

County Galway Rural Resource Study

Woodford Summary

Jim Frawley,

Teagasc, Rural Economy Research Centre

Noel O'Meara,

Galway Rural Development Company

John Whirisky,

Teagasc, Rural Development Resource Centre, Athenry

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County Galway Rural Resource Study

Teagasc wish to express its gratitude at the level of co-operation and partnership exhibited throughout the planning and conducting of this study.

Galway Rural Development contributed in a major way to the success of the study. Noel O'Meara, on secondment from Galway Rural Development, was the visible face of the study in each community. The results of the study will be used to focus programmes and schemes of LDSIP and NRDP within the county and to further foster relationships with the other organisations involved.

Galway County Council has been a key partner in the design and delivery of the study and their financial contribution is gratefully acknowledged. The outcomes of this study provide useful detail on which local authority partnerships actions can be based.

Cuireann Údarás na Gaeltachta fáilte roimh an tuarascáil seo agus tá an
-sásta go raibh sé ar a chumas cúnamh deontais a chur ar fáil. Tá
o bhfuil an suirbhé seo ag baint le Ceantar na
nOileán i nGarumna i gConamara. Tá an tÚdarás buíoch do Chomhairle
Ceantair na nOileán a thug cúnamh agus comhoibriú iomlán don obair seo.

The authors also wish to thank the partnership group Cumas who also contributed to the study. Teagasc is pleased to have led this study and appreciate that the results can be used to give further relevance to the programmes carried out by the agencies, not alone in Galway, but also in many other counties throughout the country.

*Jim Frawley
John Whiriskey
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Woodford Rural Development Study

Introduction

Many rural areas have experienced unprecedented change over the past decade in the structure of their economies and population. These changes require adjustments at the individual and household level but also in the way local agencies and services support rural communities. The purpose of this study was to examine how Woodford as a community has adapted to change and to identify the challenges in maintaining Woodford as a viable community and a desirable place to live.

The Woodford study is part of a wider County Galway study of rural development, which was prompted by major changes in EU Agricultural & Rural Development policies. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is being widened increasingly to incorporate a view of the viability of the farm household and the broader rural community and its environment. EU and National policies clearly state their aims to maintain vibrant rural areas, which are connected to the mainstream of regional and national economies. However, it is less clear as to what specific measures are appropriate and how rural communities themselves can participate. In this study, the perspective was that sustaining a viable rural community was based on two aspects namely (i) a viable economy and (ii) a rural community demographically balanced and inclusive in an amenable environment.

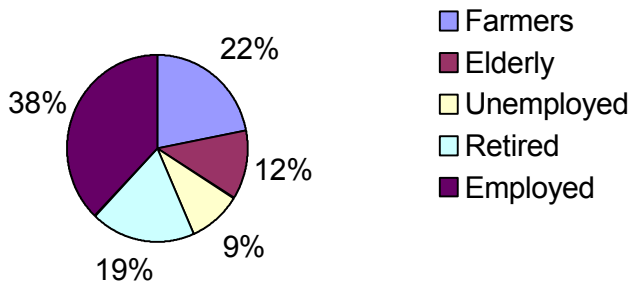
Methods

Five distinct types of rural area in County Galway were identified by analysis of CSO/Census data. These were (i) a peri – urban area (mainly near Galway city), (ii) remote peripheral area (Connemara) (iii) areas with high forest cover and two farming type areas, (iv) representing the better land and (v) other

farming area. Woodford was selected to represent an area with high forest cover, which accounts for a relatively small part of the county. Five different types of households were identified namely; (i) farm households, (ii) elderly (>65 and living alone), (iii) retired households, (iv) unemployed and (v) working households non-farm.

Figure 1 shows the different household types identified from the electoral register of Woodford Electoral Division.

Figure 1: Household Types in Woodford



From these figures it is clear that Woodford is predominantly a non-farming community with 22% of the households engaged in farming. Forty percent of households were headed by a person who was either elderly, retired or unemployed while almost 40% of households had employment outside of farming. From 181 households comprising the Woodford community 89 were selected randomly from the different household types and were surveyed in January and February 2003.

Survey Results; The Rural Economy

A number of aspects of the economy are considered namely; (i) Farm structures and incomes (ii) Sources of household income and (iii) Occupations and community patterns.

Farm Structures and Income Sources

The scale of farming was relatively small and drystock and suckling were the main farm enterprises. Farm incomes were generally low with 79% having farm incomes under €10,000 and 17% with between €10,000 and €20,000.

