European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

European Results-based Payments Network

ACRES BREIFNE

Workshop on results-based payments, Caernarfon 12-13/03/2024

Introduction to Results-based Payments

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Ariennir gan **Lywodraeth Cymru**
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Challenges when designing an effective land management policy

- (Not just about getting £XX money out the door to NN farmers)
- How to have a meaningful impact at farm level at the scale required
- How to work out fair, effective payments (remembering WTO) or politically-acceptable regulation
- How to build in (or work past) constraints of budget, capacity
- How to ensure ‘computer says yes’
- How to monitor progress towards objectives

- These are common challenges – they apply whatever the approach used

You don’t have access to the ideal solution

- Site specific support
- Continuous dialogue with farmer
- Infinitely adaptable at the outset to land, livestock, farmer, vegetation, particular special features, likely costs
- Infinitely adaptable going forward to circumstances of farmer, weather, disease, outcomes generated
- Completely flexible as regards budgetary commitments
- (Notice – WTO rules are not on this list!)

- Even the best management agreement with the most flexible and aspirational project officer and land agent is not like this; AECM definitely aren’t
- Incentive to be as simple as possible; important not to be *too* simple

Traditional prescriptive approach

- Decide beforehand what an imaginary farmer should do on an imaginary piece of land in a representative season to give the best chance of delivering a result
- Draw up a) a set of rules based on that, with specific dates, livestock numbers
- Or draw up b) a specific set of outcomes (veg. heights....) which must be delivered
- Farmer autonomy limited in case a) to decision to participate; in case b), somewhat more freedom
- But in every case, set up a black/white scenario
- Usually involves (implicitly at least) a surrogate variable which is related by a logic chain to the policy target
- Monitoring meant to feed back timeously to scheme amendment process

The critique

- It puts a lot of store on prior knowledge
- It depends a lot on uniformity across the landscape of potential participants, in weather etc. over time
- It is inflexible
- It has a very weak feedback loop, whether to the farmer or to scheme design
- It gives very little value to farmer experience, skills (or desire to achieve something!)
- Often seen as needing only low levels of 'advisory' support – just need to understand rules
- Often demoralising, or something you 'work around' or 'sacrifice' fields to
- Even at best, it recognises just success/failure, not progress
- Results sometimes very good (often where there's significant advisory input), but often poor
- Monitoring/evaluation rarely effective in generating improvements; fixed rules in guidance material etc. – costly & potentially confusing to change

- BUT good for ticking the boxes if those boxes are participants and hectares entered
- AND 'easy' to control and audit – all about catching rule-breakers
- AND that means that farmers usually 'know where they are'
- AND predicting budget is no bother (area x payment rate!)

The results-based alternative

- Acknowledge complexity from the start – more than one way to be ‘excellent, good, moderate’; spectrum of quality, not black-and-white cutoff
- Incentivise use of farmers’ skill, experience to improve things
- Scorecards with number of variables, both positive (species diversity and abundance; vegetation structure...) and negative (erosion, alien species, eutrophication...)
- Payments increase with scores
- Scoring done as often as you need to reflect expected speed of change in target/surrogate metrics
- Set procedures to make it as repeatable and auditable as possible
- Implies certain level of understanding, and therefore advisory support & training

Common Standards Monitoring of Annex 1 habitats

‘Subalpine dwarf dry-shrub heath’

Vegetation composition — frequency of bryophytes and lichens.	(1) At least 1 species of moss or liverwort or non-crustose lichen should be present Qualifiers: Exclude Polytrichum spp. and Campylopus spp.
Vegetation composition — cover and frequency of dwarf-shrubs.	Cover: (1) For herb-rich heaths (H7, H10d, H16a), 50-75 % of vegetation cover should made up of indicator species from Table 1. (2) For all other types of heath, at least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of indicator species from Table 1. (3) At least 25% of dwarf-shrub cover should be made up of Group (i) indicators from Table 1. (4) Less than 50% of dwarf shrub cover should be made up of Group (ii) indicators from Table 1. (5) For all types of heath at least two indicator species should be present from Group (i) in Table 1. This is not applicable to heath in sensitive areas which may go through prolonged phases of Calluna dominance. Table 1 Indicator Species Group (i) Arctostaphylos spp. Betula nana Calluna vulgaris Erica spp. Empetrum nigrum Racomitrium lanuginosum Vaccinium spp. Group (ii) Genista anglica Myrica gale Salix repens Ulex gallii
Vegetation composition — cover of other species	(1) Less than 1% of vegetation cover should be made up of non-native species. (2) Less than 10% of the vegetation cover should be made up of bracken. (3) Less than 20% of the vegetation cover should be made up of scattered native trees and scrub. Qualifiers: For target (3) exclude Betula nana and Myrica gale. (4) Less than 1% of the vegetation cover should consist of invasive “weedy” species (collectively Cirsium arvense, Cirsium vulgare, large docks (excluding Rumex acetosa) , Ranunculus repens, or Urtica dioica). (5) Less than 10% of the vegetation cover should consist of Juncus effusus.

