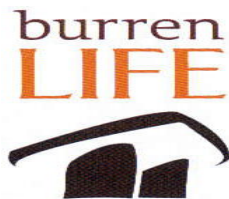


Burren Marketing and Branding Study

**Final Report
August 2006**

Study Commissioned by BurrenLIFE



Undertaken By

Insight Consulting & Blue Sky Solutions

BurrenLIFE Branding Project

**Final Report
August 2006**

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BurrenLIFE Branding Project

Key Study Findings

- The context of the project is an ongoing decline in the traditional pattern of cattle based farming leading to the incremental growth of hazel within the Burren and its decline in value from an ecological perspective.
- A project based around the development of a Burren brand focussing on the sale of beef and lamb products at a premium price can be viable and has the possibility to become self-sustaining within a period of 3 to 4 years. Such a project is likely to be able to attract funding for its establishment.
- The project should have the capacity to provide some extra revenue to local farmers directly, however this is likely to be marginal in the context of the overall farm economy of the area. The main benefits of the project will be the creation of a locally controlled vehicle for sustainable rural development within the Burren, provision of training and support for local farmers, better access to funding, an increase in awareness of the issues relating to the Burren nationally and the development of new income opportunities within the area.
- Despite the strength of the wider forces leading to a decline in farming within the Burren and generally throughout Ireland, this project can provide a small but useful part of a solution towards increasing the viability of farming in the area.
- In order to succeed, the project will require the support and nurturing of local organisations with a stake in supporting farming within the Burren especially within the first year of its existence. The BurrenLIFE project is identified as having a role in helping the project in accessing funding, in recruitment and in supporting the project generally. Leader is identified as having a role in providing funding, support for recruitment and other support to the project. Teagasc and local rural development initiatives are identified as having a role in helping the project deliver benefits to the local farming community. Once funding is available the recruitment of a suitable project co-ordinator will be the key first step in developing the project.
- A dynamic project co-ordinator capable of working closely with farmers and other stakeholders will be required to drive forward the project and establish it as a commercially viable entity.
- A precondition for the success of the project is the establishment and development of an active producer group. This group comprised of local farmers should have a real sense of ownership of the project. Initially this group should meet regularly but without a formal legal structure and this should be facilitated by the co-ordinator. The preferred structure should be selected by them and put in place by the end of the first year of the project.
- Given the barriers to entry to supplying the retail multiple trade, the project should focus initially on innovative routes to market which enable it to sell directly to consumers thus cutting out the middleman. This will have the benefit of giving it greater control and allowing it to generate a higher margin.

Key Study Findings (contd.)

- It is recommended that the project sales commence with a branded mobile butcher unit servicing the rapidly growing number of farmers' markets. These should be selected based on their trading potential. One unit should be purchased initially and further units can be acquired based on its trading success. The meat sold and its presentation must be of top quality with the Burren brand name providing the extra ingredient in its consumer appeal. A locally based master butcher should be identified to slaughter and prepare meat to a high standard for the project. A trained butcher should be employed on a contract basis to operate the unit. A premium price of 7% to 10% should be sought from the outset.
- Once this channel of distribution is established other innovative routes to market should be explored including web-based sales, development of off peak sales pitches and a branded dedicated Burren retail outlet.
- The restaurant sector is not identified as a key market in the short term due to issues of pricing, credit terms, prime cut selection required and protection of the brand name. However, it is recommended that one or two top quality restaurants be supplied on an exclusive basis to support the development of the premium quality cachet of the brand. Their selection will form part of the marketing strategy of the project rather than a major channel of distribution. A protocol for working with these restaurants should be developed with mutual marketing support forming an important part of this.
- Once a brand development process has been undertaken there will be significant potential for broader application of the brand to other products and undertakings including value added products, non-meat products, tourist products etc.
- A key role of the producer group and the groups' coordinator will be to facilitate farmers in exploring opportunities for income generation and accessing support to help them to develop relevant products and projects. This newly created organisation can provide a well-organised locally controlled vehicle to promote and support sustainable development within the Burren. It can also provide a platform for accessing further funding, becoming involved in joint projects and supporting rural based enterprises in the area.

Executive Summary

This study was commissioned as part of the BurrenLIFE project to examine the possibility of developing a brand name for produce from the Burren with a view to improving the incomes of farmers in the region. This was done with a view to improving the viability of the farming community as a whole in the area in the face of declining real prices for agricultural produce.

It was undertaken in recognition of the fact that the unique ecology of the Burren depends for its existence on an active and viable farming community. In particular, the traditional farming pattern based largely around the out-wintering of cattle in the Burren at relatively high densities is key to the maintenance of the area's ecology. This type of farming has been in decline in recent years and the study aimed to identify some ways of arresting this decline.

The study looked at other approaches to area based branding and to the collective selling of meat products in Ireland. No exactly similar project was identified although the Rossinver brand in Leitrim, the Glenbarrow brand in Laois, the South Mayo sheep farming project, the Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op and the Fuschia brand in Cork all contained relevant elements.

It emerged that a precondition to establishing a collective selling initiative was the existence of some form of collective organisation of the farmers involved. No such organisation exists in the Burren and the first step in developing a brand for the area is working with the farmers on the ground to bring them together. The experience of other projects indicated that a co-ordinator with an ability to relate to farming issues and with an understanding of rural development will be required to initiate this development.

The role of the co-ordinator will be to identify and encourage the coming together of local farmers into a producer group and to support the running of the group especially in the first year of its existence. This should be based around a relatively small number of farmers initially (10 - 15) who buy into the overall concept and vision. It can be broadened out in subsequent years to include more farmers. It is recommended that initially farmers who have some land in the four SAC's within the Burren be recruited. Some of the existing group of BurrenLIFE farmers could form an appropriate nucleus for a new producer group. A sense of ownership of the project by the local farmers is essential from the outset.

To implement the above recommendations it is proposed that a non-profit taking company limited by guarantee be established by the BurrenLIFE Project team. They should identify suitable candidates to become Directors of this Company from within their own Board and local contacts during the start up phase of the project. This new Company should apply to the local Leader Company for funding to employ a Project Co-ordinator for a period of 2 years on a three per week basis. The post should report to the Chair of the Company. The Co-ordinator should work closely with the BurrenLIFE team and this will enable them to draw on the knowledge base, ethos and contacts of the BurrenLIFE project as well as drawing support from that project.

Executive Summary (contd.)

The Co-ordinator will have the task of establishing the producer group initially based around interested individuals identified during this research and through the BurrenLIFE project. This is likely to take at least a year to coalesce and its development will continue as the project moves forward. Initially this producer group would not be a formal legal entity but would have regular minuted meetings, a chairman etc. A legal entity should be established by the end of the first year of the project with the members going through a facilitated process to decide which structure is most appropriate for their needs i.e. co-op, or profit or non profit taking company. The Board of this new entity should have representation from other stakeholders the farmer members identify as being in a position to support the project such as BurrenLIFE, Teagasc and Leader .

Within the first year of the establishment of the producer group it is desirable that it deliver some concrete benefits to local farmers. This could include the organising of a Special Sale of Burren cattle at a specially organised mart or during a specific period as part of an existing mart. This should be advertised nationally with a view to attracting a large number of buyers and hence generating stronger prices. Its appeal would be based on the good reputation, which already exists for Burren store cattle in particular. It could be viewed as a form of intermediate branding, and will have benefits in bringing farmers together to work collectively, enabling the Co-ordinator to get to meet a good cross section of local farmers, giving the project a high profile and in delivering some concrete benefits to farmers.

Part of the role of the Co-ordinator would also be to organise some other events in the name of the producer group for local farmers e.g. training events, field trips, etc. These activities will be important to establish the organisation as effective and capable of delivering positive benefits to local farmers.

The Co-ordinator will also have a broader remit on an ongoing basis in supporting the development of the broader rural economy in the area through linkages with existing rural development initiatives and workers, through identifying suitable participants for programmes already in existence in the area and through acting as a conduit to identify and channel requirements of the farmer members. The overall aim will be to support farmers to help them to explore and develop 'Alternative Farm Enterprises and Income Generating Opportunities'. This programme would include a range of mentoring supports and the delivery of a series of workshops and training sessions on a range of relevant topics including, organic conversion, poultry keeping, herb production, beekeeping, cheese making, bread making, etc. Linking with existing programmes in the area, Best Practice visits and guest artisan speakers could also be part of the work programme. Developing appropriate linkages and organising the delivery of relevant programmes, which are not already in existence, will form an important element of the co-ordinators brief later in the life of the project.

The actual development of a brand name should not begin until the second year after the facilitator has begun to work. An experienced branding consultant should be employed to support the brand development process. The brand should be based around the fact that local produce is produced in a unique habitat, that by purchasing the produce the consumer is directly supporting the survival of the local ecology and that all benefits flow directly to the local farming community. Members of the producer group should be given an opportunity to input into the brand development process.

Executive Summary (contd.)

Given the strength of the underlying characteristics of a Burren brand, there is obvious potential to develop a powerful and unique marketing tool.

In the second year of the project the marketing of branded Burren beef should begin. Given the many barriers that exist to supplying the retail trade the best option identified is to purchase a fully fitted mobile butcher unit with a refrigerated van. The Co-ordinator will have the role of organising the sourcing and slaughtering of good quality finished cattle to supply this unit and a high quality local slaughtering facility should be selected for the purpose. It is projected that one animal per week will be required during the first year of operation and this level of supply should be available from within the Burren notwithstanding the relatively low level of finishing that takes place there.

Markets should be selected on the basis of their level of trading. A trained butcher should be paid on a contract basis to operate the unit. The unit should be strongly branded and a price premium of 7% to 10% should be charged. Profits generated from the unit should initially be used to employ the Co-ordinator on a full time basis and any further profits should be used to fund project activities. A premium price should be paid for cattle purchased for sale through the unit. A number of markets should be supplied and the identification of suitable trading pitches during non-market days should be looked at by the Co-ordinator. The viability of acquiring further mobile units should be examined based on the trading levels of the initial unit.

The project should explore innovative opportunities of utilising its brand name on an ongoing basis. This will include the development of value added meat products for broader distribution, on line selling using the web and the possibility of extending the use of its brand name to non food based products.

This newly created organisation will provide a well-organised locally controlled vehicle to promote and support sustainable development within the Burren. It will provide a platform for accessing further funding, becoming involved in joint projects and supporting rural based enterprises in the area.

Section 1: Developing a Producer Group

The development of a producer group has emerged from our research as the first key starting point in developing the potential for branding Burren Produce. A coherent producer group is a precondition to the establishment of a co-ordinated branded approach to marketing.

As there is currently no producer group in operation, it will serve a range of purposes and allow farmers and producers to come together to develop real ownership of the developing brand. The producer group should also act as the catalyst to develop a range of real benefits to farmers in the Burren and it is here that real impact can arise from the project.

The initial recommendation would be to set up a producer group with no formal legal structure. It isn't felt that any emerging and developing group would flourish with the added responsibility that would come with the immediate development of a legal structure.

It will be necessary in the short term that the producer group is supported by a 'Champion Organisation'. The obvious candidate would of course be the BurrenLIFE project. It will be important that the role of BurrenLIFE as the 'Champion' is clearly defined from the outset and that its role of Champion does not overly impose on the already stretched resources of the organisation.

