

CORCA DHUIBHNE INBHUANAITHE A CREATIVE IMAGINING

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PARTICIPATING FARMERS

LEARNING BRIEF FEBRUARY 2023



An Roinn Comhshaoil,
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
Department of the Environment,
Climate and Communications

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme





BACKGROUND

Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe - A Creative Imagining was a creative climate action project based on the Dingle Peninsula involving a creative artist working with ten farm families over the course of a year between January 2022 and January 2023.

It was funded by the inaugural [Creative Climate Action Fund](#), an initiative administered by the [Creative Ireland Programme](#), in collaboration with the [Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications](#), to support creative, cultural and artistic projects that build awareness around climate change and empower citizens to make meaningful behavioural transformations. The project was led by the [Dingle Hub](#), in collaboration with the [Green Arts Initiative in Ireland \(GAIL\)](#) and [MaREI](#) (The Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine). It was supported by the [West Kerry Dairy Farmers Sustainable Energy Community \(SEC\)](#). The project team comprised [Catriona Fallon](#) (GAIL), project manager; [Lisa Fingleton](#), embedded artist; [Deirdre de Bhailis](#), Dingle Hub manager; and [Clare Watson](#) (MaREI), reflective learning & evaluation lead.

This project aimed to tackle the challenge of addressing greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture through a creative lens, with an embedded artist bringing their unique perspective to the project, helping to generate new ways of thinking, fresh perspectives and alternative approaches. Key to this was listening to the

farming community, providing them with a safe space to share their thoughts and concerns, and giving them a voice in the climate discussion. The focus was on supporting ten farm families to identify solutions that would work for them, and to imagine a low carbon farming future for the Dingle Peninsula and wider society. This experience was mediated through a creative lens.

The initial aims of the project were:

- To bring about an attitudinal change and shift in values within the farming community on the Dingle Peninsula, with regard to the role that agricultural emissions play in Ireland's carbon footprint.
- To support the farming community in transitioning to less carbon intensive methods including approaches that will sequester carbon and support biodiversity.
- Combining practical and creative approaches, to create an understanding in the wider community about the challenges that farmers face, thus creating a more supportive environment in which farmers can diversify.



REFLECTIVE LEARNING AND EVALUATION METHODS

This learning brief focuses on the experiences of the ten farm families who participated in the Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe project over the course of 2022.

It also looks at the impact the project has had on their thinking and on their farming. The initial data was collected through the following: written application forms (Dec 2021); recorded on-line induction meeting (Jan 2022); two recorded interviews with each of the ten farmers/farm families (July 2022 and Jan 2023); recorded interviews with farmers involved in the Ploughing Championships (Nov 2022); survey sheets (after familiarisation trips and some events); and the edited film interviews (filming took place in Sept 2022). Additional information was added during the writing and reviewing process, involving the farmers and the project team.

For more information, please see the [Methods Table](#)

www.dinglepeninsula2030.com/projects/creativeclimateactionproject/





In July 2021, the Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe project was awarded €180,660 from Creative Ireland. In November, Lisa Fingleton was selected as the project's embedded artist. In late December, ten local farmers/farm families were recruited from an Open Call to participate in the project.

Between February and October, eight familiarisation trips to sustainable farms and other projects of interest, were organised for the participating farmers and project team. These included: Thomas Reidy's Organic Farm, Stradbally, Dingle Peninsula; Maharees Conservation Association, Dingle Peninsula; The Burren Programme, Co. Clare; Green Gas Anaerobic Digester Plant, Shanagolden, Co. Limerick; Gearóid Maher's Dairy Farm, Cappamore, Co. Limerick; Glenilen Farm, Gurteeniher, West Cork; Top of the Rock Pod Páirc and Walking Centre, Drimoleague, West Cork; The BRIDE Project, Castlelyons, Co. Cork; MacGillycuddy Reeks European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Project, Beaufort, Co. Kerry; and Kerry Woollen Mills, Beaufort, Co. Kerry.

In June, Minister Eamon Ryan visited Michael and Sandra O'Dowd's farm and later met three other *Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe* farmers in the Dingle Hub. In August, Tom and Nora Greaney hosted a farm walk for the group in Flemingstown. Members of the group also visited Leigh Organic Farm and Lisa and Rena's organic farm, the Barna Way, in North Kerry. In September, some of the farmers visited, and contributed to, a 30m Creative Climate

Wall at the Ploughing Championships and they participated in two Climate Conversations at the event. Over the year, the farmers attended a workshop on climate change, a seminar on the mental health impact on farmers, a meeting on carbon sequestration, and a discussion on climate policy. They also participated in five online group discussions.

Two 'Guthanna ón nGort/Voices from the Field' public events were organised, the first on the 20th April as part of Féile na Bealtaine and the second on the 29th July as part of Féile Lios Póil. A Farmers' Forum was held on the 30th September, as part of the Dingle Food Festival. In early September, Lisa and filmmaker, Chris Garrett, filmed interviews and footage on each farm. The final production, incorporating all the farm portraits, was due to be publicly screened in the Blasket Centre, Dun Chaoin, on the 8th December 2022. However, because of icy road conditions it had to be postponed. The screening was successfully held in the same venue on the 18th January 2023.

For more information, please see the [Activities and Events Table](#) and [Media Table](#)



All the participating farmers said that the project met their expectations (and, for most, they were exceeded). It has broadened their thinking and brought climate action issues front and centre, in particular the importance of local food production and consumption.

The project heightened their awareness and appreciation of their surroundings and the efforts they are already making. All the farmers are now very keen to protect and promote biodiversity. They have a greater appreciation of the positive role of creativity and art, particularly in relation to climate action.

Many of the farmers decreased their use of artificial fertiliser and chemicals during the year and two have begun the process of converting their farms to organic methods. One farmer is currently planting 500 trees, one plans to plant 500-600 metres of hedging, one is considering forestry, and another, agri-forestry. One farmer is thinking about cutting his stock (cattle/sheep). One farmer has ordered a solar powered water pump and electric fence, another is looking at producing renewable energy on their land. Three farmers are considering glamping pods as a way of diversifying. The project has changed one farmer's view of public transport and she is now using the Local Link bus. It also gave two farmers their first experience of public speaking.

As a result of links made through the project, two farm families recently joined Kerry Social Farming. Four of the farmers were actively involved in drawing on the Creative Climate Wall at the Ploughing Championships.

Interestingly, all the farmers have said how important the social aspect of the project was for them. They are all very keen for the group to carry on in some form and to continue their transition journey together.

Participating Farmers/Families

- Aidan O'Connor, Maharees;
- Joe Kelliher, Burnham;
- John Joe Fitzgerald, Baile an Lochaigh;
- Michael & Sandra O'Dowd, Ballycrispin;
- Niamh Foley, Blennerville;
- Padraig O'Dowd & Sharon Ní Shúilleabháin, Kinard;
- Sean Kennedy, Doonsheane;
- Tom & Nora Greaney, Flemingstown;
- Tony O'Sé & Siobhán Prendergast, Ard na Caithe;
- Éibhlín, Séamus & Lís Ó'Chiobháin, An Ghráig.

PROFILE OF EACH PARTICIPATING FARMER/FARM FAMILY



AIDAN O'CONNOR

Background

Aidan's family has been growing fruit and vegetables in Kilshannig on the Maharees for generations and Aidan has continued the tradition. He lives on the land with his wife, Jackie and their three children. When he applied to be part of the project, Aidan was a full-time farmer, but he had already cut his growing area from thirty acres to four and had reduced stock. He grew a range of vegetables, including carrots, parsnips, onions, beetroot and brassicas, which he sold, twice a week, from his market stall in Macroom. Aidan also sold home-made carrot and beetroot juice. He had 10 pigs, 12 dry cattle, 3 goats, 300 ducks, 200 hens and 22 geese. In July 2022, Aidan was expecting that the risks and challenges may mean that he would give up growing. By September he had made up his mind to stop growing intensively, and he is now converting to organic methods. Aidan is very involved in the Maharees Conservation Association and he recently put himself forward for the role of chairperson.