Common Standards Monitoring of Annex 1 habitats

Vegetation structure — disturbance	(1) There should be no signs of burning inside the boundaries of the sensitive areas defined in Table 2. Qualifiers: For target (1) failure of this target should also be recorded if any evidence of this is found while walking between sample locations. (2) On the remainder of the feature, outside areas identified in (1), all growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area. At least 10% of the heather should be in the late mature growth phase.
Vegetation structure — indicators of heavy browsing.	(1) Less than 33% of the last complete growing season's shoots of dwarf-shrub species (collectively but excluding Betula nana and Myrica gale) should shows signs of browsing. (2) In pioneer stage regrowth, or where there is Betula nana or Myrica gale (at any stage of regrowth), less than 66% of the last complete growing season's shoots of the dwarf-shrubs (collectively) should show signs of browsing. Qualifiers: For target (2) exclude "pioneer" areas created by temporary heavy browsing and trampling in the same year as when the monitoring is being undertaken.
Physical structure — indicators of ground disturbance due to herbivore and human activity.	(1) Less than 10% of the ground cover should be made up of disturbed bare ground*. Qualifiers: For target (1) exclude recently burnt ground.

'Subalpine dwarf dry-shrub heath'

Common Standards Monitoring of Annex 1 habitats

- ‘Subalpine dry dwarf-shrub heath’; for a block to be in Favourable condition
  - It has to pass 16 criteria; failing on one is a Fail
  - Each criterion has a Pass/Fail threshold value – can be close or miles away
  - 90% of monitoring points have to Pass
- Unfavourable condition can mean
  - 100% of points fail miserably on 100% of criteria
  - 89% of points pass and the rest fail just one criterion very narrowly
- (A system which just says to land managers that they’ve failed and nothing about progress or where improvement is possible is a BONKERS system, but it’s the way we operate it)
- Arguably, a system which doesn’t communicate any of this in practice but just sets minimum and maximum stocking rates and dates on which they change is destined to fail
- A results-based approach would set those criteria into a framework and reward perhaps getting close to thresholds, definitely no. of criteria passed and % points passing

A.4 What is the cover of dwarf shrubs (heathers, crowberry, bilberry, cowberry, western gorse) present within 10m of the assessment point?

Not present	Present but less than 20%, poor age structure	Present but less than 20%, good age structure	20-70% and poor age structure	20-70% cover and good age structure	>70% and good age structure	>70% and poor age structure	>50% western gorse irrespective of age structure
0	0.5	1	*1*	*1.5*	*1*	*0.5*	-4
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H

Choose answer: | **Score:** 0

A.5 If >20% cover, how diverse are the dwarf shrubs? How many of (ling heather, bell heather, cross-leaved heath, bilberry, crowberry, cowberry, Western gorse) are present within 10m of the assessment point

2 or fewer	3	4	5 or more
0	*0.5*	*1*	*1.5*
A	*B*	*C*	*D*

Choose answer: | **Score:** 0

A6. What is the cover of live Sphagnum mosses

<20%	>20%
0	*0.5*
A	B

Choose answer: | **Score:** 0

When can it be used?

- Benefits for farmer engagement & empowerment might make it the go-to; question is to what extent practicalities allow that, or could be changed to allow that
- Not obviously (just) a ‘jewels-in-the-crown’ approach in principle; in practice constraints of capacity or politics or who’s been interested have tended to make it so
- An obvious choice where describing a simple black-and-white is difficult (hedgerows?)
- An obvious choice for complex mosaics where a single (effective) prescription is almost impossible to imagine (uplands...)
- Some cases where it’s really difficult to think how it could work – might these be cases where similar issues face traditional approaches (but these not fully thought through)? (River SAC in intensive landscapes?)
- But... some cases very sensitive to ‘wrong’ choices where its use might be risky

- Needs early and late cover
- Very sensitive to nest destruction in mid-summer
- Very sensitive to being trapped and killed by mowers

- A possible approach:
  - Results-based payments for early/late cover
  - Results-based payments for other aspects of habitat (e.g. species-richness of fields)
  - Prescriptive rule for any mowing covering both earliest date and method (inside-out)
  - Capital works for creation and/or fencing off of early cover
  - Advisory support esp. for early cover

When can it be used?

