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EDITORIAL

Matt O'Keeffe, Editor



BROADENING FARMING OPTIONS

We end the year with an increasing array of potentially viable alternative options for the management of Irish farmland. These options, some of them unpalatable for farm organisations, may facilitate individual farmers in particular circumstances, in making fundamental changes to their farm businesses while still engaging in farming. The dairy and drystock Food Vision groups, proposals around potential destocking of breeding animals have been widely criticised. That criticism is understandable in that encouraging curtailment of livestock breeding runs counter to our instincts. That, however, is neither here nor there for individual farmers who, for whatever reason, may wish to reduce or cease breeding bovines on their farms. Up to now, the range of alternatives open to these farmers was limited. Many either sold or leased their farms. In instances where age, low labour availability, or lack of succession are the driving forces for change, the option to be paid not to calve dairy or suckler cows could be attractive. That is, of course, provided the incentive is lucrative enough to make the exercise financially worthwhile. The next step is deciding what to do with the land that was previously supporting breeding bovines. If the land is sterilised for breeding livestock for a set period, that reduces the potential to lease at a reasonable price, unless the land is suitable for tillage.

We now have several novel or enhanced options emerging for farmers moving out of livestock breeding. If the farmer wants to continue producing grass, the planned development of a biomethane industry with a series of biodigester units scattered around the country is noteworthy. A large demand for feedstock sourced from slurry, grass and other materials, means that grass will be in demand for supplying raw material for bio-digestion, as well as for grazing. The

tentative prices proposed for grass supplies suggest that it could be a viable option for some farmers, particularly those currently engaged in low-margin drystock production. Allied to an exit payment from livestock breeding, the sums may well add up. Calf-to-beef production is another viable option for farms divesting of breeding stock, though it does require significant ongoing labour input. Recent increases in forestry premiums and an extended payment period offer serious options for farmers. These three options alone must be worthy of consideration for those farmers who want to, or must, change their farming practices for whatever reason. Add in the option to convert farmland to PV solar production and there is a now wide suite of alternatives for farmers to consider if existing farming practices are unviable or their personal circumstances dictate that change is needed.

This could result in even lower levels of generational renewal with fewer partnerships or long-term leases available for young farmers hoping to develop a farm business. It could also reduce the amount of livestock-based food we produce on our farms. As overarching concerns, these issues are important. For individual farmers making personal decisions on the future use of their farms, they are less important. A bovine-breeding destocking policy is not the only, or necessarily the optimal response to emission mitigation, but if such an option is made attractive enough for some farmers to engage in then they are entitled to do so, whether most of us like it or not. If policymakers want to reduce our bovine-breeding herds, there will be a significant cost. How attractive these schemes need to be to work and how they would be financed must be the subject of intense negotiation. For now, we wish our readers, contributors, and advertisers a very happy Christmas!

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IS GLANBIA VULNERABLE?

After announcing positive third-quarter financial results last month, Glanbia should have been looking forward to some bump up in its share price. Instead, the price fell back. After going below €10 per share, it rallied somewhat to trade through most of November in the mid-to-high €11 range. Glanbia had managed to do what farmers would love to be able to do when production costs rise – impose a price hike on its customers. That worked well for the global nutrition company in preserving and even increasing the forecasted margin for the full year. What seemed to worry share traders is that the strategy has limits and those limits may have been reached. It wouldn't appear to some to

be the smartest reaction to a financial report indicating buoyant profitability and higher margins in difficult times.

Where to for Glanbia now? It is undervalued based on its share price. It hasn't indicated any major change in strategy or an imminent game-changing acquisition or product launch. Glanbia may be vulnerable at its current share price to being taken over itself. It is well managed with a broad product portfolio and market reach. It has good cashflow and relatively low debt levels. Is Glanbia a perfect acquisition, or a lean predator on the prowl for a worthwhile investment? If it were sold, Glanbia might be integrated into another multinational or subjected to an asset-

stripping sell-off of the various divisions to maximise return to a buyer. That's one way the corporate world makes quick profits.

Glanbia's biggest shareholder, by far, is Tirlán, holding almost 28 per cent of the plc's shares. That's not a blocking shareholding, though it would make a hostile take-over more difficult. On the one hand, Tirlán now has full control of its vital milk- and grain-processing assets. However, the co-op also has a very valuable annual dividend stream flowing from Glanbia plc. It's difficult to see Tirlán being positively disposed to any theoretical break-up of its golden goose.

GUILD AWARDS

The Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland is holding its bi-annual journalism awards on December 9 in the Killashee Hotel. The awards, which are held in association with FBD, aim to encourage excellence in the reporting of farming, food, and rural life on the Island of Ireland. This year's awards features nine categories including Best News Article, Best Feature Article, Best Targeted Campaign and, for the first time, there is an award for Best Climate Change Reporting. The overall winner will win 'The Bull' bronze trophy, which was donated to the Guild by Bord Baine, now Ornua, in the 1970s. Chair of the judging panel is former head of radio in RTÉ, Tom McGuire, and the awards are open to all members of the Guild across the island of Ireland.



8 BILLION PEOPLE AND GROWING

According to Alltech, around 385,000 babies were born last month across the globe. One of these was the world's eight-billionth person. These population events emphasise the important role of the agriculture industry in ensuring sustainable nutrition for the growing global population. Alltech recently appointed former Bord Bia CEO, Tara McCarthy as its global vice-president of Economic, Social and Governance (ESG). Tara leaves Bord Bia with a fine record of achievement and her experience will be invaluable to Alltech. Tara's appointment will support the company's advancement of its vision of Working Together for a Planet of Plenty, which focuses on three key pillars of planetary wellbeing, incorporating economic, environmental and social sustainability. ESG best-practice guidelines in business management are increasingly taking centre-stage in every aspect of business, including investment criteria by finance houses and fund management.

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IFA MEETINGS



At the IFA-Sinn Féin farming meeting: Sinn Féin TDs, Darren O'Rourke and Matt Carthy; Sinn Féin leader, Mary Lou McDonald; IFA president, Tim Cullinan; IFA director of governance, Elaine Farrell; and IFA director general, Damian McDonald. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

It has been a busy time of late for the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA). Recently, IFA deputy president, Brian Rushe, together with IFA crime-prevention officer, Barry Carey, met up with the Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee, to discuss rural crime and the impact it has on the farming community.

In the same week, IFA president, Tim Cullinan, along with IFA director general, Damian McDonald, and IFA director of governance, Elaine Farrell, met with Sinn Féin leader, Mary Lou McDonald, together with Matt Carthy and Darren O' Rourke. Among the issues discussed were greenhouse gas emissions ceilings, renewable energy and greater support for the vulnerable sectors under the Common Agricultural

Policy heading on fairness and transparency in the food chain.

They also managed to meet the incoming Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, and current Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon, to discuss a range of farming priorities for their members.

The organisation was at full throttle as it also organised a national meeting in Portlaoise on beef prices. This was on foot of much discussion at the IFA's annual branch meetings where there was some criticism that not enough was being done to highlight the low prices that Irish beef producers are receiving compared to their European and international counterparts. Polish and Argentinian beef was, at one stage, upwards of 60c/kg ahead of Irish beef prices to the primary producer. With a World Cup in progress and Christmas only a few weeks away, the logic would suggest that beef prices should have moved up. The factories argue that the British market, still our main beef outlet, is beset by an economic recession with rising unemployment and lower demand for quality beef cuts.

FBD QUAD-COMPETITION WINNER



Eileen Dunning from Athlone, Co. Westmeath was the lucky winner of FBD's 'Win a Quad Bike' competition, which she entered at the 2022 National Ploughing Championships. Eileen is pictured here receiving her prize from FBD head of sales for the midlands and west region, Pat Gilligan.

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PRE-CALVING GRASSLAND OUTING

The annual Irish Grassland Association (IGA) Dairy Conference, sponsored by Yara, takes place on Wednesday, January 18, 2023, at Charleville Park Hotel. The conference focuses on the changing practices required at farm level to operate successfully in a rapidly changing world. Dairy farms have been given ambitious targets to meet both from water quality and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions perspectives. Conference speakers will target key areas for farmers around environment and grassland-management practices and will also examine the financial implications for dairy farms to meet new regulations.

The line-up of speakers includes dairy farmers David Fennelly, from Laois; Francis Nolan, from Kilkenny; and David O'Dea, from Limerick. IFAC's Noreen Lacey will present the financial costs of new environmental regulations in terms of lower stocking rates and increased infrastructure costs. In a time of increasing input costs are some farms financially better off with fewer cows? Dr John Upton will present a paper on energy efficiency on Irish dairy farms as soaring electricity costs have pushed energy efficiency centre stage. Dr Michael Egan will present a paper on the management of spring grass in terms of grazing management, nitrogen fertiliser and animal performance. Dr Michael Dineen's paper will examine the role of red clover in intensive dairy systems. The IGA conference also features a members pre-conference session on the previous evening at which milk producer and former IGA president, Paul Hyland will discuss farm-succession strategies with solicitor Aishling Meehan.

BALANCE FOR BETTER BUSINESS



Balance for Better Business co-chairs, Aongus Hegarty (left) and Julie Sinnamon (right) with the Tanaiste, Leo Varadkar.

Last month, Tanaiste Leo Varadkar launched the fifth annual report of the Balance for Business Review Group. The report shows that Irish businesses have made significant progress in achieving gender balance at board level over the past year, with the percentage of women on the boards of the Irish Stock Exchange (ISEQ) top-20 listed companies up 36%. The guest speaker at the conference was Glanbia CEO, Siobhan Talbot, who spoke about Glanbia's inclusion journey and how it is working to improve gender balance representation throughout the organisation. The co-chair of the Balance for Better Business is former CEO of Enterprise Ireland, Julie Sinnamon.



Preparation for the arrival of class 2023

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

The management of calves in the first weeks of their life will have a significant impact on lifetime production, and with replacement heifer calves it influences the long-term profitability of the dairy herd.

Average costs of rearing a heifer calf to 24 months is estimated to be €1,553/head. Therefore, a 100-cow herd with a 20% replacement rate, is preparing to start a long-term investment process of €31,000 over the next number of weeks.

Selecting the correct milk replacer

Teagasc research has shown that calves will reach similar weight gains on milk replacer as they would being fed whole milk. However, this is provided that the milk replacer is formulated correctly, from good quality milk protein sources and that all the feeding instructions are followed. Many questions centre around the percentage of protein on the label of a bag of milk replacer, which is important, but more emphasis needs to be placed on the origin of the protein sources.

As we are trying to replicate whole milk, as much of the protein as possible should be coming from a milk/dairy-based source relative to vegetable or plant-based sources of protein. Dairy sources are more digestible for young calves and result in greater performance. Plant-based protein sources are cheaper alternatives and where inclusions are high, similar levels of performance to whole milk should not be expected in the early weeks of life. Another often unspoken factor in overall digestibility of a milk replacer is the quality of the raw materials used and the manufacturing process. Low heat-treated milk powders will have natural immunoglobulin content available in the product and its proteins will have not been denatured or effected.

The percentage of solids in whole milk is about 12.5%, hence it is the most common feeding rate of milk replacer on farm. This equates to 125g of milk replacer in 875ml of water to make up 1L of feed. Fed at 6L, the calf will be consuming 750g of milk replacer daily. The first six months of life is crucial, in just 8% of its lifetime the calf will reach 25% of its mature weight, highlighting the importance of ensuring optimal nutrition at this early stage.

For more advice on calf rearing and calf milk replacer, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit www.agritech.ie.



InTouch

TESTING TIMES

CATHAL BOHANE,
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

The arrival of persistent rainfall has hastened the end of the grazing season for most. Silage feeding has become the norm on many farms as lactation comes to an end. Silage quantity is still an issue on farms, and now that we are feeding it, we can understand more about the requirements. Now is the time to fully assess your silage quality and quantity. We are often told that silage does not need to be tested and that cows are the best laboratories in the country, which holds a lot of truth. But, by the time we get the results from the cows, it might be too late to react or rectify. Results from over 700 samples of silage completed through InTouch are outlined in the table below. While this encompasses a wide variety of bales and pit silage of varying cutting dates, the one obvious thing is the massive range in the analysis. To put this into perspective, the difference between the best and worst silage would be greater than 6 litres of milk if fed to milking cows. Any of these silages fed to dry cows would increase body condition, and even feeding the average silage ad lib would increase the body condition of dry cows by one full body condition score, which could lead to an increase in metabolic issues around calving.

	Dry matter %	Protein %	DMD	ME	pH	Ash	NDF
Min	17	7	60	9.3	3.5	3.7	43
Average	30	12	70	10.5	4.2	7.0	55
Max	71	19	82	12.1	5.3	9.9	65

Silage also needs to be tested for minerals, especially if being fed to dry cows. As we are all striving for a tight block calving event, we do not have time to experiment with minerals. At a minimum, we are aiming for potassium (K) levels of 1.8% to reduce the incidence of metabolic issues. Unfortunately, we cannot change that now, but knowing if it is multiples of this will allow us to plan corrective action rather than waiting for milk fever to appear. Antagonists that lock up other minerals are also generally high — another reason why feeding organic minerals is a must. The first step is the get a test and let your mineral supplier interpret it. Finally, quality will be nothing without quantity, and completing a feed budget or updating a previous one will give you peace of mind. It is also important to factor in extra feed in case of poor weather next spring. Remember, if you are tight on feed and need to purchase, do a cost analysis of what is the best value rather than going with the norm.

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FINAL DATE CONFIRMED FOR USE OF CREOSOTE-TREATED FARM FENCING

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has confirmed that the final date for professional use of creosote products for agricultural or equine fencing is February 28, 2023. This follows a new European (EU) regulation concerning the marketing and sale of creosote products and creosote-treated timber. According to the DAFM, a regulation [Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1950] renewing the approval of creosote for 'vacuum-pressure impregnation of wood used for railway sleepers and telecommunication poles only' has been agreed at EU level.

This means that the sale and use of creosote products to treat agricultural/equine fencing will be prohibited. The DAFM has confirmed that the following period of grace will be applied in Ireland:

- **December 31, 2022** – Final sell out, at retail level, of containers of creosote products;
- **February 28, 2023** – Final date for professional users to use creosote products for treatment of fencing;
- **April 30, 2023** – Final date for placing on the market and sale of timber treated with creosote except for railway sleepers and telecommunication poles.

A spokesperson for the DAFM said: "By December 31, 2022, stores, merchants and importers must ensure that all stocks of creosote products are sold to professional end-users or else returned to their supplier.

"From April 30, 2023, it will be prohibited to place on the market and sell agricultural/equine fencing that has been treated with creosote. Stocks of creosote-treated timber not sold by this date may be subject to destruction as hazardous waste or subject to re-export outside of the EU."

The DAFM said that specification for fencing will be updated to reflect the changed status of creosote. All timber fencing posts purchased for grant-aided fencing must be treated and certified in accordance with I.S. 436, which is the current Irish standard for farm fencing. The enforcement of this regulation lies with the DAFM.

UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FOR ZONED LAND TAX EXEMPTION

There was unanimous agreement among Government and opposition TDs on the Oireachtas Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight recently, that farmers should be exempt from the Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT). Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) president, Tim Cullinan, who was present and addressed the committee, has said that no liability should accrue to farmers who wish to continue farming on privately owned land.

He said the RZLT, as it currently stands, is simply a 'land-grab exercise that will do nothing more than create economically unviable operations and distort the agricultural land market from forced land sales.'

"Farmers right across the country are deeply concerned about the impact of this penal tax. With political will, legislation can be changed to address this inequitable situation. We will continue to lobby and engage with Government as a matter of priority," he said.

IFA Farm Business chair, Rose Mary McDonagh, said there are many aspects of the existing RZLT that are completely unjust and unfair on farmers. "Firstly, there is no requirement on local authorities to directly engage with land owners of their liability. This must change. There is no account taken of actual commercial demand at a local level. This must also change.

"Ultimately farm land, as it was the case for the Vacant Site Levy, must be exempt entirely. Imposing this disproportionate tax rate relative to the income yield potential for many farmers is simply unsustainable," she said.



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DAIRYMASTER RECEIVES TOP BUSINESS AWARD



Dairymaster's John and Anne Daly; sponsor, RDJ Cork's, Sean O' Reilly; and chair of the judging panel, Aiveen Hyland.

Irish dairy-machinery manufacturer, Dairymaster, was awarded Multinational Company of the Year at the recent 2022 Leaders Awards, which recognises excellence in innovation, business, and technology in southwest Ireland.

Dairymaster employs more than 300 people at its global headquarters in Co. Kerry, where all of the company's design and manufacturing activities take place. Dairymaster has sales and market support operations in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and the US. These centres are further supported by a worldwide distributor network selling, installing and servicing their products.

Dairymaster has shown extraordinary commitment to the southwest region, the company says, over its five decades of growth, and is unique in terms of its vertical integration; more than 95% of its products are manufactured in-house, bucking the trend of outsourcing to lower-cost economies and, instead, carrying out all design and manufacturing in Kerry. This gives the company the flexibility required to ensure its innovative products meet the needs of its customers in every market.

Commenting on the award, CEO of Dairymaster, John Harty said: "We are thrilled to have won this award, it's a huge recognition for our great team of people. As many know, we are based in Causeway in a rural part of Kerry and to be able to make an impact locally has led to greater things globally for us. Key to our success is the diverse range of engineering skills and manufacturing capabilities employed across a broad range of disciplines all under one roof. I would like to thank John Daly for accepting the award on behalf of our team."

The awards night also brought excitement for the organisers IT@Cork and KerySciTech as their collaboration, now known as Tech Industry Alliance, was officially announced by Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath.

Dairymaster is active in the southwest business community and the wider technology industry at a national level. The company has collaborated with local and national research organisations and also actively supports the development of industry and learning networks in the southwest.

GLANBIA REVENUES UP 23.1% FOR FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 2022



Group managing director, Siobhán Talbot.

Global nutrition group, Glanbia, has reported a 23.1% increase in revenue – on a constant currency basis (a fixed-exchange rate) – for the first nine months of 2022. The company's third-quarter interim management statement revealed that this growth is attributed to: pricing, which was up by 20.9%; volume growth, up by 0.8%; and acquisitions, up by 1.4%.

Glanbia Performance Nutrition (GPN) revenue grew by 13.7% – on a constant currency basis – on the prior year, driven by: a 2.2% reduction in volume; favourable pricing of 15.4%; and the positive impact of acquisitions of 0.5%.

Glanbia Nutritionals (GN) revenue grew 27.4% – on a constant currency basis – compared to 2021, driven by: volume growth of 2.2%; price increases of 23.5%; and the positive impact of acquisitions of 1.7%. GN's volume growth was driven by growth in the nutritional solutions (NS) non-dairy portfolio and US cheese. Commenting on the results, group managing director, Siobhán Talbot, said consumption trends continue to be resilient across the performance nutrition and healthy lifestyle brand portfolios in GPN. But she cautioned that global macro-economic environment continues to be challenging.

"We are monitoring consumption and inflation trends closely. The strength of our platforms in better nutrition, supported by the combination of pricing actions taken and operational efficiencies achieved, gives us continued confidence that we will deliver strong full-year EBITA (earnings before interest, taxes, and amortisation) growth."

She said such confidence sees the company updating its full-year guidance to 10%-13% growth in adjusted earnings per share (EPS) – on a constant currency basis. And, based on current foreign exchange rates, the company's reported adjusted EPS growth is expected to be 26%-29%.

GPN Americas delivered 13.4% revenue growth in the period and there was good volume growth in the performance nutrition and healthy lifestyle brand portfolios. GPN International, which includes direct-to-consumer brands, delivered 14.5% revenue growth in the period driven by price growth as well as the LevUp acquisition. Pricing was positive in all markets due to price increases implemented in response to cost inflation. And, US cheese revenue increased by 30.5% in the period, driven by volume growth of 4.5% and pricing growth of 26%. Volume growth was driven by end market demand and the new joint venture plant in Michigan which was commissioned during 2021.

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NEW GROUP CEO DESIGNATE ANNOUNCED AT LAKELAND DAIRIES

The board of Lakeland Dairies recently announced that Colin Kelly is to succeed Michael Hanley as group CEO of the co-op. In January 2023, Colin will take the reins from Michael who announced his retirement earlier this year.

Colin is currently managing director for trading and member relations at Ornua, and has held a range of senior finance and general management positions at the company since he joined in 2011. Prior to his current role at Ornua, he served as head of strategy planning and risk management and, previous to this, he was president and chief financial officer of Ornua Ingredients North America. Before joining Ornua, he was a senior auditor with Deloitte.

A native of Luskagh, Co. Offaly, Colin is an accounting and finance graduate of University of Limerick and is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland.

Speaking about his appointment, he said: "I am excited by the challenge and look



The board of Lakeland Dairies has announced Colin Kelly as group CEO designate. Pictured at the announcement are: chair, Lakeland Dairies, Niall Matthews; group CEO designate, Colin Kelly; and vice-chair, Lakeland Dairies, Keith Agnew. Photo: Orla Murray, Coalescence.

forward, in conjunction with the board, to leading the business to continued and sustained success in the years to come. I particularly look forward to working with the excellent leadership team, management and farm families of Lakeland Dairies and to continuing the great work that has brought the co-operative to its internationally recognised position as a dairy industry leader." Chair of Lakeland Dairies, Niall Matthews, said: "Colin's knowledge and experience of the Irish and international dairy industry will be of significant benefit to Lakeland

Dairies where he will lead the ongoing future progress, growth and success of our co-operative in the interests of our 3,200 farm families, our staff and our global customer base."

Farmer-owned Lakeland Dairies collects two billion litres of milk from 3,200 farm families across 16 counties on a cross border basis. The co-operative makes a wide range of dairy food ingredients, foodservice and consumer products, which it exports to over 80 countries worldwide, in addition to comprehensive agribusiness operations.

WEST CORK'S NEILIE O'LEARY WINS PADDY FITZGERALD AWARD

Bantry-based Neillie O'Leary was recently announced as the 2022 recipient of the Paddy Fitzgerald Award. Neillie, from Inchinagown, Coomhola in Bantry, was nominated by the West Cork County Executive of the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA), with which he has been involved for nearly 50 years. He sits on the National Hill Committee, which he chaired in the mid-2000s and is also involved in numerous community initiatives in the Borbin valley area.