Reasons for Applying

Aidan applied for the project because he was aware of the need to change farming at local level and was keen to learn how to change age-old practices. As a

member of the Maharees Conservation Association he could see what a small group could do. He also wanted to meet like-minded farmers and to learn by talking to people.

Climate Change Concerns

Aidan's main climate concerns are drought, extreme winds and rain, and rising sea levels. He lives and works 200 yards from the sea on one side and 500 yards on the other. There is no shelter from the prevailing wind. Aidan can't grow trees because the salt will kill them, and the sandy soil doesn't suit them.

'Climate change has changed the way I grow completely. Ten years ago, I'd have been growing thirty acres of veg. Because of extreme weather events, I lost my crops a few years in a row, so I had to change, and I've reduced right down.' (Sept 2022)

'When I look back at it now that was actually a good thing because if I stayed going like that, growing, I would have ended up losing again. So that happening to me changed my mind for me and I've got a better life now.' (Sept 2022)

Impact of the Project

'The whole thing is making me think more. Yeah, it definitely is. Before you do anything now you think 'how do you do it?' and even my kids seeing me doing this is a good thing.' (July 2022)

'I think that there is so much talk of climate change that you have no choice but to cop on and do things right. Ten years ago, it would have all been about making the most out of the fields as I could. I mean you wouldn't think about anything else. And that's definitely changed.' (July 2022)

Aidan has made some big decisions since joining the project.

'When it comes to farming, I wouldn't be inclined to go intensive anymore. I don't see the point. And I'd be more interested in farming with nature than actually farming for food now. You can do both. I've joined the Organic Trust, so I've reduced the stock I have, and there won't be any chemical inputs.' (Jan 2023)

'I will probably grow a few gardens just beside the house, but I won't take the plough out and go ploughing the fields, they'll all go back into grass.' (Jan 2023)

'I have a few people looking for me to grow lettuce for them, which will be easy enough for me to do. There won't be a whole pile to lose if that goes wrong.' (Jan 2023)

Aidan thinks that glamping pods could work on his farm - mixing farming with tourism - but securing planning permission and funding would be challenging.

Aidan participated in the Climate Conversation in the Creative Ireland tent at the Ploughing Championships. This was the first time he had ever spoken in public. His daughter, Ciara, enjoyed seeing her dad up on the stage.

'But it was grand... he was asking me questions that you answer, that's not too bad... once you know what you're talking about, it's not too bad.' (Nov 2022)

In the past, Aidan would have refused to speak, but, *'You want to be part of something if you're in it. I don't like doing the job halfways. I know you're not forced to do anything, but you've expected to do a certain amount of stuff so there's no harm for me. It's not that I wouldn't do it, but I always feel that I couldn't do it.'* (Nov 2022)

'I have put myself forward for the role of Chair of Maharees Conservation and I'll look forward to that if I'm chosen. I probably will have to speak if I'm Chair.' (Nov 2022)

'[The project] gave me more confidence in meeting people, I'd be a quiet fella. If you had asked me a year ago, would I be on stage or on screen or anything like that, I would have said not a hope, so it has helped me in that as well.' (Jan 2023)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

Aidan did art for the Leaving Certificate. He likes drawing and his children are creative.

'I had some clue of what Lisa was thinking but I didn't know art was going to be included in this. But I think it was really well done.' (Jan 2023)

'She's drawing our thoughts and other people's thoughts. Instead of reading something, you can just see it on the wall or on a page or wherever it is, it makes more sense. And young and old can look at that because young people won't read an article in a newspaper or whatever. I wouldn't myself... if you just look, it will draw you in when you see it. It's more interesting.' (Jan 2023)

'You can see something behind all of it, so it just makes sense.' (Nov 2022)

Have Aidan's Initial Expectations for the Project been met?

'I didn't know what to expect at the very start. I just decided to go for it but didn't know what I was letting myself in for. But it was actually better than what I expected.' (Jan 2023)

'I just thought it was all great. You were always waiting for the next event or whatever, it was always something to look forward to.' (Jan 2023)





JOE KELLIHER

Background

Joe is a dairy farmer from Burnham, near Dingle town. His mother inherited the farm from her parents, and she worked on it with Joe's father until 2015. Joe then took it over and converted it from beef to dairy production in 2017. He lives on the farm with his wife, Theresa. They own 85 acres and rent a further 35 and have 70 cows and 28 followers (replacements for cows as they age). Joe is in the GLAS agri-environment scheme.

Reasons for Applying

Joe hoped to learn new ways of improving the sustainability of his farm going into the future, and to open his mind to new ideas and ways of doing things. He also wanted to highlight the importance of farming, to show how he farms and to help counteract the negative media attention agriculture is getting.

'To portray the kind of mental impact all the bad media has on farming, on farmers in general, you know, I think there's a big mental strain on guys, some people are trying to change but they're really portrayed in a bad light.' (July 2022)

'Farmers on the peninsula, the big thing about it is, there's a big ripple effect from them. They might be five farmers in the parish but they're going into town, they're spending money in the merchants, in the co-ops, they're going to the mart, all those businesses are employing people, all those people go into shops, restaurants, pubs... You can't just wipe out farming.' (Jan 2022)

Climate Change Concerns

Joe is concerned about the extreme weather we are getting, it can be very wet, very dry, and very mild. There are no seasons anymore.

Impact of the Project

The project helped Joe to think outside of the box.

'You'd be hoping to implement some of the things you've seen and possibly look into other alternatives... like agri-tourism or something. If you had to reduce your numbers of animals, you could diversify somewhere else.' (July 2022)

'You're more inclined to think outside the box as regards biodiversity, what's already on the farm, to enhance it and protect what's there. Our hedgerows that are there all our lives, but we just didn't see value in them until it was pointed out that what's there is of high value and we need to maintain it.' (Jan 2023)

'Maybe introduce methods of enhancing the hedgerows. Maybe put more in, if possible. It's difficult back here. But if we can find sheltered places, put more in. So definitely, farming-wise our methods could change to help promote biodiversity.' (Jan 2023)

'It can be done alongside what we are farming, the methods we're doing already. There's space there for it.' (Jan 2023)

The social aspect is important.

'Farming can be quite isolated, so the project has allowed us to meet each other, there's a big social aspect to it, going to different farms and each other's farms. It gave me kind of a pep in my step.'
(Sept 2022)

'We met so many different people from different enterprises. That would be the main thing. The amount of different people we met in the group... it was interesting that way. We made new friends.'
(Jan 2023)

The project has helped Joe realise what he is already doing.

'I felt proud that, I had never really viewed myself as being as good at low input as I possibly am. I have reduced my fertiliser on the farm. We now spread our slurry with mostly low emission spreading and I have found by reducing the rate of chemical this year clover has managed to grow the same amount of grass as required.' (Sept 2022)

'I've also found from the project that my own farm has a lot more biodiversity than I thought it had. Things that we pass every day and don't take any notice of. Dry stone walls, which have probably been on the farm since the 1920s, those walls have grown numerous amounts of plants and they have provided a great habitat for biodiversity. Down here on the shoreline, there's a lot of oak trees on the farm which have been here for generations.'
(Sept 2022)

But financial support and advice needs to come from government.

'Farmers would need not only financial support to put in solar panels or heat recovery systems, but also advice on how to do different things.'
(July 2022)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

'Art can show complicated issues. What's on the news, if you kept watching it, it would drain you, so art can simplify everything for any normal lay person. I think for the general public it would be a great way of putting across climate change issues. You know, rather than listening to the news all the time.' (Jan 2023)

'Film is a good way of documenting it too. And especially nowadays, a lot of people watch videos. If you put it on YouTube, it's a very simple way of getting at people again.' (Jan 2023)

Were Joe's Initial Expectations for the Project met?

