



Background

- ACRES Co-operation operates in 8 Co-operation Areas
 - These contain a large proportion of Irelands HNV farmland and Hight Status Watercourses.
- Roll out and support of ACRES Co-operation is facilitated by 8 local teams
 - A public procurement process was used to recruit these teams
 - Teams provide expertise in archaeology, ecology, data analysis and remote sensing to support farmers and farm advisors in their areas.
- 23,000 farmers participate in ACRES Co-operation

Part 1

Irelands Experience

Understanding of Requirements

- Irish Dept. of Agriculture did not fully appreciate what was involved.
- Lack of clarity on objectives, structures, systems and resource requirements prior to commencement inevitably led to delays
 - Basic concepts
 - What is a results based payment system for ?
 - Incentive, pride of place,
 - Does this clash with desire to spread funds widely, administrative complexity
- Estimation of lead in time was flawed
 - Constrained by need for approval of CAP strategic plan and desire for a January 1st opening date.
- Resources, particularly support for software development proved inadequate, software development had to follow scheme design leading to insufficient time for development and testing
- The range of systems required to manage RBPS is complex
 - applications, scoring, payments, audit trails, screening etc
- Linkages with MEA in LPIS system proved challenging

Applications

- At the start of the current CAP cycle all farmers were out of agri environment contracts. This had not happened before
- Strong demand for participation
 - 19,000 applications in the first round overwhelmed the original plan for two intakes of 10,000
 - Political decision to accept all applicants leading to considerable imbalance between tranche 1 and tranche 2
 - In hindsight this was understandable and perhaps inevitable
 - Significant Impact on Co-operation Project Team, DAFM and most significantly on Farm Advisors
- Created potential imbalance in labour requirements between future years.
 - Encouraged short term contracts for junior advisors leading to reduced ability to build long term capacity within the sector

Scoring

- Development of scorecards worked well
- Tens of thousands of fields had to be scored.
- Use of a mobile app was the only feasible method
- Development of a mobile app took longer than anticipated
 - Leading to inadequate end user testing
 - A lot of flaws in the first version – poor user experience, impacted on productivity in year 1
- Training of Advisors
 - Many advisors were starting from an inadequate skills base.
 - Habitat scoring required a new mindset, need to overcome decades of conditioning around eligibility issues
 - Business models of many advisory practices ill suited to coping with considerable volatility in labour demands

Big Questions for the Future

- Can the use of scorecards to assess every field be scaled up to a national scale ?
- Is a skilled labour resource available for such a task ?
- Can farmers be trained to self assess ?
- Can we use remote sensing technologies to supplement/ replace field assessments ?

Part 2

Time:

The most precious resource

Timelines – the initial plan

- 5 year contract for farmers
- Less than 1 year for design and development of Results based Payment Scheme – was this realistic ?
 - Procurement of CP teams – contractors, premises, staff recruitment & training
 - Design of Scheme
 - Development of IT systems
 - Selling a new concept to farmers
 - Upskilling farm advisors
- Too little time allocated for development, difficulties exacerbated by slow start
- Constrained by the narrow window between approval of the CSP and Scheme opening.

Big Questions for the future

- Are 5 year schemes too short ?
- How do we prepare for RBPS in advance ?
 - Do small pilot projects help ?
 - How can small pilots inform us of the challenges of scale ?
 - Do small pilots challenge administrative and IT systems adequately to help them prepare for RBPS ?
- To what extent can development and roll out proceed in parallel
- Can you repurpose existing systems ?

Part 3

People

People

- Existing Capacity within the Irish economy is limited
 - Very small numbers of ecologists within Dept. of Agriculture
 - No ecologists within the Farm Advisory Service
 - Very limited number of staff with experience in EIPs, LIFE Projects
- Full employment within the Irish economy makes recruitment difficult
- Housing shortages makes it difficult to attract staff from outside of the area
- Short term contracts (5-6 years) are unattractive compared to permanent positions in an expanding National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Farm Advisors face a steep learning curve, business models of current delivery model may be unsuited to supporting RBPS.

Big Questions for the Future

- Is the Farm Advisory Service a suitable vehicle for supporting RBPS ?
- How do we build capacity prior to rollout ?
 - How do you build capacity without employment opportunity ?
 - How do you justify employment without/ prior to scheme operation ?
- How do we recruit, train and deploy people within our systems ?
- How do you ensure that skillsets are adequate to support the participating farmer ?
 - Training ?
 - Career development ?
 - Staff turnover ?

Part 4

Systems

Build on what we have

or

Start again

LIFE Projects

LIFE Projects, e.g. Burren LIFE, Machair LIFE, Corncrake LIFE etc

- Specific Focus, species, habitat type etc
- Limited Footprint
- Small Number of Participants
- High Staff/ Participant ratios
 - Corncrake LIFE 7 staff: 150 participants
- Admin Support through a parent organisation
- Unsustainable cost base as a model for National Roll out

EIPs

- Two large EIPs in the last Cap Cycle
 - Hen Harrier Project - €25,000,000 budget, c 1,600 participants
 - Pearl Mussel Project – 10,000,000 budget, c 400 participants
 - Both had a large and dispersed footprint
 - HHP 5 Hen Harrier Special Protection Areas
 - PMP 8 PMP Catchments
 - Getting there but not there yet
- Numerous smaller EIPs, e.g. Inishowen Uplands EIP & the Reeks EIP
 - Budgets < €1,000,000
 - Small spatial footprint
 - Limited staff numbers

LIFE Projects/ smaller EIPs

- Advantages
 - Can develop new approaches
 - Can make real progress on specific issues
 - Can demonstrate alternatives to local participants/ communities
 - Adaptable with ability to make and implement decisions rapidly
- Disadvantages
 - Do not have to address the challenges of scale
 - Solutions/ structures are not necessarily scalable
 - Dependency on parent organisations may inhibit expansion

Farm Advisors

- Public and Private providers
- Scheme based business models
- Previous CPA cycles front loaded demand for their services
- Almost no experience in archaeology, ecology, hydrology etc
- Opportunities for training and capacity building limited by business environment

Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

- Advantages

- Established Structures

- Disadvantages

- Very limited capacity in archaeology, ecology and hydrology
- Bureaucratic, slow to make decisions
- Slow to implement decisions
 - Public procurement
 - Need to get agreement from other regulatory bodies

Big Questions for the Future

- Do you have existing structures that could support large scale RBPS ?
- How do you adapt your structures to the challenge of implementing RBPS ?
- Can you react to new challenges effectively/ quickly ?
- How can you test your structures in a way that informs development but in a way that can be done quickly and cheaply ?