The recommended role of the BurrenLIFE Project in establishing the new project would be as follows:

- Playing a part in the initial recruitment of the Producer Group Co-ordinator along with the Leader Company.
- Applying for funding to Leader who has expressed some interest in funding the part-time Co-ordinator of the Producer Group. It is expected that this and other funding would have to go through the BurrenLIFE project until such time as a legal structure has been established for the Producer Group.
- Acting to set up a Non profit taking Company Limited by Guarantee and to identify initial Directors of this Company from the Board and contacts of the BurrenLIFE project. This Company will serve as the legal entity to initiate the new project and act as employer of the co-ordinator, who would report to the Chair of the Company. Once the Producer Group Steering Committee has been established and is in a position to take on this responsibility they can decide the best legal structure to develop the project into the future. This could involve retaining the existing Company or creating a new entity.
- Some level of ongoing direction to be provided to the Producer Group Co-ordinator, simply to allow him to benefit from the knowledge and experience of the BurrenLIFE team to the benefit of the emerging Producer Group.

The key steps involved initially with the development of the producer Group would be as follows:

Section 1: Developing a Producer Group (contd.)

Step 1: Identify / Appoint a Co-ordinator

The first part in the process of creating the producer group will be to identify and recruit an appropriate facilitator / co-ordinator for the group.

It is expected that the co-ordinator will work on a part-time basis (possibly someone who is also farming) and would be funded by Leader.

This will be a key role as having the right person on board will ensure that members are facilitated in taking real ownership for the process and that there is a clear focus on using the structure of a Producer Group to deliver real benefits to farmers in the Burren and act as a catalyst for a range of developments that can contribute to increasing viability of farming within the region.

It is recommended that the co-ordinator have a good understanding of farming, possibly coming from a farming background. S/he should possess a range of key attributes if s/he is to successfully initiate and support the group, including the following:

- Good planning, organisation and management skills, i.e. the ability to understand and oversee the implementation of a strategic development plan.
- Output focussed, i.e. the ability to get things done and to manage achievable objectives.
- Ability to get on with and relate to farmers, funders and other key stakeholders.
- Experience in some of the key relevant areas including; funding, dealing with marts and other buyers, farming and animal management, promotion and selling, etc.
- Have an understanding of rural development.
- Skills to organise the commercial aspects of the project (i.e. funding / promotion / buying & selling / etc.)
- Be able to deal with and effectively recruit consultants and trainers for working with the project.

Role of Project Co-ordinator

- Co-ordinating the producer group development process.
- Bringing members on board.
- Meeting with individual members to get buy in, listen to their concerns, develop key relationships with them
- Co-ordinating producer group meetings and activities
- Liaising with BurrenLIFE and reporting on progress achieved
- Reporting / updating members
- Meet with key workers in similar posts in other areas to identify best practices that could be adopted.
- Organising programme of relevant and beneficial events for producer group members.

- Accessing funding for specific events and activities
- Identifying someone to work with the producer group to bring them through a development process (developing key aims / expected outcomes / structures etc.)

Section 1: Developing a Producer Group (contd.)

- Organise and record the development process
- Liaise with funding agencies and identify ongoing funding opportunities
- Liaising with other organisations, partners and stakeholders in the process.
- Act where relevant as a mentor to members, providing assistance re. accessing information, etc.
- Organise the establishment of the Intermediate Branding process, i.e. selling to marts, including: (organising supply / booking mart-hours / communicating with buyers / agreeing prices with farmers / organising delivery of animals / organising payment to farmers / etc.)
- Develop relationships with restaurants and oversee the implementation of the restaurant supply aspect of the project including: and liaise with them in establishing contracts, organising supply and delivery, etc.
- Organise the implementation of the mobile butcher project, including:
- Oversee the development of the Web based selling approach, with input from the management committee.
- Gather a range of profile information on members and carry out informal or formal needs assessment that will be useful in planning for the group and ensuring that members needs and expectations can be met
- Work with new members, getting them on board, bringing them up to date with the process, etc.
- Facilitate the development and implementation of a strategic plan for the group.
- When the time comes organise and oversee the establishment of the Legal structure for the producer group / project.
- Attend management committee meetings to brief members on progress in various project aspects.
- Identify new members, prepare introduction material regarding the producer group and the project in general.
- Oversee the process of developing the Brand, engaging brand development expert, organising development sessions, etc.
- Preparation of regular progress reports and financial reports for the project for comparison against established work plan.
- Liaise with other Project Managers to develop the links and relationships between the project / producer group and other relevant groups.
- Target and access sponsorship for the project.

Longer Term Role

In the longer term, realistically mid way through year 2 and in year 3, the coordinator role would need to increase to full-time, if the real potential of the project is to be realised. At this stage the coordinator would take on a broader remit, with a focus on supporting the farmers in exploring other income generating opportunities.

Extra functions that could be taken on at this stage would include the following:

- Assisting farmers to access funding

Section 1: Developing a Producer Group (contd.)

- Facilitating the Organising and planning of training programmes and courses for farmers wishing to explore alternative farm enterprises. This could involve channelling farmer members onto existing programmes, identifying unmet needs and if specific cases linking with organisation such as the Western Organic Network outside the area to provide training.

Step 2: Identify 'Key Influencers' as the Initial Members

All our research on this project indicates that the most appropriate starting point for the development of the producer group would be to start small with a handful of keen and interested members, who have some vision for the project and will be able to work together to create a realisable vision and plan for the Producer Group.

The initial group should comprise of about 10 – 15 producers, a small number of whom would sit on the Management Committee in the development stage.

It the BurrenLIFE Steering group and Project Team are well placed to identify who are the likely candidates to form this preliminary group

It is recommended that the group comprise of a mix of farmers and other key stakeholders.

Step 3: Undertake a Facilitated Development Process

This process would be a key aspect of the initial development phase and will provide a structure within which the members can explore the potential of the emerging producer group and put in place key structures and norms to ensure that the group can develop to its full capacity and deliver real benefits to the members and other farmers in the Burren.

The Development / Training process could be funded by Leader or possibly the local County Enterprise Board. Ideally a facilitator / trainer would be employed to work with the members and their co-ordinator to bring them through a comprehensive strategic exploration and development process that would help them to set out what they want from the Producer Group and how they can plan to ensure that they achieve their key aims.

The key aspects to be explored over the course of a development process would be as follows:

- Identify and agree key objectives of the Producer Group – what do the members want the Producer Group to provide for them?

- Agree clear and measurable expected outcomes for the Producer Group to deliver for the members.
- Prioritise expected outcomes and structure a realistic time frame for delivery of outcomes – i.e. a basic but clear 3-year timeframe for key deliverables. This should

Section 1: Developing a Producer Group (contd.)

include an estimation of the inputs and resources required to ensure that outcomes can be delivered, and outcomes should only be agreed if the necessary resources can be applied to ensure success.

- Agree membership plan for a 3-year timeframe. This should include agreement on how many members would be optimal for each of the initial 3 years, and a recruitment strategy for getting members on board.
- Agree a member's charter – i.e. what will be delivered for members and what will be expected of them. This should also include an effective 'ejection policy' for members to deal with the possible emergence of a situation where a member's continuing involvement is detrimental to the group's integrity.
- Agree a fee structure for membership. It will be important that this is put in place in the initial stages, as experience of other groups has shown that imposing fees down the line is generally a difficult process.
- Explore and discuss the options for developing a legal structure. This will include a full briefing on the following:
 - o A clear discussion and understanding reached as to why the establishment of a legal structure is necessary / preferable.
 - o A discussion and comparison of the different of structures that may be appropriate
 - o A discussion of the benefits / possible issues that may arise with each.
 - o Administrative and management requirements and structures that will be necessitated.
 - o Costs of establishment and implied ongoing costs (accounting and audit, etc.)
 - o Potential implications relating to possible funders and access to funding
 - o Legal obligations and responsibilities arising for members from each.
 - o Agreement to be reached on which legal structure is the most appropriate for the group.
 - o Agreement on a plan and timeframe for the implementation of the legal structure.
- Produce a clear activity plan for the Producer Group for Year 1. This should include the following:
 - o Plan for meetings; how often they should take place / how long they should last / agree most suitable venue, etc.
 - o Key activities to be delivered over the first 1 year at least (2 year plan would be preferable.) The development of an activity plan will be very important to allow a

strong focus from an early stage on action and ensuring that something actually happens and the group is not seen as a talking shop.

- o Plan for establishment of the Legal Structure
- o Commence a Brand Development Process (towards the end of Year one)

Section 1: Developing a Producer Group (contd.)

- Identify potential benefits to be delivered by the Producer Group. This should include the development of a clear list of priority benefits that members require to have delivered by the group. It should also include a longer term 'wish list' of potential benefits to be explored on an ongoing basis.
- Identify the most appropriate structures to be applied for the management of the group in the short term (before a legal structure is implemented) and in the longer term (following the establishment of a legal structure). It is expected that the types of structures will vary somewhat at these different stages however there will be many similarities. The structures to be agreed with include the following:
 - o How is the management group to be formed, how many members will it include.
 - o How will management committee members be chosen, how long will they management committee tenure last for, how will the 'roll over process' take place. At this stage we would recommend that the Management Committee might include:
 - 2-3 farmer representatives
 - Member of the BurrenLIFE project
 - Leader company representative
 - Representative of IFA
 - Representative of Teagasc
 - However the final decision on this should be made by the preliminary producer group.
 - o How meetings are to be structured and planned.
 - o What are the key roles within the management group, including treasurer, secretary, and chairperson. These roles will need to be clarified and agreed upon.
 - o What will be the decision making process (i.e. quorum within the group, etc)
 - o What will be the 'rules of engagement' both for the management committee and group as a whole.
 - o Communication and reporting structure for the management group, the overall producer group and the co-ordinator.

Key Recommendations

- If there are different levels of farmer involvement / input, those giving the most should benefit more from their participation.

- Start with a relatively small preliminary group. Identify a small number of interested and motivated farmers as the core group. To ensure non-exclusivity, then open it up to other interested farmers.
- Charge a membership fee from the beginning. Create a short brochure document that clearly sets out what members get for their membership fee.

Section 1: Developing a Producer Group (contd.)

- Have a series of events in year 1. (See appendix 1 for possible events and potential funders of each.)
 - This will ensure that a level of interest is raised in the producer group.
 - It shows members and potential members that something is actually happening and being provided.
 - It's a good method for attracting new members and promoting the actual producer group.
 - Events need to be something that is actually useful to farmers (not just another talking shop / conference type event)
- Real ownership among the farmers will be a key success factor. They must be very involved from the beginning and play a key role in defining the purpose of the Producer Group and shaping its development.
- Suggest identify and encourage initial members to join. Focus on the key people.
- Early on Mayo Co-op set up a QA scheme. Factory offered to pay but co-op needed independent person. Leader funded 18-week study of all lambs at factory. This proved that 90% of lambs were of top quality.
- Starting small and delivering real benefits will mean that there is a demand by farmers to join the group. This is the ideal – the aim should be to have people knocking on the door and wanting to get involved.
- Identify tangible benefits that can realistically be delivered. These benefits will take a range of forms and may include some of the following:
 - o Facilitated access to information about other opportunities and initiatives through linking with rural development worker and initiatives that are already in existence.
 - o Facilitated and more cost effective access to markets, more convenient methods of selling animals, dealing with buyers, etc.
 - o Support of other farmers and of the co-ordinator who should be available and aim to link farmers up with each other, with funders, agencies and other relevant bodies.
 - o Access to training and learning events.
 - o Access to possible group purchasing / group schemes.
- Don't promote the producer group / attempt to grow the membership until the group has undertaken a clear development process, is sure what it can deliver (knows what benefits it is selling) and is in a position to really deliver something of value to the member farmers.

