

Impact of the Burren Programme

Over the course of the past 9 years, the BP has had a major environmental and socio-economic impact in the Burren. €8.5m has been invested directly in the region, on average €6,500 per farmer per annum, with most of this being recycled locally. Farmers themselves have invested an additional €1.8m in the programme through co-funding of farm works, amounting to a total spend of over €10m.

This funding has contributed to a number of spin-offs such as seasonal work for local contractors, more business for local shops, manufacturers (e.g. gates) and new farm-based tourism enterprises. This investment has resulted in a range of proven environmental benefits on c.23,200ha of land, strong partnerships between farmers and management agencies, an increasingly positive attitude towards conservation among farmers, and a far greater appreciation of the work of farmers by others.

The impact of the BP has been greatly enhanced by the role of a local charity, the Burrenbeo Trust www.burrenbeo.com which runs a range of educational programmes for local children, hosts monthly walks and talks – often led by local farmers – and organises the Burren Winterage festival www.burrenwinterage.com to highlight the enormous contribution of Burren farming to the culture, heritage and community life of the Burren.

Internationally, the BP's 'hybrid' approach – whereby farmers are paid for work undertaken but also paid for the delivery of defined environmental targets – has earned a lot of plaudits, and has helped inspire the establishment of other locally-led, results based programmes elsewhere, with farmers working as equals with scientists and public servants to protect their own, special landscapes.



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Burren PROGRAMME



The Burren

The Burren (from the Gaelic word Boireann, 'place of stone') is a very distinctive limestone landscape which extends over roughly 720km² of north Co. Clare and south Co. Galway, along Ireland's mid-western coast. It is a refuge for a great many species – including 70% of Ireland's native plants – which are becoming increasingly rare elsewhere, and also boasts a fascinating archaeological record which documents – mostly in stone – over 5,800 years of agrarian endeavour. Though largely privately owned, the Burren and its rich and varied heritage represent a public resource of inestimable value.

Farming and the Burren

Farming is integral to the character and composition of the Burren. The ancient transhumance practice of winter grazing on the rough limestone grasslands has been proven to be critical to the health and diversity of the many habitats and species therein. In a similar way, much of the Burren's distinctive geological and archaeological heritage can be directly linked to the impact of the very many generations of farmers who etched a living from this 'fertile rock'.

Today, several hundred farm families continue to live in, and farm, the Burren's rough, unforgiving terrain – no mean achievement in this era of efficiency-driven farming. These farm families produce excellent livestock, as did their forefathers, in many cases using the same ancient pastoral traditions. They also hold the key to the future wellbeing of the Burren and its priceless heritage.

The Burren Programme

The Burren Programme (BP) is a farmer-centred, locally-targeted, results-based conservation programme which invests in Burren farmers, their land and livestock. We work closely with these farmers to

help optimise and adapt their farming systems so that future generations of farmers can continue to produce high quality food from an outstanding environment – one that we can all enjoy and be proud of.

The Burren Programme (BP)

The Burren Programme originated as a 5-year research project funded by the EU LIFE Nature fund and local partners (National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Teagasc and the Burren branch of the Irish Farmers Association). Running from 2005-2010, the 'BurrenLIFE' project successfully designed, tested, costed and published a blueprint for sustainable farming in the Burren. In 2017 it was adjudged joint winner of the best LIFE Nature project in the EU since the inception of LIFE funding.

The BurrenLIFE blueprint was then rolled out to 160 Burren farms (c.15,000ha of land) under the 'Burren Farming for Conservation Programme' (BFCP). Under the BFCP (2010-15), the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) allocated €6m to Burren farmers, with NPWS funding the local team. The strong success of the BFCP led, in turn, to DAFM funding its further expansion under the 'Burren Programme' (2016-22) which works with 328 farmers, 23,200ha of Annex I habitat, and a €12m budget.



The Burren Programme's Novel Approach

Under the BP, farmers can receive two forms of payment – one for the environmental condition of their fields, one for undertaking conservation actions. Details of these payments - along with recommendations as to how they can be improved - are presented to farmers in the form of simple, highly visual 'farm plans', prepared by a trained advisor and approved by the BP team.



Our Principles

The BP has a few key principles which inform its approach to meeting its overall objective of conserving the heritage, environment and communities of the Burren. The BP is:

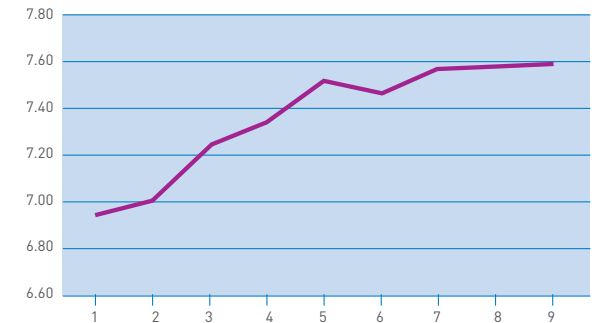
- **Farmer-centred.** Farmers nominate (and co-fund) conservation actions on their own farms and are generally free to manage the land as they see fit. We minimise the bureaucratic burden (simple farm plans, minimal paperwork, support to secure permission for conservation works etc.) so that farmers can concentrate on what they are best at – farming.
- **Results-based.** Simply put, we reward those farmers who deliver the best environmental outcomes. This gives farmers the incentive to apply their skills and experience to deliver the ecosystem services that society wants, in a way that best fits their own holding and personal and professional circumstances.
- **Local (targeted) and practical.** A local team focus on works which address real needs of the Burren and its farmers, works which will yield real long-term agricultural and environmental benefits.
- **Adaptable.** The BP model is capable of responding to the different needs which invariably arise from farm to farm and from year to year, as well as addressing different environmental priorities.

1. Payment for Results

Every eligible field of species-rich Burren grassland is assessed annually using a user-friendly 'environmental health' scorecard. Each field receives a score between 1 and 10: all fields with a score of less than 5 get no payment, while higher scores result in higher payments. This clearly incentivises the farmer to manage each field to optimise the score, and thus the payment.

This results-based payment system allows farmers great freedom in deciding (with advice if needed) how to manage their land, while guaranteeing the taxpayer value for money. It also generates data (right) which attests to the positive environmental impact of the BP over time - the average score (by area) increased from 6.81 (2010) to 7.56 (2018) on a sub-sample of 574 fields which have been in the BP continually over that time.

Change in field score for 574 fields (4,567ha) in the BFCP/BP (2010-18)



2. Payment for Actions

For low-scoring fields, conservation actions may be needed to address various threats (e.g. encroaching scrub, polluted water). BP farmers can submit up to five work plans over five years, each one listing a series of costed tasks (nominated and co-funded by the farmer) designed to improve the site management and condition. Farmers or local contractors carry out these works and claim payment on completion. These works make management easier and have the added benefit of helping to improve site condition and thus farmer payment.

Most farms nominate a mixture of actions to address the particular environmental challenges facing their farm, for example removing encroaching scrub from species-rich grassland or protecting vulnerable springs from livestock. Works completed by Burren farmers since 2010 include:

- 278ha of encroaching scrub (mainly hazel and blackthorn) removed
- 186km of (c.3m wide) pathways opened through scrub
- 121km of damaged stone wall repaired
- 792 new gates and 517 new water points installed
- 66km of vehicle access tracks repaired or installed