

The voice on the ground

A Survey of the needs of Burren Farm Families

**Commissioned by Burrenbeo Trust Limited
in association with the Burren Irish Farmers Association**

Supported by The Heritage Council

**by
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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction and Background to the Survey	4
2.	Findings of the Survey	8
2.1.	Profile of the families surveyed	8
2.2.	Farming concerns past, present and future	14
2.3.	Knowledge of the Burren	17
2.4.	The role of farming in the Burren	19
2.5.	Hearing the voices of farmers and farm families	22
2.6.	Management of the Burren	23
3.	Conclusions	33
4.	A Possible Agenda	37

1. Introduction and Background to the Survey

Commissioned by Burrenbeo Trust Limited in association with the Burren Irish Farmers Association

1.1. The Burren

The Burren, (in Irish Boireann meaning Stony Place) is a huge expanse of limestone grassland and pavement on the mid-western coast of Ireland. Most people associate the Burren with the north-west part of County Clare. In reality limestone outcrops also occur in the adjoining Co. Galway. It is one of the most extensive karst landscapes in Europe. It is estimated that the Burren extends over 720 km² rising from sea level to a maximum height of 330m. The Burren is bounded by Galway Bay to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The southern limit is usually defined by the expanse of shale rock running from Doolin in the south west, looping around Lisdoonvarna and onward to Corofin via Kilfenora. The eastern limit of the Burren is more difficult to define as the terraced hills give way to the vast expanses of low-lying pavement known as the 'Gort lowlands' which stretch as far east as Gort, and as far north as Ardrahan and beyond, in Co. Galway. A small portion (15 km²) of the Clare Burren has been designated as the Burren National Park and two small nature reserves are also found in the area.

The Burren is a predominantly rural landscape. All of the Burren's main towns and villages lie along the northern (Ballyvaughan, Kinvara) or western (Fanore, Doolin) seashore, or, more commonly, along the shale interface to the south of the region (Lisdoonvarna, Kilfenora, Kilnaboy, and Corofin). The only exceptions are Carran, Boston and Tubber small farming communities located in the central Burren.

1.2. Burrenbeo Trust and Burren IFA- the Commissioning Organisations

1.2.1 Burrenbeo Trust Ltd

Burrenbeo Trust Ltd was established in 2005 as an independent, registered charity. The core objective of Burrenbeo is to create a greater appreciation of the Burren as a living landscape of international importance, to engage in research and dissemination of information, and to promote the holistic and self-sustaining conservation and development of the Burren. Burrenbeo Trust Ltd. built on the work of Burrenbeo Teoranta which was founded in January 2002 as an information and education provider for the Burren. Since its foundation, the work of Burrenbeo Teoranta and subsequently Burrenbeo Trust Limited has included:

- the development of the portal website for the Burren: www.burrenbeo.com
- the production of an award winning CD ROM 'Images of the fertile rock'
- the production of multilingual fact-sheets
- the opening of a free information centre in Kinvara
- the development of the 'Eco-Beo – My Burren Heritage' educational programme for Burren schools from which hundreds of young Burren experts have already graduated.

In order to continue this very necessary work as an independent organisation and build a stronger foundation for the future, Burrenbeo Trust has also conducted research and advanced proposals for a

more strategic and sustainable approach to the management of the Burren. Burrenbeo is a membership-based organisation, with membership open to all those who have an interest in supporting the conservation of the unique Burren landscape.

1.2.2 The Burren Irish Farmers Association (IFA) Group

The Burren IFA was established in 1995 as the local branch of the national Irish Farmers Association. It was established to represent the unique interests of Burren farmers at a national level. The group functions as the main representative structure for farmers in the Burren. Its executive committee has farmer representatives from across the Co Clare Burren area. This group played a key role in the negotiation of the Burren agreement as part of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) in 1995, and continues to represent the interests of agriculture in the area.

1.3. The Background and Objectives of the Research

1.3.1 The Background to the Research

Given that farmers own and manage the majority of land in the Burren, Burrenbeo Trust are very clear that farmers have a critical role to play in the conservation of the Burren. In practice however, many of the decisions in relation to the Burren have been taken at a distance from the area and its farmers. Burrenbeo Trust believed that it was time to actively seek out the voices of the farming community. They enlisted the support of the Burren IFA to work with them and develop the research objectives collectively. Funding for the study was provided by The Heritage Council. Once the funding was in place Burrenbeo recruited the services of a researcher to develop, pilot and analyse the findings of the survey. The researcher (Dr. Kathy Walsh) was officially appointed in January 2009.

1.3.2. The Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research was to explore Burren farm families' views on: the role of farming in the Burren; the Burren in general and the level of interest that exists among the families in becoming more actively involved in shaping the future of the Burren.

The key objectives of the research were:

- To identify the vision farm families have for the Burren;
- To explore farm families views on the role of farming in the Burren;
- To assess the level of interest among Burren farm families in becoming more actively involved in shaping the future of the area.

1.4. The Research Methodology

111 farm households were surveyed.

The research had two distinct parts.

The first part was the survey of a sample of farm households from across the Burren. The survey was undertaken through the completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered by an interviewer, in the home of the farm family. The questions included in the questionnaire were identified and agreed by the Researcher and members of Burrenbeo Trust, the Burren IFA and other people involved in farming and the Burren. The questionnaire was divided into five parts:

- Data to profile the types of farm households surveyed;
- Information on the farm and farming practices;
- Views on farming in the Burren;
- Wider management of the Burren;
- A measure of the respondent's attitudes to the Burren and its management.

The questionnaire included open and closed questions with both qualitative and quantitative answers. The survey administrators were recruited through an interview process, with a total of four administrators recruited and provided with a half day training. The survey area was divided into four areas, the West, Central, East and Galway Burren. Each administrator was given responsibility for a particular geographical area as follows: Brigid Barry (the West Burren), Hugo Deasy (the Central Burren), Declan Peelo (the East Burren) and Catherine Seale (the Galway Burren).

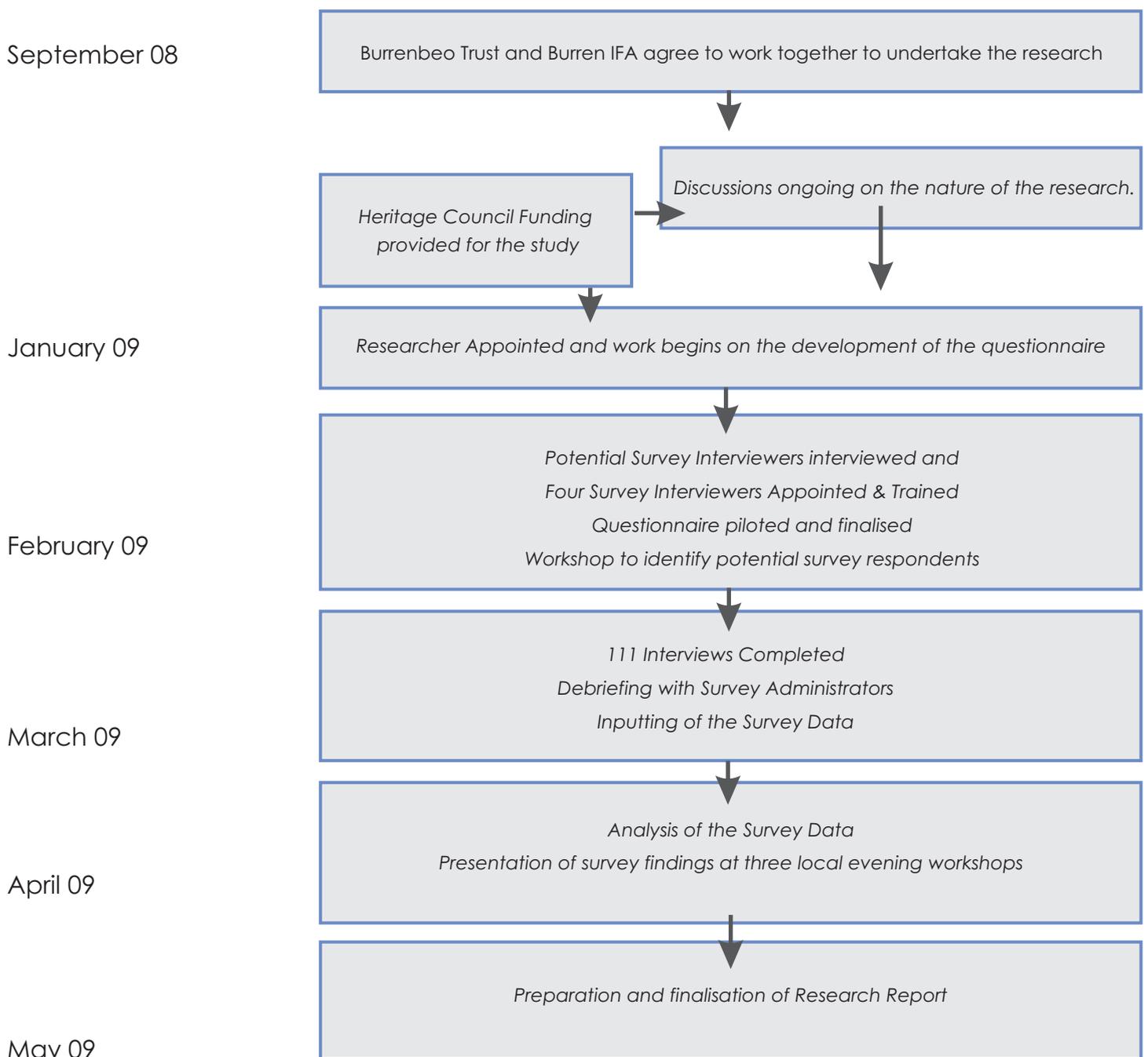
A number of key local farmers were identified in each area and these individuals assisted the survey administrators to identify an initial batch of potentially suitable survey respondents. The questionnaire was piloted with two different farm household types to assess its comprehensibility and suitability for use with different household types. The survey was finalised following the experience of the piloting. Survey respondents were selected from across the area, across the spread of ages, across the spread of household types (e.g. single person households, two person households, families with young children, families with older children, etc), across households where farming is a full time occupations and households where farming is part-time, across the spread of farm sizes, the inclusion of IFA members and supporters and non IFA Members and non –supporters (26 % of the survey respondents were not members of the IFA). See Table 1.1 for an overview of the location of the various survey respondents and Figure 1.1 for an outline of the different elements and timeframes for the research.