Section 2: Developing the Brand

Once the producer group have undergone their development process and have developed as a cohesive group with management structures and agreed outcomes, they will need to look at undertaking a process to develop the Burren Brand.

It is expected that this should take place once the producer group has been in position for circa 6-9 months, possibly autumn 2007 by which time they should be ready to begin thinking about Branding and have a clearer idea of what their aspirations are and what they need the Brand to deliver for them.

Ideally the brand development process will be led by the project co-ordinator with an experienced Branding Consultancy employed to input and assist. The project co-ordinator will probably need to allocate up to one day of his/her time to the branding initiative over the 4 to 6 months it is likely to take. It is likely that funding for this Brand development process could be secured by Leader. The total estimated cost of the Branding consultant and the employment of a Designer (to develop the logo, design scheme and letterheads, etc) would be €10,000.

The best approach to undertaking the process would be to set up a Brand Development Sub-Committee to work on the project with the consultant and facilitator. The sub-committee should comprise of members of the Producer Group Management Committee and also possibly include other Producer members with specific relevant skills or expertise.

The establishment of a small Sub Committee will ensure that progress is not hampered by the inclusion of too many people, as inevitably the larger the group the more difficult the decision making process is likely to be. It will be very important however that farmers are well represented from the very beginning of the process, to ensure that their views are taken on board and that they have a strong sense of ownership of the end product. It will also be important to ensure that there are enough people involved with different backgrounds and experience to bring a wide bank of ideas and perspectives to the process.

The entire brand development process should last about 4 to 6 months should therefore be finished in the first half of 2008. Throughout the process the subcommittee should feed back to and seek input from the broader producer group and the Management Committee. This will ensure wider ownership and buy-in to the process. This could be done through a series of focus groups allowing for a larger number of farmers and other stakeholders to be involved.

From the outset it should be factored into the brand process that down the line it could be used for other non-farming products.

The Burren is very well known nationally and internationally as a unique landscape which is famous for the variety and beauty of its flora in particular. This high level of awareness and positive image in the mind of the public will provide excellent material for the development of a consumer brand. The actual brand development process will involve drawing together the various strands so that purchasers of Burren branded produce will be aware that they are directly contributing to the sustenance of the local farming community and hence to the conservation of the Burren.

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

Overview of Process for developing a New Brand

Input provided by Una Fitzgibbon, Brand consultant

Step 1. Consider: What is meant by the term brand'?

It is a promise; it raises an expectation and delivers a product to meet that expectation. It is both a physical and emotional trigger to create a relationship between consumers and the product/service.

Essentially branding is the emotional promotion of a product, a brand should be used as a quality assured symbol, and it should extol the benefits of the product and give confidence to the consumer of a local, consistent traceable and professional product.

Brands are a central idea that people buy into – a compelling reason why to buy time and again. This is what we call brand essence.

Step 2. Conduct a Brand Audit

– A comprehensive and systematic assessment of all collateral (both tangible and intangible) which relates to a brand.

2.1) Define the brand objectives

For example these might be:

- To start small and grow.
- To promote a premium product that will provide benefits for farmers in the Burren.
- To sell product in volumes that will support long term sustainable development

The most important brand objective is to contribute to the overall sustainability of the project in creating benefits for farmers.

2.2) Identify who the customers are?

- Consumers
- Trade
- Media
- Stakeholders

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

2.3) Define the brand image

This refers to the consumer perceptions of a brand and is measured as the brand links held in the consumer's memory. It is the symbolic concept created in the mind of the consumer.

A brand is likely to have several images, with one or two that tend to dominate the mind of the consumer. Customers not only buy a product but also the image associations of the product such as in this case purity, taste, quality and also association with other users of the brand.

Good brand images are instantly brought to mind, are constructive and are almost always unique among competitive brands.

2.4) Define the Brand Vision

This refers to the type of brand you want to create, e.g. to create a brand that has a social conscience. What functional or emotional associations do you wish to be assigned to the brand by its customers and prospects?

A brand vision defines and communicates to the organisation, its stakeholders and the public, the future aspirations of the business and the goals required to achieve this vision.

2.5) Define the Core Brand Pillars

The core brand Pillars drives everything you do.

2.6) Define the brand values

The brand values are the code by which the brand lives, the brand values act as a point of reference to measure behaviours and performance. The brand values are an expression of the brand's personality (brand image expressed in terms of human characteristics) in a way that is clear and compelling.

For example:

- o Environmentally friendly
- o Healthy
- o Traditional
- o Authentic
- o Unconventional

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

2.7) What are the Unique Selling Points (USPs)?

This stage is a difficult one and requires you to highlight the reasons why customers will choose your product over the competition. These reasons are the Unique Selling Points (USPs) of your product.

Understanding your USPs defines competitive advantage and provides you with a platform for marketing.

Once the USPs have been identified there are some important questions to ask:

- How unique are your USPs in relation to your competitors?
- Will your target core audience find significance in your USPs?
- Will the product's USPs do good to the customers?
- Will your USPs encourage customers to make a primary and also repeat purchases?

2.8) Define the Brand Essence

The dictionary defines essence as the 'intrinsic or indispensable properties that serves to characterise or identify something' or 'the most important ingredients, the crucial elements.' This is exactly what should be captured when defining the brand's essence.

The brand essence is a representation of the brand identity (the physical expression of the brand including its name and visual appearance, it is a fundamental means of consumer recognition) and an encapsulation of the brand values. These values form the core of the brand's identity, what the company believes in.

Brand essence refers to the core characteristic that defines a brand. For example the brand Disney defines its essence as **MAGIC**. At this stage an extensive list of possible brand essences should be created which is then cut down to one core characteristic.

Put simply the brand essence is the brand's promise expressed in the most stark terms e.g. Volvo=**safety**, AA=4th **emergency service**. The most powerful brand essences are rooted in a fundamental customer need.

2.9) Identify the core target audience

E.g. Trendy eaters and local supporters.

The core target audience must be clearly identified based on behaviours, values and attitudes and how closely these relate to brand essence, values and attributes.

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

3) Name Generation

At this stage create an extensive list of possible brand names which reflect brand essence and the core brand pillars, then cut this list down to 4 possible brand names.

4) The importance of the Brand story

The brand story gives context and meaning. There needs to be an engaging personality behind the brand for example Wilfred Emmanuel Jones aka the Black Farmer, UK. The brand story allows the customer to join that person on their journey. Unless you have a unique story the products USPs become commoditised.

The brand story should tell what you do, what the brand provides and why the brand matters. A brand story should drive awareness, consideration, trial and buying.

The more coherent and compelling the brand story the more it will power the success of the project. The key points of a strong brand story are clarity, consistency and character.

Clarity – Make sure you know exactly what it is you wish to say, the content of your brand, who you are, what you do, why you do it, why it matters and how it's different from the competition.

Consistency – Then make sure you say it and show it in the same way, wherever and with whomever you do business. This is how all your communications, actions and achievements start to work together, building up into the unison that is your brand presence in the marketplace.

Character – This is where you add some flair and personality. It's what brings you to life at an emotional level. This makes people want to connect with you; it's what turns need into want.

5) Brand testing

3 or 4 possibilities for the Brand should be shown to a focus group (15-20 participants) in order to gain market feedback on the branding possibilities. This will allow for an objective, unbiased approach to the different branding possibilities. From the results of this focus group a final version of the brand can be decided on.

6) Developing the Protocol for the Brand

An essential part of the brand development process will be to develop a clear 'Protocol' for the brand. This can be used on web site and in all promotional material to encourage customers to buy into the brand and to justify charging a premium price. It will essentially encapsulate what the brand is about and what it means.

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

Examples of the kind of items for inclusion in the Protocol could be as follows the final decision on the content should be decided by the consultant working with the Co-ordinator and farmer members. No statement about the product should be made which cannot be supported:

- Animals reared on farms of Special Areas of Conservation in the Burren.
- This company is owned and controlled by farmers from the Burren and all revenues go to supporting them in maintaining and developing their farms
- All meat produced by Burren brand comes from cattle and lambs reared on the Burren on a diet largely consisting of wild grasses and flowers that are rarely if ever fertilised artificially.
- All meat produced under the Burren brand comes from farms who are members of the special Burren Rural Environmental Protection Scheme which means they are managed in a way which will preserve the unique flora of the Burren. This scheme is independently monitored annually to ensure good practices are being followed.
- All meat sold under the Burren brand comes from animals that spend most of their lives on the Burren whose limestone pavement leads to the development of particularly good bone structure and healthy animals.

If specific guidelines are to be put in place relating to the conservation farming practices of farmers supplying finished product for sale under the brand, then they need to be included in the protocol.

It is expected that these will include the following:

- All cattle are out-wintered on high ground in the Burren
- Cattle are fed, Irish non-GMO feedstuffs and Silage is not used.

7) A Briefing document for designers

This stage will involve providing the design company with detailed information on all of the above. Also on the following:

- Your project / company profile
- People involved on the branding project
- Branding project objectives
- Target audiences
- A description of the product including the USPs
- Supporting evidence for the USPs
- Information on competitors
- Desired brand identity

- Design preferences (colours, shapes, layout)

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

- Design examples
- Budget
- Constraints

The designer will then take the brief and work on developing a range of visual options for the Brand. The sub-committee will then need to short list the options, prioritise them and seek input from the broader Management Committee and Producer Group to help them to make the final decision regarding the logo, visual image and colour scheme, etc.

Once these have been agreed and chosen the Sub-committee will work with the designer and the facilitator to decide on exactly what supporting promotional materials need to be developed to support the effective communication of the brand.

Communicating the Brand

The next part of the entire Branding process will be to develop a clear marketing communications strategy to drive the promotion and ultimate success of the new brand. As part of this strategy the sub-committee will agree what will be the tools of communication to be utilised including a plan for:

- Advertising
- Promotion and PR generally
- Sales promotion
- Direct Marketing.

As the Burren name has such strong recognition already and the project itself will have such strong appeal, we anticipate that the development of a clear and powerful PR strategy will allow for the greatest penetration and the maximum benefit from the use of both time and financial resources that are likely to be quite limited.

Applying resources to the effective use of PR approaches (e.g. invitations to food writers, tastings, press releases, events) will be likely to yield much greater benefits than what could be expected from spend on advertising or direct marketing, but this needs to be more fully explored by the Branding Subcommittee.

A good use of limited resources would be the employment of an experienced PR person on a contract basis (year 2 and 3) to implement the PR plan. This could be budgeted in for about €5,000 per annum.

It will be important from the outset to link closely the conservation promotion and brand promotion strategies to the benefit of both. This will mean in practice working in unison with the BurrenLIFE project. Thus for example a food writer doing an article on the Burren meat brand should be briefed on the conservation side of the project. Similarly, an

environmental journalist doing an article on the BurrenLIFE project should be briefed on the branding side and how this is supporting conservation objectives. This will add to the authenticity of the brand in the minds of consumers and will have the benefit of illustrating

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

how the BurrenLIFE project is working practically to support the farming community locally. A high priority should be placed on generating positive PR for the project from the outset as this will be important to all stakeholders in the project and will contribute positively to both sales but also to easier access to funding in the future.