Table 1: Farming in Woodford

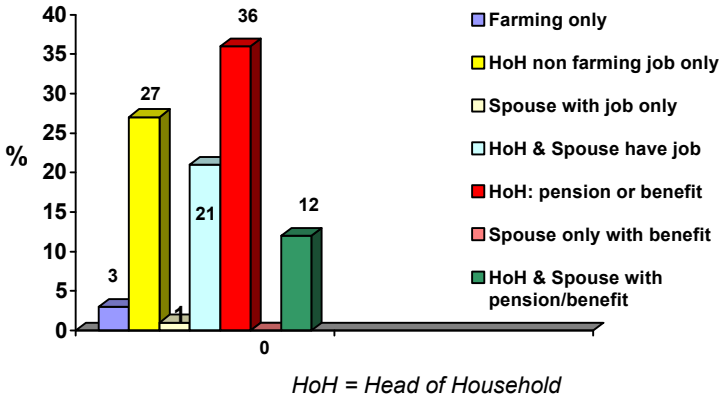
Average Farm Size	24 ha
Predominant farm system: Suckling	87%
Other Systems: Dry Cattle	9%
Farm incomes <€10,000	79%
€10,000<€20,000	17%
Part-time Farming¹	46%

¹ Operator and/or spouse have job.

Household Incomes

A summary of the income sources of all households is shown below in Figure 2. While 22% of households were engaged in farming in Woodford only 3% of all households depended on farming alone for income. Forty nine percent of all households had an earned income and forty eight percent of households had an income from a pension or other state transfer, many including farm households.

Figure 2: Percent of Households by Income Source

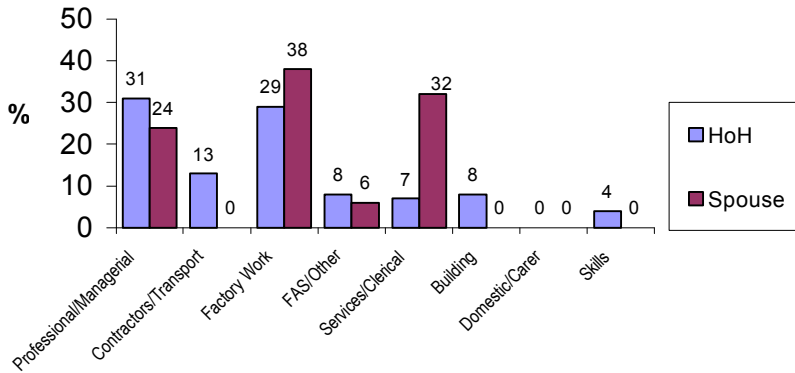


Occupational Structures

Information on the occupational status of heads of households¹ and their spouses is presented in Figure 3. Twenty four percent of spouses and 31% of heads of households at work had professional/managerial positions. Other occupations of heads of households included factory work (29%) contractors/drivers (13%) and building (8%). Thirty two percent of spouses worked in services or clerical jobs.

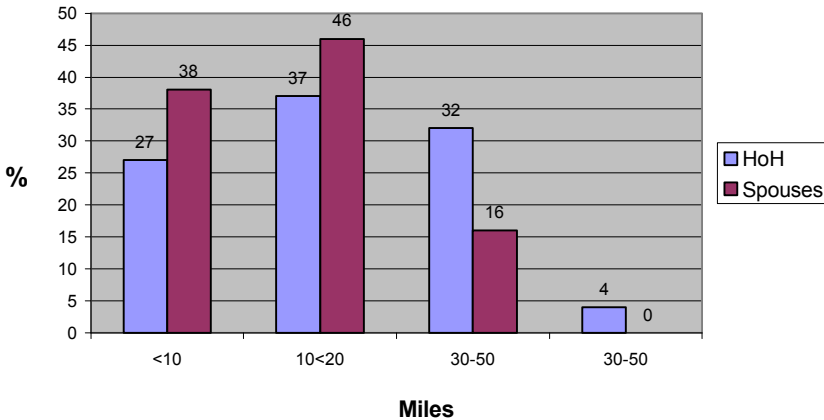
¹ In the survey heads of households were reported to be predominantly male

Figure 3: Percentage Occupations of Heads of Households and Spouses



As Figure 4 illustrates, 27% of household heads worked in the Woodford vicinity, (travel less than 10 miles to work) as compared with 38% of spouses. Thirty seven percent of heads of household and 46% of spouses travelled between 10 and 20 miles to work. Thirty six percent of the heads of household travelled over 20 miles to work. The principal destinations were the local towns of Portumna and Loughrea and most travelled by private car.