Receiving the award, he said, was "a huge honour" and he dedicated it to his family and his community.

IFA president, Tim Cullinan said the Paddy Fitzgerald Award represents the 'spirit of volunteerism and the selfless dedication of people to the betterment of their communities.'

"Each of the nine nominees had the honour of being chosen by their county executive. The cornerstone of IFA's work is the willingness of farmers to give of their time in



West Cork IFA chair, Donal O'Donovan; FBD chair, Liam Herlihy; EU commissioner, Mairead McGuinness; award winner, Neillie O'Leary; IFA president, Tim Cullinan; IFA national treasurer, Martin Stapleton; and FBD Trust chair, Michael Berkery. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

representing their fellow farmers. It is only fitting that this should be recognised and I would like to thank FBD for their support for this prestigious event."

FBD Trust chair, Michael Berkery said: "The late Paddy Fitzgerald worked unselfishly to better the lives of farmers, first through his work with Macra in Co. Limerick and then in the National Farming Association, and Cork

Marts IMP"

FBD chair, Liam Herlihy said FBD Insurance values the community role played by Paddy Fitzgerald and his achievements for farmers the length and breadth of the country.

EU Commissioner Mairead McGuinness was the guest of honour at the recent event and she praised the calibre of those who had been put forward.

'WE NEED TO ENCOURAGE A BALANCED DIALOGUE' – NEW NUFFIELD CHAIR

Meath farmer and Nuffield scholar, Joe Leonard was recently announced as the new chair of Nuffield Ireland, succeeding Karen Brosnan who has been in the role since 2019. Joe became a member of the board of Nuffield Ireland in 2018 and was appointed to the board of Nuffield International in January 2020.

Joe joined the family dairy business in the 1990s and now farms 600 dairy cows, in partnership, in Stamullen, Co. Meath. He was awarded the 2014 Nuffield Ireland Scholarship where he explored the area of stress management and investigated ways to identify stress triggers on farms. Speaking about his vision for his tenure as Nuffield Ireland chair, he said: "With so much antagonistic and polarised debate on how agriculture can adequately address the enormous climate challenge, our farmers are experiencing huge amounts of additional stress and it is very difficult to see a way forward. Never before has leadership been more important in order to meet our country's climate obligations in a realistic way. "I believe that Nuffield Ireland has a role to play in helping to encourage reconciliation on both sides of the debate in order to encourage all



New Nuffield Ireland chair, Joe Leonard with the outgoing chair, Karen Brosnan. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

parties to work together in developing solutions. We need to encourage a balanced dialogue in order to focus on action and ensure the sustainability of our agricultural sector, from an environmental, but also economic and mental wellbeing perspective."

FARMER HEALTH AND WELLBEING A FOCUS OF RECENT HSA CAMPAIGN

A week-long campaign recently carried out by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) focused on farmer health and wellbeing. Research consistently finds that farmers, in particular, and those working on the land suffer greater work-related health issues than those working in many other sectors, according to the HSA. Such research shows that musculoskeletal injury, cardiovascular disease, hearing loss, particular skin cancers, workplace stress and anxiety all have a disproportionate effect on farmer's health. These inspections were carried out to encourage farmers to give more consideration to their long-term health and wellbeing, the HSA said, because:

- Farmers who now rely heavily on machinery do not get enough physical activity, 20 per cent of heart disease and 10 per cent of stroke are caused by lack of physical activity;
- Feeling stressed influences your thinking and problem-solving, reducing your ability to think clearly and calmly and can have long-term negative health impacts;
- One in two farmers have suffered from back problems at some time in their life; one poor lift can result in a lifelong injury;
- Research shows that 25 per cent of farmers at age 30 and half of farmers at age 50 have hearing loss. In addition, around 70 per cent of teenagers living on farms show early signs of 'noise-induced' hearing loss;

- Farmers, and those working on farms, have four times the risk of developing skin disease and cancers compared with other occupational groups with deaths from melanoma higher among farmers than 'indoor' workers; and
- About 60 per cent of non-smoking Irish farmers report having some lung or breathing issues.

During the inspection campaign, HSA inspectors encouraged farmers to consider their health and wellbeing and to take proactive steps to protect their physical and mental health, such as:

- Get physically active: If you have not been very active, begin with 10 minutes and gradually build this up to 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity exercise;
- Protect your back: Eliminate and minimise strenuous lifting, pulling and pushing and seek out lifting aids for remaining lifting tasks;
- Protect your hearing: Stay away from noisy activity. If you find it difficult to hear someone speaking within 2m from you, you should be wearing hearing protection;
- Protect your skin: Wash and dry your skin to prevent disease and prevent skin cancers by wearing long sleeve shirts and broad brim hats and applying sun protection;
- Protect your lungs: Wear appropriate masks to protect from spores from mouldy

hay and dusts from animal housing; and

- Mind your mental health: Share your concerns with those you trust, reach out if feeling overloaded or low, there is lots of help out there.

Commenting on the inspection campaign, senior inspector for agriculture at the HSA, Pat Griffin said: "Many farmers do not consider their own health and wellbeing a priority in their day-to-day work on the farm, but that must change. If farmers prioritise their own health and wellbeing it will have a significant impact on their ability to live a healthy and productive life. In reality, a lot of Irish farmers work in isolation, do not prioritise their health and often do not seek out assistance when they should, especially around mental health and wellbeing.

"I would encourage farmers to take one step this month to establish healthy habits in their work on the farm around physical activity, diet and connection with others, and ensure they have a good work/life balance. Farmers should consider workload and what they are doing on the farm today, how it can affect them in the long run and what changes would help. Farmers can use the HSA guide on health and wellbeing as a step guide towards a healthier working life."

A new farmer health-and-wellbeing booklet is now available from the HSA which is full of useful tips for farmers to improve both their physical and mental health.

MACRA CONFERENCE: MINISTER ADDRESSES YOUNG-FARMER ISSUES AND PLEDGES SUPPORT

MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE, CHARLIE MCCONALOGUE, WAS GUEST SPEAKER AT MACRA'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE, WHICH TOOK PLACE RECENTLY. MATT O'KEEFFE REPORTS ON THE COMMITMENTS THAT THE MINISTER MADE ON ISSUES OF HIGH RELEVANCE TO THE ORGANISATION

Looking ahead to the next decade, and beyond, Minister McConalogue said it will be the 'most crucial' time for food production. "Over the next 40 years, we will have to produce as much food as we have over the past 1,000 years. But to think that we can carry on as before, in terms of emissions from the sector continuing to rise, is naïve. "Proteins from our world-class beef, sheep, pig and dairy farms coupled with output from our tillage sector, will continue to be the spine of the agricultural industry. We must adapt to increasing demands around how we work with nature."

Saying 'we are sustainable' is not enough, he told the young-farmer gathering: "We can't just rely on our earned reputation up to now. Customers in 180 countries who enjoy our food are demanding ever higher sustainability standards from everyone in the food-supply chain. Farmers can feel that all the pressure is on them. However, both inside and outside the farm gate there is pressure to reduce our carbon footprint. We must hit our 25 per cent emission reduction target for agriculture. I believe it is achievable through collaboration. Food Vision 2030 and the Climate Action Plan will position us as a world leader in sustainable food systems," he said.

TARGETED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR YOUNG FARMERS

In terms of his commitment to young farmers, the minister was unequivocal: "Supporting young farmers financially through targeted taxation supports is a key priority for me," he told the audience.

"That will continue through national funding as well as through the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in which there are enhanced supports targeted specifically at



SUPPORTING YOUNG FARMERS FINANCIALLY THROUGH TARGETED TAXATION SUPPORTS IS A KEY PRIORITY FOR ME

young farmers. The government continues to encourage early land transfer through a range of measures including capital gains tax, stock relief, and stamp-duty concessions. I do consider that it is better to support young farmers early in their farming career as compared to providing retirement schemes at the other end of the scale."



DRIVING LAND MOBILITY

The minister received a positive response from the assembled young farmers when he reiterated his commitment to Macra's land mobility service: "I doubled funding for the service last year. I want the mobility service to expand and be fit for purpose over the next decade when access to land will be an even greater challenge. My door is open to Macra to put forward proposals for the further development of the land mobility service. I look forward to supporting Macra as you provide a blueprint for the service into the future."

REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN FARMERS

The 'forgotten farmers' grouping also merited mention from the minister, who said he had committed to addressing this issue and to supporting this cohort of farmers, as per the Programme for Government.

"While difficult to define, our estimate is that there are up to 4,000 farmers in the forgotten farmers category, through no fault of their own. The initial request was for an allocation from the National Reserve. Upwards convergence has helped some of those farmers. I have asked my department to examine measures to address the problems to be resolved. An announcement on this is expected soon that should be of significant assistance to many farmers who missed out on support at a critical period in their farming start-up phase." Minister McConalogue went on to commit fully to young farmers' voices being heard on all issues relating to future agriculture policies.

VALUING FOOD PRODUCTION

Several questions asked during a Q&A session with Minister McConalogue referenced generational renewal and the low numbers of young people involved in farming as a proportion of the general farm population. The minister acknowledged the challenge in rectifying this situation: "For many years, because of other opportunities in the economy and because food was less valued, the returns for many farms were inadequate for a full-time income. I believe we

are turning a corner.

"Food will be more valued in future and there is increased potential for a variety of alternative income streams on many farms that were not there in the past – environmental services and energy production, for instance – all at a time when food is becoming more difficult to produce across the world and will be required in greater volumes than ever before. We will support farmers to add value to the food they produce."

BALANCING FOOD AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Again, in replying to questions on food production versus climate-change mitigation measures, as well as proposals to reduce cow numbers, the minister had a firm statement: "We need to continue producing food. At the same time, we have a responsibility to reduce emissions and our carbon footprint. A particular proposal from the Dairy Vision Group envisages a voluntary scheme allowing farmers to be compensated for reducing the numbers of cows they have. There will still be, and must be, opportunities and routes for young farmers to enter the dairy sector in the years to come. Overall, what we have to do is balance our environmental responsibilities with ensuring that there is a viable future for food producers."

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

A question on solar panel erection on farm roofs received this reply: "It should have been possible before now and it will be possible very soon." Inconsistency and changes in regulations were also brought up in the Q&A, to which Minister McConalogue responded: "It has happened in some instances and needs to be avoided in the future as far as possible. I understand that farmers need certainty in planning their farm management practices." Biomethane production came up for discussion and one conference attendee asked why the Government had been slow in drawing down EU funding and opted for further research into what is a mature technology in other countries around the world. The minister replied that biomethane production will be an important part of energy production in Ireland: "I do want to ensure that all the policy requirements are in place. It will involve large investment and cross-government commitment and will necessitate the inclusion of a renewable heat obligation by the Department of Energy to drive the market forward."

THE NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE

PAT CAHILL IS ON THE POINT OF RETIRING AFTER A LONG AND SUCCESSFUL CAREER WORKING WITH VOLAC INTERNATIONAL. FOR THE PAST NUMBER OF MONTHS, PAT HAS BEEN SUPPORTING THE VOLAC PRODUCT RANGE IN NEW ZEALAND, WORKING WITH THE COMPANY'S DISTRIBUTOR THERE, NUTRINZA. IN THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF CONTRIBUTIONS, PAT GIVES US A FLAVOUR OF HIS KIWI EXPERIENCE, WHICH INCLUDES VISITS TO 30 CONTRACTORS AND 150 FARMS SCATTERED ACROSS THE ISLAND

Nutrinsa has been distributing Megalac in New Zealand for many years and after concluding my role as Volac's European CEO, I was asked if I would explore opportunities for other Volac products, including our Blossom and Forage inoculants, in the New Zealand market.

This was my fifth time visiting New Zealand and I am enthused by the experience every time I go there. And it wasn't all work, either. On this trip, I was fortunate to travel to Eden Park twice; weekend in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland; travel the Arthur Pass on the Southern Alps by train and car; trek the Tongariro Alpine Crossing; and explore the Kerikeri and Hanmer Springs. New Zealand is a fabulous country with friendly, helpful people who really love the outdoor life – hiking, fishing, boating,

skiing, hunting, trekking, and everything to do with the outdoors. Allied to that are the varied and beautiful landscapes around every corner. Rugby is a passion and as a dyed-in-the-wool Munster fan, I regularly got to talk rugby. I watched the All Blacks beating Australia in Eden Park back in September and enjoyed the great atmosphere and banter that accompanied the occasion.

FARM OWNERSHIP

One cannot talk about farming in New Zealand without understanding the scale and importance of its dairy-production sector. The scale of the dairy farms is quite striking when compared to home. I visited Northland where the herds are smaller than the New Zealand average, but still range from 300 to 800 cows. The land there is quite rugged, with

many dairy areas prone to flooding or drought and often both extremes in the one year. The consensus is that these weather extremes are getting more common.

Among the 800 farms in the Northland region, production levels tend to be lower at 300-350kg per cow, with once-a-day (OAD) milking systems quite common. Northland farm prices are averaging NZ\$22k/ha, compared to NZ\$45-50k/ha in the Waikato and up to NZ\$60k/ha in the South Island. In the Waikato, Manawatu and Taranaki areas of the North Island, the land is a lot more productive and can often grow twice as much grass – up to 16t DM/ha – as Northland with pure ryegrass pastures as opposed to ryegrass/kikuyu in Northland. These are the traditional heartlands of New Zealand dairying with herd numbers more regularly in

THERE ARE QUITE A NUMBER OF INVESTMENT ENTITIES WITH ASSETS OF UP TO 60 FARMS CARRYING 30-80,000 COWS

the 700-1,200-cow bracket per farm. Most of the Northland and Waikato region is still farmer owned/occupied, though you do see quite a bit of corporate ownership appearing in the Waikato. In the South Island, especially in the Canterbury-Ashburton region, which was most recently developed into dairying from the traditional sheep and cropping areas, the farms tend to be much bigger, with 1,000-1,500-cow farms being very common. Irrigation is the norm across these regions, which enables large volumes of grass to be grown – 18-20t DM/ha.

CORPORATE CREEP

What is particularly striking, especially on the South Island, is the amount of dairying which is in the hands of corporate investors. There are quite a number of investment entities with assets of up to 60 farms carrying 30-80,000 cows and it is increasingly common to see corporate holdings of five to 10 farms across many parts of the country. In some ways, when we ponder on the European Union farm policies over the years, we would have to admit that it has done quite a good job, in general, around one of its original commitments to protect the family farm.

FARM-MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

There is quite a mix of management structures across New Zealand, from owner occupier to share milkers at various percentages, contract milkers, and farm managers. Farm managers take the first step towards ownership. Contract milkers generally have to organise the farm labour alongside management, make the day-to-day decisions and work on the basis of a percentage of the milk solids produced. Share milking is quite common, especially

where there are multiple farms in the ownership group. Share milking for many years was a regular pathway to buying or getting equity in a farm. You built up capital through increasing ownership of the herd over a period of time. In recent years, this progression to farm ownership has proven to be almost impossible because, though the share milker continued to build equity in ownership of the herd, the price of good land has risen from \$NZ15k/ha to \$NZ20k/ha in the early 2000s to current levels of \$NZ50k/ha to \$NZ60k/ha. There are no supports for buying land to get younger people involved and they would pay interest rates of 6-8 per cent. In effect, despite the share milker not having the potential to realise ownership it has not become a real problem. As the price of land has increased and interest rates have continued to stay

high, the return on equity on these farms remains quite low for owners. However, the share milker can build to 100 per cent ownership of a 500-1,000-cow herd, with current cow values at highs of NZ\$2,000, they can put quite a bit of equity together. I have talked to several workers who have built up share milking herds on two farms. Every contract/share-milking agreement can be quite different and, as one expert remarked, it is a consultant's or lawyer's dream. What never ceases to amaze me is the mobility in the business, driven by lack of labour, different opportunities and ease of moving. Farm managers, contract milkers, share milkers are seldom in the same place for any more than a few years. I feel that where moving house in Ireland is often a lifetime decision, moving in New Zealand is like booking a holiday.

Pat Cahill pictured with Sid Going, a former New Zealand rugby union footballer. Dubbed Super Sid by his fans, he played 86 matches, including 29 tests, for the All Blacks between 1967 and 1977.



A NOVEL LEMKEN STRATEGY

TILLAGE FARMER, BOBBY MILLAR, REPORTS ON A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN BEING INTRODUCED BY INTERNATIONAL FARM MACHINERY GROUP, LEMKEN

In October, Lemken set about a new approach to help build a road map for the company The idea is to have a more inclusive approach, where ideas and discussions could be thrashed out by all the facets of the tillage/machinery industry. I was invited to participate in the inaugural trip to France. Our base was about two hours south of Paris in the picturesque city of Auxerre. It was an apt setting. France is the European leader in the production of cereals, potatoes, industrial crops, feed crops, beef cattle, poultry and wine. It is in second place behind Germany for milk production. France has the largest cattle population in Europe with 17.8 million head in 2021. French agriculture is characterised by the dominance of cereal crops, wine and dairy production. This is

reflected by the fact that it exported 35 million tonnes of wheat in 2021 and is the top European wheat exporter. It is also the number-one producer of barley in the world, top European producer of oilseeds, biggest European potato producer and top European producer of sugar – all crops Irish tillage farmers are familiar with.

LEMKEN HQ

The first phase of our trip involved a visit to Lemken headquarters in Boigny-sur-Bionne. The showroom there was impressive with the latest equipment on display including a steerage hoe guided by cameras, increasingly used by the horticulture industry. However, true to their word, rather than a complete focus on machinery, Lemken had invited UK-based, independent research

company Agri Intelligence along on the trip. The company kickstarted the principle of the trip by presenting a broad view of their ongoing research, which was the catalyst for intensive discussions. Here is a flavour of those discussions:

- **Cultural control/integrated pest management**

Grass weeds such as black grass: should the plough be the reset button and seen as a starting point for control of weed grasses?

- **Cover crops**

We are educating ourselves on the benefits of cover crops but are they overrated? Are they encouraging new problem weeds on farms, by acting as an over-wintering haven for problem grasses and other weeds?



• Transition from plough to direct drill is an art form

Establish what soil type you have first and the current health of your soil, noting current issues like grasses and other challenges. Do you know the cultivation depth you should be working at? What's the ideal crop rotation on your farm?

• Organic tillage – the French position

The advantages and disadvantages – should we have a less polarised opinion on organic? Should we learn more from organic practices and perhaps integrate some of them into conventional farming?

ON-FARM EXPERIENCE

The second part of our trip was a visit to Alexandre Bardet's organic farm near Noyers-sur-Serein. The farm has been in organics

for a few years now and the latest step on the farm was to introduce sheep to help as part of the rotation. One of their roles will be to eat the cover crops before subsequent crop establishment by min-till. Indeed, a spade was introduced by Agri Intelligence to investigate the soil type and structure, however it couldn't travel down too far. One of the reasons min-till is used on the farm is the lack of depth of soil.

Solar panels constructed in cooperation with adjoining farm owners was the next big decision on the farm. The farmer explained how hot a summer it was with temperatures over 40 degrees seriously affecting yield. According to him, and to many of his neighbours, climate change is here, and the need to plan for its implications is regarded as essential, going forward.

CHEERS

Part of Alexandre's farm is in the Chablis region, and we duly obliged the farmer by sampling some of his wine after the farm walk. Unfortunately, here in Ireland we do not have the same regional status for our tillage produce, such as the grain destined for the drinks industry. A Chablis wine must be made from grapes from the Chablis region; how I would love for an Irish whiskey or gin to have the same status here. An Irish cream liqueur must use cream processed from an Irish cow's milk, so why are tillage farmers and grain crops treated differently?

NINE-CROP FARM

Our final part of the trip was a visit to another organic tillage farm, run by a father and son in the village of Valravillon. There are up to nine different crops grown here for rotation purposes and niche markets. Sugar beet, sunflowers, wheat, barley and maize are just some of the crops. We were even given a snack of their own organic popcorn under development as they try to latch onto the niche market emerging for this product. On-farm research and development were obvious here, with novel engineering solutions to equipment evident. They were developing a way of inter-seeding while using the aforementioned steerage hoe, while we were there. This farm was doing a lot of experimenting and the enthusiasm of the young farmer was obvious, backed by his very supportive father. Homeopathy, basalt, charcoal, row spacings, biological mixes to suit crops and individual fields, were all in

the melting pot of discovering what works best for them.

To give an example, within 10 days of planting winter wheat, they run a light spring tine harrow over the ground to eliminate the first flush of weeds. Weather and timing are key with the father pointing out that organic farming is often more management-intense compared to conventional farming, with far more crop walking required.

ORGANIC POLICY PUSH

Here in Ireland, the push towards organic farming is notable with a vastly increased budget recently announced by our government. Both farms in France had similar concerns to Irish farmers. They took the step, pushed similarly by French policy, to go organic perhaps 15-20 years ago. Markets for produce, regulations and continued financial government support have them constantly examining the decision to go organic. They plan to stay organic, which is a message in itself. The area under organics in France is now 9.5 per cent, the area in 2005 was just 2 per cent, similar to Ireland currently. There are interesting times ahead for organics in Ireland. It has worked in France but as the French farmers told us, there is nothing easier about organics.

CHALLENGES ON THE HOME FRONT

Here at home, put simply, trying to get winter crops planted and spraying done has been extremely difficult. Ground conditions deteriorated very quickly and have remained poor. Without seeing any stats, I'm guessing winter planting is well back in area, unfortunately. Fertiliser prices remain high, grain prices could be anywhere next harvest, and nitrates concerns are driving the rented land market even higher. There are a lot of financial concerns on tillage farmers' minds as we head into 2023, and the commencement of a new Common Agricultural Policy.

JOIN THE IGGG

If you are interested in joining the Irish Grain Growers Group, please send an email to info@irishgraingrowers.ie; or call/text 086 3898823.

