

Bioregional Weaving Lab Workshop Report

Dairy Deep Demo Workshop 1
12th Oct 2023
10am - 3pm

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Introduction

This report is an account of a workshop held as part of the DAFM/EIT Climate KIC partnership 'The Ireland Deep Demonstration Project for Sustainable Agriculture', in particular Workstream 4, led by BWL Waterford, part of Flagship 6 looking at the future of dairy (see 'Background' section of this report for more information).

This workshop follows in-person and online visits and conversations with key actors in the Waterford bioregion who are working with approaches that work 'with nature', for example organic, regenerative, no-chemicals or other approaches that are not the dominant and conventional 'extractive' farming practices seen in most of the dairy sector today. This workshop focussed on insights from dairy farmers themselves. Future events will reach wider into the ecosystems around them.

Aim of workshop:

- To focus on developing a shared understanding of the current and future dairy systems and imagine a 'new normal' (Deep Demonstration terminology) for dairy in the bioregion.
- To build upon earlier bilateral conversations and current workshop insights to identify emerging pathways for systemic change.
- To have a platform from which we can suggest activities that can help develop understanding of these pathways, so that we can consider how they can be catalysed in the bioregion.

Background

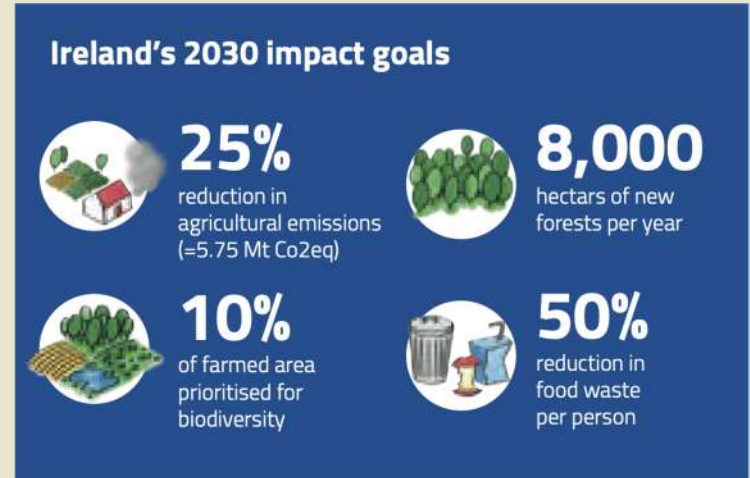


Contextualising the Dairy Deep Demo

The workshop opened with background information on the context of the 'Dairy Deep Demonstration' project as part of the broader Waterford Bioregional Weaving Lab (BWL).

The Deep Demo is a partnership between Climate KIC and DAFM. It is one out of seven 'Land Agri-Food Deep Demonstration Flagships'.

*"A Deep Demonstration is a collaborative process to **identify, test at scale, and implement a range of connected innovative solutions to accelerate systemic change.**"*



More background information on The Ireland Deep Demonstration Project for Sustainable Agriculture: [here](#)

Objective of the Dairy Flagship:

*“To facilitate the transition towards a ‘**new normal**’ for **sustainable dairy** using a **systems innovation** approach that supports **existing** and new efforts to identify, test, validate and scale different **combinations of actions** (across multiple value chain actors) to overcome barriers to action, ultimately contributing to absolute emission reduction at scale, increased carbon capture and **co-benefits** for the environment (water, soil and biodiversity) and communities”.*

Activation (co-creation) phase – Sept 2023- Jan 2024

Implementation phase – 2024 onwards

Funding: Environmental Defense Fund Europe (EDFE), EIT-Climate-KIC and DAFM



BWL contributing with a 'landscape approach'

