

Pearl Mussel Project News

Farming for nature in freshwater pearl mussel catchments



Issue no.3 March 2021



*One of the entries for the calendar competition in 2020.
Joanne Abron, Blackwater Catchment, County Kerry.*

Project Update

The project team are currently working on sending out annual works plans to farmers. These are developed based on the supporting actions submitted by farm advisors. Supporting actions are aimed at addressing any on-farm issues affecting scores.

Pearl Mussel Project were delighted to have been featured on Ear to the Ground on RTE1 in November 2020. The episode link is available on our website and social media.

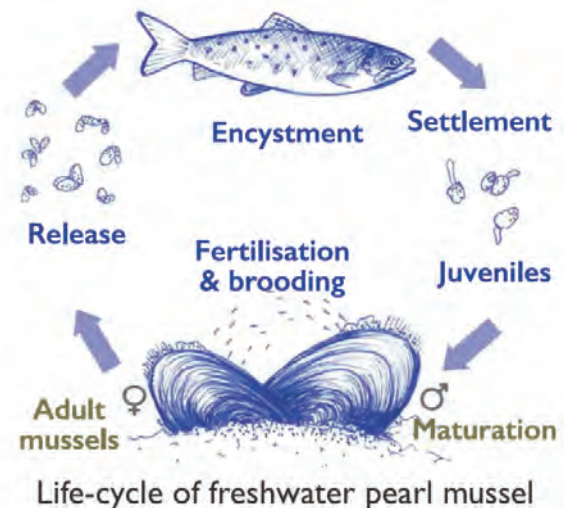


Calendar Competition

We are once again looking for your pictures of farming in the catchments for our 2022 Calendar. We were delighted with the quality last year & look forward to receiving your entries. Pictures must be in landscape format. Email to mary@pmpproject.ie

Did you know that Freshwater Pearl Mussels rely on a salmon/trout to complete their life cycle?

You can learn more about these amazing creatures in our new Youtube video "An introduction to the Freshwater Pearl Mussel" which you can watch on our website video page



Farmer meetings and feedback

The project team held two online update meetings for farmers in February 2021. Farmers were given an update on payments, habitat scoring in 2020 and supporting actions. We held polls at the end of the meeting to get some valuable feedback from farmers on a range of topics. It is great to see how farmers can see the benefits of a results-based programme and see the importance of being rewarded for the quality of the habitats they have on their farms.

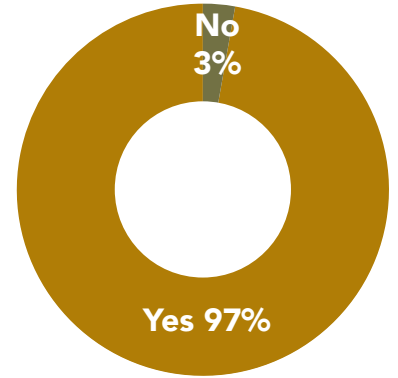
Annual farmer payments

Payments totaling 1.6 million were paid to 454 farmers in the programme for 2020. The average payment was €3,500.

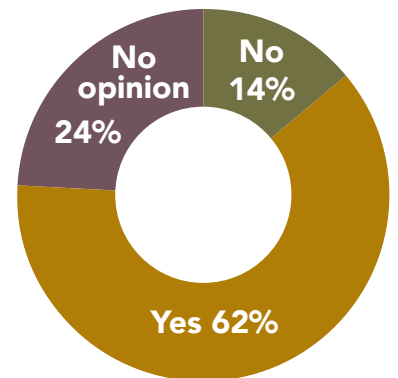
We are delighted to report that average habitat scores have increased from 6.3 in 2019 to 6.5 in 2020. This improvement in habitat score is down to the work and commitment of participant farmers.



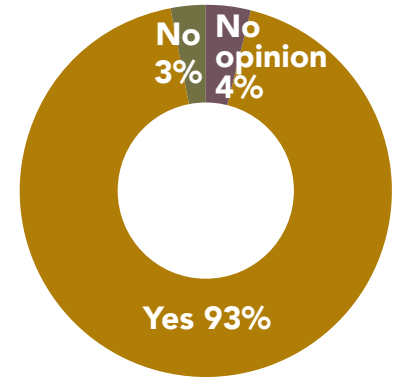
Is it right that farmers are paid for producing clean water, wildlife habitats, and carbon (ecosystem services)?



Does a locally led results-based programme work better than a GLAS type approach?