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- An obvious choice where describing a simple black-and-white is difficult (hedgerows?)
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- Some cases where it's really difficult to think how it could work – might these be cases where similar issues face traditional approaches (but these not fully thought through)? (River SAC in intensive landscapes?)
- But... some cases very sensitive to 'wrong' choices where its use might be risky
- And.. prescriptive may be only fair payment method if current condition is poor and change is known to be slow
- Always just one of the tools in the box - usually needs suite of complementary actions, incl. 'capital works'

Results-based schemes

- Ideally needs to be adaptable and flexible
  - Not common in government departments but key to farmer buy-in
- Solutions focused
  - Sustainable upland farming was focus of the Hen Harrier Programme https://www.henharrierprogramme.ie
  - Sustainable HNV farming is focus of ACRES Co-Operation https://www.gov.ie/en/service/f5a48-agri-climate-rural-environment-scheme-acres
  - More intensively farmed land can be the focus too https://www.thebrideproject.ie/
- Farmer is a central focus of the design
  - No red tape, simple application process, accessible plans, local Project Officer support

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Results-based schemes

- Payment contingent on the delivery of something tangible
- Ecosystems approach
  - If habitat is in good condition, it is providing the associated ecosystem services
  - Measure this through the structure and components of plant communities and other habitat features
- The assessed features must be obvious throughout the assessment season.
  - Jun 1st to Aug 31st for most grazed habitats in Ireland
- Features that contribute to ecological integrity -gains points
- Damaging activities or serious pressures - reduce the available points

ACRES Grassland SCORECARD

Farmer name: | Surveyor:
Field number: | Survey date:
Business ID:

Dominant grassland type: Wet grassland ☐ Dry grassland ☐

Soil type: Mineral soil ☐ Peat soil ☐

Total Score: (A+B) /100

A Ecological integrity

Total score A (sum of A1 to A5) /90

A1 What is the number of **positive indicators** in the field? Tick all positive indicators present below.
Note all positive indicators present as you walk a 'W' through the field.

Low: 0-4 **0** | Medium: 5-8 **10** | High: 9-12 **20** | Very high: 13+ **25**

Positive indicators: (tick those present)

- ☐ Bedstraws & Stitchworts
- ☐ Bird's-foot-trefoil
- ☐ Carline thistle
- ☐ Cowslips & Primrose
- ☐ Eyebrights
- ☐ Forget-me-nots
- ☐ Heathers
- ☐ Kidney vetch
- ☐ Knapweeds
- ☐ Lady's mantle
- ☐ Lady's smock (Cuckooflower)
- ☐ Lesser spearwort
- ☐ Louseworts (Common & Marsh)
- ☐ Marsh cinquefoil
- ☐ Marsh marigold
- ☐ Marsh pennywort
- ☐ Marsh thistle
- ☐ Meadowsweet
- ☐ Meadow thistle
- ☐ Mints (all)
- ☐ Orchids
- ☐ Ox-eye daisy
- ☐ Purple loosestrife
- ☐ Ragged robin
- ☐ Scabious (Devil's-bit & field)
- ☐ Sedges
- ☐ Self-heal & Bugle
- ☐ Sorrel (Common & Sheep's)
- ☐ Small rushes (Spiky, Woodrushes, Heath)
- ☐ Sphagnum & Branched mosses
- ☐ Tormentil (Common & English)
- ☐ Umbels large (and/or Common Valerian, Common Hogweed)
- ☐ Umbels small (Pignut, Yarrow, Wild carrot)
- ☐ Vetches & Vetchlings
- ☐ Violets (all species); Harebell
- ☐ Wild Thyme
- ☐ Yellow Composites (Cat's ear, Hawkweeds, Hawkbits & Goat's beard - not Dandelion)
- ☐ Yellow Flag Iris
- ☐ Yellow rattle (Hay rattle)

A2 What is the cover of **all positive indicators** (listed above) throughout the entire field?
Cover is the proportion of the field taken up by all positive indicators present.