WP1 *Climate KIC and DAFM*

WP2 *Metabolic*

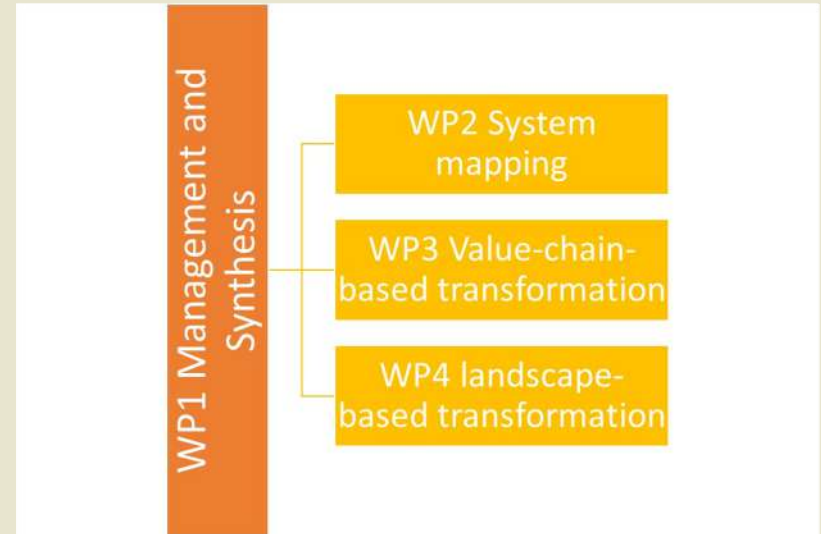
WP3 *MJB*

WP4 *BWL Waterford*

WP4 adopts a ground-up, holistic, landscape approach. This is the basis of BWL Waterford's focus on the building of trust and togetherness and the use of systemic innovation tools.

WP4 will include the co-creation of a co-owned vision for the future of the dairy system in the Waterford bioregion (similar to the process behind the [Bioregional Food Manifesto](#)).

This Dairy Flagship fits within the portfolio of concepts of the Waterford BWL. The ultimate purpose of these concepts is to deliver on the 4 returns (next slide).



Work package organisation of the co-creation phase

The BWL Framework - brief overview

Work Package 4 uses a systems change understanding which acknowledges the complex systemic nature of the 'big problems' seen in dairy. A co-created vision for the future is the centre-point and guiding force for the social network being built throughout this project.

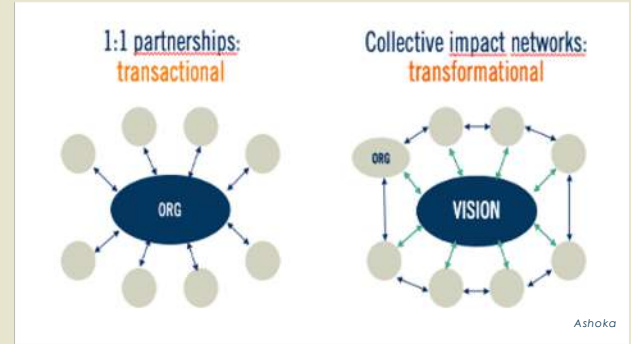


Systems change

Ultimately, the aim is to deliver not only social, environmental and economic returns, but also bring back collective inspiration, hope and sense of purpose:



The 4 Returns

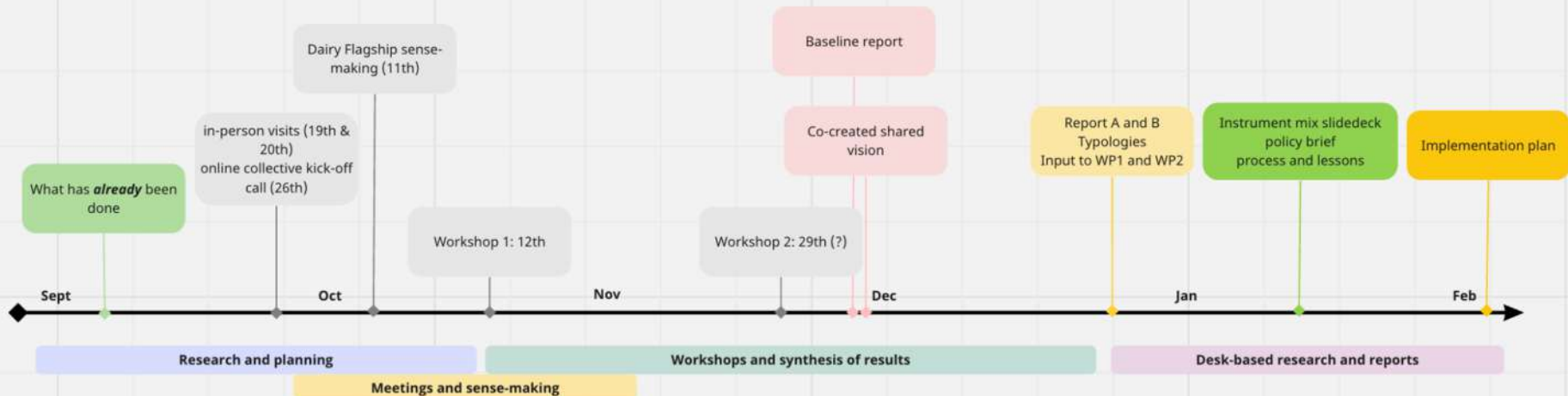


Timeline

Flagship 6, activation phase, all work packages: 1st September 2023 till 31st January 2024

