

## EIP Operational Group - Farming Rathcroghan

A results-based approach focused on the management of archaeological landscapes while improving the socio-economic circumstances of the farmers.

### EAFRD-funded projects

**Location:** County Roscommon, Ireland

**Programming period:** 2014–2020

**Priority:** P1 - Knowledge transfer and innovation

**Focus Area:** Innovation and cooperation

**Measures:** M16 - Cooperation

**Funding:** Total budget: 984 000 (EUR)

**Timeframe:** 01/2019 - 12/2023

**Project promoter:** Farming Rathcroghan\*

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### Summary

The challenge of protecting the important archaeological heritage of Ireland's Rathcroghan landscape while simultaneously earning a viable and sustainable living from the land resulted in the establishment of the Farming Rathcroghan EIP Project by a group of local farmers. Their aim was to manage the farming landscape in a sustainable way with a focus on the delivery of ecosystem services and good archaeological practice. Simultaneously, they sought to improve the viability of farms in the area, with 42 farmers participating in the project covering a highly sensitive archaeological landscape area of 2.5 km<sup>2</sup>. With an average of 3.6 archaeological sites/monuments on each farm, the project dealt with over 130 archaeological features. The cooperation project implements a results and action-based approach to assess the quality and care of archaeological features on participating farmer's land, as well as the health of the grasslands and quality of water sources. Payments are issued to farmers depending on the quantity and quality of measures undertaken.

\* The project promoter/beneficiary is an EIP-AGRI Operational Group

[https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/operational-groups\\_en](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/operational-groups_en)



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### Project results

- Rural heritage resources covering the vast majority of the Rathcroghan core area are now being managed cooperatively with best practice results-based farming standards.
- Increased action-based scores on participating farms from 6.7 to 8.7 throughout the project, reflecting incremental improvements.
- Greater public awareness and appreciation of the unique archaeological landscape of the Rathcroghan area.

### Key lessons and recommendations

- This cooperation project provides evidence that the methodologies developed for results-based land payments protecting biodiversity are transferable and can protect other resources, such as rural cultural heritage.
- The Farming Rathcroghan EIP Project has successfully demonstrated the value of implementing a results-based bottom-up approach in an EIP-AGRI Operational Group by involving farmers in the project from the outset.
- Established a good practice archaeological landscape management model that has the potential to be rolled out at a national and European level.



## Context

Rathcroghan is a well-preserved prehistoric and medieval archaeological landscape located in rich agricultural pasture in County Roscommon, Ireland. With some 240 recorded archaeological features in the Rathcroghan landscape spread over an area of 6.5 km<sup>2</sup>, 70 of which are national monuments sites on the Irish Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage Status (Royal Sites of Ireland), it is a land of national and international significance, owned by local farmers.

The Rathcroghan land area has experienced socio-economic decline in recent times. Low returns from pastoral farming systems and the broader rural economy were heightening the vulnerability of farming in the area and, in turn, the valuable archaeological landscape farmers care for. Furthermore, farms in the area are relatively small and fragmented, with an average farm size below 30 hectares.



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The Farming Rathcroghan EIP Project was established by the farming community in the Rathcroghan area to help alleviate tensions between the desire and the statutory requirement to protect archaeological heritage while enabling farmers to earn a living from the land. This locally-led results-based project works to manage the farming landscape sustainably with a focus on delivering ecosystem services and good archaeological practices while simultaneously improving the viability of farms. The project has shown the way forward as a best practice results-based model in the management of the archaeological landscape, addressing the care and preservation of the field monuments, improving the socio-economic circumstances of the farming community, and demonstrating an effective and efficient project management approach that combines tested and approved practices and procedures.

## Objectives

The Farming Rathcroghan EIP Project aims to promote the continuation of farming in the Rathcroghan area by providing results-based guidance and economic support to farmers to maintain and enhance its internationally significant archaeological landscape through a suite of innovative management solutions while simultaneously providing co-benefits for a range of ecosystem services - including biodiversity enhancement, carbon sequestration and water quality.