Low: None present or you can take several steps without encountering any positive indicators at all	0
Moderate: You encounter a positive indicator with every few steps taken	10
High: You encounter positive indicators with every step taken	20
Very high: You encounter multiple different positive indicators with every step taken (and in between steps)	25

A3 What is the combined cover of **negative indicators/weeds** throughout the plot? *(tick if present)*

- ☐ Docks (NOT small sorrels)
- ☐ Thistles (Creeping & spear)
- ☐ Perennial Rye-grass
- ☐ Ragwort
- ☐ Nettles

High >25%: Occurring in dense patches or abundant throughout the field. Very visible in the sward	-20
Moderate 5-25%: Occurring in medium to large patches in the field. Readily visible in the sward	-10
Low <5%: None present or scattered or small clumps of negative indicators. Where present, overall cover should be less than 5%	5

A4 Vegetation Structure. Note: If grassland is primarily grazed use A4(a) (including marsh fritillary suitability assessment); OR, if grassland is cut for hay or silage, use A4(b). *Refer to the guidance for sward quality details.*

A4(a) What is the **vegetation structure in grasslands** which are **PRIMARILY GRAZED?**

Over-grazed: Sward short throughout with little variation in height of vegetation. Few plants in flower	-10
Moderate (over-grazed): Mostly short vegetation. >50% of field has short sward with occasional to frequent patches of tall vegetation	10
Good: Field sward medium height throughout with positive indicators flowering. Areas of taller and /or shorter sward also occur	25
Moderate (under-grazed): Mostly tall vegetation. 50-75% of field has tall sward. Litter and dead vegetation occurring	15
Under-grazed: Rank vegetation present throughout the field	-10

OR

A4(b) What is the **vegetation structure in grasslands** which are **CUT FOR HAY or SILAGE?**

Poor structure: No field margins present. Field cropped right up to the field boundary line. No grazing of after-grass. Little or no variation in sward height	-10
Moderate structure: Narrow field margins present (~1m). Low number of flowering plants and vegetation structure within the field margin poor to moderate. Some grazing of after-grass providing some structural variation	15
Good structure: Wide field margins present (2m+) and/or good headlands. Grazing of after-grass takes place providing variations in height of sward. Sward does not look uniform in appearance	25

AgriSnap photo taken: ☐

A5 Marsh Fritillary suitability assessment in primarily grazed grassland

Numerous patches (at least quarter of the field, or majority of field with Devil's-Bit Scabious)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is the Devil's-Bit Scabious present from ankle to knee height throughout? ☐ Yes ☐ No

A6 Field boundary quality. Assess the quality of the **WORST 30m** of field boundary in the field. *Refer to guidance document for details.*

Poor: Wire fence only or very poor quality field boundary present	0
Moderate: Moderate field boundary quality	5
Good: Good field boundary quality	10

What is the dominant field boundary in this field?

Dominant			Also present		
☐ Hedgerow	☐ Treeline		☐ Hedgerow	☐ Treeline	
☐ Earth bank	☐ Stonewall		☐ Earth bank	☐ Stonewall	
☐ Drainage ditch	☐ Wire fence		☐ Drainage ditch	☐ Wire fence	

B Threats & pressures

Total score B (sum of B1 to B6) /10

B1 Is there any **evidence of damaging activities** to habitat, vegetation, or archaeology?

High: Damage occurring across a large area (>25%) or of a serious nature if confined	-30
Moderate: Damage occurring across a moderate area (>5-20%) or of a moderate nature if confined	-20
Low: Damage occurring across a small area (<5%) or of a minor nature if confined	-10
None: No damaging activities	0

Damaging activities: *(tick relevant damage & describe in comments)*

- ☐ Damage from supplementary feeding
- ☐ Damage to archaeological features
- ☐ Inappropriate herbicide use
- ☐ Quarrying
- ☐ Burning
- ☐ Dumping
- ☐ Boundary damage
- ☐ Removal of mature scrub/trees
- ☐ Other *(please specify)*

B2 What is the level of **risk to the quality of natural water bodies** within, adjacent to and downstream of the field due to pressures relating to flow, sediment, nutrients or other pollutants?
The source - pathway - receptor model should inform the assessment (see guidance).