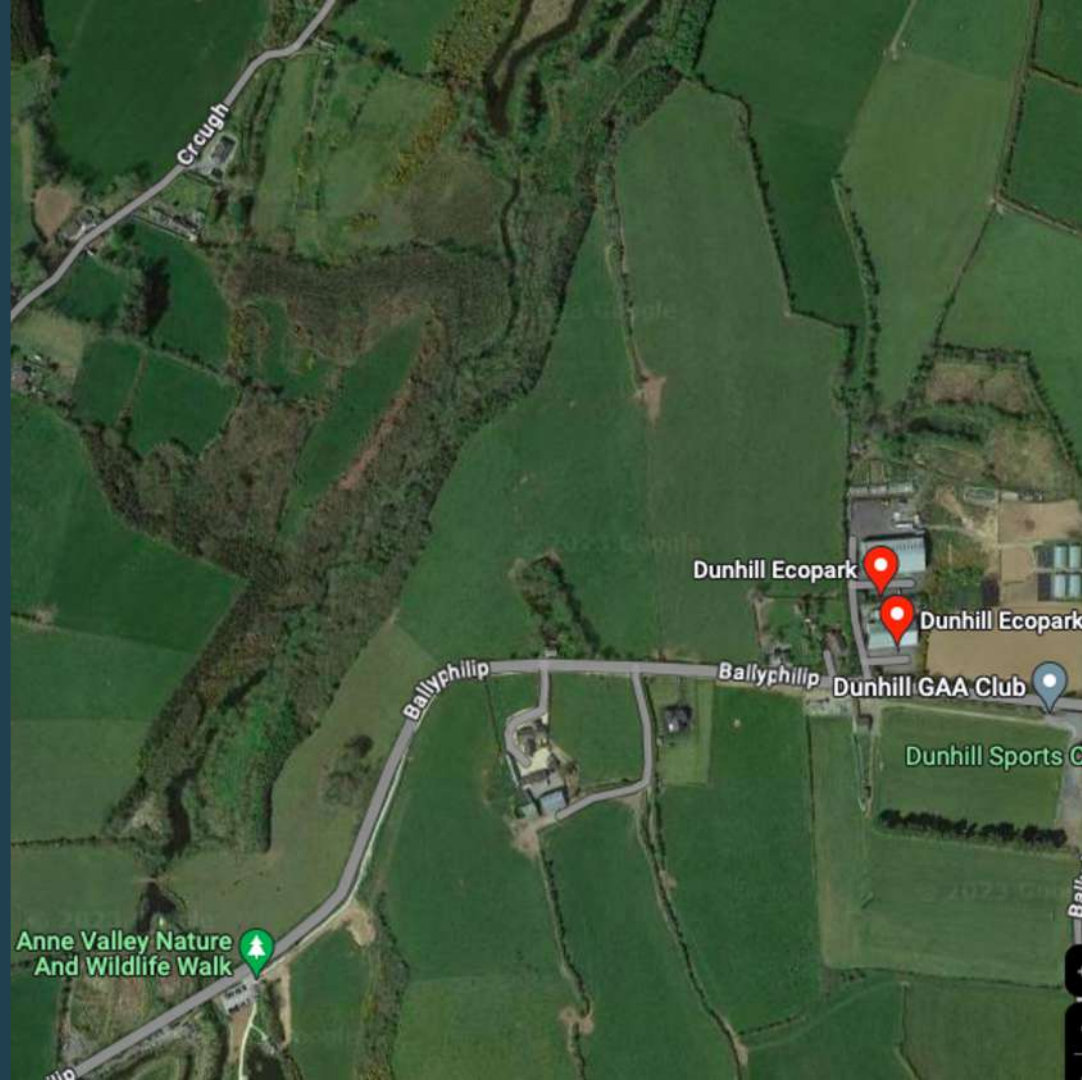
Work package 4 activities:

- Multi-stakeholder mapping and analysis of the dairy system in the Waterford bioregion – **ongoing**
- In-person visits - **ongoing**
- Workshop 1: **October 12th**
- Workshop 2: **November 29th**



Workshop

12th October
Dunhill Ecopark



Participants

Attendees

Name	
Farmer 1	Dairy Farmer (Kilmacthomas)
Farmer 2	Dairy Farmer (BRIDE Project, Farming with Nature)
Farmer 3	Dairy Farmer (Dunhill Ecopark)
Farmer 4	Dairy Farmer (Cooly Doody)
Farmer 5	Dairy Farmer (East Cork)
Farmer 6	Dairy Farmer (Camphill)
Ex-farmer 7	Agricultural Management (ex-dairy farmer)
Farmer 8	Dairy Farmer (SETU)

Facilitators

Name	
Ali Crighton	Bioregional Weaving Lab
Sarah Prosser	Bioregional Weaving Lab
Pieter Ploeg	Commonland

Session 1

3D system modelling

- What does the dairy system look like today?
- What could it look like in the future?



