

# RURAL RESOURCE POTENTIAL AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

## SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Agriculture.

Farming in Ireland and the agricultural economy is now controlled by wider economic trends and market forces over which Ireland has little control. The CAP has resulted in concentrated output, resources and income to a reducing number of farmers. The income gap between large and small farms is increasing. There is increasing under-employment on farms in the marginal regions directly related to farm viability and economic size of unit. One estimate concludes that the number of farms will fall by 40,000 in the period 1998 to 2010, with the greatest fall in the farms that are currently not viable.

Current trends in agriculture Land Use Patterns that are likely to continue into the future are: -

- A change from primary agricultural production to Forestry particularly in the W & NW.
- Dairying will contract from marginal areas eg Cavan /Monaghan to the Golden Vale.
- Sheep rearing will retreat to Uplands again as price structures are changing
- As farming moves continually towards lower intensity REPS will expand.
- There will be greater specialisation in farming.
- No. Employed in farming falling rapidly especially the BMW Region.
- Balanced Regional Development and issues like economic development/ decentralisation will accelerate loss of agricultural labour.
- Conflicts are arising as a result of changing agricultural pattern & pressures of access to rural area.

*e.g. access for walking  
Urban facilities located in the rural area cf landfill/incinerators  
CPO Roads  
Recreation/Forest parks for urban dwellers*

## Soil Type

Urban expansion has resulted in a loss of better agricultural land and therefore the most productive soils.

Urban generated housing has resulted in a proliferation of septic tanks generally located on poorer soils that do not have the capacity to absorb the effluent.

Agricultural production on poorer soils has resulted in increasing run-off to surface waters and resultant eutrophication.

The move away from agricultural production to afforestation (especially broadleaf) is occurring on the more productive soils.

As urban Ireland expands the issue of soil capability to accept increasing amounts of municipal sewage sludge particularly in the context of the preparation of Water Management plans will become important.

Most Municipal sewage sludge in other EU countries is spread on Tillage land but the land farmed for tillage in Ireland is extremely limited

The lack of a detailed soil survey means that there is no information on the heavy element status of Irish soils. Heavy metals from a major component of Municipal Sludge

## Landscape

Landscape conservation is important for many reasons, maintenance of environmental quality, tourism, provision of drinking water, agricultural production, natural heritage and biodiversity.

The Irish landscape will undergo significant change over the next 20 years and not only High Quality landscapes but also “ordinary” agricultural landscape will be subject to most change. Urban expansion, housing & building generally, tourism and recreation and infrastructure provision will have major impacts on the landscape.

The increased range and type of pressures on the landscape will require careful management.

## Natural Heritage

The area of land covered by Natural Heritage Designations is most extensive on the western seaboard although the Shannon waterway (an NHA) is a significant feature in the Midlands.

By and large the various areas designated for nature conservation are also of importance from the point of view of landscape conservation. Those coastal sites coincide with areas under pressure from development in the form of tourism, holiday home developments etc.

The upland areas designated are also those areas of highest windspeeds, which are attractive to windfarm developers.

By 2020 the number of designated SAC sites will not change dramatically due to comprehensive nature of list submitted to the EU Commission and currently being processed.

Farm management plans area to be put into place where current use is not compatible with SAC/NHA Protection eg Turf Cutting on protected bogland and overgrazing by sheep. With regard to overgrazing Commonage Framework Plans / De-stocking Plans are currently under review

Conservation Plans which specify what is acceptable / or not are being prepared with the landowners. 200 Draft Plans have been prepared.

The Department of Agriculture, the IFA and Duchas have agreed Habitat Prescriptions at National Level for protection of the Burren, Uplands, Dunes/ Machair.

## Water Resources

Water quality in surface waters continues to decline and it is significant that the causes of surface water pollution have been increasingly from sewage and additionally it is smaller rivers and streams that have been affected.

The main concern regarding the quality of groundwater is their protection as a source of drinking water supply and for use in food processing and related industrial operations.

Special measures are needed to protect the quality of groundwater in areas where large amounts of waste are stored or where wastes are applied to land.

## Recreation

The rural environment provides an increasingly important location for recreation by an increasing number of urban dwellers. Illustrative of the degree of increased usage are water based and forestry based recreation.

Over 50% of the adult population engage in at least one water-based pursuit, the most popular being trips to the beach/seaside and swimming (at about one million participants). A lot of Irish people also engage in activities such as angling (190,000) and various types of boating (144,000). About 31,000 people engage in other water-sports, while significant activity is also recorded for visits to coastal nature reserves (85,000), bird watching (31,000) and dolphin/whale watching (16,000).

Recent estimates (1998) indicate that domestic visits to forests totalled 7.7 million and that over 42% of all households visited a forest in the past year. It appears that since the majority of households did not visit a forest, those that did, did so regularly. Proximity to forests and lifestyle probably dictate visit patterns. The 7.7 million is higher than Coillte figures indicate because Coillte only monitor "manned" sites.