'The variety of stuff we've seen probably exceeded my expectations, from the anaerobic digester to the sustainable dairy, you know, to the agri-tourism side of things. It was a vast amount.' (Jan 2023)





JOHN JOE FITZGERALD

Background

John Joe is a hill sheep farmer from Baile an Lochaigh, five miles west of Dingle. He can trace his roots on the farm back to the 1830s on his grandmother's side. John Joe and his wife, Karen, have five children. They have 240 sheep on 200 acres (25 acres of improved ground and the rest is owned share of hill commonage). The farm is in transition back to the traditional Scotch Blackface mountain breed of sheep, which used to be common in the hills of West Kerry. In January 2023, John Joe began the process of converting his farm to organic standards.

John Joe is involved in a number of other programmes and groups, including the EU Ploutos Project (through the Dingle Hub), Teagasc Better Farm Hill Sheep Programme, Teagasc Signpost Programme and Teagasc European Smartfarming. He was Vice Chair of Kerry IFA but, in October 2022, left and established a West Kerry branch of the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Assoc (INFHA).

Reasons for Applying

Dinny Galvin, founder of the West Kerry Dairy Farmers SEC and Farmer Liaison Officer with the Dingle Hub encouraged John Joe to apply. He wanted to show that West Kerry farmers can be part of the climate change solution and that small suckler farmers shouldn't be painted with the same brush as the big commercial dairy farmers. He also wanted to have a more sustainable farm for his family.

'That's what motivates me more than anything else to be part of these things, making sure there's something there for the next generation. They're the future.' (Nov 2023)

Climate Change Concerns

John Joe is concerned about the heavy rains, the strong winds, the more frequent storms and how the seasons are changing.

'My grandfather put in a little bridge years ago, there was about a six-inch gullet as we call it, like a six-inch pipe running through it and, when I started farming here in 2005, I changed that to a twelve-inch pipe. Now at that time that pipe was able to take that amount of water. But there last year I had to change that twelve-inch pipe to an eighteen-inch pipe because of the amount of rain that is falling altogether like. It's totally abnormal.' (Jan 2022)

'It's seriously interfering with the kind of farming we are doing here. When you put the sheep back on the mountain after they have been put to the ram, they get a lot of heavy rain and when you bring them down again, they're sometimes not as strong as they should be, you have to give them extra care before they give birth.' (Sept 2022)

Impact of the Project

The project has changed John Joe's outlook on farming.

'I suppose the way when I get up in the morning now, if I'm going to do a bit of work on the farm... my outlook is, how will I do this to make it better for the environment? That's the first thing that goes through my mind now. I'm coming around to the way of thinking, I'm not going to wait for grants, if there's something to be done now, growing hedges and stuff, if I have to do it out of my own pocket, I am going to go and do it because it needs to be done. And that's how it's changed my mentality. I'm going into organic farming as well. And it's the way to go.' (Jan 2023)

'I'll be in conversion now for two years. It will be a different way of farming. I suppose there's a steep learning curve in front of me. But you know, I'm up for the challenge. Because we have to, for the sake of the future, we have to do it. It's changed my mentality completely that way.' (Jan 2023)

John Joe is going to plant 500-600 metres of hedges, if not more, for shelter and 'to give something back.' (Jan 2023). He was impressed by the pods in West Cork, the farm layout, and how the enterprise is integrated with walks and is community driven. He will investigate setting up something similar on his farm. He also wants to set up bird and bat boxes.

The project has also opened John Joe's eyes to the importance of taking time for rest and relaxation, and of accepting a simpler life.

'I have come to the stage in life, I suppose I have kids, and they're in their teens. We were always driven, you have to do more, keep going seven days a week, be up all hours of the night, keep working. And I suppose there was no quality of life in it. And alright, maybe the fields look nice when they're green and everything. But it would be nice to go and relax, and take a bit of time out for myself ... it's opened my eyes to that. Because looking back in my father's time when we were growing up and my grandmother's time when she was alive, things seemed to be a lot simpler. They were happy with what they had...and certain days of the week they were able to relax.' (Jan 2023)

'If you keep looking, you'll never have enough, and so the way I look at it, at the end of the day, if there's food on the table, we have our health, and no leak

in the roof of the house, what more do we want? It's changed my outlook that way.' (Jan 2023)

'As a group of farmers, we've done a lot with the last year, I suppose in West Kerry farmers we got the discussion going, and there needs to be a lot more of that happening.' (Sept 2022)

'It would be nice to see the group stay together, and something else to come out of it. As a group, with the way that climate change is going, as a group of farmers I think we need to be in the mix going forward.' (Aug 2022)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

'When we were talking about artists at the beginning, even I said, what has this art got to do with farming?' (Jan 2023)

'We do find it hard at times to express ourselves or pull the words out of our mouth. What are we going to say? How would I describe this? But while you're talking to Lisa, she could draw a sketch, and you look at the sketches and realise that's exactly what I'm trying to say.' (Jan 2023)

The Creative Climate Wall at the Ploughing was very effective.

'The amount of farmers that were stopping and looking at what we were doing, and walking by and seeing the drawings on the wall. And you could hear them say, 'that's exactly what we're trying to say, and we've been saying this for years', and it got a discussion going, it got people talking to each other.' (Jan 2023)

'I thought it was brilliant, it has changed my outlook towards artists. They're like nature, they're part of nature, and they're able to express it through their art. And I think we should appreciate them a lot more.' (Jan 2023)

Were John Joe's Initial Expectations for the Project met?

'They've been exceeded. It's unbelievable. That's the only way to describe it... I think it's brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. And I hope it keeps going in some shape or form.' (Jan 2023)



MICHAEL & SANDRA O'DOWD

Background

Michael and Sandra O'Dowd, along with their five children, run a mixed 75-acre farm at Ballycrispin, near Castlemaine. They have a dairy herd of 40 milking cows and rear 40 weanlings each year. They have an orchard of 800 apple trees and sell their own apples and Ring of Kerry Apple Juice locally. To improve pollination for the orchard, the farm has approximately 30 beehives, which also produce honey for sale. The family rears turkeys for sale at Christmas and four to five hundred chickens for Easter. Much of their vegetables are provided by a kitchen garden, hens provide eggs and goats provide milk. Michael and Sandra are involved in the GLAS Scheme.

Reasons for Applying

Michael and Sandra wanted to join the project because they are concerned about climate change and the effects it will have on their farm and they were interested in seeing what changes they could make. Also, they felt farmers need a voice.

'There's a lot of criticism about the farmers and the pollution we're doing and I want to prove that we're not the ones to blame and I hope that this course will help us out in bringing a few facts to what we're at.' (Michael, Jan 2022)

'When I heard about this project I couldn't believe that somebody is actually looking after the climate, so we were anxious to get involved in it. We don't get to meet people that often anymore I suppose.'

All our friends, they are on different roads. It's nice to get the people who have the same mindset as us. It makes a change and it gets us out some bit. We see their farms and they see ours.'

(Michael, Sept 2022)

Climate Change Concerns

Michael and Sandra are concerned about the very late frosts and very cold springs which affect apple growing, the high level of rainfall at the wrong times of the year, the short bursts of intense heat and the mild winters. Warm winters mean that cattle sweat in the slatted sheds and catch viruses. Then if it's too wet, cattle can't be let out of the sheds because they will poach the ground.

'This is the biggest fear I have had since I was born, this climate action thing that's coming because I know maybe a small bit too much about it.'

(Michael, July 2022)

'That's one thing I see about climate change, the furze, there was a bush there that was flowering with us before Christmas, one patch and there were bees. Imagine, in flower at that time! I've never seen that before. It would normally be February.'

(Michael, July 2022)

'Those days with the 30 degrees were absolutely savage. When we were pruning in that intense heat, the days that were 30 degrees, we had to stop. Where the leaf covered the apple and we took it off,

it burnt the apple. It was like a white person going out in the first day of sun without sun cream.'

(Michael, Sept 2022)

Impact of the Project

'We think more about the nature and things, and we'll be more aware of it, even though we were always aware of it. Like when we went up to see that project with Donal Sheehan - I'll be keeping the fence out maybe an extra foot now, pulling it out rather than pushing it in, to leave more space for nature. (Michael, Jan 2023)

'We had a lot of things covered. We didn't really need to make a lot of changes to anything really.'