In terms of spend on developing promotional material. A limited budget will require that only absolutely necessary materials be developed. We recommend that the following be prioritised:

- Signage for the Mobile Butcher Unit
- Simple promotional materials (posters / signage) for advertising
- Simple but informative leaflets, explaining what is the product (Beef and Lamb initially) and how it supports conservation in the Burren. These would be used at all points of sale (mobile butcher / restaurants – see below)
- A basic informational website.
- Attendance at some tastings or food fairs.

We would be recommending that only a very small advertising budget is allocated (€3,000 building up to €4,000) that the focus be on local or specialist press. Advertising is very expensive and a significant spend on general advertising would be required to yield any real results or penetration.

Linking the brand with a successful initiative such as Slowfood would be highly advantageous for establishing the brand integrity and communicating the underlying brand principles.

It is certainly worth looking at how other regional branding initiatives have developed and implemented promotional strategies. In particular Fuchsia Brand in West Cork has been very successful in achieving national recognition and significant market awareness. This is explored more fully below.

Use of the brand – broader applications

While the initial application of the brand would be for the promotion of Burren Beef and Lamb there is obvious significant potential in broadening the use of the brand over time.

The Burren name already has huge recognition value and this should be capitalised on to support further developments that can serve to create other income earning options for Burren farmers. There is great potential in developing a regional Burren brand and lessons can be learned from regional branding exercises that have been undertaken in other areas.

We would recommend that at the end of the Brand Development Process, the Branding Sub-Committee should explore further how they would like to apply the brand to the greatest effect. This process should include the following:

Section 2: Developing the Brand (contd.)

- Agreeing what outcomes should be sought in applying the brand, i.e. what advantages should applying the brand produce for the Burren in general and more specifically for farmers in the Burren.
- How can the application of the brand produce real benefits for farmers, i.e. how can it earn income for Farmers.
- Brainstorm the most applicable products / developments that the brand could be applied to and develop a prioritised list of realistic developments that could be supported.
- How can farmers and others be supported to develop successful products, that support them in growing their income potential, and that can use and capitalise on the Burren brand.
- What is the role of the Producer Group in managing the broader application of the brand? What are the priorities in rolling out the brand?
- Development of a Branding Roll-out Plan, to include, clear objectives, outcomes and timeline.

Key recommendations for the Broader Application of the brand include the following:

- It is necessary for the company to define a set of clear guidelines as to who might use the brand. It will be the property of the company and therefore no one else will have the right to use it, without permission.
- A clear brand Protocol will have been developed and all products to be included under the brand need to clearly 'fit' within the Protocol.
- Anyone wanting to use the brand should have to make a formal application and to comply with a series of key quality requirements. This should be set out in a 'Code of Practice' document to be developed as part of the brand development process. The 'Code of Practice' will be determined by and based around the Brand Protocol.
- The integrity of the brand will be of key importance. It will be essential to ensure that the process of rolling out the brand does not have the impact of 'diluting' the perception of quality and value that is associated with the brand. In many cases this has been the case with regional branding initiatives and it should be one of the highest priorities of Branding Sub Committee to ensure that all products that achieve the brand are fully compliant with and a good fit to the principles of the brand. It would be better in the long term to have a very small number of high quality branded products than to have a large number of branded products that do not fully meet with the underlying protocol of the brand. In this case broad recognition may be achieved but will be of limited value.

Overview of other regional branding projects – See Appendix 2.

Section 3: Options for Supply

A key finding of the research conducted for this study has been that there would be an issue around guaranteeing a supply of finished beef product from the Burren to be branded and sold under the new brand name if large quantities of product are required.

This is due to the fact that although the raising of cattle dominates farming in the area, traditional farming practices in the Burren mean that most cattle are sold between the ages of 6 and 18 months. Effectively the Burren specialises in producing Weanlings and Store Cattle and selling them on. These animals are recognised as being of high quality and the evidence suggests that farmers already get a premium for their animals that are very much in demand.

It was obviously important to ensure that the level of finished cattle currently available would be enough to justify the development of a brand for Burren Beef. While specific figures for finished cattle have been difficult to tie down, we have found that the supply of finished beef would not be nearly enough for the penetration of the Burren Beef product on a large scale in the National market (e.g. sale of Burren branded beef in the Multiples across the country).

However research indicates that there are currently enough animals finished in the Burren to allow for the supply of Beef to a mobile butcher unit and a small number of restaurants. While this will be a relatively small-scale operation it will allow for farmers who do and can finish cattle to earn a premium for their product. It will also be a starting point for the development and roll out of a Burren Brand that can later be applied to a range of other products that provide income-generating opportunities for farmers.

The current level of finished product will provide an adequate supply to meet the demand in the short term (first 2 to 3 years), but with the expected increase in demand for the product over time, it may be necessary in the future to look at options around increasing the supply of finished animals.

It has been estimated that fewer than 10% of the 400 to 450 farmers in the Burren finish some cattle. The number of cattle finished at present is in the low hundreds. However as the volumes required to service a mobile butcher unit are relatively small with a requirement of just 100 cattle projected for year 3, this will not be an issue in the short to medium term.

The financial business plan allows that in the first year of operation of the mobile butcher unit, there will be a supply requirement of approximately 1 animal per week. It is expected that the mobile butcher unit will not begin in operation until late 2008, requiring a supply of circa 18 animals in the first year.

Even if the level of demand were to double in the second year of operation of the unit (year 3), only 100 animals would be required, which is a relatively small amount.

Throughout the research process we have explored a range of options relating to accessing and increasing the supply and have a number of key findings and recommendations to make, as follows:

Section 3: Options for Supply (contd.)

Accessing the current supply of finished Burren Cattle

It Subject to price and quality considerations, animals should be purchased from members of the producer group. If supply is not adequate from this source further purchases of animals reared on farms of Special Areas of Conservation in the Burren should be carried out to ensure adequate supplies

Purchasing priority would be given to the member farmers of the producer group, who would be offered a higher premium for their animals. As the membership of the producer group grows in time, as many cattle as possible should be sourced from this group. Having a ready market with a premium price, should over time be a factor that creates a real demand among farmers to join the producer group. It should be noted that only high quality finished animals can be purchased irrespective of their sources, as a key success factor for the mobile butcher unit will be having top quality product from the outset. If these are not available within the producer group they should be sourced from within the area if possible.

Sourcing finished cattle will be a key aspect of the role of the project co-ordinator and the producer group. It is recommended that s/he begin early on in the process to create a database of farmers who finish cattle, so that once the producer group is in place, the brand developed and mobile butcher unit is in place, the necessary level of supply has been secured.

To support the co-ordinator in this role, we would recommend that as part of his/her initial induction process, s/he would meet with the coordinators working with the following projects:

- Sheep co-op in South Mayo
- Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op
- Glenbarrow Project
- Atlantic Organics Rossinver brand

Meeting with the co-ordinators of these projects would allow the coordinator valuable insights into how others have managed this process and should help them to fast track their own process and reduce the learning curve by benefiting from the experiences of others.

Another key aspect of the role of the facilitator will be in selecting good quality stock. The producer group will need to explore the methods for ensuring this and putting a workable quality control approach in place.

Section 3: Options for Supply (contd.)

Buying Back Finished Cattle

If the situation arises that there is not enough supply of finished cattle to meet the demand by the mobile butcher there is always the possibility of buying back cattle which were sold on as store cattle by Burren farmers.

Organising and managing this is likely to be somewhat more time consuming and complicated for the coordinator but it has been done in other projects and does represent an opportunity. Again it would be beneficial for the coordinator to speak to the manager of the Leitrim Organic Farmers co-op who has been operating this approach now for some years.

In order for cattle to qualify under the 'Burren Beef' label, if the integrity of the brand is to be guaranteed it would be necessary to ensure that the cattle in question had spent a minimum amount of time being reared on the Burren, ideally 16-18 months and this should form part of the brand message. Therefore cattle sold on as weanlings would not qualify under this approach.

This would need to be reflected in the marketing material used by the project i.e. the brand protocol could read 'All meat sold under the Burren label has spent at least 16 months on a farm within the Burren' rather than, 'Its entire life on a farm within the Burren.' It is essential that promotional material for the project is accurate and not open to challenge, as this would undermine the integrity of the project.



Section 3: Options for Supply (contd.)

Supporting Farmers to Finish Cattle

There is also an option to increase the current level of cattle being finished by in the Burren by producer group members in the in the Burren. This could be achieved by two methods as follows:

- Encouraging farmers that currently finish cattle to increase their stocking levels.

Providing a premium price for cattle (up to 10%) may over time encourage farmers to make small increases to stocking levels. The provision of other non financial supports may also encourage farmers to make some changes to their stocking levels and thus increase the supply of finished cattle available. Supports that have been suggested include the following:

- o greater convenience for farmers in accessing the market
- o access to price benefits from group bulk buying of feed, etc

Some of the feedback we have received has indicated that even in areas where farmers have good grazing land suitable for finishing, they tend to sell on their weanlings and store cattle. This would indicate that selling cattle at this stage is less work and the reasons for this need to be explored by the coordinator and producer group so that solutions may be found to deal with any obstacles that exist.

- Supporting farmers that currently do not finish cattle to explore this option.

This is very much a longer-term option and there is a range of conservation issues around encouraging some farmers to look at finishing their cattle.

For farmers that do not currently finish cattle and do not have suitable grazing land for finishing, the feeding and housing requirements that would be necessary for finishing could raise conservation issues for the project.

Section 4: Routes to Market

The routes to market that have been identified as most suitable for the project are those that fit with the scale of the project and the resources available to it as well as with the relatively limited supply of beef product likely to be available.

The primary routes that we recommend at this stage are as follows:

Primary Channel

- Branded Mobile Butcher Unit

Secondary Channel

- Restaurants

Branded Mobile Butcher

A branded Mobile Butcher option has been identified as the starting point and core method for selling the branded Burren beef and lamb product. It offers the most financially viable opportunity to provide farmers with a premium for their product. Crucially it also gives the project a high level of control of the distribution chain from farmer to consumer.

Our research has indicated that the Mobile Unit can be self-sustaining within a fairly short period of time as the costs are relatively low and the margins are high as the 'middle man' is effectively cut out. It is expected that the Unit can quickly return a profit that will serve to support and contribute to paying for other aspects of the project. This is important as it is seen as highly desirable that the project should be capable of operating in a financially self-sustaining way within a three to four year period. Sales from the unit should focus on beef but quality lamb sourced from the Burren and organic chickens should also be sold to give an adequate spread of product.

There are currently at least 3 mobile units currently operating successfully in Ireland, selling product at farmers markets.

Establishing the Unit

The process of putting the unit in place would realistically begin towards the end of the first year of operation. This will allow for the following key activities to have taken place:

- The Producer Group to have gone through their development process and be operating as a cohesive entity with clear objectives and plans.
- The project co-ordinator will have been working for at least 6-9 months on the project and will be ready to begin the process of putting the Unit in place and overseeing its operation.

Section 4: Routes to Market (contd.)

- Brand development will be well underway so as to be ready to be applied to the unit the meat products to be sold in it.
- Guidelines and quality controls for the purchase of animals to be sold in the unit will have been developed and implemented, to ensure that clear standards exist from the outset.

