



SUMMARY OF BURREN WINTERAGE SCHOOL 27–29TH OCT 2016

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Burren Winterage School Summary Report

The Burren Winterage School was held from the 27th-29th of October 2016 in Kilfenora, Co. Clare. A total of 104 people attended. Seventy-two of these were farmers. The School aims to be accessible to anyone interested in High Nature Value (HNV) farmland issues and so the format was designed to facilitate this. A Burren farmer chaired each of the sessions over two days and around a quarter of the speakers were farmers from HNV farmland areas. The remaining speakers comprised of people working with farming groups, researchers and national and EU policymakers. There were five themed sessions; Farming for Nature: An EU Perspective, Engaging and motivating 'farmers for nature', Incentivising farmers to deliver positive impacts for nature, Building capacity among farmers to deliver more for nature and Workshop on High Nature Value Farming – time for an Irish Network? For the full programme see <http://www.burrenwinterage.com/burrenwinterageschool>. There were also two farm visits on the Saturday to see the on-the-ground situation and discuss how some of the Burren innovations came about. See Figure 1 for some of the tweets in relation to the School.

Session 1: Farming for Nature: An EU Perspective

This session had three contributors who gave the European perspective on farming for nature. Michael O'Brian of the European Commission spoke about Natura 2000 designations and High Nature Value farmland from a European point of view and how farming for Natura 2000 is essential to maintain many important habitats. He addressed difficulties with the designation process in the past but urged farmers to embrace these designations and the supports available to HNV farmers. He was very positive about the Burren Programme and the potential to replicate it elsewhere.

Michael Starrett of The Heritage Council was the second speaker in the session and spoke about the history of the Heritage Councils involvement with the development of the HNV concept in Ireland and his hope to continue that development through the HNV Ireland Officer funding and newly announced Upland Partnership funding.





Figure 1. A selection of some of the tweets from the Burren Winterage School.

The final speaker in this session was Neil McIntosh of the European Council of Nature Conservation. He gave examples of how farmers across Europe have made Natura 2000 designations work for them such as Abadia in Spain where a meat factory only processes meat that comes from Natura 2000 land and Fundatia Adept in Romania who work on promoting rural community viability to protect Natura 2000 landscapes. These are just a couple of examples that we need to replicate more across HNV farmland areas. We need innovative projects and new ideas for collaboration; ways to achieve greater local identity (social & cultural) and ecological cohesion; and need to figure out how to focus on improving the quality and condition of nature while doing it in inclusive ways.

Session 2: Engaging and motivating 'farmers for nature'

This session had four speakers. Firstly Pdraig Corcoran, a farmer from Roscommon spoke passionately about the benefits of farming for biodiversity and his efforts to encourage biodiversity and biodiversity education and community outreach through his farm. He recognises that farming for nature produces public goods such as clean water. He actively participates in local community biodiversity awareness programmes but despite being active and opening his farm up to the public nothing he has done has been for monetary gain. He charges no one for visiting his farm. He has lots of birds on his farm and has created a number of biodiversity beneficial areas through planting native woodland among other things. The stretch of river that runs through his farm has the highest rate of Daubenton's bat passes in the country. Says 'protect it and enhance it and they will stay'. He also touched on the challenges of farming land that is designated. His land is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and this has big negative impacts on land valuations.

Secondly Aine Macken Walsh from Teagasc (National Agriculture and Food Development Authority) spoke on how to get people to engage in general. How can we get people to engage? What is engagement? Arnstein wrote A Ladder of Citizen Participation in 1969. There are eight steps or levels of engagement. They are 1. Manipulation, 2. Therapy, 3. Informing, 4. Consultation, 5. Placation, 6. Partnership, 7. Delegated Power and 8. Ownership. Paid employees of schemes are the ones who arguably take most ownership of a scheme. Advisors have a key role in engaging the local knowledge.



In relation to HNVf sustainability definitions are important. Vanclay (2004) stated that ‘farmers don’t distinguish environmental issues from other farm management issues’. For farmer’s sustainability means staying on the farm and so resilience is key. The major influencers on farmer decisions are money considerations, farmer’s relationships with others and pride. Farmers are often reluctant to take on new advice until it’s been proven correct. Persistence and adaptation is necessary for resilience. Farmers don’t view animals as commodities. They have a great affection for their animals and their land. They are unlikely to take risks that could result in them losing the farm. Farmers reluctance to take up conservation farming is for the same reasons they are reluctant to take up new technologies.