Table 1.1: The Spread of Survey Responses Across the Study Area

Area	No of Questionnaires	No of Returns per District Electoral Division (DED)
1. West Burren	28(25%)	Dereen (5), Gleninagh (2), Lisdoonvarna (1), Mountelva (4), Cloughan (1), Kilfenora (8), Killiagh (5) & Lurraga(2)
2. Central Burren	30(27%)	Abbey (2), Carran (6), Castletown (4), Drumcreehy (8), Noughaval (2), Oughthamama (4) & Rathborney(4)
3. East Burren	31(28%)	Ballyeighter (2), Boston (7), Corrofin (6), Glenroe (7), Killinaboy (4), Muckanagh (2), Ruan (1) & Crusheen(2)
4. Galway Burren	22(20%)	Beagh (1), Cahermore (1), Castletaylor (2), Dorus (2), Drumacoo (1), Kileenavarra (1), Kilinny (6), Kiltartan (2) & Kinvara (6)

The second part of the research took the form of consultation meetings around the Burren to discuss the findings emerging from the research. The meetings were held in the evening in three locations (Lisdoonvarna, Carran and Tubber) in late April 2009. The purpose of these meetings was to give those who participated in the research and others an opportunity to shape and prioritise the issues emerging from the survey. The farm families who participated in the research were invited to attend, as indeed were any other farmers in the area. A total of 85 individuals attended the consultations. These consultations all followed a similar format with brief introduction and welcome, a presentation on the key findings emerging from the research and a discussion of these findings in smaller groups, with feedback to the larger group at the end of the evening. The participants at the evening consultations endorsed the findings emerging from the survey, while also adding weight and detailed examples of the issues in practice.

Figure 1.1 An Outline of the Research Process and Timing



2. The Findings of the Survey

'Farming is the Burren, it would not exist without farming, without farming there is no Burren'
A Survey Respondent

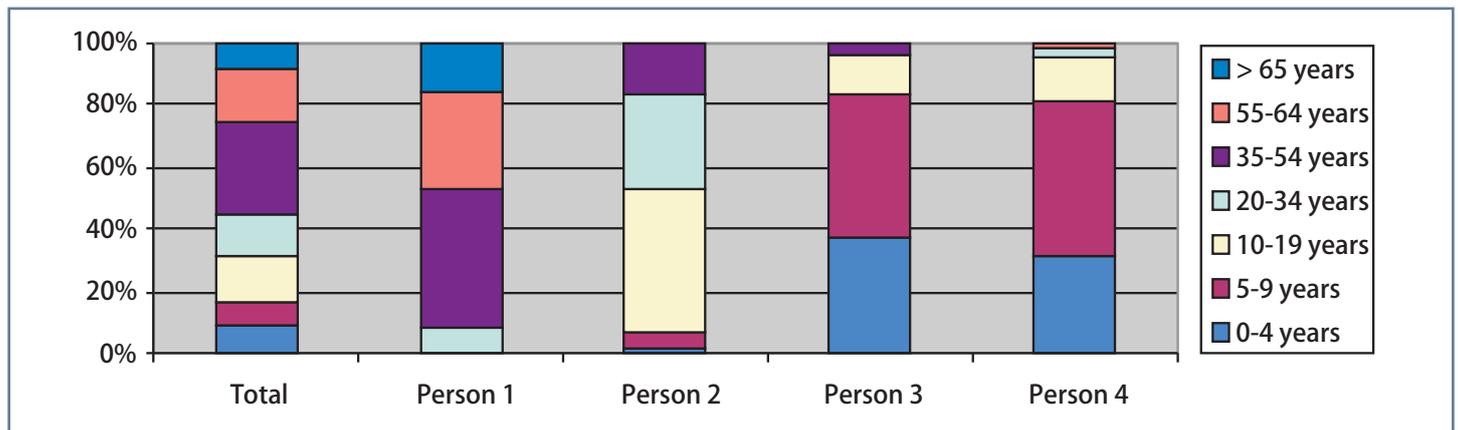
2.1. The Sample Profile

This section provides details on the number and nature of the families and farms surveyed.

2.1.1. A Profile of the Families Surveyed

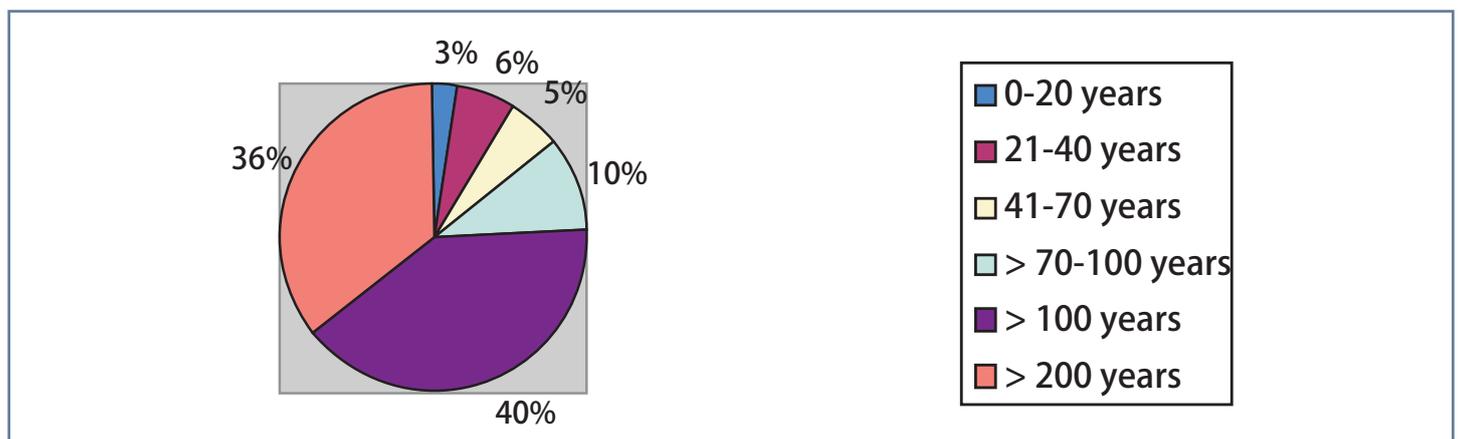
A total of 111 farm households were surveyed, representing a total of 267 individuals: 109 men, 101 women, 28 boys and 29 girls. Figure 2.1 provides a profile of the ages of the various survey respondents.

Figure 2.1. A Profile of the Ages of the Survey Respondents



The majority (75%) of farm families surveyed were found to be 'steeped' in the farming traditions of the Burren having been involved in farming in the Burren for more than 100 years, while 36% of the farm families had been involved in farming in the area for more than 200 years. See Figure 2.2 for details

Figure 2.2. Length of time farming in the Burren



In 75% of the farm families surveyed there was one person responsible for the management of the farm. 93 of these individuals were employed full-time on the farm, 10 were part-time, while 8 indicated that although retired they were still involved in decision making on the farm. 85 % of these individuals were experienced farm managers having been responsible for farm management for over 10 years, while 64% were responsible for farm management for more than 20 years. There were few individuals (12) with less than 10 years of farm management experience. 30 of these individuals (mainly the older generation) completed their formal education at primary school level, 53 left on or before junior certificate, while 23 individuals mainly the younger generation had completed some form of third level course. See Table 2.1 for details.

