

Ireland – innovation example 3

ADOPTING A FARMER-CENTERED APPROACH TO AES DESIGN AND DELIVERY

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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. 450 farm families working on c. 30,000 ha of HNV farmland.
- **Timespan:** 2010 - Present
- **Keys to success:** Understanding farmer's issues with traditional AES approaches and addressing these issues; placing the farmer at the centre of AES design and delivery; simplifying complex concepts without diluting their impact.



Figure 1

Problems addressed by this example

Generally poor farmer engagement with, and understanding of AES's arising from poor design, communication and training.

Story in a nutshell

When developing the Burren Programme, a farmer-centred approach was adopted to every aspect of the programme design. Payment structures were designed to be very clear and transparent – for example, every payment is linked to a specific action or a specific field (score). Payments are made on the basis of delivery and impact, and are made of a co-funded basis: farmers have more respect for payments that have to be 'earned' rather than for 'compensation'. Recognising farmers dislike of paperwork, farm plan documents were redesigned to be short, simple, visual and transparent - often less than 2 pages long. Receipts for work done were rarely required - instead unit costs for work are used. Payment claims are simple, just requiring a signature. Permissions to undertake work are handled by a local team using a local authorisation structure whereby the local team can 'sign off' on an agreed list of actions, thus expediting what is often a very tedious process. Annual training courses - usually based on the farm and with a lot of input from the farmer - are organised and additional technical support (e.g. dealing with monuments, designing grazing and feeding systems etc.) are made available locally. All of these measures allow farmers to get on with what they do, and love to do, best: managing their land and livestock.

What did adopting a farmer-centred approach achieve for HNV farming?

- Achievements
- High (>90% approval) levels of satisfaction by farmers of programme structure and management
- High levels of interest in participating in programme (consistently oversubscribed)
- Better understanding by farmers of programme as it impacts on the



Figure 2

Achievements

The farmer-centred approach to AES design and delivery contributed to high levels of farmer satisfaction with the AES and its management – reflected in survey data but also in the high levels of oversubscription to the AES.

Levels of paperwork for participating farmers was greatly reduced.

Economics of HNV farming

While there has been no direct impact on HNV farm economics, the farmer-centred principle is central to the Burren Programme which will bring €2-3m per annum to farmers.

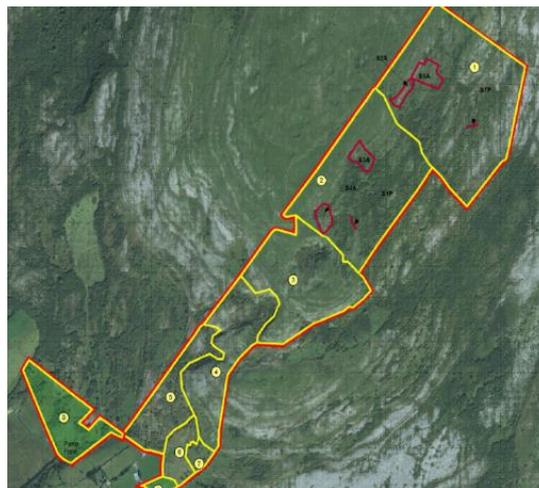


Figure 3

Maintaining or improving HNV values

This approach is part of a wider approach to HNV farming which does play a key role in maintaining and improving HNV values.

How did a farmer-centred approach respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?