## Cultural Heritage

Agriculture is responsible for the greatest loss of archaeological monuments. REPS at present provides some protection, REPS uptake is lowest where agricultural change is likely to be greatest.

Increasing urbanisation and economic development in the Gaeltachtaí may have the effect of weakening the language.

Second home development in the Gaeltachtaí have the effect of driving up land prices beyond the resources of local native-speakers and may have the effect of weakening the language.

## Tourism

Tourism will grow target 9% currently 6% Internationally 3-3.5% esp. as leisure & wealth continue to increase.

In 2000 it is expected 6million tourists will visit Ireland, increasing by 2006 to 8 million. Problems arise when the 6m visitors are concentrated in certain areas for short period of time. eg Killarney 12,600 pop but at peak 53,000 overnights in town leads to infrastructure pressures.

Holiday patterns have changed from the traditional 2-week holiday to more short-break type holiday/Activity holidays also people are travelling further.

The core values that people visit Ireland for are Landscape & People, confirmed by ITIC/BF study.

It would appear that the reason for the downturn in visitor numbers is declining core values, Ireland is no longer perceived to be welcoming, the “green”, “clean” image is deteriorating evidenced in declining water quality (B&B now giving bottled water due to GWS contamination) angling tourism declining due to falling catches from pollution of water sources, adverse impact of development in the landscape.

Ireland is losing market share in tourism, German tourists appear to visiting in declining numbers, France has static visitor numbers and United Kingdom tourists are showing declining visitor numbers

The tourism industry acknowledges the need to arrest the decline. The question is “is it possible”???

With traditional core values gone inside 20 y Ireland will need to replace it tourism attraction but with what?

Other countries already have well developed tourism product in abundance.

E. Europe has what Ireland is losing and will therefore attract continental Europe already E Europe is catching up, they are actively marketing the image that Ireland has now.

Tourism development is levelling out and B&B operators are concerned. Tourism operators can get earn more and have better hours in industrial employment.

One important aspect is that Tourism needs to afforded greater consideration in County Development Plans which should aim for better policies to protect tourism, and the Landscape / Environment on which it depends. eg Tourism Zones within County Development Plans. The Department of Tourism sees the zonal approach as one method of integrating tourism concerns into development plans.

## Policy Implications

### **Agriculture**

- Significant numbers of off-farm employment will be required that will have to be spatially differentiated according to the particular needs of part-time farmers.
- With the aim of retaining population in the rural area service and infrastructure deficit will have to be addressed, particularly in the smaller towns and villages.
- With increased intensification in some areas and afforestation in others the landscape and environment will be radically altered. Agriculture as an economic sector will face challenges to be environmentally sustainable.
- Farm diversification & off-farm employment will require significant investment in the development of human resources.
- The retention of significant numbers in the rural area will necessitate continued focus on rural poverty and social exclusion.
- The integration of all of the above may require institutional changes for implementation.
- Climate change will see more agricultural land subject to winter flooding that will affect land usage.

### **Soil Type**

- The continued and increasing dependence of most rural housing on septic tanks has implications for both soil and water quality.
- Increasing levels of urbanisation require the disposal of municipal sewage sludge and it is apparent even with limited data the appropriate soils are not widely available. The EU Waste Directive does not allow disposal to landfill.

### **Landscape.**

- The area of greatest landscape change is probably agriculture and the measure that provides some protection, REPS. REPS uptake is lowest where change is likely to be greatest.
- The impact of infrastructure and in areas of high landscape value and in particular the tariffing of wind energy concentrating development on the west coast and uplands also of high landscape value.
- Tourism and second-home development outside towns and village need to be examined closely.

### **Natural Heritage.**

- The impact of infrastructure in and adjacent to designated natural heritage areas.

### **Water Resources.**

- The need to address the infrastructure deficit and rural settlement strategy with the continued decline in water quality particularly from sewage sources including septic tank effluent.
- Increasing septic tank use and groundwater protection and in surface water catchments generally
- Climate change will see increased water levels in lakes, which will have implications for housing in the lake catchments.

### **Recreation.**

- Increasing demand for recreation space but no national strategy on provision, no hierarchy of needs established. As regional urban centres develop provision for recreation will increase.

### **Cultural Heritage.**

- Agriculture is responsible for the greatest loss of archaeological monuments. REPS at present provides some protection, REPS uptake is lowest where agricultural change is likely to be greatest.
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### **Tourism**

- Tourism will have to be more spatially driven embracing the concepts of sustainable tourism and carrying capacities. Some indications that this is happening are evident, notably Tourism Strategy 2000-2006.
- Tourism & agri-tourism can contribute to rural development and farm diversification but are often not seen as such and potential not realised.
- If traditional core elements of Irish tourism are destroyed as appears to be the case, what will be the attraction for tourists?
- Stronger consideration of tourism in development plan hierarchy.