Table 2.1. Highest level of education completed by the primary survey respondent

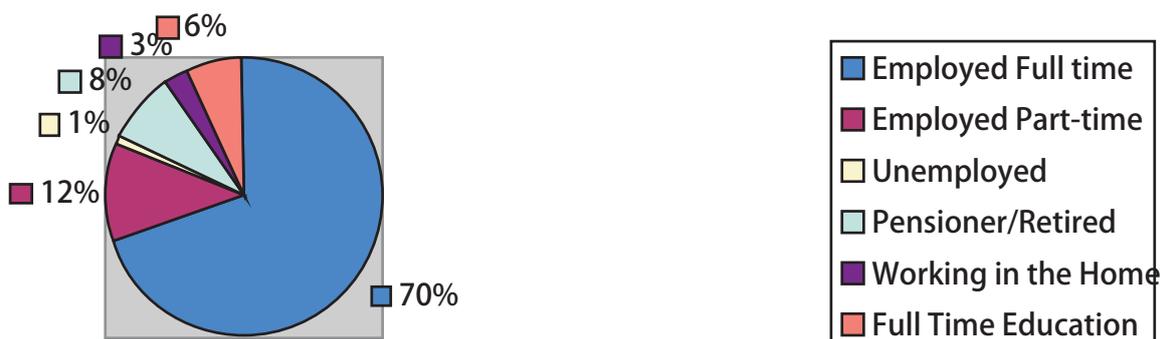
Level of Education	No of individuals
Primary school	30
Left before Inter/Junior Cert	17
Junior/Inter Cert	16
Leaving Cert	22
Third level	23
Other	3
Total	111

On about a quarter of the farms surveyed there was a second person involved in farm management. Almost three quarters (74%) of these individuals had been responsible for the management of a farm for more than 15 years. This analysis suggests that that the majority of the farms surveyed were managed by experienced older farmers.

Employment Status and Income Sources

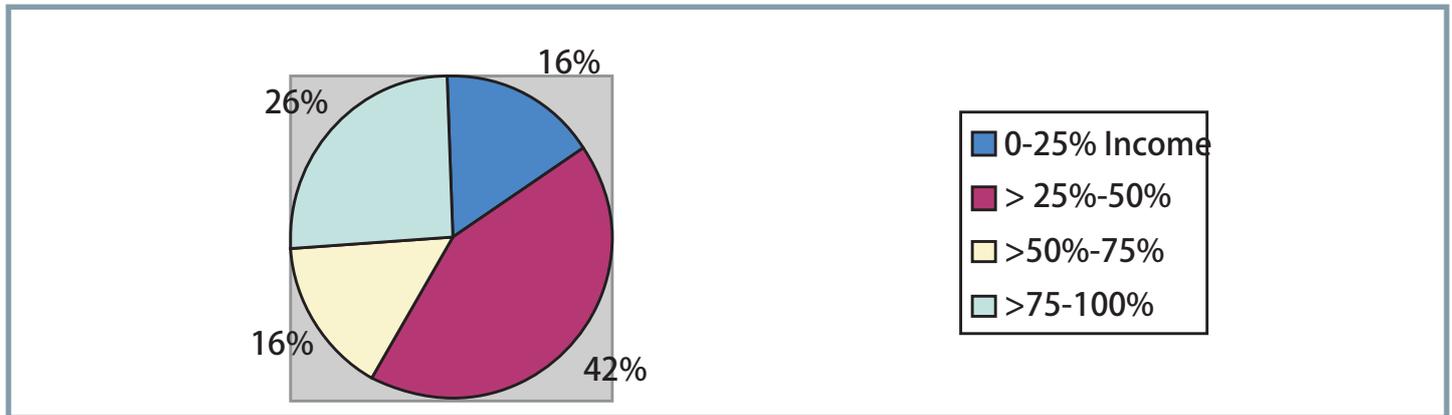
63% (133) of the individuals of working age (18 years or over) indicated that they were in full-time employment. 22% indicated that they were in part-time employment. See Figure 2.3 for details of the employment status of the households surveyed where they were provided.

Figure 2.3 The Employment Status of the Household Members Surveyed



102 individuals were involved on a full-time basis in farming, while 50 individuals were involved in farming on a part-time basis (at least 10 or more hours a week). This suggests that about 43% of the individual members of the farm families' survey had limited or indeed no involvement in farming activities. This figure tallies with the finding that 41% of the farm households surveyed derived their full income from farming, while a further 41% of the households derive 50% or more of their household income from other sources. See Figure 2.4 for details

Figure 2.4 An Analysis of the % of Household Income Derived From Farming



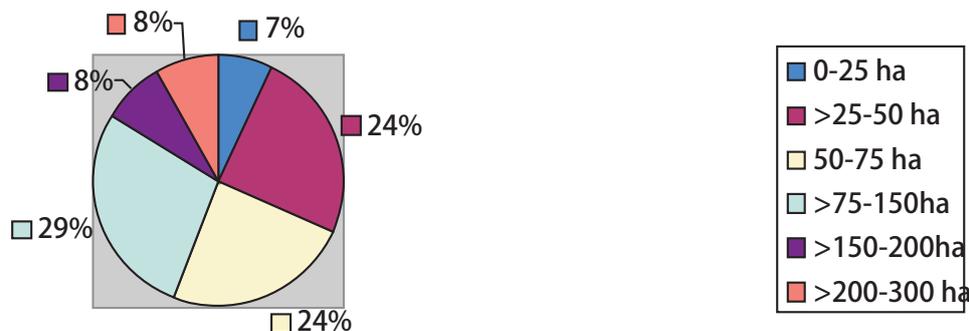
This ties in with the finding that at least 67 individual household members had at the time of the survey some form of off-farm employment. The most popular types of off-farm employment included Tourism and Hospitality (11), Construction (7), Education (7), Manufacturing (5), Transport, Storage and Communications (4), Public Administration (4) Health and Social Work (3), Wholesale and Retail (3), Electricity, Gas and Water Supply (2) and Forestry and Fishing (2). The majority of individuals have relatively short travel distances to work, although 15 individuals do travel more than 20 miles one way to access their work and 3 of these travel more than 70 miles (one way) to work.

Only 16 (14%) of the households surveyed had other businesses based on their farm, while just four households had more than one business based on the farm. A number of these businesses were tourism related (B&B (5), Self catering cottages and hostel (4)), a number were agriculture-related (5) (contracting mainly), while other enterprises identified included retail, childcare and walling

2.1.2. A Profile of the Farms Surveyed

The farms surveyed ranged in size from less than 25 ha to over 300 ha (1ha = 2.42 acres). The average size of the farms surveyed was between 50 and 75 ha. The spread of farms sizes surveyed was broadly reflective of the spread of farm sizes on the Burren although farm sizes tend to be larger than national average (The Teagasc National Farm Survey (2002) found that the average national farm size was 32 hectares with almost 50% of farms less than 20 hectares). See Figure 2.5 for details of an analysis of the farms sizes included in the survey.

Figure 2.5. An Analysis of the Farms Sizes included in the Survey



The majority of the farm families surveyed owned the land they farm, only three families rented land to others, while 45 (40.5%) of the farm families were leasing and/or renting land from others. The total amount of land being rented from others was relatively small and 68% of those who were doing so were renting/leasing less than 25ha. These figures do however raise the question of from whom farmers are renting the land? Anecdotal evidence would suggest that farmers are largely renting from either retired farmers or people who own land in the Burren but who for various reasons are currently not farming it. The survey also found that 92 (83%) of the farms surveyed had access to winterage on the Burren, see Table 2.2 for details.

Table 2.2. A Profile of the Amount of Land Owned, Rented and the Amount of winterage the farms surveyed had access to.

No of Ha of	No of Farms who Own Land	No of Farms who rent land to others	No of Farms who lease/rent land	No of farms who have access to Winterage
0-25	9	1	31	36
>25-50	36	1	7	22
>50-75	22	1	3	8
>75-100	15		1	9
>100-150	10		2	9
>150-200	8		1	3
>200-300	3			3
>300	3			2
Total	106	3	45	92

The majority of the farms surveyed were involved in more than one enterprise and as such respondents generally gave multiple answers to this question. The most popular enterprises were beef-suckler and cattle production. The next most popular enterprise was sheep-farming. See Table 2.3 for an analysis of the types of farm enterprises.

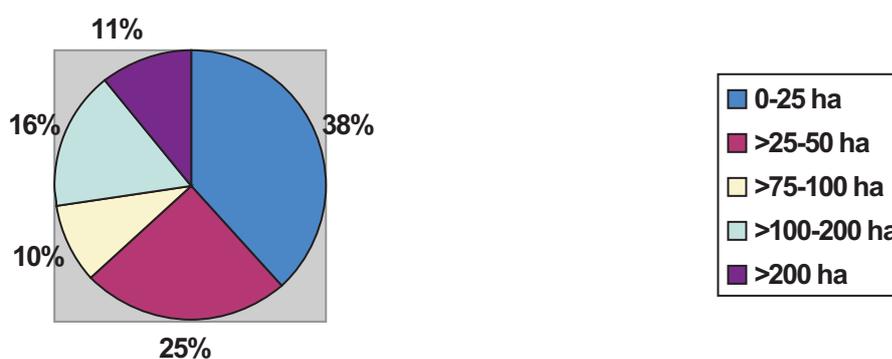
Table 2.3 An Analysis of the Types of Farm Enterprise the Farms Surveyed were involved in

Type of Farm Enterprise	No of Farms (Multiple answers were possible)	% of Survey Sample engaged in the particular enterprise
Beef (suckler and cattle)	99	90
Beef (dry only)	11	10
Sheep	38	34
Equine (horses, ponies, donkeys)	16	14
Dairy	13	12
Mixed Farming	11	10
Tillage	9	8
Organics	7	6
Other (Forestry, Goats, Potatoes)	3	3

2.1.3. The Extent of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) Designations

92 (83%) of the farms surveyed had land designated under the EU Habitats Directive as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The majority of farms had less than 25 ha designated. See Figure 2.6 for details of how much land the farms surveyed had designated as part of an SAC.

