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NOVEMBER 2023

EDITORIAL

EATING THE EMISSIONS
ELEPHANT REQUIRES
IMAGINATION

Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

The ACRES programme seems to have struck a chord with thousands of farmers.

The Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme, to give it a full title, was developed with the express purpose of addressing biodiversity decline on Irish farms. More accurately, it might equally have been described as a strategy to improve biodiversity, as many farms retain high levels of biodiversity. That would only be nit-picking with a scheme that is sufficiently financed to deliver a worthwhile income support to thousands of farmers at the same time as engaging them in practical biodiversity improvements. Such is the extent to which ACRES Tranche 2 has caught the attention of farmers, that the fund provided may prove inadequate to meet the entry demands being made on it. Unless funding increases, the current plan to deal with an over-subscription to ACRES involves a ranking and selection process based on prioritising the environmental impact of measures proposed in farmer applications. To describe the process as a 'cull' would be offensive. But could any screening process that eliminates applications that meet the base criteria be potentially deemed discriminatory?

Given the carbon tax stream coming through annually, and increasing with each passing year, there is a reasonable case to be made for directing more of the revenue to ACRES. The biodiversity and general environmental benefits accruing from ACRES are obvious and measurable. It is, after all, described as a results-based scheme.

ACRES is just one of a range of relatively small-scale on-farm strategies that have the potential to bring about large-scale changes in the management of our countryside and farms. We have an elephant to eat in terms of meeting our climate-change mitigation obligations. While big, individual projects – biomethane digestion plants, solar and wind farms spring to mind –

have roles to play in meeting ambitious targets, so too have small, incremental actions on farms around the country. Whether it is converting to protected urea use, seeding clover-rich swards, planting hedgerows or raising the genetics of a livestock herd, the results are positive and appreciable. However small the bites may be, they are a lot more digestible than coercing farmers into reducing livestock numbers and, consequently, diminishing their economic sustainability.

Large-scale afforestation is promoted as another panacea to combat climate change and accelerate our progress towards a net-zero carbon economy. The new forestry programme may deliver a substantial improvement on current derisory planting levels. However, it is unlikely to reach the 20,000-hectares-per-annum outcomes being advocated as necessary to make up for the low planting levels of recent years. There is one aspect of the forestry programme, that has potential to deliver large-scale outcomes from a series of bite-sized measures. The Native Tree Area Scheme allows for the planting of small areas with minimal planning requirements. Would it be a stretch to suggest that this should be encouraged across our 120,000 farms? There are few farms that do not have an area more suited to trees than conventional agricultural practices, some more than others. Riparian areas as well as inconvenient field corners are obvious candidates for afforestation with native species without any impact on the economic sustainability of a farm, especially as there are supports for establishment and maintenance for many years of growth. Even on a simple mathematical basis, one hectare per farm of trees, or pro rata based on farm size, would deliver an overnight 14.5 times multiple of the 8,000 hectares what we are hoping to plant annually. The best way to eat an elephant is still one bite at a time.

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The Agricultural Trust is running an event in the RDS this month to celebrate the *Irish Farmers Journal's* (IFI's) 75th anniversary. The *IFI*, which was originally established by Macra na Feirme, was then purchased and placed under a philanthropic trust structure by the late John Mooney. It has been a strong voice for Irish farming for over three-quarters of a century. It is an incredible success story. Led by an enlightened team under the editorship for many years of Paddy O'Keeffe and including such great journalists as Michael Dillon and Larry Sheedy, the weekly publication was, and remains, a constant defender of farming interests as well as a promoter of modern agricultural practices. Founded in 1948, its owner, the Agricultural Trust, has used its revenues

BIG BIRTHDAY FOR IRISH FARMERS JOURNAL

from the *IFI* to support Irish agricultural development and promotion in myriad ways over the years. The current editor, Jack Kennedy, is only the fifth person to hold that position. The first editor was Stephen Cullinane, who was also the founding general secretary of Macra na Feirme. He

was followed by Paddy O'Keeffe, who held the role for 37 years. Matt Dempsey then took on the mantle, leading the publication into the 21st century. Jack Kennedy was preceded by Justin McCarthy, who retired from the editorship last year. We wish the *IFI* continuing success.



The planned closure of Wyeth Nutrition, the Nestlé-owned infant-formula manufacturing plant in Limerick, by early 2026 is a worrying development.

The decision is based on demand reduction in China and a consequent intention to streamline Nestlé's infant-formula processing capacity. The company has reduced its labour force substantially in recent years. However, even after that, revenue generation and output per employee at the Askeaton plant continue to decline as the company's main market in China reduces its infant formula imports year on year. Fewer babies and increased domestic infant formula production inevitably mean lower demand for imported product. Any potential purchaser of the Askeaton facility would have to reduce the cost base further and a due diligence exercise would question the viability of the existing salary and personnel number profiles. In addition to upfront production cost cuts, there is the reality that further output reductions and/or lower product prices could be needed in the coming

years. All these challenges would have to be factored in by any new operator to preserve the viability of infant formula production at the Wyeth facility. On the positive side, there are alternative market prospects, especially among other fast-growing population centres in Asia and Africa. Buying the manufacturing facility and restructuring the production cost base is only one part of the equation. The processing and product patents, the marketing expertise and the brand strength belong to Nestlé. How many, if any, of those critical, non-tangible assets would be part of the purchase price? The value of the Askeaton facility would depend on how much of the intellectual and marketing resources would remain with the business. Nestlé says its research and development (R&D) work at Askeaton will be absorbed into its Konolfingen R&D centre, in Switzerland and a satellite R&D centre in Shanghai would be strengthened. That confirms an expectation that only the stainless-steel production hardware would be available to purchase if a buyer does come forward.

NO COMFORT ZONE FOR FARMERS

Some years ago, Trinity College Historical Society disinvited Richard Dawkins from a speaking engagement because, it was said at the time, the society valued its members' comfort above all else! Farmers would love a bite out of that cherry! Imagine being able to ward off criticism of their farming practices, their so-called climate-damaging cattle herds, and their perceived pollution of watercourses by upholding a right to avoid any situation or criticism that makes them feel uncomfortable? If banning an 'uncomfortable' speaker, as the society did back then, is reflective of young adult mindsets, and we hope it is not, then heaven help them when they enter the world of work. The harsh realities of life cannot be avoided by insisting one is entitled to a safe comfort zone where no one can say or do anything to discommode or question one's ideological certainties. In another, somewhat related reflection of the open-mindedness or otherwise of the self-righteous brigade, Trinity College last month declared Monday 16 to be a meat and dairy-free, vegan diet-only day in its canteen. That's the kind of liberal-minded attitude we like to hear about. Having a right to make basic nutritional choices is only acceptable if those choices comply with the dietary diktat handed down by those who know best and who insist on force-feeding their ideologies on the uninformed proletariat.

O'REILLY'S FIRST YEAR WITH ICOS



It's hard to believe it's 12 months since Damien O'Reilly joined ICOS in Brussels. In his position as ICOS's EU affairs and communications manager he has hit the ground running, enhancing the co-operative representative body's profile as an effective lobbyist and communications conduit for Irish co-op policies. A new website, a regular newsletter direct to ICOS members, and a monthly column here in *Irish Farmers Monthly* are among the initiatives introduced by Damien to enhance the image of Irish agriculture and its co-operative movement to the general public. In addition, Damien is using his role in Brussels to connect ICOS leaders with MEPs and Commission officials, and regularly hosts co-op board members and farmer visits to Brussels. His appointment by ICOS secretary general, TJ Flanagan, and the ICOS board is considered by the industry as a master stroke.



Fendt scooped the coveted TOTY award for 2023. Can it take the 2024 title?

The Tractor of the Year (TOTY) Awards will be announced this month at Agritechnica, in Germany. The competition is now in its 25th year. The TOTY jury is made up of farm machinery editors from all over Europe, with our own colleague, Noel Dunne, representing *Irish Farmers Monthly*. The awards are sponsored by tyre manufacturer, BKT, which is based in India. There are four award categories including the prestigious Tractor of the Year 2024. The awards categories have been expanded over the years to include Best Utility Tractor, Best Specialist Tractor and, in later years, Best Sustainable Tractor. We will carry full coverage of the TOTY 2024 overall award-winning tractors in our December issue of *Irish Farmers Monthly*.



Why prevention trumps cure

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

Prevention of metabolic issues next spring will hinge around management decisions that will be made in the coming weeks. When costs associated with clinical cases are assessed alongside the time and labour involved in such cases, prevention is always better than cure.

Cost of Metabolic Disorders (clinical cases)	
Metabolic Disease	Estimated Cost/Case
Milk Fever	€312
Clinical Ketosis	€190
Retained Afterbirth	€392
Displaced abomasum	€515
Mastitis	€262
Acute Lameness	€312

It remains best practice to dry off cows at, or very close to the same condition that they should calve down in (Target BCS 3.0-3.25). Nutrition over the dry period targeting maintenance – with thin cows ideally dried off early to permit BCS recouperation – typically equates to 68-70% DMD silage in an adlib silage feeding scenario. However, one should always be mindful that over-conditioned cows at calving are troublesome and can be linked with several metabolic issues.

Dry Cow Mineral Provision

Feeding a dry cow mineral throughout the dry period is essential to build up mineral reserves and allows the cow to calve down comfortably. High Potassium (K) levels in silages is very common, which requires dilution of K levels in the diet and/or a high level of soluble Magnesium (Mg) to counter the increased risk of milk fever. High levels of K limits/blocks Mg absorption, delaying the release of Calcium (Ca) and increases the incidence of milk fever. Grass silage with greater than 1.8% K can cause issues.

Sub-clinical cases of milk fever are being estimated to cost greater than €100 with approximately six sub-clinical cases going undetected for every single clinical case seen. This typically presents through slow calving and/or retained afterbirths. Where this has proven an issue, a silage mineral analysis establishes K% in the dry cow silage being offered. A preventative plan can then be put in place to preclude reoccurrences.

Feed facilities

When there's limited feed space for dry cows, and where minerals are being dusted on top of silage, some cows may not be benefiting from the advised feed rate. Minerals can be offered via diet feeder or alternatively where top-dressing minerals at the barrier and space is limited, offer mineral twice daily (half rate AM/half rate PM) to ensure all cows receive the correct amount.

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BBC TO DROP FARM GATE FROM RADIO ULSTER

Over 30 years ago, Farm Gate started as a standalone radio programme serving rural communities in Northern Ireland. It moved to a regular slot on Good Morning Ulster and Evening Extra. The latter slot was dropped in recent years and the duration of the farming news profile on Radio Ulster has been reduced significantly over time, to the stage that it now accounts for an average of four minutes within the 24-hour cycle of broadcasting on the channel. The Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) is asking the BBC to rethink its plans to cut Farm Gate from Radio Ulster. The show goes out at

6.45am on Saturday mornings and is presented by Elaine Mitchell. According to the UFU, by axing Farm Gate, BBC would be isolating rural and farming families. Farmers deserve to have a voice and, according to UFU president David Brown, that voice is Farm Gate. By contrast, the farming community in the Republic is better served with Countrywide still attracting decent listenership numbers every week, even if figures have reduced in recent times. In addition, TV coverage of farm-related issues remains strong with Ear To The Ground still going strong and back on the air this month.

ALLTECH ANNOUNCES NEW APPOINTMENTS

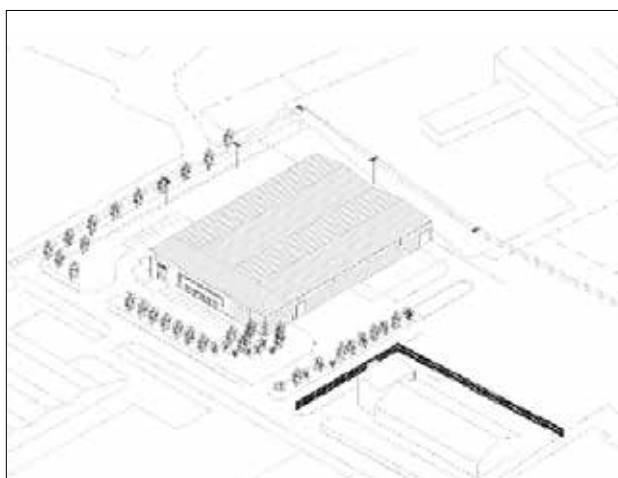
Alltech has made some significant appointments within their global marketing team. Clare Fahey has been appointed director of customer insights, and Ruth Kelly to design manager for Europe and Asia-Pacific. It's great to see so many well-qualified Irish people get the opportunity to spread their wings and gain such experience with an international company that was established in Ireland and now has such a global spread.

AHI PERSONNEL CHANGES

Two major changes in personnel at Animal Health Ireland (AHI) were becoming public as we went to print. Grainne Dwyer will no longer be communications and events manager with AHI, after 14 years with the organisation. Grainne was very much the go-to person for many contacts with AHI and her departure will leave a significant void to be filled. Another imminent departure from AHI is its CEO, Dr David Graham, who will step down next spring. Dr Graham has been a member of the AHI team since 2010 and was CEO for the past six years. AHI has a broad agenda of 'work in progress', with the eradication of BVD almost, if not quite, completed. The list of challenges is long, including developing a control programme for Johne's disease, making inroads on the prevalence of IBR in the national herd, as well as continuing its work around further reducing somatic cell counts in individual dairy herds.

PEARSON EXPANSION

Pearson, the family-owned milking technology company, has ambitious growth plans. It is now in the process of a new infrastructure development that will allow the company to expand its share of the strong global growth in dairy technology. As well as facilitating further product research and development and an expanded dairy technology production capability, the planned expansion at the Athy HQ (see diagram), will cater for the product and service diversification strategy being pursued by Pearsons, such as the award-winning Bullseye automated body-condition assessment tool, which utilises vision technology, allied to artificial technology. In 75 years, Pearsons has travelled a long way to become a global name in innovative milking technology.



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SILAGE MATTERS

The presence of heavy rain has made grazing conditions very difficult around the country. The season has ended on many farms, while on others it is not too far away. Grass silage will be the main stay of many of the diets, and knowing its quality is very important. The previous article dealt with body condition score, but that only tells us where we are. How we will get to the next step will mainly be determined by the quality of the forage we have available. While we sometimes focus the discussion on concentrate – with regard to cost, quality and level to feed – the biggest determining factor is the quality of the forage. Over 50 per cent of the diet is forage in higher-producing animals, while forage makes up 80–90 per cent of the diets of dry and growing animals. Silage quality has improved this year somewhat, based on the analysis of over 600 samples so far through InTouch, but only marginally. The average Dry matter digestibility (DMD) ranges from 71 to 68 for first and second cut, respectively. Protein is still low, at just over 12 per cent and it is the feeding value of this silage will determine whether you need more or less concentrates.

What is the most noticeable is the wide variation in the analysis across the country, and even within farms, between cuts. DMD varies between 59 per cent and 82 per cent, which is a very large range. In energy terms, the difference between feeding a 12.1 MJ and a 9.1 MJ is approximately 7 litres of milk in feeding value. When we look at the protein of the silage, for a fresh cow to go from 23 per cent protein silage to 8 per cent, we would need an extra 15 per cent protein in the concentrate, which would cost approximately €128/t of concentrate.

Based on 600 silage samples	DM %	Protein %	ME	DMD
Max	75	23	12.1	82
Min	17	8	9.1	59

While nobody goes out to make poor silage, and we continue to struggle with the weather, we need to consider getting serious about silage quality and how we can improve it. Doing what we have always done is not an option anymore. Changing two to three things — like cutting date, number of cuts or pre-grazing — can have a significant impact.

The final thing for this month is that when we have silage, we need to feed it, and dropping milk yield over the last month is evidence of underfeeding. Relying solely on low dry matter grass and avoiding the need to supplement with silage and concentrate will cause this intake gap. If we look after intake, everything else will look after itself.

BOVINE BREATHALYSER COMPANY SELECTED FOR AGTECHUCD'S PROGRAMME



Pictured at UCD Lyons Farm are: PJ Maguire, business development manager, Moonsyst; Marion Cantillon, founder, Pitseal; and Paul Connellan, founder, Burpeeze. Photo: Nick Bradshaw, Fotonic.

The AgTechUCD Innovation Centre recently announced the eight companies that have been selected to take part in its third accelerator programme dedicated to early-stage start-ups with global potential in the ag-tech, agri-food, and equine sectors.

Among the participating start-ups are Agri Data Analytics Ireland, which is developing the Bovine Breathalyser, a non-invasive machine that measures enteric methane emissions from ruminants. The Co. Offaly company, founded by Jack Pilkington and Alan O'Donovan, was recently named winner of the AgTechUCD Start-up Award as part of the 2023 Innovation Arena competition, hosted by Enterprise Ireland with the National Ploughing Association.

Another company, Pitseal, founded by Marion Cantillon and based in Co. Limerick, offers a game-changing, biofilm spray, comprising of unique strains of seaweed and nutrients, that forms an airtight, water-repellent seal over silage pits, eliminating the need for plastic sheeting and weights. The other participating start-ups, profiled below, are: Burpeeze, Moonsyst, PolyBo, Prepsheets, Spread It and Trojan Track.

START-UP PROBLEM-SOLVERS

Burpeeze is developing an edible netwrap for silage bales. Once the outer bale plastic has been removed, the netwrapped silage bale can be safely fed to ruminant animals. The netwrap will be fortified with postponed-release additives to decrease the rate of burping in cattle; reducing methane released during digestion. The founder of Burpeeze, based in Co. Clare, is Paul Connellan.

Moonsyst, an Agri-IoT, has developed a Smart Rumen Bolus system. The smart bolus is orally administered by a farmer or veterinary and remains in the cow's rumen. It is designed to alert dairy and beef farmers to any health, calving and breeding events on farm, all easily readable on a mobile phone and web application. The co-founder of Moonsyst, based in Co. Cork, is Desmond Savage.

PolyBo offers a unique bolus platform technology. Being composed of FDA-approved bioresorbable polymers, the system allows for a tailorable release-rate of included ingredients, such as trace elements or vitamins, vital for ruminant livestock. The co-founders of PolyBo, based

Trojan Track is addressing a key problem in equine care, unnoticed injuries. By combining biomechanical analysis with cutting-edge deep neural network technology, Trojan Track provides quick and accurate analysis of a horse's movement and performance, using just a smartphone camera and a tripod. The founder of Trojan Track, based in Co. Kildare, is Stephen O'Dwyer. The 2023 AgTechUCD Agccelerator Programme, which has just commenced, is an intensive 12-week hybrid programme, tailored to address the particular needs and challenges facing start-ups in the ag-tech, agri-food and equine sectors. The programme is focussed on fast tracking the business development and leadership skills of participants and to provide them with the support and guidance needed to accelerate their start-ups in Ireland and on the global stage. Based at the UCD Lyons Farm, AgTechUCD offers the first and only on-farm workspace hub to promote and accelerate agri-businesses and start-ups. AgTechUCD provides access to on-farm experimental facilities, allowing testing and trialling of products and services in a real-world environment. Start-ups also have preferred access to UCD food processing facilities, access to venture capital and business angel

Leo McGrane, centre manager, AgTechUCD

Innovation Centre, said: "We are looking forward to the next 12 weeks as we focus on supporting the commercial development of the participating start-ups as they further develop their disruptive ag-tech, agri-food and equine-tech innovations with global potential. During the programme we will also be supporting the participating cohort to help them to enhance their visibility in the marketplace, attract customers and investors and forge new partnerships in Ireland and further afield." This third AgTechUCD Accelerator Programme will conclude next January when participating start-ups will pitch their businesses to a panel of investors.

