

Abstract

Throughout Europe farming occupies a central role within the economy and is of vital importance both socially and environmentally. Whilst the primary output of agriculture consists of food products for consumption, it is increasingly recognised that agriculture is also intrinsically linked to the production of what are termed *public goods* which include the rural landscape, cultural features and heritage features. In order to accommodate such unprecedented change, the EU has introduced alternative support measures for farmers in the form of agri-environmental schemes.

Archaeological sites and monuments help us to redefine and discover our heritage and enhance our sense of identity. They provide an important medium for understanding cultural heritage and are themselves a physical expression of that heritage (UCD 2006:7). The rural landscape has been shaped by farming throughout the centuries and, yet, it is this very activity that now threatens what remains of the archaeological heritage. Agriculture as both a system of land use and an economic activity is, according to Daugstad et al (2006), both a threat to, and a caretaker of, archaeological heritage.

An overwhelming majority of archaeological features are situated upon farmland and it has long been acknowledged that the techniques employed in modern agriculture can damage such features. This research adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to ascertain the effectiveness of agri-environmental schemes in respect of the built heritage of two neighbouring EU countries; England and the Republic of Ireland.

Agri-environmental schemes have been at the centre of government initiatives and policies aimed at safeguarding and enhancing important landscapes and habitats and have paid farmers to farm in more environmentally friendly ways. However, there has been a definite marginalisation of the built heritage within both national and EU environmental conservation policy. This imbalance has been carried through to agri-environmental policies and this research shows that schemes have not been sufficiently widespread or numerous to create

anything other than a patchwork of potential preservation that has lacked the contiguity to benefit the historical landscape as a whole.