Figure 2.8. How Much Land is Designated as part of an SAC



2.1.4. Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS)

79% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'REPS has had a positive impact in protecting the Burren's heritage' some went on to qualify this statement further stating that 'REPS was a good income supplement' and that 'it tidied up the place'.

91 of survey respondents were in REPS. 71 of these had been in REPS for more than five years, while 45 (49%) had been in REPS for more than ten years. Only 20 (22%) of the respondents had been in REPS for less than five years and only 4 (4%) had been in REPS for less than a year. When the farms that were not in

REPs were asked why they were not they gave a variety of answers. Their answers can be grouped under a number of headings including a concern about the amount of red tape and restrictions associated with the scheme, a general lack of interest, the restrictions associated with renting and leasing land and an aspiration to enter in due course. Table 2.4 provides a sample of the responses, grouped under a number of different themes.

Table 2.4 Responses to the Question: Why are you not in REPS?

Theme of Comments	Comments
Red Tape/Restrictions	<p>'Don't believe in the amount of red tape',</p> <p>'Very badly policed and over policed when they do, do something'.</p> <p>'Rules don't always make sense - such as using barbwire fences instead of using traditional methods e.g. hazel fencing.'</p> <p>'Delayed going in because of a fear of the restrictions it imposes',</p> <p>'Too much bother, doesn't suit',</p> <p>'Too much hassle with it - don't have the time',</p> <p>'Too many restrictions',</p> <p>'too much restriction on being allowed to farm intensively for profit'</p>
Restricted for people who rent land	<p>'because of renting the land on a year to year basis it doesn't work out',</p> <p>'If letting land, not eligible'</p>
No Interest	<p>'Couldn't be listening to people',</p> <p>'Didn't suit',</p> <p>'It's not worth it'</p> <p>'No interest' (3)</p>
Planning to enter	<p>'Delayed going into REPS in order to get key work done beforehand',</p> <p>'Due to enter soon'</p>
Other	<p>'Got plan drawn up but felt that wasn't geared for it, put up slatted shed though'</p> <p>'Was in REPs and had dairy they wanted a tank and it was so expensive and not worth it'</p> <p>'Wouldn't have qualified because of slurry storage until now',</p> <p>'Lack wintering facilities'</p> <p>'Would need to do a lot of wall maintenance'</p>

2.2. Farming concerns past, present and future

2.2.1. The most significant change/s made on the farm in the last 10 years

Survey respondents were asked to identify the most significant change they had made to their farming practice in the last 10 years. Most respondents identified more than one change. The most frequently identified changes were a change in farm enterprise and the building of slatted sheds. At least 29 survey respondents had made changes in their farming enterprises. These changes included getting out of:

- 'dairy and into full time suckler production'(8)
- 'dairy' (4)
- 'beef and into dairy
- 'beef into full time suckler production',
- 'sheep'(7)
- 'dairy into bullocks'
- 'sucklers' (2)
- 'organic back to conventional production'

The changes also included getting into a number of new enterprises as follows:

- 'forestry'
- 'goats and sheep
- 'organic' (2)
- 'tillage'
- 'market gardening'

28% survey respondents identified the building of a slatted shed/s to house and over winter stock as one of the most significant changes that they had made. 22 respondents reported that the most significant changes they had made related to expansion, in many cases this involved increasing stocking level (16 respondents), for others it involved land purchase (6) and/or land reclamation (4) while at least two individuals had concentrated on particular cattle breeds. Two individuals rented more land, while others expanded their dairy production (through changes to the milking parlor and/or the purchase of more milk quota). In contrast, 22 survey respondents reported that they had scaled-back their production, the majority reduced their stocking levels (17), while the others decreased the amount of land they farmed.

13 respondents identified as significant the construction of new farm sheds, tanks and access roadways and walls. 11 respondents also identified their entrance into REPS as significant. Interestingly 9 respondents believed that no significant changes had taken place, while three, perhaps not surprisingly identified their retirement as the most significant change. Other changes identified as significant by survey respondents included reductions in the levels of inputs (fertilizers in particular), the introduction of bagged silage (4), increased levels of meal-feeding and the introduction of different grazing systems.

2.2.2. The Drivers of the Changes (over the last 10 years)

Among the key drivers of change identified by the survey respondents were:

- a need to reduce labour inputs;
- ill health/age;
- the availability of grant-funding;
- a desire to increase profitability.

One of the popular drivers of the changes made by farmers on their farms was the need to reduce the amount of labour required and thus make the farm easier to manage, particularly in the winter (40 respondents). At least 13 respondents specifically cited their age and or ill health as the reason for wanting to reduce their labour input. Other key drivers of change included the availability of grant funding for the construction of slatted sheds, and a commonly held view that keeping animals out in the winter where sufficient winterage was not available was ruining the land. A number of respondents commented that their land holding was too small to allow for expansion and that the construction of the sheds had allowed them to increase their stocking levels. The overwintering of cattle indoors was also a requirement of participation in REPS in some cases, with a number of farmers (15 respondents) building their sheds to enable their entry into REPS and their subsequent draw-down of grant payments. 25 respondent's changes were driven by a desire to increase the farm income, while others (4) were keen to reduce both their costs and their inputs. Three made the changes after inheriting the farm, while one or two made the changes following '*BSE having cleaned them out*'

2.2.3. Current Concerns

Survey respondents were asked to identify their main concerns as Burren Farmers. Among the most commonly cited concerns (54 mentions) were the various restrictions farmers had to comply with. Specific restrictions identified included:

- levels of manure/slurry that can be spread and the timing of the spreading;
- those imposed by the National Parks and Wildlife Services
- land reclamation work;
- the timing of hedge cutting as specified by the legislation;
- the methods that can be used to control scrub - under REPs you cannot spray herbicide;
- those associated with the SAC designation (including stocking and grazing levels);
- various EU regulations;
- use of the winterage;
- stocking levels and cattle numbers in REPs'.

89% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement that '*The Burren is a landscape of international significance that needs to be conserved*'

The second most commonly identified concern (identified 34 times) was scrub infestation and the fear that the scrub will be allowed to take over the Burren due to low stocking levels. Respondents also had concerns in relation to profitability (identified 17 times) and the future of farming (identified 13 times). The comments made by the respondents provide very vivid illustrations of their concerns.

*'If profitability does not improve we will struggle to stay farming as a livelihood'
'Wonder about profitability of farming post grant funding'*

*'The price of cattle and sheep has dropped in real terms in the 20-30 years'
'The price of fertilizer and feed is too high'
'The price of milk isn't reflected in the cost/and the prices are falling'*

*'...Need protection for the Burren. After 2013 farm families will be wiped out without supports.
Unable to survive off the Burren'*

'Farmers should be paid/rewarded for keeping the land as it is'

*'It is hard to attract people to the area, very sparsely populated, especially as the school might be
closing down'*

*'Our greatest natural resource is our landscape - Environmentally – it needs to be protected. But the
Burren farms are different than conventional Irish farms. They need to be treated differently. We
need an overall plan for the Burren'*

Other concerns identified by survey respondents (identified 9 times) included the difficulties associated with getting planning permission for family members to build houses/homes on the farm and the difficulties associated with an older and aging farming population (identified 8 times).

The destruction of habitat and the need for enhanced levels of conservation of the heritage, flora and fauna and walls of the Burren were also identified by at least 13 survey respondents.

A least 8 respondents specifically singled out the control of goats as a concern. As one respondent described it *'The control of goats is a big problem in the Burren'*. Other concerns expressed by smaller numbers of respondents related to the unsuitability of some Burren land for slurry spreading and pollutions levels linked to the run-off from sheds. The issue of fly-tipping was also identified as was the absence of sufficient levels of grazing. Tourism and the issues of access to land and through land by visitors were also mentioned. One or two respondents also spoke very eloquently about their concerns about global warming and the implications of wetter warmer winters for farming in the Burren. A number of survey respondents were also concerned about the possibility of additional designations being introduced in the Burren and the additional restrictions that they might impose on farming. As one respondent said

*'I would hope that we will always be allowed to farm it and that they will not put more designations
on it'.*

2.2.4 What plans do you have for next 5-10 years?

*72% of the survey respondents indicated that they planned to continue
farming as they currently are*

Respondents were asked to comment on what plans they had for their farm for the next 5-10 years. They were given a number of options and then asked to qualify their answer. 80 respondents (72%) indicated

that they planned to continue as they currently are, although 11 respondents went on to further identify changes they were planning to make. 3 respondents indicated they were planning for extensive growth, five were planning to change their farming type, 10 were planning for succession, while two were planning to sell up/lease their farms.

2.2.5 Succession

70 (63%) of the farm households surveyed were able to identify a successor. Where the respondents did not indicate that they had a successor they were asked to foresee what they believed to be the future of the farm. Table 2.5 details the answers given.

Table 2.5 An Analysis of the Answers to the Question: Without a successor what do you foresee as the future of the farm?