Thirdly, Patrick McGurn, manager of the AranLIFE project spoke. Engaging with the whole farm family is a good idea. It is important to remember that the conservation angle does not always match with the farmer angle. If the quality grasslands support quality animals, then what’s the problem? What does the breed etc matter to the grasslands? The HNV land can produce quality animals. From an engagement point of view knowledge and consideration of the agricultural side of things is key. Farming is the farming system, not the land. A beef farmer is a beef farmer. Some are HNV farmers and some are not.

Finally, in this session, Brendan Dunford, manager of the Burren Programme spoke (See figure 2). He pointed out that lessons learned in the Burren can be used in other HNVf areas. Farmers like to earn money, not to be given money for nothing. They also need to know where to go if they need advice on how to farm for nature. A good farm advisor system for HNV farmers is vital. You need to engage the heart of the farmer and reignite their pride in place. It is difficult to deal with apathy. It takes a long journey of little steps instigated by the farmer. It takes time. In the Burren there has been a lot of parallel work engaging the wider community. They took six important steps in the Burren

1. Retold the story of the Burren with farming at the core, 2. Tested practical local solutions at the farm level in co-operation with and co-creating with the farmer. Really involve the farmer, 3. Take a long-term perspective-emphasise the long term, 4. Engage the wider community e.g. monthly heritage



walks, 5. Work with the next generation-engage schools and 6. Organise community festivals to celebrate the farmer and the local community



Figure2. Brendan Dunford speaking about motivating farmers for nature

Session 3: Incentivising farmers to deliver positive impacts for nature

Session three had four contributors. The first was Eva Rodriguez, a Spanish farmer. She farms an extensive beef farm in the north west of Spain. They farm Limousin cattle. The cattle are well-adapted to the land and feed on natural systems. Five ha of land is necessary to support one cow per year. Depopulation in the local area has resulted in increased scrub cover. The farmers in this region plan to have calving in the Spring when vegetation is growing. Electric fencing is used to separate the animals. TB, Brucellosis and worms are a problem for the livestock. From year to year, farm economic returns vary greatly. CAP supports are essential. Market prices are generally low, there is poor access to additional land, there are problems with wolves and poor relations with inaccessible and inflexible government agencies. Farmers in the area have formed a farmer group and are trying to work with local agencies to solve problems with innovative solutions.

The second speaker was Simon Murray, a farmer from Inishbofin Island, Co. Galway. Simon has a hotel and an equestrian centre that he runs as side enterprises to the farming. Cattle used to be the dominant livestock. This has changed dramatically and now the dominant livestock is sheep. There is

a mix of good agricultural land and commonage on the island. He also farms the neighbouring islands. There are high proportions of Natura 2000 designations on the islands. Many farmers entered GLAS 1 (AE scheme) which forced farmers to take up the corncrake option. This resulted in unduly onerous management restrictions on land that wasn't relevant to corncrake conservation. This was changed for GLAS 2 and 3 but had little effect as over 90% of island farmers entered GLAS1. There are a number of issues that islands face that are not replicated to the same extent on the mainland including small farms, inaccessible sites, land abandonment. There are a number of potential solutions such as changes in the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) payments. This has been put in place and has helped. Other options include reducing freight costs on animal transport, island branding of products. It should be possible to use the islands to pilot schemes before a national roll-out. Simon got Ecotourism certification for his farm. Everything is connected. It's more than farming, it's sustainable rural communities.

The third speaker was Caitriona Maher, manager of the Results-Based Agri-Environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS) Project. This is a pilot scheme trialling results-based scheme across three pilot areas; 2 in Ireland (County Leitrim and the Shannon Callows) and one in Navarra, Spain. The project is testing the implementation of various score-based systems outside of that already trialled and tested in the Burren. In this project the score-based system for the assessment of species-rich grasslands in Leitrim and flood-meadows on the Shannon Callows are primarily based on the number and extent (cover across the grassland) of positive indicator plant species, i.e. those plant species that are associated with high ecological quality grasslands. For the delivery of breeding wader birds on the Shannon Callows the score-based system is focused on delivering the best habitat for wading birds, e.g. suitable vegetation height for nesting birds and appropriate wet features for feeding chicks; payment is based on habitat quality rather than the occurrence of the birds as this is what the farmer has control over. Similarly, in Navarra the presence and quality of landscape features known to support the local wildlife is rewarded. These include the cover of herbaceous plants under the olive, almond and vine crops (as opposed to the mechanical or chemical removal of the ground vegetation), and the maintenance of



old dry stone walls and huts known to support reptile and invertebrate populations. Overall the main incentive to encourage the appropriate management of the target species and habitat is the banded payment system with higher payments rewarding better quality biodiversity / habitat that supports biodiversity. Engaging with farmers through on-going dialogue and training is also essential, as it builds understanding on both sides of the relationship between low-intensity agricultural practices and the delivery of high quality environmental goods.