'STRONG BALANCE SHEET' FACILITATES KERRY'S €300m SHARE BUYBACK SCHEME

Kerry Group recently announced a €300m share buyback programme involving Kerry Group plc ordinary shares. The company said the programme would commence at the start of November 2023.

The news coincided with the company's recent quarter three, interim management statement which revealed that the dairy side of the business has been impacted by 'significant reduction in dairy prices'. It also revealed that full-year earnings guidance are expected to be at the low end of the previously stated 1-5 per cent constant currency range.

Dairy volumes were down by 12 per cent in quarter three, and 6.2 per cent year to date (YTD) 'as challenging industry dynamics persisted; pricing dropped by 176 per cent in quarter three, and 6.5 per cent YTD, 'driven by the significant impact from changes in dairy market prices'. And group earnings were down 110 basis points, driven by the significant impact from changes in dairy market prices. Volumes in Dairy Ireland were lower through the period, as input cost



Kerry CEO,
Edmond Scanlon.

dynamics continued to impact overall market demand, the interim report stated. Within Dairy Ingredients, volumes principally reflected softer market supply dynamics with prices continuing to reduce through the period. Overall growth in dairy consumer products was led by Kerry's branded cheese ranges and private-label spreads. However, Kerry's Taste and nutrition division saw overall volume growth of 1.5 per cent with growth of 1.6 per cent in quarter three. This was driven by continued strong foodservice performance. And this contributed to group margin expansion of +100 basis points in quarter three. Meat, snacks and dairy markets achieved good growth also.

In relation to markets and performance, the report stated that given the prevailing industry dynamics through the period, the overall demand environment remained quite resilient. "Customer innovation activity primarily focussed on new taste profiles, continued improvements to products' nutritional characteristics, products targeting health needs, and providing more relative value options for consumers."

Commenting on the results, Edmond Scanlon, chief executive officer said: "We delivered a good overall performance in the period recognising varying conditions across our markets. North America saw good improvement through the third quarter, Europe performed in line with expectations while Asia Pacific/Middle East/Africa (APMEA) continued to deliver strong growth. Our unique positioning in foodservice supported our continued strong growth in the channel.

"We made good strategic progress through the period with further footprint expansion and strategic acquisitions, and given the Group's strong balance sheet and cash flow, we are also initiating a share buyback programme.

"Taste and nutrition remains strongly positioned for volume growth and margin expansion while recognising current market conditions, however Dairy Ireland performance continues to be impacted by challenging industry dynamics. Given this context, we expect our constant currency earnings growth to be at the low end of our guidance range."

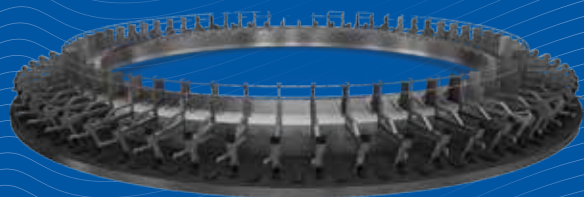
Europe region

Here, overall volumes were up 3.7 per cent, with quarter three growth of 2 per cent in line with expectations. This volume growth was led by meat, snacks and meals markets. There were also strong performances in the UK and Ireland. The region achieved 'continued excellent growth' in the foodservice channel driven by seasonal products, new menu innovations and ongoing nutritional profile improvements. The retail channel delivered a solid performance in the region considering the significant consumer inflationary environment.

Growth in meat was driven by culinary taste and texture system launches combined with continued nutritional enhancement innovations. Snacks delivered strong growth through savoury taste and Tastesense salt reduction technologies, while meals also achieved strong growth through nutritional enhancements and authentic taste solutions for stocks and broths.

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Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and
Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

It is over 30 years since the Maastricht Treaty was implemented. Central to it was the introduction of the legislative procedure giving the European Parliament and the European Council equal power as joint co-legislators. Co-decision meant that the laws proposed by the EU Commission are hammered out, amended, and adopted by the MEPs and ministers. It was further enhanced thanks to another treaty that we are very familiar with in Ireland. The Lisbon Treaty renamed the co-decision procedure as the 'ordinary legislative procedure' and increased the number of policy areas to which this procedure applies, thus enhancing the Parliament's powers.

As we hurtle towards a bumper year of significant elections (EU, local, US and possibly UK and Ireland, among others), it is worth re-emphasising the significance of these treaty milestones.

Next June, we will go to the polls to elect members of the European Parliament. Of all the elections we vote in, most people would probably consider the European elections as the least significant. 'Gravy train' is a phrase commonly used to describe anybody getting a role in Brussels, be it as an elected representative or an EU institution appointee. Yet, what people may not realise is that 80 per cent of domestic laws have their genesis here in Brussels. And, MEPs play a huge role.

The draft laws are proposed or 'cooked up' by the EU Commission before Member States' governments via their respective ministers, and the Parliament's 705 (going up to 716 in 2024) MEPs put the proposals under the microscope. The Council of Ministers makes amendments and takes a position, before relevant committees in the building, literally around the corner, debate, amend and present their position. There are a total of 27 committees focussed on different aspects of what consumes our daily lives.

So, for instance, there is a committee on agriculture and a committee on environment. When you are elected you seek out the committee that best represents your interest or that of your constituents and you try to make an impact. That is where much of the careful stitching together of large proposals happens before getting the final nod in the broader plenary and subsequent signing into law. The EU might not be perfect but that should not deflect from the significant role that those we elect play in making decisions that affect what we do daily, and that is no more apparent than on the farm.

Take the Nitrates Directive, for example. There is a lot of anger in relation to the cutting of the nitrates derogation from 250kg/N/ha to 220kg /N/ha. For what it's worth, it is a nothing story in Brussels since Ireland is one of only two and a half countries where it applies. Nevertheless, the aim now is to hold onto the 220kg limit. For that to happen, the Commission needs to be convinced that the environment and biodiversity will not be impacted. They are only interested in science. Economic impact means zilch. Proving that water quality is improving is all they want to see. The overarching EU Green Deal is here to stay even with next summer's changing of the guard. The bottom line for Irish farmers to meet that head on is simple, improving water quality. That will make life easier for MEPs and ministers when it comes to EU law making.

APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMMES IN DEMAND AT TEAGASC

The Teagasc College of Amenity Horticulture at the National Botanic Gardens welcomed the first ever land-based apprenticeship class recently. Ten horticulture

apprentices from across Ireland completed their first week of block training and look forward to the two-year programme. Each apprentice is an employee of an approved horticulture employer, and will complete 80 per cent of their learning on the job with 20 per cent block learning with Teagasc across the 24-month programme. Upon completion of the apprenticeship, the graduate will hold a QQI Higher Level 6 Certificate in Horticulture.

Teagasc head of education, Dr Anne-Marie Butler welcomed the apprentices and highlighted the significance of this milestone achievement. She said: "The new apprenticeships led by Teagasc offer a new and powerful learning opportunity for learners. We are delighted to work with SOLAS and the National Apprenticeship Office to deliver new land-based apprenticeships. We look forward to the launch of the sportsturf and agriculture apprenticeships and wish all apprentices and their employers well."

The first sportsturf apprentices were also recently welcomed at Teagasc Kildalton Horticulture College. Demand for this course has been very high and applications for the 2023 intake is now closed with the course fully subscribed.

The Level 7 Farm Manager Apprenticeship programme will welcome its first cohort of apprentices on December 4. Applications for this course remain open (at time of print) but for further information, check the Teagasc website.

Apprentices will engage in on-the-job training with a SOLAS-approved employer during the two-year apprenticeship programme. Off-the-job training will take place at Kildalton College and Teagasc Moorepark in three-to-five-day blocks, supported by online learning. To be eligible for the level 7 Farm Manager Apprenticeship programme, an applicant must:

- Be directly employed by a SOLAS-approved employer;
- Have a minimum qualification of a Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Agriculture (or equivalent or higher award);
- Be working in the agriculture sector for two years full-time with the relevant experience and a NFQ Level 6 or higher qualification;
- Complete the Apprentice Registration Form with SOLAS.

Upon completion of the farm management apprenticeship programme, the apprentice will hold a QQI Level 7 Bachelor of Science in Professional Sustainable Farm Management.

The Level 6 Farm Technician Apprenticeship, based in Teagasc Clonakilty College, will welcome apprentices on December 13. Applications for this course remain open (at time of print) but for further information, check the Teagasc website. Apprentices will engage in on-the-job training with a SOLAS-approved employer during the two-year apprenticeship programme. Off-the-job training will take place across the two-year programme supported by online learning. Upon completion of the farm technician apprenticeship, the Apprentice will hold a Higher Level Certificate in Technical Farm Operations (NFQ Level 6).



Irish parts manager for
Argo Tractors Ireland,
Luke Gardiner.

NEW APPOINTMENT AT ARGO TRACTORS IRELAND

Luke Gardiner has been appointed as Irish parts manager for Argo Tractors Ireland, working with the Landini and McCormick brands. A native of Eyrecourt in Co. Galway, and skilled in business relations, sales management, e-commerce, marketing and logistics, Luke moved to France aged 13 when his parents purchased a farm in the Limousin region. A graduate of the Montluçon-Larequille School of Agriculture where he obtained the French equivalent of the Green Certificate, Luke returned to Ireland in 2017 to work as French sales rep for Quality Tractor Parts. In recent years, Luke has worked for Ned Murphy Tractors/Massey Salvage – a busy Massey Ferguson parts business in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. While there, Luke created and launched its parts website in addition to increasing the company's level of domestic and international sales. Last July, Argo Tractors Ireland Ltd was launched at the FTMTA Farm Machinery Show held at Punchestown Racecourse, underlining its commitment to promoting the Landini and McCormick brands throughout the island.

FIRST MICROBIAL AUTHORISED FOR LIQUID FEED HYGIENE

Lallemand Animal Nutrition has announced that its unique lactic acid bacteria strain *Pediococcus acidilactici* CNCM I-4622 (Bactocell) has become the first microbial to receive an authorisation in the EU related to the hygiene of liquid feed. Lallemand's regional business manager for Northern Ireland, Kevin McAneney, says this new authorisation could be a game changer for Irish pig producers using liquid feed systems. "It's estimated that around 70 per cent of pigs in Ireland are liquid-fed due to the availability of nutrient-rich co-products from the food and beverage industries," he said. "We're also seeing increasing amounts of milk replacer being fed to piglets as a result of larger litter sizes, and hygiene is also important at this time." Ensuring the sanitary quality of liquid feed and the feeding system itself is a key priority for all producers, he added. Bactocell is recognised by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for its safety and potential to reduce pH and limit growth of coliform bacteria in liquid feeds. "By converting non-digestible carbohydrates into L+ lactic acid, it promotes a healthier bacterial balance, helping maintain the nutritional quality of liquid feed and reducing the colonisation of harmful bacteria contributing to negative biofilm formation," said Kevin.

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Freebick Kelly, K. 2020. Bovine mastitis. All Island Animal Disease Surveillance, p.33.

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These products are not licensed for concurrent use. A decision to use either of these vaccines before or after any other veterinary medicinal product therefore needs to be made on a case-by-case basis.

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VET23 CONFERENCE UNITES MULTI-DISCIPLINE VETS FOR FIRST TIME

The inaugural Vet23 conference took place in the Rochestown Park Hotel, Co. Cork in October and attracted a strong attendance of veterinary professionals from around the country across food animal; companion animal; and equine disciplines. A unique collaboration between Veterinary Ireland's food-animal, companion-animal and equine groups, the conference facilitated the sharing of knowledge and practical information by multiple veterinary disciplines in one location. Expert speakers from practice, as well as from industry, research and academia, presented on key challenges in animal health and welfare.

BRINGING COLLEAGUES TOGETHER

President, Veterinary Ireland, Paul McDermott, said: "This is a period of significant change in veterinary medicine and the entire Irish veterinary community came together at Vet23 to provide Irish vets with the information and knowledge on how best to deal, at a practice level, with the issues that will arise due to these changes. "Providing a forum for the exchange of information and ideas, our aim was to bring colleagues together from across the profession to talk through common issues and establish strong professional ties that will drive the development of the profession and advance veterinary medicine."

Experts shared the latest research and insights across a comprehensive range of the key issues facing the profession. Just some of the topics covered included:

- Sustainable ruminant health and selective treatment of clinical mastitis;
- Anaesthesia and sedation of respiratory compromised companion animal patients and decision making in small animal chest emergencies; and
- Radiology in equine clinical practice and the role of sepsis in foal mortality.

There was also a presentation focussing on the most common injuries incurred by vets in practice, along with advice and guidance on how veterinary professionals can maintain their own wellbeing and physical resilience.

HARNESSING A DIVERSE NETWORK OF EXPERTISE

Vet, Donal Lynch of the Cattle Association of Veterinary Ireland (CAVI) committee said "For the CAVI strand, we hosted leaders in their field in Ireland and from other countries within Europe. They addressed issues that we are affected by on a daily basis such as mastitis and fertility, as well as the sustainability challenges that face our agricultural sector."

Allen Dunne of the Equine Committee said: "We had expert speakers on a wide range of topics including neonatal care, radiology, lameness, reproduction, parasitology and Cushing's disease. The equine strand of the programme had plenty to appeal to both mixed and equine practitioners."

Three parallel wet labs – on companion animal work, food animal



Pictured at the conference were: Allen Dunne of the Equine Committee; Jane Pigott, chair of the Veterinary Ireland Companion Animal Society (VICAS) committee; and Donal Lynch, Cattle Association of Veterinary Ireland (CAVI) committee.



Pictured at the conference were: Paul McDermott, president, Veterinary Ireland; Hazell Mullins, vice-president, Veterinary Ireland; and Finbarr Murphy, chief executive, Veterinary Ireland.

skills, and equine work – acted as a curtain-raiser for the conference on day one.

According to the Veterinary Ireland president, the accessibility and interactivity of these small group teaching sessions will make a vital contribution to the development of surgical and practical skills for all the veterinary professionals in attendance.

A major industry exhibition took place in conjunction with the conference featuring leading-edge innovation from leaders in veterinary technologies, equipment and medicines.



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SEISMIC CHANGE ON SIGNPOST FARM

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY REPORTS ON THE PROGRESS MADE OVER TWO YEARS BY KILKENNY FARMER, RUAIRI CUMMINS, A SIGNPOST FARMER NEAR KILMOGANNY, CO. KILKENNY



There has been some doubt over the ability or willingness of Irish farmers to change management practices to the extent required to meet climate-change mitigation targets set for the farm sector.

If the first few years of the Teagasc Signpost Programme are any indication of what can be achieved over a relatively short time period, then we can conclude that, not only is widespread management change possible, but it is also widely achievable, with the correct advice, incentivisation and rational explanation to farmers that much of what is being expected of them is economically beneficial as well as environmentally and socially positive.

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

Ruairi Cummins is a cattle producer based near Kilmoganny in Kilkenny. He is a member of Teagasc's Signpost Programme and has made significant progress over the past two years in implementing many of the best practices being advised to meet the targets set for himself and fellow Signpost participants. The Cummins farm runs to 36 hectares, with 45 suckler cows. Ruairi finishes

the male progeny to beef at 16 months of age. Aside from the bull-beef enterprise, heifers and some bullocks are sold as store cattle. Ruairi outlines the major changes that have taken place on the farm since his involvement in the Signpost Programme began: "Fertiliser use has changed completely. Our traditional fertiliser would have been NPK compounds, backed up with CAN. Now we spread protected urea, with 18:6:12 used to maintain fertility as well as providing additional nitrogen. The protected urea has been a real game changer for the farm. Its effectiveness is obvious. There are no atmospheric losses and there is a far lower weather impact than on conventional urea products. The science is there to back it up. I would have been very 'iffy' about protected urea initially, but over the past two years it has proven to be at least as good or better than straight urea or CAN. The initial price may be dearer but in the long run it works out cheaper because it delivers better results. For instance, we make all our silage in round bales and a lower application of protected urea still provides enough nitrogen for the same number of round silage bales per hectare."

SOIL FERTILITY IS A KEY PRIORITY

Ruairi places a lot of attention on soil fertility: "Building up the soil index is important to get good grass growth rates and get the best return from our fertiliser inputs, whether that's bag manure or slurry. When I joined the programme that was one of the priorities, to soil test and act on the results. For me, it's about building our pH figures and building our soil P and K indexes. Adequate liming is important to maximise the benefits of those other inputs. We spread 50 tonnes last year and a further 25 tonnes was spread this year, based on soil test results. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's liming scheme support is another incentive to spread whatever lime is needed for optimum soil fertility."

Ruairi has firsthand experience of the benefits of increasing clover content in the swards on his farm: "We have been increasing clover on the farm. It is a gradual process and we are already seeing the benefits, in terms of lower chemical fertiliser inputs without any reduction in the amount of forage produced. On the fields where clover has established well, we have reduced or eliminated nitrogen spreading. That's a big one with huge saving on fertiliser purchase, especially now that prices are far higher than they were a few years ago."



LESS IS MORE

One of the biggest obvious changes in farm practice has been in the application of slurry on the Cummins farm, as Ruairi explains: "Better use of slurry has helped lift both soil

index figures as well as productivity from the slurry. The splash-plate was the method of spreading previously. Now that has changed completely. The emphasis has changed. It's more about timing, about weather and ground conditions and getting the best return possible from the slurry. Low emission slurry spreading, like the use of protected urea, is a game changer. We are making far better use of our cattle slurry with more selective spreading periods. Most of it gets spread in springtime when grass growth is taking off. Ammonia losses are reduced. The smell has reduced completely, and that's important too. We all have to live with each other and share the countryside."



LOW EMISSION SLURRY SPREADING, LIKE THE USE OF PROTECTED UREA, IS A GAME CHANGER

FIRM TARGETS

Ruairi and his Signpost advisers have also targeted the livestock in terms of reducing their carbon footprint: "Any cow that is not performing well, such as calving annually, or not producing a good calf is culled. Finishing the bulls at 16 months is a massive challenge. Because of our emphasis on quality breeding, we are succeeding in getting some of them away at 14 months. We are able to calve the replacement heifers at two years. There's a big saving in that from a lot of angles. Keeping a heifer to calve down at three years is a big cost in itself, without any benefits whatsoever."