As our research indicates that there may be issues around using second hand Mobile Units, we would recommend the purchase of a new butcher unit, with a second hand refrigerated van which are readily available.

The total capital investment cost is estimated at €49,000 (see business plan schedule 1 for detail). This is to be funded partly with a grant and partly through sponsorship and the securing of a soft loan. As the timeline for the project only has the mobile unit coming into operation for the last 18 weeks of the second year, we have assumed that loan repayments will be deferred until year 3 (first full year of operation of the mobile unit).

Running costs for the unit will be relatively small and will depend somewhat on how many market days the unit operates. We have assumed that 3 days will be operated for the first year, (2008) increasing to 4 days from then on. The figures used for the financial projections are based on research of figures for other mobile units.

The average assumed margin per animal will be €1,100 after direct purchase and butchering costs. It is assumed that in the first year of operation an average of 1.1 animals will be sold in the unit per week, increasing to 1.5 animals per week in year 2.

This will yield after running and direct costs of operating the mobile butcher unit, profit figures of €6,086 in the first year (assuming 18 weeks of operation) increasing to €25,000 in the second year of operation.

Operating the Unit

The key to operating the unit will be to identify the markets with the greatest revenue potential. These are likely to be in the larger urban areas of Limerick and Galway rather than the local smaller markets. Smaller markets, which are operating during the week, could also be serviced once they yield a positive return. The number of farmers markets is growing constantly and so new opportunities are likely to emerge on an ongoing basis. There are currently farmers markets operating in Clare from Thursday to Sunday each week, as follows:

- Thursday : Kilrush
- Friday: Ennis / Shannon
- Saturday: Ballyvaughan
- Sunday: Kilaloo

Section 4: Routes to Market (contd.)

We would also recommend that the practicalities of servicing on or more of the many Dublin markets be looked at, taking into account the higher level of trade, the greater distance to be travelled and the fact that many of these are likely to have a meat trader in operation.

While most markets are in the morning, some occur in the afternoon and it may therefore be possible to target more than one market on some days, most likely to be Saturday, following the model used in the North West where the Sligo market is serviced on a Saturday morning and the Boyle market on Saturday afternoon by the same unit.

It's possible that the busiest markets will clash, but this will need to be explored and different markets given 'trial runs' once the unit is up and running. It has been suggested that weekend markets work in tourist towns and weekday markets work in business towns in the case of the local Clare markets and this should be taken into account. The best approach will be to assess the various markets for potential then make an initial selection. Depending on actual trading levels it may be necessary to move from one market to another.

The key to maximising the turnover of the unit will be to develop ways of look at ways of utilising its spare capacity from Monday to Wednesday. The option of identifying a busy trading pitch in association with a good trader should be explored, e.g. a retail park in Limerick or Galway, or in the car park of a retailer engaged in non-competitive trading. This could be done by paying a rental fee, or ideally by getting the anchor store (Tesco / Superquinn) to buy into this as a form of sponsorship. They may be interested in doing this from the Corporate Social Responsibility Angle - 'Tesco supports conservation farming in the Burren'.

In the longer term as the project develops, the possibility of having 2 or even 3 units on the road could be explored, perhaps with one operating in the greater Dublin area on a permanent basis.

Benefits of the Mobile butcher approach

- Cost effective access to the customers.
- All cuts both prime and non-prime can be sold which is a significant benefit. Evidence from other units operating indicate that there will be minimal wastage from the unit e.g. home made burgers have proven to be highly popular in other mobile units.
- Mobile unit can service farmers markets but also be used to deliver product to restaurants & other customers.
- Potential to use excess capacity to support on-line selling.
- Fewer middlemen means that the farmer can retain more of end value, i.e. achieve a higher return per animal.
- As an approach it will effectively support the promotion and sale of regionally produced meat.
- The unit can be effectively and strongly branded.

Section 4: Routes to Market (contd.)

- Provides a good outlet for selling innovative products that might be developed in the future e.g. salamis, cured meats etc
- Can be used for promotions at shows etc, e.g. the National Ploughing Championship.

Benefits to Customers

- Local product being provided for local people who trust that they know where the food is coming from.
- Minimises food miles.
- Meat is fresher and in better condition for consumers than that sold through central distribution.
- Critically it restores the link between farmers and consumers
- Provides food tourism benefits as tourists want to see locally produced food.
- There is an educational dimension – farmers could talk to consumers directly on the unit.
- GM free is an important dimension.
- Meat produced to an artisan standard, i.e. hung for a longer period, will be available.

Key Recommendations:

- The choice of butcher is critical, he must be personable and professional and able to deal well with customers.
- The slaughter facility is also very important. There will be a need to source a craft butcher capable of slaughtering, hanging, cutting and packing meat. Potential highly regarded abattoirs, Fannery's near Gort and Burkes of Kinvara have been identified.
- It is important to display the names and addresses of farmers on the unit for the public as well as putting this information on the meat.
- Other products apart from beef will be required to give the mobile butcher a broader range. In particular Burren lamb has a good reputation in the market. Lamb should form an important part of the product range. Lamb should be sourced from within the producer group or the wider Burren area. Whether a premium price should be paid for lamb also should be decided by the producer group. Once again high quality lamb only should be sold. Organic chickens should also be sourced for sale in the unit.

Other factors to consider:

- Both the operator and the promoter must do HACCP training and implement a range of measures to ensure hygiene standards are maintained. The highest standards of

Section 4: Routes to Market (contd.)

hygiene must be in place from the outset as meat is classified at relatively high risk and any breakdown in standards will have a very damaging impact on the project.

- It may be worth considering sub-contracting out the mobile unit, as this may be a less complex method for running it. This will be particularly relevant if further units are going to be considered. Initially it is recommended that the unit be run by a contract worker. This is to ensure that the project is close to the customer from outset and can take on board feedback with regard to price, quality, display etc. Sub contracting could be looked at as it would have the advantage of sharing the risk, especially if further units are to be purchased. The benefit is that the cost of employment and management no longer falls on the project. However, there is a trade off in terms of losing control and in generating a lower margin for the project. A precondition for subcontracting would be a situation of complete trust in the butcher being contracted in. This is because any lapse in quality or other problems could damage the brand name significantly. In general caution is needed in considering the subcontracting option and it is not recommended during the initial stage of the project.
- Selection of an appropriate slaughtering facility is going to be of key importance. This will need to be capable of working to artisan standard. This means:
 - Minimal washing of carcass
 - Capacity to hang beef for 3 weeks and lamb for up to 15 days to tenderise.

Restaurants

The research carried out on the project has indicated a number of key issues relating to supply to restaurants, which include the following:

- Most restaurants even the good ones are not willing to pay a premium for ingredients. They need to deliver a high margin (usually between 60% and 70%) and are under pressure to keep costs to a minimum. Restaurants tend to be driven by portion cost control.
- Restaurants only want to buy very specific cuts of meat, generally prime cuts.
- Generally restaurants are very price sensitive and may be slow payers.
- Many restaurants will not be open to spot check systems that will be required to ensure brand control and maintenance of the credibility of the brand.
- Research indicates that the catering trade forms a major market for meat from developing countries such as Brazil. This applies across the various types of operation and is not just confined to lower priced premises. Without a provenance checking system of some type for producer sourced and branded by the project, there is a real potential for meat sourced from different suppliers to become mixed together within the catering trade.

Section 4: Routes to Market (contd.)

- The recent introduction of place of origin legislation governing meat in the restaurant industry will support the project aims.

Given these potential issues, at this stage of the process we perceive that the primary benefit to the project of selling product in restaurants is that it offers an opportunity to promote the brand in high profile venues. This means using select restaurant outlets as a 'shop window' for the brand rather than as a serious channel for selling substantial volumes of meat. In practice only the very top quality restaurants should be supplied and permitted to use the brand name as part of their promotion strategy.

A simple written agreement would need to be put in place that would govern the trading relationship to the mutual benefit of both restaurant and the project. This would deal with price, credit terms, but also how the meat would be described on the menu. In return the project would promote the restaurants involved, by stating Burren Brand Beef is only available at the following top quality restaurants. This would be done on the project web site, mobile unit and on any promotional leaflets produced.

Restaurants will only really be interested in buying prime cuts and realistically even if they are willing to pay a premium, the margin on sales to restaurants will be substantially lower than that achieved for sales from the mobile butcher.

With the limitations in supply generally, ensuring a consistent supply to a large number of restaurants would be difficult and would also mean that prime cuts of meat would not be available for sale in the mobile unit, which would be likely to have a significant negative impact on customer perceptions of the unit and its ability to cater to customer preferences.

It is therefore recommended that only one or two key restaurants be carefully chosen to serve Burren Beef and that these are used as a key promotional tool. Ideally in time, there should be demand from restaurants to access supply and only the best restaurants will be supplied. This will ensure that the brand is supported rather than threatened.

The project will need to be willing to refuse to supply any outlets that might damage the brand, i.e. restaurants that claim to sell the product yet serve other beef in its place. The restaurants chosen should be willing to provide information to customers (display promotional material, etc.) and should be open to a spot check system. Such a system of monitoring should actually deliver a positive marketing benefit to the type of restaurant, which the project is targeting. The project should aim to work in partnership with its restaurant customers for their mutual benefit.

Research carried out has identified Gregan's Castle as a key venue in the area. They have indicated in principle a willingness to support the project, to pay a premium for quality branded meat, actively promote it and are open to taking part in a spot check system. Supply would start once the mobile butcher unit is up and running. Ideally a key restaurant in Dublin and possibly Cork, with a reputation for high quality ingredients would also be targeted for supply in the second year of operation of the unit. These would be taken on with the same view to supporting and promoting the brand name.

As the brand name becomes established the possibility of developing further the distribution of the Burren Beef to a greater range of top restaurants could be explored.

Section 4: Routes to Market (contd.)

This could have particular relevance if value added products are developed as the supply of quality cuts to high-end restaurants could dovetail with the production of value added branded products which utilise the lower value cuts. The ideal scenario is that the branded meat supplied by the project will develop a cache, which will make it appealing to the top end of the restaurant trade.

Other Market Route Approaches

Selling to Shops

In the longer term when value added products have been developed or other products have been awarded the brand, selling to gourmet shops around the country or the establishment of a Burren Shop selling only Burren produce may be an option to explore. It is unlikely that this would be something that the producer group or company would take on itself but it may be something that it could support someone else to explore and develop. This could also provide an outlet for cheese, breads and other products. However issues of displacing business from local retailers would have to be considered here if such an outlet was located within County Clare. An option could be to locate it outside the county, say in Galway or Dublin. This could possibly be linked with tourist interests as a vehicle for the overall promotion of the county.

Web Selling

The development of a Web site as a promotional tool has been planned and budgeted for late in the first year.

With the further development of the Web site in the longer term, Web selling could be an option and should be explored at a later stage. The most practical approach would be to sell boxes of meat, e.g. €100 worth of mixed cuts. As a refrigerated van will be required for the mobile butcher, deliveries could be made on non-market days. However there would have to be a delivery charge which may be an issue. Another possibility would be selling on the web for collection at the markets.

Section 5: Longer Term Options

Option 1; Developing Branded Value Added Products

Once the project and brand name are established, late in year 3 or early in year 4, the project should begin to explore the option of developing branded value added products.