## Activities

The Farming Rathcroghan project has made substantial progress towards sustainably managing the farming landscape with a focus on the delivery of good archaeological practice, good farming practice and increasing awareness and recognition of the cultural heritage significance of the area through the following results-based activities:

- Devising and compiling an operation manual for all the project activities with the steps needed to deliver outcomes.
- Conducting two annual farm inspection visits per year to monitor all works, provide advice and support to farmers, and encourage engagement.
- Implementing a result-based scoring and payments system for farmers, which assesses the predominance of archaeological features on participating farmers' lands, the health of the grasslands and the water sources, etc.
- Implementing an action-based process plan for farmers, with a range of measures identified from thirty action codes to address specific archaeological protection issues.
- Developing innovative farm products by the project office, such as bespoke fencing, resting frames, buffer areas along external perimeters and cattle brushes.
- Developing bespoke vernacular traditional Rathcroghan gates, placed in visible landscape locations as built heritage features that encourage pride.
- Delivering innovative archaeological trialling conservation practices in partnership with the National Monuments Service on their sites at Rathnadarve and the Mucklaghs.
- Introducing biodiversity plans for each participating farm to record and protect native wildflower species, which supports the project's whole-landscape approach.



- Delivering project training on hedge-laying, dry stone wall building, soil compaction, soil nutrients, water quality and precision grazing to proactively monitor, manage, maintain and enhance the ancient cultural landscape in an environmentally and ecologically friendly way.
- Introducing a programme of native trees and hedge planting programmes as part of landscape protection and wildlife habitats restoration.
- Introducing the Farming Rathcroghan Pilot Silage Wrap Recycling initiative to support waste management practices on farms and provide recycling solutions.
- Supporting Rathcroghan Biodiversity Days with local national schools, performing easy, age-appropriate actions (as advised by an ecologist), such as planting wildflowers.
- Delivering a wide-ranging promotions and publicity campaign to highlight the project's success at the local, national, and international levels.
- Partnering with the local Farm Connect Programme to increase participation and awareness around farm safety and wellbeing.
- Establishing strong working relationships with the University of Galway for the provision of academic support, hosting field schools, and research.
- Establishing an effective and efficient system of governance and financial control, which is conducted and exercised by the Board of Management and Operational Group.

The project was steered by the Farming Rathcroghan EIP Operational Group and Board of Directors, which consisted of farmers and representatives from the National Monuments Service, the University of Galway, the Office of Public Works, Teagasc, Roscommon County Council, and the Heritage Council of Ireland.

## Main results

The Farming Rathcroghan EIP Project applied its results-based methodology to successfully protect rural heritage and sustain the target area as a viable farming landscape in harmony with its rich cultural and ecological assets. This included the following results:

- Established a good practice archaeological landscape management model that has the potential to be rolled out at a national and European level.



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- Provided 75 resting frames, 3 500 metres of bespoke fencing and 7 500 metres of fencing for precision grazing to farmers to protect the archaeological landscape.
- Provided 3 000 metres of field margins fencing, planted 1 500 metres of native hedging and protected over 35 water sources as part of project environmental habitats restoration measures.
- Installed ten scratching posts, 15 bespoke Rathcroghan Gates, and 45 individual farm ground reinforcement cattle and machinery tracks.
- Conducted over 500 farm visits throughout the project providing operational support, farming advice, implementation of plans and monitoring of works.
- Delivered greater public awareness and appreciation of the unique archaeological landscape of the Rathcroghan area.
- Over 75% of the core area of the Rathcroghan plateau (6.5 km<sup>2</sup> area) is directly managed by Farming Rathcroghan farmers. This means that most of the Rathcroghan core area is managed with best practice standards.
- Provided farm income and viability support to 33 full time farmers and 12 trainee farmers over the course of the project.
- Delivered almost EUR 600 000 from Farming Rathcroghan EIP funding to the local community in terms of farm payments, training payments and communal actions and purchases.
- Increased action-based scores on participating farms from 6.7 to 8.7 throughout the project, reflecting incremental improvements.



## Key lessons and recommendations

- This cooperation project provides evidence that the methodologies developed for results-based land payments protecting biodiversity are transferable and can protect other resources, such as rural cultural heritage.
- The Farming Rathcroghan EIP Project has successfully demonstrated the value of implementing a results-based bottom-up cooperative approach in an EIP-AGRI Operational Group by involving farmers in the project from the outset. By placing the farming community at its core, the project has successfully demonstrated its invaluable role in spearheading and leading activities that protect and maintain the cultural and environmental landscape of this internationally significant archaeological area.
- The farmer-centred cooperation approach of the Farming Rathcroghan EIP Project is informing best practices for archaeological preservation at a community level and on earthwork monuments nationally. It has also led to increased levels of innovation within the local farming community. In addition, the project helped increase and bolster the pride and identity of the Rathcroghan community for future generations.

### Additional information:

[www.farmingrathcroghan.ie](http://www.farmingrathcroghan.ie)

[www.facebook.com/FarmingRathcroghan](https://www.facebook.com/FarmingRathcroghan)

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