Being a PMP participant has increased my knowledge, value and appreciation of nature and the environment.



An fáth a bhfuil cabhair ag teastáil ó na Diúilicíní Péarla

[Why pearl mussels need our help]

We have now released an Irish version of our education resource pack for primary schools. The English and Irish versions are available for download at:

<https://www.pearlmusselproject.ie/resources/schools--education-resouces.html>



Congratulations

Congratulations to Tom Keane, from Connemara on reaching the finals of the Farming for Nature awards in 2020. Make sure and look up all of the interesting nominees from this year at www.farmingfornature.ie and make sure and vote for who you think is the most worthy!!

Pearl Mussel Farmer Profile



We are delighted to have a nominee for the Farming for Nature awards for the third year.

This year's nominee is Colm Gavin from the Bundorragha Catchment in Mayo. He farms 85 mountain ewes on a mosaic of peatland and wet grasslands. Colm is an 8th generation farmer and is deeply passionate about the land he is farming. He is very conscious that he is caretaker of this land and wants to pass it on to the next generation in good condition.

Colm takes great pride in that fact that his farm runs along the main Freshwater Pearl Mussel River in the catchment and it is a testament to the farming practices of Colm and his family that it has one of the healthiest populations of the critically endangered Freshwater Pearl Mussel, not only in Ireland but in

Europe.

Colm has been very generous with his time and knowledge in helping develop key measures for the Pearl Mussel Project. He has put in drain blocking measures and completed a lot of work on removing rhododendron from the farm. He has been quick to embrace these measures on his farm because he understands the reason they are needed. His enthusiasm in seeing the results and understanding the benefits of these measures for the habitats on his farm are one of the reasons he is in demand with other projects to speak to farmers about what he is doing and more importantly why is he doing it.

When asked about the future of farming in areas like Bundorragha, Colm feels that working with the landscape you are farming in is so important and preserving it for the future generations.



Pearl Mussel Advisor Profile and Management Advice

The Pearl Mussel Project relies on the expertise of trained farm advisors for delivering our results-based programme. The advisors play a critical role in assessing the farms and providing advice to our participant farmers. This section is going to be a regular feature in our newsletter. Mr Ian Kenny, who works with many of our farmers in County Mayo, is featured in this edition.



Ian Kenny, PMP
approved farm advisor

I graduated from UCD in 1992 with a degree in Agricultural Science and started working as an Agricultural Consultant in 1994 when the REPS scheme was introduced. Since then I have provided a broad service to Mayo farmers in REPS, AEOS, GLAS, Single Farm Payment, Farm Buildings grants, Discussion groups, Commonage Management Plans and most recently as a Pearl Mussel Programme Advisor in the Bundorragha Catchment Area in West Mayo.

The Pearl Mussel Programme has been an interesting and rewarding new scheme for farmers and indeed advisors. The results-based approach means that a farmer can potentially choose to make minor adjustments on the farm and this can lead to a higher annual payment. One other unique aspect to the Pearl Mussel Programme is that there are no penalties to the farmer. A few things that the Pearl Mussel farmers should be aware of for this time of the year include consideration when spreading slurry and fertilizer. Water quality in the catchment areas is paramount and spreading slurry or fertilizer when land is very wet, and when heavy rain is forecast must be avoided.

There is also a risk at this time of the year of severe grazing pressure on some fields when ewes are brought in for lambing. Very heavy rain on very bare ground has the potential to cause run off to adjoining watercourses. The hedge cutting season has now closed, as it gives a chance for birds to build their nests and hatch their eggs. Farmers should also be aware of ground nesting birds that may be on their farms.

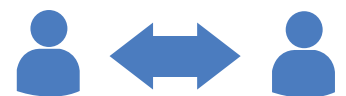


We hope that you and your families are keeping safe and well. It has been a tough year for everyone during the Covid pandemic. If you find yourself needing to chat to someone about your mental health, you can call Samaritans free, day or night, 365 days a year on 116 123.

Keep in touch!

Don't forget to check our project website (www.pearlmusselproject.ie) for news and updates. We also have active Facebook (@[pearlmusselproject](https://www.facebook.com/pearlmusselproject)) and Twitter (@[pearl_mussel](https://twitter.com/pearl_mussel)) accounts where we post regular updates, so follow us there if you don't already.

On our website you will also find a range of videos that we have created which may be of interest to you or someone you know.



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Investing in rural areas