This is a complex and time consuming process and it should be noted that most new products do not succeed in the marketplace. On the other hand the rewards for successful new products are significant. The development of new value added branded products offers the potential to achieve very significant revenues and to utilise much larger quantities of meat being produced in the Burren.

The best approach to exploring the options for branding value added products would be to employ an external consultant or facilitator with food industry knowledge to carry out a scoping exercise working with the Coordinator and Management Committee of the project.

This would identify whether value added product development offers good potential for the project or not and it should also identify the types of products to be looked at in more detail.

This will enable the production of a realistic time framed and costed plan for developing new products. Funding for this initial study should be available through Leader or the County Enterprise Board.

The kind of issues that should be taken into account are:

- The overall project aims in supporting cattle raised in the Burren, i.e. beef based products should be focussed on, in particular those that have the potential to utilise non prime cuts. This is a key parameter, as there exists a strong demand at a premium price for the best cuts in any case.
- Also the changing nature of consumer demand e.g. growth in demand for convenience, quality, ethnic foods etc.

The plan produced at this stage could be used as the basis of a more substantial funding application for value added new product development. In general from concept to product launch is likely to take 1 to 2 years depending on the product. The extra staff resources needed should also be identified at the stage.

Another issue to be considered is the possibility of forming a strategic partnership of some type with another company that has experience in the area. This could involve co-operation in new product development, production or distribution.

Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 1; Developing Branded Value Added Products (contd.)

The steps involved in the new product development process are as outlined below.

Step 1: Assess stock available across the 12-18 months ahead

- How many animals
- Determine options for time line for availability
- Quantity of different cuts therefore being available
- Identify reasonable amounts to be sold direct through variety of market channels
- Calculate remainder for use in value added, quantity and typical cuts

Step 2: Market Research

- Research marketplace in Ireland, UK and Europe
- Identify trends in meat purchase and specifically value-added products
- Segment products by volume, shelf life, territory, market channel
- Select products which can be matched to availability of raw materials
- Identify possible partners e.g. friendly food manufacturers who have the capacity and interest in developing prototypes

Allow time: Complete research across 8 -12 weeks

Allow resources: One person part-time to co-ordinate and assess information from range of sources (retail evaluations, seminars/events, trade press, market research publications, e.g. Mintel etc).

One experienced food consultant to advise and interpret e.g. 2-4 days per month.

Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 1; Developing Branded Value Added Products (contd.)

Step 3: Product Development & Packaging research

- Identify appropriate development method for each product e.g. prototypes and recipes for each product to be by food manufacturer, butcher, meat processor, specialist/artisan producer, chef.
- Trial recipes, revise, trial again, revise, trial again.
- Focus group with taste testings only when range of trials underway (e.g. don't waste resources on bringing people together until close to being happy with a product).
- In parallel explore options for packaging of product (this may affect how the product is produced, stored, how and where it is sold, shelf life etc). Do not leave packaging until the end.
- Assess what packaging methods are available locally many packaging options are effective but equipment incredibly expensive to purchase, and kit already in use by local manufacturers may be very specific to their needs, e.g. MAP kit can cost €20,000 to €30,000 new.
- Price point determination (to establish gross profit margins) and feasibility of producing product to be explored in tandem with product development.

Allow time: For 4-8 products allow 12-20 weeks minimum

Allow resources: Co-ordinator part time.
Access to chef,
Access to food technologist, test kitchen,
Allow lab fees for shelf life and micro testing,
Allow for raw materials for trials and tests.

Step 4: Branding and Design

As the brand is already in place, appoint design company with food industry experience to explore options for application of brand and design themes on packaged across the range of identified products.

Packaging size, product weight etc should be established before final brief for design agency agreed to avoid constant revising of brief and design work.

Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 1; Developing Branded Value Added Products (contd.)

Step 5: Test marketing

Allow period for test-marketing and direct consumer and customer (e.g. retail, food service etc) research. Complete on small scale. This is not the same as product launches which should only happen when the product is completed and production systems in place.

Step 6: Marketing and Distribution Strategy

Whilst product development is underway, establishing routes to market and methods of distribution is critical, including:

- Establishing vehicles for product promotion
- Establishing the method for ongoing sales.
- Logistics for transportation, including tying in with existing transport/distribution networks and assessing needs for own transportation (e.g. to have access to a refrigerated van and driver on the road, or to combine this with using local delivery firm, or pay distribution fees to existing food co with their own transportation etc)

Step 7: Creating a Production Plan

Working with Quality Management system to establish systems for flow of production, incorporating:

- Where raw materials come from,
- How they are stored and transported to processor,
- Where and how processing happens,
- Where and how packaging happens,
- Where and how finished packaged products are stored and distributed,
- HACCP systems and pre-requisites,
- Regular lab testing for safety,

- Ongoing revision of quality management systems, etc

Step 8: Developing the Business plan

Research for all of the above will feed directly into creating a working business operation plan for production and distribution.

Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 2: Supporting existing programmes of Support for Alternative Farm Enterprises

Once the producer group is well established and the Mobile Butcher Unit is in place, it would be projected that enough profits will be generated to contribute towards having the Co-ordinator working on a full time basis. It is also recommended as mentioned earlier that there could be a fund in place to provide the 'matching funding' element necessary to allow members to access jointly or individually a range of funding opportunities.

A important element of the role of the coordinator at this stage would be to work with farmers to maximise the benefits available to them from existing programmes in particular the North Clare Family Farm Support Services, Teagasc, RRD Leader, Cohesion Fund, IFA Skillnet and the Western Organic Network (WON) Accel programme. In this way to explore options for alternative farm enterprises and income generating opportunities. A good option to allow for a high level of input from the producer group, without this process taking up all of the producer groups time, would be to develop a subcommittee of producer group members with a specific interest in this area to look at 'Alternative Farm Enterprises and Training Programme Development' Establishing a manageable route to market for small producers represents a barrier to development. In this regard, the development and growth of farmers' markets represents an opportunity and identifying gaps in the range of local produce for sale in local markets could be one source of potential ideas.

It is anticipated that the role of the coordinator in relation to supporting these activities would be as follows:

1. Carry out a Survey of Interest in 'Alternative Farm Enterprises' among members of the Producer Group and other local people in partnership with other agencies

This survey would allow for a clear assessment of the level of interest among farmers in a range of potential 'Alternative Enterprises' including possibly the following:

These include:

- Organic vegetable and herb production
- Artisan/organic bread and cake production
- Local/organic goats, cow and sheep cheese
- Organic poultry, organic eggs
- Honey

- Wildflowers
- Jams and chutney production

Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 2: Providing Supports for Alternative Farm Enterprises in partnership with other agencies (contd.)

The survey should allow for the following information to be gathered:

- Whether or not farmers are interested in looking at joint enterprise
- What specific areas they are interested in looking at
- What if any research / work they have carried out to date in exploring or starting to develop their alternative farm enterprises
- What further information they require at this stage to help them to further their plans
- What financial / other support they would require to pursue their enterprise
- What programmes are in existence or are accessible to support them.

The results will allow for coordinator to zone in on specific areas of interest, to identify and prioritise supports and resources required to support farmers and also to identify where there are opportunities to link farmers together.

2. Gathering and creating an Information Pack on 'Alternative Farm Enterprises'

Once the survey has been implemented and the results collated, the Co-ordinator should work on putting together an information pack for farmers to help them to move forward in the initial exploratory process of looking at options for an enterprise. This should be done by liaising with other agencies/programmes working on the ground.

The information pack should include the following:

- The results of the survey process, including the list of enterprises named, many of which other farmers may not have thought of.
- The potential areas where there may be opportunity for collaboration.
- Similar projects around the country and the region that could be visited and looked at.
- Demonstration farms / enterprises being supported by other initiatives that are can be visited, (e.g. the Western Organic Network have a number of demonstration farms and members that could be contacted and visited).

- Details of specific projects / initiatives that might be of interest to farmers, i.e. funded, supported or pilot projects that might be relevant.
- Training and information sessions and programmes that are being held elsewhere in the country that farmers might wish to access.

Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 2: Providing Supports for Alternative Farm Enterprises in partnership with other agencies (contd.)

- Relevant case studies, reports that have been compiled that might be of interest to farmers.



Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 2: Providing Supports for Alternative Farm Enterprises in partnership with other agencies (contd.)

3. Organise the development and provision of a series of Training Programmes on 'Exploring Options' for Alternative Farm Enterprises in conjunction with other support programmes.

The training programme should be developed with input from the Producer Group, possibly under the 'Sub Committee' structure mentioned above.

A suite of Training Programmes to be accessed from other agencies within the county or if not available to be developed in partnership with them would ideally include the following:

- A series of Information sessions on specific types of 'Alternative Enterprises', including talks by subject matter experts, experienced relevant practitioners, etc
- A series of 'farm visits' around the country to look at other people engaged in a range of alternative farm enterprises.
- Link in with the 'Small Food Business Programme' being run by Isobel Fletcher of Leader, around Ireland to see if she can hold specific sessions for the Burren Farmers, or if they can attend sessions being run elsewhere.
- The Western Organic Network, Accel Funded programme are also in a position to fund some training programmes (with an organic element) in the area and have expressed a keen interest to support the Burren Project in this way. (See Appendix 3 for list of WON programmes to be run in coming period).
- A specific Mentoring Programme to be run for farmers. This programme would include 4-5 one to one sessions, which would allow farmers to work with a trainer to assess the potential of his / her own farm and devise a possible plan to meet their particular circumstances. This plan would have to take into account the following:
 - The particular resources available to the farmer, including land and physical resources, capital available for investment, time resources available.
 - The earning requirements of the farmer, is this enterprise to supplement current farming income, replace income from a part or full-time job, etc
 - The experience and background of the farmer, his/her spouse and family members, that may be relevant and beneficial.
 - The preferences and ideas of the farmer in relation to developing an alternative enterprise.
 - The opportunities for working with and linking up with other enterprises, farmers, developments in the area.
 - The flexibility / lifestyle preferences and requirements of the farmer, i.e. does s/he have family or other commitments that need to be worked around, how many hours per week is s/he willing to work, is this to form part of a 'down-sizing' plan, etc.

Section 5: Longer Term Options (contd.)

Option 2: Providing Supports for Alternative Farm Enterprises in partnership with other agencies (contd.)

4. Organising / Facilitating Farmers involved in developing 'Alternatives' to come together.

This will be an important resource to provide to farmers. The establishment of an 'Alternative Farm Enterprise' network could be invaluable to the members allowing them to;

- Discuss problems and issues they may be encountering.
- Talk about their progress to date and where they need further support and assistance.
- Share resources, learning and experiences to the benefit of all.
- Identify and prioritise their needs for further training and support.
- Identify where there are opportunities for joint initiatives, joint purchasing or approaches to suppliers, etc.
- Offload concerns, worries, and irritations to others that understand.
- Reduce the 'isolation' involved in embarking on a process of huge change and upheaval and gain real peer support, with the development of valuable relationships and support structure.

5. Helping farmers to access and explore 'Routes to Market' for Produce from Alternative Farm Enterprise.

The provision of this service is likely to be of more interest further down the line, when farmers have begun to actually produce. It may include looking at the following:

- Access to farmers markets, both as a group and as individuals.
- Exploring access to shops and other retail outlets.
- Exploring the potential for setting up a 'Burren Shop' for all the producers.
- Exploring shared distribution services and facilities, to reduce costs and create greater convenience.