Finally, Aidan Cotter, Chief Executive Officer of Bord Bia (The Irish Food Board) spoke (See figure 3). Aidan presented the market side of the story. It's no longer ok to say 'Green' without evidence. Ireland is the largest exporter of beef and dairy. We are very reliant on external markets. Sustainability became very important to the consumer and therefore also to the suppliers. The FTSE4Good Index (<http://www.ftse.com/products/indices/FTSE4Good>) is now something for companies to get on. Farm audits were developed and OriginGreen was launched in 2012 in response to this. BordBia require a rolling sustainability plan from all suppliers. 520 companies have registered for OriginGreen. There are 800 targets set including raw material sourcing, social sustainability and market processes. They now run the Sustainable Producers Awards. They spend a lot of money on market insight and promote responsible living. Irish products include Achill Lamb, Gunpowder Irish Gin. He offered the Market Insight Centre services to HNV products and said reputation is everything.



Figure 3. Aidan Cotter speaking on incentivising farmers to produce for nature

Session four: Building capacity among farmers to deliver more for nature

The fourth session had a number of contributors from four areas. Firstly, Lefkios Sergides (AgroLIFE) and Marina Xenophontos (Department of Environment, Cyprus) spoke about AgroLIFE and mapping HNV farmland in Cyprus. AgroLIFE worked with farmers to restore habitats and increase biodiversity. Farmers and scientists worked together, getting feedback on the things that worked and developing flexible plans. They restored habitats and facilitated reptiles and insects. They set up exclosures and showed precisely what overgrazing and undergrazing look like. The process of AgroLIFE was described. Marina described the process used to map HNVf areas in Cyprus.

Secondly Helena Fitzgerald & Martin Shannon of the Blackstairs Mountain Farming group spoke. Martin is part of a locally-led farmer group in the Blackstairs Mountains. He thinks that support of a locally-led scheme will change the landscape of rural Ireland. The farm group is not motivated by money. Feels that a long-term plan is needed for commonages in particular, e.g. 20 years, not 5 years. Populations in the region are reducing. In the past, there were more sheep on the hills. GLAS requires putting sheep back on the mountain, but it's not as easy as just putting sheep back up. Mountain sheep are bred on the mountain, you can't just put any sheep back up. They could also require shepherding. Tourists come to the area to walk the hills and the local community want to keep tourists coming to enjoy the area. People have been trying to advance conservation in HNV areas for many years, will farmers all be old men before tangible actions are taken?

Helena started off by mentioning a farmer-organised event for Heritage Week. Farmers in the area have come together to move things forward. Three reports have been produced ([http://www.efncp.org/download/Blackstairs Biodiversity Audit 2015.pdf](http://www.efncp.org/download/Blackstairs_Biodiversity_Audit_2015.pdf), [http://www.efncp.org/download/Blackstairs Background Report 2015.pdf](http://www.efncp.org/download/Blackstairs_Background_Report_2015.pdf) and [http://www.efncp.org/download/Blackstairs Proposal 2015.pdf](http://www.efncp.org/download/Blackstairs_Proposal_2015.pdf)). The concept of HNV farming helped to consolidate the group-it made sense for them. The idea of a locally-led scheme also fit. Stone walls are an essential part of the cultural landscape in this region of eastern Ireland. The inclusion of locally-led plans in the Irish RDP was very motivating for the group. The whole group had a number of



motivated actors. They went on trips to other areas, the Burren and Magillicuddy Reeks. Hill farming is not easy and motivating farmers in this area was not easy either. Lots of group meetings were organised including farm walks. The group are now active on Twitter and Facebook. There are many images of the Blackstairs Mountains but farmers (who shape the landscape) are often missing.