Figure 4: Distance to Place of Work



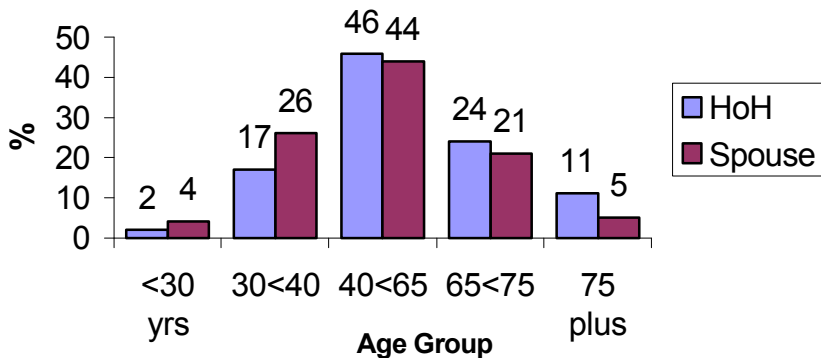
Survey Results; The Rural Community

The main resource of any community is its people. The latest census of population shows that there was a total of 479 persons living in Woodford in 2002, an increase of (2%) since the previous census in 1996. This compares with a growth in the County of Galway population of 9% in the same period.

Human Resources

Two aspects of the human resource in Woodford were studied; namely the age profile and educational status of household heads and their spouses. The age profile, shown in Figure 5, revealed that predominantly household heads and spouses were aged between 40 and 64 years. One-third (35%) of household heads were 65 or over as compared with 26% of spouses. Conversely less than one-fifth of household heads were 40 years or younger

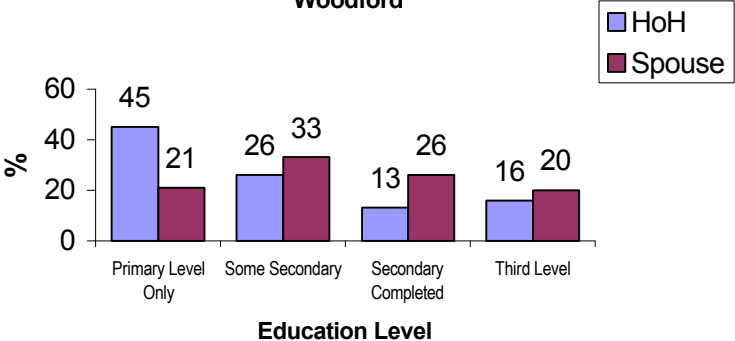
Figure 5: Age Profile of Heads of Household & Spouses



with 30% of spouses in the category. In general spouses (mainly female) were younger than household heads.

Figure 6 presents the profile of the highest educational level achieved by both household heads and spouses. Slightly less than half of household heads (45%) had primary level only and this was associated with the farming sector. Spouses had higher educational levels than the heads of households as indicated by the proportion (20%) that achieved third-level standard.

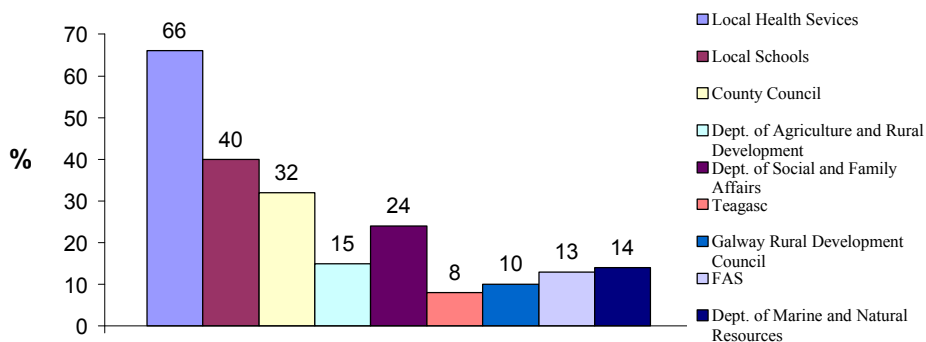
Figure 6: Educational Status of HoHs & Spouses in Woodford



Local Agencies and Services

Figure 7 indicates the level of usage of selected agencies in the community. The local agencies most in demand in the area were the health services (66%), local schools (40%) and County Council (32%). The high usage of the health services was probably due to the relatively high proportion of elderly and retired households in the community. In general the services of these agencies were readily available to all households and user satisfaction was overall adequate to good.