(Sandra, Jan 2023)

The social experience was the biggest part.

'It's very easy to become isolated on a farm. It got us out more, it got us out to these things, meeting people. That's the biggest danger I see in farming... that's my biggest worry with my own young fellas. Farming can guide us straight down the path of isolation. Tis so easy to get isolated. You're at home so long, you lose your friends, because they're gone off on different paths... There's always more things to be done, and it just eats you up, it can swallow you up. You have to pull back a bit from it.'

(Michael, Jan 2023)

Sandra took part in the Climate Conversations at the Ploughing Championships. She had never really spoken in public like this before.

'I just didn't like, didn't like talking. It isn't me I suppose really at the end of the day... but I did want to put out there that there are women in agriculture. And trying to rear a family and doing the best for the environment. I mean, we do love what we're doing, and it's not that we're out to harm the land or anything else. You know, we're out there to try and do our very best.'

(Sandra, Nov 2022)

'I was glad I'd done it, when it was over. I suppose really a lot of time it's the thought of actually going up there and doing it. But I wouldn't be pushing myself out front for anything else!'

(Sandra, Nov 2022)

It's important to act for the next generation.

'Our children were really interested in it. At the end of the day, they are the future. I think definitely it had a big impact on them.' (Sandra, Jan 2023)

'I suppose there's more people than me worried about the climate and worried about the way they are looking after nature and looking after the trees. I thought I might have been the only one but at least there's ten of us now in this group. They're all concerned for the next generation and to leave the land and soil and trees in a better condition than we got them.' (Michael, Sept 2023)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

Michael and Sandra's ideas about art and creativity have definitely changed since they started this project.

'My idea was somebody drawing something in art. But there's more to art obviously. The film, that was big art. No, it was never like the art I thought about. My art was somebody drawing something and that was it. (Michael, Jan 2023)

'Lisa brought it alive really.' (Sandra, Jan 2023)

'A picture, like they say, tells a thousand stories - all these pictures and the art was fantastic. It changed our thoughts on it anyway.' (Michael, Jan 2023)

'It definitely is the way to get it out there, yes. You can be talking all day but one clip of a film or a few photographs. More so the film part of it, we can show people so much in three or four sentences.' (Michael, Jan 2023)

'And young kids as well. They'd be more interested in looking at pictures and drawings, rather than trying to read something. I mean, you wouldn't get a ten year old to sit down and read something about it.' (Sandra, Jan 2023)

Were Michael and Sandra's Initial Expectations for the Project met?

'Yeah. People were really dedicated to it. From the start off they were dedicated to it. So definitely, they were.' (Sandra, Jan 2023)

'It was amazing that none of us fell out and we all worked away together... because we were all focused on much the same thing.' (Michael, Jan 2023)

'It's the joined-up thinking, looking at the film..., there's pieces from everybody, and I think our story is well out there.' (Michael, Jan 2023)



NIAMH FOLEY

Background

Niamh is a part-time farmer on 20 acres and she has a share in commonage which stretches from Blennerville to Castlemaine. She lectures in MTU Kerry, across a range of programmes - agricultural engineering, agricultural mechanics, mechanical engineering and agricultural science. Modules include farm machinery, ag tractor technology, hydraulics and project design. Niamh's primary degree is in agricultural engineering and she has recently completed an MSc in Bioeconomy with Business, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture. Niamh farms a suckler cow herd and rears some weanlings. She has some horses and a donkey. Niamh was a participant in the 'Women Active in Society Programme' organised by NEWKD & the Entrepreneurs Academy, which ran from August 2021 to April 2022.

Reasons for Applying

Niamh had been looking at making changes on the farm for the twelve months prior to applying to the project, but felt she was not ready to go organic. She had already trialled the use of biological soil enhancer instead of fertiliser and had started to re-seed with different types of grass for pasture rotation. Niamh applied for the project because she wanted to improve the efficiency of her farm and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. She also wanted to investigate soil fertility, carbon sequestration, the use of bioenhancers, how to avoid soil compaction, manure management, the control of weeds without spraying, reducing dependency on artificial fertilisers, and improving animal health and welfare by reducing antibiotics and trying other remedies. She wanted

to start growing vegetables and encouraging biodiversity on her land. She was interested in getting guidance from different organisations and seeing the inputs and outputs from an artist and a creative mindset.

Climate Change Concerns

Because of her location, Niamh is particularly concerned about drought, flooding, and declining water supplies and water quality. With uncertain weather, it is also difficult to re-seed and hit the right temperature for germination.

'In terms of climate change one of the big things I am facing here on the farm over the last four years is the fields behind me, the tide comes in and it's flooding the land. Its limestone land but that never happened before. So we had to re-drain the land. Water and water quality would be an issue on the farm, with salinity from the tide, so we do a lot of rainwater harvesting from the sheds for the animals.' (Sept 2022)

Impact of the Project

The project has broadened Niamh's thinking.

'It's funny how you see things on the farm, feeding animals and having silage and you'd see in the winter the little birds around, and I suppose it just never dawned on me till I was part of the project to see what I could do to help them survive the winter and enhance their habitat and food. So, I started looking at bird boxes, and then I started looking at sourcing grass seeds.' (Jan 2023)

'I have 500 trees coming over the next six weeks, but it never dawned on me to make sure they were sourced, that they were Irish grown trees. So, looking at local produce for the farmer and trying to support a local area...it really made you think of that a little bit more.' (Jan 2023)

She has learnt how important it is to have buy-in from the local community.

'The wider community has to come on board... you can't be running to the supermarket expecting to have carrots at a very low margin, when you can hardly buy the seeds for it, and the care and everything else that you're looking at. So, you have to have that buy-in from everybody on the peninsula really.' (Jan 2023)

Niamh has a better appreciation of the importance of biodiversity.

'It wasn't till the day of filming, really, that pointed out to me about looking at the butterflies, looking at what birds are around, the food sources, the rabbits, that kind of thing. And what could you do to attract more biodiversity onto the farm? A lot of it isn't actually costing a whole pile, it is actually just thinking outside the box.' (Jan 2023)

She now sees the importance of collective action.

'Only for this project I don't think I would have engaged as much. It's opened up an awful lot of avenues around sustainability and the future and what we can do as a collective group rather than as individuals.' (July 2022)

'The film was just so powerful. we started off as ten farmers, but we've become a group of friends and like a little mini co-operative trying to expand more than anything. I think that is powerful.' (Jan 2023)

Niamh highlighted the importance of the Whats App group and the contacts they have made.

'The Whats App, the networking that has come out of it has been huge. I think that has been amazing.' (July 2022)

'We can tell other people that there's somebody local that sells organic chickens or organic turkeys, or the juice or the dairy side, or the PV panels.' (Jan 2023)

Niamh is now working on a fertiliser plan to utilise her farmyard manure and she has begun producing compost. She is using her local Co-op more and has asked them to source a solar powered water pump and electric fence. Niamh has started moving the fence out from the ditch to allow for wild seeds and she has put out some seed bombs, sourced from Co. Clare. She is hoping to introduce some pigs and five or six turkeys onto the farm during the year.

[These changes] 'may look insignificant to one person, but they build, you know, that's where the power comes.' (Jan 2023)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

'It was difficult to look at the vision as to how they were going to build in this understanding with the community through art, showing what challenges we faced as farmers, and then how the community could input on that. But at the Ploughing Match, and at that Wall, it just all came together.' (Jan 2023)

'It gave the highlights of the urgency of climate change to everybody, and how the farmers were pivotal, but how the wider community had to actually support, whether it be local produce, purchasing, creating a circular economy, looking at how waste food could be put into a biosystem on the peninsula, or how could we use wool, could it be used for insulation, what could we do with heat and electricity and transport. So, it was the big picture.' (Jan 2023)

'We always linked food and farm and climate change, but we never actually link art in and actually see the benefit. And I think that was one of the big things that I saw from the Wall at the Ploughing Match that, wow, the engagement and the visual and the story, it was like a storyboard. You can say, you write this and that's like, oh, no, that's not what I meant. But up there in art, you know, it's there.' (Nov 2022)

The creativity has rubbed off on Niamh.