Section 6: Creating Benefits for Farmers

The development of a Burren Brand will have an impact in awareness creation in consumers' minds, and in providing a focus for the development of the Producer Group, fostering and building on the sense of local pride in the area and in generating revenue to fund the project going forward. The brand will also help to raise national awareness of the real and urgent conservation issues facing the Burren. However our research has indicated that an equally important impact of the project will be its ability to act as a catalyst to deliver a broad range of benefits to farmers.

Our research and discussions with farmers and other key stakeholders in the area has indicated a range of benefits that should be considered for delivery, and these are set out below in some detail. However we do recommend that once the producer group is up and running, as part of their development process they should discuss and prioritise the benefits to farmers to be delivered over the course of the project.

The primary benefits that can be delivered by the project will be enabled through the development of the producer group, which will act as the vehicle for creating and supporting a range of key projects and initiatives for the benefit of farmers in the community.

The project coordinator will be a key resource available to the farmers and it is important that the recruitment process focus on finding a coordinator with a range of skills and the vision to realise the potential for the group.

Some of the feedback of the research process has indicated that there is a need now for concrete action to take place arising from this process. As such we have recommended that a key function of the producer group be to organise a series of events for each year, with some key events taking part in the first year. This will boost the entire process and show potential producer group members that something is actually happening and that the process has not just resulted in another report.

This will be important in getting buy-in locally and from agencies and in enabling the project to gain a sense of momentum from the outset. The establishment of a reputation for having the ability to delivery concrete benefits on the group is important both for attracting members and marshalling support from stakeholders.

Key benefits that could be delivered include the following:

Access to Training / Advisory Supports to support the development of Alternative Farm Enterprises

There are a number of funders who may be interested in funding training and advisory programmes and supports for farmers interested in exploring alternative farm enterprises and other income generating projects, these include the following:

Section 6: Creating Benefits for Farmers (contd.)

- Skillnets Ltd, either through currently operating Skillnet networks (including locally the Western Organic Network, IFA Skillnet,) or through the development down the line of a specific Skillnet application to serve the needs of the Burren Farmers.
- Clare County Enterprise Board.
- RRD Leader

Accessing funding to training as a producer group is a much easier process than accessing it as individuals. The producer group coordinator will be in a key position to carry out a range of specific tasks and functions that will ensure that members have a much greater chance of accessing the most relevant and useful supports available.

- Work with the producer group members to explore and prioritise training and advisory needs. This can include the following:
 - o Discuss alternative farm enterprise and income generating opportunities with producer group members to clarify exactly what options exist and prioritise areas of interest.
 - o Identify key speakers, experts, etc, that are of interest to members to come and share their experience and knowledge.
 - o Carry out Training Needs Analysis with members to allow for specific outcomes for programmes and events to be identified. This will ensure that events organised will be fully relevant to members.
 - o Identify the most appropriate training / support methodology to meet specific needs, these may include - one-to-one support / information evenings / mentoring / workshops / or longer training programmes.
 - o Work where possible with individual members to discuss specific ideas and opportunities and to develop support and training plans and approaches.
- Develop relationships with funders:
 - o To gain a clear understanding of what funding is available during particular time periods and when applications need to be made.
 - o To gain a good understanding of how to apply for funding, what types of activities will qualify, etc.
 - o To develop activity and training plans with the funders that meet with both the priorities of the funders and the needs of the individual producer group members.

Section 6: Creating Benefits for Farmers (contd.)

- Organise, plan and co-ordinate events:
 - o Plan training and information events for times to suit members
 - o Work with trainers, speakers and subject experts to develop programmes, set outcomes, etc.
 - o Organise venues, promote and advertise events, organise attendance, etc.
 - o Carry out evaluation of training and events, to assess where improvement is needed and how effective various activities are in delivering real benefits to participants.

'Intermediate Branding' – Special Sale of Burren Cattle to Generate Price Premium

The vast majority of Burren cattle go for finishing all over Ireland and overseas and as they are limestone reared and have good bone structure, they are viewed as premium store animals.

One key recommendation that during the research process, was that although Burren animals already achieve a premium price at the mart, there is an opportunity to look at organising specific 'Burren Marts' to generate a premium price, attract buyers and create a range of other benefits for the fledgling producer group. This could be organised either as a once off special mart or as a period of 2 to 3 hours within an existing mart.

The recommended approach would be as follows:

- The producer group coordinator should begin the process of organising the Mart as one of his very first tasks. As recommended earlier he should first talk to coordinators in other similar projects to gain a good insight into how these have worked, what to avoid, what advantages / benefits can be gained by farmers, how to get the farmers on board, etc.
- S/he should use the development process as a key opportunity to get out on the road and talk to farmers and begin to develop relationships with individuals. Although this will be a time consuming process, it will be key to ensuring that there is a high level of buy in by farmers to the producer group and that he develops early on a good working relationship and level of trust with key producer group members.
- S/he should explain his idea for developing the mart to the farmers, get their ideas and opinions on how best it might work, get them interested in the project and its potential and explain how this approach has worked for other projects.

Section 6: Creating Benefits for Farmers (contd.)

- Having visited and spoken individually to producer group members, s/he should then advertise locally and hold a number of meetings with other farmers in the area. During these meetings s/he should talk about the project and the plans for a special sale of Burren Cattle under the auspices of the new Burren Producer Group project. This will be an excellent vehicle to meet new farmers. Names of non-producer group members can be collected and the coordinator could then arrange to meet these farmers to get to know them and tell them more about the project. It would be a great opportunity to identify potential new producer group members.
- Ideally both weanlings and store cattle should be sold. There would need to be at least 150 animals at a sale to make it worthwhile. The aim should be to hold the first Special Sale about 6-9 months after the coordinator has begun. Once the date has been set the coordinator will need to work to create some hype around it as it will be the first real PR opportunity for the Producer Group and will be important to attract enough buyers to drive the prices and make it a real success. PR approaches should include local press releases, a feature in the farmers journal, some local advertising, a feature on RTE radio farm programme and possible features on RTE's 'Nationwide' or 'Ear to the Ground' programmes. These are all low cost options; they will take time but allow for development of relationships that will be valuable for PR in the future and thus worth the time investment.
- The local Marts should also have contact details of purchasers at previous Marts and this information should be accessed so that a mail shot can be prepared to target buyers.
- By ensuring that there is a good selection of quality animals available from the Burren which already has a reputation for producing quality stores and weanlings and by generating publicity around targeting both local farmers and potential purchasers, it should be possible to generate stronger prices than would be otherwise obtained.
- Once the first sale has been run successfully, work should be done to evaluate the experience with both the farmers and the buyers, to look at where and how improvements could be implemented.
- Factors such as Quality Control and possible size grading should be explored for second and subsequent sales. Ideally the producer group should work together to come up with approaches for this. It is likely to be too much to tackle for the first sale, and would slow the process down.
- It is recommended that 2 to 3 sales should be held in year 2 and subsequent years, depending on ongoing demand and success.
- The 'Special Sale' approach while not revolutionary does offer a real opportunity to get farmers involved and for them to see something very concrete happening as a result of the producer group and the branding project as a whole. It should offer increasing benefits in terms of greater convenience and increased premiums, but will also give an opportunity for the coordinator to sell the bigger picture and put the project in context.

Section 6: Creating Benefits for Farmers (contd.)

Peer Group Support through membership of the Producer Group

Discussion with project managers and coordinators of other producer groups has indicated that a key benefit that producer groups can deliver to member farmers is the opportunity to meet up and discuss a range of issues and developments.

There is a strong sense that farmers are becoming increasingly isolated and surveys in other producer groups have indicated that the opportunity for interaction is a primary benefit farmers perceive as arising from membership.

It will be important that the coordinator recognises the potential return to members from peer discussion and support and work on facilitating the development of real interaction and sharing among members and that activities are organised that assist with the building of real openness and communication among members.

Bulk Purchasing Opportunities

The producer group structure will offer a range of opportunities for farmers to explore the potential of economies of scale that can be achieved through group and bulk purchasing of a range of relevant items. The most promising areas to look at initially will be the group purchase of feed and of insurance.

Research with other groups has indicated that these are the two starting points. Research has also indicated that while group purchasing is an opportunity it has taken other groups a number of years to be in a position to begin focussing on it.

Assistance with Access routes to funding

The producer group will be in a position to improve access to funding by farmers to a range of different funds and funding agencies. This will be facilitated through the following:

- Improved relationships with funders

The producer group coordinator will as part of his/her role, develop good working relationships with all relevant funders. This will allow him / her to have a better understanding of:

- o Which funders should be approached for funding specific projects, research and support?
- o What is required by funders in terms of application documentation, support materials, legal structures, etc?

Section 6: Creating Benefits for Farmers (contd.)

- o What funding different agencies and funders have available at particular times and what their funding priorities are?
- Improved information and assistance with completion of application forms

The producer group coordinator will be in a position to advise farmers on what funding routes are best to take, to assist them to complete application documentation and to help to organise meetings / interviews with funders and agencies.
- Access to larger and joint funding initiatives with other producer group member
 - o By working together, producer group members will have greater access to larger funding initiatives that they would otherwise be unlikely to be in a position to target. These will include funding programmes under Interreg, Skillnets, etc.
- Access to matching funding funds through the producer group.
 - o Many funding agencies require that for all funding granted a level of matching funding (usually circa 25%) is provided by the organisation being funded. This often is a serious deterrent to those interested in accessing funding, particularly small operations and farmers, etc.

It is recommended that once the Mobile Butcher Unit is in operation and profits are being made, that some of the surplus could be allocated to providing matching funding for worthy project being undertaken by either the producer group as a whole or individual members (who might be granted the amount as an interest free loan to be repaid to the producer group over an extended period of time)

Section 7: Project Roll-out Timeframe

Project Timeline – Pre Year 1: 2006

2006 – Pre Year 1			
From	To	Task	Who
		- Review Project Branding Report and agree recommendations to proceed with.	BurrenLIFE Steering Group & Project Team
Sept	October	- Complete application for funding for Project Coordinator	BurrenLIFE Steering Group & Project Team and Leader Company
October	December	- Recruit Project Coordinator - Induction / familiarisation of Project Coordinator	BurrenLIFE Steering Group & Project Team and Leader Company

Project Timeline – Year 1: 2007

Year 1 – 2007			
From	To	Tasks	Who
January	February	- Identify key farmers / stakeholders to form the initial Producer Group	Project Co-ordinator (with input from BurrenLIFE Project Team)
January	May	- Begin visiting and recruiting initial Producer Group Members - Hold first Producer Group meeting	Project Co-ordinator (with guidance from the BurrenLIFE Project Team)
April	May	- Recruit facilitator to work with Producer Group and lead them through the development process - Apply for and secure funding for the Producer Group Development Process - Agree 2-3 information / training sessions to take place before end 2007.	Project Co-ordinator (with guidance from the BurrenLIFE Project Team)
May	September	- Undertake 'Producer Group' Development Process.	Producer Group Steering Group, with Facilitator and input from Co-ordinator
June	October	- Organise and run 2 – 3 training sessions / information sessions to be funded by Leader / CEB / WON Accel Project.	Project Co-ordinator
June	September	- Put in place Legal Structure for the Producer Group	Producer Group Management Committee and Project Co-ordinator.
June	September	- Hold a range of meetings re. Special Sale - Begin meeting farmers to start the 'Special Sale' research process	Project Co-ordinator