THE DIVERSITY OF NUFFIELD

THE 2022 NUFFIELD IRELAND CONFERENCE WAS, AS USUAL, BOTH STIMULATING AND ENLIGHTENING. NOT ONLY WERE THE PRESENTATIONS FROM THE SCHOLARS A TESTAMENT TO THE ENDURING SUCCESS OF THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME, BUT THEY ALSO PROVIDED ALTERNATIVE VIEWS ON AGRICULTURE, FOOD PRODUCTION, LAND MANAGEMENT AND USE, WRITES MATT O'KEEFFE

Various dissertations were presented on topics as diverse as sheep-milk production, egg farming, urban agriculture, and promoting trees in the Irish landscape, among others. In between the different sessions of the conference programme, there were opportunities to discuss the state of the world and, particularly, global agriculture with a host of former Nuffield scholars. One of those scholars who took time out to attend was Jim McCarthy. For Jim, that can often, and did in this case, mean taking long flights from foreign parts.

the Ukraine border, so the war is having a big impact on life as well as agriculture. For global tillage farmers, generally, Ukraine's loss has been their gain, that's just a simple fact. Probably €60 to €70 of the price-per-tonne increase in grain prices over the past nine months is attributable to the war. "There has been additional pressure on Romanian farming because of increased amounts of Ukrainian grain being shipped through the country. The Romanian grain-transport system was already stretched to accommodate the rising grain production within the country. That has had the effect

Jim explains: "All of Eastern Europe has been through a very severe drought. We normally get 530ml or so of rain in our region in the 12 months to September. This year we were down to 310ml. It's very hard to grow crops of sugar beet, grain or maize with that level of rainfall, but that has been the reality. It's the second significant drought in three years."

A MIN-TILL PROPONENT

Jim is, and has been for many years, a strong advocate of min-till production: "That has been my practice for the past 30 years. Having farmed in Argentina, I became even more confirmed in my view that min-till is the right method to prepare soil for sowing. In moisture-restricted areas of the world, min-till or no-till cultivations are absolutely essential. No-till and cover-cropping are the future practice for large-scale production on arable land across the world," he explains. Jim grows a variety of crops in Romania: "Our main crop is maize for grain production. In addition, we grow a lot of soyabean crops, sunflowers and oilseed rape. We grow wheat as a break crop. Our claim to fame is that we are Romania's main sugar-beet growers. In 2014, we bought a company farm that was being worked organically since 2007. We expanded the organic farming business a bit. If we were back again, we wouldn't have done that.

"Because of the climate we are in, growing row-crops like soyabeans and sunflowers requires a lot of row-hoeing. That means a lot of added cost, work and increased labour requirement. We could have to go through the crop up to 10 times with different types of hoes, depending on the crop and the weed challenges. That loosens up the topsoil and leaves it vulnerable to damage from intense rainfall, especially in thunderstorms. There is a huge depletion of phosphorous levels because of an inability to mineralise the soil phosphorous that is there or will do so very slowly. So, organic farming is far more



Jim McCarthy, at the recent conference.

McCARTHY'S VISION

Those familiar with Jim's career and business interests know that he embarked on a farming career without the benefit of land behind him. After completing the farm apprenticeship scheme, Jim developed a tillage business near Castledermot in Kildare and went on to develop farming operations across the globe, including in Argentina, the US and, latterly, in Romania. Here, Jim manages a vast tillage operation, and he spoke about the concerns he has around the impacts of the Ukrainian war as well as climate change and mistaken food policies: "We're only 60 kilometres from

of weakening grain prices in the Romanian market because it is coming in at a discounted price and much of the grain is old-season product. Having been stored in poor conditions in many instances, the quality has suffered and that drags down all grain prices in the region. It is often blended with Romanian grain and that reduces quality and price in turn. In the long term that can't do the reputation of Romanian grain any good."

DROUGHT

Climate change, or at any rate, low rainfall, is also impacting farming in the region, as



Nuffield scholar, 2003, Geoff Dooley; associate professor UCD School of Agriculture, Helen Sheridan; dairy farmer and vice president CEJA, Thomas Duffy; dairy farmer and chair VistaMilk Industry Advisory Committee, Gillian O'Sullivan; farmer and environmentalist, Ciaran Duggan.

challenging than many people believe. I think organic farming is fine for rearing low stocking numbers of cattle and sheep but not for cropping, in general."

LESS LAND, MORE PEOPLE

As an international food producer, Jim has strong views on food security: "In 2010, there was 0.197 hectares of arable land available per person in the world. Now, due to desertification and construction/urbanisation, road building and an increasing population, there is only 0.175 hectares available per person on the planet. Meanwhile, we have policymakers in the EU who want to take us down to the least productive organic type of farming. "Let me give you an example of how serious a policy flaw this is. In areas of low rainfall such as in Romania, with a 40 per cent rainfall reduction this year, our conventionally managed wheat yields halved. Our organic wheat yields were half of that, again. People need to realise how fickle and precarious food production is around the world. If you

have a halving of yields in drought years, suddenly, there will be bare supermarket shelves, and that day is coming."

PEOPLE NEED TO REALISE HOW FICKLE AND PRECARIOUS FOOD PRODUCTION IS AROUND THE WORLD

A NEW ERA

Food pricing is undergoing a seismic change, Jim insists: "It had to happen because the prices from 2014 to 2020 were unsustainable. As long as energy stays expensive, and it will, food prices will continue to rise. The environmental measurement in the future will be how much energy is needed to produce a litre of milk or a tonne of grain, not the environmental scheme a farmer is

participating in, or the organic production system being pursued by a farmer. That is what matters. It is the amount that is produced per unit of energy required and that energy, from whatever source, is expensive."

IRISH FOOD PRODUCTION

But Jim has high praise for Irish food production: "Ireland is an amazing farming country. Irish grass-based livestock production is second to none. This talk of cutting cow numbers is nonsense. There are many other things we can do. It is the most efficient, environmentally friendly way to produce milk in the world.

"The European Commission wants us to continue a policy that will inevitably destroy the rainforests and involve shipping soya halfway across the globe to feed cattle in enclosed production units. How environmentally friendly is that? The world cannot survive without top-quality dairy produce and we have the best model anywhere to produce it."

Homegrown for the world stage.



As Ireland's largest exporter of Irish dairy products and the proud owner of Kerrygold, we understand what Irish dairy means to consumers across the world.

It takes great passion, care and commitment to produce a world-class product, which is why we're proud to support Irish farming families like the Connelly Family – suppliers to Aurivo Co-op and winners of the 2022 NDC & Kerrygold Quality Milk Awards.



Ornua
THE HOME OF IRISH DAIRY

FOCUS

IRELAND AND EUROPE A 50-YEAR MILESTONE



FIVE DECADES OF JOINED-UP THINKING

JANUARY 2023 MARKS THE OFFICIAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF IRELAND'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU), KNOWN IN 1973 AS THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EEC). IT WAS A TRANSFORMATIVE TIME IN OUR HISTORY THAT HAS CHANGED OUR COUNTRY IN MANY WAYS. THROUGH A SERIES OF SPECIAL INTERVIEWS, THIS ISSUE OF *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY* MARKS THIS MILESTONE AND THE WAYS IRISH AGRICULTURE HAS EVOLVED AS A RESULT, WRITES BERNIE COMMINS

Ireland's membership of the EU has been and will remain a constant talking point – and rightly so – among critics and proponents, alike, especially within the agricultural sector. Of all the corners of society, it is fair to say that Irish farmers, their working practices, their communities, their lives, and their families have been greatly impacted. Many would say for good, others would disagree, perhaps.

When asked about the effect of membership on Irish agriculture, our Taoiseach Michael Martin told *Irish Farmers Monthly* that 'we have used our membership to emerge as a truly modern, open economy and society with a reach and influence that we would not otherwise enjoy.' EU membership was a decision that was not taken lightly, but it was definitive with 83 per cent of voters saying yes to membership, in the 1972 referendum that took place in May that year.

"When we, as a country, decided to join the European communities, 1.2 million people of the 1.8 million eligible voters voted in favour. This highlights not only the foresight of these voters but also Ireland's consistent and longstanding commitment to the European project." The latest Eurobarometer data, which showed that Ireland had the highest proportion of people with a positive image of the EU backs this up, he points out. It shows that Irish people 'appreciate and do

not take for granted all the advantages that have resulted from that historic vote by the citizens of 1972' the Taoiseach said.

Now, is an opportune time, he says, to remember the extent to which the Irish agri-food sector has grown, adapted and evolved with the support of the EU.

"These past 50 years have seen a transformative and overwhelmingly positive impact on the sector. When the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was first introduced, it aimed to increase agricultural productivity and to ensure a fair standard of living for farmers. We have seen several reforms since, with new goals supported through the CAP, including rural development, innovation and sustainable practices. At each juncture, Ireland has been to the forefront of engaging and cooperating with our EU neighbours.

"Today, our EU membership continues to be a central factor defining our place in the world and it has enabled our agri-food sector to be globally orientated, exporting quality products to over 180 markets worldwide.

"The current CAP has put a particular focus on the contribution of agriculture to environmental and climate goals, and I am confident that the supports put in place will be vital to the agri-food sector as it embraces the necessary transition that we are all facing."

But it is important to acknowledge the role



that Irish agriculture has played also, he points out – it is a two-way street.

"As much as the sector has gained, we can also be proud of all that it has contributed. Despite this unprecedented time for global supply chains, Ireland is among the most food secure countries in the world, due to the special relationship with our EU neighbours and our place in the EU single market.

"Given the resilience and innovative approaches of our farmers, and their ability to persist through challenging times, I am confident that our global reputation for high quality agri-food products – developed in tandem with and supported by the EU project – is secure."



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'FARMERS AND THEIR LEADERS WERE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT JOINING'

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST, PUBLIC-POLICY ADVISOR, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S SPECIAL ENVOY ON FOOD SYSTEMS, TOM ARNOLD HAS HELD A VARIETY OF KEY POSITIONS IN IRISH AGRICULTURE OVER THE DECADES, AND IS WELL-POSITIONED TO REFLECT ON THE IMPACT OF IRELAND'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EEC)

The story of Ireland's interest in the European project, according to Tom, began well before Ireland joined in 1973.

"There was a very clear recognition within the farming community from the early 1960s that membership of the EEC should be a goal for Irish farmers, and would provide a huge advantage for Irish agriculture." The background to that belief was quite simple, he explains. "Ireland had very little market access to European and wider international markets, being almost entirely dependent on the British consumer to buy our agricultural produce. So, when the prospect for EEC membership first appeared in the early 1960s, farmers and their leaders were enthusiastic about joining. That was a short-lived hope, because President de Gaulle vetoed the British application, and it was not considered viable for Ireland to join without Britain. That all changed in the early 1970s when it was agreed Ireland would join at the same time as Britain and Denmark. A referendum held in May 1972 endorsed the application by a massive 83 per cent of the Irish electorate. We became members of the EEC in January 1973."

AN AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION

Ireland's agricultural development since joining the EEC is described by Tom as 'revolutionary'.

"The statistics support that description," he says. "In 1972, one in three of our working population was engaged in agricultural production. That figure is now below 10 per cent. Productivity has risen significantly. The structure of the sector has changed enormously with fewer full-time farmers and that has been facilitated by wider economic development and greater opportunities for



people living in rural Ireland.

"Increased productivity has been driven by several factors including the development of institutions such as An Foras Taluntais in 1958. Investment in science, in people, along with a willingness by rural people to adapt to and adopt new practices have all influenced our successful agricultural development. "Macra na Feirme had an important role in driving change as had Teagasc, Bord Bia, the Food Safety Authority and other organisations which all contributed to agriculture and food production being transformed, alongside access to European and global markets."

THE MACSHARRY REFORMS

A strong cog in the wheel along this journey, Tom says, was former agriculture and finance minister, Ray MacSharry, who served as EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development from 1989-1993.

"Sicco Mansholt was, of course, the godfather of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) but he [MacSharry] was one of the three most important agriculture

commissioners in the history of CAP," says Tom.

"Problems emerged over the years with unsustainable surpluses developing in the 1980s resulting in butter mountains and wine lakes. MacSharry changed the CAP from price supports to income supports, resulting in the emergence of the CAP we still have today. The CAP has become a more complex mechanism with more attention paid to the environment, to animal welfare, and so on. There is criticism, but even with those complexities, the CAP continues to work reasonably well. While it is not exclusively about food production, it is important that we continuously make the case that a focus on food production remains hugely important."

CHANGED TIMES

"When Britain left the EU, the reason there was no discussion around Ireland's continuing membership was because, overwhelmingly, Ireland had benefitted from EU membership to the extent that we are far more independent of Britain than we had been when we joined the Community in 1973," Tom says.

"On the agricultural side, access to the CAP from 1973 onwards had delivered huge benefits. There were ups and downs along the way, of course, and the introduction of the milk quota in 1984 was problematic but Ireland secured a reasonable deal at the time, mainly through the intervention of Garret FitzGerald, the then Taoiseach, and his agriculture minister, Austin Deasy. "But it was the wider effects of Ireland's membership of the EU that led to the virtual unanimity that our place is within the EU – with or without Britain. A lot of that came from the development of the Single Market in

1992 officially implemented on January 1, 1993 with Ireland as a full-hearted member and benefiting greatly especially in our standard of living."

When Ireland joined the EEC back in 1973, it was one of the poorer countries, Tom says. "By the time Brexit came in 2016, we were among the best-off countries in the EU. We have a well-diversified trade, and we are much more self-confident. The claim by a minority in 1972 that we would lose our sovereignty through membership of the EEC was completely inaccurate. In fact, by pooling our sovereignty we gained influence and independence. Our political leaders and civil servants have been very skilled in influencing the shaping of policies at European level to Ireland's advantage." Tom recognises the threats to EU stability from the increase in more extreme political philosophies both within the Union and globally: "The EU has responded collectively to the Ukrainian conflict. There is a realisation that multi-lateralism, which is at the heart of the EU, must be protected. There

are short-term issues around re-establishing positive relationships with Britain. Hopefully they can be resolved to all our benefit."

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

But we need to look to the future within a global context, he says.

"There are two major challenges. By 2050 almost ten billion people will need to be

THE CLAIM BY A MINORITY IN 1972 THAT WE WOULD LOSE OUR SOVEREIGNTY THROUGH MEMBERSHIP OF THE EEC WAS COMPLETELY INACCURATE

fed. That's two billion more than are living today. The second challenge is to feed those people while also reducing global warming. Even keeping temperature increases to

2.5 degrees above pre-industrial level is an enormous challenge. The agricultural sector, globally and in Ireland, will have to play its part. Productivity must rise, using fewer resources and in a way that is more sustainable. Ireland is well positioned to be a leader in sustainable food production. That's the central message from the Food Vision Strategy, which I had the honour of chairing. I am confident it can be done despite the challenges involved.

"There are clear targets in place and they will concentrate our efforts. On the issue of water quality, there is no room for compromise. Society will not accept that agriculture contributes to continuing deterioration in water quality. Strong collaboration among farmers, our advisory services, the co-ops and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is essential. If Environmental Protection Agency measurements continue to show quality dropping, then farmers are on a hiding to nothing. That, for me, is the single biggest issue to be addressed very seriously and very urgently."

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MACRA AND THE EU – ‘ASPIRATIONS BECAME REALITY’

FORMER CEO OF MACRA, PÉADAR MURPHY AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE IRISH FARMERS’ ASSOCIATION AND MACRA, PADRAIG WALSH WERE INVOLVED IN THE ORGANISATION DURING TIMES OF GREAT CHANGE IN IRISH AGRICULTURE. THEY SHARE THEIR MEMORIES OF THOSE SEISMIC PRE- AND POST-EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EEC) ACCESSION YEARS

Péadar Murphy was CEO of Macra during those years and, reminiscing on the build-up to membership, he says: “There was a period of waiting in the wings to see if Britain would join, allowing us to also apply. In 1970, Macra leaders were invited to visit Brussels by the Irish Council of the European Movement. That allowed us to be fully informed on the implications of EEC membership.

“In the lead-up to the referendum on membership, Macra held several information meetings. Those were highly successful and influenced the massive vote for membership. The National Farmers’ Association (now the Irish Farmers’ Association) and the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers’ Association (ICMSA) were equally heavily involved in campaigning for EEC membership at the time,” he says.

THE MANSHOLT VISIT

In 1970, Macra president, Kieran Curtin invited

EEC agriculture commissioner Dr Sicco Mansholt to attend a Macra conference in Tralee. It was a truly momentous occasion, Peadar says, setting the scene: “Some of Mansholt’s policies were controversial, especially his plan to reduce farmer numbers in Europe. There was controversy over his attendance and a militant grouping allegedly threatened to assassinate the commissioner. Obviously, that was an empty threat and the speech by Mansholt was widely regarded as being very supportive of Irish membership and of the advantages for our farming community.

“The commissioner was so impressed by the structure of Macra that he subsequently provided European funding for Macra participation in a European Young Farmer Exchange Scheme. For Macra, Ireland’s accession to EEC membership brought so many benefits for a new generation of young farmers. We were helped, financially, to

develop our advice-and-education support programme. Eventually, the EEC introduced Installation Aid and a Pre-retirement Scheme. They didn’t last but, nevertheless they were very important while they were in place and were totally consistent with Macra’s aims in terms of advancing generational renewal.”

THERE WAS CONTROVERSY OVER HIS ATTENDANCE AND A MILITANT GROUPING ALLEGEDLY THREATENED TO ASSASSINATE THE COMMISSIONER

DEVELOPMENT

Government and EEC grant aid for farm development during the early years of membership meant that more farmers had to keep accurate farm accounts, says Peadar. It was the start of a more formal and professional approach to farmers’ finances and accounts.

“The introduction of income tax on farmers also drove book-keeping. Macra set up the Farm Accounts Cooperative to assist farmers, with Donie Cashman and others driving the move to a farmer-facing accounts body. Likewise, the Farm Relief Services were also initiated by Macra. It is no coincidence that many of these developments gained traction after Ireland joined the EEC. There was a new confidence in farming and food production,” recalls Peadar

“Macra, itself, joined the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), and was influenced by the development of policies that would support young farmers across Europe. It was very much a two-way flow of ideas and



Former president of Macra, Kieran Curtin; former agriculture minister, Jim Gibbons; and EEC Commissioner for Agriculture, Dr Sicco Mansholt, at Macra’s annual conference in Tralee, 1970. Photo: *Macra na Feirme 1944-2019 - A History in Pictures*; courtesy of Macra na Feirme.

priorities. The model for a farm-relief service was borrowed from the Netherlands, for instance. And CEJA delegates from other countries took on the idea from Macra of a young-farmer organisation with economic as

influence during those years. There are far fewer now taking that career route and that's a pity, from the perspective of keeping an Irish viewpoint to the fore across the Commission, though we still have very capable people

CHANGE, IN EU TERMS, OFTEN MEANT MORE FORM FILLING, WHICH IS NOT WHAT FARMERS WANT TO BE DOING

well as social agendas. That cross-pollination of ideas made us more ambitious as we saw what worked in other Member States. Aspirations became reality through exposure to new ideas and new practices."

THE QUOTA EFFECT

Padraig Walshe has been a central figure in Irish agriculture across several decades of EU membership. He became president of Macra in 1987, not long after the introduction of milk quotas in 1984. He then went on to take the top role in the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA), having previously held the position of IFA National Dairy Committee chair. He recollects many of the key moments for Irish and European agriculture during those years: "On a personal level, we were expanding milk production on our farm and quotas hindered development in the following years. We leased in land and quota to build up production, which was obviously less profitable. That was the same for so many other milk producers during those years," he says.

INFLUENCING EU POLICIES

In terms of opportunities for working in Europe and influencing policy, Padraig recalls: "There were so many Irish people who went to work in the Commission in the 1980s, and earlier. They rose to positions of prominence and that was very important in terms of Irish

working in Europe."

Through his association with Macra, Padraig had the opportunity to visit Brussels, and other countries, before he became the organisation's president. "The experience was positive, in terms of finding out how other agricultural systems operated across Europe. Surpluses in beef, dairy and other commodities during the 1980s drove a fundamental reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the early 1990s, during the commissionership of Ray MacSharry. There was a specific agricultural language before that happened. Phrases like 'export refunds', 'green pounds', 'intervention', were all important to the economic wellbeing of farmers across the EEC. "Ultimately, the CAP gave us reasonable price stability, with the Commission determining the price of farm produce from year to year. That changed with the MacSharry reform introducing a farmer-support system and the market deciding prices. Today, the system has evolved further with greening payments becoming more important. When we joined in 1973 the Treaty of Rome was all about ensuring that there was enough food to feed the people of Europe while giving farmers a fair income."

HANDLING CHANGE

Change is always difficult but those who accommodate that change as best they can,

are the ones who survive, says Padraig. "Change, in EU terms, often meant more form filling, which is not what farmers want to be doing. They want to focus on food production. There was an early recognition by the IFA that a permanent presence in Brussels was important. People like Michael Treacy were able to open doors for us and influence decisions and policies. It allowed us to meet and negotiate directly with the various agriculture commissioners. Not every country or farm organisation had that opportunity. I recollect discussions with Commissioner Marianne Fischer Boel aimed at ending the milk-quota system. After a long lead-in that happened in 2015."

LOOKING FORWARD

The worldwide demand for food is growing and environmental restrictions will increase pressure on food supplies, says Padraig, which means something's got to give. EU policy in this regard is not performing as well as it should, he believes.

"The Netherlands, for instance, could see a 30 per cent reduction in cow numbers over the coming decade. The impact won't be restricted to the Netherlands. Beef production across Europe will also be disrupted, perhaps to a lesser extent, by lower exports and further restrictions on animal transport, as well as by ongoing environmental restrictions. "I am worried about the ultimate impact on food production. There is a group-think mentality in Brussels that seems to have no concern about reduced European food production. The priority is reducing carbon and other emissions and nothing else seems to matter. There is little or no thought given to the responsibility to produce food for millions who cannot feed themselves. They are the ones who will suffer most from current EU policies that sacrifice our capacity to produce food in Europe."