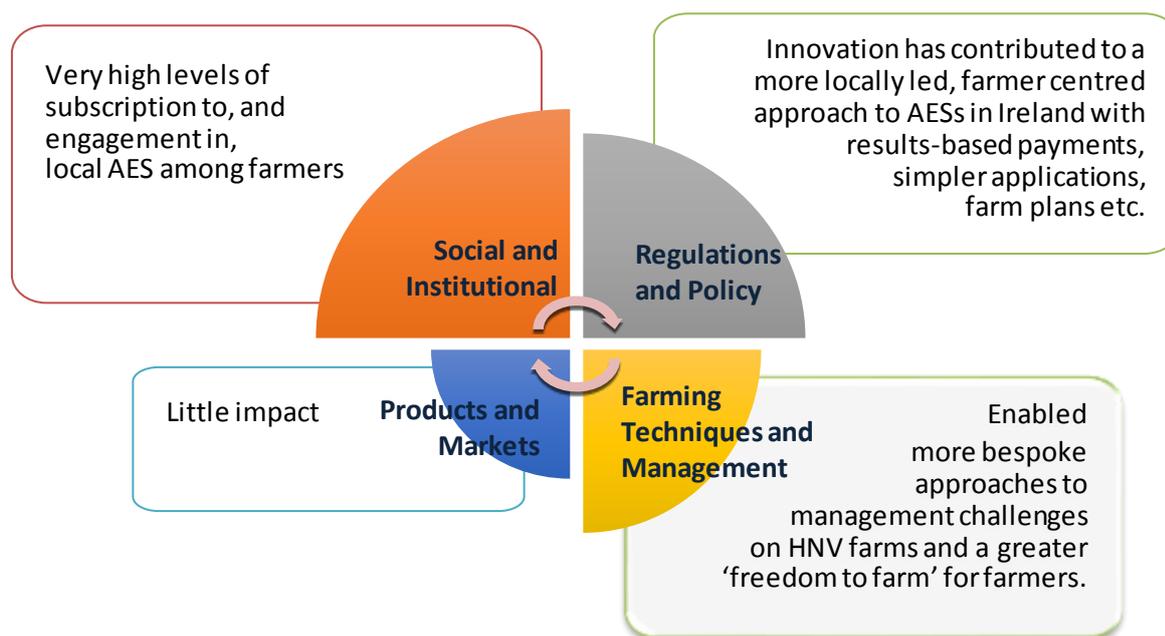


Figure 4 Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.

This innovation has been important in improving levels of farmer understanding and engagement (clearer farm plans, simpler applications for entry, simpler mechanisms for payment claims), has informed more impactful payment structures (payment for results), and enabled more bespoke farm plans. It has contributed to a rethink of AES’s in Ireland. It has not however impacted on products and markets in a significant way.

The process that made it happen and critical factors for success

- A recognition that the farmer is the key actor at the 'coalface' of conservation farming
- Building an understanding of barriers to farmer engagement in AES – bureaucracy, unintelligible plans, impractical actions, lack of freedom and flexibility, penalties not incentives etc
- Integrate solutions to these barriers in the design and delivery of a bespoke AES – the Burren Programme



Figure 5

Actors and roles: A local team, who had worked in the Burren with farmers for almost 10 years, designed an AES which was built around the farmer. Previous research (Dunford 2001) and experience from the Burren LIFE project identified key problems that farmers had with existing AESs and these were addressed in the design of the new AES.

Institutional context: Local team funded by NPWS, AES funded by DAFM.

Processes: Critical factors for success: having the creative freedom, trust (of all stakeholders including farmers) and experience to create a farmer centred AES.

Limiting factors: difficulty in planning budgets (results-based payments), securing permissions for works, abiding by funding conditions: these were addressed by working closely with all partners and continually monitoring impact to give reassurance. A year to year approach was adopted rather than 5 year contracts.



Figure 6

Lessons learnt from this innovation example, and its potential replication

- AES's should always be designed with the end user – the farmer – at the core
- While programme design may be complex, interface with farmer should be clear and simple
- Freedom to farm is a core value for farmers and should be incorporated in so far as possible into programme design
- Clarity of language, use of visual aids, conciseness of documentation are vital
- Reducing bureaucratic burden allows farmer to focus on his/her strengths: land and livestock management

Overall lessons for HNV farming:

Designing AES's with the farmer in mind will result in more engaged farmers and better environmental impacts.

Payment levels are not the only motivational issue for HNV farmers: fairness and transparency of payments, practical, locally-relevant measures, clarity of objectives and of communications, adequate advice and support and freedom to farm are also very important. These must be borne in mind when designing AES's.

Replicability of innovation and key requirements to do so:

These design principles are easily replicable and should be fundamental to AES design in most if not all situations.



Figure 7

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