

North & West Clare

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Farm scheme's €23m dividend

Dan Danaher

A NORTH-Clare-led agri-environment scheme has generated €23 million for the local economy, according to new figures provided for the Burren Programme Steering Group.

Payments totalling €9.4 million has been remitted to 328 Burren farmers for environmental farming since 2010, with an average direct results-based payment of €2,613 in 2019.

With a focus turning to sustainable environmentally farming, the Burren Programme can point to a number of relevant and topical achievements.

It has helped to deliver a range of environmental, social and economic benefits for farmers,

the local community and wider society.

It has ensured the continued use and viability of Burren farms by funding land access improvements, water infrastructure and scrub clearance.

At least €33 million worth of landscape and biodiversity improvements have been completed in the Burren since 2010 thanks to the scheme.

More than 23,000 hectares of scrub has been removed from 328 farms, providing space for rare flowers, such as orchids and gentians to flourish.

Significant water improvements have also been achieved by reducing point-source pollution from participating farms.

The programme supports an average of 20 local jobs annually

for Burren businesses, contractors and crafts people, making roadways, rebuilding walls and making gates.

In total, more than 130,000 metres of fallen dry stone walls have been repaired, while 199 traditional Burren Gates have been installed.

Arising from the success of the BurrenLIFE project, the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) was launched in 2010 by its funders, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the NPWS of the Dept. of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The BFCP ran from 2010 to 2015. It worked with 160 farmers on 15,000 hectares of prime Burren habitat, built directly on the lessons learned during

BurrenLIFE and worked in a very creative way to support and incentivise farmers to maintain and enhance the habitats of the Burren.

The programme effectively tackled many of the issues identified in the original research project over a decade previously. Having won a diploma award from the Council of Europe in 2014, the state signed up to an agreement to keep the Burren in pristine condition.

The Burren Programme, started in 2016 with 200 farmers, and has now grown to 328 farmers, is a natural progression of the BFCP and will continue to work closely with farmers, advisors and the EU, DAFM and NPWS to implement solutions to help manage and protect the Burren.

Burren farmer, Michael Davoren stressed if the Burren Programme ceased, it would arguably make farming unviable in many cases.

Mr Davoren recalled a study completed by Dr Brendan Dufford as part of his PhD on the impact of farming on the Burren flora showed if farming ceased, the Burren could effectively disappear through a proliferation of rank grass and scrub over a 20-year period.

Armed with this extensive research, a local committee looked for funding to devise solutions to the issues raised by this study, which resulted in approval of €2.3 million.

For the first time ever, a group of Burren farmers worked as equal partners with two govern-

ment departments – National Parks and Wildlife and the Department of Agriculture, which is still operating effectively today.

Parts of the Burren were being overtaken and overgrazed so individual plans were drawn up and approved by Burren Life for farmers to operate environmental farming that has actually protected and fostered the unique flora and fauna.

Rebuilding old walls and providing agricultural roads up the side of mountains, farmers were able to keep cattle in the remote upland areas of farms.

The more fields were properly grazed, the more flora and flowers grew, which was a double victory for the farmer and the environment.

For the first time ever, an en-

vironmental scheme could be scored on its delivery on what farmers achieved over a five-year period, which has formed the blueprint for other environmental schemes in Ireland and Europe.

The Carron farmer explained rank grass blocks the light for any of the rare Burren flowers if it is not grazed off properly.

If a hazel nut gets blown into the rank grass it makes an ideal bed for a hazel tree, which will stop all the light, fostering moss growth.

Satellite imaging has shown scrub increases by about 7% in the Burren every year. However, the work of Burren farmers clearing scrub ensures the overall amount remains static.

In addition to a ban on all arti-

ficial fertiliser on the mountain, the Burren Programme funds the protection of springs by fencing off particular areas or providing a borehole or putting in a solar pump to supply the water to where it is needed.

When cattle are fed a special Burren ration it creates a craving in their rumen to consume roughage and fulfil this desire by grazing the rank grass.