'I went into Google Maps and screenshot the farm. And I then went around the farm at where hedges were lacking, or what I wanted to plan, and then I looked at the other hedges and what trees were there and devised a plan. The art wasn't great, but I had block colour, because I'd hardly understand my own drawing!' (Jan 2023)

'I see art as a new language. it is something that should be used for a lot of programs to get messages across, because it does actually engage people. It's amazing.' (Jan 2023)

Have Niamh's Initial Expectations for the Project been met?

'They've been exceeded. I don't think anybody could have foreseen where the project was going from the beginning, from the initial meetings.' (Jan 2023)

'It has been a fantastic journey. And I think it's a journey that will go forward, with all of us. I think we've learned so much... it's just opened up a new way of looking at things and a new vision as well.' (Jan 2023)

'I never thought that much was going to come out of it, I had been thinking about how was I going to start reducing my carbon footprint but the message it just went, you know, huge. Yeah, it was fantastic.' (Jan 2023)



PADRAIG O'DOWD & SHARON NÍ SHÚILLEABHÁIN

Background

Padraig O' Dowd is a part-time sheep farmer (and full-time block layer) in Kinard, Lios Póil, where he lives with his wife, Sharon Ní Shúilleabháin and their four children. Sharon has a degree in environmental science. Padraig inherited the farm from his mother's brother. He has 200 breeding ewes, 6 rams and 40 replacement lambs on 29 acres of green ground and 264 acres of commonage. It is a low input hill farm enterprise, playing to its strengths by farming the local breed of native Scotch sheep and making full use of the hill commonage. The sheep are brought down from the hill to grassland for lambing in April. Padraig is involved in the GLAS and Sheep Welfare Schemes.

'I am fairly extensive, I lamb when they are supposed to lamb in the middle of April. I've a hardy hill sheep who have been here before me. There's no sheds, there's no tractors, there's no machinery. No spraying goes on, the sheep eat everything and keep it simple.' (Padraig, July 2022)

Reasons for Applying

Having seen the good work and positive outcomes of other sustainable agri-projects run by the Dingle Hub, Padraig and Sharon felt it would be a good opportunity for them to highlight how a high-quality product can be achieved with low inputs, and also to show how farming can positively contribute to climate action. They hoped that the site visits would inspire positive biodiversity enhancing actions on their farm and that the perspective of a creative individual would help them see and explore less obvious options. Because their farming is already quite low-impact they were not looking to diversify but they were open-minded and keen to see things from the perspectives of others. The financial stipend (€1,500 per farm family) and the chance to socialise with other farmers and to be part of a community again, were also incentives.

Climate Change Concerns

Padraig and Sharon are concerned by the huge shift in weather patterns, the mild wet winters, the longer hot summers, and the changes in biodiversity.

'I have noticed a huge decline in the numbers of insects since I was young, even the annoying ones - when was the last time you were bitten by midges?' (Sharon, Jan 2022)

'These last few weeks have been just unreal, dry and warm. I was working in a T-shirt today which is just mad for the middle of January and that can't be right and maybe next August it'll be pouring rain and rain and more rain.' (Padraig, Jan 2022)

Impact of the Project

Padraig appreciated the push.

'I suppose it makes you more aware of what is happening. And unless you are prodded and poked and pushed along, cajoled, you're not going to be made aware of what actually is happening. Because we're all just floating along, aimlessly at times. But when you're definitely being pushed in one direction...' (Padraig, Jan 2023)

Seeing what others are doing helped Sharon appreciate what is happening on their farm.

'Until you see other farms you don't realise exactly what you have on your own farm. There is room for improvement of course but it's not a huge jump. The jump that is perceived to be there isn't as big as we think it is. So, that's a huge thing I have got from this project.' (Sharon, Sept 2022)

'How to work towards or achieve the 'ideal' farm felt completely outside my abilities. The farm visits, however, injected a much-needed dose of reality into my vision! This project has enabled me to view our farm without that 'ideal' bias and truly appreciate what is here. I have always recognised and appreciated how hard Padraig works on the

farm but now also feel proud of how he farms and what he has achieved. I also have a very clear view and impetus to take small, incremental steps to add to the biodiversity that is already here.'

(Sharon, Jan 2023)

Sharon is keen to develop the hedgerows and plant some trees, but Padraig is more hesitant.

'I suppose the mindset of most farmers is land is so valuable and you cannot physically see a value in ten acres of trees, regardless of the environment. Once you set trees, you'll never have that land again, it's in trees forever. On a lot of farms, there's the farmer, but there's also the generation who we get the farm from, be it your parents, uncle, aunt and they farmed it all their life with whatever they had, 30, 40 sheep and 50 cows. Next thing didn't they see you go off planting trees. They'd have a nervous breakdown. There was never trees there before, why do you plant trees? That's a great field. And you have to keep a happy ship.'

(Padraig, July 2022)

The social side of the project was important for Padraig.

'The project is very social, meeting different farmers... like-minded people who are open to change and going to different places – you mightn't have the same viewpoints but sure let them do what they want, and I'll do what I want.' (Padraig, July 2022)

Negative messages don't work.

'Before this project I didn't fully appreciate how detrimental or far reaching all the negative stories were. They have a very negative impact on farmers mental health but also, I've learnt that usually when farmers do get a chance to respond, their narrative is also negative, trying to reappropriate the blame. In turn what the public mostly hear is negativity about, and from farmers which serves to widen the divide even further.' (Sharon, Jan 2023)

Farmers need to be compensated for improvements.

'It took going to other farms to see what other people are doing to go, well actually Padraig isn't doing very much wrong here. Now there's always something you can improve, but what could be improved here definitely needs to be paid to be improved... you have to pay for ecological services... It's just too much for one farmer, to add on to their day, or any farm.' (Sharon, July 2022)

Community change is really where it's at.

'The project has shown that in buckets, anything that is constructively happening is happening at the community level. And then the big-ticket changes have to come from higher up - we're not going to be able to go off fossil fuels in the morning.' (Sharon, Jan 2023)

Framing matters.

'[The message] 'is geared towards 'put in a hedgerow because it's great for biodiversity' or 'do this because it's great for the environment', but they don't show how putting in a hedgerow or multi species swards actually benefit you as a farmer, or benefits your farm, or improves your productivity ... we just have to change how you frame it.'

(Sharon, Jan 2023)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

'I had no ideas whatsoever, preconceived none whatsoever, nothing doesn't register, doesn't appeal or doesn't tickle my fancy.' (Padraig, Jan 2023)

'It has certainly changed my perspective on what I would consider art to be, and I appreciate creativity in a much broader context now.' (Sharon, Jan 2023)

'I think the role of art with respect to climate change is to draw attention to the issue, start conversations and also provide different perspectives on how to address it. After this project I believe that the power of art in this role is unparalleled when compared to other forms of communication – a picture paints a thousand words! And as Donal Sheehan said, it's so important to tell our story.' (Sharon, Jan 2023)

'I think the power of Lisa's drawings and film is that she framed them in such an honest, balanced and accessible way. I do think though that for actions to be implemented in a way that results in measurable outcomes, the whole package that we experienced is required - the farm visits, knowledge transfer etc.' (Sharon, Jan 2023)

'The film is there forever. It's really special. And it is something very solid.' (Sharon, Jan 2023)

Have Padraig and Sharon's Initial Expectations for the Project been met?

