

## Ireland – innovation example 5

### BURRENBEO TRUST: BUILDING A CONSERVATION 'CULTURE' AND COMMUNITY IN THE HNV LANDSCAPE

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[www.itsligo.ie](http://www.itsligo.ie)

- **Location:** Burren Region, Ireland
- **HNV system:** Extensive winter-based grazing of rough limestone pastures by suckler cows.
- **Scale of operation:** The Burren (72, 000 ha) and the c.18, 000 people who live there.
- **Timespan:** 2002 – Present.
- **Keys to success:** Communicating the importance of HNV farming in a positive and creative way; investing in community education; empowering farmers to become the conservation leaders and spokespeople for their place.



Figure 1



Figure 2

#### Problems addressed by this example

Low levels of engagement by the local community – farmers and others - in their natural and cultural heritage and their role in its care. Poor understanding of the importance of farming in sustaining the HNV landscape, the challenges faced by these farmers, and the consequent threat to the landscape.

#### Story in a nutshell

The Burrenbeo Trust is an independent charity dedicated to connecting the people of the Burren with their place, and their role in its care. Burrenbeo - 'the living Burren' - was initially established to highlight the importance of HNV farming in the Burren by affirming that the Burren was a 'living landscape' and not a heritage museum. This was done through a 2002 website [www.burrenbeo.com](http://www.burrenbeo.com) and through articles and images in local and national media. The next focus was offering local schoolchildren - the future farmers - the opportunity to learn more about their heritage and their role in safeguarding it. This was achieved by developing the 10-module 'Eco-Beo' programme in local schools: over 2,000 children have now graduated as 'local experts' in the Burren from this free course, enthusiastically taking ownership of their place and its care. Burrenbeo has also organised a wide range of HNV farming-related learning experiences: these include monthly walks (which have run for over 8 years now) often led by farmers who bring people across their land; 'Tea Talks' where people come together in the local community hall to learn more about their place; the Burren Winterage Festival where the importance of HNV farming is celebrated through open farm events and a community cattle drive across the landscape. Burrenbeo also co-ordinates the Burren Winterage School on sustainable farming which is now a National forum to discuss and develop ideas on how to support HNV farming in Ireland ([www.burrenwinterage.com](http://www.burrenwinterage.com)). A group of Conservation Volunteers was also organised whose monthly outings are usually on farmland and include works such as stone fence repair and scrub removal.



### What did the establishment of the Burrenbeo Trust achieve for HNV farming?

- HNV farming is now as much a part of the Burren 'story' as the flora, archaeology and geology of the landscape.
- Burren HNV farmers now leading monthly walks, organising festivals, charring workshops, hosting study groups, acting as spokespeople for HNV farming
- Over 2,000 young Burren children – mostly from farm families – graduated as 'Burren experts' having completed an intensive 10-module Eco-Beo programme.
- A team of Conservation Volunteers who do monthly work on HNV farmland



Figure 3

#### *Achievements*

Since its inception in 2002 (and its re-constitution as a Charitable Trust in 2008) Burrenbeo has:

- Built up a membership of 500 active members, many of whom are HNV farmers
- Organised monthly walks (year round) and talks (winter) for over 8 years: many of the walks are led by farmers.
- Since 2011, organised the annual Burren Winterage Weekend which celebrates the importance of HNV farming
- Since 2002, graduated over 2000 children – mostly from farm families - from the Eco-Beo programme
- Established the Burrenbeo Conservation volunteers who hold monthly conservation outings

#### *Economics of HNV farming*

While Burrenbeo does not contribute economically to HNV farmers, it has given valuable skills to the HNV farming community, some of whom are using these skills (as walk leaders etc) for economic gain. Burrenbeo has made a very significant positive contribution to the social situation of HNV farming through monthly walks and talks, annual conferences and festivals, volunteer outings, study group visits etc.

#### *Maintaining or improving HNV values*

Burrenbeo Trust has made an enormous contribution to raising awareness, restoring pride and creating a culture of stewardship within the Burren and beyond. This is the best long term investment in the future of this HNV landscape and to the efficacy of future conservation efforts.