THE EU IS STILL THE ANSWER, BUT THE QUESTIONS ARE CHANGING



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) AS A TRADE AND ARBITRATION BODY CAN PROBABLY BE BEST UNDERSTOOD BY EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCE OF BRITAIN, WRITES PAT MCCORMACK, PRESIDENT OF THE IRISH CREAMERY MILK SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION

You often don't know the value of something until you don't have it. I'd say many British farmers and businesspeople now better understand the value of free trade and free movement than they did on June 22, 2016. Those who criticised membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), now the EU, must deal with the facts. Brexit has

WHAT WE DON'T WANT IS THE DELUSION THAT CAP CAN HAVE A DUAL-PURPOSE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

not been positive for the British economy. Efforts to reintegrate themselves into a global trading network and conclude any number of complicated trade agreements are proving difficult. The negotiating power that comes with membership of the single most-valuable consumer market on the planet has been lost.

ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCY

The EU works economically. But it's important – particularly considering events in Ukraine – to remember that it was not just economics that provided the initial impetus to an economic union. The EEC and the EU

were founded on a momentous political realisation that if Europe's different states are economically interdependent, then it is impossible for them to go to war with each other. That was the original inspiration – that Germany and France must be economically tied to each other in a way that removes the economic cause and capacity to wage war on each other. That realisation – and the determination to make it a reality – is the real glory of the EEC and the EU. It goes far beyond trade and it's worth remembering that founding motive when we see what happens when tyrants consider themselves to be free of the obligations of union and interdependence.

CAP – NOT PERFECT

As farmers, our most direct and meaningful experience with the EU was, and is, through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the supports it offered. Is it perfect? No. Was it used as a Trojan Horse to introduce a 'cheap food' policy that enriched corporate retailers and wiped out traditional farmer margins? Yes, it was. Did that steady erosion of farmer margin force farmers to make up in volume production what they had lost on margin? Yes, it did. And so, has CAP's facilitation of 'cheap food' and its emphasis on supplying ever greater volumes at ever lower prices contributed to current environmental stress? We must answer that we think it has. But CAP is still the best method for regulating

the supply of high quality, sustainable food to Europe's populace. The ICMSA understands that, and we'll always contribute to debates around CAP in that knowledge. What we don't want – and unfortunately, what we are increasingly having to deal with – is the delusion that CAP can have a dual-purpose as an instrument for climate-change mitigation and other environmental issues. We believe that's a mistake and that retrofitting a policy aimed at providing food to consumers at affordable prices into a policy that continues trying to do that, while also effecting environmental change through increasing production costs is doomed to failure.

MAKE-UP-YOUR-MIND MOMENT

Since this dual purpose was first introduced, we have said that the EU and CAP have arrived at a make-up-your-mind moment. We can either have cheap food for consumers and low environmental regulation for the primary producers, or we can have high environmental regulation for primary producers and correspondingly high prices for the consumers. What we can't have are high environmental production costs and low retail prices.

The next 50 years of the EU will be about many things – some of which are not even conceivable. Right now, the EU must understand that food production is costly, both economically and environmentally. CAP 2023-2027 gives no indication that this truth is recognised.

'FIFTY YEARS LATER, THAT COMMON MARKET IS UNRECOGNISABLE'



MICHAEL BERKERY'S VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF IRELAND'S DECISION TO JOIN THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EEC) ARE BASED ON HIS FIRST-HAND INVOLVEMENT IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP), WHEN HE WAS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE IRISH FARMERS' ASSOCIATION (IFA). HERE, HE RECALLS THE EARLY DAYS OF THE COMMON MARKET AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE CAP

Well before TJ Maher (founding member of National Farmers' Association [NFA, later the IFA] and former president of the IFA) played a pivotal leadership influence in the 1973 referendum to join the Common Market (EEC), NFA leaders like Juan Green, Rickard Deasy, Sean Healy and Louis Smith had established close contacts with like-minded farm-family organisations on the continent, especially in Belgium and the Netherlands.

These relationships and knowledge of the benefits of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its attraction for Irish farmers delivered an overwhelming majority with 90 per cent of farmers voting in favour of joining the Common Market in the 1972 referendum. Established in 1962 against a background of chronic food shortages in post-World War II Europe, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg agreed in the Treaty of Rome to set up a CAP to pool their resources and modernise farming and food production. Farmers were at the centre of this development with the stated objective being 'to provide affordable, safe and high-quality food for European consumers in addition to ensuring a fair standard of living for farmers in line with other sectors of society.'

CENTRAL TO PROGRESS

Those objectives were to be achieved by applying community preference, market unity and financial solidarity, which entailed a substantial budget financed by the Member States. By any objective criteria, the CAP delivered on its mission and for Irish farmers and the food industry, joining the Common Market in 1973, now the European Union (EU), was transformational.

Fifty years later, that Common Market is unrecognisable. Similarly, Irish farming and the food industry have progressed beyond recognition from the the abysmal conditions and subsistence living standards of previous

generations. EU membership has been central to that progress.

The constant challenge for Irish farmers is adjusting to the ever-changing requirements of an evolving CAP but even with these demands, Irish agriculture continues to benefit enormously from membership of the EU.

A DIFFERENT CLIMATE

Representing Irish farmers in Europe in the late 1970s was in an entirely different climate; farmers' incomes were determined by the 'objective method' and product prices for the main commodities were set by intervention, ie. public purchase and storage of butter, milk powder, beef, wheat and barley to remove surpluses from the market. Being a surplus-producing area within the Common Market, Ireland became unhealthily dependent on this form of market support, particularly in milk and beef, which would lead to serious repercussions, later. In response to CAP prices, Irish milk production had doubled in the 10 years between 1972

THE CONSTANT CHALLENGE FOR IRISH FARMERS IS ADJUSTING TO THE EVER-CHANGING REQUIREMENTS OF AN EVOLVING CAP

and 1983, and the intervention system was coming under critical scrutiny. Ultimately, European farmers and the European Commission decided to maintain the price-support structure but limit production by introducing a fixed milk quota in 1984. While the IFA mounted a robust campaign opposing

milk quotas and pointing out the far greater importance of milk production in the Irish economy than any other Member State, nevertheless, quotas were to last for 30 years until finally abolished in 2015.

While it's indisputable that quotas limited Irish dairy farming, it's also important to recognise that the industry was profitable during that period and the enormous investment in processing by co-ops heavily grant-aided by the European Commission, coupled with enhanced marketing capacity, provided the platform for the the recent spectacular growth of the Irish dairy industry. Cost competitiveness is the foundation of sustainability in dairying and Teagasc Moorepark has contributed enormously through its grass-based system in this regard. European Commission grant aid for beef processing has greatly improved efficiencies in the industry.

EU structural funds have transformed facilities on Irish farms and recent years have seen massive investment in winter housing for stock, milking parlours, slurry storage – all very tangible benefits of EU structural improvements.

After the various reforms of the CAP over the past 40 years, it still remains the strongest direct-policy instrument universal among the 27 member states, accommodating all types of agriculture and food production on the European continent. A stark reminder of the importance of food security is the realisation that the world population, when Ireland entered the Common Market, was less than four billion and has doubled to eight billion in the 50 years since, and likely reach close to 10 billion by 2050.

As we embark on a new five-year CAP from 2023 to 2027, we have sight of the societal and political demands on farmers with particular emphasis on the environment. Our future is inextricably linked to European developments.

IRELAND JOINING THE EU: 'WHAT WAS THE ALTERNATIVE?'

JOHN BRUTON RECALLS A TIME BEFORE MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EEC) WHEN IRELAND WAS A 'MUCH POORER COUNTRY'. THE FORMER FINE GAEIL LEADER, TAOISEACH, OPPOSITION SPOKESPERSON FOR AGRICULTURE, AND AMBASSADOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) TO THE UNITED STATES, TELLS BERNIE COMMINS WHY THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE TO JOINING THE EEC AT THAT TIME

John was elected to represent the Meath constituency in Dáil Éireann in 1969, just four years before official membership, a time when Ireland was a 'much poorer and much more rural country'.

"While there were areas of prosperity, with a newly opening mining industry, and a very large furniture industry, there wasn't the sort of general prosperity that we are enjoying now in Ireland," he says.

In 1973, there were around 250,000 farms in the country and more than one-quarter of the total workforce was in agriculture. The overall farm population comprised a large number of small farms and in the same year, Teagasc's National Farm Survey (NFS) estimated that almost half of these farms were run on a part-time basis.

The overwhelmingly positive referendum response from the Irish electorate around that time to joining the EEC was indicative of the potential for prosperity that was identified. For farmers, part of that prosperity could come from gaining independence from our nearest neighbour and main trading partner, Britain, where 70 per cent of our food exports went back then.

"Prior to our joining the EU, our agricultural sector was – as it still is – very important, but it was handicapped by the way in which it had access to the British market. It was not subject to any form of external discipline," John explains.

"Britain was able to give subsidies to its own domestic farmers that were not available to Irish exporters. That essentially meant that British beef producers could undercut Irish beef producers substantially and get a larger share of the market. As a result of [Ireland] joining the EU, that then became impossible."

SINGLE-MOST IMPORTANT THING

Following on from that, 20 years later, the Single Market, established in 1993, was pivotal for Ireland, he says: "In the immediate term after we joined, the membership afforded us a major boost in agricultural incomes, through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Green Pound evaluation, and the like. But also later, from 1993 onwards, through the Single Market.

"Ireland was able to establish a lot of

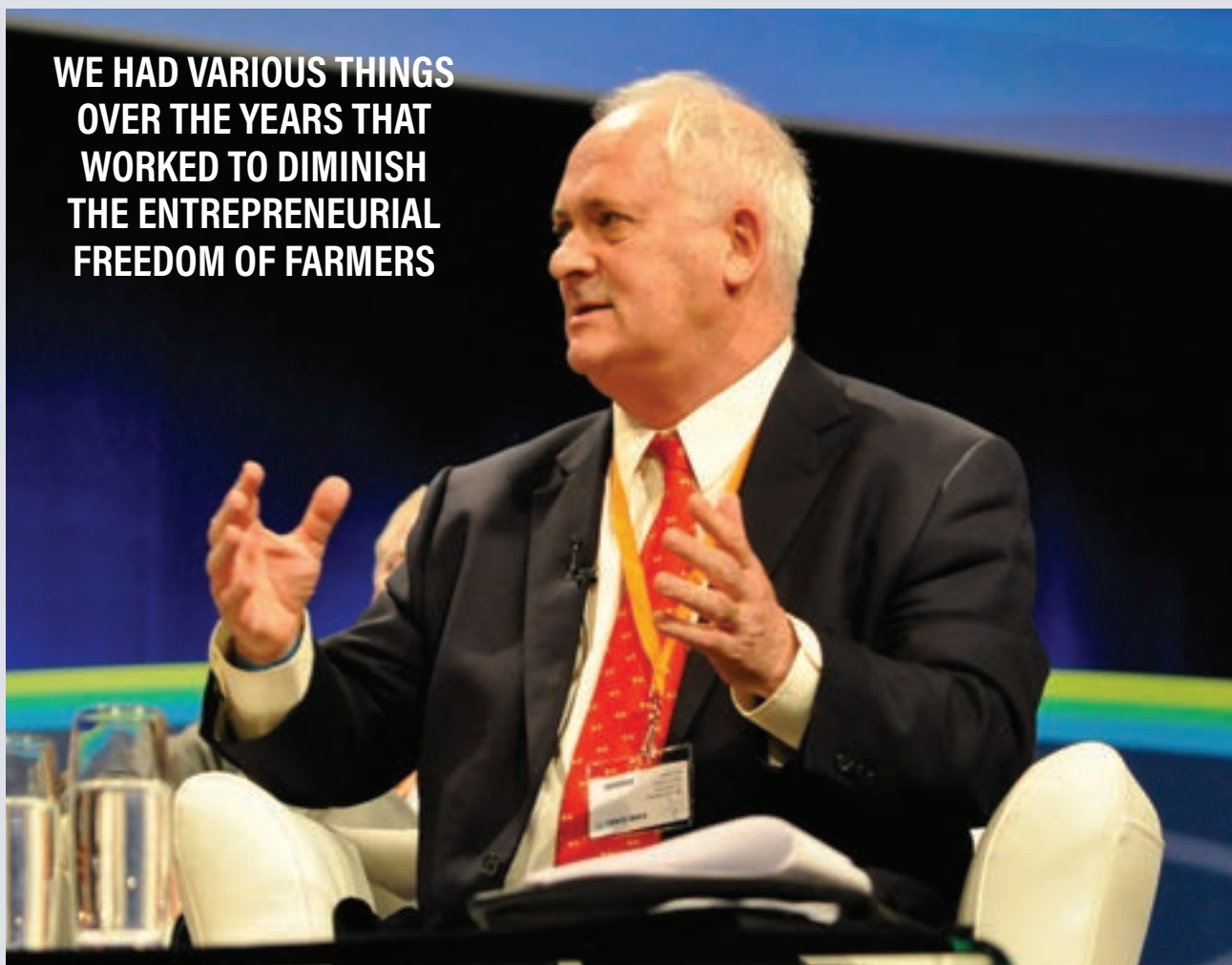
industry here on the basis that it had full and unimpeded access to the Single Market of 27 countries. This meant that, in the area of government purchasing, there could be no discrimination against us as an EU member. It meant that a small country like Ireland could compete on a level playing field." For John, Ireland's access to the Single Market is probably the most important legacy that our five-decade membership has yielded. "The really important thing was that we moved from being part of the free trade area, which was what the EU was, originally, to a single market, which was the most important development, economically speaking, not just for agriculture, but for Ireland.

"I don't think the importance of it, for this State, is adequately appreciated or explained by the Government [in the context of Brexit]. The Government is saying that we mustn't have border controls, well there are things worse than border controls and that would be us being out of the Single Market. Economically, the effects would be devastating. I think that, obviously, the income support that CAP gives to farmers is important, but the Single Market was important for everyone, farmers included."

CAP THEN AND NOW

In January 2023, the next iteration of the CAP comes into being and, reflecting on the CAP of the 1960s versus today's version, John comments: "In the 1960s, a large part of Irish agriculture worked on a free-market basis – you got the best price you could, and you made your income from the market, so it had all the advantages of enterprise. Now, increasingly, agriculture is being rule-bound. Farmers, especially in beef production, for example, are not making a living; their living is derived from income support that they have to qualify for through compliance with increasingly detailed requirements." While the aim of these requirements – improving the environment, water quality,

WE HAD VARIOUS THINGS OVER THE YEARS THAT WORKED TO DIMINISH THE ENTREPRENEURIAL FREEDOM OF FARMERS



climate-change mitigation, etc. – are necessary, they bring with them a level of bureaucracy that the farmers of four and five decades ago never experienced.

“Achieving these things requires a level of bureaucracy, and bureaucracy isn’t a bad word, it is a necessary evil, but this would have been foreign to farmers in the 1960s and the 1970s,” says John.

“Admittedly, farmers today are computer literate and agriculturally literate in ways that farmers would not have been 50 years ago. So, they can cope with this bureaucracy, but it is very different.

“At one stage, we had milk quotas that restricted milk production, and we had various things over the years that, I think, worked to diminish the entrepreneurial freedom of farmers. So, there are good changes but there is also another side,” he says.

“It is also hard to overstate the extent to which Irish incomes have increased, particularly between 1990 and 2010. And this

has meant, in a way, that other occupations, outside of farming, have become relatively more attractive. So, we have a lot of farming now done on a part-time basis. That was always the case, but I think it is more common now,” says John.

WHAT WAS THE ALTERNATIVE?

In considering the impact of EU membership on Ireland, John comments: “What is the alternative?

“OK, there have been ups and downs for farming, but generally, people have prospered and if they weren’t prospering, they had the freedom to find other work in Ireland. For other generations, they would have had to go to America or Liverpool. You can’t guarantee success for everyone, but people gained better alternatives, as well as better incomes.”

Over the next 50 years, however, he says, trade-offs will have to be made when it comes to balancing our food production with our climate targets. “We are heavily

emphasising environmental issues now, but we will have to get past the situation where we say that everything that is environmentally beneficial is necessarily the thing to do, because there may be other things that you are sacrificing. You need to look at the cost of the environmental measure and the potential benefits of approaching something in a different way,” he says.

“There will be an increased emphasis on food-production efficiency using the most sophisticated cultivation techniques to get the most food at the right time. I think there will be a shift away from beef production because it is not intrinsically as profitable, or as a means of producing a given amount of energy from a given amount of sunlight. We may have to look more at arable farming, and the value of that may have to increase. If global climate gets worse, then Ireland may well be one of the best countries to be in, and it may mean that our agriculture will have a bigger market,” he says.

'WE WERE COMPLETELY TIED BY THE APRON STRINGS TO THE UK ECONOMY'

FORMER AGRICULTURE MINISTER, MARY COUGHLAN, WAS JUST A CHILD WHEN IRELAND OFFICIALLY BECAME MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EEC), BUT SHE REMEMBERS IT BEING A HOT TOPIC OF CONVERSATION AT HOME, SHE TELLS BERNIE COMMINS

"I was just seven and, although I was very young, I do remember my mother and father having a lot of discussion – it was a political house, as you can appreciate – about what this would mean, and a bit of debate about what the impact would be," says the former Fianna Fáil minister and tánaiste.

Fianna Fáil was, of course, in power at that time and promoted a yes-vote in the referendum – alongside Fine Gael. The consensus in the Donegal-based Coughlan family, unsurprisingly, was that membership 'would have a hugely positive impact'. Mary's uncle, Clement Coughlan, was a Fianna Fáil TD from 1980-1983, while her late father, Cathal, was a TD from 1983 until his death in 1986.

"We were a small, poor country at the time, in the context of the other members who were large, fairly well-established economic entities. So, certainly, without a doubt it would be for the betterment of Ireland. And if you remember, there was resounding support for our entry with more than 80% of people supporting it. The view was that we were a small state and that without a doubt, this would make Ireland better."

Part of the reason for such strong referendum support, Mary says, was down to the fact that Ireland was so reliant on the UK at that time for our exports.

"We were very reliant on the UK, we had huge emigration [there], we were completely tied by the apron strings to the UK economy and there were concerns about how long that would last if anything happened in the UK that would have a detrimental effect on us." But the impact of membership on these close ties also caused some trepidation, she says, and the status of Northern Ireland, which was 'in turmoil' at the time, was cause for concern too.

"The other thing to note is that politics, at the time was such that people were starting

to open up. Civil servants were opening up their views and their perspectives, and were very driven about the necessity of driving this State and particularly agriculture, and that we saw opportunities in the context of that overall EU membership," she said.

CONTENTIOUS TALKS

Mary served from 2004-2008 as Fianna Fáil's agriculture minister, and was the first female politician to do so. In terms of EU headlines from that time, what stands out are the contentious World Trade Organization (WTO) talks and the threat to Irish agriculture through proposed changes to EU farm subsidies and free access to EU markets. Of that time, she says: "It wasn't easy and wasn't perfect, and we would have had needs and priorities that had to be met in the context of Irish agriculture. We would have been aligned, at the time, with the French view, or that of the southern Mediterranean countries, as opposed to the Nordics when it came to agriculture," she said.

"From my perspective, and as a former agriculture minister, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was really the only common discussion that took place in my time. And all members [EU Council of Ministers] participated, whereas interaction in my other portfolios wasn't the same.

"We [EU agriculture ministers] all knew each other very well, and had a very good relationship. We had a deep understanding of each other's agricultural sectors and their needs. We certainly worked within the context of consensus to the best of our ability and, further on, we had to work with the Parliament with co-decision making, and we worked very closely with our commissioner. "I know it used to be talked about in European circles as a club, and it was a club, but it was a good club in that we had that opportunity to pick up the phone and talk to someone if we had a concern because we knew them very



well. That interaction was hugely important," she says.

Despite the perception that Brussels made decisions and Ireland followed, and to a certain extent, still do, Mary says: "I appreciate that farmers have the view that Brussels is telling us what to do but, overall, in my view, being a participant in the EU was hugely beneficial for Irish agriculture. It gave us access to new ideas, to new markets, it has certainly supported the food industry massively, and because we have a competitive edge over our colleagues with regards to our grass-based farming practices, that gave us the opportunity, when things like the removal of the quota happened, to develop and sustain an industry." She agreed that there were occasions, of course, when Brussels issued a diktat, but being part of the EU meant that there was a process whereby everyone could work together to negotiate the best deal possible, she says.

And there have been challenges along the way, including the burden of bureaucracy: "If you talk to any farmer, the biggest challenge they have is the challenge of paperwork, inspections, and accountability.

"And that has had a considerable resource impact on the likes of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to the extent that one tick of a box, and you may not get your scheme, you know, such was the lack of flexibility.

"Now, it is all computerised of course, but these are things I would have picked up on as a politician, that people had an anxiety about, and the need for simplification."

AND THE NEGATIVES?

When asked about the potential negatives of our EU involvement, its impact on our smaller farmers is mentioned. Despite the increased spend on agriculture under CAP, the numbers of farmers in Ireland have dropped; the most productive enterprises have thrived, while others have not.

"There has been an ongoing difficulty between the large and the small farmer and determining what is viable and otherwise,"

she says. In rural areas, where depletion of farming has occurred, it may have had a knock-on effect on terms of the mental health of farmers; the local economy; the social aspect of the local mart, for example.

Now, with a more concentrated focus on the environment and the impact of climate change, there is also the challenge of finding a balance between sustainable farming and food production.

"So, how are we going to sustain farming life as a consequence, and how are we going to make an economically viable option for the larger farmers, and still be able to support smaller people on the land, and where are the new opportunities?

"Organics, for example, have become hugely important, getting that premium for your product. It is about what Ireland can do differently that will be accepted on the European market and on the world market."

FEMALE FARMERS

Recently, Mary has been asked by Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConologue, to lead a dialogue here in Ireland about the role of women in farming. It

is recognised that more than 58,000 women are working on farms in Ireland without official recognition or status. Has the EU done enough throughout the decades to promote women in farming, does she think?

"Policy-making in the past was definitely gender-led. Now, we see that it [recognition of women in agriculture] is part of the CAP, so having it within that context is going to be hugely important. The minister [McConologue] is very supportive and is anxious that this dialogue will take place – in the new year – and that we will have some actions that can be realised and supported. We have to be ambitious with regards to gender equality and ensuring that there are opportunities there for women.

"There have been a lot of women behind the scenes [in agriculture] who were the bedrock; they did the paperwork, they were there when the vet came, they were there for calving, were very much part of the family farm. But they didn't own the farm, or they weren't in partnership.