Up to 70 contractors and self-employed people get regular employment cutting scrub and rebuilding stone walls.

Some tradesmen such as Padraig Howley in Kilfenora make Burren gates – an old fashioned renowned gate created by blacksmiths. These gates are funded by the Burren Programme to keep this old tradition alive.

Lisdoon people have say on park project

AN AMBITIOUS reimagining of the North Clare Sports and Amenity Park could see the popular facility transformed.

Since 2020, there has been intensive collaborative work involving local schools, artists, clubs, businesses and organisations in the community and local catchment area in creating a new vision for the amenity.

Brian Gaynor of Green Pine Consultants presented the initial draft plans to the North Clare Community and stakeholders this week, via Zoom.

"We feel these themes will be a very special development for the community of North Clare and our local areas with particular benefit in tourism, education, cultural/heritage and sports fields," said Lisdoonvarna Fáilte Director, Councillor Joe Garrihy.

"The collective and shared commitment of our groups align very much with the concept and proposal under development and we are delighted to share the planning stages with the community now at this early stage for comment, observation and input," he added.

Significant funding support to the tune of €210,000 has been secured towards delivering this project with a number of other submissions made to various funding streams to add to the overall pot.

Lisdoonvarna Fáilte is convening a steering group to oversee the project and will be running a 300 club draw over the period of May to September to secure local match funding. This will enable the best possible specification and see the overall project delivered.

Full details of the fundraising initiative and timelines will be announced in the next week.

The presentation is available at Lisdoonvarnafailte.ie and suggestions and ideas are welcome.



Councillor Joe Garrihy.



John Gilmarin, Head Chef, Glas Restaurant at Hotel Doolin, Tina O'Dwyer from The Tourism Space and Michael O'Connell, lobster fisherman, Liscannor, promoting the Burren Slow Food festival which is to be held virtually this year and begins this Friday.

Slow Food Festival to celebrate the fertile rock of Clare's Burren

Fiona McGarry

A CELEBRATION of the rich food culture of the fertile rock of North Clare's limestone landscape will be the focus of this year's Burren Slow food Festival.

The virtual event which begins this Thursday, April 29, will see producers and chefs come together in a series of online pairings with events streamed online up to May 5 at 7pm and hosted by Tina O'Dwyer of The Tourism Space.

Over the course of the festival, viewers will have the opportunity to see the region's spectacular landscapes, as the events will be hosted by different members of the Burren Ecotourism network in their own home venue.

Festival regular John McKenna of McKenna Guides, will set the scene with a short introduction, which will be followed by lively discussions between producers and chefs, along with food tastings.

Each event will be wrapped up with traditional Irish music performed by some of the Burren's finest local musicians.

Geologist Eamon Doyle from the Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark will also feature, providing an insight into the fertile landscape of the Burren which has long been known for its quality of beef and lamb, thanks to a unique and ancient system of farming.

Set up by Birgitta Curtin of the Burren Smokehouse over 15 years ago, the Burren Slow Food

Festival is a platform to promote the best of the Burren's produce, recognised as some of the finest in Ireland and internationally.

"This year we will showcase the rich flavour of the local produce, brought to life by the people who have nurtured and enriched the Burren; the food producers, farmers, distillers and chefs," she said.

For the theme of this year's festival, inspiration has been drawn from the deep roots of food production in the Burren area which dates back to the 12th century and the Cistercian Monks at Cormroe Abbey, Santa Maria de Petra Fertis, which translates as the Fertile Rock.

"We feel particularly proud of the Burren Food story as it is very well depicted on the excel-

lent documentary The Burren, Heart of Stone on RTE 1," Birgitta added.

"The programme illustrates that the earliest farmers in Ireland can be traced back to the Burren."

Each of this year's foodie pairings had been chosen due to their strong connections, whether it is a 40-year working relationship like that between Gregan's Castle Hotel and the Burren Smokehouse; or a bond between cheese producer Burren Gold and Caherconnell Farm, who supplies the milk.