SHARING THE COSTS

Improving water quality and biodiversity on the Cummins farm has been a focus for Ruairi: "We are a lot more conscious around the environment than we were before we entered the Signpost programme. We are signing up for the ACRES programme and that that will help us to finance changes that will deliver environmental improvements on the farm. Keeping adequate distances from streams for spreading fertiliser and slurry and moving fences out to keep livestock away from watercourses is important and we have done that. ACRES will allow us to make more changes on the farm and we welcome that opportunity. It will reduce the costs involved and that's important, especially for farmers



in fairly low margin drystock sectors. It's essential that we all do our bit. The changes farmers are making are for the benefit of everyone, farming and non-farming, so we shouldn't be left carrying all the cost."

PROGRESS REPORT

Changes implemented

- ▶ 72% protected urea.
- ▶ 100% LESS.
- ▶ Clover inclusion in reseeds.
- ▶ Earlier finishing through better breeding and animal health.

Further progress planned

- ▶ Retain protected urea use levels.
- ▶ Increase clover content further to reduce N by 20%.
- ▶ Continue 100% LESS.
- ▶ Improve breeding for health and productivity increases.

Financial gains to date

- ▶ Nitrogen reduction: savings €880.
- ▶ 80% nitrogen spread as protected urea instead of CAN: savings €1,230.
- ▶ Total savings to date: €2,110.

HEAD-TO-HEAD: IFA PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

FRANCIE GORMAN FROM LAOIS AND MARTIN STAPLETON FROM LIMERICK ARE IN THE RUNNING TO REPLACE OUTGOING PRESIDENT OF THE IRISH FARMERS' ASSOCIATION (IFA), TIM CULLINAN, WHOSE FOUR-YEAR TERM IS COMING TO A CLOSE. NEXT MONTH, WE WILL FIND OUT TO WHOM HE WILL HAND OVER THE REINS

The ballot to elect the next president of the IFA opened earlier this month, and Francie and Martin have been engaged in a gruelling series of hustings around the country to impress on IFA members the merits of their candidacies. They sat down with *Irish Farmers Monthly* to debate the major issues of concern to farmers.

WHAT CAN YOU OFFER?

When asked what they would bring to the role of president, Francie responded: "I have a great belief in the IFA. I believe I can bring a pro-activeness that we have lost in recent years. I'm not being critical of my predecessors. It is something we have slipped into over time. I want to restore the credibility of the IFA as a strong, political force representing farmers. In addition, I want people who are disillusioned with the IFA to regain confidence in it. Many farmers are disillusioned with the IFA, primarily because we haven't taken a pro-active approach on so many issues. We seem to be on the sidelines, waiting to see what happens and when there's an issue – particularly the likes of the Nitrates Derogation that's hugely important to many farmers' incomes – we aren't pro-active enough. In 2022, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) decided there would be a reduction in stocking rates depending on water quality and the first we knew about it was a month later."

In response to the same question, Martin outlined his experience over the past eight years' working at the forefront of the IFA:

"I will focus on delivering for Irish farmers.

I will focus on what's possible to achieve, on building better relations with everybody we deal with, our food purchasers, our Government, the EU, and I will bring back a sense of respect for the IFA by the public and a better sense of respect among farmers for the IFA itself."



WE MUST FOCUS, AS FARMERS, ON WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON, RATHER THAN DISCUSSING WHICH SECTOR OR REGION IS DOING BEST

PRESIDENTIAL PRIORITIES

When asked what his priorities would be if elected, Martin responded: "I mentioned a sense of respect for the organisation and for farming. That has become the top issue for farmers. The next priority is unity. We must focus, as farmers, on what we have in common, rather than discussing which sector or region is doing best, or which farm organisation is doing best. Unity is important because without it we won't be strong as an organisation and without strength we cannot deliver for our members.

"I also want to bring a real priority around our freedom to farm. Inside each farm gate, there is a real need for farmers to have the freedom to choose what they want to do. If Government wants to change what farmers are doing, they must be incentivised and supported, not forced. There must be a focus on getting returns from the marketplace and

Martin Stapleton.



proper assignment of the supports for farmers because I don't think we do that well now."

ACHIEVEMENT LIST

What would Francie like to have achieved if he were the outgoing president in four years' time: "My 100 per cent priority is income. It all comes down to income across every policy we engage with, whether that's with the department, Government or EU. How it affects farm income is the central question. There's not enough emphasis placed on how policy implementation affects the costs of production on farms and at processing level. It comes back to being pro-active in whatever policy is being negotiated at the time. We must be prepared to put our ideas forward,

make sure they are taken on board in forming the final policy or regulation and not be waiting for the final policy and then reacting to it when it's too late.

"We need to be actively involved in the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) over the next two years. If we miss the opportunity, we won't have any real influence. I reference a proper environment scheme. We haven't had one since REPS 3. Farmers need to be paid properly for environmental achievements. That's not happening now with the CAP funding being raided to pay for environmental ambition. Adequate CAP funds must be available to support farmers in producing food sustainably and to meet environmental ambition on our farms."

PROTEST VERSUS NEGOTIATION

Both candidates asserted the primary role of negotiation while holding onto the strategy of protest if or when negotiation fails. When asked about how the IFA can represent all farm sectors, Martin responded: "It's absolutely necessary. Otherwise, we end up competing with each other. We must be able to make hard decisions within our own farming community as to what is important. The challenge for us is to decide what we want to achieve, where we want our focus to be. Vulnerable sectors and areas, quality food production and environmental ambition are my choices. If farmers decide something else that's fine."

UNITY OF PURPOSE

It was proposed that the many representative organisations for different sectors make unity of purpose impossible. Martin asserted that: "The reason we have so many farm organisations is because we left a gap there. We weren't listening to farmers. We weren't representing them. That's a key challenge I will face if elected as IFA president. My aim would be to bring a unity of purpose to the issues of the day, including CAP negotiation and environmental issues. These are the big challenges we face, and farmers have a lot more in common than what divides us."

Both Francie and Martin were asked about the unseemly spectacle outside the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the ICMSA passed an IFA

protest. Martin's response: "What happened was regrettable and we would be better off if we didn't find ourselves in a situation where one organisation is walking past another's protest. But, the reality is that things were said to fellow farmers that should not have been said." Francie's comment: "I neither justify nor condemn what happened. It's a reality and is what happens when there is no prior consultation, and everyone gets backed into a corner."



IT ALL COMES DOWN TO INCOME ACROSS EVERY POLICY WE ENGAGE WITH, WHETHER THAT'S WITH THE DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OR EU

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Is Irish farming becoming increasingly economically unsustainable and more and more dependent on subvention from Government and EU? Martin insists that there are many definitions of sustainability: "Must a farm be able to generate an income for one person or an entire family, or does a farm income have to be supplemented with off-farm income? All options are working well and providing decent living standards for over 100,000 Irish farmers. I don't go along with the notion that a small-scale farm or one that is operating in a low-margin sector, is unviable. The biggest threat to viability is succession and the lack of young people willing to commit to a life in agriculture. When you talk to young people, a lot of the problem is the perceived lack of respect for farmers."

Francie reflected on the same sustainability question: "Take the beef sector as an example. We can't compete with South American beef, with limitless land resources, differing environmental standards to our own, access to cheap labour, and use of hormones. Our regulatory standards do not allow fair competition. A viable beef industry has to be supported against unfair competitive forces and those supports have halved in the last decade."



Francie Gorman.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE IN THE AUDIENCE?

MARTY MURPHY IS HEAD OF TAXATION WITH IFAC, THE FARMER-OWNED ACCOUNTS AND BUSINESS CONSULTANCY SERVICE. IN THIS POST-BUDGET ANALYSIS, HE DISCUSSES, WITH MATT O'KEEFFE, THE MAJOR BUDGETARY MEASURES AS THEY APPLY TO FARMERS

Budget 2024 has been described as a latter day Late Late Show, with something for everyone in the audience. That includes farm businesses, though more so in terms of a continuance of existing farm-related taxation measures and concessions rather than anything startlingly original.

PERSONAL TAXATION CONCESSIONS

In relation to changes to personal taxation and implications for farmers and their spouses, Marty explains: "The threshold for the 20 per cent rate of tax, previously payable on income up to €40,000 per annum, has increased by €2,000 to €42,000. For a single-income farm-family couple, the standard income-rate threshold has moved up to €51,000. For a farming couple where one spouse is working off-farm, the total relief from the budgetary changes provides for €84,000 combined earnings to be taxed at the lower standard tax rate." That concession puts extra income in a farm family's pocket, provided, of course, that one or both incomes are high enough to benefit from the raising of the thresholds, which is not the case for many farm families.

Taxpayers subject to the Universal Social Charge (USC) the 'temporary emergency

tax' brought in after the financial crash all of 15 years ago, have benefitted from a reduction in the USC tax rate, as Marty confirmed: "The 4.5 per cent USC rate, which catches most people earning in excess of the basic cut-off income, has been reduced by 0.5 per cent to 4 per cent." He continued: "The second band has also seen a small reduction for higher earners. In addition, the ceiling for payment of USC has been raised to €25,760. These are modest positive changes, but they all add up in the calculation of annual earnings. There was another small nod towards alleviating the tax burden with personal tax credits rising by €100 to €1,875. For employees, tax and earned income credits improved by the same figure of €100 to €1,875. That's money directly into a taxpayer's pocket.

"Looking at the totality then for a couple earning, for instance, €55,000 per year, the total benefit should work out at €917 per annum. For a couple in a higher-earning bracket, with one working off-farm and the other engaged in profitable farming for example, with €100,000 joint income, the benefits in terms of reduced personal taxation for that couple work out at €1,600 in a full year. Add in the various financial

cushions that are in place for energy costs, with three payments of €150 spread across the winter to April 2024, and a doubling up of various social-support payments for December, and the end result is some alleviation in the living cost pressures on households. The caveat is that the inflation rate, while it has been falling, is still at a high level and current political and military turmoil across the world has the potential to increase living and business costs in the months ahead, eroding any concessions from the budget."

For the many retired farmers, there is a €12 per week increase in the old-age pension and for those farm businesses that have diversified by renting out a property on the farm, there will be a €3,000 per year income disregard on the standard income tax band, says Marty. "That's an aspect of Government strategies to encourage the retention of small landlords in the rental market, when many are moving out of the sector," he adds.

AGRI TAXATION CONCESSIONS MAINTAINED

The IFAC expert had reasonably positive news on the agri-taxation front, particularly in relation to inheritance and capital taxes,



generally. "There were no significant changes in the capital tax area for the farming community, though there were some notable concessions. For the young, trained farmer, where previously he or she would have had stamp duty relief up to €70,000, that concession has been increased to €100,000. "Consanguinity relief has been extended out for a further five years. That's positive on several fronts, including providing assurance that the relief will remain in place from an inheritance-planning perspective. In another concession to supporting inheritance planning, the land value ceiling has been increased, reflecting increases in value and the age limitation has also been raised to 70 years. "We were anticipating increases in thresholds for inheritance to move upwards, from €335,000 for instance for direct descent inheritance and lower levels for more indirect relationships. That didn't happen and could be seen as a hidden additional inheritance taxation hit, with property values rising generally," he says.



IFAC's head of taxation, Marty Murphy.

LAND-LEASING CONCESSION TIGHTENED

There has been much farmer agitation at what has been seen as a hoovering up of large farms by wealthy investors. That issue was somewhat addressed in Budget 2024, Marty explains: "Basically, the long-term land rental relief will not apply unless the land has been owned for seven years. That could act as some discouragement for potential investors buying land as a wealth-gathering exercise without any intention of farming the land, and then leasing it out again for a tax-free income. It may not prevent non-farmers buying land, but it will be a deterrent for some."

FLAT-RATE VAT HIT

On the negative side of Budget 2024, the Government lowered the VAT flat rate refund, which, Marty says is an 'unfortunate change.' "There was a reduction last year but given the fact that farm incomes are under pressure this year, the timing alone is unwelcome. "Ultimately, it represents a €17m reduction in income for the farming community, taken in its entirety. Traditionally, farmers did not have to register for VAT, instead using a flat-rate scheme, reducing the hassle of compiling VAT returns. At its peak, that reduced rate was at 5.8 per cent, and now it is down a full 1 per cent to 4.8 per cent." Marty noted the postponement of additional carbon tax to May 1, 2024, but pointed out another harsh reality: "While the increased rate was due to be implemented immediately, the reality is that a previously postponed carbon tax increase will kick in anyway, so that businesses and everyone else in society will take another carbon tax hit immediately, with the prospect of another increase by mid-2024."



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ENGINEERING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

FORMER DAIRYMASTER CEO AND MECHANICAL ENGINEER, DR EDMOND HARTY, WAS APPOINTED AS CEO OF ENGINEERS IRELAND EARLIER THIS YEAR. *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY* EDITOR, **MATT O'KEEFFE CAUGHT UP WITH DR HARTY TO FIND OUT ABOUT HIS AIM TO PROMOTE THE ROLE OF ENGINEERING IN DEVELOPING A MORE SUSTAINABLE FARMING AND FOOD-PRODUCTION MODEL**

There is, Dr Harty insists, 'an absolute necessity' to include engineering in any plans to accelerate our pace of progress towards carbon net zero food production in the years ahead. He explains: "Agricultural technology has now advanced to the point where robots can milk cows, harvest fruit, and can even seed and weed our soils. In fact, the latest innovations in artificial intelligence (AI) can assist in identifying parasites in livestock, managing irrigation, and offering nutritional solutions to maximise crop yields." The relationship between engineering and agriculture is hugely important, he adds. "If you just think about society and all the things we use, whether it is the technology we have in agriculture and on our farms, or on our mobile phones, that's technology that has been developed by engineers. "Engineering has a big role to play in developing the solutions we need for the

future of the world. Engineers Ireland has over 26,000 members, spread across all strands of engineering, covering agriculture, electronic, bioengineering, chemical, civil and electrical engineering."

SOLUTIONS-FOCUSED APPROACH

Dr Harty fully understands the close interactions of engineering and farming on an everyday basis: "If you think in terms of farm machinery and farm infrastructure alone, it is engineers who develop the solutions to the challenges of food production. Dairymaster, which I was closely involved with for many years, developed so many engineering technologies for use in agriculture. I reflect on my college days where many of my student colleagues came from farming backgrounds and had a natural affinity with solutions-focused practical approaches to challenges they met in their everyday working lives."

THE MAGICAL MIX

Dr Harty describes what he refers to as 'a magical mix of agriculture and engineering'. "If you think about the needs of society in terms of food and water, many of the advances in agriculture over the past 50 years alone, have been led by engineering-technology developments. Engineers are all about identifying and developing solutions. From tractors to milking equipment to robotics, engineers have been involved. Whether its dairy or tillage or horticulture developments, engineering has led the way. "As a general observation, I would suggest that there are lots of scientists involved in agriculture, but not enough engineers. We need far more engineering participation because, outside of a few companies, there's not a lot of engineers involved. The reality is that many of the challenges facing agriculture require the close involvement of engineers to

deliver solutions, whether that's in a digital context or climate-change mitigation, all of them require some aspect of an engineering input."

SUSTAINABILITY

The Engineers Ireland president outlines how engineering, in its many facets, can contribute to more sustainable agriculture: "From buildings and building components, through new methods of construction, we require new technologies that are all dependent on engineering to a greater or lesser degree. Culling the herd seems to be the only other solution being offered. In reality, there are multiple solutions that require imagination, ingenuity, and practical, scientific and engineering-based approaches in many cases.

"Animal-monitoring products that I would have been involved in previously, have practical application in reducing labour requirements, increasing efficiencies, improving livestock health outcomes. That's all about improving sustainability and it all has engineering concepts and outcomes in the mix. We need to continue on that journey and broaden our approach. Digital solutions have much to offer. AI is another development that will contribute to sustainable food production. As of now, there has been little AI application in agricultural activities. We need to drive that development. There is a need for more food in the world. The global population is increasing by as much as 200,000 people per day, equivalent to the population of Ireland every month. Meanwhile, the European population is reducing. We need innovative solutions to food production, which will allow more efficient production with lower labour input. Robotics, and now AI, are not there to replace human involvement, so much as to augment the human aspect. New technologies have proven to increase productivity, not eliminate human participation."

BUILDING ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS

Dr Harty outlines where he believes agriculture is going: "Sustainability will be key. Ireland is a small place in global terms. However, it's not about the effect we will



Dr Edmond Harty.

“
**AS A GENERAL OBSERVATION,
I WOULD SUGGEST THAT
THERE ARE LOTS OF
SCIENTISTS INVOLVED IN
AGRICULTURE, BUT NOT
ENOUGH ENGINEERS**

have on climate change, it is about solidarity with the rest of the world. Everyone must be involved. Our ambition must be to be the best in the world at what we do; in this case, the production of food. That's our opportunity, to produce and sell the best product, not the cheapest. Efficiency will be central in achieving that goal.

"Individualisation, in terms of looking after each animal will be important. That applies to fields for fertilisation and crop protection. A blanket approach will not optimise our inputs and outcomes. The same approach increasingly applies to antibiotics and anti-parasitics. I see technology driving those developments with engineering expertise as

a key component in the development and application of those solutions.

"Medtech is another example of the benefits of individualisation of treatment. As people live longer, they need more medical interventions, or more accurately, in many cases, medical engineering interventions in terms of joint replacements, heart valves and stents, for instance. Many people with farming backgrounds have been involved in the development of these technologies because of their solution-based mindsets. Connectivity, for example through high-speed broadband, has a huge engineering component. That is going to revolutionise our rural economies where distance will no longer be a barrier to communication and information flow."

INNOVALOGIX

Dr Harty describes what is involved in his latest venture, Innovalogix, of which he is founder and CEO: "When I left Dairymaster, I wanted to become involved in the next important technologies that will influence societal and economic development, such as the application of AI-based concepts and solutions to the challenges facing us. I have been involved in promoting start-up companies and ensuring they have the financial and other resources to be successful. The whole area of innovation, identifying the next successful generation of innovators, interests me, not necessarily from a daily management perspective, but rather in terms of advising on strategy and understanding how progress can be made. "Gaining product adoption and market access is as important as the development of the product in the first place. Farmers buy a product if it makes a positive difference to their business. Otherwise, they won't invest. My Dairymaster experience has provided me with a valuable, simple insight as to how markets and purchasers think and act. "Innovalogix is a company that allows me to maximise the benefit of my previous experiences. My aim is to assist up to 30 companies in their development and progress towards long term success. It's not about being operationally involved. It is more about being able to take a step back and identify what will matter in the future."