"The fact that this is supported now within the CAP framework means that, at long last, gender will be part of those conversations."

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CATCHING A GLIMPSE

A LOOK AT HOW IRELAND'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (EEC), AS IT WAS KNOWN 50 YEARS AGO, SHAPED IRISH AGRICULTURE

Ireland signs the Treaty of Accession to join the EEC in January

Referendum in May – 70.3% turnout with 83.09% voting in favour of joining

1972

Ireland is on course to join the Common Market, and be part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which was established 10 years earlier

Ireland officially joins the EEC on January 1

1973

First major CAP reform – introduction of quotas on milk production, significantly impacting our dairy sector

1984

Second major CAP reform – MacSharry reforms – saw a shift from commodity price supports to direct payments to sustain farm incomes

1992

Environmental measures under CAP were also introduced

'Agenda 2000' programme led to the creation of a second pillar of the CAP, which would be dedicated to rural development

1992

**PIVOT
MOM**

1973-2020

Under the CAP, €64.7bn was invested in supporting Irish farmers and rural development projects

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1973, Ireland imported more than it exported – €1.4bn versus €1.1bn. In 2020, our imports were valued at €85.3bn and exports exceeded €160bn



2023-2027

New CAP – seeks to enhance the contribution of agriculture to EU environmental and climate goals, provide greater redistribution, more targeted support to smaller farms

Member States given greater flexibility than before to adapt measures to local conditions

Milk quotas are abolished

2015

Common Fisheries Policy reform – the EU adopted a €239m investment package for the Irish fisheries and aquaculture sectors for six years from 2014 to 2020

Irish Presidency Reform aimed to promote competitiveness, sustainable practices, innovation, growth of rural areas and to better link financial resources to the productive use of land

2013

It also aimed to respond to new concerns such as climate change, animal welfare, food safety and the sustainable use of natural resources

2008

'Health Check' of CAP, which agreed on the abolition of milk quotas to be introduced in 2015

2003

Luxembourg CAP reform introduced 'decoupling' – the single farm payment – with the fundamental aim of reducing the link between direct payments and production

**TOTAL
EVENTS**

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SUSTAINABILITY

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

TEAGASC'S SIGNPOST PROGRAMME HAS THE EVENTUAL AIM OF IMPROVING THE SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS OF IRISH FARMING ACROSS ALL RELEVANT PARAMETERS. WITHOUT A STANDARDISED STARTING POINT, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ESTABLISH AND QUANTIFY IMPROVEMENTS ACROSS THE DIFFERENT SECTORS, WRITES MATT O'KEEFFE

With the carbon and other key component baselines for 2021 now finalised for all Signpost farms across dairy, beef, sheep and tillage, the way is clear to determine how intensive advice and adoption will deliver tangible results.

Cooperation will be a key element of ultimate success. The cooperation of the Signpost farmers is a given. They have volunteered for the programme and have committed to introducing and/or intensifying a variety of management practices which, it is hoped, will deliver significant improvements across emission rates, soil fertility improvements, reductions in carbon metrics, while also safeguarding and improving the economic sustainability of their farms.

DEMONSTRATION AND ADOPTION

Presuming that the Signpost Programme delivers major improvements on the farms involved, the next, and more challenging, step will be to improve all those figures on every farm in the country. That challenge should not be underestimated. The reality is that the reach of the advisory services, Teagasc, and private service providers, is low. There may be occasional interaction for the purposes of the scheme and Basic

Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) applications, but the reality is that more than half of Irish farmers do not avail of regular advisory services for their farm-management practices. This does not make the challenge insurmountable, but it is likely that some degree of coercion may be necessary to ensure widespread adoption of the proposed management changes that will come from the likely success of the Signpost Programme.

Demonstration and adoption are two different things. Unless all farmers can be persuaded to adopt most, if not all, of the practices involved, the average figures for Irish farms will not improve sufficiently to reach the magic 25 per cent reduction in emissions required. Scale will help. If success can be achieved on 80 per cent of the land, then the average improvement, overall, will be delivered on. That still requires an enormous change in farm-management practices, greater than anything achieved over the past half century.

A PROFITABLE CHANGE

In suckler farming, for example, there are clear benefits from a change in breeding practice. Several months ago, *Irish Farmers*

Monthly interviewed Michael and Niall Biggins, who run a suckler herd on the Galway/Mayo border and are Signpost farmers. One of their key breeding-management practices is to calve down their first-calver heifers at, or around, two years of age. That might seem like a common practice but the reality on the majority of suckler farms is much different. Fewer than 25 per cent of suckler heifers calve down under 26 months of age. That compares unfavourably to dairy heifers where the average calving age for 75 per cent of first calvers is from 22 months to 26 months of age.

The benefits for suckler farms of lower calving age are economic as well as environmental. Moving from a first-calving average age of three years to two years would reduce the carbon footprint of the farm by 12 per cent. It is also calculated that the cost, per month, of calving after 24 months is €50 per month for each heifer. Bringing the average first-calving age down to 24 months for at least the same 75 per cent rate, as on dairy farms, would deliver impressive economic and environmental benefits. We should not, however, underestimate the challenge of achieving that change, especially in the time frame



necessary to meet our emissions targets. The research is there to prove the value of change, the advisory services are in place to assist in adopting change and Teagasc has 24 suckler Signpost farms around the country to demonstrate where positive change has been achieved and is delivering tangible benefits, most especially

emissions per hectare and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per kilogramme of output for Signpost farms, along with other key sustainability metrics. The key statistic to watch is the year-on-year change for a farm. You don't need to measure yourself against other farms in terms of total GHG emissions, but you do need to track your own total GHG

THE REALITY IS THAT MORE THAN HALF OF IRISH FARMERS DO NOT AVAIL OF REGULAR ADVISORY SERVICES FOR THEIR FARM-MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

increased profitability. Achieving a 75 per cent two-year calving adoption rate across our suckler herds by 2030 is a challenging proposition.

MEASURING CHANGE

Head of the Signpost Programme, Tom O'Dwyer, puts the challenge of change in context: "As with any change process, it is important to know your starting point. We now have this information for the

emissions and, where possible, take steps to reduce them."

Bord Bia's Sustainable Quality Assurance Scheme provides feedback reports to farmers through its sustainability survey. The reports contain a farm's carbon footprint figure as well as other sustainability measurements. The planned strategy, using a platform that is being built by Teagasc, the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation and Bord Bia, is that farmers will be able to access

these figures online and then work with their advisors to increase sequestration and reduce emissions on their farms

NITROGEN-USE EFFICIENCY

When chemical nitrogen was relatively cheap, there was less awareness or concern around its efficiency rate; in other words, how much of the applied nitrogen is taken up by the grass plant to promote growth. On average, on dairy farms (where the highest utilisation figures are measured) the usage efficiency for chemical and organic nitrogen is less than 30 per cent. The rest of the application presumably goes up into the atmosphere or runs into watercourses or down into the sub-soil and, ultimately, into groundwater. A 25 per cent increase in nitrogen-use efficiency would bring environmental, water quality, and economic benefits. More use of protected urea, the widespread adoption of low emission slurry spreading (LESS), and targeted spreading dates and rates, aligned to weather and growth patterns would go a long way to achieving a target of 40 per cent nitrogen efficiency. That is another primary target for Teagasc's Signpost farms.

"A number of Signpost farms are already achieving targets in relation to nitrogen-use efficiency, protected urea use, LESS usage, and spring application of slurry. The challenge for the Signpost Programme is to convince more farmers to follow their example," said Tom.

COMPULSION OR PERSUASION?

The average baselines for the Signpost farms show the scope for improvement. Nitrogen-use efficiency on dairy farms is 28 per cent and on beef farms it is half that figure. Plenty of potential to improve in both cases. Nitrogen applied as protected urea on the Signpost dairy farms is 40 per cent, while average usage on beef farms is 18%. There is little reason why it couldn't be doubled in both cases. LESS use on dairy farms is high at 92 per cent, while adoption is only 42 per cent on beef farms. Persuasion has worked on dairy farms with high investment in LESS equipment. Have lower incomes dissuaded greater adoption on beef farms? If that is the case, then a fresh strategy of persuasion with even greater financial support must be considered. Whether that must be accompanied by a greater degree of regulatory compulsion remains to be seen.



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IRELAND'S ANAEROBIC DIGESTION AMBITION

AT A RECENT CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY RENEWABLE GAS FORUM IRELAND (RGFI), AMBITIOUS PLANS TO DEVELOP A €1BN BIOMETHANE SECTOR IN IRELAND WERE REVEALED. LARGE-SCALE, AGRICULTURAL ANAEROBIC DIGESTION (AD) PLANTS COULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THIS NEW SECTOR, BUT WE ARE STARTING FROM A LOW BASELINE, WRITES BERNIE COMMINS

According to Teagasc, the potential for an indigenous biomethane industry comes mainly from the abundance of grassland that can be used to grow feedstock for AD, and the significant number of livestock producing large quantities of slurry that can be co-digested with grass and grass silage in the AD process.

There was consensus at the RGFI conference, which heard from over 30 speakers from Ireland, the EU and the US – where AD biomethane production is already well-advanced – that ambitious AD plans would offer farmers a new and viable diversification option. They would also contribute greatly to Ireland achieving

our legally binding climate targets, as well as helping the agricultural sector hit emissions-ceiling success.

THE SECOND-BEST TIME FOR AD

There is a saying that 'the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second-best time is now'. Similar can be said of Ireland's indigenous biomethane sector, which is very much in its infancy, but which is slowly lifting itself off the floor.

In the Government's budget for 2023, €3m in State investment was allocated to help reach a target of 150-200 operational AD plants by 2030. This number, according to the Minister for the Environment, Climate,

BIOMETHANE FUND

In mid-November, the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), managed and controlled by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) announced that it is putting in place a dedicated biomethane fund of €200m.

Communications and Transport, Eamon Ryan, is necessary to achieve another target – 5.7TWh of biomethane by the end of the decade, satisfying about 10% of our current natural gas demand. The AD plants required for this, he said, would likely be larger than a

A national heat study carried out by the Sustainable Energy Authority in February 2022 found that the availability of sustainable biomethane is linked to land-use choices and requires increased productivity in the agricultural sector. "It can be a competitive option if the costs and benefits are shared across all gas grid users or used off-grid to displace oil," the study found.

A biogas plant on a German farm.



Biomethane produced from an anaerobic process is a carbon-neutral gas, that can, according to Teagasc, 'seamlessly replace natural gas' and is 'fully compatible with existing appliances, technologies and vehicles.'

WHAT IS AD?

According to Teagasc, anaerobic digestion (AD) is a multi-step process whereby organic waste and residues are converted into biogas by a group of microorganisms in an anaerobic environment. In Ireland, biogas would be most useful if used for renewable heat or transport. Biogas refers to the gas prior to upgrading, which contains approximately 55 per cent methane (CH_4), while biomethane refers to the upgraded gas, containing approximately 97 per cent CH_4 . Anaerobic digestion plants can be fed a wide range of organic feedstocks. There are many suitable feedstocks for biogas production from the agricultural sector, including crops such as maize specifically cultivated for biogas production, animal slurry and manures, as well as waste and by-products from agri-industries.



Minister Charlie McConalogue addressing the RGFI conference.

farm-scale plant, with the average time from concept to commissioning taking three to four years.

More recently, the same minister announced renewable heat obligation scheme, to be implemented by 2024. The obligation will incentivise suppliers of all fuels in the heat sector to ensure that a certain proportion of the energy supplied is renewable.

And the final report of the Food Vision Dairy Group also recommended the use of anaerobic digestion to produce biomethane to help decarbonise the dairy sector, as well as the use of the AD digestate as an alternative to nitrogen.

So, things are moving in the right direction, but when you consider that Northern Ireland has around 80 AD plants and the south has around 14, we do need to move faster. And while the above Government support is welcome it is a drop in the ocean in terms of overall funding, policy and regulatory support required to make a proper AD dent.

COST AND BENEFIT

At RGFI's recent conference, it revealed its AD ambitions to have 130 plants operational in rural Ireland by 2030. In terms of output, the RGFI indicated that 2.5TWh of biomethane

I HAVE COMMITTED TO DIVERTING CARBON TAX MONEY OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS TO AD DEVELOPMENT

would be produced by 2030 and 9.5TWh by 2050. Such an undertaking would require capital funding of €1bn and, the group believes, would create around 3,000 jobs. RGFI has made a submission to Government for €100m capital funding to 2025, which is necessary to develop an initial 20 AD biomethane plants, it said. An RGFI spokesperson said: "Ireland is now recognised by the Government as having the potential to be a major player in biomethane production, using agricultural feedstock on-farm AD, as well as dedicated waste-fed plants. As part of the recent agreement on sectoral emissions ceilings, the Government committed to delivering up to 5.7 Twh of indigenously produced biomethane, a three-fold increase from the Climate Action Plan 2021. This level of ambition is in recognition

of the key role that anaerobic digestion producing biomethane can play in providing a diversification opportunity for farmers, as well as providing a renewable gas supply for gas consumers, including the food and drinks industry and the transport sector."

NATIONAL STRATEGY

Speaking at the conference, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue acknowledged the AD potential and highlighted recent budget support pledged by him: "Being cognisant of the need for capital support to develop an anaerobic digestion industry of scale, which is agriculture focused and farmer centric, I have committed to diverting carbon tax money over the next four years to AD development and I am also committed to mobilising the National Development Plan capital allocation in due course." But, he said there is a need across Government to define a strategic policy direction. And he confirmed that, along with the Department of Environment, Climate Action and Communications, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will co-lead the development of a national biomethane strategy.



NETWORKS



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SUSTAINABLE TOTY: WHAT TICKS ITS BOXES?

A recent category addition to the annual Tractor Of The Year (TOTY) awards is Sustainable TOTY, which was introduced about four years ago.

The word sustainable is as common as muck across all facets of agriculture today – for all the right reasons – but what does it mean in tractor terms, and what boxes does a machine have to tick to take the coveted TOTY title?

According to TOTY, the concept of sustainability in a tractor encompasses several things: comfort; safety; efficiency; and connectivity. And while it also involves looking at new engines and alternative fuels, and how technology can make future tractors more efficient, more effective, and more environmentally friendly, Sustainable TOTY is not an award for the 'greenest tractor', per se, but for the innovation that can deliver on all the above.

Chair of TOTY, Fabio Zammaretti, explains the place of Sustainable TOTY within the overall award.

"It is divided into four categories in order to better represent the agricultural tractor market," he says.

"The historical TOTY category, which gave the contest its name, is dedicated to open field tractors; the Best Utility category is dedicated to multi-purpose and utility tractors with power ranges between 70-150hp; and the Best of Specialized category sees the jury evaluate orchard, vineyard, and other specialised tractors.

"Last, but not least, there is a special category called Sustainable TOTY, in which all of the shortlisted tractors from the three previous categories are also eligible to win."



Chair of TOTY,
Fabio Zammaretti.

METHANE-POWERED

Last year, the first commercially produced methane-powered tractor was awarded Sustainable TOTY for 2022. New Holland's T6.180 certainly represented a step forward to more sustainable farming, says Fabio. Its FPT, six-cylinder, CNG-powered engine promised the same performance as the diesel equivalent but with reduced fuel costs, together with a significant drop in pollution, and CO₂ emissions. A win-win for environment and the driver, and a worthy recipient of the award.

"With this prize, we are trying to give direction to the sustainability concept when we talk about an industrial product such as an agricultural tractor," Fabio explains.

"For sure, it cannot be only about the emissions. But it is also it's driven by sustainability trends, such as how digital

technology positively effects a tractor's efficiency; automation and how the autonomous driving impacts everyday use of a tractor; how digital services will make maintenance more predictable and make driving a kind of new experience; electrification, not only of engines, but also PTOs and implement uses; and alternative fuels such as gas, hybrid and electric engine. "To cut a long story short, this is not an award to the greenest tractor, it's all about how new technologies are making tractors more connected, more efficient, more reliable, safer, more effective on soil protection and less polluting."

SUCCESS FOR JCB

This year, the 2023 Sustainable TOTY award went to JCB's Fastrac iCON, which fully satisfied these requirements, Fabio says.

"Despite its generous dimensions, it impressed the jury with its agility, numerous steering options, including 'crab mode' which makes it gentle on soil, and thorough optimisation of the entire package – the hardware and the software." As well as that, JCB also offers coaching that allows clients to tailor the tractor to their demands. Fabio adds: "The GPS systems and integrated connectivity services like fleet management and predictive maintenance are at a new level. And the top speed on the road, where allowed, can reach 60km/h, so less time on the road equals more time in the field."

Again, a win-win for environment, and driver.



The 2023 Sustainable TOTY
winner, JCB's Fastrac iCON.

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PESTICIDE RESEARCH: '70 HOURS LATER, THE BUMBLEBEES WERE STILL MERRILY FORAGING'

VERY LITTLE HAS BEEN RESEARCHED AND PUBLISHED ABOUT THE USE OF HERBICIDES AND FUNGICIDES BY IRISH FARMERS, AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE ECOSYSTEM, SPECIFICALLY ON OUR SOILS AND OUR POLLINATORS. DR ED STRAW, A RESEARCH FELLOW AT TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN CHATS TO BERNIE COMMINS ABOUT 'PROTECTS', THE FOUR-YEAR RESEARCH PROJECT THAT IS CHANGING ALL THAT



This large-scale research project is funded by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, and is being carried out collaboratively by University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin City University, Maynooth University and Teagasc.

The extensive body of research commenced in 2018 and is set to wrap up in February 2023, with much detail and findings yet to be published. But the project's aims can be summarised as follows: to develop risk-assessment scenarios for pesticides in Irish soils and recommendations for a national soil-monitoring programme; and provide recommendations and potential measures to mitigate the effects of pesticides on pollinators and other ecosystem service providers.

EU CHEMICAL PESTICIDE PLAN

The researchers' work is timely in the context of the European Commission's plan to cut chemical pesticide use by 50% by 2030, as part of the Farm to Fork Strategy. While not an outright ban, it is understood that the proposals – which would be legally binding on Member States – will lead to a decline in pesticide usage in public places.

Very often the conversation around pesticide usage is limited to farmers and agricultural settings, but, according to Dr Straw, this does not tell the whole story. As part of the research,

Dr Straw and his colleagues found that while there are close to 900 pesticide products on the market for farmers, there are close to 300 products on the market for general public purchase in supermarkets and other retail settings. A focus on all pesticide usage is important but stricter standards should be applied to non-food production usage, Dr Straw says. That is another story for another day.

PESTICIDES AND POLLINATORS

Pesticides can be found as residues in soils where they may build up over time, but they may also be taken up by plants, and occur in the nectar and pollen they produce, causing potential hazards for pollinators.

"The first step that we took was to look at what the data said and what was being used, then the second step we took was to look at the available literature on this," says Dr Straw. What they found was there was very little of both and so, not a lot of knowledge of the effects of herbicides and fungicides – those substances mainly used in Ireland – on bees and soils.

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR

One aspect of the extensive research looked at the buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) and the impact of glyphosate-based herbicides on their foraging behaviour, Dr Straw explains. Glyphosate is one of the

most widely used herbicides in the world, in both agricultural and non-agricultural settings. Its exposure to bumblebees may be greater than previously thought, and warranted deeper delving.

So, when presented with a choice of foraging on plants that were treated with glyphosate and those that were not, what did the bees do?

"What we found was that the bees would forage on both of those plants with very little discrimination at all," says Dr Straw.

"They were quite happy foraging on the herbicide-treated plants, which goes against the popular assumption that once you've sprayed with the herbicide, it dies, and bees won't be exposed to that pesticide. Seventy hours later, and the bumblebees were still merrily foraging away on it," says Dr Straw.

SHORTCOMINGS

The outcome of this particular aspect of the research is important in highlighting a shortcoming in the way pesticide-impact on insects is currently measured, Dr Straw explains. Currently, this is limited to whether the substance kills bees, and what amount of it kills bees.

"That is the majority of the information that's taken to assess whether or not these substances should be approved for usage. But even if they are not killing bees, they can still be hurting them, they can impair their learning or their ability to reproduce. If they can't contribute to the next generation of bees, then this is problematic," he points out. "So one of the things that we're calling for is that we look at the impacts of pesticides at a regulatory level. So when the government and the European Union and the European Food Safety Authority are deciding what should and shouldn't be allowed, we need to be looking at sublethal metrics – the things that happened before an insect dies, we should be measuring their health."

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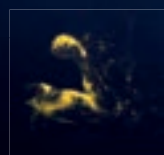
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FARMER AMBASSADOR

NICHOLAS COONEY, A DAIRY FARMER IN CO. LOUTH, TOOK ON THE ROLE OF A NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL (NDC) FARMER AMBASSADOR AS A WAY OF CONTRIBUTING TO THE NARRATIVE AROUND FARMING IN IRELAND IN A POSITIVE WAY

Nicholas farms with his wife and three children in Monasterboice in Co. Louth.

He farms 500 acres and has 480 cows. His passion for his work has seen him join the NDC in its Farmer Ambassador programme, where he is keen to shine a light on the hard work being undertaken by farmers all over the country towards climate action issues: "I can see that across social media and in some mainstream media outlets there is a lot of farmer bashing going on, particularly regarding livestock farming in the context of sustainability and climate action. I felt that getting involved in NDC's programme was a good way of trying to promote our industry to show what we are doing on the ground towards these issues. Farmers feel under attack and I want to counter this. There is huge pressure on the farming community to reduce emissions and meet targets but there is an awful lot of innovative work going on already and this needs to be promoted."

REDUCING THE HERD

Nicholas adds that reducing the herd is not the answer: "Simply saying we need to get rid of all the cows is not the answer. It's a



dramatic thing to say and it is easy to run with as a soundbite which is simplified and dramatic, but it won't solve the problem. I am not denying that we have a problem though. But in Ireland, unlike France or Germany for example, we don't have other large industries to compare our agricultural industry against. And tackling climate action is a global issue, not a national one. Ireland is one of the most sustainable producers of dairy in the world and demand for the product is there. If we simply cut production, it will be produced elsewhere but in a less sustainable fashion.