3D Modelling Session

Aim: using objects to help comprehend the current system of dairy in the Waterford bioregion, and identify leverage points for change.

Method: Group divided into two teams. Began with constructing a visual representation of the system using objects as icons for different elements, actors, flows or processes. Participants then re-grouped to reflect on each other's work. Next, the teams build the system of the future, and in doing so identify what systems changes (leverage points and change pathways) are needed to move from current to future situation.

Questions:

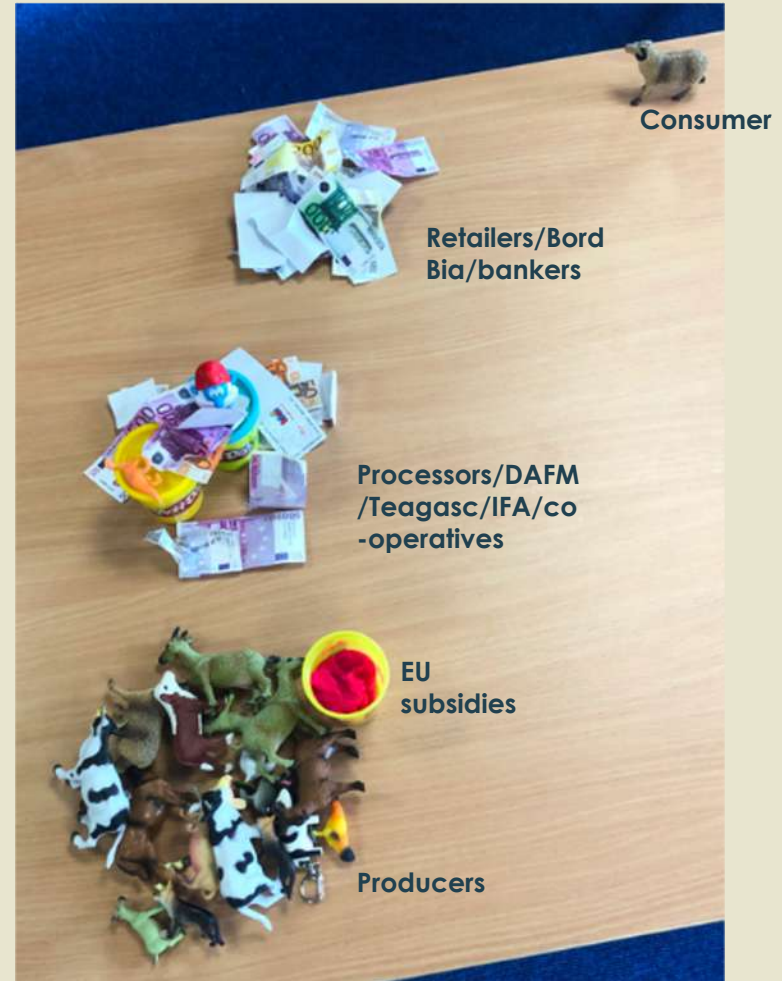
- What does the dairy system look like today?
 - What do you like about it?
 - Where are the key conflicts?
 - Reflections / comparison to each other's models?
- What do you want the future system to look like?
 - Reflections and comparison?



Group 1: current system

Key points:

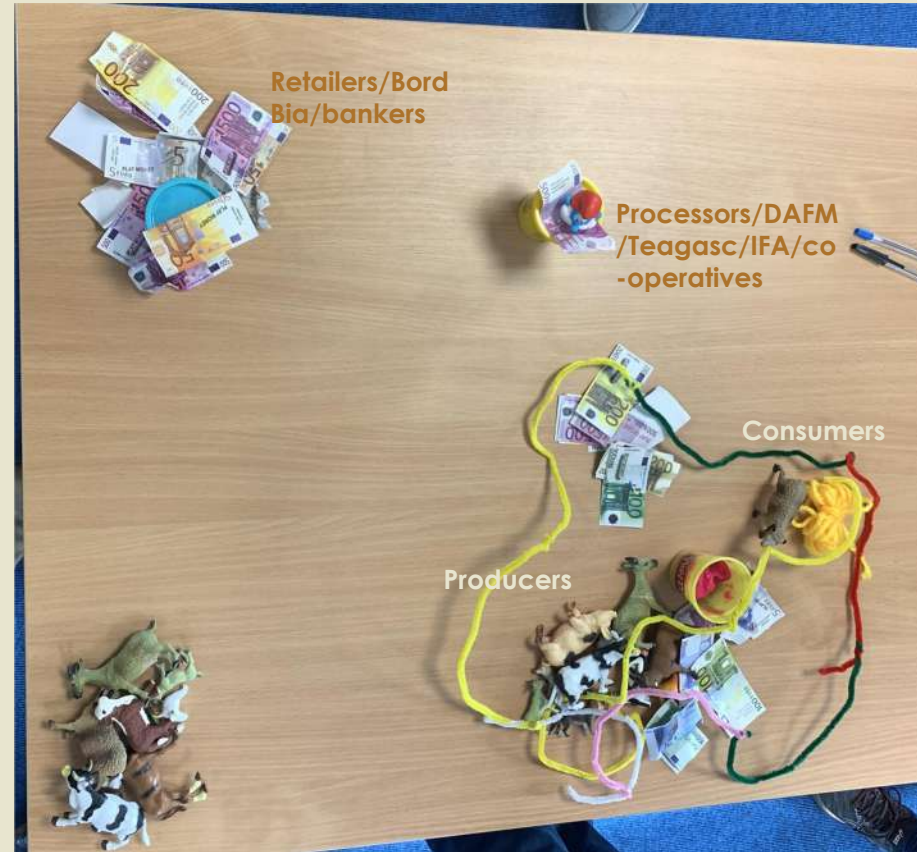
- The only money dairy producers get is from EU subsidies (the pot is mostly empty to reflect how little money this is)
- The consumer is represented by a sheep that is unaware of what is going on Retailers/bankers are profit driven
- Processors have a lot of influence due to money flows
- Farmers and consumers are far removed
- The system runs on money and power flows, the health of humans and ecosystems do not play any significant role
- Quantity of milk production is the primary aim



Group 1: future system

Key points:

- The circle of pipe cleaners represents a **self-sustaining** model with internal carrying capacity, based on the specific natural boundaries of diverse, local ecosystems
- Inputs into the system are reduced, production level is maintained, **herd** is reduced in size, efficiency has increased
- Processors and department are mostly removed from the farm-to-fork circle
- **Healthier** food has direct link between farmer and consumer - more **direct route to market** (potentially in a coop structure) - secured mechanism to bring premium margin to milk producers
- **Less dependency** on EU subsidies
- This new model should help to solve climate change and other issues as an integral part of the new structures



Group 1 - Insight summary

Most important structural differences between current and future systems?

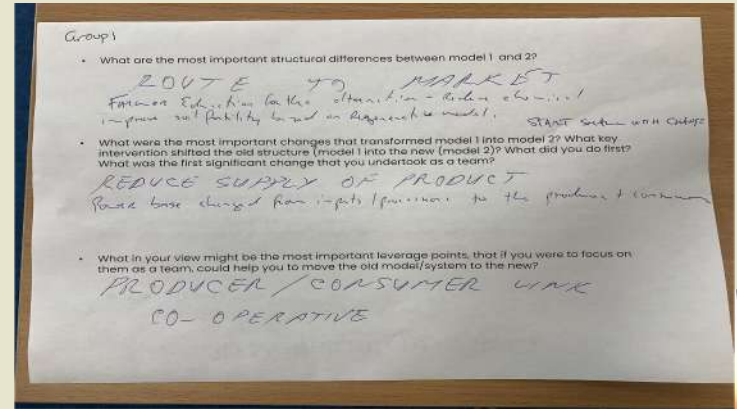
“Route to market. Farmers education for the alternative - reduce chemical. Improve soil fertility based on regenerative model. Start small with change.”

Most important intervention?

“Reduce supply of product. Power base changed from inputs/processors to the producer and consumer.”

Most important leverage point you can influence?