High:	-25	**Low:**	-5
Moderate:	-15	**None:**	0

B3 What is the extent of **bare soil & erosion?**

High: Excessive areas of bare soil within the body of the field. Bare soil may also be extending out significantly from the main feed site and/or water troughs, where poaching evident. Significant rutting and soil disturbance caused by vehicle/tractor access	-20
Moderate: Bare soil mainly along regularly used stock routes or congregation areas, with minor soil loss occurring at a few points. Bare soil may extend a short distance beyond the main feed site and/or water points. Minor rutting and soil disturbance caused by occasional vehicle/tractor access may be present	-10
Low: Bare soil more or less restricted to regular stock paths, gates, points & small congregation areas. No soil loss	10

B4 What is the cover of **non-native invasive species?**

High: Abundant. Some forming dense clumps, many seedlings	-20
Moderate: Frequent. Some flowering, many seedlings present	-10
Low: Scattered. Plants mostly small and not flowering	-5
None: No non-native invasive species present	0

Non-native invasive species: *(tick if present)*

- ☐ Rhododendron
- ☐ Cotoneaster
- ☐ Japanese Knotweed
- ☐ Giant Hogweed
- ☐ Himalayan balsam
- ☐ Himalayan knotweed
- ☐ Himalayan honeysuckle
- ☐ Other *(please specify)*

B5 What is the extent of **spreading immature scrub?**
(This can be brambles, seedlings, scrub and trees generally lower than 1m in height and with a stem diameter of <5cm). Do not include established scrub.

High: >25% of the field has immature scrub cover, some well-established saplings may be present. Field is likely to show few signs of active management, such as signs of recent grazing or signs of topping	-20
Moderate: Cover of immature scrub in patches or individuals with overall cover of between 11-25% with particularly brambles coming in	-10
Low: Small patches of immature scrub or individual seedlings of immature scrub with overall cover of less than 10%. Grass growth easily seen underneath the scrub	0

B6 What is the cover of **bracken?**

High: Very dense stands of bracken covering over half or more of the field, forming closed canopy	-20
Moderate: Bracken forming dense stands covering parts of the field, mostly forming closed canopy	-10
Low: Bracken absent, or some scattered fronds and none forming closed canopy. Can include some isolated small patches or some larger patches on steep slopes	0

Common management recommendations to pick from:

- ☐ Continue current management of this high quality grassland
- ☐ Control the occurrence and spread of invasive species. Consult with CF team regarding solutions
- ☐ Control the occurrence and spread of encroaching scrub, supporting actions are available
- ☐ Control the occurrence and spread of bracken
- ☐ Consider removing fertiliser inputs
- ☐ Consider using supporting actions to alter or impede the flow of water
- ☐ Use rock to graze field more evenly
- ☐ Improve stock management, supporting actions (e.g. fencing / drinking facilities) are available
- ☐ Consider establishing a field margin
- ☐ Field boundaries - reduce cutting
- ☐ Field boundaries - consider planting gaps with suitable native species
- ☐ Field boundaries - continue current management of high quality boundaries
- ☐ Management advice

Scorecard layout

All scorecards have an Ecological Integrity section

This section will primarily gain marks for the farmer

Grassland fields

- number of positive indicators
- abundance of positive indicators
- vegetation structure

Peatland fields

- number of positive indicators
- abundance of mosses and lichens in particular
- vegetation structure of the peatland habitats

Scorecard layout

Some cards have a Hydrological Integrity section if the wetness of the habitat is integral to its health

- Peatland
- Low input grassland on peat
- Scrub/woodland

This section also gains marks on the scorecard

Wetter is better

Ecological Integrity

This section gains most marks for the field, typically around 90%

Weightings for sections important

E.g. Weighting for Positive indicators and Abundance is 50% of marks on Grassland card but only 20% on Rough grazing card

A Ecological integrity — Total score A (sum of A1 to A6) /90

A1 What is the number of **positive indicators** in the field? Tick all positive indicators present below.

Note all positive indicators present as you walk a 'W' through the field.