"As farmers, we know we have to adapt and change, and I believe we will meet our targets. I would argue that agriculture is one of the few industries in Ireland that is doing an awful lot about the climate issue and has been for years. There is an awful lot of work to do, but Irish farmers are putting the work in."

A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH

It's all very well to say 'let's reduce or do away with nitrogen' but the fact of the matter is that people around the world rely on it for almost half of our global food production and food security needs to be protected. Imagine if we were suggesting that all mobile phones are banned, or computers are banned? Or that we ban televisions? They all have a carbon footprint, from mining raw materials to the production of them. But that would not be a popular suggestion and it would not make sense as an overnight solution from an economic point of view. No politician would ever suggest this. I think farmers are an easy target, but it is our job to speak up and promote the good in our industry. Yes, we know things need to change and we are happy to work on that problem, and here are the ways we are doing it..."

PRACTICAL MEASURES

Citing some examples of how Nicholas is practically addressing climate issues on his own farm he says: "We have been using protected area on our farm for the last four years exclusively. It reduces the emissions

I WOULD ARGUE THAT AGRICULTURE IS ONE OF THE FEW INDUSTRIES IN IRELAND THAT IS DOING AN AWFUL LOT ABOUT THE CLIMATE ISSUE AND HAS BEEN FOR YEARS

of ammonia into the atmosphere when it is spread so this is a big step towards improving our sustainability credentials. In addition, this year alone, 15 per cent of our total milking platform has been reseeded with clover, which we have been doing for a few years now – at this stage probably about 30-40 per cent of our total grassland area is clover so that will help to reduce the amount of nitrogen by about 20 per cent. We can measure this and give quantifiable examples of improvements here.

"Another measure we have taken is the rating of our cows using the economic breeding index. We are using this to breed a more sustainable cow and we can measure how efficient it is in terms of carbon emissions, so that's a massive game changer. These are just some examples of what is being done on the farm to become more sustainable but everything we do now takes into account environmental measures, whether it be around slurry spreading or measuring moisture content in soil."



Supporting Farmers for Climate Action

Teagasc has launched its Climate Action Strategy 2022- 2030 to support farmers and the agri-food sector to meet the climate challenge by reducing greenhouse gasses and increasing carbon capture.

The three key pillars of the action strategy are:

- A Signpost Advisory Programme
- A Sustainability Digital Platform
- A Virtual National Centre for Agri-Food Climate Research Innovation

Urgent action is needed. All farmers are being encouraged to adopt the technologies that are proven to reduce emissions.

Signpost Advisory Programme

The Teagasc Signpost Advisory programme complements the Signpost Demonstration Farm programme which has 65 partners and over 120 demonstration farms. The Signpost Advisory programme will be open to all farmers, to help to develop a tailored action plan for each individual farm.



Sustainable Digital Platform

Teagasc in co-operation with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and Bord Bia, and supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, is building a new digital platform to facilitate a whole farm sustainability assessment.



Virtual National Centre for Agri-food Climate Research Innovation

Teagasc is establishing a new virtual centre, to co-ordinate climate research and innovation programmes, and accelerate efforts to bring 'almost ready' and 'early stage' technologies required for adoption at farm level, to fruition.



See www.teagasc.ie/climateaction
for more information

SUSTAINABILITY AT WORK – AND PAYING OFF

EARLIER IN 2022, TIRLÁN INTRODUCED A SUSTAINABILITY PAYMENT FOR SUPPLIERS WHO AGREE TO CARRY OUT A RANGE OF SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS ON THEIR FARMS. THE PAYMENT, PART OF TIRLÁN'S SUSTAINABLE ACTION PLAN, TOTALS €54M OVER THREE YEARS, AND FARMERS WHO DELIVER ANY SEVEN SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS FROM A TOTAL OF 16 OPTIONS CAN QUALIFY FOR THE PAYMENT

Milk supplier, Bryan Daniels is undertaking 14 of the 16 options and is urging fellow suppliers to do similar now to ensure they get the 0.5c/L bonus payment from next year.

"The only two actions we're not undertaking on the family farm here are incorporating multi-species swards and taking part in the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP). Clover is working well and is giving us a higher level of resilience and we're sticking with it. We're not in an ASSAP area because the quality of our water is already high," says Bryan.

WHEN A PLAN COMES TOGETHER

The process involved in signing up to the sustainability plan was not difficult, Bryan explains: "I made myself a cup of tea and sat down to declare my actions. I'd the whole thing done before I had finished my tea. All these actions mean farmers will end up with more money in their pocket in the long run. It's great to see a milk processor and our customers showing such an interest in the work we are doing on farm, and rewarding us for this."

SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS

Bryan describes the sustainable actions being taken on his Kilkenny farm – old and new: "We've incorporated clover into our pastures, we're milk recording, working on our EBI and have been using low emission slurry spreading for 10 years. We've used protected urea for seven years and are regularly planting trees and hedgerows.

"We have a nutrient-management plan, fenced-off waterways, solar panels, we are part of the Twenty20 Beef Club, and are herd disease screening as well as using selective dry-cow therapy for the past six years. We try to not to buffer feed during the summer but if we do, we make sure it is a low protein percentage feed and we're using sexed semen."

NUFFIELD STUDY

Bryan, an Operation Biodiversity ambassador (a Tirlán initiative), is about to begin a Nuffield Scholarship, which will see him undertake a study to identify the restrictions and solutions to incorporating clover on Irish grassland farms.

"Clover is working very well for us and is giving us a higher level of resilience. I'll be able to share my learnings with other farmers. We've recorded 15.1 tonnes of grass with 147kg of chemical nitrogen per hectare, so far, and will achieve 16 tonnes by the end of the year."

PROMOTING BIODIVERSITY

Preparation for further planting work continued throughout the summer and next on the agenda on the family farm at Kilmoganny, outside Kilkenny, is the planting of about 200m of hedge in addition to tackling an 80m stretch of very old hedging that is dying back. Bryan and his wife Gail will cut out some of the old wood to encourage growth.

"We're constantly doing our bit to promote biodiversity and hand the farm over in an even better state to the next generation as it was when we took over," Bryan says.

"We've just built two owl boxes – one for the barn and one for the farmyard. We have a good population of house martins and swallows and plan to build a better place for the house martins to nest. We've also earmarked an extensive grassland area with native grass and flowers which will provide great feeding for winter."

I MADE MYSELF A CUP OF TEA AND SAT DOWN TO DECLARE MY ACTIONS. I'D THE WHOLE THING DONE BEFORE I HAD FINISHED MY TEA

A RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

Bryan Daniels was Teagasc Student of the Year in 2001; FBD Young Farmer of the Year in 2007; and Teagasc Overall and Sustainable Farming Grassland Farmer of the Year in 2019. He was one of several Tirlán suppliers recognised at the recent CellCheck awards.

ICMSA

THE UNBRIDGEABLE CREDIBILITY GAP IN AGRI-CLIMATE POLICY



Pat McCormack,
President, ICMSA

Under the current circumstances, it is almost impossible for the ICMSA to 'sign-on' to both the Food Vision Dairy Group and the Food Vision Beef and Sheep Group proposals. The reason is straightforward, in our view. There is an unbridgeable credibility gap between the detail and energy with which the Government is planning to curb Irish farming and food production and the casual, half-hearted and strolling pace with which they outline the level of supports to be offered farmers impacted by the quite-drastring cuts envisaged. Despite our repeated requests, there is no detail on how the Government will be supporting those affected farmers through this programme of managed reductions. This is the exact boundary between credible and incredible, where you have all farmer duties fully detailed right down to individual specified hedges, while the Government's proclaimed duties and commitments to supporting the farmers through this downward transition are mysteriously vague.

Noone – least of all farmers with our long experience of these situations – should even be asked to 'sign-on, sight-unseen' to a policy that by the Government's own

admission is almost certain to involve year-on-year reductions in volumes to a degree that must mean double-digit reductions in income.

I'm blue in the face explaining this to the other side. Whatever about the obviously flawed logic behind reducing production of, say, dairy in the most sustainable and low-emissions production environment in the Northern Hemisphere, the idea that we will embark on that policy and leave thousands of farmers twisting in the financial wind as their incomes fall while costs and interest rates rise is downright delusional. Farmers will not be fobbed off with some vague and worthless assurance that 'sure we might get around to that at some stage later on when we have the time and if we ever have the money.' That's just never going to work.

It's time to stop looking sincere for the cameras and announcing airy 'packages of measures' that will support the farmers through this programme that is being inflicted on them. We need to see the detail of the funding supports before embarking on this policy of adjustment. And that's going to mean a pause on these blustery announcements to farmer meetings or

conferences and a line-by-line engagement with farmer organisations that sets out in minute detail how the funding is to be calculated, allocated and then ringfenced from raiding by the Government every time some other issue gets the media focus and is deemed to need resources.

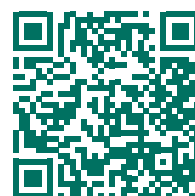
We will want to see year-on-year dedicated funding – whether from Just Transition or other funds – that sets out the exact circumstances and qualifications for farmer access to the emissions reduction funding. The farmers are the ones who will be making the transition and they are the ones whose incomes will be reduced – the funding must be kept for them and not siphoned off for audits, consultations or 'plans.' It's time for the Government to put its money where its media message – and mouth – has been. If we are going to embark on the madness of reducing food production in one of the least environmentally stressful countries in the world, then so be it. But ICMSA is going to insist that every cent the Government said it would commit is committed and that those funds go to the people who will carry the heaviest burden of this illogical policy – Ireland's farmers.



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DRY COW MANAGEMENT FOR MAXIMUM SUCCESS

NIALL NOLAN, INTOUCH FEEDING SPECIALIST AT ALLTECH IRELAND, HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF DECISION-MAKING AROUND THE DRY COW PERIOD FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE

December is typically the busiest month for drying off cows in most spring-calving herds throughout the country, and many farmers look forward to a slightly reduced workload for the weeks leading up to calving.

However, while this rest period may benefit the farmer, we must be sure not to neglect dry cows. The dry cow period should be viewed as pre-season training rather than time off for the cows. Decisions made now will greatly affect the performance of these cows in the coming lactation.

As a result of this year's challenging grass growth conditions in most parts of the country, many herds have consumed higher volumes of concentrate feed than usual. While this was the correct decision for matching cows' requirements where grass availability was low, many herds are now finding themselves with cows in better body condition compared to previous years. While this is not a negative, it does require some extra management decisions for feeding these cows between now and calving. Cows fed silage ad-lib for the dry period will put on extra condition, even with low-DMD silages. Where dry cows are fed 13kg DM of a 67 DMD silage at 10.2 ME (metabolisable energy), they will consume approximately 133Mj of energy. For a dry cow requiring maintenance over this period, 105Mj is sufficient. In this example, there is an oversupply of 28Mj of energy per day or sufficient energy to put on 0.5kg of body weight. This equates to 30kg extra body weight over a typical 60-day dry period for already well-conditioned cows.

A diet now commonly seen on farms in Ireland and abroad is a controlled energy high fibre (CEHF) diet. This programme involves drying off the cow at the ideal body condition (3–3.25) and only feeding a maintenance diet for the dry period. This offers significant benefits for cows already on target to carry them through to calving without increasing body condition, as over-conditioned cows are four to nine times more likely to encounter



metabolic issues around calving. In addition to managing body condition, the CEHF diet also provides massive benefits in maintaining rumen fill for the dry period. Typically, late lactation cows indoors eat approximately 18kg of dry matter. However, this figure falls to between 13–14kg DM when dried off due to the cow's requirements reducing when milk production ceases. The issue with this occurs when these cows calve down and are moved to a fresh cow diet. Their intakes are limited by the volume they had been eating as dry cows, even as their requirements rapidly increase post-calving. This situation leads to cows milking off their backs to meet requirements and, in turn, leaves them in a negative energy balance state for a prolonged period. Cows consuming a high-fibre diet, including straw, will maintain greater rumen fill, allowing them to consume greater volumes of a fresh cow diet, reducing fat mobilisation and significantly reducing the time spent in the negative energy balance state. Other benefits of this CEHF diet include

significant savings on silage stocks for this period, dilution of high-potassium silages linked to milk fevers, decreasing overall metabolic issues at calving, lessening difficulty with oversized calves and reducing the overall dry-cow diet costs compared to ad-libitum grass silage.

Before starting dry-cow feeding this year, it is essential to take note of where you are coming from and assess the level of health issues encountered this spring. You must also realise the costs associated with these problems and additional workload they demand during the busiest period.

Key tasks moving forward include:

- Assessing the BCS of the herd;
- Testing dry-cow silages for nutrient and mineral status;
- Planning how you are going to avoid potential issues if encountered previously;
- Considering late-calving cows and the extra condition they will lay down;
- Making decisions now to form the foundation for the coming season.

Dairy Christmas



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MESSAGES

- Your motto for 2023 – measure, assess, plan, do, review.
- Establish tonnes of grass utilised and analyse it – 'why low'.
- Analyse the reason your six-week calving rate was low in 2022.
- Manage your financial 'windfall' carefully.
- Meal feeding has 'gone through the roof'. Be logical.
- Cattle and dairy farmers can co-exist.
- Feed dry-cow minerals from December 15.
- My 10 commandments for dairy farmers.
- Discussion groups must organise and keep developing.



By Matt Ryan

MEASURE, ASSESS, PLAN, DO, REVIEW

- » This is a very big month for planning the success of your farm in 2023.
- » The way successful businesses – and farming is no exception – go about their business includes:
 - Measure;
 - Assess;
 - Plan;
 - Do; and
 - Review.
- » To be a successful, profitable dairy farmer there are only two key performance indicators (KPIs) you must achieve:
 1. Tonnes of grass utilised per hectare on the farm;
 2. Your six-week calving rate (%); and
 3. You must add in cost-control measures as being essential also. This latter may not be available for all farmers to assess in December 2022.
- » Measure
 - Grass utilised is calculated on the Moorepark Grass Calculator.
 - The six-week calving rate is done for you in the calving report for your herd on the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) web page. Simple.
 - Comparative cost and comparative profit must be established for 2022 using the profit monitor.
- » Assess
 - Where your achievements are relative to target.
- » Plan
 - Decide as to how you are going to move from where you are to where you should be.
- » Do
 - Plan for 2023 in December 2022. Don't procrastinate, work it out with the whole family.
- » Review
 - At the end of 2023, review what you said you would do. To realistically move forward now, you must review 2022 under the three listed criteria.

TONNES OF GRASS UTILISED PER HA

- » This figure is calculated using the Moorepark Grass Calculator. This is the most important efficiency figure you must establish for your farm. The calculator is available on the Teagasc website, and is simple to use.

- » The data required to generate the tonnes utilised in 2023 are: farm size; the average number of cows, 0-1years, 1-2years; cows and heifers calved in each month; the number of first and second calvers; the let-out and housing dates (night and day); the litres of milk sold and fed to calves plus the fat and protein percentage for the year; the total tonnes of meal fed to all stock; plus any purchased silage as well as silage you have left over at the end of the year.
- » Based on this data input, the programme will generate the following information:
 - (a) tonnes of grass utilised – target 13+tonnes/ha;
 - (b) feed conversion efficiency – target 85+ (kg MS per tonne DM available feed);
 - (c) stocking rate/ha – target depends;
 - (d) grazing season length – target 280 days;
 - (e) % of diet supplied by home grown grass – target 90%+, kg milk solids (MS) per cow and per hectare.
 - In assessing why your tonnes utilised is below target ask yourself, is it because of: over use of meals, low soil fertility or pH; poor drainage; poaching or soil compaction; poor grass varieties; poor infrastructures; poor grazing-management techniques; low stocking rate; stock bull bred cows(grossly inefficient); too many late calvers; wet farm; consistently under grazing resulting in topping; severe over grazing; grazing too low pre-grazing covers; not forgetting weather effect (comparing the change in yield from one year to the next in a discussion group isolates this as an individual farmer effect), etc.
 - We know that for every 10% extra grass in cows' diets, costs will be reduced by 3c/L and profit increases by €185/ha.
 - Really good reasons to establish the tonnes of grass utilised, so that, based on your assessment of the reasons, you can make plans to improve next year.
 - Write out your plan of action.
 - Prioritise the tasks you must address. Can I get by with less meal to cows (target is 0.9kg meal per kg milk solid produced)? Do I need to soil test? Do I need better infrastructures? How do I compact calve? What must I change with my grazing management practices? Do I need to measure grass and have I the skills to do it?
- » Next December 2023, review what you did and achieved by way of grass utilised per hectare. The same review should take place so that you can compare years and monitor progress.

SIX-WEEK CALVING RATE

- » The target is 90%. For every 1% your herd is below that target, you are losing €8.26 for every cow in your herd. Therefore, the

average Irish dairy farmer with 70 cows and a six-week calving rate of 58% (national average) is losing €18,502 – a serious loss.

- » Look up ICBF for your figure. Why is it less than 90%? Based on the answers you and your team come up with, plan to rectify mistakes made in 2022.
- » For this month, to improve the six-week calving rate in 2023, you need to seriously address cow body condition scoring (BCS) and feed according to silage quality and the length of dry period remaining.
 - Firstly, you must now check the BCS of all cows. Cows over 3.25 should be put on restricted silage if very good and continue milking on.
 - Essentially, cows now on BCS of 2.75 or less should be on 2kg meal for December and 10 days in January with silage of 70 DMD or lower and, for sure, should be dried off.

MANAGE YOUR FINANCIAL 'WINDFALL' YEAR

- » Added on to the two key KPIs is cost control – something we are very bad at in a good milk-price year.
 - Milk price seems to be up 18-20c/L on 2021, which means milk sales will have increased by approximately €1,000/cow; of course costs have dramatically increased also.
 - It looks likely that profit per cow could be €1,500+ for 2022.
 - However, milk prices are predicted to significantly decrease next year, while costs are unlikely to decrease much. Hence, the need to assemble your profit monitor data in December and plan carefully for next year.
- » The financial year is effectively over so the profit monitor should be completed in early December. This will allow you do your 2023 cost control plan now.
- » Use your figures to compare yourself with others in your discussion group. Motivation will be greater to take remedial action. It might be slightly 'painful to pride' but it is much better to suffer that little bit now to prepare you for working with milk price and input volatility.
- » The financial targets have changed greatly from 2021; therefore, it is best to compare with other group members. Teagasc will have enough farmers' figures in to have comparative figures for you on January 20 (approximately).
- » What it really means is that you, as a sole trader, must forward-buy a lot of your variable costs for next year and chat to your accountant in early December to minimise your tax bill.

Meal feeding (kg/cow)	Cost meal fed (At €420/t)	Diff. in meal Cost	Predicted yield (kg MS/cow)	Value of MS (at €7.61/kg)	Difference
1,100	€462		502	€3,820	
550	€231	€231	473	€3,600	€220

MEAL FEEDING GONE THROUGH THE ROOF

- » Moorepark recommends the feeding of 1kg of meal per 1kg MS produced. An alarming number of farmers are feeding two to three times that amount per cow.
- » Teagasc, through George Ramsbottom, has a programme that can predict milk solids yield per cow.
 - Based on the county you live in, the farm stocking rate, the herd's subindex for milk, fertility, and maintenance; plus, the amount of meal fed per cow and purchased forage, it predicts the kg of MS that your cows will/should produce.
 - The following is an actual farm example; the results are similar for all farmers I have examined.

- Input data: Stocking rate = 2.5; Milk = €52; Fertility = €64; Maintenance = €10; 1,100kg meal/cow + 400kg DM/cow forage purchased.
- Actual kg MS produced = 490/cow. Paid €420/t for meal.
- What would happen if you fed the recommended meal level? Instead of the 1,100kg, I inserted 550kg, a saving in cost of €231, and the predicted kg MS that would be produced was 473kg, a reduction of 29kg.
- At €7.61 (approx. 60.7c/L), that represented a loss of €220.
- Therefore, the farmer made an investment of €231 in meal for a gain of €220. Are you surprised?
- There are a few consequences to feeding too much meal:
 - It is uneconomic – this farmer's cows were genetically capable of giving 452kg MS.
 - It will push many farmers into a higher stocking rate band – this farmer's cows yielded 6,200L (pretty close to the high band). Incidentally, it required 12.54L of milk to yield one kg MS because his percentage of fat and protein were only 7.8% (target = 9%).
 - The percentage of homegrown grass in the cows' diet was 80% (target = 90%).
 - The feed conversion efficiency was 61kg MS/tonne DM feed available on the farm (target = 85). This means:
 - * There was a lot of substitution of grass with meal.
 - * The farmer fed meals at times during the year when the response to meal feeding was/is poor, e.g., summer, or feeding more than 2kg in the autumn.
 - * The farmer was either grazing stemmy grass or grazing too tight; had a high percentage of heifers in the herd; or herd genetics is poor at producing milk solids.

It is interesting to note that the cows yielded 490kg MS (22% heifers in the herd), compared with the programme's prediction of 502 when 1,100kg meal was fed – pretty much validates the exercise.

» Message: Get back to basics

- Don't overstock the milking platform with bad cows.
- Feed the recommended levels of meals/cow.
- Manage grass to maximise profits, while minimising nitrate losses.

CATTLE – DAIRY FARMERS WORKING TOGETHER

- » Rural communities need cattle and dairy farmers to work more closely together so that those communities survive in the long term.
- » Cattle farmers and dairy can work together to be mutually better off.
 - Labour is in very short supply on dairy farms; cattle farmers could do part-time work on local dairy farms at a time that suits both. That might be milking, calf rearing, herding, spreading fertiliser or slurry, feeding silage to stock, cleaning yards, etc.
- » There are other more involved options:
 - Contract rearing of replacement heifers;
 - Lease out stock bulls for the breeding season;
 - Lease out vasectomised bulls for heat detection;
 - Long-term lease the farm for dairying;
 - Do share farming with a young dairy farmer (seek advice on this).
- » All collaborative options, if they are to be win-win for both sides, must be based on trust, understanding, and be covered by legal

- If you are one of those people: who cannot work with others; who is jealous of people doing well; who is mistrusting; who is not careful with your or other people's property; who is suspicious by nature; who cannot stick to agreements; who cannot manage stock; etc. then, forget about these suggestions (be you lessor or lessee).
- I suggest you use these statements or some version in assessing the 'partner' you are taking on board.
- Of course, compliance with DAF stock movement rules and all disease-potential risks must be adhered to by both sides.
- All of these suggestions are working in Ireland.

