



Farming the Uplands - Where to from here?

Catherine Keena
Teagasc Countryside Management Specialist

Introduction

- **Production Targets for Hill Sheep**
- **Wicklow Study**
- **Environmental Targets for Upland Habitats**
- **Commonage Management Planning**
- **Marrying all objectives**
 - **Lessons from the Burren**
 - **Hen Harrier EIP**
 - **Upland EIP's**

2016 Profit monitor results (€/ewe)

	Average	Top 1/3
Gross Output	€63	€96
Other Variable Costs	€4	€4
Total Variable Costs	€38	€36
Gross Margin	€25	€60
Total Fixed Costs	€46	€50
Net Profit Excl. Premia	- €21	€10
Total Premia*	€104	€88

Extract from Teagasc Hill sheep Conference 2018

What are good production targets for hill flocks?

- **Pregnancy rates >90%**
- **Weaning rates of at least 1.0 lamb per ewe joined**
- **Gross margin of > €40/ewe**



Take Home Messages

- **Ensure you have enough grass for ewes pre-mating to build live weight and BCS**
- **Availability of grass in the autumn will play a large role in dictating what you do with weaned lambs**
- **Finishing lambs to light carcass weights is a potential outlet for the hill sector but these markets need development**
- **Finishing lambs to heavy weights indoors requires lambs to gain 6-8kg at grass first to maximise indoor performance margins**
- **Market your lambs to suit your own farm**

Wicklow Study (317 farmers)

Maguire et al. Teagasc, UCD

Year	Uplands grazed	Uplands grazed for more than 6 months
1999	83%	70%
2014	41%	18%

Type of sheep and Time of year grazing the uplands	1999	2014	% change
Ewes and Lambs: May – July	5082	856	-83%
Ewes after weaning: Aug - Oct	8312	3822	-54%
Ewes after mating	4832	1602	-66%
Dry ewes and hoggets	2377	1238	-47%

Why is there less grazing on the uplands?

Reason	% of farmers who mentioned this reason
Sheep losses	43
Poor economic returns	43
Reduced lamb performance	33
No market for light hill lambs	29
Smaller lamb crops	18
Hills are overgrown	18
Farmer told to destock	15
Grazing not needed with less stock	11
Labour issues	9
Age	4

Economic Returns: Wicklow Example

Declan Byrne Teagasc Adviser, Wicklow

Net Margin = €0 / ewe, Teagasc eProfit Monitor

Average area of lowland: 32 ha

Average area of upland / commonage: 52 ha

Area of Natural Constraint (ANC): €0 (Maximum payment on 34 ha so full payment on lowland)

Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) & Greening: Rising to a minimum payment of €150 / ha in 2019

GLAS: €120 /ha up to a maximum payment of €5,000. Average over 51 ha = €98 / ha

2019 Scheme payments: BPS + Greening + GLAS = €240 / ha

At an upland Sustainable Stocking Rate of:

❖ **1.4 ewes/ha**

➤ **Scheme Payments = €171/ewe**

❖ **2 ewes/ha**

➤ **Scheme Payments = €124/ewe**

***Assumes you must be grazing the uplands
to get these payments***

Ideal Market Lamb:

GRADE 1



Specification:

Weight: 18-20kgs

Grading: R3, U3, E2, E3

Overview:

- Suitable for all markets
- Ideal lamb for processing



- ✓ Suitable for all processing applications
- ✓ Optimum yield



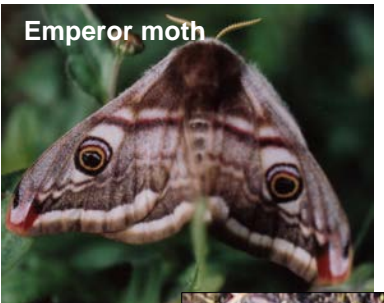
- ✓ Can achieve a competitive price point relative to other proteins
- ✓ Increasing requirement for fixed weight/ fixed price consumer packs
- ✓ Good uniform presentation and tray fill