€40m EXPANSION SPREADS KERRYGOLD'S PRODUCTION PROWESS

THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN THE KERRYGOLD STORY WAS REVEALED AT THE RECENT OPENING OF A MAJOR EXPANSION OF ORNUA'S KERRYGOLD PARK BUTTER-PROCESSING FACILITY IN MITCHELSTOWN, CO. CORK. *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY* EDITOR, **MATT O'KEEFFE**, WAS THERE AND HE CAUGHT UP WITH ORNUA'S INTERIM CEO, DONAL BUGGY, TO LEARN MORE

The official opening of the €40m expansion of Kerrygold Park was attended by both Charlie McConalogue, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Simon Coveney, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Their presence reflected the importance of the development for the Irish dairy sector, in what is a challenging time, as well as enterprise development in a key indigenous industry. Kerrygold Park's cutting-edge processing technology and infrastructure includes two state-of-the-art butter churns and 10 packing lines for a range of over 50 different product formats available across more than 60 markets, globally.

The investment in this facility has seen Kerrygold Park's total cream-processing capacity grow significantly, and putting some context on that Donal said: "We have doubled the size of the Kerrygold Park facility, going from a throughput capacity of 40,000t

to 80,000t. To put that into perspective, one million packets of butter per day can be produced on the site. That will facilitate our growth ambitions, mainly in the US, over the coming years."



WE ARE NOW VERY NEAR TO ANNOUNCING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A €2bn BRAND STATUS, AND THEN WE WILL GO FOR €3bn

PRODUCER OWNERSHIP

The importance of Irish milk producers in this venture is not lost on Ornu, Donal said: "This is their butter-production facility. It's their brand, their butter, and because they produce the best quality milk in the world, that allows us, in Ornu, to produce the best

quality butter, so they are an intrinsic part of the Kerrygold story."

Ornu originally took the production of Kerrygold butter in-house in 2016 with the development of Kerrygold Park. The growth in demand since then was not anticipated: "We thought the original plant would be sufficient for 10 years," said Donal. "And five years later we had to build this additional production capacity to cater for the phenomenal success of the brand in international markets, driven largely by the US, though across the globe it sells phenomenally well. Kerrygold butter has caught the imagination of consumers, worldwide. America having such a large consumer population, that's where the sales growth figures are most impressive." Covid-19, in fact, contributed a lot to this growth as more people turned to cooking at home. Donal commented: "The Americans use Kerrygold butter as a premium ingredient in their baking and cooking and that has been a big driver of sales growth."

STANDARDISATION

Product consistency at Kerrygold Park is a key goal, Donal explained: "The primary reason for establishing the facility back in 2016 was to ensure total quality



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standardisation. With a premium brand, you must ensure consistency on the shelves anywhere in the world. That was the original aim.

"The new extension is, obviously, about extra capacity, as well as allowing us to engage in product innovation. We can produce our butter in different sizes, different formats, and packaging in future. That's what will drive premium value for our product."

The consumer will pay more for the type of butter pack they want, and Donal cites the development of the Kerrygold butter stick packs as a prime example. "They are a new phenomenon for us here in Ireland. However, we studied the US market over several years and recognised that 70 per cent of American butter purchases in the States were for the butter stick format. The American consumer wants that format, and we weren't providing it. Three years ago, we began producing a Kerrygold butter stick offering, on a limited basis, and now, with this processing extension at Mitchelstown, Ornuia can really deliver the volumes required. Whatever format the consumer wants we will provide it."

AMBITIOUS GROWTH TARGETS

In relation to Ornuia's ambitions for Kerrygold, Donal commented: "Our ambition is to repeat what has been achieved over the past five years. We aim to drive the business on. In 2017, we announced that Kerrygold was a €1bn brand. We are now very near to announcing the achievement of a €2bn brand status, and then we will go for three billion." But he acknowledged the current turbulence in international dairy markets: "We've had a tough year. Milk producers have had it tough, member co-ops and ourselves have had challenges because we entered this year with very high prices and then experienced a very quick fall through 2023.

"It was tough for Ornuia with the Kerrygold brand because we were competing against products internationally that had a lower price than Ornuia would have had with stock held over from 2022. We have managed our way through that, cleverly if I may say, and the good news is that we have seen a stabilisation in commodity pricing across the world in the last few weeks.

"The Global Dairy Trade (GTD) index had a four-in-a-row set of increases, albeit off very big decreases over the past nine months. There is hope there in those positive figures. What everyone needs, the producers, the co-ops and ourselves, is a gently growing


price that provides a stable market. That would be good for everyone. The volatility we have experienced over the past two years is not good."

A KEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Kerrygold has already passed the milestone of being Ireland's most successful food export brand, a point highlighted by Ornuia's chair, Aidan O'Driscoll during his address to the large gathering in Mitchelstown. Enterprise Ireland, which provided significant financing for the expansion project, was represented by Jenny Melia, an executive director with the organisation. As a result of the investment in Kerrygold Park, Ornuia has also expanded its direct employment at the facility with 30 new jobs bringing total Kerrygold Park workforce to 180 employees.

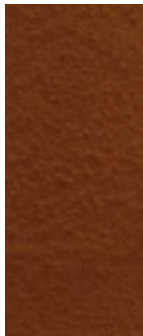
What was also notable at the launch was the large numbers of milk producers present, representing many of the co-ops who supply Ornuia with its base product to process into Kerrygold butter and a range of other dairy produce.

The expansion of Kerrygold Park follows the recent launch of a major new global advertising campaign which is expected to reach more than 150 million consumers around the world in the coming 12 months.



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€4.8m ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND RESEARCH FACILITY OPENS AT UCD LYONS FARM

THE MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT, SIMON COVENEY, OPENED A NEW €4.8m STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY INCORPORATING THE AGTECHUCD INNOVATION CENTRE AND THE UCD BIMEDA HERD HEALTH HUB AT UCD LYONS FARM IN CO. KILDARE

The focus of the AgTechUCD Innovation Centre, the first and only on-farm workspace hub in Ireland, is to promote and accelerate early-stage start-ups and SMEs with disruptive innovations in the agri, ag-tech, agri-food and veterinary sectors, as they build their innovative businesses into leading enterprises, creating jobs. The centre provides clients with preferred access to on-farm experimental facilities, allowing testing and trialing of products and services in the real-world environment at UCD Lyons Farm.

Facilities in the innovation centre include: flexible lab spaces, meeting rooms, offices and an exhibition and seminar space.

The establishment of the UCD Bimeda Herd Health Hub will provide a national facility for dairy herd health education, research and consultancy and will support the delivery of state-of-the-art training to undergraduate and postgraduate students in the UCD School of

Veterinary Medicine.

The UCD Bimeda Herd Health Hub has its own teaching room and lab space on the ground floor.

The herd health hub will also support the provision of UCD's flagship distance-learning graduate programme, the Graduate Certificate in Dairy Herd Health. This programme equips practising veterinarians with the latest tools for analysis of herd data, as well as practical herd evaluation skills, which they can apply in developing holistic herd-level solutions to ensure healthy and profitable dairy herds. Funding for the new facility, which is 1,010m² in area, approximately, has been provided by Enterprise Ireland, through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, a philanthropic donation from Bimeda to the university through UCD Foundation, and UCD.

CUTTING-EDGE AG-TECH

Formally launching both facilities, Minister Coveney said they will ensure that thousands

of graduate and postgraduate students will be able to access cutting-edge research and technology.

"In addition, both facilities will host and nurture the next generation of Irish ag-tech start-ups, ensuring our global reputation in this sector goes from strength-to-strength. This Government is proud to have invested almost €3.5 million funding in the AgTechUCD Innovation Centre through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund."

A DISTINCTIVE ADVANTAGE

Professor Helen Roche, interim UCD vice-president for research, innovation and impact, commented: "One of UCD's distinctive advantages, on the national and international stage, is UCD Lyons Farm, our research and teaching farm which currently supports over €40m of ongoing research activities and over 2,000 undergraduate and 40 postgraduate students."

Lyons Farm, UCD's research and teaching farm, is a fully functioning farm comprising of 250 hectares of land, with dairy, beef, sheep, equine, crop and environmental research, teaching and commercial facilities.



"This new facility will enable researchers, entrepreneurs and educators to co-locate in a single on-farm facility allowing them to collaborate more closely to further enhance Ireland's capabilities and sustainable impact in agricultural, agri-food and veterinary sciences."

Carol Gibbons, manager, regions and local enterprise, Enterprise Ireland, said the innovation centre is a state-of-the-art facility that will foster talent and innovation. "This facility will become a focal point for Irish ag-tech, providing new entrepreneurs with the support, guidance and collaboration they require to bring their ideas to the next level and start ambitious agtech companies. It has been a pleasure to work with UCD and other partners on this project and we are excited about its potential in the years ahead."

Donal Tierney, chairman, Bimeda Group, said: "From innovating the mastitis prevention technology which revolutionised global dairy farming practices, to establishing our own

AgTechUCD, which is part of NovaUCD and builds upon NovaUCD's 20-year track record of supporting high-tech start-ups with global potential, also runs an annual accelerator

AgTechUCD is a collaboration with AIB, Kildare County Council and Kildare LEO; agri-company, Devenish; investors, The Yield Lab Europe, Thrive/SVG Ventures, Finistere and Atlantic Bridge, and leading AgTech researchers and innovators at Teagasc and Wageningen (in the Netherlands) in addition to UCD.



You can do loads of work on your quad bike.

Or never work again because of it.



Quad bike incidents can end in serious injury or death. From the 20th November 2023, it will be compulsory for quad bike users to wear a helmet and undergo appropriate training.

Find out more at www.hsa.ie/farmsafety



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

HSA

An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority



FOCUS



FARM SAFETY



OP-ED: MINISTER MARTIN HEYDON

AGRICULTURE IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SECTORS IN IRELAND, BUT IT IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS. AS A FARMER YOU ARE SEVEN TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE IN A WORKPLACE INCIDENT THAN ANY OTHER OF THE MORE THAN TWO MILLION WORKERS IN IRELAND. IT IS A SHOCKING STATISTIC AND ONE WHICH I HAVE BEEN WORKING TO CHANGE IN MY TIME AS MINISTER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR FARM SAFETY. FARMERS MUST TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FARM SAFETY

Over the last three years, improvements have been made as farmers take steps to protect themselves and their families. But every death is one too many. These incidents not only have a devastating impact on the families involved but also for the wider farming community. We cannot wait for serious incidents to occur to change behaviour and adopt safer working practices.

Since my appointment, I have created a dedicated unit within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) focussed on farm safety, and I have put a ringfenced €2.5m fund in place to support new safety initiatives. I also prioritised incorporating farm safety into the new CAP with safety training now forming part of core schemes such as Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme, Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme, Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme, and the new Knowledge Transfer programme.

Improving safety on farm starts with identifying risk. And there are several high-risk areas that most farmers will be familiar with:

► Machinery

Machinery is one of the biggest causes of fatal incidents on farms, with tractors and other vehicles being involved in many of these. Farmers should ensure that all machinery is well-maintained and that they have received proper training in its use.

► Livestock

Livestock can be unpredictable, and farmers need to take care when handling them. They should ensure that they have proper handling facilities and that they are familiar with the behaviour of the animals they are working with.

► Falls

Falls are a common but often unidentified cause of incidents on farms, particularly from heights such as roofs or ladders. Farmers should ensure that they have proper safety equipment, such as harnesses and safety rails, and that they use them when working at height.

Each farm is unique but improving safety starts by looking at your farm with a fresh pair of eyes and considering ways in which it could be made safer:

► Training

Farmers should ensure that they and any employees or family members have received proper training in all aspects of farm safety, including machinery operation and livestock handling.

► Risk assessment

Farmers should conduct a risk assessment of their farm to identify potential hazards and take steps to mitigate them. This could include installing safety rails, improving lighting, or providing proper signage.

► Maintenance

Farmers should ensure that all machinery is well-maintained and that they have a regular maintenance schedule in place. They should also ensure that all safety equipment, such as fire extinguishers and or aid kits, are in good working order.

► Personal protective equipment

Farmers should ensure that appropriate personal protective equipment, such as helmets, gloves, and safety boots, is used when working on the farm.

Sadly, so far this year 10 people have lost their lives on Irish farms. Each one of these leaves behind a farm, a family, and a community that has suffered an irreversible loss. That is why improving farm safety is such an important issue for the farming community, and why I am such a strong advocate for this cause. By taking steps to identify potential hazards and mitigate them, farmers can reduce the risk of incidents and protect themselves and their families. With proper training, maintenance, and the use of personal protective equipment, farmers can make their farms safer places to work and live.



NEW QUAD REGULATIONS. ARE YOU READY?

New regulations aimed at reducing the number of accidents involving quad bikes are coming into effect on the 20th of November 2023.

These regulations require that:

1. Quad bikes operators in all workplaces must have successfully completed a quad bike training course provided by a registered training provider to a QQI Standard or equivalent.
2. All operators must wear appropriate head protection while operating a quad or ATV.
Head protection is essential as a significant percentage of serious injuries with quad bikes involve head injuries.

For more information,
see fbd.ie/farm or
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The HSA demonstrating safe operation of quads and ATVs at the 2023 National Ploughing Championships.



Pat Griffin, senior inspector, HSA.

NEW QUAD-BIKE LAWS

PAT GRIFFIN, SENIOR INSPECTOR AT THE HEALTH AND SAFETY AUTHORITY (HSA) TALKS TO *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY* ABOUT NEW QUAD-BIKE REGULATIONS COMING INTO EFFECT IN NOVEMBER, THEIR ENFORCEMENT, AND CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ABIDING BY THEM

Farming remains the most dangerous sector in Ireland with 191 fatalities recorded on farms during the period 2013-2022 – 52 per cent of these involved farm machinery and vehicles, including quad bikes. Efforts to reduce quad-bike related injuries and fatalities involve the introduction of new regulations for their safe use on November 20. These new quad-bike laws, which are the first of their kind in the European Union (EU), require that operators of the quad or ATV have successfully completed a safety-training course provided by a registered training provider to a QQI standard or equivalent.

The regulation also states that personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn by the operator of the quad or ATV. In addition, a risk assessment must be conducted in

accordance with section 19 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005.

In the 10-year period from 2012- 2021, there have been 11 fatalities in agriculture involving quad bikes.

REACTION FROM FARMERS

Commenting on farmers' reaction to the new laws, Pat says that, so far it has been positive. "We've had little negative reaction," he says. "Quads have been an issue for a long time,

internationally and in Ireland, in relation to safety. Lots of attention went to them in Australia and New Zealand where they're commonly used, and where quad safety is a concern.

"In Ireland, too, there's recognition that while they're simple machines, they've caused a lot of fatalities. So, reaction has been generally positive. What helped is that we consulted with the sector broadly. And the regulations were considered and mooted through farm-safety partnerships, and all stakeholders had the chance to air their views on this. When we [HSA] drafted the regulations, they were on the website for public consultation, like all regulations are."

While initial uptake on safety training has been slow, Pat says he is optimistic about farmers' compliance with the new requirements. "I think the uptake [of training] only started about six months ago," he admits. "Farmers tend to put things on the long finger – as we all do. They see a deadline in the distance and say they've lots of time. And

again, most of us do that, whatever our line of work.

"That said, in the last six months there's been a significant uptake in training. It's heartening to see. I'm in contact with training organisations and they say there's quite an uptake. We don't have numbers yet, it'll be hard to get numbers, as there is no requirement to record your training with the authority.

"Farmers are used to regulations through cross compliance, and they strive to be in compliance. I don't see that this is going to be a major issue."

PPE AND HELMETS

According to the HSA, depending on the circumstances of use, motorcycle helmets or specialist ATV helmets must be worn during operation of quads and ATVs.

Commenting on the helmet requirement, Pat says: "We can't accept a bicycle helmet or a construction hardhat or similar. Quad-bike helmets must be as specified by the manufacturer. The helmet is subject to speed and type of surface – the higher the speed, the harder the surface, the higher the specification [i.e., the greater the level of protection needed].

"We also recommend that an operator wears goggles and, generally, that the eye protection is within the helmet itself. If you're operating a quad and something goes into your eye, that can be distracting and can cause overturn. We also recommend having the visor down. Also, operators should have sturdy boots and, depending on where you're operating, a high-vis vest."

ENFORCEMENT

Pat says that 'absolutely' enforcement is within the HSA's remit: "The inspectors,



IF THE INSPECTOR DOES NOT SEE A HELMET, OUR GENERAL RESPONSE IS A PROHIBITION NOTICE

for our agriculture unit, are doing general farm inspections [all year] and if they see a quad, they'll ask to see certificate of training. And, if they find that the farmer hasn't had the training, we'll issue them with an improvement notice, which will give them time to source and complete the training. The inspector will judge the timeframe for that. "If the inspector does not see a helmet, our general response is a prohibition notice, prohibiting use of that machine until the helmet is sourced. In our experience, when someone is injured or killed on a quad, it's

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The main causes of serious or fatal injury associated with quad bikes/ATVs are:

- ▶ Being thrown off during vehicle overturns or after loss of control;
- ▶ Collisions with structures, trees, poles, other vehicles etc.;
- ▶ Being trapped/asphyxiated under an overturned machine;
- ▶ Being drowned under a quad bike overturned in a water course; and
- ▶ Pedestrians being struck or run over by an ATV/quad bikes.

generally a head injury – whether that's impact with the ground, a pole, or another stationary object.

"In general, a prohibition notice can be issued when the inspector sees potential for serious injury. We also have a memo of understanding with An Garda Síochána," he adds. "I'm not saying they're enforcing it, but they'll be made aware."

NO EXCEPTIONS

A common question to the HSA relates to the use of quads on private and public roads, and whether there are any exceptions to the new laws. Pat confirms that there are 'no exceptions whatsoever'.

"Many think the training is [mandatory] only if you use the quad on the public road, and that is incorrect," he says. "Operating a

quad for any work activity, means you need training. Also, many are asking if the training is for gator-type units, and the training does not extend to those units, because they have cabs and seatbelts."

EXPECTED RESULTS

Pat is optimistic about the future effects of this new legislation: "We hope that with professional training undertaken and the wearing of appropriate helmets, that there won't be as many quad-bike overturns, and the level of serious injury and death will reduce over the next five to 10 years. We don't expect to see an immediate sharp decline – it takes time to bed in these changes. But certainly over the next decade, we hope to see a significant reduction in injury from quad-bike operation."

Those who undertake quad bike/ATV training must ensure that:

- ▶ The training provider used is a registered training provider, registered with a registration body such as QQI, Lantra, City & Guilds or others such registered training bodies;
- ▶ On successful completion of the training course, they receive a certificate of training that confirms that the course was successfully completed to the QQI standard 5N1752 or equivalent; and
- ▶ They retain and show when requested their training certificate as proof of training.