- The fee is usually from €1.30 to €1.70 per animal per day depending on the periods involved. I am worried that the fee expectation is going to be too high – this will destroy the practice because, with milk-price volatility, some dairy farmers will be making less than the rearer in some years.
- The rearer must be very good with stock and be an excellent grassland manager, otherwise, target weights won't be achieved (they must be specified in the agreement) or meals will have to be fed to achieve them. The benefit is that the farmer will have no capital tied up in stock; when the farmer cashes their present stock, they can pay off loans for example.

- The dairy farmer must supply healthy calves that have received the recommended levels of colostrum.
- The dairy farmer must pay on time – best done by standing order.
- There are many cattle farmers out there wishing to contract rear now. The local Teagasc cattle

» Long-term lease the farm to a young dairy farmer. The tax and other benefits from this are massive to the cattle farmer. But I think the lease fees being sought are over the top (no new entrant should pay more than €200/acre; otherwise, they will go broke very fast and where will the landowner be then?). This will result in

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the proposition not working to the benefit of the landowner. A sensible landowner should want his property well maintained; hedges and farm entrance well maintained; new grasses in the fields; soil fertility improved (very expensive) and maintained; improved building and infra-structures; guaranteed payment, etc. All of these will increase the value of the farm and make it attractive while he lives nearby. Auctioneers are driven by the bidding rather than these considerations. The tax benefits are as follows:

Term of lease (years)	Max tax-free income per year
5-7	€18,000
7-10	€22,500
10-15	€30,000
15+	€40,000

- » Cattle farmers with 150 acres, or more, in one block might consider share-farming with a young energetic 'would-be dairy farmer'.
- » In recent years, many dairy farmers have 'gifted' male calves to neighbouring cattle farmers; one recently informed me that the cattle farmer 'finished' the Jersey-crosses at €1,300. And was pleased with the venture.

DRY-COW MINERALS FROM DECEMBER 20

- » Farmers who are starting to calve cows from the February 1 will need to start feeding dry-cow minerals from December 20 (40 days before calving).
 - It will cost €2.50-€3.00 per cow for the season.
 - Late-calving cows don't need minerals for another six to eight weeks (save money).
- » Dry-cow minerals are necessary to prevent:
 - Retained placenta (costs €500, and is due to selenium, vitamin E, or iodine deficiency);
 - Calf deaths (each death costs €470), due to copper/iodine deficiency;
 - Milk fever (costs €312/case) due to too much calcium;
 - Urine drinking due to sodium (salt) deficiency;
 - Reduced appetite due to several minerals and vitamins.
 - Poor thrive due to several minerals and vitamins;
- » Feed 100-120g per cow per day of pre-calving mineral.
 - Spread half in morning and half in evening on top of the silage.
 - It is very doubtful if buckets or free access to minerals is safe for all cows;
- » Make sure your mineral mix meets your deficiency requirements on the farm:
 - Most silages are deficient in iodine, copper, sodium, selenium, cobalt, phosphorous, and magnesium;
 - More recently the major elements, particularly phosphorous, are deficient in some silage;
 - A silage analysis can identify your problem minerals and, for sure, should be done.

MY 10 COMMANDMENTS FOR DAIRY FARMERS

- » For what it is worth, here are my 10 guiding principles:
 1. Operate a simple system of farming;
 2. Value the quality of your lifestyle;
 3. Be driven by environmentally sustainable profit;
 4. Manage the people you deal with, with respect, consideration,

and care;

5. Cow breeding management is priority;
6. Utilise 11-13 tonnes DM grass, having grown 13.5-16 tonnes in an environmentally acceptable way;
7. Animal preventative care; the new norm;
8. Respect the soil by way of fertility, structure and from compaction;
9. Rear replacements to targets; and
10. Invest in your own self, self-improvement, and worth.

MAKING YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP WORK

- » This is a big month for your discussion group, and you should review 2022.
 - What did your group achieve?
 - Are all members turning up to all meetings, participating and pulling their weight?
 - Is the group a bit stale with no energy?
 - What went well during the year?
 - What went badly – be honest!
 - I can't, for the life of me, understand why farmers can't give one full day per month to 'in-service' training (most businesses do) – giving at least half a day to their discussion group.
 - It will help you stay informed of new technologies.
 - As dairy farming is very seasonal, the group meeting will remind you of tasks and things to do in the next month.
 - More importantly, social contact is essential, and the group meeting provides that in a small way.
- » Plan now for 2023.
 - Elect a chair/treasurer/facilitator.
 - Decide group goals/targets.
 - Plan your events/visits for each month next year. An example chart is available.
 - Meet on a set date and time every month.
 - Plan a social outing, even this year, as it's not too late yet.
 - Take on a project/s to make things interesting; one group I know have embarked on putting up owl boxes, which they made themselves, on their farms.
 - Do you need new members and if so, who should canvass them?
 - Some groups are too small with seven to 10 members while others are too large at 20+ members.
- » Are all members doing the following?
 - Attend 10+ group meetings per year?
 - Doing the dairy profit monitor?
 - Doing 30+ grass measurements on PastureBase?
 - Updating all information on the ICBF?
 - Doing the spring and autumn rotation plans?
 - If the answer is 'no' to any or all of these, your group needs to redefine its goals.
- » Group chair and facilitators should now look after this requirement.

BITS AND PIECES

- » Dry off all spring-calving cows before December 20 so that the cows' BCS and udder health improves. All humans on the farm will also benefit from this.
- » Animal-health issues:
 - Make sure all animals are comfortably housed with adequate cubicle and feeding space;

- Bring forward all relevant spring vaccinations to December-early January;
- Keep an eye out for shy feeders, lame animals, coughing, etc.
- » **Get a soil test and forward-buy now adequate phosphate and potash.** Mark Plunkett, Teagasc, suggests the following quantities are required to raise phosphorous and potassium levels:
 - Phosphate: To raise it one part per million (ppm) requires 50kg/hectare, costing €5/kg;
 - Potash: To raise it one part per million (ppm) requires 2kg/hectare, costing €2/kg;
 - Lime is a no-brainer – forward-buy now, land is probably too wet to spread, for early spring spreading;
 - These investments will save tax and give a return of 152% (Moorepark) on money spent.
- » **Soiled water cannot be spread from December 21-31.**
- » **Test milking machine now – technician will be too busy in January.**
- » **Get your profit monitor done in early December before your**

adviser goes on holidays.

- » **Organise your spring staff requirements now:**
 - Book farm relief help;
 - Organise locals for milking, calf rearing, and general farm work;
 - Put laminated standard operating procedures on the walls in the dairy, calf house, calving pen, office, etc. so that everyone knows what to do and when to do a specific task.
- » **A suggestion made by a west Cork farmer: his discussion group have broached the idea of gifting all his male calves to African farmers. Can anyone arrange transport?**

SEASONS GREETINGS

Make sure to take it easy for a week, or so, over the festive period. To all my readers, may I wish you a very happy Christmas.

"What counts cannot always be counted, what can be counted doesn't always count" – Einstein

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CASE IH LAUNCHES TWO NEW FARMALL A MODELS

Case IH has launched two new Farmall A tractors – the 90hp 90 A, and the 100hp 100 A – which form part of the company's extended Farmall range. These powerful and versatile machines are reliable, easy-to-use, simple-to-maintain and offer excellent value for money, according to the company. Designed for small and medium mixed farms, together with specialist livestock enterprises and smallholdings, these 'robust, versatile all-round tractors are highly productive, comfortable, and manoeuvrable,' a company spokesperson said. And they are flagged as being ideal for applications such as hay and forage, livestock, seeding, spraying, fertilising, light tillage, and transport.

POWERFUL AND EFFICIENT

With common rail-fuel injection and four-valves-per-cylinder design, the new four-cylinder, 3.6L FPT F5 engine is very responsive. This engine can provide outstanding maximum torque at lower engine speed – 380Nm and 450Nm at 1,300rpm in the Farmall 90 A and Farmall 100 A, respectively. The excellent 47 per cent torque rise delivers strong lugging ability in high-load situations. Despite its considerable responsiveness, the FPT F5 is highly fuel

efficient, which, combined with the larger 130L fuel and 14.4L AdBlue tanks, means more time can be spent working before refuelling. Another significant benefit is the 600-hour service intervals, which minimise downtime and maintenance costs.

A key feature of the engine is its highly efficient and maintenance-free after-treatment system (ATS). Developed to meet Stage V legislation, the Compact Hi-eSCR2 emissions-reduction technology requires no filter replacement or mechanical cleaning. Highly effective, it integrates a diesel oxidation catalyst (DOC), a diesel particulate filter (DPF) and a selective catalyst reduction (SCR) system, which is very compact due to an exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) rate of less than 10 per cent.

This advanced technology is contained under the engine hood, allowing simple, fast-loader installation, together with easy access to oil and engine filters located on the left side of the tractor. With no external components, the design also maximises ground clearance, which contributes to operator safety during row crop and hay-making operations, provides excellent forward visibility and makes the tractor very easy to manoeuvre precisely. Power is transmitted through a

simple, efficient, dependable, and durable 12x12 40kph mechanical transmission or optional hydraulically actuated Powershuttle, the four gears in each of the three ranges enabling exactly the right speed to be selected for each task. A 20x20 creeper transmission option is also available.

The four-wheel drive Farmall 90 A and 100 A models feature a Class 1.0 front heavy-duty axle with electro-hydraulic differential lock, while adjustment-free annular disc brakes deliver powerful braking performance. Automatic engagement of the four-wheel drive system under braking is also available to improve performance, stability, and safety further.

EXTENDED VERSATILITY

To extend the versatility of these new Farmall A models, the rear linkage has a maximum lift capacity of 4,400kg, while the Case IH Lift-O-Matic system offers fast raising and lowering of implements to a pre-set position on headlands. The tractors also feature a smooth,

TIME TO COP ON, NOT COP OUT



Unless you have been living under a rock for the past few years, you all know about the state of our fair planet. As I write this, COP27 happens to be drawing to a close with nothing significant agreed on – in my view – in relation to climate change, apart for compensation for the poorer countries that have been so disproportionately impacted.

'We are on a highway to climate hell with one foot still on the accelerator' and 'humanity is in a fight for its life' are some of the messages we heard at COP27 – some of the many one-liners. The reality is this, we must change for real; that means all of us pulling our weight, but some may need to pull a bit harder. The next few years are critical for the welfare of the planet, and the superpowers of the world must significantly reduce their carbon footprints, or poorer countries will continue to suffer. There is no point throwing money at the problem and hoping that it goes away. Neither is there a point to culling a few cows in Ireland, or addressing our fertiliser and slurry issues, or growing alternative crops and changing farming practices if the major powers don't do their housekeeping immediately. It is time to cop on, not cop out! The year gone by has been challenging in many ways, and not least because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the knock-on impact of that on global food production and subsequent rise in energy, fertiliser and inputs prices. These challenges are not going to disappear any time soon either, which is another reason why we must all turn our attention to more sustainable farming practices as we fight climate change. Other challenges for the agri-industry include low margins, labour shortages, and being tasked with feeding the ever-growing world population while remaining sustainable and climate aware. This is a big old jigsaw with many parts but whether you are farming 100 or 1,000 acres, the rules should be the same for us all to be able to farm, live and work within the climate-change targets we have set.

Connected to that is the whole area of biomethane and anaerobic digestion – it is high time we got anaerobic digestors up and running in this country. The devil is in the detail on this so we will watch it with interest in 2023, and beyond, no doubt. New forestry premiums are coming on stream for the sector, and we should see farmers going back to planting trees once again next year. This is good news for the sector as well as the businesses and services around it. As we sign off the year, sheep and cattle prices remain strong around the country. Some dairy farmers are looking at milking longer this winter as prices remain high, and tillage farmers have told me that they had a great year with a few quid left after the harvest. And, last but by no means least, on the machinery front, it was celebration time recently for Fendt as it took the 2023 Tractor Of The Year title; AGCO launched a new engine that can run on alternative fuels; Bobcat launched a new skid steer; and Joskin has introduced a new body to its muck spreaders. The spring farm machinery shows are gearing up for the 2023 season. The first show takes place on January 18-19 in the Green Glens Arena in Millstreet, Co. Cork; then we are off to the Eikon Exhibition Centre, Balmoral Park on January 25-26; and the Cavan Equestrian Centre is the destination for February 1-2. Oh, and be sure to get all the most up-to-date tractor news in January's issue of Irish Farmers Monthly. But for now, I want to wish you and yours a very happy and healthy Christmas. Thank you for all your support throughout 2022, and I shall see you on the other side!



self-modulating electro-hydraulic independent three-speed PTO (540/540E/1,000) with ECO and ground-speed options. Options include a mechanical front linkage which can lift up to 1,400kg, a front 1,000rpm PTO and an extra-flow open-centre pump with a very high hydraulic flow rate of 82L/m. This improves loader cycle times further and will be beneficial when operating linkage-mounted implements through up to three remote outlets.

GET A LOAD OF THIS

Both new Farmall A models can also be specified from the factory with loader-ready brackets and hydraulics, making them compatible with the Case IH front loader offering. The ideal loader for the new Farmall A is the Case IH L3815A. Utilising a simple plug-and-play design, it has a lift height of up to 3.8m and a maximum capacity of 1,922kg, ideal for general handling tasks.

THE GIFT OF THE CAB

Operators will enjoy the new four-pillar, flat-floor cab, with up to four external working lights and easy access up wide steps to the large single door. Inside, there is more space, air conditioning is standard, and the maximum sound level is just 77db. The optional roof hatch has been made wider to improve overhead visibility, while a 320° angle of vision provides outstanding all-round vision, which is perfect when working in confined areas. All controls are positioned in a panel to the operator's right side and are within easy reach, the air suspended seat optimises ride comfort, while a USB socket and phone holder also feature.

'SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS'

Case IH product manager responsible for the Farmall A range, Edoardo Ronco, said: "The new Farmall 90 A and Farmall 100 A are significant new introductions for Case IH in this important sector of the market. Both incorporate significant benefits which make them more productive, more cost effective and more comfortable to operate."



PAYING THE PRICE WILL MAKE IT A HAPPY NEW YEAR



Tom Murphy

Professional Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland



Agricultural contractors have completed the main work of 2022 and now it is time to take stock of the year. In doing so, they face the reality of knowing if their charges were correct and if they have made a profit or if, instead, they face financial difficulties by carrying an overdraft into 2023. Getting paid for the work they have done will go a long way towards avoiding the latter. Having already paid out money for labour, fuel, machinery repayments, etc., our agricultural contractors must receive payment for all work carried out to ensure continuity of service. Let's be quite clear, without the services of the agricultural-contracting sector, the cost of production for farmers would be unsustainable. While it may be true to say that some farmers don't get a fair price for their endeavours, it is also

a fact that the vast majority would be out of business without their agricultural contractor.

SLOWER THAN NORMAL

I am told by contractors that it has been particularly difficult to collect money, with farmers who would usually pay on time being slower to do so this year. So why is this? Apart from the current economic climate, in my view it goes back a long way to when agricultural contractors were slow to send out invoices and slow to make a call to collect money. It followed that leaving the contractor's bill at the bottom of the pile became commonplace. If agricultural contractors allow this to continue, nothing will change.

In fairness, when times are tough, we all tend to pay the bills that are most urgent first because if we don't, a service may be cut off or we will get a bad credit rating. But contractors cannot continue to subsidise those people who will not pay on time, or at least within a reasonable agreed timeframe, and that's a stance contractors must resolve to change if they want to stay in business.

Furthermore, contractors who also farm should run their contracting businesses separately to their farming; if they don't, I can guarantee you that they are subsidising their contracting business.

JEOPARDISING THE FUTURE

While I appreciate that not all farmers delay paying their contractors, those who do are playing a dangerous game. They put in jeopardy not only the contractor's business but also the availability of future contractor services to them and their fellow farmers. They should be aware this might come back to bite them next season when the contractor gives them a miss or even worse has gone out of business. Having said all that, contractors and farmers need each other to survive, and both need to run profitable businesses to survive – to make that happen, communication is vital.

As we commence the count down to the festive period, I wish you and yours a very happy Christmas and good health and prosperity in 2023.

NEW HOLLAND ANNOUNCES ROI DEALER NETWORK CHANGES

Casey Tractors & Agri Spares Ltd (Casey Tractors) has recently been confirmed as a New Holland dealer to cover counties Laois, Offaly and south Kildare. Operating from their depot in Garryhinch, Portarlinton, Co. Offaly, Casey Tractors will offer a range of New Holland products and parts including tractors, telehandlers, balers and New Holland-branded implements. Full service and aftersales support will also be available in the area. Owned by Denise and Bob Casey, this family-run business embarks on its first partnership with a full line manufacturer, having served the local farming community for over three decades selling machinery, parts and spares. New Holland has said it is very pleased to be able

to partner with Casey's to continue the development of the dealership over the coming years in the area. Dealer principal at Casey Tractors, Denise Casey, the company is delighted to have been able to expand its agricultural operations with the New Holland brand. "We look forward to working with all of the many loyal New Holland customers in the area and wish them a warm welcome to Casey's as we grow our business in the area together with New Holland."

BKT'S NEW AGRIMAXFACTOR RESPONDS TO BIGGER-TYRE REQUEST

Agrimaxfactor is a new name for a new tyre recently launched by Indian multinational company BKT, which makes agricultural, industrial, and off-road tyres. The tread design has been improved from a technical viewpoint, according to the company, by an increased lug length and changed lug orientation and angle for the purpose of providing improved handling and smooth roadability. "Excellent stability plus a fast-steering response – even at high speeds and under heavy-duty service – are ensured by an extraordinarily strong carcass made in polyester, a material that replaces nylon. In particular, there are six polyester belts and four strong polyester plies providing high stability at any speed. Increased comfort is an additional advantage of this product novelty," according to a company spokesperson.

The Agrimaxfactor displays the 'E-Ready' logo as a sign of BKT's 'commitment towards electric mobility', the company said, and that will be extended to all products falling under this category.

"Electric vehicles represent new challenges and different needs, requiring a high torque and a higher weight on the tire. A high torque requires the need of new tread designs and compounds that are able to better resist wear," the spokesperson added.

Agrimaxfactor is at home in diverse conditions and is available in the three sizes 600/70 R 30, 710/70 R 42 marked by the load index/speed symbol 173 D, and 710/70 R 42 marked by the load index/speed symbol 176 D. Twelve additional sizes are under development and will be ready for launch by the first half of 2023.

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NEW YEAR, NEW SLURRY-MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

Maximising the return of nutrients from slurry is vital in reducing the use of expensive chemical fertilisers on the farm, and maximising grassland utilisation. In order to achieve this, agri-machinery manufacturer, Abbey Machinery, is reminding farmers of the need to review their slurry-management system and find the best-fit machine to suit their needs.

With its six-step management plan – incorporating the likes of transportation needs, slurry agitation and precision nutrient management – Abbey says it can help you to get the best use of your slurry.

Abbey manufactures a range of 37 slurry tanker models from standard to tridem, ranging in capacity from 900 gallons (gl) to 6,000gl. Additionally, Abbey has a range of mounted and standalone low emission slurry spreading (LESS) applicators which come in a variety of sizes, up to 24m.

“Applicators are also built to support umbilical systems and are an excellent way to help farmers in our carbon-reduction goals. LESS equipment from Abbey can offer up to 60%



reduction in nitrogen loss as ammonia,” said a company spokesperson.

Abbey integrates sustainability and digital innovations into all aspects of machine manufacturing and product design with its latest technological development using near-infrared technology (NIR sensing). “Thousands of readings are taken each second and are related to a processor

computer to determine the live nitrogen, potassium, phosphorous and dry matter content of the slurry. One of the benefits of NIR sensor is it allows the farmer to know exactly how many kilogrammes of nitrogen, potassium or phosphorous have been applied to their land, helping to reduce artificial fertiliser inputs. This is precision technology at its best.”



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AJS MACHINERY SHOWS ALL SET FOR SPRING 2023

Machinery enthusiasts have a very happy new year to look forward to as two of three spring farm machinery shows, hosted by AJS Promotions, are set to take place in January, with the third event hot on their heels in February. The shows return with 'exciting expansions and new features added' the organisers have said. More than 200 exhibitors are expected at each show with the very latest tractors, combines, arable and grassland machinery, as well as a wide range of new technology, services and tools for every sector on display. Additionally, organisers are promising all the latest innovations, machinery launches, Irish debuts, and global brands. Smaller agricultural engineering and machinery companies from across the Ireland and the UK, will also be present. The first show takes place on January 18-19 in the Green Glens Arena in Millstreet, Co. Cork; then it is off to the Eikon Exhibition Centre, Balmoral Park in Co. Antrim on January 25-26; and the Cavan Equestrian Centre is the destination for February 1-2.

"Each of the shows bring something unique



and exciting for the agri calendar with leading brands and companies throughout that provide a unique platform to interact and engage with existing and potential new

customers as well as giving an outlook on the busy season ahead. Trade stand bookings are now live and spaced are filling up fast," said a spokesperson.

SPRING FARM MACHINERY SHOWS

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IRELANDS LEADING MACHINERY & SERVICES EVENTS RETURN!

2023 SHOW DATES

18th & 19th
JANUARY

GREEN GLENS ARENA
MILLSTREET, CO CORK

25th & 26th
JANUARY

EIKON EXHIBITION CENTRE
BALMORAL PARK, LISBURN

1st & 2nd
FEBRUARY

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CLAAS SCORPION RANGE RECEIVES A FACELIFT FOR 2023

The 2023 iteration of Scorpion telehandlers from Claas will receive a comprehensive facelift, according to the company. As well as improvements to operator comfort, the smaller models will also have new engines with more engine power.

Telehandlers have featured in the Claas product range since 1994 and since 2019, the machines have been developed and built in association with Liebherr. Six models with 143hp and 156hp engines currently cover a range from 7.5t-11.7t operating weight; 7m to almost 9m stacking height; and 3,200kg-6,000kg lifting capacity.