**We have a clear message for farmers
as to what is required for market
and clear advice how to deliver this**

**Are farmers as clear about what we
want from upland habitats???**

Uplands - important for:

- farming
- carbon sequestration
- recreation
- tourism
- flood attenuation



➤ biodiversity



Undergrazing

- Strong heather
- Scrub



Overgrazing

- Peat erosion
- Loss of species



Habitat Type (Undamaged)	Stocking Rate: Ewe Equivalents / ha
Upland Grassland	1.5 - 5
Dry Heath	1 - 1.5
Wet Heath	0.75 - 1
Blanket Bog	0 - 0.75

Commonage Management Planning

- **1980's:** Increased stocking due to headage payments
- **1998 -2002:** Commonage Framework Plans (CFPs) - *Destocking*
- **2003:** Single Farm Payment – reduction in sheep numbers
- **2015:** GLAS Commonage Management Planning – *Sustainable Stocking Rate*
 - *9,000 of 15,000 farmers with commonage are in GLAS*
 - *4,200 out of 4,500 commonages are in GLAS and will have a Commonage Management Plan*

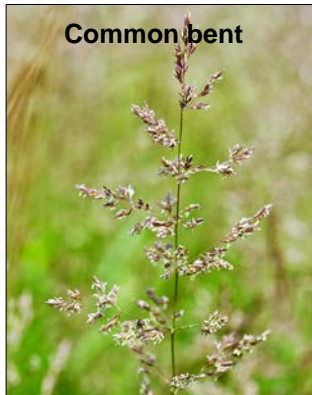
Upland Grassland



Mat-grass



Sweet vernal-grass



Common bent

Dominated by low-growing grasses

If undergrazed:

- Bracken
- Gorse / whins / furze

Dry Heath



Calluna ling heather



Bell heather



Bilberry

Peat depth < 15cm

Species poor

Ling and bell heather dominate

If overgrazed

- Heather disappears

Wet Heath



Purple moor grass



Deergrass



Cross-leaved heath

Peat depth: 15 - 80cm

If overgrazed:

- Slow to recover
- Erosion of peat
- Mat-grass / purple moor-grass monoculture

Blanket Bog



Bog asphodel



Sphagnum mosses



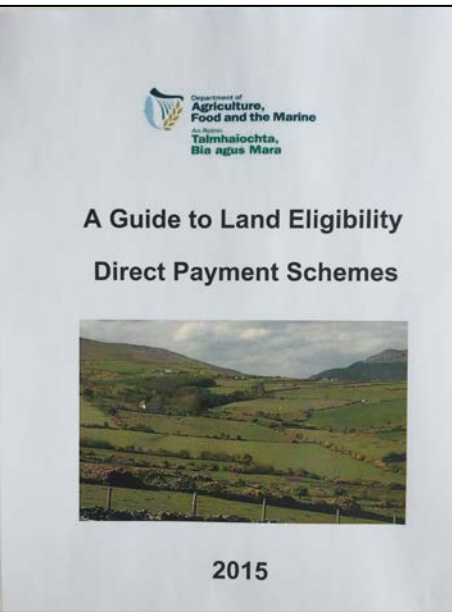
Sundew

Peat depth > 80cm

If overgrazed:

- Peat layer eroded

Integration of objectives

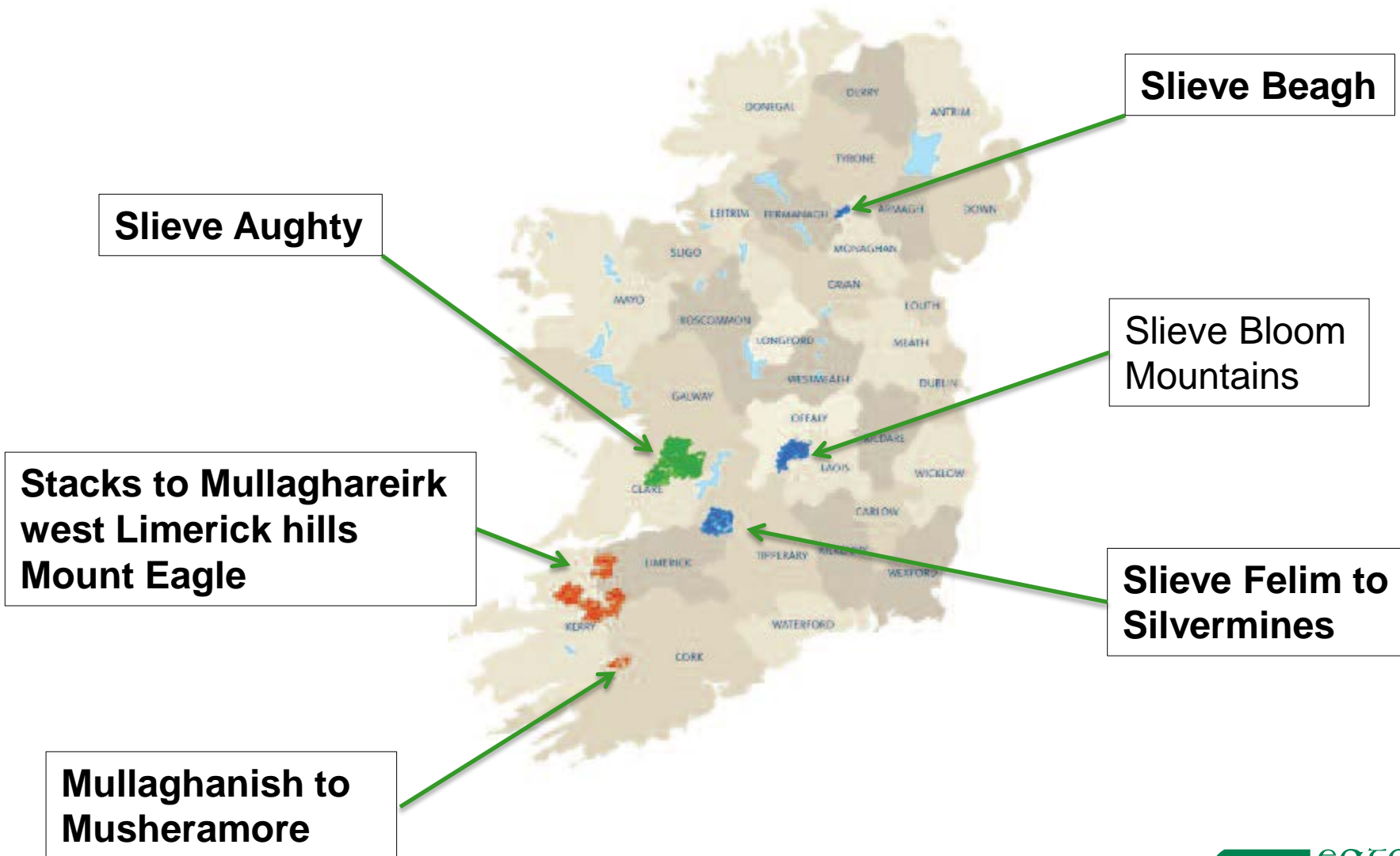




Lessons from the Burren...



Hen Harrier EIP (€25m)



Slieve Beagh

Slieve Aughty

Slieve Bloom Mountains

**Stacks to Mullaghareirk
west Limerick hills
Mount Eagle**

Slieve Felim to Silvermines

Mullaghanish to Musheramore

www.henharrierproject.ie

Upland EIP's (€1- €2m)