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CHAINSAW SAFETY VIDEO LAUNCHED

UP TO 4 PER CENT OF FARM WORKPLACE DEATHS AND AN ESTIMATED 6.5 PER CENT OF INJURIES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH CHAINSAW AND TIMBER-RELATED WORK, ACCORDING TO TEAGASC. THIS HAS LED TO THE RECENT LAUNCH OF A NEW CHAINSAW SAFETY VIDEO DESIGNED TO EDUCATE USERS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NECESSARY TO OPERATE CHAINSAWS EFFECTIVELY AND SAFELY

Up to 80,000 chainsaws are used on Irish farms and these machines vary in their safety standards depending on their age and associated state of repair. The new safety video, presented by Arthur Kierans, machinery training technician at Teagasc Ballyhaise Agricultural College, Co. Cavan, informs the viewer that safe chain sawing and timber work is a combination of:

- ▶ Having adequate knowledge and skill;
- ▶ Having a modern chainsaw with up-to-date safety devices;
- ▶ Wearing chainsaw PPE; and
- ▶ Using safe techniques.

Teagasc health and safety specialist, Dr John

In 2021, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) reported one fatality relating to chainsaw use and have reports of 39 serious incidents/injury involving chainsaws over past 10 years across all sectors. However, this figure is likely to be higher due to low reporting of injuries.

McNamara adds that while the video looks at approaches and techniques for small-scale timber work, a specialist contractor should be used for large-scale chain-sawing jobs. Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with special responsibility for farm safety, Martin Heydon launched the video and in doing so, commended the practical information it contained for farmers. "Chainsaws are common tools found across many farms, but when used incorrectly they can prove deadly. The video highlights the necessary safety measures needed when undertaking this hazardous work activity. I urge every farmer who uses a chainsaw to view this video to review the safety standards of their chainsaw, its maintenance, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for chain-sawing before any timber related task is undertaken. Most importantly, consider your skill and competence with timber work and seek training if necessary." Teagasc director, Professor Frank O'Mara,

Chainsaw injuries involve cuts and lacerations to the limbs, neck, head and trunk. The major cause of timber-related fatal accidents is being struck by falling trees or branches while felling trees. Appropriate training in chainsaw use and the wearing of suitable protective clothing to protect against these injuries is essential.

said: "This video not only educates but empowers chainsaw users to tackle their tasks with confidence, knowing they have the knowledge and skills to operate their chainsaws safely." He particularly thanked FBD Insurance and the Farm Safety Partnership advisory committee to the HSA for support with production of the video, which can be viewed on the HSA website.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The HSA advises that you must complete a written risk assessment of the work to be completed prior to starting it. This risk assessment should list the hazards that may cause harm and detail the control measures to be taken to ensure safety.

Step 1: Identify hazards

Start by identifying the hazards involved in the work activity to be undertaken and

the hazards at your workplace. A hazard is simply anything that can cause harm to you, your employees or other persons. Identify where and how people could come to harm.

Step 2: Determine the level of risk

Assess if people could be harmed and how serious the injury (harm) could be.

Step 3: Put in controls and inform

Decide what you are going to do to eliminate or control the risk to make the task safer for you, your employees and other people around you. Advise all involved in the work on the control measures to be followed.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

According to the HSA to protect against fatalities or life-changing injuries, in addition to appropriate training, it is important that suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn when using a chainsaw.

No matter how small the job, you must ensure you have the appropriate training and PPE.

PPE cannot provide complete protection against cuts or other injuries while operating chainsaws, but should provide protection against serious life-changing injuries. Using chainsaws also exposes operators to high levels of noise and hand-arm vibration, which can lead to hearing loss and conditions such as vibration white finger. It is also important to understand that PPE doesn't protect you against falling trees. Chainsaw operators should refer to the manufacturer's handbook for safety instructions and advice. The following safety equipment should be used:

- ▶ A safety helmet (to conform to EN 397), suitable eye protection (visor to EN 1731) or safety glasses (to EN 166) and ear defenders (to EN 352);
- ▶ Chainsaw gloves with protective pad on the back of the left hand, leg protection incorporating clogging material (EN 381-7);
- ▶ Safety boots with steel toecaps with good grip (EN 381/345);
- ▶ Non-slag close-fitting outer clothing;
- ▶ Chainsaw trousers (EN 381-5);
- ▶ No personal protective equipment can ensure 100 per cent protection against cutting by a hand-held chainsaw.

A first aid kit should be readily available, including large wound dressings.



Pictured at the safety-video launch: Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with special responsibility for Farm Safety, Martin Heydon, along with Ciaran Roche, FBD; Frank O'Mara, Teagasc director; Harry Hill, Farm TV; Frank Ryan, Teagasc, Oak Park; Frances McHugh, forestry development officer, Teagasc; Brendan Burke, Teagasc Oak Park farm manager; and John McNamara, Teagasc health and safety specialist.

FREE ONLINE FARM SAFETY TRAINING IN NOVEMBER

FRS Training has partnered with farm families, Health and Safety Authority, Irish Farmers' Association, Teagasc, FBD Insurance, and FRS Network to launch 'Farm Family CPD – Online Farm Safety Training' for Irish farmers. The training aims to affect attitudes and behaviours to reduce the level of on-farm fatal and non-fatal incidents. This training is available free of charge as a result of the funding provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine through the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Initiative. Farm families are at the core of this initiative.

For the first time, training is designed not only for the principal farmer but specifically for all people over 12 years of age living on farms. Training is farmer friendly, family friendly and can further develop the capacity for behaviour change on farms. Farm families

can work from home, at the kitchen table and assess their farm health, safety and behaviour practices while completing training essential to their wellbeing.

There are five courses to choose from:

- ▶ Running a Safer Farm for Farm Principals;
- ▶ Keeping Yourself Safe for 12-16-year-olds;
- ▶ Keeping Yourself Safe for Over 65s;
- ▶ Keeping Yourself Safe for Employees and Non-Paid Farm Workers;
- ▶ Managing Dangers – Livestock, Machinery and Buildings: Essential Safety for Everyone Living and Working on the Farm.

Register your interest: www.farmfamilycpd.ie



BE READY TO WEATHER THE STORM

PREPARATION IS KEY TO MINIMISING DISRUPTION TO FARMING ACTIVITIES DURING SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS. JOHN McNAMARA AND FRANCIS BLIGH, HEALTH AND SAFETY SPECIALISTS WITH TEAGASC, HIGHLIGHT SOME IMPORTANT WINTER-READY ADVICE

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has developed a practical checklist for farms, which outlines key issues to address when planning for, and responding to, severe weather events this winter.

The more significant issues involve planning for:

- ▶ Provision of feed and water to livestock;
- ▶ Delivery of feed to farms and the transport of products from farms;
- ▶ Freezing of water pipes to sheds and outdoor water troughs;
- ▶ Freezing of milking machines and other equipment in milking parlours;
- ▶ Freezing of coolant and diesel in tractors;
- ▶ Damage to forage crops being grazed in-situ or stored in farmyards; and
- ▶ Personal risks of working and driving during severe weather conditions such as ice.

STORM BABET

October's Storm Babet saw parts of the country battered by wind and torrential rain. According to Met Éireann (on October 20) much of the country was wetter than average. Accumulations largely ranged between 133 per cent and 431 per cent of average. The wettest conditions were in the south, with 133.6mm recorded at Cork Airport over the

previous seven days. Well-drained soils were saturated, while most moderately and poorly drained soils were waterlogged.

The Irish Farmers Association (IFA) reported that many farmers faced increased operational pressures to rehouse stock in drier locations and to deal with fodder stocks under water/destroyed. IFA president Tim Cullinan added: "The floods and heavy rainfall also effectively put an end to the salvage effort that was harvest 2023. There will be crops around the country that simply won't be harvested this year. What has been collected has largely been of lower quality in many parts, meaning little or no returns for cereal growers. Increased targeted interventions are needed," he said. According to the Government's advice on flooding, scientists are predicting that climate change may lead to more of this level of flooding. We all, especially farmers, must be mindful of the risks to safety when dealing with flood waters.

According to the publication, *Be Winter-Ready Guidance on Flooding*, flooding can result in injury and loss of life. "Just 150mm of fast-flowing water can knock a person off their feet. As little as 300mm of fast-flowing water can move most cars off the road. Flood water can move manhole and drain covers, creating invisible dangers. Electric currents can pass

through flood water from fallen power lines and cables."

The booklet advises that businesses in an area at risk of flooding should consider developing a flood plan so that all workers know what to do in the event of a flood:

- ▶ Develop a flood plan as part of your health and safety strategy and practice evacuation drills.
- ▶ Ensure that cut-off points for gas, electricity and water are marked on a map that is stored with the flood plan.
- ▶ Have a list of emergency numbers readily available including contacts for utility and telephone providers.
- ▶ Be aware of the location of chemicals, oils or other materials that could be dangerous or contaminate flood water. These should be stored safe from floods and other hazards.
- ▶ Consider the possibility of moving key operations to an alternative premises should it be necessary.
- ▶ On the farm, you should consider how to manage livestock in the event of a flood.
- ▶ Identify people who can help before, during and after a flood.

For more information visit <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9e1358-preparing-your-business-for-severe-weather-stay-winter-ready/>.





Agri Aware executive director, Marcus O'Halloran.

AGRI AWARE SOWING THE SEEDS OF FARM SAFETY AMONG CHILDREN

GROWING THE AWARENESS OF FARM SAFETY AMONG CHILDREN HAS LONG BEEN A REMIT OF AGRI AWARE. MICHAEL GEARY, THE ORGANISATION'S COMMUNICATIONS AND EDUCATION OFFICER, TELLS *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY* ABOUT ITS 'DIG IN' INITIATIVE, WHICH AIMS TO SOW THE SEEDS OF FARM-SAFETY FROM AN EARLY AGE

Agri Aware has always played an important role in educating the general public on Irish agriculture and the importance of the agri-food industry as well as being a supporting shoulder to the agriculture industry, particularly the farmers on the ground, Michael says. But it doesn't stop there: "There is as much an onus on Agri Aware to support and educate the farming community where possible and an important topic where the need for more awareness and education is needed is farm safety," he explains.

"With any line of work, there are risks to one's safety and Irish agriculture is no different. In

2022, it had the unwanted title of being the sector with the most deaths according to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). Sadly, this number was 13.

"And even though the dangers on farms are highlighted and more information is widely available on the risks associated with animals, machinery and infrastructure, people continue to get injured and, sadly, fatally injured," Michael says.

DIG IN

The risk of injury on farms has grown significantly in the last 20 to 30 years with the advancements in machinery and



EVEN THOUGH THE DANGERS ON FARMS ARE HIGHLIGHTED AND MORE INFORMATION IS WIDELY AVAILABLE ON THE RISKS ASSOCIATED, PEOPLE CONTINUE TO GET INJURED AND, SADLY, FATALLY INJURED

infrastructure, and due to the size of farms. Handling facilities for cattle that once were suitable, for example, are now outdated on some farms, and aren't fit for purpose, Michael says. But tackling the important safety aspect of farming at a young age is key to driving a change in culture on farms.

"As an educational body one of our remits is to promote greater awareness of farm safety



through programmes we run in primary and secondary schools, and events that we attend, Michael says. "One long-standing Agri Aware educational resource that targets children at a young age is called Dig In. This is a free educational resource that provides information on farming, food and the countryside for primary school students from junior infants up to sixth class."

This educational resource comprises modules that relate to different areas where risks are posed. These include general farm safety, animal safety, machinery safety, and electrical safety.

Michael adds: "The lessons within the modules not only contain information on farm

safety but also feature activity sheets where students can put the theory they learn into practice by answering questions related to farm safety, and take those learnings home with them and put them into practice while out helping on the family farm."

PLANS FOR 2024

In 2024 and beyond, Agri Aware is looking to further build on its farm-safety remit and make more strides in this area, says Michael. He adds: "Particularly through our programmes where young people can be targeted and be educated from a young age about being safe on farms with the help of a new farm-safety initiative.

"Our presence at events, dealing with the topic of farm safety, will be further highlighted after a successful pilot at Flavours of Fingal, the popular Dublin family show, in 2023. There, the Agri Aware team gave talks on farm safety with the help of physical props to give a visual aid of the dangers posed to farmers, and how they can be reduced to prevent accidents from occurring."

To view and access the Agri Aware Dig In modules and lessons, visit: agriaware.ie/programmes

Agri Aware

EDUCATE • ADVOCATE • ENGAGE



THE AGRI FOOD EDUCATION BODY

Agri Aware was founded in 1996 to educate the public on the importance of agriculture and food to the Irish economy and the rural landscape. Today, we connect the consumer to their food story through our school programmes, attendance at national events and public awareness campaigns.

WHAT WE DO

Educating over 130,000 pupils about agriculture, food, and the importance of farming Irish food.

Advocating for modern agriculture, the rural environment, animal welfare, food quality, and safety.

Engaging a digital audience of over 40,000 on social media, and over 50 agri-food and education patrons.

ENGAGING

Our flagship **Primary School** offering is a Horticultural growing, healthy-eating programme called Incredible Edibles. Our in-class webinar series, **Farming Through the Seasons** brings pupils on virtual farm tours across various enterprises. Finally, we support teachers with a full resource of Agricultural learning through Dig in!

Secondary School: In transition year we introduce students to the horse racing industry and its career offerings with our From Foal to Race programme. We compliment with with our **Environmental Innovators** - Food systems education for Transition Year students.

We support the leaving cert Ag Science students with our study guide series and also our Farm walk and talk events.

National Shows

- Bord Bia's Bloom in the Phoenix Park
- Flavours of Fingal
- Open Farm

Campaigns

- Rambling with the Irish Rare Breeds

Mobile Farm Service



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FOCUS

A close-up photograph of a pig standing in a field of dark, wet mud. The pig has a light-colored face with a large, prominent snout and large, upright ears. It is looking directly at the camera. In the background, other pigs are visible, and the scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting sunset or sunrise.

PIG HEALTH

AHI PRIORITISES TESTING OF SALMONELLA STRAINS

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY EDITOR, MATT O'KEEFE, ATTENDED TEAGASC'S RECENT PIG FARMERS' CONFERENCE. HERE, HE PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND'S (AHI) STRATEGY TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC STRAINS OF THE SALMONELLA BACTERIUM IN IRISH PIG HERDS, AND HE SHARES SOME OF THE OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DAY

During the conference, the Irish Farmers' Association's (IFA) Pigs Committee chair, Roy Gallie, outlined the AHI-led strategy to identify specific strains of salmonella in Irish pig herds. The existing tests for salmonella infection being undertaken at pig-processing plants, do not identify the individual strains of the bacterium that may be present in the pigs being tested.

To rectify this shortfall in infection data, AHI has set up a Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH), through which on-farm serological tests will be carried out that have the capacity to identify the strains of salmonella that may be present in the herd. It will be a fully funded service and is voluntary in nature for participating pig producers.

CROSS-INFECTION DANGER

The rationale for this AHI intervention is that while there are several salmonella strains that can cause infection in humans, there is a coincidence between the two more serious serotypes that cause the greatest pig-health challenges on pig-production farms and those most commonly associated with human infection from the consumption of pigmeat products. These are *Salmonella typhimurium* (ST) and monophasic *Salmonella typhimurium* (mST). The ease of transmission between pigs and humans is the driving motivation to engage in this new initiative to determine the breadth of infection as well as the targeted identification of specific strains on Irish pig farms.

This is not a theoretical, clinical exercise. At

stake is the potential reputational damage to Irish pigmeat, should there be a case of human infection directly identifiable as having been transmitted from our pig herd or produce. There is a European dimension in terms of salmonella disease surveillance and, as AHI has confirmed, there are higher-than-average levels of infection of these specific salmonella strains among our pig herds.

TARGETED CONTROL STRATEGIES

Ultimately, in order to control, if not eliminate, the infection in pig herds, specific farm-targeted control programmes will have to be put in place. Adding to the complexity of the initiatives being planned is the fact that most of the targeted ST and mST strains isolated from pigs and pork products, are resistant



to at least three antibiotics, as confirmed by AHI. That fact intensifies the necessity of accurately identifying the salmonella serotype present and then formulating a viable control. AHI advisory strategies propose farm-specific control plans to be drawn up in conjunction with a farmer's vet. These may also include vaccination, hygiene programmes, external and internal biosecurity and other actions as proposed by the vet in attendance. Of reassurance to pig producers is the fact that the TASA involvement is voluntary and cost-free with funding being provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. It is also not intended to be part of Bord Bia's quality standards. It is understood that if farmers do proceed with implementing any proposed control protocols there would be costs involved at that stage. However, apart from the health and productivity benefits of reduced salmonella challenge, there would be a more broad-based disease suppression benefit from the introduction and adoption of a control programme.

APPLICABLE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Aisling Holmes, who is based at Teagasc's pig research centre in Moorepark, focussed on improving growth performance in the early stage of a pig's life. She noted that there is an ongoing improvement in productivity on Irish pig farms, quoting figures from the Teagasc Profit Monitor which show a 36 per cent increase in average born-alive figures between 2000 and 2020. Aisling then went on to highlight research into building on those figures by improving productivity in the farrowing house. Outcomes from the Moorepark research included a lift in average piglet birth weight from 1.3kg to 1.5kg from 2021 to 2022 – a 15 per cent increase. Average weaning weight also showed a significant improvement rising from 8.1kg to 8.7kg – a 7.4 per cent increase. These performance figures compare favourably to those compiled in the profit monitors from commercial farms. Aisling outlined a range of factors that drove

those productivity improvements, including genetics, sow diet, management and creep feed. She then homed in on the productivity gains to be made from two specific actions: sow feeding and creep feeding, and their strong influence on performance. She urged producers to review their lactating sow diet and asked them to consider whether the sows could eat more during their lactation. The Moorepark pig researcher also asked that creep recipes be examined with a view to increasing intakes, possibly with an increase in milk product content to improve consumption. Emphasising the attention to detail required to improve productivity in the young piglet, Aisling described changes in levels of creep feed availability and the impact of introducing new delivery systems at Moorepark. She outlined how these measures helped to improve intakes at this critical growth stage.



THE EASE OF TRANSMISSION BETWEEN PIGS AND HUMANS IS THE DRIVING MOTIVATION TO ENGAGE IN THIS NEW INITIATIVE

IRISH AND INTERNATIONAL INSIGHTS

The Teagasc pig conference proceedings encompassed a range of insightful research and commercial pig production experiences of value to producers. Optimising post-weaning feed intakes, for instance, was discussed by Teagasc researchers Louise Clarke and Peadar Lawlor. The Finnish experience of managing a ban on tail docking over the past 20 years was discussed by Johannes Vugts an adviser with HKScan Finland. His conclusions were straightforward: "If you want to succeed in keeping the tails of your pigs intact, you need to change your management from a low-cost to a low-risk focus." Raising pigs with long

tails "will increase the cost price of your pigs." "This is why producers need to be rewarded for delivering pigs with intact tails to the slaughterhouse," he said.