The Different Options	No of Responses (% of responses)	Sample of explanations given for the various options
Don't know	15 (31%)	'It's a problem arising this generation' 'No clear ideas as of yet' 'Family have no interest' 'Single and too young to be that concerned'
Stay in the family	9 (18%)	'Difficult to know perhaps one of the kids' 'Division between family members'
Decide later	9 (18%)	'Family still young' 'Just took over the farm'
Land leased/rented	9(18%)	'Lease it when retiring' 'Short term going to lease, long term who knows' 'Son will work outside the farm and lease it'
Keep the Farm	5 (10%)	'Wish to see it farmed and not sold'
Farmed on part time basis	2 (5%)	'Potentially part time as there are 4 children'

2.3. Knowledge and Attitudes towards the Burren

96% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'It is a privilege to farm in the Burren'

2.3.1 Descriptions of the Burren

Survey respondents were asked for three words to describe the Burren. The majority of words (112 words/terms) used were positive or indeed descriptive (79 words/terms). There were few (12 words/

terms) negative terms used suggesting that Burren farm families are appreciative of the Burren and its landscape. Table 2.6 provides details of some of the most commonly occurring words/terms used to describe the Burren.

Table 2.6 An Analysis of the Most Popular types of words used to describe the Burren

Positive Words or Terms	Negative Words or Terms	Neither/Both Positive and Negative	Descriptive (32 words terms)
Beautiful (37)	Tough (3)	Unique Landscape/Unique farming area (30)	Rocky/Stony/Karst (11)
Healthy (6)	Bleak(2)	Scenic/Picturesque (13)	Lunar/Lava-like (4)
Natural Beauty (5)	Difficult (3)	Tourist attraction (7)	Bare/Barren (3)
Special (4)	Hard to farm (2)	Part of what we are (5)	Changing (2)
Lovely (4)	Nothing (1)	Home (4)	Ancient (2)
Nice (3)	Non profitable area (1)	Challenging (3)	Big (1)
A good place to live (3)	Wasteland (1)	Sensitive (2)	Colourful (1)
Fabulous (3)		Isolated (2)	Community (1)
Fantastic (3)		Robust (2)	Different (1)
Peaceful (3)		Vulnerable (1)	Hazel (1)

74 % of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'Farmers need to be prepared to farm for wildlife & conservation rather than commercial agricultural' (with some qualifications around the quality and nature of the land and the need to ensure farm viability)

2.3.2. Knowledge and sources of knowledge of the Burren

Survey respondents were collectively asked as a family to rate their knowledge of the archaeology, geology, plant life, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Burren. See Table 2.7 for details of how they rated their knowledge.

Table 2.7. An Analysis of the Survey Respondents Levels of Knowledge of different aspects of the Burren

Area of Interest	Would like to learn more	Very Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable	Adequate	Limited	Very Limited
Archaeology	80 (72%)	14 (13%)	31 (28%)	23 (21%)	23 (21%)	20 (18%)
Geology	71 (64%)	10 (9%)	22 (20%)	30 (27%)	20 (18%)	29 (26%)
Plant Life	80 (72%)	22 (20%)	33 (30%)	27 (24%)	20 (18%)	9 (8%)
Wildlife	87 (78%)	39 (36%)	36 (33%)	25 (23%)	5 (5%)	4 (4%)
Cultural Heritage	94 (85%)	34 (31%)	45 (41%)	20 (18%)	6 (5%)	6 (5%)

Survey respondents stated that they were most knowledgeable about the wildlife and cultural knowledge of the Burren and least knowledgeable about the plant life and geology. It was interesting therefore to note that when people were asked what they would like to learn more about the Burren, the most popularly cited subjects were again cultural heritage and wildlife. Survey respondents were also asked about where they got their knowledge of the Burren. The most frequently identified source of information was family and friends, with 49% identifying it as the most important source of knowledge. See Table 2.8 for details of other sources of knowledge and their relative importance. This finding suggests that there is scope for the provision of more information and knowledge about the Burren through walks and talks, schools programmes and through wider use of the media.

Table 2.8 Sources of Knowledge of the Burren

Source of Knowledge	No who identified source	Importance of Source
Family & Friends	91 (82%)	53 (49% ranked this the most important source)
Books	58 (53%)	9 (8.3% ranked this the most important source)
Attending Walks and Talks	57 (51%)	20 (19% ranked it the most important source)
Primary School	50 (45%)	9 (8% ranked this the most important source)
Local Newspapers	36 (32%)	1 (1% ranked this the most important source)
TV & Radio	37 (33%)	3 (3% ranked this the most important source)
Secondary School	32 (29%)	1 (1% ranked this the most important source)
Internet	9 (8%)	1 (1% ranked this the most important source)

2.4. The Role of Farming of the Burren in the future

98% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'Farming and Farmers are the key to the conservation of the unique flora, fauna and landscape of the Burren'

2.4.1 What Role could Farming play in the Burren?

'94% of the survey respondents said 'Yes -Farming has a role of play in the long term future of the Burren'

Survey respondents outlined the different role farming plays and could play in the future of the Burren. Among the different roles identified for farmers and farming included: custodians, guardians and protectors of the land. As some survey respondents put it:

'Farming has maintained the Burren for the last 2000 years and farmers should be allowed to manage it without outside interferences'

'It has been farmed for 1000 years and if it is to be preserved this needs to be continued'

'There is a farming culture that is rich and it is important not to lose it'

Significant numbers (35%) of survey respondents referred to the symbiotic and complementary relationship between farming and the Burren, and the interaction between farming and the landscape.

'Farming is the Burren, it would not exist without farming, without farming there is no Burren'

'Farming has shaped the character and landscape'

Farming was specifically identified by at least 29 respondents as having a particular role in ensuring that scrub does not over run the Burren.

'If you do not farm the Burren the scrub will take over'

'Farmers need to work the land, otherwise it becomes a scrub'

In a number of cases (15 respondents) the statements about the importance of farming to the Burren were qualified by identifying particular types of farming as more relevant than others. According to a number of respondents it was important that the land was not overgrazed and that good use was made of the winterage grazing.

'A certain type of farming has a role, with prices guaranteed for quality Burren lamb, etc '

'Burren farming is the old fashion farming; less fertilizer etc.'

Farming was also seen by a small number (5) of survey respondents as a mechanism for supporting the conservation of the unique flora of the Burren.

'If it (the Burren) is not grazed flowers will suffer'

Only one respondent was negative about the future of farming in the Burren.

'Farming has no future unless there is a lot of development. There are only 10 kids on the local school now, it had 55. There is no one to farm, it's an ageing population'

63 % of survey respondents agreed with the statement *'I see tourism as part of my family's future in the Burren'*

2.4.2. What Role could Farmers Play in the Wider Management of the Burren?

Survey respondents identified a number of roles for farmers in the wider management of the Burren. The most popular role identified was as a partner working with others and in particular, the local community to support the wider management of the Burren.

'Community and farming needs to be hand in hand'

'Farmers should cooperate with others'

'Farmers need to get involved in more organisations'

A small number of respondents (3) identified a need for the establishment of a specific Burren Group that would act with a unity of purpose and that farmers in the Burren could be a part of. The Burrebeo Trust and/or Burren LIFE (there was some confusion throughout the survey on the distinction between these two groups, although the distinction between them was clarified by the surveyor administrators) were identified by three respondents as a possible vehicle for farmers to progress a shared agenda with others. There was also a minority view that farmers should be networking and working together more to progress the farming agenda. A number of respondents (6) believed that farmers needs and interests could best be represented by the various farming organisations, while 5 respondents identified the IFA in particular. Only 3 respondents identified a very limited role for farmers in the future management of the Burren.

93% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that *'The long term future of the Burren requires different interest groups to work together'*

The majority (75) of survey respondents who answered this question went on to detail how the role of farmers might be developed. Key tools identified to support the involvement of farmers in wider management issues included:

- **More focused consultation:** Farmers as owners of the land need to be consulted. There also needs to be consultation with the less vocal individual farmer who might be unwilling to express views in public.
- **Enhance Access:** Farmers could be more involved in overall management of the area through collaborating with each other and increasing public access to particular areas.

- **Awareness Raising & Education:** Awareness-raising about farming should be undertaken with younger people and the wider community in the area who do not have a farming background.
- **Decision Making:** Farmers should be involved in decision making. They need to be at the centre of the decision process, and have more of a say of what restrictions should be put in place.
- **Developing and actively marketing the 'Burren' brand:** Farmers should become more involved in the development marketing and use of the 'Burren' brand.
- **Sustain sustainable farming, grazing and stocking levels:** Farmers should not overstock the area and should be allowed to implement sensible grazing and other farming practices.

2.5. Hearing the Voices of Farmers and Farm Families

2.5.1 Who Represents Farmers

79% of survey respondents stated that there was at least one organisation that represented farming.

Organisations identified as representing farmers included:

- Burren LIFE (identified by 35 respondents)
 - Burren Beef and Lamb Producers Group (identified by 3 respondents)
- Burren IFA (identified by 27 respondents)
 - The IFA (identified by 12 respondents)
- Burrenbeo Trust (identified by 15 respondents)
- The Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA) (identified by 4 respondents)
- Irish Cattle and Sheep Association (ICSA) (identified by 2 respondents)

Other organizations identified by survey respondents included: the National Parks and Wildlife service, The Dept of Agriculture, the Burren Action Group, Burren Connect, Developing the West Together, the Dept of Environment and Macra na Feirme.