Other pairings include chef John Gilmarin from Hotel Doolin and Michael O'Connell, lobster fisherman; Bronagh O'Rourke from Burren Premium Beef and Tomas Walsh from Doolin

Inn; Viv Kelly, Chef from Fiddle & Bow and Ciara O'Halloran from Flaggly Shore Oysters; chef Ryan Fitzpatrick and Siobhán Ní Gharbhith; and Brewer Peter Curtin from the Roadside Tavern and Noel O'Loughlin from Burren Distillers.

A 45-minute radio documentary programme on the event was broadcast on Clare FM last week, as part of the Atlantic Tales series, produced by Pat Flynn.

The event will be available on the VisittheBurren Facebook page up to May 5.

It will be available on YouTube and on Burren.ie, after the event has taken place. The Burren Slow Food Festival is sponsored by Calor Bio LPG with support from the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

Plan to develop tourism potential of estuary progresses

COMMUNITIES and businesses on the Shannon Estuary Way are to benefit from a year-long destination development programme to boost economic growth on this newly-launched tourist route.

Located off the Wild Atlantic Way, the Shannon Estuary Way was developed by Fáilte Ireland, together with Clare and Limerick City & County Councils, and is set to become a key tourist attraction for the Mid-West Region.

The route is 207km in length and is the first in a series of Wild Atlantic Way looped drives aimed at increasing visitor 'dwell time' and spend in local communities.

The drive showcases the spectacular stretch of water, where the Shannon, meets the Atlantic Ocean and offers a beautiful drive along the scenic and unspoiled coastlines of Limerick and Clare, taking visitors through the picturesque towns and villages, heritage sites and many visitor attractions within the route.

The route was officially launched in March 2019, following a community-led project supported by Clare County Council, Limerick City and County Council, West Limerick Resources, Clare Local Development Company and Fáilte Ireland.

The initial development programme facilitated communities on both sides of the Shannon Estuary to come together to create a vision for the new route and

harvest the rich heritage and history in each of the areas, under the concept of 'big skies and sheltered waters'.

This new destination development project represents the second phase of development for the Shannon Estuary Way and is specifically designed to support the local communities in leveraging the route to deliver positive economic benefits for their local communities and to position the drive as a key tourist offering in the Mid-West.

The project is a joint initiative between West Limerick Resources and Clare Local Development Company and has been funded through the LEADER programme.

The programme is being delivered by leading Irish tourism consultants, The Tourism Space, who also facilitated phase one of the training programme in 2019.

Tourism Space MD Tina O'Dwyer said, "This programme is designed to bring solid, tangible benefits to both businesses and communities along The Shannon Estuary Way."

The programme is scheduled to begin in early May. Local businesses and communities located on the Shannon Estuary Way are encouraged to participate.

For further information on this training programme contact the Tourism Space at tina@thetourismspace.com.

THANK YOU

Tony, Geraldine Neylon and family, Kilmurry McMahon wish to thank most sincerely all our customers who supported the shop over the last 63 years. We are most grateful for your loyalty and friendship. We also wish to thank you for all the good wishes, cards, Mass bouquets, phonecalls, flowers and gifts which we received and for taking part in the "Drive By" on the evening of our retirement. We were very touched by your generosity and kindness and appreciate it very much. Mass will be offered for your intentions.

Mile Buiochas

ENTERPRISING YOUNG WOMEN REWARDED



Head of Enterprise at the Clare Local Enterprise Office, Padraig McElwee visited schools in the north and west of the county to present student enterprise awards for the winning companies in three age categories. Above left, overall senior winners were 'Portable Pouches' the brainchild of Aoibhnaid O'Dea and Roisin Montgomery, St Joseph's, Spanish Point. Above right, Mr McElwee, presenting intermediate winner Mae Kivlehan of 'Tried and Tested' and junior winners Niamh Lavender-Duncan and Sadie O'Brien of 'The Art Company' with their awards at Scoil Mhuire Ennistymon. The winning teams will represent Clare at this year's Student Enterprise Programme national finals. Given the current restrictions the final will take place virtually on May 14.

Photographs by Arthur Ellis

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