**IT Sligo Plays Key Role In European Boost for High Nature Value Farmland**

One of IT Sligo’s main research centres is playing a central role in the establishment of a new knowledge and best practice network which aims to boost innovation in agricultural areas across Europe renowned for their outstanding natural and cultural values.

The Centre for Environmental Research, Innovation and Sustainability (CERIS) at IT Sligo and the Burrenbeo Trust in County Clare (Ireland’s only landscape-based charity) are launching an international project dealing with High Nature Value Farming, known as HNV Link.

High nature value farmland defines areas across the continent where agricultural activities support and are associated with exceptionally high biodiversity. This new project has financial backing from the prestigious Horizon 2020 EU Research Programme to the tune of €2.2 million.

The project will operate across 11 countries: Ireland, the UK, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, France, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Finland and Sweden.

The goal is to increase the socio-economic viability and environmental efficiency of these areas, some of which are currently threatened by marginalisation.

More than 70% of habitats of European importance in Ireland are impacted by agricultural practices with many of the negative effects relating to the lack of management or land use change.

“Marrying science with local innovations and skill is vital in the quest to safeguard the future of these unique areas across Europe,” explains Dr James Moran, the project leader at IT Sligo.

“Their uniqueness demands a holistic approach to their management and to take into account local environment and socio-economic conditions.”

The project will focus on collecting, developing, transferring and sharing innovative solutions of all kinds for supporting high nature value areas.

The Burren in County Clare, recognised internationally as one of the flagship farming landscapes, will be one of ten European learning areas for the project.

“The Burren is the ideal learning area for this project given its high heritage value, its long history of farming, and the many pioneering conservation initiatives introduced here,” says Brendan Dunford, Secretary of the Burrenbeo Trust.

While County Clare will be the flagship ‘learning area’ in Ireland for this new project, the goal is to expand the network across the country as the high nature value characteristics apply to almost one third of Ireland’s agricultural landbase.

**ENDS**

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**NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

[1] H2020-ISIB-2015-1. “Closing the research and innovation divide: the crucial role of innovation support services and knowledge exchanges”. Despite the continued generation of knowledge through scientific projects, research results are often insufficiently exploited and taken up in practice, and innovative ideas from practice are not captured and spread. Cooperation between research and extension services or farmers and other actors in the supply chain is crucial for innovation-driven research. Therefore, mechanisms and networks, which stimulate this interaction and knowledge exchange, should be developed in view of optimising resource use and enhancing the transition to innovation-driven research.

Projects should involve actors from science and agricultural practice and facilitate the exchange on existing knowledge on innovative approaches in agriculture, the supply chain, and rural areas. They should help to put existing research into practice and capture creative ideas from the grassroots-level. Methods for generation of innovation-driven research should be promoted taking into account the diversity of European regions, farming and agro-food systems.

[2] The importance of low intensity farming for the conservation of biodiversity throughout Europe was acknowledged early in the 1990s and the concept of High Nature Value (HNV) farmlands was devised. It has been given high priority within EU Agricultural Policy requiring each EU Member State to identify and monitor the extent and condition of HNV farmland. In Ireland, details of the distribution and types of this farmland can be viewed at [www.high-nature-value-farmland.ie](http://www.high-nature-value-farmland.ie). In Ireland, typical examples include the Burren, off-shore islands, extensively farmed upland and peatland areas, extensively farmed pastureland and floodplain landscapes (e.g. Leitrim and Shannon Callows).

[3] Partners:
Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Mediterranéennes – Institut Agronomique Mediterrannéen de Montêllier CIHEAM-IAMM, France – Coordinator

European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism EFNCP, United Kingdom

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University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine – Cluj Napoca, Romania

Society for Territorial and Environmental Prosperity STEP, Bulgaria

County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland, Sweden

Application des Sciences de l‘Action AScA, France

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University of Thessaly - Department of planning and regional development, Greece

University of Helsinki – Department of Agricultural Sciences, Finland

Local action group LAG 5, Croatia

Conservatoire Espaces Naturels Languedoc-Roussillon, France

Fundación entretantos, Spain