Low: 0-1 0 | Medium: 5-8 10 | High: 9-12 20 | Very high: 13+ 25

Positive indicators: (tick those present)

- Bedstraws & Stitchworts
- Bird's-foot-trefoil
- Carline thistle
- Cowslips & Primrose
- Eyebrights
- Forget-me-nots
- Heathers
- Kidney vetch
- Knapweeds
- Lady's mantle
- Lady's smock (Cuckooflower)
- Lesser spearwort
- Lousewort (Common & Marsh)
- Marsh cinquefoil
- Marsh marigold
- Marsh pennywort
- Marsh thistle
- Meadowsweet
- Meadow thistle
- Mints (all)
- Orchids
- Ox-eye daisy
- Purple loosestrife
- Ragged robin
- Scabious (Devil's-bit & field)
- Sedges
- Self-heal & Bugle
- Sorrel (Common & Sheep's)
- Small rushes (Spike, Woodrushes, Heath)
- Sphagnum & Branched mosses
- Tormentil (Common & English)
- Umbels large (and/or Common Valerian, Common hogweed)
- Umbels small (Pignut, Yarrow, Wild carrot)
- Vetches & Vetchlings
- Violets (all species); Heraball
- Wild Thyme
- Yellow Composites (Cat's ear, Hawkweeds, Hawkbits & Goat's beard - not Dandelion)
- Yellow Flag Iris
- Yellow rattle (Hay rattle)

A2 What is the cover of **all positive indicators** (listed above) throughout the entire field?

Cover is the proportion of the field taken up by all positive indicators present.

Low: None present or you can take several steps without encountering any positive indicators at all.	0
Moderate: You encounter a positive indicator with every few steps taken.	10
High: You encounter positive indicators with every step taken.	20
Very high: You encounter multiple different positive indicators with every step taken (and in between steps)	25

A Ecological integrity — Total score A: (sum of A1 to A7) /90

A1 What is the number of **positive indicators** in the field? Tick all positive indicators present below.

Note all positive indicators present as you walk a 'W' through the field.

Low: 0-4 0 | Moderate: 5-8 5 | High: 9+ 10

Positive indicators: (tick those present)

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- Carline thistle
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- Sedges
- Self-heal & Bugle
- Sorrel (Common & Sheep's)
- Small rushes (Spike, Woodrushes, Heath)
- Sphagnum & Branched mosses
- Tormentil (Common & English)
- Umbels large (Angelica, Valerian, Common hogweed)
- Umbels small (Pignut, Yarrow, Wild Carrot)
- Vetches & Vetchlings
- Violets (all species); Heraball
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- Yellow Composites (Cat's ear, Hawkweeds, Hawkbits & Goat's beard - not Dandelion)
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- Yellow rattle (Hay rattle)

A2 What is the cover of **all positive indicators** (listed above) throughout the entire field?

Cover is the proportion of the field taken up by all positive indicators present.

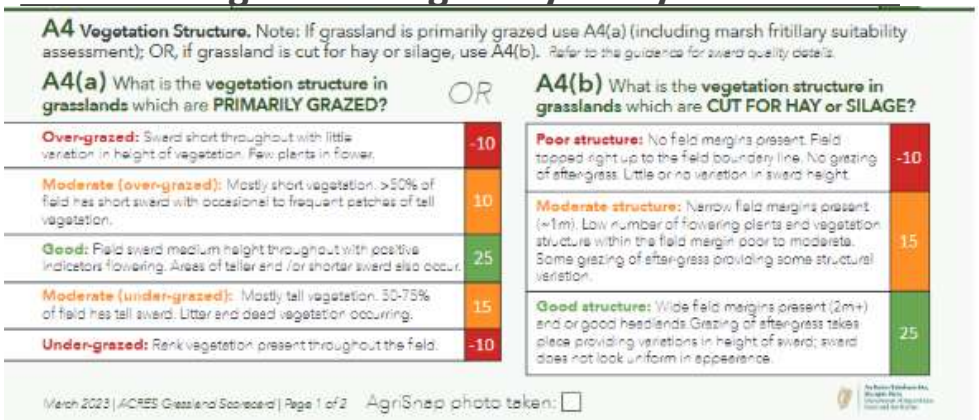
Low: Only a couple of individual plants present or you can take several steps without encountering any positive indicators at all.	0
Moderate: You encounter a positive indicator with every few steps taken.	5
High: You encounter positive indicators with every step taken.	10

Ecological Integrity

But the weighting for Vegetation Structure is 25% on the Grassland card compared to 40% on the Rough grazing card

This reflects the objective of the different scorecards i.e. biodiversity and pollinators for grassland but small bird and mammal habitat and raptor prey source for rough grazing

Can be designed to target any ecosystem service



A4 Vegetation Structure. Note: If grassland is primarily grazed use A4(a) (including marsh fritillary suitability assessment); OR, if grassland is cut for hay or silage, use A4(b). *Refer to the guidance for sward quality details.*