2.5.2. Are the Voices of Farmers being Heard?

96% of survey respondents thought the voices of farmers could be more clearly heard

96% of survey respondents thought the voices of farmers could be more clearly heard. Survey respondents went on to make suggestions in relation to how the voices of farmers could be more clearly heard. Among the most popular suggestions made included:

- Through the work of the Burren LIFE Programme (23 respondents)
- Group consultations (20 respondent)
- One to one consultations with farmers (8 respondents)
- A more proactive IFA (10 respondents)
- Through Burrenbeo Trust (6 respondents)
- The Burren IFA (6 respondents)

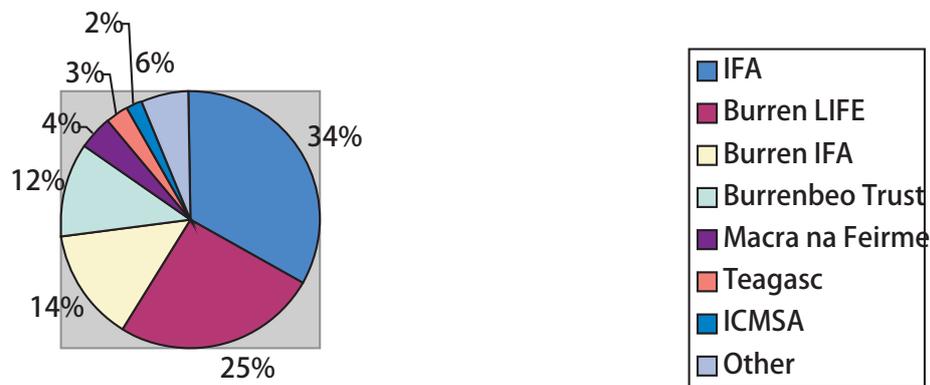
Other suggestions made as to how the voices of farmers could be more clearly heard included enhanced levels of participation of farmers in decision making structures, through local political representatives, through co-operation, through being more vocal in general and through more effective use of the media.

2.5.3. What Organisation/s should represent Farmers?

84% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I would like more of a say in deciding how the Burren is managed'

Survey respondents identified a variety of organisations, they believed should represent the interests of farmers. Some respondents identified more than one organisation. Figure 2.9 provides details of the most frequently identified organisations.

Figure 2.9 Organisations to Represent the Interests of Farmers



The category of other organisations included 'A local organisation of the people by the people', 'a group set up by farmers', the farming organisations and the Burren Beef and Lamb producers group. Other groups identified included: Archeologists, the Dept of Agriculture. REPs planners, The Heritage Council, LEADER, Specialists in fields of botany and conservation, The Irish Cattle and Sheep Association, and Farm Pensioners as they have the necessary experience.

2.6 Management of the Burren

97% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'Having businesses based in the Burren is important to ensuring people can live and work in the area'

2.6.1 Is the Burren being well looked after?

25 (23%) of respondents believed that the Burren is well looked after at present while 56 (50%) of the survey respondents believed that the Burren is not being well looked after at present. 29 (27%) of the respondents had no opinion. Interestingly, the majority of survey respondents who stated that they had no opinion on whether the Burren was being well looked after went on to discuss the subject in a lot more detail with the survey administrators.

Among the main reasons people cited in relation to the Burren not being well looked after were the breadth and impact of the various restrictions operating in the area. Some respondents believed that these restrictions had negative ecological impacts, particularly in relation to the control of scrub. A small number of respondents believed that the restrictions particularly in relation to land reclamation were preventing farmers developing their farms as fully as they might.

Other respondents cited recent changes in farming practices (with increasing levels of intensification, particularly on the lowlands) to follow market demands as having a negative impact on the Burren landscape.

'A lot of restrictions with negative ecological impacts'

'Farming by calendar is not ideal, especially when the Burren is so sensitive'

'The area is becoming overgrown with bush, hazel and briars, government regulations are responsible'

At least 8 survey respondents stated that current piecemeal planning and development policies were having a negative impact on the Burren. As one respondent put it *'there is no big future plan and planning is inconsistent'*. Poor water and waste water management practices were also identified by respondents as having a negative impact on the Burren. Other issues, identified by respondents, that need to be addressed if the Burren is to be well taken care of would include: the better control and management of the goat population and to a lesser extent the pine marten, badger and mink populations; and the need for greater local input (with farmer input specifically identified by some) into decision making. Respondents also identified concerns in relation to access for visitors and the needs for greater levels of conservation of the unique habitat and archaeology of the area. A number of respondents were frustrated by the lack of funding available to support initiatives in the Burren.

92 % of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'Farming for profit is rarely compatible with conservation without appropriate Government support'

Where respondents stated that they thought the Burren was being well looked after, a significant number (27 respondents), perhaps not surprisingly ascribed this to the work of farmers and associated it in particular with reduced stocking levels.

'Farmers are doing a generally good job'

'Farmers are looking after it by not overstocking as it would lead to poaching the ground'

15 respondents believed that REPS had been a positive development particularly in relation to 'tidying and cleaning up the Burren', while 9 respondents were very clear that the Burren LIFE Programme had been a very positive development for the Burren.

'Schemes like Burren LIFE weren't happening 20 years ago and have made an improvement'

'Burren LIFE needs to stay or else in 10 years it (the Burren) will all go into bushes and scrubs'

Other positive developments identified by survey respondents included better waste management, more involvement by the farming organisations in decision-making, a greater recognition and awareness of the international significance of the Burren and the presence of regulations. All of these developments have scope for further improvement.

85% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that

'Farming post 2013 in the Burren is going to be more difficult than it is now' although some believed it was too far away to know exactly what might happen

2.6.2 What are the Key Challenges for the Burren

Maintaining the Status Quo

The four most frequently identified challenges for the Burren were:

- the control of scrub (33 survey respondents);
- inconsistent planning (32 survey respondents);
- an aging population linked to increasing levels of social isolation (32 respondents);
- farming viability (23 Respondents).

13 respondents went on to indicate the importance of particular farming practices, including the importance of the grazing of the winterage, the need for reductions in the use of fertilizers and a movement away from the use of ring feeders and the housing of animals throughout the winter months.

'We need to keep people living in the Burren'

'The average age is old men'

'We are socially isolated in terms of having to drive everywhere, limited phone coverage and limited or no broadband'

'The local school down to 10 kids, if it closes it will be a disaster'

45% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'If the issue of liability was sorted, I would have no difficulties with public access through my farm' (There was a lot of qualification associated with this statement related to the management and control of access and privacy and damage issues)

Tourism

63 % of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I see tourism as part of my family's future in the Burren'

Other challenges identified included the need for better management and control of tourism (16 respondents) linked in turn to access issues, the conservation of the unique biodiversity landscape and archaeology of the Burren (14 respondents) as well as the need for better control of the goat population



Pollution and Water Management

Pollution control, water storage and waste management were also recognised (by 11 respondents) as challenges for the Burren. Respondents reported increasing levels of fly tipping in the area and recognised that the control and spreading of slurry was a sensitive issue. Concerns were also raised in relation to water quality, water storage and the extent and potential for ground water pollution in the area.

Communications

Nine respondents identified a challenge associated with the need for farmers to communicate and

come together more in order to have their voices heard and enable them have a voice in decision making. Another challenge identified related to the integration of locals and people newly/recently arrived in the region. The absence of sufficient resources and the presence of a plethora of regulations were also seen as important challenges.

'There is a lack of interaction between outsiders and locals this wasn't there years ago'

Promotion and Marketing

A challenge was identified by a small (5) number of respondents in relation to raising awareness of and marketing the Burren both nationally and internationally. Locally, respondents recognised that it was important to raise awareness and educate people (particularly young people) about the Burren.

90 % of survey respondents agreed with the statement

'We need a vision and a plan to ensure the long term management of the Burren for future generations'

2.6.3. How could the key challenges be addressed?

Respondents saw the challenge of an ageing population linked to increasing levels of social isolation, the retention of farmers on the land and indeed farm viability as intimately linked. The creation of this type of connection is probably not surprising given that it was a survey of farming families. Among the solutions suggested included the creation of more social outlets for both the young and the old. A small number of respondents believed also that the current economic downturn might indeed have the effect of bringing young people back to the area and back to farming, given that their other options were now a lot more limited. It was also suggested that farm family members should be allowed greater flexibility in relation to building on family land. A number of respondents suggested that there was a need, and indeed that it was time for the development of an overall plan, for the management of the Burren and that there was scope for the establishment of a local Burren Authority (involving all the local stakeholders) to oversee the implementation of this plan. The creation of employment opportunities in the local area was also seen as important; some respondents went on to suggest that 'incentives should be given to support new cottage industries'. The roll out of the Burren LIFE Programme was suggested as a mechanism for supporting the development of sustainable farming practices. There was also a strong view that if the Burren is to be maintained that Burren farmers should be paid for the work they do to maintain it.

Scrub Management

Addressing the challenge of controlling the scrub was, according to the survey respondents, going to require the use a variety of mechanical and chemical controls particularly for scrub stumps. Respondents also believed there might be a need for some controlled summer grazing alongside winter grazing. Some respondents believed that there was scope for more scrub contractors and that it should be an option in REPs to cut the scrub. The Burren LIFE project was mentioned as a big help with scrub encroachment and the suggestion was made that the scheme should be expanded to cover the entire Burren.