SURVIVAL TACTICS

Francesc Illas, of Grup Batallé, a large, Spanish-based pig production company, laid out his agenda in stark terms: "Raising pigs is not a business based on marginality, it is a business totally related to cost. Regardless of the challenges that we have for the future, pig producers must continue reducing the euro cost per kilogramme of pork to survive." Even though Francesc highlighted the percentage of pig-production costs associated with feed in the Grup Batallé pig units, and the requirement to manage that cost carefully, he took time to highlight the importance of managing and safeguarding other costs directly related to overall pig performance. Salaries, he noted, account for six per cent of costs, but insisted that employee input has a big impact on the performance of the business. He made another interesting and important observation that, even though vaccines and medication only account for 2 per cent of total costs, it is an area where farmers typically try to cut costs; sometimes, as Francesc noted, with disastrous results in terms of pig performance.

STAY CALM, BREATHE EASY

Des Rice of Creating Collaborative Organisations presented a paper that wasn't pig-performance focussed. The theme of his presentation could be summarised as describing the tools needed to stay calm, despite challenging circumstances. It was a very practical advisory session that has relevance for most farmers across the country, at a time when stress levels have rarely been higher as farmers try to accommodate regulatory and management changes, increased workloads and the ever-present challenge of working in all weathers.



FINANCING THE VOLATILE PIG SECTOR

MATT O'KEEFFE SPOKE TO PAT BYRNES, AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER WITH BANK OF IRELAND, ABOUT THE VOLATILITY IN THE IRISH PIG SECTOR, THE FINANCIAL SUPPORTS REQUIRED AND THE FACTORS THAT BANKS CONSIDER WHEN LENDING TO FARMERS

Pig-production farms are back in profit for the past six months but the price trough up to then had been one of the longest in pig farmers' memories. At times of financial loss, such as Irish pig farmers have experienced, the financial resilience of a business is only as robust as the financial backing it receives from its bank. The financial volatility in the pig sector is something that financial institutions are conscious of, says Pat. "Last year, they were losing money, considerable sums in many cases, because of low output prices and historically high input costs. Feed costs, and they make up the majority share of the input costs on a pig farm, were especially high. "Margin over feed is the key profit or loss indicator on any pig farm and was the lowest since Teagasc records of pig farm accounts began. It was a huge challenge from a banking perspective, and it was our aim to support pig farmers through that loss-making period," he explains.

EXTENDED CREDIT

Pat agrees that it was not only the depth of the financial losses, but also the prolonged nature of the downturn in profitability that was challenging: "It started in around September 2021 and continued until the end of last year and into the early months of 2023 before profitability really returned and stabilised the sector. Through 2023, cashflows have been improving. Before that, so that pig businesses could manage their way through the loss-making period, we would have offered interest-only loans. In addition, working capital would have been financed to keep the business operating and producing on a daily basis."

IN FOR THE LONG TERM

The banking representative says that Bank of Ireland, in common with other lenders, is in the business of financing the pig production sector for the long run: "We see the pig sector as very important to the whole Irish agri-

economy. Even though there are relatively small numbers of producers involved, the total revenues and output are quite large. Irish commercial pig producers are large scale, intensive and extremely efficient, and we are aware of the volatility involved in pig production.

"In general, we work well with our pig farmer clients, and we are as supportive as possible when necessary. We are all in for the long haul. It is up to all stakeholders to support production during downturns. The financial trajectory can run from severe losses to the generation of very good profits in a matter of months during the inevitable peak-trough cycles. Economics books have been written about hog cycle volatility over the years. We need to be able to understand that and work with pig farmers along the way."

PAYBACK TIME

But borrowed money must be repaid and, Pat says, that is already happening: "In almost all

cases now, pig farmers are back meeting their loans, repaying interest and capital. In relation to long-term financial planning, we do advise our clients, if possible, to put a cash fund – a sinking fund – in place so that they can build up some cash reserves. That money would be available to them to meet or at least soften the next downturn, which, given previous experiences, is inevitable at some stage.”

His experience with the sector has given him a sound understanding of its financial dynamics: “I recollect one producer saying to me that he has to monitor the cost of everything right down to the price of a lightbulb. That gives some indication of how financially aware pig producers are in managing all costs in their businesses. They have to be very efficient and, in fairness to them, an awful lot of the pig farmers still in production are operating at very high levels of financial and production efficiency, comparable to other producers across the world. We see ongoing improvements in terms of meeting the key production figures such as pigs per sow per year, feed ratios and all the other key production indices involved.

“In fairness, Teagasc and other independent advisers provide strong support to pig farmers. At the end of the day, the pig price is dependent on European and global factors outside of pig producers’ control. Feed costs, in particular, and energy costs which went up to extraordinary levels, have a big impact on margins. All non-feed costs, including energy, increased over the past two years.”

CONSERVATIVE MARKET OUTLOOK

Pat was cautious on market prospects: “It’s not because of anything in particular on the horizon. It is more to do with the fact that pig prices are always subject to that extreme volatility. There has been a major sow cull across Europe and the big unknown, always, is China and what will happen in that market in production as well as consumption terms.

African swine fever hit the Chinese pig sector badly, he said, and that provided a period of profitability for Irish and other international pig producers during 2019 and 2020. Cashflow was strong among our clients as the Chinese imported much of their requirements. Since then, the Chinese pig production sector has been rebuilt and remodelled into large scale units with thousands of sows in each unit. Because they are such a big player in the global pig sector, their actions and strategies impact greatly on international pig meat prices, right down to the Irish pig farm.”

PIG-FARM AMBITION

Bank of Ireland’s monitoring of the Irish pig sector has noted some critical developments: “Over the past 12 months, we have seen the most efficient producers looking at opportunities, where some farms were exiting the sector for one reason or another, not always directly due to their financial circumstances. Succession issues, animal health challenges or the need to invest significantly to meet higher regulatory standards, also came into play on some farms. That has facilitated some expansion among remaining pig production businesses. Some producers culled their numbers to reduce losses and/or rejuvenate their pig herds with improved genetics and higher health status. That is an ongoing process on several pig farms.”



THE FINANCIAL TRAJECTORY CAN RUN FROM SEVERE LOSSES TO THE GENERATION OF VERY GOOD PROFITS IN A MATTER OF MONTHS

MAKING LOAN JUDGEMENTS

It is not only the financial and production figures that lenders consider when supporting their pig farmer clients, Pat says: “The pig farmer, the individual, is really important. Management ability, expertise, track record, they are all taken into account, as well as, obviously, the efficiency of the business. Competent labour and its availability on a farm are important facets of a pig-production business. When we look at financial accounts, in general, we look across a three-year cycle. In the pig sector, with its incessant volatility, we study the business over a five-year period. That provides a better indicator of average profitability over the long term.”

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HOW TO MAINTAIN HYGIENE IN PIG LIQUID FEED SYSTEMS



Hannah Elliott.



Mixer tank with biofilms on sides.

"Liquid feeding systems are popular among Irish pig producers, with an estimated 70 per cent of pigs liquid-fed due to the availability of nutrient-rich co-products from the food and beverage industry". They allow for controlled feeding of pigs, using a mix of water and feed ingredients," explains Hannah. "Proper hygiene in these systems is important to prevent the growth of harmful biofilms which can have a knock-on effect on pig health and performance."

Understanding the difference between a hygienic liquid feed system and an unhygienic system is vital. She explains:

"A hygienic system is one that has a dominant *Lactobacillus bacteria* population, characterised by a white pleasant-smelling biofilm on the inside walls of tanks and pipes," she says.

"If the inside of your liquid feed system is brown or dark in colour and gives off an unpleasant odour, then it's likely your feed system is unhygienic, and the presence of negative biofilms is leading to sub-optimal pig performance."

DAMAGED OR OBSTRUCTED SECTIONS CAN BECOME AREAS WHERE FEED ACCUMULATES, MAKING IT A HOTBED FOR NEGATIVE MICROBIAL GROWTH

RESTORING HYGIENE

If you think you have an unhygienic liquid feed system, there are several steps that you can take to reset your system's hygiene, Hannah explains. "First, give your system a thorough clean by draining it and scrubbing all parts that can be scrubbed, especially areas where feed residue can accumulate. A high-pressure wash, ideally with hot water, should be followed by descaling and disinfection using an acid product and then an alkaline product. "The system should be then fully rinsed out,

which is also a good opportunity to inspect feed equipment for signs of wear and tear. Damaged or obstructed sections can become areas where feed accumulates, making it a hotbed for negative microbial growth," she says.

Making sure what you put into the system is of the right quality is also a key consideration when addressing any sanitary issues. Contaminated water and feed ingredients that have been incorrectly stored can introduce negative microbes and lead to pathogen growth.

HYGIENE AND ADDITIVES

In addition to a thorough clean of the liquid feeding system, introducing the unique lactic acid bacteria, *Pediococcus acidilactici* CNCM I-4622 (Bactocell) is proven to help maintain good hygiene.

Mark McFarland, feed additive product manager at Lallemand, says Bactocell has become the first microbial to receive an authorisation in the EU related to the hygiene of liquid feed.



Mark McFarland.



"The authorisation is for use in all animal species (Regulation (EU) 2023/53)2, as a technological feed additive in the functional group of acidity regulators and hygiene condition enhancers," explains Mark. Bactocell is recognised by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for its safety and potential to reduce pH and limit growth of coliform bacteria in liquid feeds. By converting non-digestible carbohydrates into L+ lactic acid, it promotes a healthier

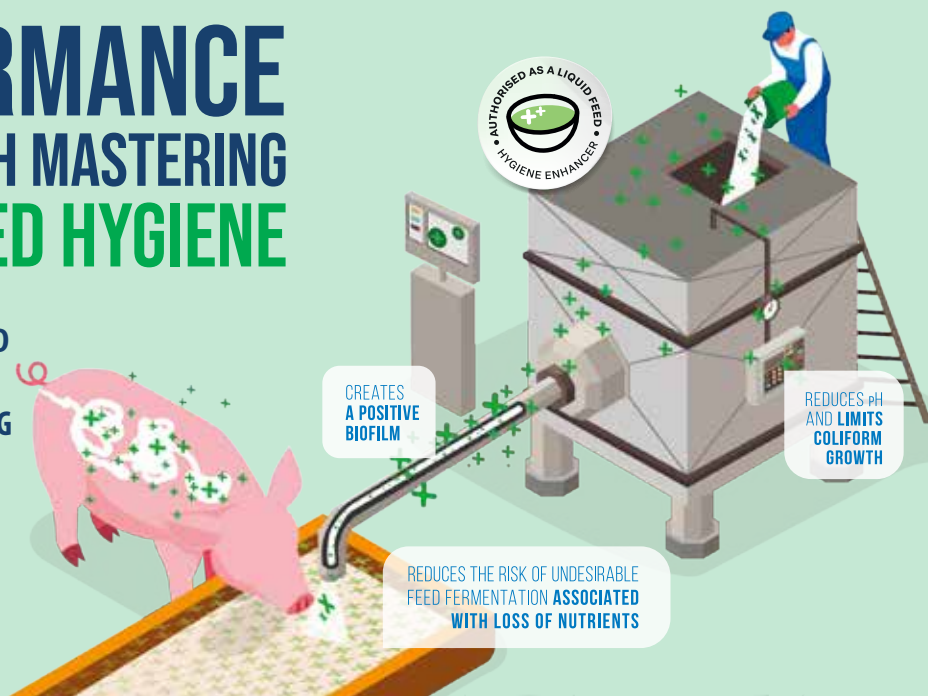
bacterial balance, helping maintain the nutritional quality of liquid feed and reducing the colonisation of harmful bacteria contributing to negative biofilm formation. "By maintaining a clean and efficient liquid feeding system, pig producers can preserve

the nutritional quality of feed and help ensure the health and productivity of their pigs. Regular checks and a proactive approach to hygiene using proven feed additives can prevent problems before they start," says Mark.

*Cullen JT, Lawlor PG, Cormican P, & Gardiner GE. 2021. Microbial Quality of Liquid Feed for Pigs and its Impact on the Porcine Gut Microbiome. *Animals*, 11(10), 2983. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32023R0053&from=EN>

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NEW CHALLENGES IN THE CONTROL OF PRRS

MAUREEN PRENDERGAST, TECHNICAL MANAGER, MSD ANIMAL HEALTH, DISCUSSES THE BEST WAYS TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES POSED BY PORCINE RESPIRATORY AND REPRODUCTIVE SYNDROME (PRRS)



Maureen Prendergast.

PRRS is one of the more difficult swine diseases to control.

In recent years, new strains have emerged in Spain and the US causing devastating welfare and economic problems for affected farms. It's been reported that over 18 million pigs have been affected by the Rosalia strain in Northern Spain. The new strain is highly pathogenic with a particular effect on breeding stock with high rates of mortality in sows, abortion storms, and stillborn piglets.

PRRS is a single strand RNA virus and, like Covid-19 in humans and influenza in pigs, it multiplies as it passes through its host, changing or mutating very slightly. If this

occurs when other similar virus strains are also circulating, it can recombine creating a new strain. Rosalia is made up of at least four different PRRS fragments found across Europe.

Although it's unlikely that this particular strain will reach Ireland any time soon, pig farmers shouldn't be complacent about PRRS. The industry needs to be vigilant to the risks and alert to the potential emergence of new strains. Farmers and vets should report any unusual features of disease in their pigs.

'BLUE EAR'

PRRS, also known as blue ear, first occurred in Europe in the early 1990s and is, generally, controlled through strict biosecurity and vaccination, as complete eradication is difficult to achieve. Herd-to-herd transmission of PRRS can occur following the introduction of infected animals or the use of infected semen. The virus can also be spread via contaminated equipment and there are reports that the virus can spread on the wind for up to 3km. The proximity of other farms and the movement of lorries are believed to have been an important factor in the

transmission of the Rosalia strain in Spain. Strict biosecurity and cleaning regimes are essential to reduce the risk of PRRS transmission. Acquired immunity continues to be the best protection against PRRS. As we see with Covid 19 in human health, vaccination protects against the effects of the virus and works best when all animals in the herd are vaccinated.

PROTECTING THE ENTIRE HERD

Sows should receive regular PRRS vaccination, either during each reproductive cycle on a '6-and-60' programme, or at regular intervals as part of a blanket immunisation programme. Gilts or sows continue to shed virus for a short time post-vaccination as their immunity develops. This time period will depend on the individual vaccines, but ideally use a stable, low-shedding vaccine.

Gilt management is key to stability of the breeding herd. Gilts may have been exposed to disease and still be potentially infected with field strain of PRRS, so need to be immunised prior to joining the rest of the breeding herd. Early selection is

recommended to allow the full course of vaccine to be administered and allow a suitable interval prior to service to allow immunity development. Your vet will advise the recommended procedure for your farm.

Farmers should always discuss their vaccination regime with their vet who can also advise on diagnostics, herd health, and on-farm biosecurity.

Even on farms that are vaccinating sows and gilts, if there is a small break in biosecurity or if the PRRS virus is present anywhere on the farm, the rest of the herd is at risk. Piglets that are not vaccinated are particularly susceptible to the disease and it can also circulate within second stage and fatterer groups.

The PRRS virus also acts as a gateway to a whole host of bacterial respiratory diseases. If PRRS infection occurs in young pigs, the suppression of their immunity can be immense and we often see *Mycoplasma*, *Streptococcus suis*, *Actinobacillus pleuropneumonia*, and Glässer's disease following on throughout the growing and finishing phases. Speak to your vet if you are concerned about respiratory disease on your farm, they will be able to run tests to give a comprehensive diagnosis of this complex issue.



ALTHOUGH IT'S UNLIKELY THAT THIS PARTICULAR STRAIN WILL REACH IRELAND ANY TIME SOON, PIG FARMERS SHOULDN'T BE COMPLACENT ABOUT PRRS

NEW ADVICE FOR PRRS VACCINATION

A range of commercial live vaccines against PRRS is available to farmers in Ireland. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) recently recommended general guidelines to ensure the safe use of these vaccines, to mitigate the risk and the frequency of recombination between PRRS viruses including PRRS vaccine strains.

All pig farmers are now advised to:

- ▶ Only vaccinate healthy animals;
- ▶ Only use one vaccine throughout the herd, avoiding the use of two different companies' vaccines for breeders and rearing piglets;
- ▶ Select a vaccine with a reduced and self-limiting shedding period of the vaccine virus (information available in the SPC);
- ▶ Respect a transition time before introducing a new vaccine, and if needed, to undertake diagnostics to confirm the absence of any other vaccine or field virus strain circulating on farm; and
- ▶ Speak to their vet about the new EMA guidelines before making any changes, in order to identify the best vaccination programme for their farm.



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Dr Hazel Rooney.

UNVEILING THE MYSTERY WITHIN

DR HAZEL ROONEY, PIG TECHNICAL COORDINATOR AT ALLTECH IRELAND, EXPLORES INTESTINAL DISORDERS IN PIGS

As a cornerstone of global agriculture and a vital source of protein, pigs have been integral to human sustenance and economic growth for centuries. However,

the presence of intestinal disorders in pigs is a persistent concern that not only compromises their well-being but also has far-reaching implications on the agricultural and food industries.

Pigs, with their remarkable digestive physiology, are incredibly efficient at converting a diverse range of feedstuffs into valuable meat products. This unique capacity relies heavily on the proper functioning of their gastrointestinal systems, which unfortunately are highly susceptible to a variety of disorders. These disorders, if not identified and managed in a timely manner, can lead to reduced growth rates, increased mortality and economic losses for pig producers.

Furthermore, the emergence of zoonotic diseases underscores the critical importance of studying intestinal health in pigs, as such diseases directly impact public health and food safety. It is, therefore, important to explore the various factors that contribute to their occurrence, the consequences they bring, and the measures that can be taken

to prevent and manage them, so that the pig industry can continue to strive for healthier and more sustainable pig production.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INTESTINAL DISORDERS

Intestinal disorders in pigs, such as colibacillosis, swine dysentery, porcine epidemic diarrhoea (PED) and ileitis — to name but a few — can result from a complex interplay of various factors. Understanding these factors is essential for preventing and managing these disorders in pig populations. Some of the key contributors to intestinal disorders include:

- ▶ **Pathogenic microorganisms:** Bacteria, viruses, and parasites can infect the pig's gastrointestinal tract, causing diseases like colibacillosis, salmonellosis and coccidiosis. These pathogens can disrupt the balance of the gut microbiota and lead to various intestinal issues.
- ▶ **Dietary factors:** The pig's diet can significantly influence its digestive health. Overfeeding, underfeeding, improper nutrient balance, and the presence of mycotoxins in feed can all contribute to digestive problems.
- ▶ **Stress:** Pigs are sensitive to stress,

which can be caused by transportation, changes in environment, overcrowding, or social hierarchy within a group. Stress can weaken the pig's immune system and make it more susceptible to intestinal diseases.

- ▶ **Environmental conditions:** Poor sanitation, high humidity and temperature fluctuations in the pig's living environment can create favourable conditions for the growth and transmission of pathogens.
- ▶ **Age:** Different intestinal disorders may be more prevalent at specific stages of a pig's life. For instance, neonatal piglets are prone to enteric colibacillosis, while older pigs may be more susceptible to diseases like swine dysentery.

