**Ireland – innovation example 2**

# THE BURREN PROGRAMME: A LOCALLY TARGETED 'HYBRID' AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEME (AES)

- **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.30,000ha of HNV farmland.
- **Timespan:** 2010 - Present
- **Keys to success:** Creating simple but effective incentives to reward farmers for the delivery of clearly defined environmental outputs; supporting practical farming interventions to improve the management of HNV farmland in the Burren; continually adapting to reflect new information, ideas and objectives; providing clear guidelines and training to farmers and advisors; ensuring respectful working partnerships.

***Figure 1***

**Problems addressed by this example**

National, action-based, Agri environmental schemes were not adequate to deal with the main environmental challenges facing the Burren HNV farmed landscape, particularly undergrazing of key habitats and scrub encroachment. While the BurrenLIFE project was successful in developing a blueprint for sustainable farming in the Burren, HNV farming in the region remained fundamentally unviable for many farmers and so these farmers were reluctant to change their feeding and grazing systems. A new incentive was required to encourage the restoration of grazing and the adoption of environmentally friendly feeding systems, as well as supporting investment in key conservation infrastructure (walls, water, access etc). Thus, a new type of AES was needed for the Burren.

**Story in a nutshell**

***Figure 2***

Arising from the success of the BurrenLIFE project (which adopted a mainly action-based AES approach) the Department of Agriculture provided funding to roll out this new 'blueprint' for sustainable farming across 15,000ha of the Burren. The key stakeholders, recognising the fundamental limitations of an action-based approach to AES to the problems facing the Burren, worked instead to develop a locally targeted 'Hybrid' AES whereby farmers are paid for project actions (on a co-funded basis) and also for project impact/results. The resultant 'Burren programme' contains two main measures. Firstly, an annual 'works budget' - based on the HNV area of the farm - is allocated to each farmer. Conservation works to improve the farm environment are chosen by the farmer to suit his/her needs. These works are submitted by a trained farm advisor for approval by a local team. Payment (for 25-75% of the cost of the work) is made on completion of work by the farmer. Secondly, the farm advisor assesses the 'environmental health' of every HNV field within the farm annually. This is captured in a field score (1-10) which is verified by the local team and is then used to calculate an 'environmental performance payment' for the farmer. Bonus payments made for exceptional scores of 9 and 10, no payments are made for scores less than 5. The two programme measures are closely linked in that, with targeted conservation works and improved management, field scores can be improved and payments increased. Data from 6 years of applying this approach on 15,000ha of land (160 farmers) have proved the positive impact and value for money of this hybrid model and it has now been expanded to the entire Burren (30,000ha) under Ireland's RDP.



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**What did the development of a locally-targeted 'hybrid' AES achieve for HNV farming?**

- €6m direct investment in the local farm economy (2010-16)
- A measurable improvement in the environmental health of c. 50% of the Burren (15,000ha of Annex 1 habitat) (see chart below)
- A major improvement in the HNV 'infrastructure' – 112km of stone fences repaired, 242ha of invasive scrub removed, 440 new water tanks connected etc.
- The expansion (by a factor of 3) of the Burren Programme under RDP funding (2016-2022) and the introduction of a National Measure for Locally Led AES in Ireland