Year 1 – 2007	Continued		
From	To	Tasks	Who
July	August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree terms of reference for Brand Development Process - Recruit Branding Consultant to work on Brand Development Process 	Producer Group Management Committee Project Co-ordinator
August	October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organise and put in place pr and promotion for first 'Special Sale' of Burren Cattle. - Hold first 'Special Sale' of Burren Cattle. 	Project Co-ordinator
September	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin Brand Development Process 	Producer Group Management Committee (or Branding Subcommittee)

Project Timeline – Year 2: 2008

Year 2 – 2008			
From	To	Task	Who
January	March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin the process of recruiting to grow the Producer Group - Begin the process of collecting information on supply of finished cattle for the Mobile Butcher Unit. - Begin putting together agreement for restaurants for supply of beef. 	Project Co-ordinator
Ongoing	April / May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete Brand Development Process 	Producer Group Management Committee
May	August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruit designer & web designer to begin creating web site / logo / printed materials for the project. 	Project Co-ordinator, Branding Subcommittee
April		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organise, Promote and Hold 'Special Sale' of Burren Cattle 	Project Co-ordinator
May	July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruit PR sub contractor to develop and implement a PR and communications plan for the project 	Project Co-ordinator with input from the Branding Subcommittee
April	October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organise and run 2 – 3 training sessions / information sessions to be funded by Leader / CEB / WON Accel Project. 	Project Co-ordinator
June	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project Co-ordinator to begin working full-time on the Project 	Project Co-ordinator
June	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin the process of establishing the Mobile Butcher Unit, including: - Organising funding for the Unit - Purchasing and kitting out the unit. - Recruiting a butcher 	Project Co-ordinator with input from Producer Group Management Committee

Year 2 – 2008			
From	To	Task	Who
September	October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Launch the Mobile Butcher Unit - Launch supply of branded product to local top restaurants. 	Producer Group Management Committee
September	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organise, Promote and Hold a second 'Special Sale' of Burren Cattle 	Project Co-ordinator
October	December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carry out survey of interest in 'Alternative Farm Enterprises' - Set up Producer Group Subcommittee to lead the development of the 'A.F.E.' programme - Create 'A.F.E.' information Pack for farmers - Develop programme of events and training for supporting 'A.F.E.' 	Project Co-ordinator Producer Group 'Alternative Farm Enterprises' Subcommittee
October	December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin to explore bulk purchasing opportunities for the Producer Group - Create a plan for realising these opportunities 	Producer Group Management Committee Project Co-ordinator

Project Timeline – Year 3: 2009

Year 3 – 2009			
From	To	Task	Who
January	December	- Begin rolling out the programme of events to support 'Alternative Farm Enterprises'	Project Co-ordinator with input from Producer Group 'Alternative Farm Enterprises' Subcommittee
April	April	- Organise, Promote and Hold 'Special Sale' of Burren Cattle	Project Co-ordinator
April	October	- Organise and run 2 – 3 training sessions / information sessions to be funded by Leader / CEB / WON Accel Project.	Project Co-ordinator
June	September	- Begin investigating potential for selling branded product on the Web	Producer Group Management Committee
August	November	- Begin to explore the potential for purchasing and launching another Mobile Butcher Unit.	Producer Group Management Committee and Project Co-ordinator
September	September	- Organise, Promote and Hold 'Special Sale' of Burren Cattle	Project Co-ordinator
September	Ongoing	- Begin exploratory process for looking at the potential of developing Branded Value Added Products.	Producer Group Management Committee and Project Co-ordinator

Section 8: Funding Options Explored

Funding Requirements based on Financial Plan

Year 1- 2007	Investment Requirement €	Funding €
Capital Investment		
Producer Group Development / Training Process: To be funded by: RRD Leader / Clare CEB	4,000	4,000
Office Equipment To be funded by: RRD Leader / BurrenLIFE Project	3,500	3,500
Overhead Costs		
Staffing & Running Costs Co-ordinator Operating Costs To be funded by: RRD Leader	27,000 <u>3,975</u> 30,975	30,975
Activity Costs		
Provision of Training Programmes and Events To be funded by: Skillnet / Accel Projects (e.g. WON) RRD Leader / Clare CEB / Small Business Development Project	2,400	2,400

Section 8: Funding Options Explored (contd.)

Year 2- 2008	Investment Requirement €	Funding €
Capital Investment		
Branding & Design		
Brand Development Process	7,800	
Designer	2,200	
Web Designer	<u>5,600</u>	
	15,600	
To be funded by: RRD Leader Producer Group Income		14,400 <u>1,500</u> 15,600
Mobile Butcher Unit Karma can you add on 15% to all costs here to account for inflation		
Butcher Unit	25,300	
Refrigerated Van	23,000	
Ancillary Equipment	<u>8,000</u>	
	56,300	
To be funded by: RRD Leader Sponsorship Clan Credo Soft Loan		16,650 5,000 <u>34,650</u> 56,300
Overhead Costs		
Staffing & Running Costs		
Co-ordinator	37,800	
Operating Costs	<u>9,450</u>	
	47,250	
To be funded by: RRD Leader Producer Group (Mobile Butcher Income)		37,800 <u>9,450</u> 47,250
Activity Costs		
Provision of Training Programmes and Events		
To be funded by: Skillnet / Accel Projects (e.g. WON) RRD Leader / Clare CEB	4,500	4,500
Producer Group Ongoing Training		
To be funded by: RRD Leader / Clare CEB	1,500	1,500

Section 8: Funding Options Explored (contd.)

Year 3- 2009	Investment Requirement €	Funding €
Capital Investment		
Branding & Design		
Printing Promotional Material	2,000	
Website Maintenance and further development	<u>1,500</u>	
	3,500	
To be funded by: Producer Group Income		3,500
Overhead Costs		
Staffing & Running Costs		
Co-ordinator	49,600	
Admin Support	7,000	
Operating Costs	<u>12,275</u>	
	68,875	
To be funded by: RRD Leader		37,800
Producer Group (Mobile Butcher Income)		<u>31,075</u>
		68,875
Activity Costs		
Provision of Training Programmes and Events		
To be funded by: Skillnet / Accel Projects (e.g. WON) RRD Leader / Clare CEB	6,000	6,000
Producer Group Ongoing Training		
To be funded by: RRD Leader / Clare CEB	1,500	1,500

Section 8: Funding Options Explored (contd.)

Brief Overview of Funders

Skillnets based funding

Skillnets is an enterprise-led body, which receives funds from the National Training Fund, to support Irish businesses to set up as regional and national 'Training Networks' to access funds. Skillnets Ltd, also manage another fund called the 'Accel Project'. The Accel funding is provided by the ESF funding and is also made available for in-company training thus making it somewhat more flexible than Skillnet funding.

There are currently circa 52 funded networks around the country catering for different regions and sectors. The training network structure allows business members to decide what training they need, how it should be delivered, etc.

The options regarding accessing Skillnets and Accel funding are either to link up with an existing Skillnet or Accel project, or to make an application to Skillnets under the next round of funding due to be launched in September 2007. At this stage we would highly recommend that the project link up with an existing Skillnet or Accel project, most of whom would be very happy to gain new members and broaden their scope. In particular we have approached the WON Accel project, and as Clare is in their geographical remit for the current project, they have agreed to run a series of training programmes with the Burren Group.

Making a new application to Skillnets is an option, however we do feel that it would be likely to distract the project from their real objectives and force them to focus much more heavily on training provision. There would also be a matching funding requirement of at least 25% with a Skillnet project, which our experience shows would be likely to put pressure on the producer group members.

Current funded projects likely to be open to an approach by the Burren project are as follows:

- Western Organic Network Accel Project
- IFA Skillnet
- Accel Small Food Producers Network

Western Development Commission

Discussions with the Western Development Commission have indicated that this project in its development phase will not fit their criteria for direct support. However the Commission is interested in the project and has asked to be kept informed as to its progress as they are supporting a number of innovative approaches to the development of the food industry in the West of Ireland. As part of its remit, the Western Development Commission also manages a loan fund called the Western Investment Fund and is associated with the Clann Credo community loan fund. Preliminary discussions with the Fund management

Section 8: Funding Options Explored (contd.)

indicate that the purchase of capital equipment such as a mobile butcher unit by the project is likely to fit their loan requirements. As a source of loan finance, this would have the advantage of not necessarily requiring personal guarantees covering the amount lent as would be the case with commercial lenders. We recommend that the Western Investment Fund be approached for a loan for this purpose.

RRD Leader Funding

Our research has indicated that for similar projects around the country the primary and most accessible funder is generally the local Leader Project. In this case this would be RRD Leader with whom we have had a number of discussions.

Leader are obvious funding candidates, however their current funding period is drawing to a close and they have yet to receive the terms for the next round of funding.

Despite this they have expressed an interest in funding the project and we are recommending that the following key elements of the project could be funded under leader:

- Funding for the co-ordinator (This would be a part-time rate. When the co-ordinator comes on board on a full-time basis – mid way through year 2, we would see the project income covering the extra cost)
- Partial capital funding for the Mobile Butcher Unit. As we are recommending that the Refrigerated van be purchased second hand this part would not be eligible. However we recommend that a capital grant of 50% of the remaining cost be applied for.
- Funding of operating costs. (It has been factored in only to fund at the operating cost level for year 1. These costs will increase to include a greater allowance for promotion and advertising in year 2 and 3 but we expect the project income to cover this)
- Funding for development processes, for both Brand Development and Producer Group Development. (Brand development would fall very clearly under the Leader brief, however as mentioned earlier the local CEB should also be approached for Producer Group Training and Development)
- Possible funding for Training and Events (as a last option, as there are other funders who could easily support this type of activity – CEB / Skillnet projects, etc.)

Section 8: Funding Options Explored (contd.)

Brief Overview of Funders (contd.)

Clare County Enterprise Board

All County Enterprise Boards differ somewhat in terms of their priorities. While the experience of other groups has shown that funding has been made available for capital projects (contributions to purchase of mobile butcher units, etc), we think that it would be best not to assume that this may be an option.

We are recommending rather that the project focus on securing funding for the following areas, which should definitely fall within the CEB remit.

- Training programmes, including training provision to the producer group as an organisation and provision of training programmes and events to the individual producer group members.
- Possible mentoring / training under the 'Alternative Farm Enterprise' Programme of activities to be rolled out.

With the development of a good relationship between the staff of the local CEB and the project co-ordinator, it may be possible to explore the potential for Capital funding down the line.

This will also depend on the funding available to the CEB and their own spending priorities, which are likely to change on an ongoing basis, as they are funded on a year to year basis.

Interreg

Making applications for funding under Interreg is a serious undertaking and requires significant investment of time. We would not see Interreg as a potential short-term funding option for the project. However in the longer term, once the co-ordinator is in place and the Producer Group is well established, there would be potential for linking with other Limestone regions to develop a very specific project for funding under Interreg and this should be something to be explored possibly in Year 3 of the projects life.

This could possibly be looked at in conjunction with the BurrenLIFE project using the angle of supporting commercial approaches towards sustaining agriculture in ecologically sensitive limestone areas in Europe. This will require significant work in identifying other European partners, etc. However the possibility of accessing very significant funding exists under this programme.