THE CONSEQUENCES

Intestinal disorders in pigs can have significant consequences, affecting the health, welfare and productivity of the animals, as well as causing economic losses for pig farmers. Some of the more common consequences of intestinal disorders in pigs include reduced growth and weight loss as a result of reduced feed intake, impaired nutrient absorption and diarrhoea; severe dehydration, which can lead to lethargy,



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weakness and even death if not promptly addressed; reduced feed efficiency, as more feed is required to maintain body weight; and, in severe cases, increased mortality rates, especially in piglets exposed to diseases such as PED and swine dysentery.

THE SOLUTION

Proactive measures, such as implementing good management practices, ensuring proper nutrition, and focussing on disease prevention strategies, are crucial for minimising the occurrence and impact of intestinal disorders in pig populations. However, maintaining optimal gut health is unequivocally the linchpin in preventing intestinal disorders in pigs.

The pig's gastrointestinal tract is a complex ecosystem where a harmonious balance of beneficial microorganisms, a well-functioning intestinal lining, and proper digestion are imperative for overall health. A robust gut microbiome acts as a formidable defence against pathogenic invaders, fostering resilience to intestinal diseases. Furthermore, a healthy gut lining ensures efficient nutrient absorption and minimises the risk of leaky gut syndrome, a condition associated with various digestive disorders.

Certain feed materials can help maintain a healthy gut by reducing the load of pathogenic bacteria and promoting gut microbial diversity, all of which will allow animals to respond more effectively to pathogenic challenges. Multiple research studies demonstrate that feeding Actigen,

Alltech's proprietary yeast mannan-rich fraction derived from *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, can help to reduce gut colonisation due to the product's ability to bind pathogens and support the health and lifetime growth performance of sows and their offspring. Recent data have demonstrated that Actigen supplementation can significantly reduce the attachment and adhesion of *Escherichia coli* and *Salmonella Dublin* to porcine intestinal cells. Preventing these bacterial pathogens from attaching to and colonising the gut can directly affect lowering inflammatory markers for infection, making Actigen an important part of best strategies to reduce intestinal disorders in pigs. Several studies have also demonstrated a significant improvement in the intestinal structure of piglets after weaning via Actigen supplementation in piglet diets. Subsequently, nutrient absorption and utilisation increased, followed by an improvement in piglet weight gain and feed conversion efficiency (Figure 1). By prioritising strategies that promote gut health, pig producers can fortify their herds

against a multitude of intestinal challenges, enhancing both animal welfare and economic viability in the process.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the specific causes and clinical signs of these intestinal disorders is crucial for effective diagnosis, treatment and prevention. Proper management, biosecurity measures, and veterinary care are essential for maintaining the overall health and productivity of pig populations, but the importance of establishing optimal gut health must never be overlooked. As the gut is the first line of defence against many diseases, supporting a healthy and diverse gut microbiome will reduce intestinal disorders by helping to make swine herds more resilient to pathogen challenges.

Applying an integrated approach, from sow to offspring, that incorporates feed strategies may form part of the solution for controlling pathogens and helping pig producers achieve optimal pig health and meet performance and profitability goals.



Figure 1. Several studies show a significant increase in the growth performance of pigs (wean and wean through to finish) fed a diet containing Actigen.

MESSAGES

- Nitrates Derogation: are you ready for the effect on your income?
- Become a new dairy farmer to make a decent living.
- Make plans NOW for next year.
- Grassland management in November decides spring grass availability.
- Drying off management: teat seal where appropriate.
- BCS cows now to make good winter feed decisions.
- Manage replacement heifers based on their weights.



By Matt Ryan

NITRATES DEROGATION: CONSEQUENCES

- » A recent and very informative farm walk organised by the *Irish Farmers Journal* clearly demonstrated the consequences of nitrates derogation, even to moderately stocked farmers.
- » With the advent of 220kg N/ha (called organic N) derogation requirement from January 1, 2024, at minimum, an impacted farmer's income will be reduced by 7%.
- » If the farmer has land rented and replacements out on contract rearing, because these are very likely to increase in cost by 30-50%, the income will be reduced by 15+%.
- » However, if and when stocking rate decreases to 170kg N/ha, the income will decrease by 32-35% – pretty disastrous!
 - Some farmers, with their heads buried in the sand, think this can't happen, but it is in the European Union legislation from 1991.
 - Ireland has been given a derogation so that up to now we can farm up to a max of 250kg N/ha.
 - This is because we have a long grass-growing season, high rainfall, a high proportion of crops with a high N uptake (grass). But this is dependent on water quality improving.
- » These are the costs, whether one reduces cow numbers, leases more land or exports slurry. All routes will reduce farmers' income, distort the cow sales market (there will be 40,000 less cows milked by existing dairy farmers in 2024) and drive land rental prices through the roof. High priced land rental will be counter-productive to income.
- » **Will reducing stocking rates improve water quality in Ireland?** Eddie Burges, Teagasc agricultural catchment adviser, says that overriding factors such as weather and soil type can have a greater impact on nitrate losses than whole farm stocking rate (SR), when fertiliser and slurry application are sensible and timely. He says reducing SR from 250kg to 220kg "will not improve water quality".
- » All of this is galling when we know that: 54% of Irish surface water is classified as good to high quality compared with 44% in the EU; and 92% of Irish ground water has good status compared with 82% in the EU.
- » We also know that farmers have made huge efforts and commitments to be compliant. A little survey of 30 of my group members shows the following:
 1. Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) = 0.81kg CO₂/kg fat- and protein-corrected milk (FPCM)..
 2. This doesn't include carbon sequestration.
 3. The target is 0.75; whereas the present world figure is 2.4 (approximately).
 4. Ammonia emissions = 46.2kg NH₃ per ha.
 5. Some of my clients have improved their nitrogen use efficiency from 2021 to 2022 by 7%.
 6. I believe the powers that be do not understand, or wish to understand, how slow 'practice adoption' is. Dairy farmers in derogation have, over the last few years, invested heavily both financially and in the adoption of science-based knowledge to improve their environmental footprint. All we need is a little more time to allow all farmers to catch up.
- » To have your farm facts, so as to debate your case, all farmers should now join the Teagasc/ICBF AgNav programme – it is free from your local Teagasc adviser.
- » Of 45 farmers questioned, only three contacted his/her local councillor or TD to inform him of the facts associated with these environmental impositions – talk about "wouldn't someone do something" when we do nothing ourselves but complain!
- » Now, in preparation for next year, you must adapt your system of farming to the new norm.

BECOME A NEW DAIRY FARMER!

- » With all this doomsday talk of dairy farming having no future,

those of you in full-time, low-profit farming systems should seriously consider switching to dairy. There will always be a market for dairy products.

- » Dairying will always be two to four times more profitable than most farming systems.
- » Recently, I got a very interesting, motivating email from a young, new dairy farmer who came home from a high salaried-overseas accountancy job. He gives the following summary:

"My girlfriend (now my wife) was shocked when I announced my intentions to her but the lifestyle and the ability to have more family time, even if it took a few years, have been the big reward for both of us.

- » I would have been very disappointed to see a serious income potential opportunity from the home farm being missed out on. Previous to my job experience, I would have incorrectly assumed that only farmers work hard. Not so: to make a good income in any job you have to work very hard. And, surprisingly, they don't accumulate the assets their work hours should reward them with. Dairying does! Having worked for multiple 'bosses' over many years, I realised I could work well with my parents. Country living and outdoor working is enjoyable and being your own boss has its perks."
- » Now is as good a time as any to get into dairying:
 - Dairy breeding stock are very good value.
 - You can now do all your investment planning to meet future environmental requirements – a big advantage!
 - Before you move, talk to your adviser or discussion group.

MAKE PLANS NOW FOR NEXT YEAR!

- » As of now, for next year, we are faced with lots of uncertainties, including: environmental pressures, reduced stocking rates, increased input costs and decreased commodity prices.
 - Dealing with milk price reductions, costs increasing, calf issues, labour availability and environmental concerns, dairy farmers must be very careful with spending and investment.
 - Definitely, no expensive short or long-term land leases. You may

be interested – those high price land leases that got a lot of publicity have been renegotiated down to less than €290/acre – will that be publicised?

- Because of nitrates restrictions, definitely do not invest in extra unwanted housing.
- » Firstly, based on your banding category, decide on the number of cows 'the system' will allow you milk.
- » Financial planning is more important than any other farm planning! It starts now for next year and it will be essential to successfully negotiate these challenges. Relevant and realistic figures must be used when making financial and efficiency plans.
- » First up, by way of planning, is your spending on the essentials this November – don't leave this until December. This will ensure that you have a full set of financial accounts to do next year's plan with. The essentials are: dry cow treatment, cow BCS, replacement heifer weight targets, investment in lime P and K, labour for spring, pay essential creditors, adequate land area for the livestock planned for next year.
- » Financial planning, which most farmers are very neglectful of, starts now:
 - To do a financial plan now you must update your 2023 financial accounts. This is possible because very few financial transactions take place in December – you will be 95-98% accurate. Look at where you can reduce cost and where you can expect to make more sales. All advice suggests we make plans at 30c/L base milk price.
 - From this you will know the quantities of fertiliser, meal (500-600kg/cow), veterinary products and medicine, dairy products (30-40cc/cow/day teat dip, etc.), insurance, etc.
 - With this information you should get three quotations/tenders from different merchants for each individual input. Take delivery in early January so as not to waste time when busy.
- » A lot of thought needs to be put into your labour requirement for 2024, both in terms of quantity and type.



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- Ask yourself how you 'got on' last year; if poorly, get more help for next spring.
 - One labour unit should, in an efficient set-up, be able to manage 120-160 cows with extra help during the calving season.
 - Some large farmers get in a 'nighttime calver', which is a great idea! The idea should be considered by two to three medium sized farmers who might share one such person, operating to strict hygiene protocols. How and where can you source this help? You must be proactive through all public media outlets.
 - Talk to the FRS now and if taking on help, be it student or other, take him/her on in December/early January so that you have 'taught' him/her what they need to know.
- » **Associated with labour is the need to "contract rear calves". This is determined by the acreage available to "carry planned livestock" in 2024 and not by spring labour availability.**
- Don't wait until last minute to get your 'contract rearer' in place – do it now.
 - Make sure you have adequate calf housing and an efficient way of feeding large numbers over a short period.
- » Good contractors for spreading slurry and fertiliser, feeding out silage, dehorning calves, maintaining roads and fences are invaluable; have them lined up for the spring with specific dates.
- » Vaccinations should also be done in January – talk to your vet.

NOVEMBER MANAGEMENT: VERY IMPORTANT FOR SPRING GRASS

- » Decisions made now, directly or indirectly, will influence grass grown/growth rates to next May.
- » Facts drive good decisions: every extra day's grazing you achieve in autumn gives you €2.0/cow profit while the figure is €2.50/cow in springtime.
- With good planning, even now, you can maximise both.
 - Every day you delay closing in the autumn reduces spring available grass by 12kg DM.
 - Whereas, every day you delay grazing in spring only increases yield by 8kg DM.
- » The key autumn cover target date is December 1.
- You must know/decide your opening spring target average farm cover (AFC) for February 1. It will be between 800 and 1,100kg

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DM/ha, depending on stocking rate, calving pattern, soil type, etc. You will know, by consulting PastureBase, all your daily winter growth rates and they generally range between 1-5kg DM/day.

- From this, generally, you will be aiming to have an AFC on December 1 of 650-900 depending on stocking rate.
- If you plan to close up on November 1, then you must work out the amount of grass you expect to grow in November and subtract from the December 1 target so as to know your 10th November closing target.
- » There is a case to be made to close one or two paddocks with covers of 1,500-1,600 so as to have adequate grass in early March.
- » If you are not into the detail of grass measurements contact your adviser immediately, your discussion group or other grass training workshops.
- » 60-70% of the grazing area must be grazed off by November 1. If that is not done and a high proportion remains you must get in extra stock to get that proportion eaten off quickly.
- » Therefore, keep grass in cows' diet for as long as possible, ration the silage and feed some meals now.
- » Every farmer should be using the autumn rotation planner to guide grass allocation per day, but measurement must also be done so as to STOP grazing when target closing covers are arrived at. A grass budget must also be done – get help from your adviser.

DRY COW: TEAT SEAL WHERE POSSIBLE

- » Firstly, go to the Animal Health Ireland (AHI) website and view the videos to refresh your memory on the correct way to do this task.
- » As the cure rate of mastitis/SCC is 50-70% with dry cow treatment, this is one cost (€3-€7/cow) that cannot be avoided.
- » To use an antibiotic dry cow treatment, you now must get a prescription from your vet. But you must teat seal cows that don't need antibiotic.
 - Use on cows who have had no clinical mastitis during the year and on the last SCC test were under 100,000 and consistently under it during the year.
 - The overuse of antibiotics is a major concern for farmers and the general public.
- » Dry off cows that:
 - Are within 56 days of calving;
 - Have a daily milk yield of 7L (0.7kg MS) or less per day;
 - That have SCC levels of over 300,000;
 - First calvers that have milked for 270 days; and,
 - Thin cows, being particularly concerned about high yielders, who 'milk off their backs.'

- » Drying off cows is not an easy task and much care, time and planning must be set aside for the job. Don't do more than 20 cows together.
- » The following suggestions should be taken on board:
 - Treat all quarters of each cow with the same treatment.
 - A milk recording one month before dry-off plus a sensitivity test has merit.
 - Abruptly dry-off all cows – no OAD milking.
 - Milk out the quarter fully before infusing the dry cow antibiotic/sealant.
 - Disinfect the teat end, starting from the back teats – vigorously rub the teat end for 10-15 seconds with cotton wool soaked in methylated spirits, starting with the furthest away teats.
 - Do not contaminate the nozzle of the antibiotic tube before insertion into the teat canal, starting from the front teats.
 - Infuse the contents of the antibiotic tube into the quarter – hold teat-end firmly between thumb and forefinger and with other hand, gently massage the antibiotic upwards into the teat (NOTE: This is not done with teat seal).
 - Teat spray (post milking teat disinfectant) treated quarters immediately after infusion at a rate of 20cc/cow.
 - Record cow number, date and product details of all dry cow treatments.
 - Mark the cow (leg band or spray paint on udder) so that cows that have received dry cow antibiotic therapy can be readily recognised.
 - Post treatment, standoff cows on a clean yard for one hour.
 - Maintain dry cows separate and put dry cows in clean, dry paddocks (particularly for the first two weeks after drying off) to reduce teat exposure to environmental mastitis bacteria.
 - The cow is at a greater risk of new infection for the first three weeks after drying off. Keep a close eye on cows to identify new infections.
- » It is not advised to teat seal heifers unless, historically, more than 2-3% of heifers have calved down with mastitis. But, if being done, it must be done extremely carefully and is a tough job.
- » You should cull cows that:
 - Had three or more clinical cases this year and had two-three high SCC readings during the year.
 - It is a waste of money treating these cows as they will continue to spread infection to other cows next year.

MANAGE THE DRY COW BY BCS:

- » Cows that are dried off thin will calve down thin, which will result in:
 - Calving difficulties.
 - Poor milk yields next year, as every 50kg below target

(1 condition score) will result in a loss of 450L.

- Surveys show that cows calving down in body condition scores (BCS) of less than three have a lower chance of going back in-calf.
- » **Drying off thin cows in early November means they need no meals during the dry period if the silage is good.**
 - The cheapest way of managing thin cows this autumn/winter is to dry off early and feed no meal if silage is good enough – see Table 1.
 - However, weight is put on more efficiently during milking (50mj to put on 1 kg weight) compared to dry period (72mj). But it must be low % protein.
- » **Divide up your cows into three groups, based on condition score (CS):**
- » **Group (1): BCS 2.75 - 3.25**
 - Most of the herd will be in this group and will need no special attention with silage 68% DMD or better.
- » **Group (2): BCS 2.75 or less**
 - These cows need meal, the amount depending on the quality of silage (see Table 1) and, if calving in February must be dried off in early November. A cow that is 2.75 BCS now and due to calve in early February in a BCS of 3.25 and being fed 68% DMD silage; she has 84 days to calving of which there are 40 days where no BCS is added. Therefore, she only has 44 “effective” days for meal feeding and she need to put on extra 0.5 BCS or approx 25-30kg of weight. This will require 150+ kg of meal or 3.4 kg/cow/day for the 44 days. Therefore, the meal feeding period is too short.
- » **Group (3): BCS 3.25+ cows:**
 - Cows that are very fat at calving down will underperform by milking poorly and have a lower in-calf rate next year.
 - Some farmers push on the leftover silage from groups (1) or (2) to these animals.
 - Other farmers will feed only 5kg DM per day of silage with straw. That means only giving them 25-30kg of fresh (20% DM) silage per cow per day plus 4-5kg fresh straw.

Table 1: Recommendations for dry cow feeding (10-12 weeks dry period).

Silage DMD	Body condition score at drying off			
	< 2.5	2.5	2.75	> 3.0
> 72	Silage + 1kg	Silage ad-lib	Silage restrict	Restrict
68 - 72	Silage + 2kg	Silage + 1kg	Silage ad-lib	Restrict
64 - 68	Silage + 3kg	Silage + 2kg	Silage + 1kg	Ad-lib
60 - 64	Silage + 4kg	Silage + 3kg	Silage + 2kg	Silage + 1kg

- » Some farmers see these three grouping requirements as impractical but it will result in three-four more cows per 100 being in-calf, less calving problems, less feed wasted on fat

cows and higher peak yield next April/May. If separate grouping is an issue with you, then you must invest a small amount of money in this requirement.

REPLACEMENT HEIFER CARE

- » Weigh your weanling (called R1s) and your incalf (R2s) heifers now to see how they compare with the targets (Table 1). Targets: R1s and R2s should be 40% and 80%, respectively, of their mature weights.

Table 2: Target weights (kg) for R1s and R2s on November 1.

Breed	Mature weight (kg)	R1s (40% mature weight)	R2s (80% mature weight)
Holstein	580	224	448
British Fr/NZL Fr	550	220	440
Jersey x HF	545	218	436

- » Animals under target should get extra meal as per Tables 2 and 3. With good silage, for every 10kg R1s are under target they need 40kg of extra meal and for every 10kg R2s are under target they need an extra 60kg meal over a period to bring them to target.

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Table 3: Meal requirements for weanling heifers (R1s) on silage.

	Silage DMD		
	65	70	75
Gain on silage only (kg/day) Light weanlings	0.24	0.41	0.58
Meal required to give 0.7kg/day Heavy weanlings	2	1.4	0.5
Meal required to give 0.5kg/day	1.0	0.4	-

It is obvious from above that silage must be analysed (contract rearers must do so, as well) and a weighing scales (grant aided) is essential to manage heifer target weights.

All this information is essential to bring to the attention of contract calf rearers so that subsequent hassle doesn't arise.

Table 4: Protein levels (%) in meal required to supplement silage of different % proteins to R1s.