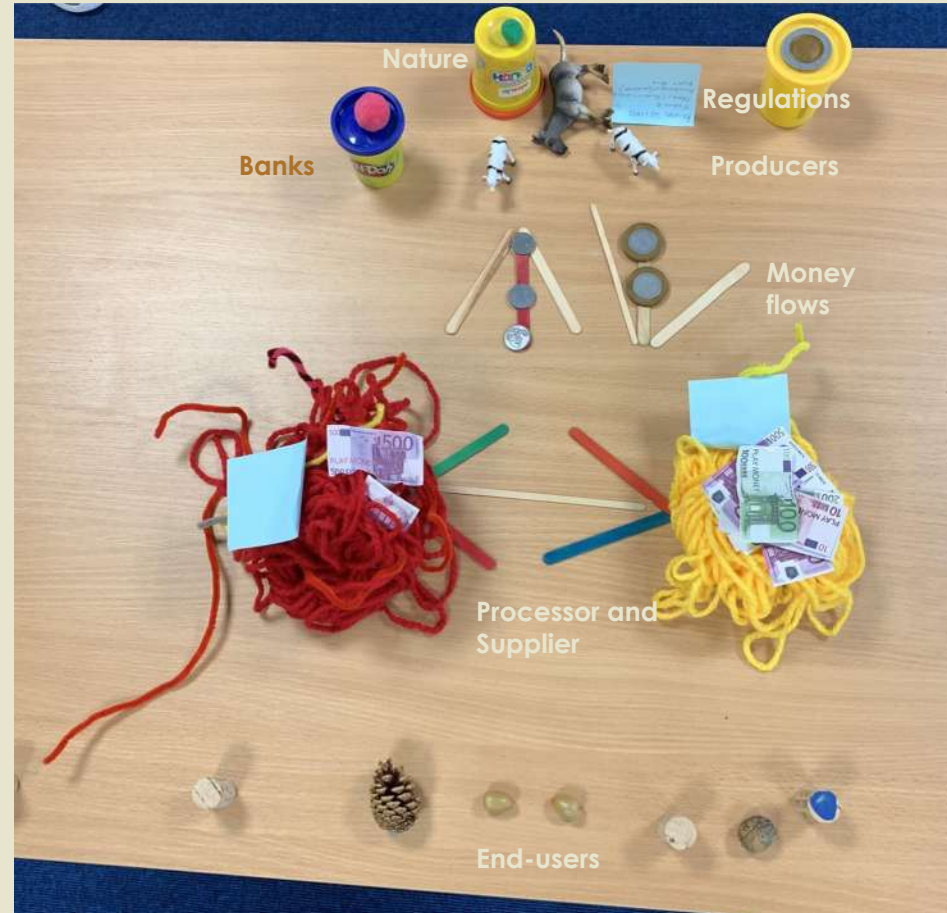
“Producer/consumer link. Cooperative.”



Group 2 - current system

Key points:

- This system captures the power centralised within the processors and suppliers in the middle and the lack of a connection between the producers and end-users.
- Consumers are far removed from the process of food production
- Producers are locked into a system over which they have very little control/freedom and are pushed to maximise milk production to remain economically viable



Group 2 - future system

Key points:

- Input suppliers have been **mostly removed** from the system
- Greater financial flows are being delivered **direct** to the farm and **space for nature** has increased threefold as a result
- The stick represents **control** on the processors and suppliers
- **New cooperatives** have been set up
- **Less** mark-up delivered to **middle-man**
- **Closer** link to consumers in local and English markets (as opposed to international customers)



Group 2 - Insight summary

Most important structural differences between current and future systems?

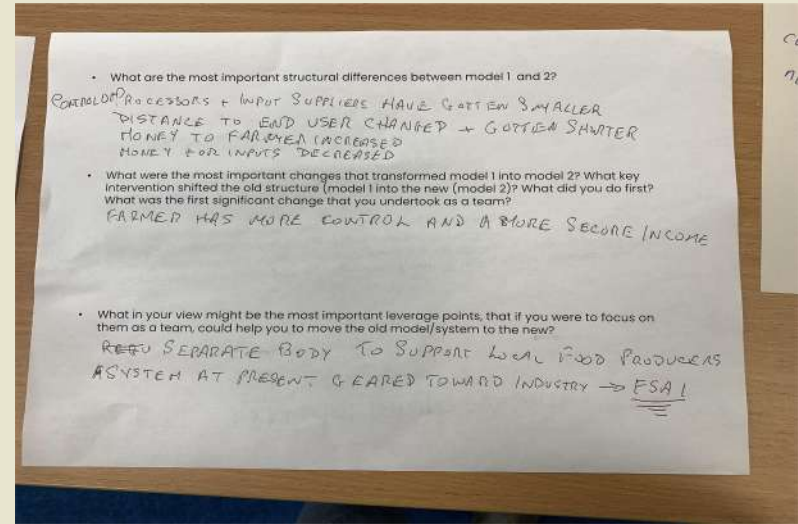
“Processors and input suppliers have gotten smaller distance to end user changed + gotten shorter. Money to farmer increased. Money for inputs decreased.”

Most important intervention?

“Farmer has more control and a more secure income”

Most important leverage point you can influence?

