism has encouraged them to engage more fully with conservation farming work.



**Figure 5**

**How did an ‘added value’ approach respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?**



**Figure 6** Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.

Adding value for HNV farmers – whereby innovations are developed with the intention of benefitting HNV farmers directly – have really helped create a suite of new business and social opportunities for Burren farmers and other local businesses. These innovations have also enabled HNV farmers to work better by having good pool of local skills to draw on. Little impact on policy however.

**The process that made it happen and critical factors for success**

- Responding to the need –e.g. for farm labour, for better marketing of local food.
- Focussing on the farmer when opportunities do arise –e.g. hosting of study groups from other HNV landscapes.
- Keeping things local –e.g. in terms of local product design and manufacture.



**Figure 7**





**Figure 8**



**Figure 9**

**Actors and roles:** The Burren Programme Team and Burrenbeo Trust Team have supported many of these value-added initiatives.

**Institutional context:** Investment in HNV farming (funded by DAFM, NPWS) and the higher profile of HNV farming in the Burren (BurrenLIFE) has created new employment opportunities and new product and service needs.

**Processes:** Critical factors for success: building the skills and confidence of farmers to do new things through skills training (e.g. for scrub removal), piloting ideas (e.g. leading walks) and selling their products (producers group), as well as creating new markets for HNV products and services.  
Limiting factors: low confidence levels among farmers and a reluctance to change, limited product range (weanling cattle) and seasonality of tourism.

#### **Lessons learnt from this innovation example, and its potential replication**

- Farming alone is not sufficient to address the weak socio-economic outlook for many HNV farmers.
- Seeking to add value through new products and services, collective working processes, developing new markets and funding mechanisms etc will become increasingly important.
- HNV farmers have the capability to create added value but will need ongoing support and encouragement to do so.

#### *Overall lessons for HNV farming:*

While HNV farming generates a lot of added value for other industries (e.g. tourism) HNV farmers often do not benefit from this added value. To address the weak socio-economic outlook for HNV farming in many regions, this situation needs to change. While farmers have the ability to generate added value from their work and their place, they need a lot of encouragement and support, ideally at a local level, to do so.

#### *Replicability of innovation and key requirements to do so:*

Some of the ideas listed under this innovation are easily replicable: developing workers databases, producer groups, local products, agri-tourism services etc. Local support structures will be needed to ensure these initiatives are not short-lived.

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