

KT&I support examples across the EU27

This series of informative fiches aim to present, in summary, examples collected by the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer and Innovation. The case studies describe practices and approaches that EU Member States and Regions put in place in order to promote Knowledge Transfer and Innovation, mainly but not exclusively, through their Rural Development Programmes in the current period. These examples aim to contribute to the understanding of what has worked well and less well in supporting innovation through the 2007-2013 RDPs and as far as possible, draw lessons in the view of future improvement of the programmes.

The BurrenLIFE Project in Ireland promoting 'farming for conservation' in priority habitat areas

SUMMARY: The BurrenLIFE Project in Ireland developed a new model for sustainable agriculture in the Burren in order to conserve the habitats of the region designated under the Habitats Directive.

1. Why the approach has been put in place

The Burren in northwest County Clare, in Ireland, is one of the largest managed karst landscapes in Europe. Much of the Burren has been designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) under the EU Habitats Directive.

The landscape had come under threat due to a shift away from traditional farm management practices. Traditional extensive farming practices in the Burren became financially non-viable because of social and market trends, exacerbated by poor land in the region. The response by farmers was the adoption of conventional / commercial farming practices. This impacted negatively on the landscape. Moreover, in some case, gradual abandonment

of the land for off farm employment was occurring.

To tackle the landscape's decline the BurrenLIFE Project (BLP) was set up and it is the first farming for conservation project in Ireland. This project set out to address the challenges of resource constraints and also improving the livelihoods of the farm families in that area by utilizing local farm knowledge.

A key goal of the project was to explore if traditional practice could be made more economically viable, so as to deliver a public good (protection of the Burren's unique cultural, physical, biodiversity and social environment).

2. How it was achieved in practice

The project was implemented by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Teagasc and the Burren IFA. It was also supported by Clare &

Galway County Councils, Heritage Council, RRD Leader, NUI Galway and the Department of Agriculture and Food. Although this

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particular partnership configuration might have been new, all partners were active in the area already and had collaborated with each other previously to varying extents.

The project was set up to investigate the best ways of farming the Burren through a programme of practical research. This participatory research approach involved working closely with the farmers and drawing on their traditional knowledge and skills. These findings were used to formulate management schemes by adjusting the traditional farming practices to incorporate favourable modern elements.

The project adopted a spatial approach both in terms of targeting of participants and delivery of the programme. For the first 5 years of the project, (2005–2010), the BLP experimented on 20 different farms (covering 3,000 hectares) in order to identify practical farming methods that would improve the conservation status of the Burren habitats while securing a future for the farmers.

Knowledge Transfer was integral to the project. In relation to just one specific

outcome to the BLP, the Burren Beef and Lamb Producers Group was established to sell ‘conservation grade’ meat (derived from animals raised to the highest standards of food safety and animal welfare). The group was set up after an intensive three month training course coordinated by the BLP, with financial support from LEADER and technical support from Teagasc.

There was a comprehensive awareness and dissemination activity associated with the project. This included establishing communication with similar EU regions/projects; website development; media campaign; educational programme including public information meetings; demonstration farms, conferences, seminars and workshops; project reports; publications and presentations and information fact sheets and promotional material.

In addition, to facilitate project operation and monitoring activities (environment/ecological, agricultural, farm finances) the BLP office was established in the village of Carron, in the heart of the Burren.

3. Lessons learnt for the future

Results: Three types of innovative results can be noted. First, **innovative spatial targeting and delivery**; the BurrenLIFE project set out to address local challenges and thereby deliver environmental public goods that are unique to the landscape of the Burren, in a way that existing agri-environmental schemes couldn’t.

Secondly, it did this primarily through the promotion, following on from an intensive applied and participatory research process, of **innovative farming process and practices** that were sympathetic to the environment but react to market and social challenges.

Thirdly, the Burren Beef and Lamb producers group, with the support of the BLP, **developed an innovative product**, ‘conservation-grade’ meat derived from animals raised to the highest standards of food safety and animal welfare.

The project was accompanied by extensive scientific research on its impact. Environmental improvements were identified and quantified in terms of biodiversity indicators etc. In addition, an economic analysis showed that given the willingness to pay for the key public goods generated by the

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BLP the rate of return per Euro of government support could be as high as 1,156%.

In 2010, the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) was launched, which is essentially Phase 2 of the BLP. The BFCP is a joint initiative between the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and local government. It is administered by the NPWS from the BLP offices.

This voluntary programme aims to support high environmental value farming in the Burren, therefore, continuing and mainstreaming the findings of the BLP. Approximately 120 farmers who participate in this agri-environmental programme will be assisted by 15 trained advisors for drawing up individual farm plans. The farmers will receive a payment for the production of species-rich grassland (good management), the cost of farm enhancement works and the protection of designated habitats.

Conclusions/lessons learnt:

- ⇒ The policy environment is a key factor, as shown in this case through the designation of the Burren as Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive.
- ⇒ Evaluations of existing agri-environmental schemes showed that their voluntary nature meant that sufficient clustered uptake might not occur to effectively deliver the required environmental public goods. Spatial focus together with participatory approaches to Knowledge Exchange with local farmers around ways to 'reinststate' traditional farming practices, can be critical to similar project's successful outcomes.
- ⇒ The BLP project differed from existing agri-environmental measures in that it was based on involving farmers in a participatory way to develop solutions to both environmental challenges and market and social trends which were diminishing the viability of farming in their area.
- ⇒ The BLP exhibited a very strong partnership between the various actors, perhaps fostered by a very strong awareness and dissemination campaign.
- ⇒ It is important to try to link activities/outcomes in projects. In this case, the original BLP project led to a value-added, market-facing innovation.

For more information: <http://www.burrenlife.com>

Information included in this fiche is primarily coming from the case studies carried out within the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer & Innovation. The fiche is compiled by the ENRD Contact Point on the basis of the information collected in the EU Member States and Regions and takes into account views expressed at the European, national and regional level. This notwithstanding, the content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions and national authorities.