Inconsistent Planning

92 % of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'The planning regulations in the Burren are currently too restrictive'

Addressing the challenge of inconsistent planning was believed to require a greater recognition of local needs. There was a belief that local planning should be made more accessible to local people and allowances should be made to provide for local people to build in their local area.

It was also felt that the County Councils needed to erect more directional signage.

Tourism Opportunities

Not all respondents were interested in the development of tourism, some had no interest. Where respondents were interested in tourism they were keen to ensure that its benefits could be more widely spread across the Burren. Getting visitors to stay in Burren rather than in Galway was seen as an important first step in this process. Some also felt that there was scope for more local people and more members of farm families to train as guides and tour leaders. There was also a view that were farmers to co-operate more with one another they might be able to create more attractions for tourists.

Conservation

The conservation of the Burren was seen by the majority of respondents to depend on the goodwill and farming practices employed by the local landowners.

There was a view that farmers should be subsidized for the conservation work they do, although there was no clear consensus about the particular farming practices required, some survey respondents suggested that intensive farming practices should be avoided, where other advocated the need for increase stocking levels and more grazing for longer periods.

'Farmers should be subsidized in some way to retain the plant life as we know it'

It was also suggested that there was a need for more structured conservation monitoring and that there was perhaps a need for a particular organisation to do this.

'There should be a body with oversight that checks, records, maintain and preserves sites, etc.'

Goat Control

Control of the goat population was an issue of some concern for a number of farm families, and it was suggested that there was a need for increased levels of culling although most respondents were of the opinion that the (culling) methods to be used should be non lethal and that the goats should be removed and relocated elsewhere.

73% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'There is an absence of a long term dedicated centre where farmers can go to get information and advice about the Burren'

Pollution

In relation to pollution the solution that was suggested was that farmers should be incentivized to keep the water clean.

Enhanced Levels of Consultation

More consultation and liaison with farmers were seen as important mechanisms to ensure that policies introduced to the Burren were indeed both relevant and appropriate. Where regulations are in place it was felt that there should be some scope for local accommodations to recognise local land and weather conditions. Interestingly survey respondents had a lot of suggestions in relation to raising awareness of the Burren. Suggestions made included the following:

'Get the Government to recognise it (the Burren) as an area of significance'

'Ensure there is strong Burren representation'

'Get more publicity for these areas, especially the local village'

'Get more TV promotion of the Burren area'

'Through talks and getting people interested especially locals'

'Through the use of modern technology'

Through Burren LIFE doing further dissemination of information'

'Teaching the primary school kids - educating children in the Burren about the Burren'

91% of survey respondents agreed with the statement
'Public education initiatives have an important role to play in conserving the Burren'

2.6.4. Organisations that Farm Families have contact with

Survey respondents were asked which of a number of organisations they had contact with. See Table 2.9 for an analysis of the levels of contact.

Table 2.9 The level of contact Farm Families have with a selected organisations

Organisation Name	% of Total Survey Respondents who had contact with group/organisation
Dept of Agriculture and Food	95%
IFA	85%
Teagasc	78%
County Council	68%
National Parks and wildlife Service (NPWSO	59%
Burrenbeo Trust	47%
FAS	28%
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	23%
Dept of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	21%
Shannon Development	18%

The organisations the survey respondents had most contact with were the Dept of Agriculture, the IFA, Teagasc, the County Council, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Burrenbeo Trust. Survey respondents, where they had contact with a particular organisation, were asked to what extent they trusted the organisation. The top five most trusted organisations were as follows:

- Burrenbeo Trust (were somewhat/fully trusted by 79% of the 52 respondents who had contact with them)
- Teagasc (were somewhat/fully trusted by 79% of the 87 respondents who had contact with them)
- The IFA (were somewhat/fully trusted by 73% of the 94 respondents who had contact with them)
- The Dept of Agriculture (were somewhat/fully trusted by 53% of the 106 respondents who had contact with them)
- The Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (were somewhat/fully trusted by 47% of the 23 respondents who had contact with them)

2.6.5. Programmes Relevant to Farming

*88% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that
'The Burren LIFE project has had a positive impact on the conservation of the Burren'*

Survey respondents were asked which of a list of Programmes they had had contact and how relevant they believed these programmes were to farming. Table 2.10 details the findings.

Table 2.10 Programmes Survey Respondents had Contact with and their Relevance to farming

Organisation Name	No of Respondents who had contact with group (5 of total sample)	Very Little relevance	Little Relevance	Neither Relevant nor irrelevant	Some Relevance	Very Relevant
Burren LIFE	68 (61%)	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	6 (9%)	16 (24%)	43 (63%)
LEADER Programme	32 (29%)	4 (13%)	2 (6%)	8 (25%)	13 (41%)	5 (16%)
Burren Connect	21 (19%)	4 (19%)	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	6 (29%)	7 (33%)
Rural Social Scheme	19 (17%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	6 (32%)	9 (47%)
CLAR Programme	15 (14%)	2 (13%)	0	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	7 (47%)
Others Programmes identified included: Burren Eco-tourism, Bus connection for old folk, IFA farm walks, and the Walkways Scheme						

Burren LIFE was the programme the majority of survey respondents had had contact with, it was also interestingly the programme that survey respondents believed to be the most relevant to farming. The programme that was ranked the second most relevant by the respondents that had contact with it was the CLAR programme, closely followed by the Rural Social Scheme and then Burren Connect.

2.6.6. Views on Designations

*60% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that
'As a farmer I would prefer if we had fewer designations, not more'*

SAC Designations

Respondents were asked for their views on the existing Special Area of Conservation Designation and on the potential UNESCO World Heritage Site and Geo-Park designations. A total of 91 survey respondents gave an opinion on the SAC designation, with no clear consensus. About 35% of that group believed the

designation was an asset, while 20% of the group believed it was a liability. Interestingly about 21% of the group believed it was both an asset and liability, while 24% were of the opinion that it was neither an asset nor a liability. Where respondents were positive about the SAC designation most of the positivity seemed to relate to the payments (top-up payments for REPS) associated with the designation, in many cases the respondents were of the opinion that the land designated under the SAC was of limited agricultural use in any case.

'The mountain part is good as an SAC because you wouldn't be able to do much else with it so it is good to get grants from it'

Other respondents saw the designation as positive in terms of creating an enhanced level of awareness of the heritage and biodiversity to be found in the Burren. Where respondents were negative about the SAC designation, most of the negativity seemed to relate to either the various restrictions or indeed the low level of payment associated with the designations. Restrictions associated with the removal of scrub and grazing practices were particularly singled out for comment.

'A liability in that scrub land can't be cleared and the scrub is spreading',

'Not free to manage the farm fully, due to grazing restrictions''

'There is some good land that without the SAC designation could be levelled.

The humps are dangerous for cattle'

'Everything needs to be done by a certain date and one has to be careful changing anything'

'Reclamation has to be by hand not machine'

Where respondents were broadly neutral or where they had no particular opinion about the designation it was the case that the amount of farmland designated as SAC was relatively small and as long as it did not interfere with the main productive areas the respondents had few issues.

'Too little land involved to make it either an asset or liability'

82% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that

'I don't know enough about the proposal to designate the Burren as a World Heritage Site, to decide whether it would be good for farming in the Burren'

There are two new potential designations being considered in relation to the Burren, a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation and a UNESCO Geo-Park Designation. Respondents were firstly asked whether they were aware of either designation. Where they were aware of a designation they were subsequently asked how useful they believed the designation was to Farming. 70% of respondents were

aware of the potential World Heritage Designation but the majority were unclear what it would involve and how it might impact on farming

'Would love to know the difference between this and other designations'

'There is a lack of clarity about what it means, so can't say the impact'

Given the lack of clarity about what this designation might involve it was probably not surprising that only 26% of the people who knew anything about it believed it could be of use to farming. There were one or two respondents who were very positively disposed to this designation.

'The Burren has the potential to be a world heritage site and I am for it'

58% of survey respondents were aware of the UNESCO Geo-Park Designation. More survey respondents stated that they believed the Geo-park designation was of less use to farming than the World Heritage Site Designation. There also appeared to be a lack of clarity about exactly what this designation would mean for farming in the Burren

'Attended meetings but still don't know what it means'

'Relevance to farming will depend on restrictions it imposes'

Again there were one or two survey respondents who were very positively disposed to the designation.

'It is positive and good for tourism'

3. Key Conclusions

The survey provides a broadly representative view of the opinions and experiences of what Burrenbeo Trust estimate to be '1 in 6 farm families' across the Clare/Galway Burren. It is interesting to note that this survey was the first time the views of farmers in the Galway Burren had been actively sought.

3.1. Burren farm families long term residents who appreciate the Burren

The farm families surveyed had a long history of farming in the Burren, three quarters had been farming in the area for more than 100 years, while more than a third had been farming for more than 200 years. The farm families were generally very positive in their descriptions of the area and their

role as farmers in it, with a majority (72%) intending to continue farming in the area into the future.

3.2. Significant changes in farming practices

Among the most significant changes that have taken place in farming in the Burren has been the change in farming enterprises with significant numbers of farmers having gone into sucklers, and substantial numbers having got out of dairy and sheep. The building of slatted sheds and the housing of animals over winter has also proved to be a significant change for the farmers, and indeed for the wider landscape as upland areas that used to be grazed in the winter are now abandoned and slowly being taken over by scrub.