Part of the overhaul will deliver increased performance to the range with thanks to more engine power and Varipower 2. The entire Scorpion series from is equipped with efficient, powerful four-cylinder engines from Deutz. For the 2023 model year, the 3.6L Stage V engine in the Scorpion 732, 736, 741 and 746 models have been optimised for greater efficiency and performance. As a result, these models each have 50Nm more torque and an increase in power output of 6hp. The compact engines remain economical in operation and

maintenance, as usual, and are characterised by low maintenance requirements.

The Scorpion 741, 736 and 732 models have been fitted with the hydrostatic Varipower 2 drive from the Claas Jaguar since 2021. The compact drive unit with its highly efficient, high-torque twin motor ensures a long service life, further improved drive efficiency and a lower noise level on the road. The driver has three driving ranges available – 0-20km/h, 0-30km/h and 0-40km/h – which can be preselected with the press of a thumb, with a maximum speed of 40km/h. The final speed is reached at a reduced, fuel-saving engine speed. The braking behaviour of all Scorpion telehandlers has been further optimised by new components such as the brake valve and brake pedal along with new software tuning. An automatic parking brake is standard as a braking assistant for uphill and downhill gradients, which prevents the machine from rolling away.

For even faster and more convenient loading cycles, the larger Scorpion 960 to 746 models are equipped with automatic telescopic boom arm retraction when lowering. Together



with the optional automatic bucket return, loading cycles are child's play for the driver. From now on, all Scorpion models will also have regenerative working hydraulics. The load-free lowering is decoupled from the engine speed and the speed adjustment dependent on the joystick deflection also reduces the noise level and fuel consumption. There will also be a revised cab with new air conditioning. A new, angle- and height-adjustable steering column with automatic indicator reset optimises ergonomics and ensures greater safety when driving on the road. In addition, the steering mode switchover has been optimised so that the four steering modes can be set even more reliably and precisely.

A LONG WAY TOGETHER



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FENDT SNAPS UP COVETED TRACTOR OF THE YEAR TITLE

In association with



LAST MONTH, A 25-STRONG JURY RETURNED ITS VERDICT ON WHO WOULD TAKE THE COVETED TITLE OF THE 2023 TRACTOR OF THE YEAR (TOTY). GUILTY AS CHARGED WAS FENDT WITH ITS 728 VARIO, EQUIPPED WITH A HOST OF ATTRACTIVE FEATURES

But just what was it about this tractor that the jury of European machinery-expert judges found so compelling? Well, to start, the 2023 Fendt favourite boasts a brand new six-cylinder 7.5L AGCO-Power engine that produces 283 maximum horsepower (hp) with capacity to allow for an extra 20hp in all conditions; a new transmission; a new hydraulic and cooling system; and safe cabin filtration.

It has separate hydro motors that drive front and rear axles, constant four-wheel drive is automatically regulated for best traction, and pull-in turn reduces the turning radius by up to 10 per cent.

"Models in the Fendt 700 Vario series are our best-selling tractors and are used by farmers all over the world," said chair of

the Fendt management board, Christoph Gröbblinghoff.

"For our Fendt engineers, it was therefore a challenge to make something good even better. Factors such as low fuel consumption combined with high performance of up to 300hp, soil conservation and maximum flexibility for different applications are very important for our professional customers worldwide. I am very pleased to receive this award for our new top model Fendt 728 Vario from an international and independent jury of experts."

Other Fendt 728 Vario features that caught the judges' attention include: Fendt iD low-speed concept; intelligent VarioDrive; integrated tyre-pressure control system; superior manoeuvrability; very low weight-



to-power ratio; new generation front loader; new premium driver's seat; and Fendt's 'onboard offboard' digital universe FendtONE.

WITH THE OVERALL TITLE GOING TO FENDT, THE OTHER TOTY CATEGORY WINNERS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

BEST UTILITY 2023 - MCCORMICK X6.414 P6-DRIVE WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

One of the main highlights of the new McCormick X6.414 P6-Drive is the robotised powershift P6-Drive transmission – made in house – which offers six power shift gears in four ranges and 40+40 when a creeper is fitted. A distinctive feature of the McCormick high visibility cab is the mechanical suspension that, when combined with the suspended front axle with independent arms, further improves driving comfort. The cab is designed with high-quality automotive-derived materials and the same attention to design and functionality can be seen in the control instrumentation with its fully ergonomic design, a 12-inch touch screen monitor, and all-in-one multifunction joystick.



BEST OF SPECIALIZED 2023 - NEW HOLLAND T4.120 F WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

The design concept comes directly from higher ranges of New Holland and among the most interesting features identified included: a standard flat deck cabin; front suspended axle; lowest noise level in the cab of the segment; updated hydraulics specs offering Power Beyond connection and HER.



SUSTAINABLE TOTY 2023 - JCB FASTRAC 4220 ICON WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

Despite the generous dimension, JCB Fastrac iCON is very agile thanks to the numerous steering options including the 'crab mode' that make this tractor 'gentle on soil'. The GPS and integrated connectivity services such as fleet management and predictive maintenance are at a new level, all of that goes together with fact that JCB provides a coaching service that allows the client to customise the tractor to its needs. The profound optimisation of the whole package – hardware and software – makes this tractor more efficient, safer, more comfortable, more connected, more reliable and it positively affects consumptions costs.



AMAZONE EXTENDS SEED-DRILL RANGE WITH CENTAYA 3000 SPECIAL

Amazone is extending its range of one-pass seed drills with the Centaya 3000 Special, replacing the AD-P Special, which has been a hugely popular one-pass seed drill among Irish tillage farmers over the past 20 years. The Centaya Special is available in hopper sizes of 1,000L and 1,500L and with a working width of 3m. The seed drill can be equipped with the RoFeC single-disc coulters or with the high output TwinTeC Special double-disc coulters.

The seed distributor head on the Centaya Special is now mounted behind the seed hopper directly above the coulters. This arrangement ensures a short conveying time for the seed. The hopper is positioned further forward and offers an optimum centre of gravity close to the tractor. The distributor head can be reached easily via the loading platform and can then be regularly checked. Setting the tramline system is also easy to carry out as a result of the good accessibility. The low profile of the hopper also gives the driver a better view of the machine. The very large hopper opening (2.3m x 0.84m) ensures



a quick and easy fill, from large bags with a front-end loader. The deep hopper tip and steep walls are specially designed to guide the seed down to the metering unit.

The Centaya Special drill can be controlled via Isobus with AmaTron 4 terminal and will also be available with AmaDrill 2 in the future.

Calibration of the seed hopper can be carried out conveniently from the loading platform. The easily accessible metering unit on the bottom of the hopper ensures even, accurate seed metering. The seed is gathered in the collection bag supplied and is weighed using the scales that are included as standard.

For other seeds, or different seed rates, Amazone offers a variety of different metering

wheels for the Centaya Special. Only two bolts need to be released on the metering unit using the tool supplied to change the metering wheels.

The Centaya Special can be equipped either with the RoFeC single disc coulters or with the TwinTeC Special double disc coulters. RoFeC coulters are maintenance-free and work very reliably, even where large amounts of straw or cover-crop residues are present. Row spacings of 12.5cm and 15cm can be chosen. Equipped with the high-performance TwinTeC Special, the seed drill offers a very precise and sturdy double disc coulters with a disc diameter of 340mm and a coulters pressure of 40kg, the row spacing is 15cm.

The Centaya Special harrow-mounted seed drill can be very easily and quickly connected without tools to the various Amazone tillage implements via the QuickLink quick coupling system. Depending on the soil conditions, it can be combined with the KG and KX rotary cultivators. The Centaya Special can be combined with the CombiDisc compact disc harrow also.

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VÄDERSTAD – WHAT’S COMING DOWN THE TRACK IN 2023?

NOEL DUNNE RECENTLY TRAVELLED TO GERMANY TO CATCH SIGHT OF WHAT IS COMING DOWN THE TRACK IN 2023 FROM SWEDISH TILLAGE-EQUIPMENT AND FARM-MACHINERY MANUFACTURER, VÄDERSTAD, WHICH CELEBRATED A MILESTONE OF 60 YEARS IN BUSINESS THIS YEAR

Over six decades, Väderstad has built a presence in more than 40 countries, which sees it manufacture a whopping 7,000 machines annually, and employ more than 2,000 people. Despite the challenges of the last 12 months, strongly influenced by the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the company's turnover has grown by 25% to €500m, and the year ahead looks positive, Noel heard when he joined the company at its newly acquired 52ha test farm in northern Germany. There, he got a flavour of what is to come in 2023, and he shares some of the highlights here.

CARRIER XT 425-625



This new machine is used for high-speed tillage and seedbed preparation and comes in a choice of working widths: 4.25m, 5.25m and 6.25m. Trailed or mounted versions are available and can be equipped with single or double packer options. The new Carrier XT is available to order for next season.

CARRIER XL 725



Available early in 2023, the 7.25m Carrier XL 725 is a new addition to the current XL range of disc cultivators. It is available with 510mm TrueCut discs, CrossCutter discs, or the all-new CrossCutter Disc Aggressive. It can be equipped with front tools packer options as well as a Biodrill360 seeder for sowing cover crops. It has a new enhanced frame and transport height options for easy road transport.

CROSSCUTTER DISC AGGRESSIVE



Väderstad also has added the new CrossCutter Disc Aggressive option to its new range. This aggressive option is ideally suited to heavy, hard soil conditions ideal for tilling after maize and oilseed rape and comes in 440mm for working depths of 2-3cm, and 510mm for working depths of 3-5cm. Discs can be operated at working speeds of up to 20kph, and can also be retrofitted to existing machines.

CULTUS HD TINE HARROW



This mounted tine cultivator is a completely new machine for next season available in widths of 4.25m and 5.25m, and working depths of 30cm. It is equipped with three tine axles and up to 19 tines, and depth can be set from the cab. It comes with a new levelling system known as dynamic control, which ensures that the levellers are always working in the optimal position. There is no need for manual setting.

VÄDERSTAD 600S



Also on display was a selection of drills and hoppers. Pictured here is a new Väderstad 600s a popular machine here in Ireland with large-scale tillage farmers and contractors.

PROCEED DRILL



The all new Proceed drill is a machine that can increase the potential yield of a wide range of crops. It can place the smallest seed at the ideal depth with millimetre precision. It is capable of sowing oilseed rape, sugar beet, peas, maize, cereals and much more besides. You can read more on this machine in our tillage focus next spring.



PUT FARM SAFETY FIRST IN 2023

WITH A NEW YEAR ON THE HORIZON, CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, URGES FARMERS TO PUT SAFETY FIRST IN 2023 AND, HERE, HE OUTLINES HIS TOP TIPS FOR SAFETY ON THE FARM



Sadly, every year many people are either seriously or fatally injured in preventable farm accidents. New data from the Teagasc National Farm Survey (NFS) has revealed that there were 4,523 accidents on Irish farms in 2020. Over 88 per cent of these involved the farm operator, with a further 11 per cent relating to family members. Forty-six per cent of farm workplace injuries required hospitalisation, with a further 18 per cent needing GP medical treatment and 16 per cent receiving first aid. One-fifth of those injured did not require medical or first-aid treatment.

1. MANAGE SAFETY ON THE FARM

Farmers must manage health and safety by safely planning work activities on their farm. This planning process should start with a risk assessment, which involves the identification of hazards, risks and the appropriate control measures. Safe systems of work should be put in place for all work being carried out, such as operation of tractors and machinery, handling of livestock and working at height. Additionally, maintenance on farm machinery, equipment and facilities should be planned. For example, ensure that the PTO shaft on the slurry spreader is safely covered prior to the day you plan to spread slurry.

2. PRIORITISE TRACTOR, VEHICLE AND MACHINERY SAFETY

Fifty-three per cent of all fatalities in the

farming sector involve tractors, vehicles and machinery. The majority of tractor and vehicle accidents are caused by inexperienced operators, poor mechanical condition, excessive speed, lack of concentration and environmental factors such as steep gradients. Most machinery accidents are the result of human error: the operator forgot something, took a shortcut or a risk, ignored a warning, was not paying close attention, failed to follow safety rules or did not maintain the machine and its guarding in a safe condition. Many accidents involving tractors and machinery could be prevented by putting a few basic safety measures in place. All tractors, vehicles and machinery should be maintained in good condition, adequately guarded and only operated by competent persons. Special attention must be given to ensure that all brakes are serviced on tractors and trailed implements.

3. LIVESTOCK SAFETY

Teagasc's NFS has identified that 52 percent of farm accidents involved livestock and Health and Safety Authority (HSA) data has identified that there were 37 work-related fatalities involving cattle during 2011-2020. Most were caused by attacks by cows with calves (13); by the victim being knocked over by cattle without aggression (nine); or attacks by bulls (six). Most victims of work-related fatalities involving cattle were older people, with 70 per cent occurring to those aged 65 years or

older. With this in mind, it is important that cattle handlers are experienced, competent, and sufficiently agile for the class of livestock being handled. Well-designed handling facilities are essential for safe handling of all cattle. Facilities should include securely fenced fields, good holding pens, suitable cattle crush, sculling gate, calving facilities and bull handling facilities. Particular care should be taken when handling cows at calving time.

4. AGE-RELATED SAFETY FACTORS

Forty-seven per cent of the 208 people who died in work-related incidents in the agricultural sector from 2011-2020, were aged 65 years or older. The physical capabilities of older farmers vary by individual, while some maintain good strength, flexibility, eyesight, and hearing well beyond age 65, others do not.

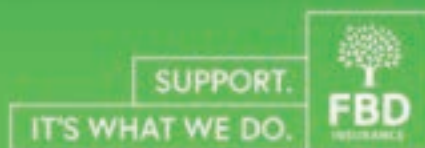
Heartbreakingly, 21 of the 208 fatalities in the past decade were under 18. It is important that children are kept away from working vehicles and machinery, dangerous livestock, dangerous activities/areas (including slurry facilities, chemicals stores, stacks of bales, etc.) and children must be adequately supervised when they are on the farm. Remember, a farm is a great place to be and there are lots of ways children can get involved but it is not a playground. Children should play in a safe, supervised play area, away from all the hazards of a working farm.

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A man and a woman are walking a large, fluffy dog on a dirt path in a rural setting. The man is wearing a flat cap and a plaid jacket, and the woman is wearing a blue vest over a light blue top. In the background, there are farm buildings and a fence.

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RURAL RENOVATION

A SCHEME THAT WAS LAUNCHED EARLIER THIS YEAR TO GIVE PEOPLE SOME FINANCIAL SUPPORT TOWARDS THE REFURBISHMENT OF VACANT OR DERELICT PROPERTIES IN TOWNS AND VILLAGES, HAS RECENTLY BEEN EXTENDED TO INCLUDE RURAL AREAS. ERIN MCCAFFERTY REPORTS ON THE INITIATIVE AND SHARES SOME STELLAR ADVICE FROM CONSERVATION-ACCREDITED ARCHITECT, MARK STEPHENS, ON HOW TO SUCCEED IN YOUR RURAL RENOVATION

The Croí Cónaithe Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, introduced in July 2022, is run by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Following calls for it to be rolled out to more rural locations, from November, it now gives people the opportunity to breathe new life back into empty or derelict properties in these areas. The scheme provides up to €30,000 for vacant properties and up to €20,000 for derelict homes. Combined, it amounts to a maximum of €50,000 and can really help to make a dent in the total cost of such a project. But if you're thinking of using the money to turn one of these properties into a holiday home or planning to sell up after it has been renovated, well, think again. To qualify for the scheme, the property in question must be your principal dwelling. What's more, you are required to live there for a minimum of 10 years. If it is sold within five years, the government can take back 100 per cent of the grant and within 10 years, 75 per cent of the grant can be recouped if the property is sold on.

Since July, more than 420 applications have been received by local authorities across the country from people interested in renovating a house in a town or village.

THINK TWICE

Taking on the refurbishment of a derelict property is not for everyone and Mark Stephens, of Mark Stephens Architects in Mayo, highlights a number of factors to consider. First up, the time and money consumption of such a project. Restoration and renovation of a derelict rural building can be more time consuming and can cost the same, if not more, than a new-build, or than renovating a modern house. "This is because it requires the use of specialist materials, which are suitable for restoration, rather than mainstream products," says Mark. "Generally, also, it takes more time and effort to restore a rural building as opposed to a modern one as greater care is

required at each stage."

Key to restoring and renovating a rural building using a conservation-led approach is to ensure that the materials used in the building fabric are breathable. "A solid walled, masonry-built rural building does not have the cavity of a more modern wall construction. This means that water does not penetrate it and cannot, therefore, escape. If this happens, it can lead to dampness and decay. So, it's essential that the wall is allowed to breathe."

The Croí Cónaithe grants can also be combined with the SEAI Better Energy Home Scheme that covers works of up to €26,750.

BUILDING MATERIALS

It's best to use naturally hydrated lime plaster on the external walls, breathable insulation and limecrete floors, Mark advises. These materials allow for full ventilation and breathability of the roof. Insulating old stone

Agri-conservation

While Croí Cónaithe is looking after the potential 'homes' that are dotted around towns, villages and rural areas, another scheme is keeping an eye out for our old agricultural buildings too. The Heritage Council, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), manages a traditional farm building initiative under the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS). This scheme aims to ensure that traditional farm buildings and other related structures, that contribute to the character of the landscape and are of significant heritage value, are conserved for active agricultural use. The grant amounts vary from €4,000 and €25,000. A grant covers up to 75% of the cost of the work, with a maximum available grant of €25,000. The grant is available for the conservation of traditional farm outbuildings, including roof, walls, structural repairs, windows, and doors. Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McCauley said of the scheme: "It generates measurable, publicly visible results and recognises these buildings as an active contributor to preserving biodiversity, the sustainable use of resources and the mitigation of climate change. "Experience shows us that many of these buildings serve as a habitat for wildlife, in particular bats and birds with many vulnerable species now relying on these buildings for their survival. The scheme helps demonstrate that sensitive conservation action and management by farmers safeguards these habitats and contributes to the reversal of biodiversity loss." The 2022 GLAS traditional farm buildings grant scheme opened for applications in January 2022 and closed in late February. Subject to 2023 funding being confirmed by the DAFM, a similar timeline is expected for next year.

walls on the inside is, however, more straightforward.

Mark explains that there are ecological building materials available, which are not only insulating, but can be used to straighten walls. "For example, you can use a lime/cork/clay insulating plaster to plum walls and then use an insulating board to provide additional insulation."

While the materials are easy to acquire, finding someone who's trained to use them can be difficult, especially at the moment when such labour is in short supply. If you're up to doing the job yourself, however, there are a number of courses on the skills required to renovate a derelict house on offer, in different parts of the country.

PLANNING PERMISSION

A habitable house can be extended under exempted development, up to 40m², for a detached dwelling, subject to conditions, explains Mark. "You can apply to your local authority for a decision on what does and does not require planning permission for your specific instance, using a Section 5 declaration."

But planning permission may be required for other reasons: "For example, if there's no septic tank or effluent treatment system, or if it's sub-standard, then a planning application is required," Mark explains. "Also, if the property has been left derelict for a number of years, technically, it loses its use as a dwelling, so it's a good idea to include the restoration or renovation in the planning application."

When it comes to a protected structure, however, the rules on what you can and cannot do are more stringent. "The owner or occupier of a protected structure can apply to the council to see what types of work would affect the character or element of any structure," says Mark. "This will clarify what work would be considered 'exempted development,' and the application can be made via a Section 57 declaration to the council."

THE BIG ONE



History has a habit of repeating itself.

This extends to geological history as much as it does to military or political history. A major volcanic eruption, for example, would have catastrophic effects. This is not end-of-the-world nonsense, but it would mean the deaths of many millions through starvation and cold. We don't know when it will happen. We only know that it will happen because it has happened in the past. And not the long-lost past, mind. These huge volcanic eruptions have happened several times in recorded history with devastating consequences for man, beast and every other living organism on the planet. Millions of people have perished from hunger, cold and disease. The only difference from past major volcanic eruptions, presuming that a future event happens while humanity is as populous, or more so, as it is now, is that the loss of life will be many times greater than any of the previous events. That is simply down to a numbers game. The more people alive when a calamitous volcanic event happens, the more people will die from its effects.

DISTURBANCE

Lest we are somewhat blasé about those effects, they may not be confined to a geographical region as we are accustomed to

on a relatively regular basis when volcanoes erupt. We saw a significant disturbance in air travel when an Icelandic volcano poured smoke and ash into the atmosphere in 2010. We have witnessed the devastation caused by undersea eruptions and earthquakes causing tsunamis. These are devastating at a local or regional level. Major volcanic eruptions that blocked out sunlight for months and years are of another scale entirely.

GLOBAL IMPACT

Let's start with the most recent one of gigantic scale. In 1816 the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia had global repercussions. A vast cloud of ash and dust reached the stratosphere and spread around the globe. Temperatures cooled the following summer, with decreased rainfall, crop failures and mass starvation. Europe was not spared and 1817 became known as the 'year without summer'. While estimates vary, it is reckoned that upwards of one million people died as a result of Tambora. The global population has grown eightfold since the early 1800s, so a simplistic calculation would suggest a far higher death toll should a similar blast recur today. Far more people today are dependent on food being sourced from outside their own area, region, country or continent. The

majority live in urban areas and rely on food transported over long distances. The Icelandic volcano of 2010 registered four on the Volcanic Explosivity Index (VEI). Tambora was a seven. Each VEI from one to eight represents a tenfold increase in magnitude. So Tambora was one thousand times more explosive than the volcano that caused flight disruption for several weeks in 2010. In 1257 a volcanic eruption of unknown location caused another year without a summer and resulted in a global cooling effect for much of the following century, causing death and starvation across the world. The Annals of Ulster confirm a volcanic weather impact in 536, referencing 'a failure of bread', implicitly confirming crop failures resulting in famine across these islands and wider afield. The period is known in climatic terms as the Late Antique Ice Age. An additional complication from a Tambora-scale dust cloud would be the likelihood of it impacting satellite systems, causing world-wide communications chaos. In terms of food supplies globally, we are precariously positioned to limit the impact of another catastrophic volcanic eruption, with a couple of months of grain and other foods in reserve. Let's hope it never happens.



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