A4(a) What is the **vegetation structure in grasslands** which are **PRIMARILY GRAZED?**

OR

A4(b) What is the **vegetation structure in grasslands** which are **CUT FOR HAY or SILAGE?**

Over-grazed: Sward short throughout with little variation in height of vegetation. Few plants in flower.	-10
Moderate (over-grazed): Mostly short vegetation. >50% of field has short sward with occasional to frequent patches of tall vegetation.	10
Good: Field sward medium height throughout with positive indicators flowering. Areas of taller and /or shorter sward also occur.	25
Moderate (under-grazed): Mostly tall vegetation. 50-75% of field has tall sward. Litter and dead vegetation occurring.	15
Under-grazed: Rank vegetation present throughout the field.	-10

Poor structure: No field margins present. Field topped right up to the field boundary line. No grazing of aftergrass. Little or no variation in sward height.	-10
Moderate structure: Narrow field margins present (<1m). Low number of flowering plants and vegetation structure within the field margin poor to moderate. Some grazing of aftergrass providing some structural variation.	15
Good structure: Wide field margins present (2m+) and or good headlands. Grazing of aftergrass takes place providing variations in height of sward; sward does not look uniform in appearance.	25

March 2023 | ACRES Grassland Scorecard | Page 1 of 2 AgriSnap photo taken: ☐

A4 Vegetation Structure. Note: If grassland is **primarily grazed use A4(a)** (including marsh fritillary suitability assessment); OR, if grassland is **cut for hay or silage, use A4(b).** *Refer to the guidance for sward quality details.*

A4(a) What is the **vegetation structure in grasslands** which are **PRIMARILY GRAZED?**

OR

A4(b) What is the **vegetation structure in grasslands** which are **CUT FOR HAY or SILAGE?**

Poor: All vegetation short (overgrazed) / Tall & rank (undergrazed)	-10
Suboptimal: Tall vegetation cover is patchy. No areas with distinct tussocks. Grassy areas dominate field. Little variation in the height of vegetation. Dead standing leaves rare. **OR** Uniform vegetation height throughout the field.	10
Good: Tall/medium and short vegetation throughout. May contain frequent tall tussocks or frequent sharp-flowered or jointed rush. Some grass/sedge dominated areas also occur.	25
Very good: Tall and medium and short vegetation throughout. Tussocks throughout. Some tall dense soft rush, some areas of shorter sharp-flowered rush and some grass/sedge dominated areas.	40

Poor structure: No field margins present. Field topped right up to the field boundary line. No aftermath grazing. Little or no variation in sward height.	-10
Moderate structure: Narrow field margins present (<1m). Low number of flowering plants and vegetation structure within the field margin poor to moderate. Some aftermath grazing providing some structural variation.	10
Good structure: Wide field margins present (2m+) and or good headlands. Aftermath grazing takes place providing variations in height of sward; sward does not look uniform in appearance.	20

A5 Marsh Fritillary suitability assessment in primarily grazed grassland

Numerous patches (at least quarter of the field) or majority of field with Devil's Bit Scabious? Yes ☐ No ☐

Is the Devil's Bit Scabious present from ankle to knee height throughout? Yes ☐ No ☐

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Scorecard layout

All scorecards have a Threats and pressures section

This assesses active threats to the ecological integrity such as the presence of invasive alien plants, threats to water quality or damaging activities such as dumping

This section has zero values unless the threat or pressure is present except for bare soil which gains 10 marks

Turbary on peatland is an exception that also gains 10 marks if absent




Threats and pressures

These can be weighted to provide key indications of what you want to avoid happening in a field

Is burning an issue? Make the reduction in score for any burning significant

Is bare soil an issue? Consider making the absence of bare soil a positive AND making it's presence a serious reduction

This can be tailored depending on the threats faced in a region/country

ACRES Scorecards

Each field score and how it was arrived at is important

They point to the farmer how to improve if they wish

If the vegetation structure is moderate due to grazing pressure, consider whether fields can be rested more before the next assessment

If non-native invasives are present then recommend contacting an advisor to discuss how best to remove them to help improve the score

If there are issues due to dumping or supplementary feeding, discuss possible solutions with an advisor and implementation team

First years scores are a baseline. Ideally, we want to see scores and their associated payments increasing