Figure 7: Usage of Agencies by Households in the Woodford Area



Apart from the state agencies, access to consumer services are another important dimension of community well being. Information on the satisfaction of households on a range of services is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Household Satisfaction with local services*

Service	<u>Excellent/Good</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>	<u>Poor</u>
	%	%	%
Shopping	11	19	69
Leisure Activities	17	22	57
Churches	87	6	2
Post Office	89	10	1
Bank	8	0	65
Activities for Youth	22	35	40
Security for Elderly	37	27	31
Access to jobs	2	11	81
Water Supply	72	13	14
Public Transport	2	7	89
Childcare Facilities	2	3	73

*Some respondents did not reply to specific questions

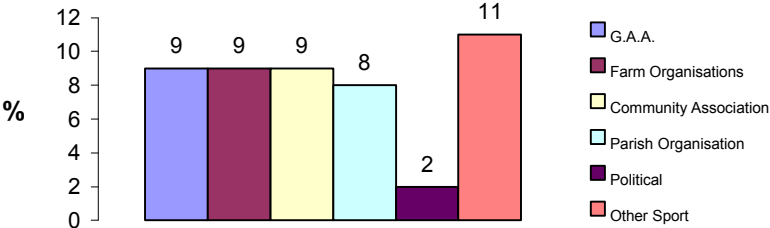
Clearly there are major differences in the satisfaction level of households for different services. In particular there were very high levels of dissatisfaction in the community with regard to (1) the provision of public transport, (2) childcare facilities, (3) access to jobs, (4) shopping facilities, (5) leisure facilities and youth activities and (6) bank services.

While these deficiencies were highlighted in the study the potential for local communities to intervene is more challenging. With the possible exception of job creation it is not beyond the capacity of a vibrant community to tackle many of these issues. Local effort suitably supported by public agencies could be effective.

Community Participation

A crucial dimension of a viable community is the level of formal and informal social contact. A measure of formal participation was taken as the level of involvement in voluntary organisations in the area. As outlined in Figure 8, the involvement in local organisations in the Woodford area was low with no more than 9% of the population involved in any one organisation.

Figure 8: Percentage Head of Household Membership in local organisations



Informal social contacts were examined by way of identifying the regular social activities of respondents. Across all households types visiting friends/relatives or having them visit was the main activity identified (Table 3). For the elderly and retired categories having friends or relatives visit was a

major social activity and this contrasted with employed/unemployed households who tended to do the visiting. However 'going for a drink' was equally associated with all types of household whether employed, unemployed or retired. The other social activity of importance for households in the area was card-playing.

Table 3: Activities engaged in once a week or more by household types:

Household Type	Visiting friends %	Have friends visit %	Go for a drink %	Card Playing	Go to a match %
Farmers	62	66	56	35	4
Elderly	67	75	25	33	0
Retired	38	54	54	38	0
Employed	74	61	55	13	19
Unemployed	80	40	40	10	0

Attachment to Own Place

The responses to a number of attitude statements are indicative of how people feel about their community; these are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Level of Agreement with Attitude Statements about the Woodford Area

Attitude Statement	Agreement %
The longer I live here the more I feel I belong	95
If I was in trouble most people would go out of their way to help me	98
Most people in the community can be trusted	95
Young people can have a better way of life if they remain in the area	35

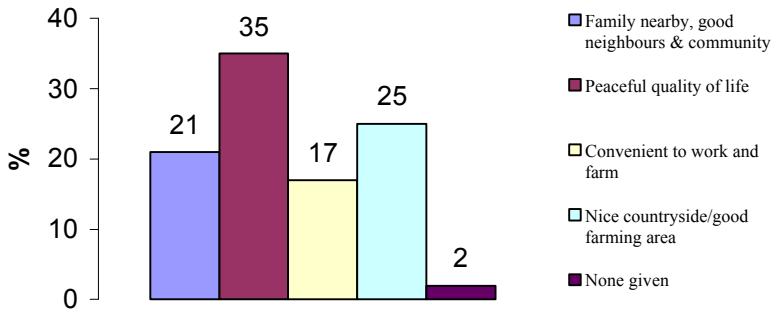
Apart from some concern for young people remaining in the area, the attitudes expressed are an endorsement of the positive feeling generally held about their community by Woodford residents. In a similar way householders were asked how safe they felt about living in their area. As can be seen in Table 5, households felt secure in most circumstances. This feeling of security extended across all household types though elderly persons had more concern about walking alone after dark.