'I had no expectations whatsoever...it was either going to turn out fairly alright or an absolute disaster from start to finish with people who want to you to do quare things. But no, it was very engaging. As a farmer I wasn't being bombarded with leaflets and books and petitions and etc, etc, etc. No, no, it was well thought out. After a slow start last year, the trips were good in fairness, and the meetings they didn't go on, you know some meetings some nights they go on, and on and on.' (Padraig, Jan 2023)

'I had no expectations really at the beginning of the project especially as I couldn't envisage how climate change and farming issues would be addressed through art – I'm not sure that I understood what 'an embedded artist' meant! I can say though that my reasons for wishing to be part of the project have been fulfilled.' (Sharon, Jan 2023)



SEAN KENNEDY

Background

Sean took over the family farm in Doonsheane, near Dingle town, in 1988. He and his wife, Gabrielle, have three daughters and they manage a dairy herd of 66 cows and replacements on 60 adjusted acres and 24 rented. They operate a spring calving system and are trying to be as efficient as they can with breeding. Sean has a great interest in grass quality and he has introduced clover into his paddocks. Sean is also involved in the EU Ploutos Project (through the Dingle Hub), the West Kerry Dairy Farmers SEC and the Teagasc projected grass growth project in Moorepark.

Reasons for Applying

Sean was keen to see if he could help make a difference. He wanted to learn about the upcoming changes and to keep on top of things that are happening. He is very interested in soils. His land is 70% sand and the rain drains away the nutrients, so he's looking for a sustainable replacement.

'I got involved in this project to see what is going on in the West Kerry community, to see what is going on in the Hub. We're socialising with the other farmers because there's no more creamery anymore, there's just the creamery driver and that's it. Only for the discussion groups, you wouldn't see anybody, they're all at home working.' (Sept 2022)

Climate Change Concerns

Sean's main concern is trying to hold the Ps and Ks on light sandy soil. Without this, it won't be possible to make a living off the farm.

'It's just evolving, I suppose the climate change, we have the cows at their most efficient and we are putting out protected urea, spreading less, low emissions slurry spreading. We're doing all that, we're doing what all the information is telling us to do. Efficient as we can at the moment, yeah. The ground gets, everything gets very dried up and we'll have to go into a longer rotation. It never happened before.' (Sept 2022)

Impact of the Project

The project and the discussions have helped to bring the issues front and centre.

'You're watching things more like you know. It's only a small thing but you have that in the back of your head all of the time, that's what I find about it. You're watching any water, any run-offs or anything around the farm, it all makes a difference. We've cut back in our fertilizer and we've nearly got the same amount of grass growing, you know what I mean, that would be my big thing. I've cut back by maybe, it wouldn't be a third but maybe 27 or 28 per cent... It seems to be working.' (Sept 2022)

Sean realises he is already contributing to biodiversity.

'You'd be inclined to think first when you're doing something, instead of cutting hedges, you'd think about it. I actually never cut hedges, I always just trimmed the wire from them with a snips instead of actually coming along with a hedge cutters and cutting hedges. I just leave them grow away, they're only briars anyway, so they'll die back over the winter. It will give them a chance. It made me realize that I was actually doing the right thing, for a change.' (Jan 2023)

Sean doesn't think organic farming is the way to go for his farm.

'The organics doesn't play with me because we have to be stocked where we are to make a living out of it because there's two of us here, we have no other employment, the farm is our income and that's it. So, we have to make it work as best we can. If we can get free return out of anything, that's what I'm watching for.' (July 2022)

Sean sat clover for the first-time last year, to test it out. He would be open to thinking about converting some rough ground into forestry.

'Land that can't be used, what would be the best to plant there, because it gets very wet during the winters. It's handy for me in weather like this, it all dries up and at least there's some bit of grass for cows, it's rough grass but if there were some trees they could walk through them when the weather is dry. What would be the best trees to plant in an area, without overtaking the place?' (July 2022)

Sean and his wife are close to retirement age, and they are thinking of cutting back.

'Because we're getting older, we might cut back a bit as well, pull back the throttle a small bit. We'll be cut back with fertilizer anyway so you'd have to tone back on the animals and stocking rate.' (July 2022)

Nevertheless, thanks to a contact made through this project, they have recently joined the Social Farming, a scheme which offers people who are socially, physically, mentally or intellectually disadvantaged the opportunity to spend time on a family farm.

Sean would like the group to stay together.

'Is it going to carry on? It would be nice to meet up the odd night, maybe three or four times a year, just to keep in touch more than anything... you're just after getting to really know the people.' (Jan 2023)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

'I was amazed with the creative side of it, the way I looked at it was, it was great to put a thing in a picture because it shows you what's going on and it makes other people that don't understand farming, they might get something from a picture.' (Jan 2023)

'A picture paints a thousand words. It's as simple as that... you'll read something and it will go in one ear and out the other.' (Jan 2023)

Have Sean's Initial Expectations for the Project been met?

'Actually more so, because we weren't expecting a whole lot. We didn't know, we joined up to see what was happening and just to know what it was all about more than anything else. It helped us to see everybody's side of it because we are stuck in a rut here, we're head down and backside up. So, we're working flat out. It was nice to see everybody's side of it.' (Jan 2023)





TOM & NORA GREANEY

Background

In 1985, Tom inherited the 107-acre farm at Flemingstown, Anascaul from his uncle and together he and Nora have raised their three children there. After five years of dairy farming, Tom moved into sucklers and then dry stock. He currently has a calf to beef enterprise, with 90 cattle. He also breeds lambs from 40 sheep for butcher sales and brings in 50-60 lambs in the spring for fattening up. They have chickens and a polytunnel for their own use. 40 acres on the farm have been converted into forestry.

Reasons for Applying

Dinny Galvin, founder of the West Kerry Dairy Farmers SEC and Farmer Liaison Officer with the Dingle Hub, encouraged Tom to apply because he wanted to gain more knowledge on climate change and how he can improve his farming practices.

Climate Change Concerns

Tom and Nora are worried about the volumes of heavy rain, the frequent storms and how the seasons are getting shorter, and the temperatures are unpredictable.

'It's getting hard to work with all the weather conditions, there's so many storms... Even to cut silage or anything like that, it's a hit and miss thing to get crops in, to get crops dry.' (Tom, Jan 2022)

'There's a lot of springs in the mountains and they come down, even though there are drains to gather the water it still breaks up on the land. We have problems keeping farm roads here because the

springs, the water, during flooding it just covers the whole road so we break the water by cutting trenches across the road, so it doesn't tear away the whole road.' (Tom, Sept 2022)

'The cattle were sweating in the slatted sheds and they were stressed out and getting pneumonia.' (Tom, Jan 2022)

Impact of the Project

'This climate action group is the best thing I ever joined to be quite honest. I've found it fierce interesting.' (Tom, Nov 2022)

The highlight of the project for Tom and Nora has been visiting the different farms, seeing the organic farming and the glamping, and learning from each other.

'I have learned more about biodiversity and about the climate from talking to people... I think that's the best way to pick up tips on how things are being done.' (Tom, July 2022)

'We went to Top of the Rock. It's very interesting to see how they have just a small area, just a little field and the way they had their glamping pods there. It was in the middle of the country and they had their outdoor area, even their fires they sit around at night. It was so interesting in such a small place. You know it would make you think, gosh we have that here, we could do something similar.' (Nora, July 2022)

The trips helped them to appreciate what they already have.

'Until you go to somebody else's farm you don't realise what you have yourself.' (Nora, July 2022)

'We've a pile of hedges and shrubbery, forests and everything. It's only when you sit back and think after you've seen how it is in other places, when you tune into this climate change, you'd say you're doing things nearly just as good, without realizing it.' (Tom, July 2022)

They picked up ideas along the way.

'Even that coffee place we went to, where was it, in Fermoy we went for our lunch with the group. They had the waste coffee outside the door in the little plastic bags for anyone to take home.' (Nora, July 2022)

'You could take them away and use for fertiliser in the greenhouse.' (Tom)

'So we have a lovely new cafe in Annascaul, and Tom went and asked them, could he take the waste coffee for our greenhouse?' (Nora)

'You see there's a lot of things that can be used up again.' (Tom)

In July, Tom and Nora went to visit their son, who works in tourism in Canada. Because he knew of their involvement in this project, he arranged three farm trips for them during their stay involving, cider-making, glamping, a community owned shop and café, vegetable and herb growing. Tom and Nora reckoned that if they hadn't been in this project they wouldn't have been interested in those trips. On their return, in August, Tom and Nora volunteered to host a farm walk on their land for the group, which was very successful.