3.3. The drivers of change at farm level

Among the key drivers of changes in farming practices has been the need to reduce the labour requirements and increase 'convenience', and this in turn is driven by an aging farming population and a growing level of part-time farming among the younger farming community. The availability of grant funding for the construction of slatted sheds and the advice that this is the way forward for farming can also be seen to have been strong incentives for farmers to build sheds. Changes at farm level can also be seen to be driven by concerns in relation to sustaining adequate income levels and increasingly a concern about the need to reduce the amount of costly external inputs required.

3.4. Key farming concerns

Many farm families concerns focused on the restrictions imposed on them by an SAC designation, by national regulations (in relation to the spreading of slurry under the Nitrates directive and hedge cutting under Section 46 of the Wildlife Act) or by restrictions imposed as part of their participation in the REPS Programme. Farm families were also very concerned about the speed and extent of scrub infestation in the area. Profitability was another key concern for some farm families, who questioned their very ability to remain farming if profitability did not improve. Other concerns related to the difficulties associated with getting planning permission for family members to build homes on the farm, linked to the need to put in place family supports for aging family members. The destruction of habitat and the need for enhanced levels of conservation of the flora, fauna and walls and management of the goat population were also identified as concerns for farming as indeed were pollution from slurry, the role of tourism and issues related to public access.

3.5. Local communities under pressure

Across the Burren there are a number of smaller rural communities feeling the pressure of an aging

population and falling school roles. In one or two communities the future of the local national school is in question. The post offices in many of these areas have closed with services now provided in larger towns. Individuals too have become increasingly socially isolated with the demise of the rural pub and the social fabric of communities. In some locations it is difficult to get broadband and mobile signals. The farming community's contact with the wider local community has also been reduced as many people now commute significant distances for work. It was also noted that there is less mixing of locals and new residents given that the opportunities for meeting have been reduced with the closure of local shops and businesses.

3.6. The Role of Tourism in the Burren from a Farming Perspective

Only a small number of farm families identified tourism as an issue for them. This is probably not surprising since only nine (8%) of the families surveyed had tourism based businesses on their farm, with a further 11 household members employed off the farm in the tourism and hospitality sector. Where tourism was raised as an issue, there were some very diverse views. Some of the farm families had no interest in tourism given that they and their farm were located in an area that tourists generally did not visit. Others simply had no interest in tourism although some expressed concerns about public access. Where individual families (16) were actively interested in tourism there was a view that tourism in the Burren tended to be focused on some key sites and locations (e.g. the Aillwee caves and the Cliffs of Moher) most were keen that methods and products could be developed to ensure the benefits of tourism would be spread across the wider community and farmers of the Burren while some clearly saw potential for family members to train and act as local guides for visitors to the area and indeed for farm families to work together to develop initiatives that would attract visitors to the farm as an additional source of income.

3.7. Public Access from a Farming Perspective

The issue of public access which was frequently linked to tourism was raised by farm families across the Burren. It was an emotive issue with two very different responses to the issue. One response was that if the issue of liability was sorted and access was controlled and managed to ensure the privacy of the farm family and the safety of livestock and crops, then there would be no problem with public access. The other was a minority view linked to this that access should be provided only in limited areas. The second response was scepticism about whether the issue of liability could be sorted and a view that public access and farming were generally not compatible.

3.8. The need to enhance levels of awareness of the Burren

The need for enhanced marketing of the Burren, locally, nationally and internationally was identified by a cross section of farm families who believed that marketing was needed to raise awareness of the

uniqueness of the Burren as a landscape and as a habitat. The example of the Burren Beef & Lamb Producers Group was cited several times as an example of how the Burren could be used as a unique brand and quality symbol. It was suggested that further such initiatives could be developed. There was also a view that many local people had limited levels awareness of the Burren and the role of farmers in conserving the Burren and that some work could perhaps be done with farmers and the local schools to ensure that young people growing up in the area were aware of the complexities and interdependencies associated with the landscape around them.

3.9. The role of farming in the Burren

The farm families surveyed believed that farming is central to the conservation of the unique landscape of the Burren. They saw farming and farmers as having a key role in controlling scrub and conserving the plant life of the Burren. They identified themselves as being particularly knowledgeable about the wildlife and cultural history of the area but identified that they would like to learn more about not only the wildlife and cultural heritage of the area but also the archaeology, geology and plant life. Family and friends were identified as the most important source of knowledge of the Burren suggesting that there is a repository of local knowledge within the farming community in Burren that may have to potential to be shared with others.

3.10. The Role and Potential of Designations

There was no clear consensus about the role and value of designations in the Burren. Very few people were clear about what might be involved in either the possible UNSECO World Heritage site designation or indeed the UNESCO Geo-Park designation and as such were not able to give clear response to either designation. Most people were however open and in many cases keen to learn more about what would be involved in the designation and what impacts it might have on their farming practices, thus enabling them to have a clearer position on the designations.

3.11. Representing the Views of Farming, Farmers and Farm Families

96% of the farmers believed that the voices of farmers needed to be better heard. Mechanisms identified that could be used to better represent the views of farmers were seen to include one to one and group consultations linked to participation in decision making structures. Particular groups that were identified as having a role in representing the views of farmers included the Burren LIFE programme, Burrenbeo Trust and the IFA locally and nationally.

3.12. An organisation to represent Burren farm families?

The IFA, the Burren IFA, Teagasc, Burren LIFE and Burrenbeo Trust were all identified as having potential to represent the views of Burren Farm Families. In reality the views of farm families could be represented by

a number of these groups in different ways, in different contexts. There is, it must be noted, some confusion between Burren LIFE and Burrenbeo Trust, probably because an individual who works for one organisation is very closely associated with the other. It is also the case that the Burren IFA currently only operates in the Clare Burren, although there may be potential for them to either extend their remit and engage with the IFA parish structure in the Co Galway Burren, thus strengthening their ability to represent the views of farmers across the Burren.

4. A Possible Agenda

The current economic downturn poses unique challenges for farming, for the west and indeed for the communities and individuals who live and work in the Burren. Burren farmers also need to consider the implications and respond to the wind down of the Burren LIFE Programme and the proposals emerging to designate the Burren as both a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Geo-Park. This survey is therefore very timely in that addressing these challenges will undoubtedly require the adoption of new ways of working and new approaches to the management of scarcer resources.

This survey has found that the Burren farming community is steeped in the history of the area, are broadly appreciative of the landscape about them, keen to continue farming and open to working with others to ensure the sustainable management of the Burren as a unique landscape.

This provides a very positive context both for the farming community to develop their role in the Burren and for other organisations working in the Burren to seek out and engage with the farming community. From this survey we can see that what is needed to enable this work to be progressed would include the following:

1. There is a need for ongoing and effective representation of the interests of Farmers and the Farming Community

Burrenbeo Trust, Burren LIFE, the Burren IFA and Teagasc all have roles to play in the ongoing collection and representation the views of farmers in the Burren. These groups also need to develop meaningful feedback mechanisms to ensure that the farming community is up-to-date with progress.

2. There is a need for ongoing pro-active involvement of the farming community in consultations and decision making about the Burren

Burren farmers as the managers and owners of the majority of the land need to be consulted and centrally involved in decision making about the area.

3. There is a need for the development of a shared vision and longer term management plan for the wider Burren, with farming as a central element of the plan and farmers involved in the development and management of the plan

The Burren is a complex landscape that requires a multi-dimensional management approach. There is a need for all the various interest groups to work together to develop a shared vision and plan for the sustainable management of the area in the longer term. In this context consideration should be given to the establishment of a wider Burren Management Structure/Authority that would oversee the overall development and management of the plan. To be effective this structure would need a long term commitment with associated resources and staffing.

4. The farming community needs to work with other groups and local communities to ensure the long term management of the Burren (ideally as part of the structure identified above)

5. The management of the Burren needs to be led by an organisation that farm families trust

Farm families work best with individuals that they know and trust. As such it is important that organisations working with, or indeed intending to engage with the farming community, identify one or two key individuals who will work with and establish relationships of trust over time with the farmers.

6. There is a need for more information and consultations with the farming community in relation to the possible World Heritage Site and UNESCO Geo-Park Designations and any other relevant options

Farmers and farm households are keen to learn more about these proposed designations and how they might impact on their farming in real terms. Ideally farmers would like to learn about the designations from other farmers who are living and farming within these types of designations.

7. There is a need for a regular and accessible forum where practical questions in relation to landscape management can be discussed and information shared

Key issues to be addressed for the farming community include:

- Scrub Control
- Control of goat population
- Some local flexibility in relation to the application of national restrictions

8. The Burren LIFE Programme needs to be extended and open for participation to all farmers within the Burren

9. There is a need for and an interest in the provision of further information and knowledge about

different aspects of the Burren to farm families and to the wider local community particularly through the provision of walks and talks and work within the local schools.

- 10. There is need for the different interest groups working the Burren to come together to develop a clear 'Burren' identity. This identity could be used to market, promote and raise awareness of the area and the products produced there. The development and marketing of if this identity will need to be effectively resourced with skilled personnel.**

- 11. Ways need to be found to spread the benefits and income derived from tourism across the wider community of the Burren and the farming community in particular**