

Ireland

Biodiversity's restoration, preservation & enhancement

Location

Clare

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P4- Ecosystems
management

Measure

M10 – Agri-environment
climate

Funding

RDP contribution: 5 000
(EUR) annual payment for 5
years

Project duration

2016 – 2022

Project promoter

Joe Melody

Email

dphelan@pfarrelly.com

A young farmer undertook voluntary agri-environmental commitments to ensure that his land provides a sufficient habitat for overwintering migratory birds and other plants and animals.

Summary

Joe Melody is a young farmer who, together with his father, manages a 150-hectare dairy operation close to Bunratty, Co. Clare. The farm is set across two separate land parcels, one of which is bounded by a 3km stretch of estuary riverbank (the River Shannon). Joe is an active participant in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS) and actively supports the ecosystem that sustains his farm.



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Project Results

Under the Green Low Carbon Agri-environmental Scheme GLAS, Joe manages the area as a space for nature, rather than a potential opportunity to extend his grazing ground. Joe's light grazing practices within certain timeframes of the year maintain habitat quality. Geese and swan overwintering is particularly improved.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The payments received through the rollout of Ireland's Rural Development Programme GLAS scheme are a practical incentive to encourage better on-farm environmental practices and an acknowledgement of the public good that motivated farmers provide.

Context

Joe Melody is a young farmer who, together with his father, manages a 150-hectare dairy operation close to Bunratty, Co. Clare. The farm is set across two separate land parcels, one of which is bounded by a 3km stretch of estuary riverbank (the River Shannon). Joe is an active participant in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme (GLAS) and wants to support the ecosystem that sustains his farm.

Many waterfowl rely on the riverbank reed beds for nesting, and without appropriate grazing at the right times throughout the year, the herbaceous vegetation would become too dense for them.

Joe and his father have an area of sward next to the riverbank; where they rear young stock and cut silage to support the main farm. Joe noticed that the quality of the grass on this farmed area of land also attracted the geese and swans for grazing.

Objectives

Agri-environmental payments supported a young farmer to apply a grazing plan on his land, which would provide benefits to the wildlife that rely on it.

Activities

Ireland hosts a considerable proportion of the European population of Geese and Swans, many of which are Red and Amber Listed (a classification of the degree of threat of extinction). To promote the production of grass sward to feed overwintering geese and swans (including the Whooper Swan, Greenland White Front Goose, Barnacle Goose and Brent Goose), Joe receives a per hectare payment of EUR 205/ha/year. Without consideration and intervention, these local populations would face decline.

Managed grazing and cutting for silage are actions that provide great benefit to the ecosystem of grasslands. During the winter months, all Joe's cattle are housed, which provides the wildfowl with many opportunities to take advantage of the riverbank's surrounding area.

Joe has undertaken other GLAS actions to maintain and manage Traditional Hay Meadow (THM) areas and Low Input Permanent Pastures (LIPP).

THM related actions are awarded a payment of EUR 315/ha/year up to a maximum payable area of 10ha. Mowing is permitted annually only after July 1st. Grazing is restricted from April 15th until after cutting on July 1st.

LIPP related actions are awarded a payment of EUR 314/ha/year up to a maximum area of 5ha. LIPPs must be maintained by grazing, and topping cannot occur between March 15th and July 15th. This allows a greater diversity of grass species to disperse and to go to seed, which sustains a greater variety of plants and wildlife.

Joe keeps all but a small number of his cattle away from the protected areas from the end of September up until April. The few that remain - young heifers, weighing approximately 205-250kgs - graze and walk over the grass, breaking up any dense foliage and contributing to maintaining mosaic vegetation that is favourable to nesting birds.

Main Results

Under the Green Low Carbon Agri-environmental Scheme GLAS, Joe manages the area as a space for nature, rather than a potential opportunity to extend his grazing ground. Joe's light grazing practices within certain timeframes of the year maintain habitat quality.

This avoids overstocking, whereby the vegetation would be destroyed by poaching, rendering it unfavourable to the nesting birds also threatening any birds that may already be residing within the site. Maintaining some grazing prevents the sward becoming coarse and dense, which would also make it unfavourable to the nesting birds.

Key lessons

The intervention is a result of Joe's enthusiasm for caring for the habitats that exist on his farm. The payments received through the rollout of Ireland's Rural Development Programme GLAS scheme are a good incentive and an acknowledgement of the public good being provided.