

## Ireland – innovation example 1

### BurrenLIFE: CO-CREATING SOLUTIONS TO HNV FARMING CHALLENGES

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- **Location:** Burren Region, Ireland
- **HNV system:** Extensive winter-based grazing of rough limestone pastures by suckler cows.
- **Scale of operation:** 20 pilot farms (2,500ha) but with an impact on c.30,000ha of HNV farmland
- **Timespan:** 2004-2010
- **Keys to success:** Improved understanding of the importance of HNV farming and farmers by conservation authorities; better appreciation by farmers of the potential opportunities arising from HNV farming and of their role in positively managing the HNV landscape; adequate funding (€2.3m) and time (5 years) to co-create solutions at farm level to resolve some of the key threats to the HNV landscape; practical solutions with multifaceted (economic, agricultural and environmental) monitoring of impact by a dedicated project team.



Figure 1

#### Problems addressed by this example

A number of issues relating to agricultural intensification and extensification which were impacting negatively on the environmental health of the Burren needed to be resolved. However the high levels of mistrust and poor working relationship between the key conservation and agricultural interest groups mitigated against any such resolution.

#### Story in a nutshell

After a period of conflict in the late 1990s – arising from the introduction of the Habitats Directive (SACs) and the introduction of ill-fitting AES (REPS) – relationships between farmers and conservation authorities were at an all-time low. However, following a research project which established the importance of traditional farming practices to the natural heritage of the Burren (Dunford, 2001), there was a growing realisation among the disparate interest groups that they needed each other to achieve their objectives.



Figure 2

Arising from this, the parties came together to make a successful application in 2004 for funding from the EU LIFE Nature fund for €2.23m. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Teagasc (the Irish agricultural advisory body) and the Burren Irish Farmers Association (IFA) participated as co-funders and key stakeholders. The project's objective was to develop a blueprint for the sustainable agricultural management of the Annex I habitats of the Burren.

The project approach was simple; to implement a range of management interventions across a selection of working farms in the Burren and to monitor the agricultural, economic and environmental impact of these interventions. The project worked on 20 pilot farms. On these farms, key management challenges were identified and potential solutions (mainly proposed by farmers) were implemented, monitored, adapted if necessary, and costed. Key achievements of the project included the development of new cattle feeding systems, livestock watering facilities and scrub removal techniques. The key output was a blueprint for the sustainable agricultural management of the Burren which included a range of actions, their impact and cost. This provided the basis for the subsequent development of the Burren programme (2010 - present) and for the positive, respectful working relationship between agricultural and conservation interests that continues to exist.



### What did working together under BurrenLIFE achieve for HNV farming?

- Improved conservation status of 2,500ha of HNV Farmland.
- New technologies for feeding and watering livestock, new scrub removal techniques, resulting in better utilisation of available HNV grasslands.
- Better HNV farming infrastructure on 20 pilot farms – access, water, fencing, feed systems.
- Better understanding of conservation issues by farmers, and farming issues by conservationists.
- A blueprint for sustainable farming in the Burren which is now being applied across the Burren.



Figure 3



Figure 4

#### *Achievements*

From 2005-2010 improvements were made on 20 holdings (2,500ha of Annex I habitat) through the development of new feeding systems, improved grazing levels and improved conservation infrastructure (stone fences, water facilities, access paths, gates, feeding equipment etc).

All works were closely monitored in terms of their agricultural, environmental and economic impact and this information was used to generate a series of Best Practice Guides for the sustainable agricultural management of the Burren.

The project also allowed farmers, scientists and management authorities to work closely together and the positive working relationships continue today.

BurrenLIFE served to engage farmers in environmental issues in a very practical way and created a strong sense of ownership and pride among these farmers.

The project also helped to raise public awareness of the importance of HNV farming in the Burren.