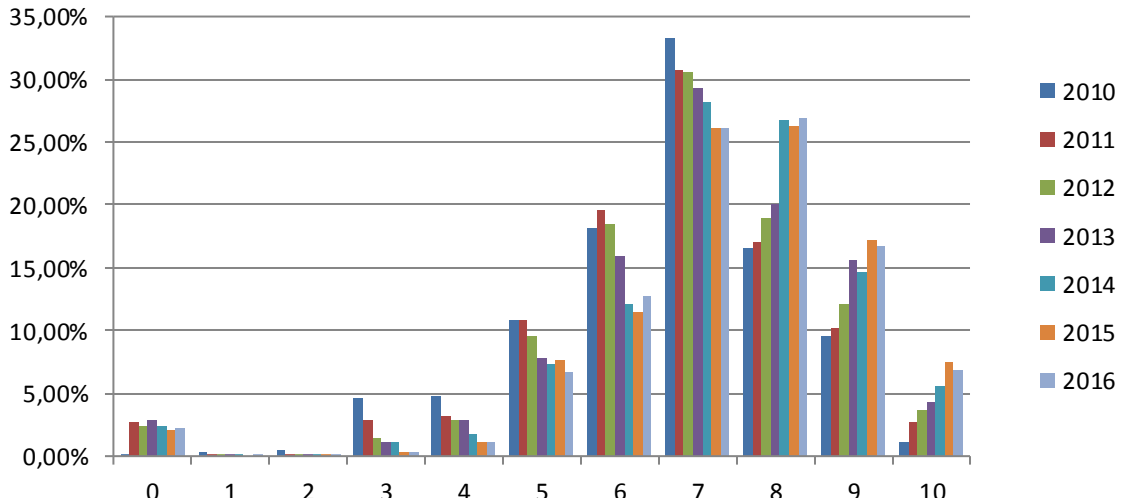


***Figure 3*** *Change in percent of target area per field score over 6 years*

*Achievements*

Over the period 2010-15, the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme targeted up to 160 HNV farms on c,15,000ha on Annex I habitat. The positive environmental impact of the programme can be demonstrated by an analysis of the annual 'environmental health' scores for over 1,000 fields on the 160 farms: the average score was 6.61 in 2010 and by 2015 this had increased to 7.37. Grazing levels had increased, damaging feeding systems had been replaced, water sources had been protected and new water facilities had been provided, over 130km of pathways had been opened through encroaching scrub thus improving livestock access. The high impact and excellent Value for money of the programme has led to its being expanded to 450-500 farmers in the period 2016-2022 and has contributed to the inclusion of a dedicated €70m measure for locally led AES in Ireland's RDP.

*Economics of HNV farming*

The programme invested a total of €6m directly in up to 160 farms between 2010-16 equating for example to an average annual payment of €6,600 per annum in 2015. This is in addition to payments made to farmers as part of their participation in the National Agri-environment scheme. Farmers, when surveyed, frequently claim that the programme has also 'improved' the farm. The €1m annual investment into Burren HNV farming has now (2016-2022) increased to €2-3m as the programme continues to expand.

*Maintaining or improving HNV values*

The programme was designed to maintain and improve the HNV values of the Burren (biodiversity, water quality) and the cultural heritage of the region. It has been demonstrably effective in doing so (see data above).



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**How did the Burren Programme respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?**