Arising from a contact made through this project, Tom and Nora have recently joined Kerry Social Farming

'You're doing some good for someone.' (Tom, Jan 2023)

Tom is interested in agri-forestry, planting trees and letting his sheep graze around them, but he will need policy and financial support.

'I have to see what the government is going to come up with first... they tell you one thing one day and the next thing that changes. There's no guideline and nothing to follow. They can't make up their mind. If they came up with a solution. We all know we must do something to rectify this, I mean, every small bit will help.' (Tom, Jan 2023)

'We could do lots of things but everything we start carries money. You see the likes of myself and Nora now, we're not too far away from the pension. If we were 20 years younger, it would be a totally different story.' (Tom, Jan 2023)

'We know we must look after the climate, but people have to look after their income as well. If you're in a job you'd get redundancy but when you're farming you get nothing.' (Tom, July 2022)

Nevertheless, change is on the horizon.

'I think I will be cutting back on stock anyway. And I'd say fertilizers as well, it will have to be cut down.' (Tom, Jan 2023)

'What we're doing, we must try to do it for the next generation. We have to otherwise they won't have a world to live in.' (Tom, Jan 2023)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

'The art and the creativity is good, it's good for everyone. But I'd say more for the young crowd coming up to see different aspects of farming and how things have changed. You can show a lot of that with pictures and they probably understand it a lot, it will help them understand.' (Tom, Jan 2023)

'It should start at a young age, this art, and they'll learn through it.' (Nora, Jan 2023)

'Even farmers' sons and daughters, they can see how hard it is for their parents to get crops in. And to look out the window every day and buckets of rain coming down. So, they're going to ask questions, why is all this happening?' (Tom, Jan 2023)

Have Tom and Nora's Initial Expectations for the Project been met?

'Definitely beyond our expectations, definitely and especially that I got to go as well, I didn't expect to be included!' (Nora, Jan 2023)

'When we started out on this project, we thought we'd only be going to each other's farms and things, but sure we travelled further and further afield and learned a lot of different things. We thought it would be only a kind of discussion group, but it was far more than a discussion group.' (Tom, Jan 2023)



TONY O'SÉ AND SIOBHÁN PRENDERGAST

Background

Tony and Siobhán live with their three children on a coastal farm in Ard na Caithne, near Ballyferriter in Corca Dhuibhne. The land has been in Tony's family for over 80 years. The couple sold their suckler herd last year. They have 150 sheep, including pedigree Belclares, and 3 Connemara ponies on their mountainous land and pastures. The family eats their own meat and organic vegetables, and they catch fish, lobsters and crabs. They also collect seaweed as food (mostly sea spaghetti and dillisk) and to fertilise the garden.

Both Tony and Siobhán have full-time jobs - Tony is a secondary school teacher in Dingle and Siobhán runs her own publishing business from home. Over the past 20 years they have planted about 1,000 blackthorn bushes. They have experimented with many aspects of the 'John Seymour' self-sufficient life, including making their own cheese, beer and keeping bees. Tony and Siobhán participated in Store Net's solar PV and battery installation pilot scheme in 2019/20. They are currently involved in the EU Ploutos farm sensor scheme co-ordinated locally by the Dingle Hub.

Reasons for Applying

Tony and Siobhán are extremely interested in self-sufficiency and sustainability. The project pulled together a lot of their interests - farming, the arts and reducing impact on the environment. They were interested in meeting new people, seeing what other farmers were doing and what's going on with climate change. They felt it is important for artists to have opportunities to work in, and with, the community

and they hoped the project would provide an opportunity to highlight the contribution that farmers are already making. Furthermore, the financial stipend of €1,500, provided by the project to each of the ten farm families, was attractive.

'Unfortunately, the farm itself isn't financially sustainable. It's not about saving money, it's about filling another little hole that needs filling on the farm.' (Tony, July 2022)

'Farming income is hugely subsidized by government schemes and this is essential as farmers are not paid properly for their produce, so even if it is only 100 euros, or 800 euros, or 1,500, it's an essential addition to farm income.' (Siobhán, July 2022)

Climate Change Concerns

The violent storms, unpredictable weather and the heavy rains are all a concern. How do you build up hedgerows and shelter belts?

'I had a polytunnel which was wiped out yet again. This one only lasted two years and it got wiped out by a storm in about two minutes.' (Siobhán, Jan 2022)

'You have "pet weeks" these days where plants begin to bud but then frost or a bad storm comes in that wipes them out again... You just couldn't have the drains clear enough or deep enough, every year they have to get a little bit deeper and the pipes have to get a little bit wider.' (Siobhán, Jan 2022)

Impact of the Project

While Tony and Siobhán have been reducing their environmental impact on the land over the years, the project and seeing what is happening on other farms has energised them to do more.

'I was happy to find that I was already doing a lot of sustainable and nature-friendly farming. I had a lot of hedges set and as we try to practice low density farming we already had a lot of wonderful biodiversity on the farm anyway... But there is so much more we could do. I'd like to do more.' (Tony, July 2022)

'We have plans to plant a lot more trees because after doing the project and after listening to the experts talking to us about storing carbon, we would love to plant a load more.' (Tony, Sept 2022)

'It has inspired me to continue doing the work that we have been doing, but to up the ante and do even more.' (Siobhán, Jan 2023)

'We'd like to increase our energy production through solar and wind ... and to inspire our children further on this journey so that nature-friendly practices will continue on the farm long into the future.' (Siobhán, Jan 2023)

The transfer of knowledge was key, as was the social aspect.

'One thing I've learnt is the amazing knowledge that the farmers themselves have... Any problem I have, I just had to mention it on the bus, and someone has a solution, because as farmers they have come across the problem already.' (Siobhán, July 2022)

'It's wonderful, we're all like a sort of pool of information. That's education isn't it really?... And not only that, we've made loads of friends, we had great craic going around, talking to each other. New company and making new friends, and we'll continue with this work.' (Tony, Sept 2022)

'I'll be looking forward to meeting this great bunch of farmers again, I had such fun with them and what a mine of information!' (Siobhán, Jan 2023)

It's important to balance the damage machinery and methane is doing with the benefit of maintaining green spaces.

'We're not selling off the land to developers, though we live on the Dingle Peninsula. We could make a fortune from selling our land off to developers and live a much easier life very comfortably, but we're not, we're working 24-7 for no financial reward, in fact we are lucky to break even most years.' (Siobhán, July 2022)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

Siobhán is a director of Dingle Literary Festival and works with Féile na Bealtaine and already had a huge interest in the arts and culture. But her involvement in the project has enhanced this.

'When it comes to the art, I look at it in odd places around the farm where farmers long ago, you could just call them master craftsmen really, have built drains using stone and the material that is around them in the field, and built the most aesthetically beautiful drains that are still working, are still open, are still holding, the strength of them - it's remarkable and they're absolutely stunning. And when you look at some of the stone walls around and the patterns that they're using...' (Siobhán, Jan 2022)

'I can see the farm through a different lens now, thanks to Lisa. Whenever I am knee deep in mud or elbow deep in a lambing sheep I will think of the farm from above and be even more delighted that I am blessed to live in such a wonderful place. I can now see art in the world around me, inspired by Lisa's creativity and vision.' (Siobhán, Jan 2023)

'As Lisa has shown, a visual representation of farming practices can greatly aid both understanding by non-farmers and by farmers themselves. It gives us a more objective view making it easier to see the problems and the solutions and how we can be effective on our own farms.' (Siobhán, Jan 2023)

Have Tony and Siobhán's Initial Expectations for the Project been met?

