

Capacity Building for Commonage Groups in the Wicklow Sustainable Agri-Environment Scheme (SUAS)

Eóin Lynch; Declan Byrne (SUAS); Dr Helen Sheridan (UCD); Dr Catherine Keena (Teagasc); Dr Monica Gorman (UCD)

Background/Context

SUAS is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) which enables commonage management groups to be formed and to develop commonage management plans that will ensure the uplands are restored to good environmental and agricultural condition.

Objectives

The research investigates how the commonage groups were brought together with the aim of; identifying catalysts to success; highlighting shortcomings; establishing important attributes to ensure independent manifestation and most importantly why. The research, having appreciated the fact that this EIP may serve as an inspiration for future upland schemes, also takes the opportunity to find out from upland farmers what kinds of information they feel they might need to meet future Agri-environmental demands, in what form and from which sources they utilise and prefer thus enabling future knowledge to be provided through such channels.

Methods

The two main methods employed are; Observational research and Surveys. The observational research consisted of attendance at various knowledge transfer events and SUAS specific events in order to observe farmer engagement and to ask their opinions. The surveys consisted of two independent surveys; one specifically for the SUAS participants and another for non SUAS upland farmers.

Provisional Results

The research is still ongoing but to date but some interesting findings:

On site consultations with the ecologist are excellent for farmers to see areas for improvement and to brainstorm ideas. They lead to high levels of engagement in two-way exchange

“It was great, I think it’s the first time I could see where farming in the uplands will be going in an understandable way” – Farmer at the National Sheep conference, Ballybofey

“The commonage groups have been good as they have shown that with the right framework commonage users who don’t necessarily like each other can still work together to a common end” – SUAS participant

Implications

1. Provides a focus on Upland farming and its importance in the climate and biodiversity challenge.
2. Gives policy makers an idea of how future schemes could be constructed.
3. Allow new information to be directed through the correct mediums and channels.

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The Sustainable Uplands Agri-environmental Scheme in county Wicklow is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP). The project enables commonage management groups to be formed and to develop commonage management plans that will ensure the uplands are restored to good environmental and agricultural condition. Within this the research investigates how the commonage groups were brought together with the aim of; identifying catalysts to success; highlighting shortcomings; establishing important attributes which are essential to ensuring commonage groups can manifest independently and most importantly why. The research, having appreciated the fact that this EIP may serve as an inspiration for future upland schemes, also takes the opportunity to find out from upland farmers what kinds of information they feel they might need to meet future Agri-environmental demands and in what form or from which sources they utilise and prefer as a catalyst to enabling future knowledge to be provided through such channels.