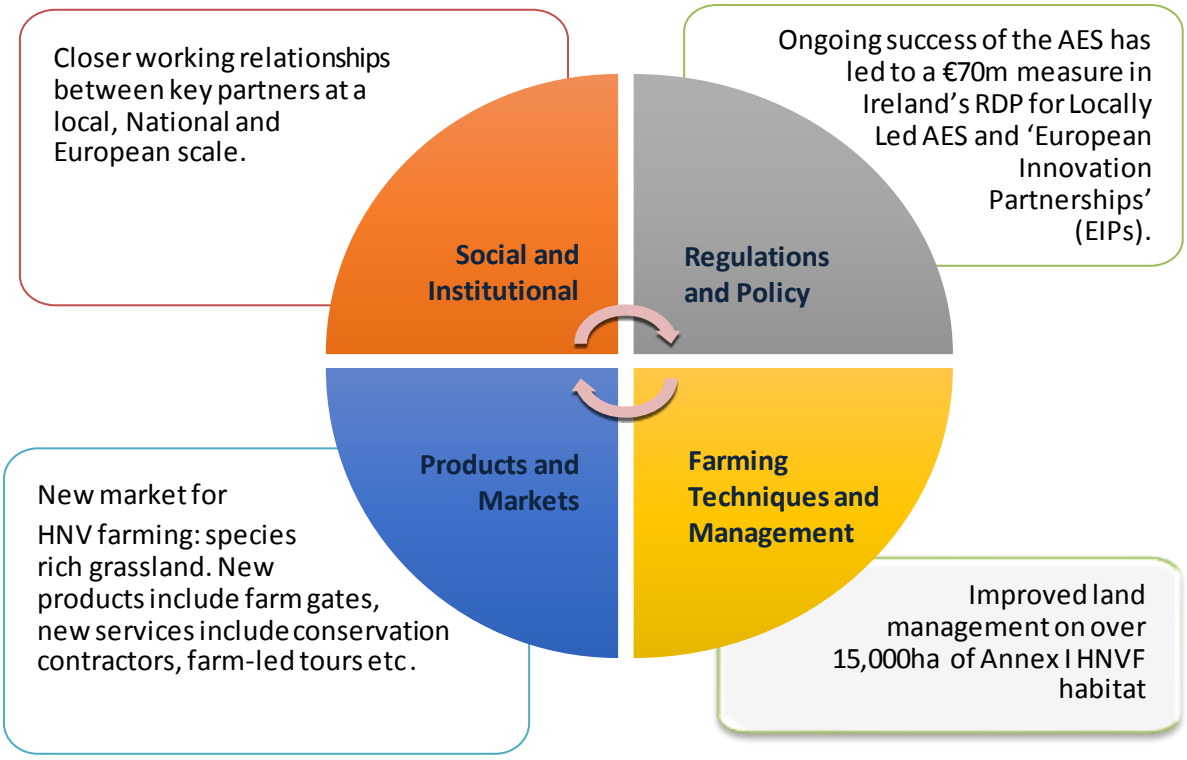


***Figure 4*** *Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.*

This innovation has proven to be very impactful across all innovation themes and has been a game-changer for HNV farming in the Burren.

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

- A good working relationship between partners and a solid research base
- Trust in an established local team to design a farmer-centred, results based approach that met the HNV need
- The flexibility to adapt and evolve
- High levels of ownership by farmers and other stakeholders

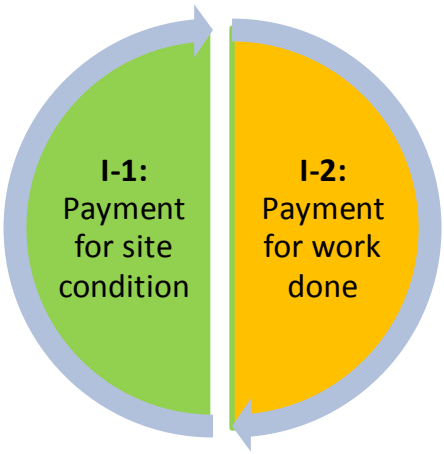


***Figure 5***



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**Actors and roles:** Building on the success of the BurrenLIFE project, the data generated and the excellent partnerships that existed, The Department of Agriculture and Food and the National Parks and Wildlife Service came together to supply funding and support for an expansion of the project.


***Figure 6***

**Institutional context:** €1m annual budget for farmers supplied by DAFM (Article 68 – unspent Single Farm Payment money) and a dedicated local team of 4 people funded by NPWS for 6 years (2010-2015)

**Processes:** Critical factors for success: dedicated local team who were given the freedom and trust to design a programme which met the needs of the Burren and its farmers and to adapt and 'fine tune' (especially he new results based scoring system) this programme over time
Limiting factors: rapid scaling (20 to 160 farmers) – addressed by the phasing in of the programme (119-143-156 farmers in years 1-2-3)

**Lessons learnt from the Burren Programme and its potential replication**

- Farmers respond well to a results-based payments as this gives them an incentive to improve their environmental output while allowing them the flexibility to adapt the AES to their own farm and to the year to year circumstances of the farm.
- Results-based payments alone may not be enough to address HNV challenges: additional funding for capital works is often also needed.
- A well-designed and costed results-based approach can deliver much better value for money and a measurable impact.
- This approach may be adapted and replicated to address a range of environmental objectives across a range of circumstances but may not suit all situations.

| **Farm Works (2010-16)** | **Total** |
|---|---|
| Area of Scrub removed – not incl. paths (ha) | 241.99 |
| Scrub pathways (m) | 164,047 |
| Area of scrub stump-treated (ha) | 181.45 |
| Stone wall repair (m) | 111,823 |
| Wire fencing (m) | 32,735 |
| Gate installation (no.) | 723 |
| Water Troughs (no.) | 443 |
| Water storage tanks (no.) | 79 |
| Feed Troughs (no.) | 180 |
| Feed Bins (no.) | 132 |
| New Access Tracks (m) | 21,738 |
| Upgrade Access Tracks (m) | 34,388 |
| Habitat Restoration Jobs (n) | 127 |

***Table 1***



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**Overall lessons for HNV farming:**
The hybrid-AES design exemplified by the Burren Programme can offer the flexibility, focus, incentive and support for HNV farmers to deliver measurable environmental impacts at a very competitive cost. While some environmental challenges may be best met by an action-based approach, others by a results based approach, the Burren Programme suggests that a hybrid approach works best in many situations.

**Replicability of innovation and key requirements to do so:**
The principles underlying the Burren Programme are very transferrable to other agri-environmental objectives in other regions. These design principles include local targeting, farmer-centred design, high levels of adaptability over time and place, and payments which are at least partly results-based.

***Figure 7***

***Figure 8***





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# Two 'Interventions'

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