'We really had no idea what to expect and the project far exceeded our expectations. There was an amazing pool of knowledge with the farmers that took part and we learned even more from the farm visits and talks and trips. Catriona, Lisa and Clare were a mine of information themselves and we just saw the tip of the iceberg. Their own work and commitment to the environment was so motivating. It was inspiring to be working with so many different bodies coming together in one movement forward. It really was an inspiration, coupled with information on how to improve and do more to forge a new and brighter future for ourselves, our children and all the generations that hopefully will follow them.' (Siobhán, Jan 2023)



ÉIBHLÍN, SÉAMUS & LÍS Ó CHÍOBHÁIN

Background

Séamus has been involved in farming at an nGráig, Ballyferriter all his life. He initially worked for other farmers around the parish and then took over the family farm when his father died. He and Eibhlín have raised four children on the 50-acre farm (with 70 acres of commonage). Their daughter Lis and her family now live on the land and will bring it into the future. The economics of farming has already forced the family to downscale. They have moved out of cattle and milk production and have reduced the number of sheep to 100, so they already have a much lower impact on the environment. They have a polytunnel for their own use.

'It was always the mindset you know, increase in numbers. That was where the profit was in farming. Keep up the numbers, get as many as you can. Lash out the fertilizer. Lash out the chemicals. Just keep going like that. The money was coming in, but now it's all turned around on its head. It's completely different to what we were doing in terms of farming in the 70s and early 80s, but we have to be happy with that. I totally take the latest scientific advice. This is what we must do.' (Éibhlín, Jan 2022)

'And you know it's just the government not being far sighted enough, it wasn't so long ago that they got rid of the quotas, and all these young fellows just expanded, spent so much money - parlours, oh my god I feel so, it would make you cry for them, it

would make you cry for them. ... My god how many times have we changed in the last 40 years I've been farming here?' (Éibhlín, July 2022)

Reasons for Applying

Éibhlín and Seamus applied to help improve the image of farming and the farmer in the ordinary community. They also wanted to see what is going on and keep abreast of the modern innovations for their daughter, Lis, who will lead the farm into the next generation. Lis is a science teacher and is interested in the environment, the impact of climate change on farming, new technologies and how farmers will make a living in the future.

'It's good to be part of something that's going on in the Hub. We'll be going along on the coattails of that in a sense, you know. They're doing fantastic work.' (Éibhlín, July 2022)

Climate Change Concerns

The family is concerned about the increased frequency of the storms and winds. Being near the sea, erosion is also an issue.

'There's no doubt that storms are more frequent than they were fifty years ago, in my opinion. I don't know if they are more fierce, but they are more frequent. Of course, when you get those storms in the spring, one after the other, that's not good for the grass. It makes it turn black.' (Séamus, Sept 2022)

Impact of the Project

This project is 'reinforcing messages and a change of culture that we've been hearing about in the media for the last, on the radio and television and things, in the last year or two. It added to it.' (Éibhlin, July 2022)

Éibhlin is now clear that they have a responsibility to act.

'We did get a lot of information, which we were looking for, from the very beginning... and I found as time went on, and talking to other farmers, we did get a clearer view. And then towards the end, quite recently, I began to think that, which I had never thought of before, as farmers we can have an impact, bigger than you could have just as a housewife at home, running your house... even though our farm is very small, we could in our own small way have an impact and that, actually, we had a responsibility there... It's a privilege to own a farm and with that comes a responsibility to do something about global warming and the environment.' (Éibhlin, Jan 2023)

'Our farming system creates really low emissions, but we think that we could improve biodiversity on our farm, that we could maybe let the hedgerows that are dividing our fields, grow out a bit more and thicken up, and not to be cutting them back. There could be a role there for us, because there are a lot of little animals, and especially birds, that we used to see that maybe we don't see as much of anymore. We can have a sward that would be more biodiverse, with clover - that would be a good thing to stitch in.' (Éibhlin, Jan 2023)

'We've just built our house here, and it's geothermal heating we have. I suppose I'd be thinking about not depending on oil or anything like that. And I'm thinking more about my energy usage... and buying local food.' (Lis, Jan 2023)

Seeing others in the project team using public transport has encouraged Éibhlin to give the Local Link a go!

'I have been listening to Deirdre Wallace (de Bhailís) and seeing her use the Local Link bus. It's the example, I think, what you see from people that can have an effect on you, you know? So, seeing how you can get on the bus, a young woman who wasn't, you just associate the bus with pensioners really, and then thinking, oh, yeah sure, the bus is for everybody. It's not just for old people, it's for young people as well. So that

changed my thinking about the bus and now I have made several trips, instead of taking the car to Dingle. The bus is passing my door, the Local Link. It is an image change, really. And I think it's Deirdre Wallace, when it was such a normal thing for them all going in the bus and listening to Lisa coming and going on the bus when she came out here. So, the bus is for us now something to take seriously and so that's a big thing that the project has done, it has changed my attitude to transport.'

(Éibhlin, Jan 2023)

There is a great sense of camaraderie between the farmers in the group.

'We enjoyed it really... the meeting and the exchanging of ideas, and that camaraderie that has been lost from farming really in the last 10 years. People aren't meeting up, people are more dispersed. So that's good, because we all know what the others are doing. And we have a feeling of camaraderie with them because we're all on the same boat.' (Éibhlin, Jan 2023)

The Creative Aspects of the Project

Éibhlin sings, but neither Éibhlin or Lis have a direct interest in art. However, the way Lisa sees things has heightened their awareness of their surroundings.

'We're looking at drains and stone walls, in a more, not in an aesthetic way but in a more kind of practical way, something that has to be done. That stone has fallen there, put it back up again. But she can see it in a more aesthetic way really. So that's opened our eyes, the day she walked down our land, there I was with her in the middle of winter and the things she was seeing, you know in the grasses and pointing out and definitely, you're super aware of them from then on.' (Éibhlin, July 2022)

'At the start of the project, we didn't really know how the art would come into the whole equation. And then with Lisa drawing, the little sketches...when you see those kinds of pictures and animations it hits you harder, or you see it more clearly than if you were reading a two-page essay or reading all these facts and figures.' (Lis, Jan 2023)

'It's more impactful to you, than listening to talk or viewing a documentary on the TV.' (Éibhlin, Jan 2023)

Were Éibhlín and Lís' Initial Expectations for the Project met?

'We didn't really know what it was about in the beginning. But I suppose we thought we would be learning about climate change. It's not that we didn't know about climate change, we did. But it was more abstract for us, and we were thinking that it was an overwhelming thing that you just had to push out of your mind, because you didn't feel that you could ever have any kind of impact or input into resolving this question.' (Éibhlín, Jan 2023)

'It has changed our mind from being something very abstract that you would be hearing about every day, bombarded with it. But to bring it down then in the sense of meeting the farmers in the area, talking to them and visiting other places and seeing what is been done. Yeah, we could have a hand in this as well, ourselves in our small patch.' (Éibhlín, Jan 2023)

'At the start, we were saying, oh, sure we don't have much of an impact at all, we're not using much power, no electricity, it's not like we're milking or anything like that. So, we have very low impact, but I suppose it's not about that, it's about what can you change to lessen your carbon footprint and make a difference for the biodiversity of the farm and stuff like that, rather than just looking at energy and energy usage.' (Lís, Jan 2023)





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This is one of a series of three learning briefs on this project:

1. ***The Experience of the Participating Farmers***
2. ***The Experience of the Project Team***
3. ***The Creative Climate Wall***

Clare Watson (MaREI) led the reflective learning, evaluation and writing process with crucial and valuable support and input from Catriona Fallon (GAI), Lisa Fingleton, Deirdre de Bhailís (Dingle Hub) and all the farmers involved. Maria Power, Community Consultants, engaged by MaREI, carried out a review of the embedded evaluation processes and use of reflective learning in the project.

Photography by Manuela Dei Grandi and Dominic Walsh. Filming by Chris Garrett and Editing/Colour grading by Clint Fitzgerald.

Drawings: c. Lisa Fingleton

FILMS

For more please see the following videos: [*Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe: A Creative Imagining*](#) Interview with embedded artist, Lisa Fingleton at the end of the project, January 2023

[*The Future is in the Fields*](#) at the Ploughing Championships, September 2022

[*Guthanna ón nGort: Voices from the Field*](#) Film trailer, directed by Lisa Fingleton, December 2022