“Separate body to support local food producers. A system at present geared towards industry - FSAI”



Session 2

3 Horizons

- What is the dominant system that is no longer fully fit for purpose?
- What is the future we aspire to and where are signs of it emerging?
- What innovations do we need to introduce?



3 Horizons Session

Aim: using the 3 Horizons framework (more info [here](#)) to discuss the current dominant system (H1), the emerging future we want (H3) and the innovations that will help us to get there through disruption (H2).

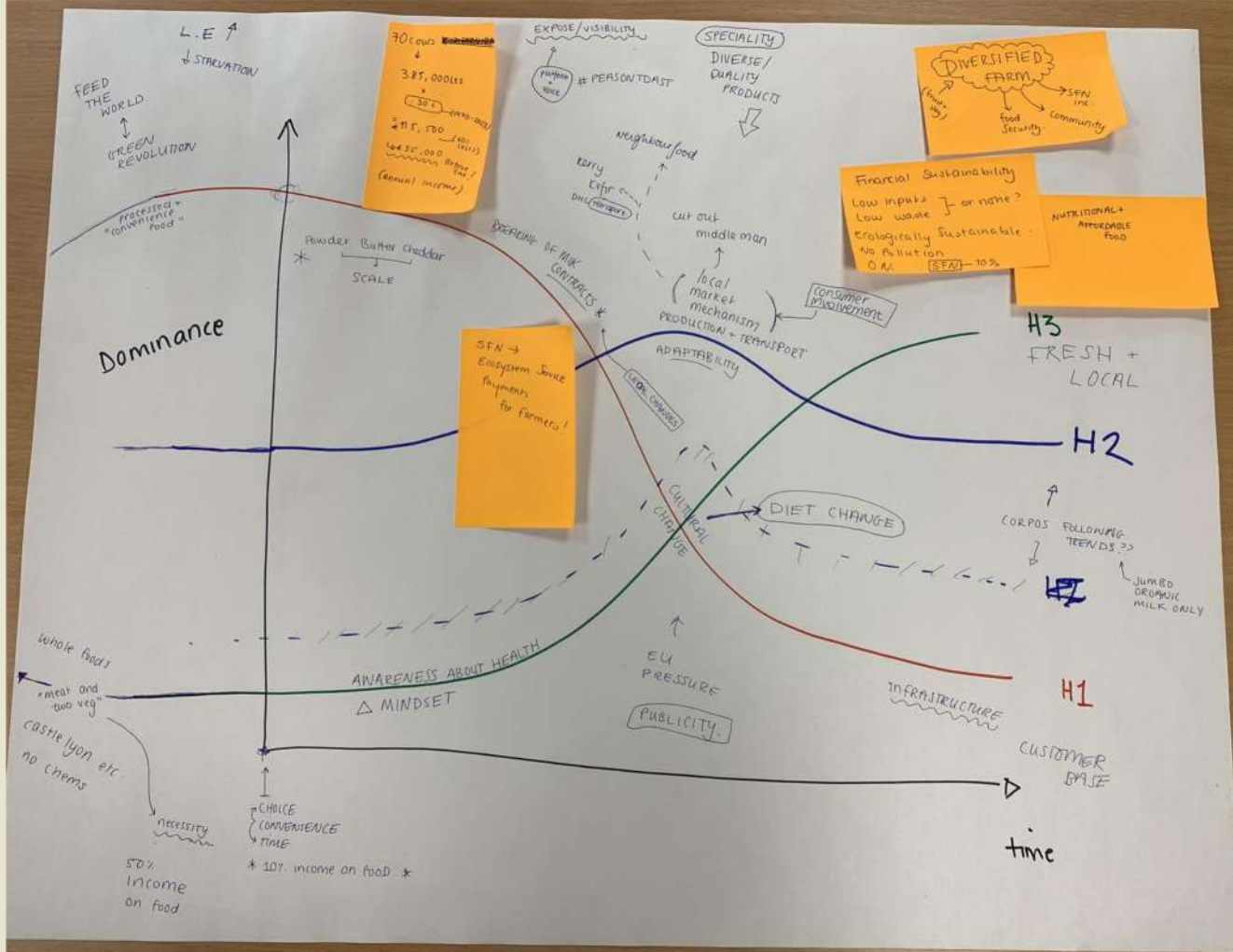
Method: Groups split into 2 teams. The 3 horizons were drawn on large sheets of paper. Groups considered questions that arise from looking through these lenses, and wrote notes on the sheets to capture insights.

Questions:

- What is business as usual?
 - How did we get here?
 - Why is not desirable?
 - Is there anything we want to retain?
- What is the future we want to bring about?
 - What seeds are visible in the present? How have they emerged and how could they be scaled?
- What is being disrupted?
 - What are the roots of those disruptions?
 - How could it be harnessed or captured?