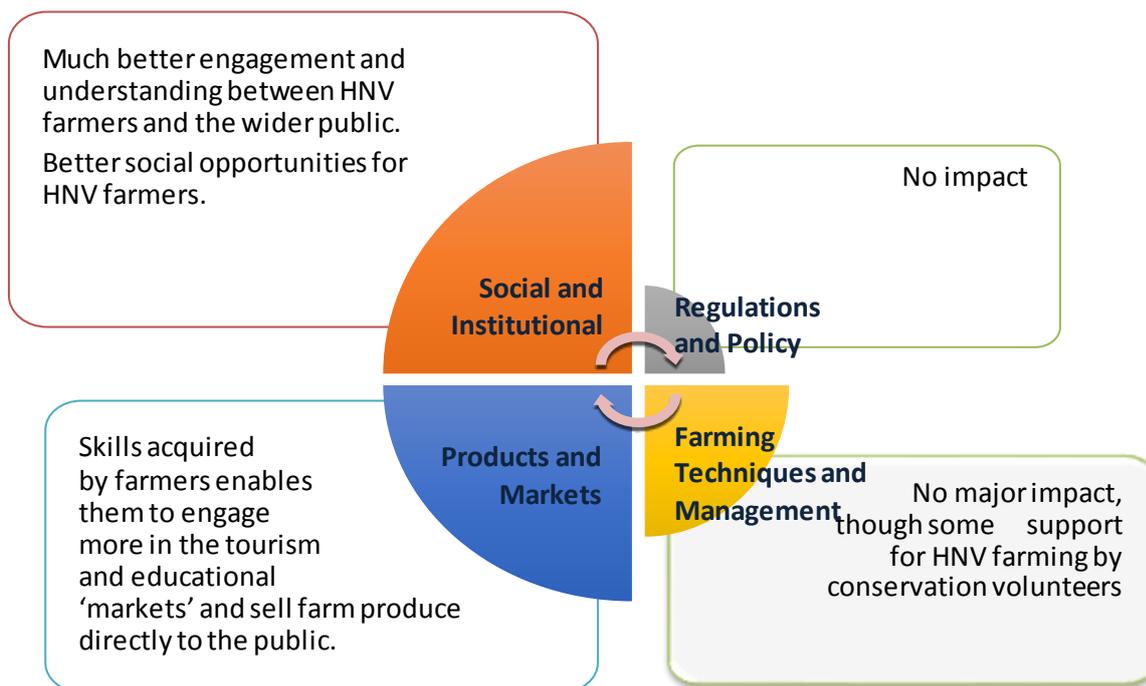


Figure 4



Figure 5

**How did the work of the Burrenbeo Trust respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?**



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

The work of Burrenbeo has been fundamentally important in improving relationships between, and awareness among, key HNV stakeholders – farmers, rural communities, NGOs, scientists, public authorities and the general public. This has resulted in improved social and economic opportunities for farmers, though has not significantly impacted on policy or on farm management techniques.

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

- The commitment of key individuals within the community who want to contribute to a brighter future for the Burren
- Focussing on impact: identifying and meeting the key needs on the ground
- A highly professional and inclusive approach while remaining independent



**Figure 7**



**Figure 8**

**Actors and roles:** Burrenbeo was established in 2001 by Ann O'Connor and Brendan Dunford, a locally-based couple with skills in communications and HNV farming respectively. Until 2008 most of Burrenbeo's innovations were developed and delivered directly by Ann and Brendan. In 2008 Burrenbeo was reconstituted as Charitable, Membership Trust and its range of programmes (now over 40) and impact has grown under the guidance of its co-ordinator Brigid Barry.



Figure 9

**Institutional context that made it possible:** Burrenbeo does not receive any core funding and relies on membership fees, donations and grant-aid and sponsorship for certain programmes and events. It has an average annual turnover of c. €130,000 and has three part-time staff based in Kinvara on the edge of the Burren. Funding has been received from Leader, Local Authorities and others.



Figure 10

**Processes:** Critical factors for success: passion, determination and hard work of staff and volunteers and a positive, inclusive approach to its work. Limiting factors: low levels and unpredictability of funding. Mistrust of ENGO. Overcome by building the organisations impact, credibility and trustworthiness.

### Lessons learnt from the Burrenbeo Trust, and its potential replication

- There is a real need for, and benefit from, raising awareness of the importance of HNV farming within the farming community but also within the broader HNV community and among the wider public, particularly given the increasing need for public funding and support for HNV farming.
- Investing in the education and support of the HNV community is a fundamental long-term investment in the future of the HNV landscape
- A range of low-cost, easily replicable initiatives have been developed in the Burren including HNV festivals, Farmer-led walks and talks, Heritage educational courses, Volunteer groups.

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

The importance of HNV farming needs to be better communicated to the broader public and HNV farmers themselves are the best ones to relate this message. Simple, low cost initiatives such as farm walks, community festivals are very effective mechanisms for farmers to achieve this. There is also a need for investment in the education and skills of the local 'HNV community' through schools educational projects and skills training.

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

The range of innovative educational initiatives developed by the Burrenbeo Trust are very replicable individually or collectively. These are low-cost innovations which mainly require a good network of local volunteers and modest resources. The Burrenbeo Trust organises annual 'Learning Landscape Symposium' where many of these innovations can be witnessed first-hand.

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