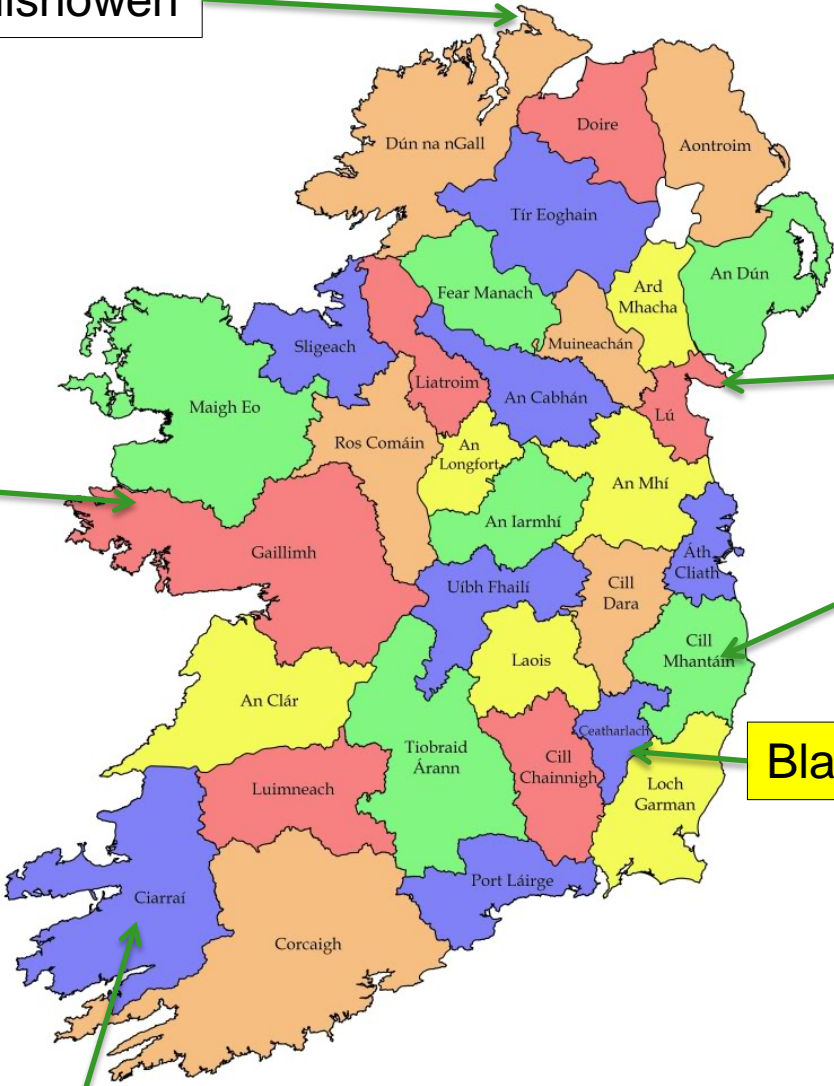
Inishowen

Cooley

SUAS

Blackstairs Farming Futures

Connemara



MacGillycuddy Reeks

SUAS Innovations

Establish
Commonage
Groups



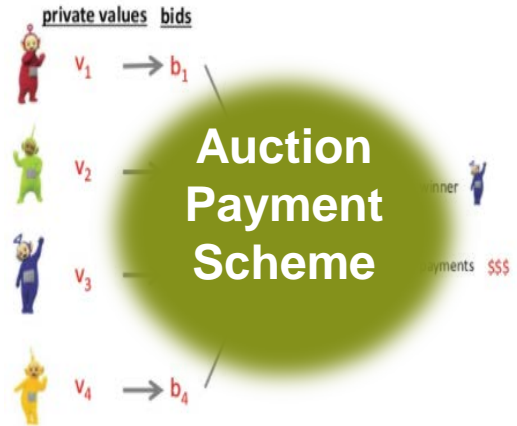
Integrated
management -
environmental
and flock
management

Operating
Commonage Groups –
Management Plans

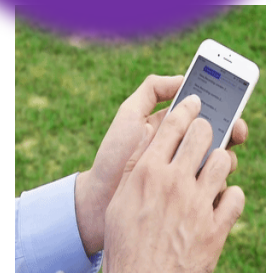
- Developing
- Implementing
- Monitoring
- Evaluating
- Adapting



Auctions scheme



Recording
app



Go raibh maith agaibh