Table 5: Respondents’ Feeling of Safety in Selected Circumstances

CIRCUMSTANCE	% feeling safe
To leave the door unlocked if you were going out for an hour or so	35
Walking alone in the neighbourhood after dark if you were alone	84
Being alone at home at night	94
Safe from crime and violence in the community	98

The positive sentiments and feelings about Woodford were reinforced in that 98% of householders stated they liked living in the area. The main advantages of living in the area are shown in Figure 9. The peaceful quality of life was the aspect of Woodford most appreciated but the traditional sentiments of placing high values on neighbours and the community were also clear. The findings provide some understanding of the attraction and meaning a rural environment has for its inhabitants. In the Woodford area it is clear that community criteria are important factors in deciding to live and remain in the locality and explains to a degree why commuting, even long distances is not considered in negative terms.

Figure 9: Advantages of living in Woodford



Conclusions

The Economy

In the typology analysis Woodford was identified as a rural area with a high density of forestry plantations, a high proportion of marginal land and a historically declining population. In addition farms were small with a high proportion of cattle rearing. In the analysis of aspects of the economy these features were found to persist in Woodford.

Twenty two percent of all households were farming but farm scale was small and incomes low, often supplemented by welfare payments such as Farm Assist. Given the scale of farming in the area, it is unlikely that any more than a small number of Woodford farmers will be viable in terms of farming alone. However subsidies aimed at rural development (such as forestry, REPS, disadvantaged area payments or early retirement) are important elements in contributing to farm incomes in the area.

Local employment in forestry was not high and its contribution to the local economy was difficult to assess. Surprisingly, for such a scenic and natural area there was little evidence of tourism contributing to household incomes. Is there a possibility to develop tourism?

Almost 40% of households in Woodford were gainfully employed, one third of them were self employed. Many of these jobs / businesses were local or within the south east Galway area. For employees there was a combination of professional and semi/unskilled occupations while retailing and construction businesses mostly featured for the self employed. Forty percent of households were not gainfully occupied being elderly (12%), unemployed (9%) or retired (19%)

The Community

There were high levels of contact with many of the supporting agencies such as the health services, schools, the County Council and the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Agencies such as the Department of Agriculture

and the Department of Marine and Natural Resources (Forestry) had a lesser level of contact. In terms of satisfaction with the agencies a number of problems arose particularly with respect to the health services, where the need for a resident doctor and chemist service was of particular concern. The under utilisation of the forestry resource in the area was highlighted as well as sensitivity to the location of plantations. Regarding the County Council more road improvements were cited.

Concerning the local services, a number of issues were recognised namely (i) the lack of public transport (ii) access to local employment (iii) childcare facilities and (iv) leisure activities. The level of participation in voluntary organisations was relatively low. However, measures of social interaction on an informal basis such as visiting friends or going for a drink were relatively common, especially for those in employment.

Demographic Structures

Heads of households and their spouses are relatively old in Woodford. Over a third of heads of householders were 65 years or older. This is reflected by the fact that more than one in ten of households in Woodford were inhabited by elderly persons living alone. In a declining population the proportion of elderly living alone is likely to rise in future with the attendant demands on improved health and community services. Another aspect to demographic balance is the relatively low skills and education levels across all household types. Clearly the better educated and younger people are leaving the area for employment, emphasising again the need for better local employment.

The Rural Environment

In Woodford all respondents indicated that they liked living there. More than half of householders stated that the quality of life and the scenic peaceful environment were the main advantages. Others mentioned the closeness to family and good neighbours. The study also showed that there was generally a positive attitude and attachment, among residents, to Woodford and in the main people felt safe in their homes.

The Challenge

Clearly there are a number of challenges in developing and maintaining Woodford as a viable rural community.

There is a need to strengthen the economy of the community and this is recognised by the residents in that they saw the most critical issue for the welfare of households was access to jobs locally. EU and national policies extol the need for viable rural communities and the Co Galway Development plan recognises the need to strengthen the economies of rural villages and rural areas. The promotion of indigenous enterprises is vital and must be facilitated by adequate communications and access infrastructures such as broadband. While the provision of infrastructure and an enterprise environment is beyond the scope of local communities, local initiative and endeavour is an essential element in the regeneration of local economies. Ideally, local development should be a partnership led by community initiative and energy and appropriately supported by state and local agencies.

In the same way the community issues, such as lack of public transport, childcare facilities and leisure activities for youth, could be tackled by partnerships of community interests supported and facilitated by local and state agencies.