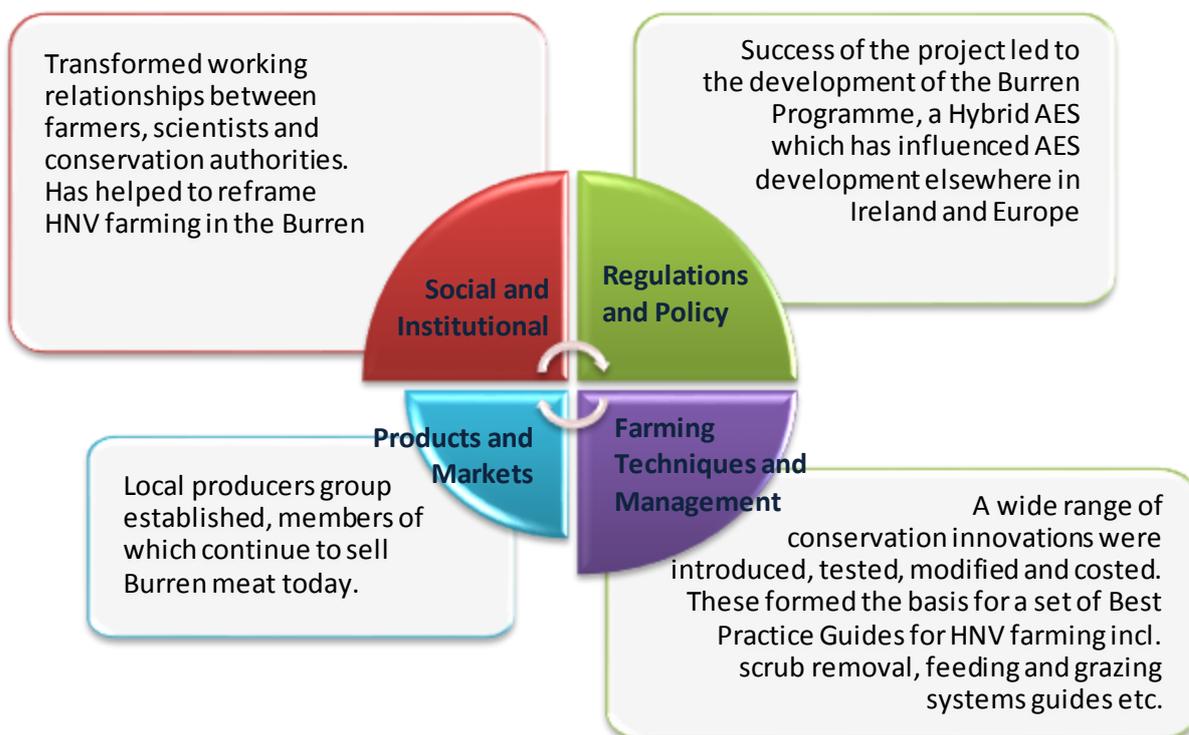
#### *Economics of HNV farming*

Data generated during BurrenLIFE confirmed the poor socio-economic outlook for most HNV farmers in the Burren. The project addressed this directly by investing in these farms – paying farmers for carrying out works, including agricultural monitoring - and indirectly by developing a costed blueprint for sustainable farming which led to the Burren programme which now pays these farmers on average €6,600 per annum.

#### *Maintaining or improving HNV values*

BurrenLIFE explicitly targeted a number of key nature conservation objectives and was successful in improving the conservation status of the 20 HNVf monitor farms (2,500ha). This has also led to an improved outlook for the Burren HNV landscape (c.30,000ha) – particularly focussing on species rich grasslands and water quality - through the consequent development of the Burren Programme.

**How did BurrenLIFE respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?**

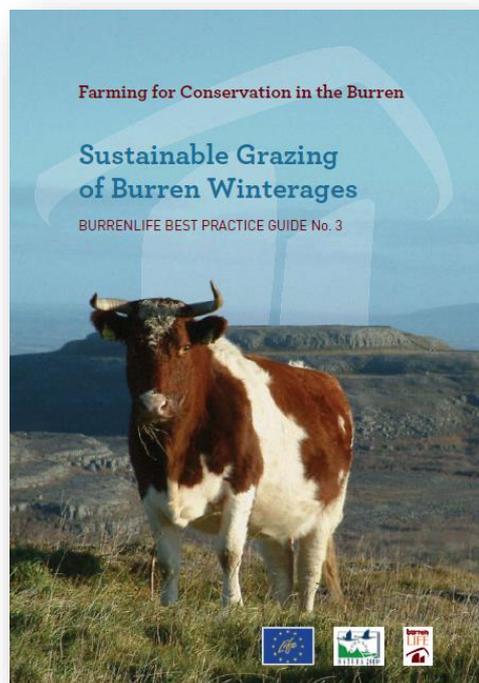


**Figure 5** Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.

BurrenLIFE addressed all innovation themes to some degree – resulting in significant social, institutional and regulatory impacts arising from the successful implementation of new farm management techniques – but diversification of outputs in terms of new products and markets remains relatively unchanged.

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

- A locally based research project proved the importance of HNV farming: this empowered farmers and convinced management authorities to work with these farmers
- A project was conceived which was farmer-led, very practical but scientifically rigorous
- All partners were kept fully informed and engaged and treated with respect



**Figure 6**

**Actors and roles:** An initial research project (1998-2001) by an embedded student researcher highlighted the important role of HNV farming and identified the main threats.

This was published by Teagasc in book form 'Farming and the Burren' (Dunford, 2001) which placed farmers centre stage in the Burren. This led, in 2004, to NPWS sponsoring an application for EU LIFE funding with Teagasc and the Burren Farmers Association (IFA) as partners.

**Institutional context that made it possible:** LIFE nature funding and closer co-operation among key stakeholders

**Funding, staff etc:** €2.23m and a local team of 4 people for 5 years (2005-2010)

**Critical factors for success:** Close working partnership by stakeholders, farmer-led approach to problem solving, rigorous monitoring, dedicated project team, good communication

**Limiting factors:** High expectations by farmers – managed expectations carefully and emphasised the long term



Figures 7-10

#### Lessons learnt from BurrenLIFE and its potential replication

- Understanding the perspective of others, identifying the common ground and the mutual benefits of working together, are all fundamental.
- Involving farmers in the co-creation of solutions to HNV challenges results in much more embedded and effective outcomes.
- Having a practical but robust scientific approach to developing targeted local solutions gives a high level of credibility to these solutions among farmers and management authorities
- This steps involved in this innovation – and the principles that underpin it - are very replicable but require time and resources
- A key first step is to get disparate stakeholders to identify common ground and focus on opportunities as well as challenges

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

A well-resourced (time, money) applied research project such as BurrenLIFE can form the foundation (partnerships, measures, costs) on which an effective AES for HNV farming can be built. The engagement of the farming community in all phases of the project – designing, implementing, monitoring and disseminating – is fundamental to the success of the project and to its subsequent implementation.

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

This innovation is not only replicable but is essential for the development of an effective approach to addressing the challenges to HNV farmed landscapes.

The key needs for this to happen are a good working relationship between stakeholders, clear objectives and actions to meet these objectives, as well as resources to carry out actions and monitor and disseminate impact.

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