Shows increased delivery of ecosystem services for taxpayer investment

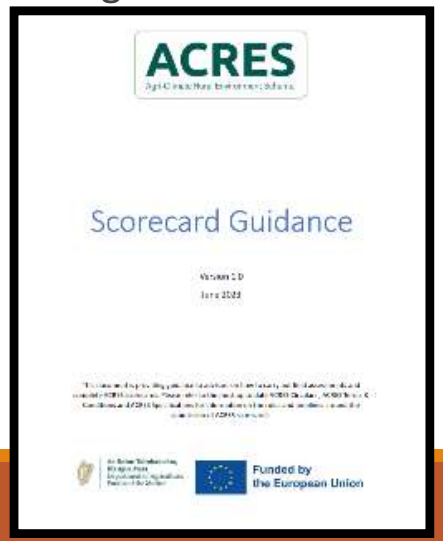
ACRES Scorecard

The scorecards are designed to be straightforward to use

There is a detailed Guidance document available to assist with using them in the field

There are also tip sheets that help identify the key features to keep an eye on in the field

Google ACRES Scorecard Guidance to find copies of these



Actions

Actions-field-level and landscape-level

Actions should help improve the scores in fields or have significant landscape effect

E.g. Improved grazing management through fencing, gates and water delivery infrastructure

Planting buffer strips to benefit water quality

Co-funding amount will vary

If it's 100% beneficial then it will be 100% funded

If there are co-benefits for farming e.g. water delivery systems, fencing, gates etc then there will be a co-pay

Actions

Supporting actions that help improve management of livestock to improve habitat quality

- Gates, fencing, water troughs, piping, solar-powered electric fencing etc

Actions that benefit the environmental target

- Wild bird cover, pond creation, drain blocking

Landscape-level actions

- Drain blocking, implementing fire resilience plans, conifer tree removal
- Bespoke depending on the local issues and required solutions

Again, these can be tailored to assist farmers with key issues faced in a region/country

ACRES BREIFNE

Implementing a Results-based scheme

1. Be ambitious
   - Irish pilot that led to national roll-out had 1600 farmers
   - Need a pilot at scale to be really confident of a national roll-out
2. Large-scale implementation relies on tech solutions
   - Mapping system for farms
   - App for recording field scores and sending them back to a database
   - Customer Relationship Management (CRM) with Application Programming Interface (API)
3. Clear understanding of responsibilities and flow of information
   - Government, Private company/other agency, Advisory, Farmer
4. Provide information and training for relevant stakeholders
   - Staff delivering the programme, advisors assessing the fields and applying for actions, farmers who are delivering product

ACRES BREIFNE

Implementing a Results-based scheme

5. Review process so that issues can be identified and resolved as early as possible
   - Needs to happen after year one and probably again after year 3

6. Don't be afraid of concurrent action
   - Launch scheme while developing and testing scorecards or writing specifications for actions. Just do it!

In our example, the large-scale pilot was a European Innovation Partnership (EIP). Govt tender, private company delivered with lots of flexibility throughout. Private company works with advisors and farmers and makes payments

Current national scheme has 20,000 farmers. Govt scheme with private company delivering the results-based co-operation measure. Govt communicates with advisors and farmers and private company AND private company communicates with govt, advisors and farmers

Different approaches will suit different regions/countries

ACRES BREIFNE

Implementing a results-based scheme

Easy to understand for farmers

Easy to understand for advisors and other stakeholders

Provides clear direction on where issues are and actions and funds to solve them

Provides baseline data and a simple mechanisms

Auditing is simple on a national and EU level

ACRES BREIFNE

Challenges

Biggest challenge is addressing the risk of zero payment for farmers

A results-based system makes forecasting payments very hard

If the farmers in areas that the scheme is designed for aren't receiving payment then it's been designed wrong

Farmers with no/low habitat payments could have a bigger budget available for actions

Once you have people in they respond very well to it

Worth the effort

ACRES BREIFNE


DON'T MAKE ME TAP THE SIGN.

To be remembered throughout:

You want to deliver policy objectives – no impact is not an option


To be remembered throughout:
You have to apply the same critiques to prescription and regulation

To be remembered throughout:

Results-based payments are NEVER stand-alone, even if we forget to say so occasionally
(are there many examples of successful stand-alone prescriptions?)

To be remembered throughout:

Noone's saying 'apply it just like [country]' – it's about seeing opportunities, identifying challenges and discussing how to address them