Thirdly, Patricia Deane from the Magillicuddy Reeks Partnership spoke. Patricia works on developing and promoting walks and does a lot of work on train interpretation. In the Magillicuddy Reeks (a very popular mountain range with walkers especially since it includes the highest mountain in Ireland) a forum was established to assess access requirements and issues. The forum was required to put together a prioritised action plan. The main concerns included lack of knowledge that reeks are privately owned, uncontrolled dogs, no conservation plan, charity and challenge events, commercial guides and recreational pressures leading to environmental pressures. The Reeks have the potential to become a model for sustainable management of upland areas. Locally-led plans have to work. In the Reeks there are 130 landowners. Some other initiatives include putting people counters in place, setting up a Friends of the Reeks initiative

Finally, Francis Cusack and Gerry O'Neill from the Nephin Farming Group spoke. Francis could see that the Nephin area as in trouble from a farming perspective and needed to do something. Approached people who might be able to help after seeing the system in place in the Burren. He sees the potential of a locally-led scheme. The rural community in the area is already quite vibrant, there's a walk scheme in place, a walking festival, a community centre. There is a need to make farming more integral to that. Gerry works for the South Mayo Development Company (SMDC). They developed a walking scheme in the area. When they were approached by Francis they organised a large farmer meeting to gauge interest in developing a sustainable farming plan. Organised actors from Marine Institute, Inland Fisheries Ireland, IT Sligo, farmers, Teagasc, NPWS, Community Water Officer and volunteers. They carried out some baseline research, carried out a questionnaire and collated available data. The local development organisation strongly supports the local environment within the LEADER programme.



SMDC is happy to support this initiative as it's essential to a sustainable rural community. A locally-led scheme is a good opportunity to put together a plan that suits the local area.

The final session was a workshop on High Nature Value Farming – time for an Irish Network? facilitated by James Moran and Caroline Sullivan (HNV-LINK Project). The question 'Do we need a network?' was posed. The following is a summary of the consequent discussion; a network should facilitate communication, not advocate on behalf of an issue or group. The National Rural Network exists already and can possibly disseminate information and feed into a HNV network. It was acknowledged that a network already exists informally, but not in a more structured way. Not all HNV areas were represented at the Burren Winterage School and a network should facilitate their inclusion openly. This could be most easily done by formalising the existing network and facilitating exchange visits among areas. Where a HNV region can identify people who will champion their area, the network should provide them with assistance to be that champion. IT Sligo resources-part-time post with some other facilitative staff but it would be good if something self-supporting was in operation.

We also posed the question 'What do you want out of the network?' It may be possible to host a resources section on high-nature-value-farmland.ie that would provide useful information in relation to HNV farmland such as HNV specific management advice on e.g. burning or grazing regimes or other management issues. It is likely that an email-based network may not be most effective as many HNV areas have farmers who don't use computers on a regular basis or poor internet connections. The Blackstairs Farming Group use an SMS system. Regular events that connect groups might be useful. The Burren Winterage School is an annual event which is very useful as face-to-face communication is very important but it would be important to leave the Burren and look at outside areas, perhaps with an annual field-trip also.

Often there are good ideas implemented that we simply don't know about. With a centralised information port, these ideas should become accessible to all. This port could also hold HNV Ireland collated information that should be relevant to all HNV areas. This should help other groups get going. Any network that is formed should ensure the integration of other groups that have an interest in HNV



farmland such as the Irish Uplands Forum and the Heritage Council. The network could provide a list of established groups with a brief overview of the mechanisms they used to establish themselves e.g. which organisations they spoke to, how they mobilised local farmers etc., a 'start-up' pack. The question of whether a core co-ordinator could be appointed was raised. The HNV Ireland officer can do this to a degree but resources are limited and ultimately setting up something that is self-sustaining should be a goal. This type of network could be very successful if everyone contributes something and if information isn't just provided in a one-way manner. Much like the Burren process, it needs to respond to feedback, be flexible and will only be successful if groups engage with it and contribute to it also. The Department of Agriculture's RDP sub-committees on biodiversity should be made aware of this HNV network.

Fieldtrips

The field trips on Saturday 29th were to two Burren farms where delegates could see the Burren landscape and the challenges associated with farming it. The solutions to some of the problems such as water access, general farm access and the development of special feed concentrates were discussed (See figure 4).



Figure 4. Images from the Burren fieldtrip. Left to right, John Waldon (Dartmoor) getting to see what the Burren landscape looks like; Brendan Dunford explaining some of the management issues and how they were resolved through the Burren Programme; some happy cows on a Burren farm.