



## Tales From the Land Overview

### *Purpose:*

Tales from the land was a participatory research inquiry into land use, farming and food production in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland. We wanted to better understand the food systems by hearing stories from people who understand it in different ways. During April – July of 2021, we spoke to people from a range of different backgrounds including farmers, food producers, ecologists, activists, researchers, market gardeners, business owners, linguists, creators, students and artists. Our two live events allowed us to meet with a wider group of people in tandem with the 10-week podcast series. From these discussions we have engaged with the agri-food policy on the environment and intend to take our learnings forward into meetings with our TDs and local representatives as the Common Agricultural Policy for Ireland is decided upon this year.

### *Approach:*

We were very aware of the often-changed discussion around agriculture and the environment in the national discourse. Farmers shared with us that they often feel scapegoated by society while they struggle to make ends meet and adhere to policy. We were inspired by the Irish tradition of '*craic agus ceol (fun & music)*' to bring people from different backgrounds together to discuss land use in Ireland. Enthused by indigenous ways of research we used conversational storytelling and ceremony as our two key methodologies to obtain qualitative data to inform our policy proposals (Ref: Shawn Wilson's Book *Research is Ceremony*). We did this with a series of 10 creative podcasts with guest from different areas of society and 2 live events funded by the ESAI & EPA Grassroots award scheme.

### *Events:*

Our live events brought together landowners, farmers and environmental activists. Our first event was a facilitated online community forum on June 4<sup>th</sup>. We created a space where we could listen and learn from the different experiences in the room. Empathic skills such as non-violent communication and active listening were used to ensure people could share and be heard by the others present. We asked 2 key questions: **What challenges you most in relation to land use and food production in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland?** and **What are your hopes, visions and dreams for the Irish food system?** Some of the key topics that were discussed include: animal welfare and plant-based diets, monocultures and deforestation, the true cost of food, importance of education and community supported and regenerative agriculture practises. We used this discussion to inform our policy proposal for the Environmental aspect of the Agri-Food policy which we submitted on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

Our second event was a closing ceremony where we gathered out on the land to reflect on the Tales from the Land Inquiry. We met at the *Magic Forest* in Ballydehob. Thomas Weigandt owns the land and allows free access to the respectful public. In a sally grove on the land, which in agri-business terms is known as 'wasteland,' Thomas and his family have created a musical sound scape with upcycled materials. This healing space consists of twisting paths and

sit spots and had been created with minimal impacting the native biodiversity. Thomas' aim is to encourage people to think differently about 'wasteland' and he invites people to experience an immersive journey in the natural world. We met in a circle and offered our tales of how we relate to the earth. We asked our guests '**How are you deepening your connection to nature?**' We listened and learned together and closed by offering songs, poems and other artworks.

### ***Podcasts:***

During the 10-podcast interview we touched on a few core issues. These included decentring human narratives, decoloniality, doughnut economics, dairy and beef farming, organic food growing, environmental impact of agriculture, the role of agricultural technology in the farming industry, the interconnected nature of ecosystems, the disconnection from nature that many people have grown accustomed to, the importance of pluralistic approaches to the climate and biodiversity crisis, how Irish relates to the land, fermented foods as a strategy for food preservation, and a number of biodiversity restoration projects that are ongoing in Ireland. We connected with people from organisations including One Future, Irish Wildlife Trust, Cork Nature Network, Tuiscint na Talún, the West Cork Doughnut Economic Network, Irish Cattle Breeding Federation, the Irish Farming Federation, Transition Kerry, the BRIDE Project (Biodiversity Regeneration in a Dairying Environment) and the Pearle Mussel Project. As well as that we had conversations with researched from a variety of fields and independent farmers and food growers. Throughout the podcast we featured songs and poems created by members of the Green Step Community.

### ***Impact:***

Throughout the course of the project we have connected with several hundred people and engage with the Agri-food policy consultation process. Our podcast has received over 400 listens with 86.25% of those based in Ireland. We worked with 26 people in our live events on and offline. However due to concern over the Delta variant of COVID19 several people chose to not come to the in-person event. Throughout the series we engaged regularly with the 413 members of the Green Step Facebook Community and the wider audiences of 1,344 on the Facebook page and 1,133 on Instagram. Our work has also been reshared by some of the people we have worked with and we expect over the next few months that we will continue to reach people. As well as that we intend to arrange several meetings with our TDs and other local representatives to engage with the Common Agriculture Policy implementation in an Irish setting.