Group 1



3 Horizons session takeaways:

Key points:

- Need for more **direct routes to market** - local cooperatives (includes both farmers and consumers for direct relationship)
- **Eliminate the 'middleman'** to make food more affordable by reducing margin - this will then allow farmers **to reduce herd numbers**
- **Education** needed on pastorally-based farming in the Irish system - soil-habitat permanence
- *'Soil is the answer. Now what's your question'*
- The **organic** milk system needs major attention in Ireland – also as a step towards a 'beyond organic future'
- Need for **independent farm advisors** (independence from industry) for advising transition to zero nitrogen
- **New brands** / certs will emerge to communicate to end-customer
- **EU funding mechanisms:** questionable suitability and amounts





Analysis

Summary of emerging needs for systems change

Overview of key points from 3D systems modelling:

Most important structural differences between current and future systems:

- Route to market
- Farmers education for the alternative - reduce chemical.
- Improve soil fertility based on regenerative model.
- Start small with change.
- Processors and input suppliers have gotten smaller.
- Distance to end user changed + gotten shorter.
- Money to farmer increased.
- Money for inputs decreased.

Most important interventions

- Reduced supply of product.
- Power base changed from inputs/processors to the producer and consumer.
- Farmer has more control
- Farmer has a more secure income

Most important leverage point you can influence

- Producer/consumer link. Cooperative.
- Separate body to support local food producers. A system at present geared towards industry - FSAI

Overview of key points from 3 Horizons:

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Emerging pathways for systems change

Analysing the summary of insights and findings from the two sessions undertaken in this workshop, three clusters of actions and systemic changes can be identified. These can be considered as emergent pathways that should be explored in more depth:

1. Routes to market - with less 'middlemen'

- Consumer relations with new brands/certifications
- Local coops (Horace Plunkett principles)
- Local coops with both consumer and producer co-ownership
- Organisational support of local farming (connected food system)
- Farming with secure incomes and empowered decision-making (reconfigure current power structures), including dependency on EU schemes.

2. Education of farmers (and those around them) present and future

- Include an option to learn about less input/regenerative/organic/water protection
- Sustainable/pastoral farming at Green Cert equivalent.
- Advisors with Independent views and relevant competencies
- Access to demonstrations and learnings of current farmers and their families
- Soil health at the end of every value chain decision – financial, social, environmental.

3. Food nutrition awareness and science

- Current research knowledge gathered in accessible place and format
- Citizen science to link consumers to soil and food
- The potential of AI to shine light on truth
- Local community awareness of benefits of supporting local food chains



Pathways – now for deeper dives

For each emerging pathway we can ask: **‘what works’** based on local examples and inspiration from other areas in Europe and **Ireland**. This will give us the basis to consider: **‘what would it take to catalyse these actions in our landscape/bioregion?’**

We welcome any inputs to these topics from any stakeholder. We will share examples at the next workshop, along with our own examples from the BWL and Commonland international networks. These pathways guide us in revealing which broader stakeholders should be engaged with as part of our approach.

What works?

1. Routes to market - with less ‘middlemen’

Collate examples of local cooperatives, consumer co-ownership of coops, biodistricts, short value chains, identity with local brands, predictable farmer incomes, reconfiguration of power of input providers and funding control mechanisms.

2. Education of farmers (and those around them) present and future

Collate examples of farmer (and wider) education programmes locally, nationally and- importantly – internationally that could bring in new capacity, competencies and motivation to the landscape.

3. Food nutrition awareness and science

Collate examples of scientific articles/research on the benefits of eating food produced in ‘alternative’ dairy system, and how the can be gathered in accessible and comprehensible way.

Next steps



Next steps

Ongoing: share 'what works'

Please share any examples of 'what works' for the three pathways. We will collate and share. Send an email / ring or WhatsApp Ali on ali@bwl.ie or 086 783 5654

Nov 2nd 19:00 online open discussion event to comment on pathways identified

Open to anyone at the workshop or other landscape stakeholder.

This is an opportunity to comment on the findings in this report so far, and in particular give feedback on the emerging pathways: Are they the right ones? What is missing?

29th November: In person meeting

Location to be decided – contact us if you would like it to be at 'your place'

The next in-person workshop will look at inspiring examples of what has worked in these pathways.

What would it take to catalyse this in our landscape/bioregion?

We will also collectively develop a co-owned vision for the future we are referring to.

Thank you to everyone who joined for your input
and for reading the report.

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