Kg meal	% protein in silage			
	8	10	12	14
2	20	18	16	14
3	18	16	14	12

Many farmers give the leptospirosis vaccine now or earlier to R1s to minimise spring work.

Mix the in-calf heifers with the first calvers so as to minimise stress now and particularly after calving when stress then can have a detrimental effect on her subsequent weight gain.

EXTRA BITS OF ADVICE

- » Over 90% of farmers' fields are deficient in either lime, P and K.
 - Soil test and correct P and K levels
 - Lime your low pH fields if weather is dry.
- » Animal health.
 - Engage with your vet to get this task correct.
 - All animals must be treated for lice and fluke (get samples done).
 - R1s must be treated for worms at housing and maybe R2s but really, they should not need a dose.
 - Deal with fluke, if an issue.

"You have to be optimistic to learn something new."

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DELVING DEEPER INTO 'THE BOSS'

FINNISH TRACTOR BRAND, VALTRA, HAS UNVEILED THE LATEST GENERATION OF ITS FLAGSHIP HIGH-HORSEPOWER TRACTOR – THE S SERIES. AFTER SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENTS IN THE BRAND'S HOME FACTORY IN FINLAND, THE 6TH GENERATION S SERIES WILL NOW BE PRODUCED IN SUOLAHTI. LAST MONTH, WE GAVE A TASTER OF WHAT THE NEW SERIES HAS TO OFFER; THIS MONTH WE DELVE A LITTLE DEEPER

Valtra has nicknamed its latest offering 'The Boss', which at 280-420hp, is the company's largest and most powerful tractor, promising high torque at low revs, the company says. The 8.4L AGCO Power engine and CVT transmission offer a 5 per cent reduction in revs and up to 10 per cent decrease in fuel consumption compared to the S's predecessor, according to Valtra. The latest S Series places high emphasis on comfort, visibility, and smart technology. And there are several new features and improvements, including: a new design; improved access; a new, spacious cab; an increased number of lights (all of which are LED); as well as the factory-fitted TwinTrac reverse-drive system and SmartTouch user interface. The new S Series brings a number of upgrades including a range of suspension options for front axle and cab, and now S Series tractors can also be fitted with Valtra's Skyview cab option and Valtra Unlimited customisations.

NORDIC DESIGN

The design of the new S Series draws inspiration from Valtra's popular fifth-generation design, but there are some notable changes. Valtra's industrial design and user experience department lead, Kimmo Wihinen explains: "The 6th generation S Series combines form and function in a modern, aggressive form language that conveys the S Series' power. The sleek slope of the bonnet gives exceptional forward visibility. As an industry-first, the S Series features a fully integrated light unit including LED low/high beam, LED daytime running lights as well as close-range LED working lights in the front. This provides an exceptionally high level of light output and gives the 6th generation S Series its distinctive look". There are now a total of 16 work lights, all of which are LED. Fans of Valtra's 5th generation N, T, and Q Series cabs will appreciate the familiar and ergonomic cab in the S Series which is accessed via more gently inclined steps than the previous generation.

IMPROVED EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Valtra's SmartTurn automatic headland turning completes the autonomous field driving experience with four turning patterns – Part Field Mode, U-Turn, Y-turn and K-turn – that allow the driver to work the field in the most efficient way.

"Our precision farming offering today meets the majority of customers' demands, and the SmartTouch user interface makes Valtra smart-farming technology the easiest in the market. We are working on new technology features from which Valtra customers will benefit in the near future," comments product marketing specialist Johan Grotell. For example, Isobus-based Tractor Implement Management (TIM) is planned for release on the S Series in 2025. Valtra promises that the S Series will be one of its most sustainable tractors both in terms of production and supporting farmers to grow sustainably. Two-thirds of components in Valtra tractors are sourced from within Finland, and their factory



runs on 100 per cent renewable energy. The S Series is renewable-diesel compatible and will leave the factory with 'Neste MY Renewable Diesel' in its tank. The company claims that the smart-farming technology offered with the S Series reduces inputs and time, and lowers fuel consumption.

FULLY TAILORED

Over one-third of all tractors leaving Valtra's Suolahti plant have some form of Valtra Unlimited customisation. Vice president, marketing, Valtra EME, Mikko Lehtikainen explains how these are of particular benefit to high-horsepower customers: "Large farms and agricultural contractors, depend on having the right solutions to undertake advanced smart farming tasks in the most efficient way possible. Valtra Unlimited is uniquely placed to offer exactly what each business needs to farm more efficiently, more ergonomically, and with increased safety."

Valtra Unlimited features will be available for all 6th generation S Series models. The new S Series tractors are available with Unlimited's popular Central Lubrication System (CLS) and a state-of-the-art sound system (including Apple CarPlay, and Android Auto). The Unlimited VIEW camera system also comes to the S Series. This system uses cameras mounted on the tractor, a high-definition display, and advanced machine learning algorithms to automatically detect objects moving in front of the tractor and warn the driver for enhanced safety in the field and on the road.

THE S SERIES GLOBAL LAUNCH

The 6th generation S Series marks the first global launch of a Valtra tractor. Serial production will be ramped up in the second quarter of 2024 and first deliveries in Europe can be expected in the summer. Deliveries to regions with less-regulated emission standards, such as South America, are planned to begin in the second half of 2024. Valtra will present the S Series in field and customer events worldwide from November 2023. For those keen to be among the first to see the new S Series up close, Valtra will be showing the 6th generation S Series at Agritechnica in Hanover, Germany between November 12-18. We are looking forward to it!



NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

'YOU CAN ONLY PLAY WHAT IS IN FRONT OF YOU'

Well readers, as I sit and compile this month's column, the rain is pelting down in buckets outside. I am cold. The ground is cold. The cattle in the field beside me are standing with humps on their backs with the cold.

Although autumn has just landed, it feels as though winter is truly upon us. There are floods everywhere, machines are lying idle, and farmers are taking stock of the harvest – the crops, in some cases, that have been lost or not even sown yet. Maybe it's just that I am writing this on a cold, damp, miserable morning that has me starting with a negative attitude, but that is just reality. We can't be upbeat all the time, and that is OK! It is hard times on man, woman, machine and stock.

Our World Cup dream is over, beaten by that great rugby and, indeed farming, nation New Zealand. In the fields in Ireland, our own World Cup of farming is being decided by fine margins influenced by weather and prices. It's funny how life and sport sometimes throw up similar results. There are the highs of the harvest and commodities prices that are cause for celebration, but then there are the lows – and we have had some this year – that cause us to lament what could have been, as we are forced to embrace defeat. The great Moss Keane former Irish and Lions rugby star once said to me: "You can only play what is in front of you." This, my friends, is so true. We must fight and take on the elements, ruck and maul and scrum down with commodities prices, and put ourselves in a position to score whenever the chance presents itself.

Results, no matter how small, are really what it is all about at the end of the day. Whether it is filling the trophy cabinets or the grain sheds, we aim to compete, embrace, and win. But the great thing about life and sport is there is always another day. We will get back on the training grounds again and back out in the fields again – when they dry out – and, most importantly, we will compete again! Now down to the business in hand! More than €450m made its way to farmers' accounts recently as part of the basic payment income support scheme (BISS) and the complementary redistributive income support scheme (CRISS). With 103,764 farmers qualifying for this, it works out at an average of €4,336 per farmer. All is very welcome.

There is a call out for a payment to be made to tillage farmers who lost crops this year owing to the bad harvesting conditions. According to the IFA, approximately 4,500 acres of various crops were not harvested this year. The IFA recently met with the agriculture minister about targeting those farmers most affected. While €8m was allocated in the budget for compensation, this is not enough to offset losses in the sector. We will wait and see the outcome. There is talk of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine rolling out a tillage-expansion and sustainability scheme. At time of print, that was still at the discussion stage but anything that can help and develop the sector will be welcomed.

Mandatory ATV training is to come into effect later this month, which is fantastic news. These machines need to be treated with respect and operators need to know how to handle them properly.

I see the first two biogas tractors were sold here recently. M&S machinery delivered two New Holland T6.180 methane-powered tractors to Green Generation based in Nurney Co. Kildare. They have replaced diesel models and will be used for tanker and trailer work.

Finally, many congratulations to Eamonn Treacy and John Whelan on retaining their world ploughing titles in Latvia last month.

Until next month, farm safely, farm wisely.

VOGELSANG'S SLURRY-MANAGEMENT INNOVATIONS AT AGRITECHNICA

Vogelsang says it is showcasing some big innovations for economical and environmentally friendly low-emission slurry spreading at Agritechnica 2023. Here we bring you a taster of what to expect.



The BlackBird trailing shoe.

BLACKBIRD TRAILING SHOE

A highlight of Vogelsang's exhibit is the 30m BlackBird trailing shoe applicator, which allows working widths of 30m, 27m, 24m and 21m without any overhang to the selected width. Mark Hughes, Vogelsang's managing director in Ireland, says: "The 30m BlackBird opens new avenues for contractors. Its larger working width provides greater flexibility and efficiency in slurry distribution, highlighting the potential for advancing slurry spreading practices in Ireland." At Agritechnica, Vogelsang will spotlight the 30m BlackBird's side arm, demonstrating its capabilities.

SWINGMAX5 SLIDE

Vogelsang has fine-tuned its SwingMax Slide to better-meet the needs of farmers and contractors, the company says. The 24m SwingMax5 Slide trailing shoe features a more compact design with reduced width and height, lighter welded assemblies, and larger hydraulic cylinders for optimised performance on sloped terrain. This modified applicator is adaptable to vehicles with high tyres or fenders, aligning with the evolving trends in agricultural equipment.

SLURRY STABILISATION SYSTEM

Vogelsang's SyreN slurry stabilisation system is designed to balance slurry during field spreading by adding sulfuric acid. This innovation, the company says, can reduce ammonia emissions by up to 70 per cent and maximise nutrient utilisation. Agritechnica

visitors will witness the system's permanently installed front suction arm, which facilitates convenient in-field slurry refilling via established feeder logistics systems. This enhancement particularly benefits contractors and larger farms, improving overall operational efficiency.

TOGGLE SWITCH CONTROL

For enhanced control over linkages, Vogelsang introduces a universal toggle switch control with automated headland management. This innovation is compatible with the BlackBird, UniSpread series, and SwingUp dribble bar linkage. Designed as an in-house development on a printed circuit board, the control system offers ease of operation and can be combined with linkage lighting, ensuring optimal equipment performance even during nighttime operations.

XSPLIT SLURRY SEPARATOR

The XSplit slurry separator takes the spotlight for its unique benefits. It offers an extra storage capacity for slurry, addressing the long-standing challenge of adequate storage space. By efficiently separating solids from liquids, it reduces slurry volume, creating up to 20 per cent extra storage capacity. This not only saves time and resources but also enhances slurry application management, preventing scale formation, and improving the flow of slurry, according to the company. The XSplit separator plays a vital role in

grazing-rotation planning. By eliminating the risk of leaf sward contamination, it ensures healthy and productive grazing lands. Contaminated grazing can lead to reduced animal health and compromised silage quality, making the separation action a crucial component of efficient and sustainable livestock management. The XSplit separator simplifies slurry management for green bedding by efficiently separating the liquid portion from solids. This makes it easier to use as economical bedding. Adjusting the pressing area and dry substance content allows for a dry matter content of up to 40 per cent, promoting animal comfort, hygiene, and overall welfare within livestock housing. Traditional slurry-spreading methods often result in nutrient loss and environmental concerns. With the XSplit separator, this issue is eliminated. The separated slurry can be evenly spread on fields, ensuring maximum nutrient availability while minimising emissions. This precise application enhances crop growth, reduces waste, and benefits both farmers and the environment. You can find out more at Vogelsang's stand – B46 in hall 23 – at Agritechnica 2023.



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SHOULD WE WELCOME COMPULSORY TESTING?

The proverbial has already hit the fan following the Road Safety Authority's announcement of its plans to introduce a compulsory roadworthy test, similar to the NCT, for tractors and farm machinery that use the public highway. Some media claim that the last time this was attempted, Minister Shane Ross was forced to annul an order he had already signed. Not so. What actually happened was that the order was withdrawn following an intervention by PAC Ireland, pointing out that the legal advice his order was based on was flawed. Had that order gone through, it would have deemed agricultural contracting as fully a commercial enterprise, preventing contractors from using

marked diesel and requiring them to install tachographs in all tractors. The eventual legislation applied only to tractors used for commercial haulage that were over four years' old, with a speed capability in excess of 40km/h. The legislation required that these vehicles had to be submitted for a roadworthiness inspection once every two years. This process is called commercial vehicle roadworthiness testing (CVRT). PAC Ireland's intervention clearly showed the influence that a respected representative body can have by working closely with Government agencies and, in this case, Department of Transport officials. So, the question is, should agricultural contractors welcome this announcement by the RSA? In principle I would say 'yes'; subject, of course, to examining the finer details. Firstly, let me remind those who may rush to reject an NCT out of hand, it is already a legal requirement under the Safety Health & Welfare at Work Act that all workplace machinery, vehicles and equipment be maintained in good order. If owners fail to do so, they can be subject to prosecution and severe penalties, especially if an employee is injured due to badly maintained machinery. This applies to all employers including agricultural contractors and farmers.

Will it be costly? The machinery of professional contractors is normally kept in excellent condition so preparation for the test should be minimal. The cost of testing is a tax allowable business expense, so the net cost is zero. Will testing result in agricultural contractors getting more work? I think it will. It should make it less cost-effective for those dabbling in contracting to bring older machinery up to the NCT standard. PAC Ireland will ensure that the agricultural contractor's voice is heard during the consultation period.

LONG-TERM PLANNING

You will have often read my criticisms of the EU and our own Government for their lack of long-term planning, particularly for the agricultural sector, and my views on the tendency of politicians and representative bodies to look for short-term solutions, always with an eye on the next election. Imagine my delight hearing the government across the water declare that short-term solutions were not working, stating that the system was broken, with the prime minister saying he was going to break that cycle and would be working on long-term plans with a scope of up to 30 years. Let's hope our leaders and the EU Commission have the courage to follow suit.



KRONE UNVEILS WORLD'S LARGEST FOUR-ROTOR RAKE

Krone's new Swadro TC 1570 is centred around the well-proven V-frame concept adapted from the world's largest centre six-rotor rake, the Swadro TC 2000. This concept gives the machine a flexible working width of up to 15.7m and makes it extremely stable and smooth running. Using the new intuitive user interface, the entire machine can be operated from the tractor cab via an Isobus-compatible terminal or in combination with an Isobus joystick. The working width of the four-rotor rake centre delivery can be variably adjusted from 11m up to 15.7m via the front rotors guided by the V-outriggers. The two V-outriggers can be retracted and extended independently of each other ensuring field corners and obstacles can also be raked around effortlessly. The outriggers are each supported by a wheel in the front area enabling quiet running, especially at high speeds and during fast turning on the headland. Hydraulically adjustable outrigger arms of the rear rotors, mean that swaths can be produced in a width of 1.40m to 2.90m

EQUIPPED TO THE MAX

In addition to the V-frame concept, integrated vibration damping also ensures that the machine runs smoothly in the headland position. An automatic lowering mechanism ensures that the outrigger arms are decelerated just before the rotors touch down, ensuring that they land gently on the ground. This protects both the machine and the grass, while also minimising the turning time at the headland. Fifteen tine arms on each rotor, each with four tines on the front and five tines on the rear rotors enable work quality to be maintained at higher driving speeds. With electrical rotor height adjustment, the height of each rotor can be adjusted individually, or all rotors can be adjusted simultaneously via the operating terminal to suit the working conditions. The Swadro TC 1570 is equipped with a category II/III pendulum-suspended two-point hitch. This reliably compensates for uneven ground and gives the rake enormous manoeuvrability thanks to its large steering angle.

EQUIPMENT WITHOUT COMPROMISE

The hydraulic rotor relief integrated in the lifting cylinders ensures optimum bearing pressure of the rotors. This can be set separately for the front and rear rotors via the terminal, even while driving. When adjusting the working width or swath width, the relief pressure is automatically adjusted by an active control system so that the rotors are always evenly relieved. Together with the gimbal rotor suspension pulled by the outrigger arm, the rotor adjusts optimally to the ground contours under all conditions – this protects the grass and prevents dirt from entering the crops. The main frame of the rake is hydraulically adjustable to allow for a transport height under 4m without the need to fold down the tine arms.

ABBEY EXPANDS SUSTAINABILITY AND DIGITALISATION OFFERING



As part of its low-emission slurry-applicator range, Abbey Machinery has introduced the new Agri Pro 7.7m trailing shoe.

This trailing shoe, according to the company, provides soil engagement with an enhanced contour following, and includes a 30-hole distributor, stone trap system, 40mm hose, and five-inch distribution pipe. It provides precise application and a flotation system on hilly or uneven ground, keeping downward force on the shoes, and includes a self-levelling boom that adjusts to the ground. A spokesperson said: "The Agri Pro gives the operator the option of filing from directly behind

the applicator into the tank. It is complete with mounting brackets between the tank and applicator, sufficiently mounting onto the tank via a linkage system. The use of slurry applicators is one of the biggest opportunities to capitalise on precision nutrient application to further increase the value of the nutrient-dense slurry while reducing emissions. Low-emission slurry spreading offers up to 60 per cent reduction in nitrogen loss on farm."

Abbey has added several optional extras to the recessed tanker range including exhaust extension and galvanised mudguards along with Abbey-branded oil and holder. In addition, Tandem Recess Tankers now include a bolt-on hitch as standard. With growing trends in precision farming Abbey offers a range of technology options for

slurry tankers. Tanker technology options include NIR Live Sensing technology, Isobus solutions, GPS mapping, multi-stage rapid filling arm, and Flow Meter controls to support the farmer in getting the most out of their nutrient dense slurry. Abbey Plus Range Diet Feeders also have several new upgrades to the line as standard, including 22mm auger, 2810 clock, fully galvanised viewing platform, new style feed out arm, rounded mudguards, wider tray for minimum spillage and door wedges for an even feed out. Diet feeder technology available includes NIR sensor, weighing system clocks, feeding apps and ingredient tracking.

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LEMKEN INTRODUCES THE 10m-WIDE RUBIN 10

Lemken rounds off the top end of its range of Rubin compact disk harrows with a new model. This model has a 10-metre working width that, despite its large disc diameter of 645mm, has EU-wide road approval for speeds of up to 40km/h. Like the smaller Rubin 10 models, up to 7m width, the Rubin 10/1000 boasts a symmetrical disc arrangement for fuel-efficient operation without side draft, the company says. This new compact disk harrow can be hitched via a ball coupling or drawbar eye and hydraulic support is available to make attachment and detachment easier. The two rows of serrated concave discs allow thorough incorporation across the full surface width from a soil depth of just seven centimetres (cm). The 14cm line spacing ensures blockage-free work even with large volumes of organic matter. Each concave disc of the Rubin 10/1000 is equipped with an

overload protection with damped kickback, which reduces loads on the frame. The new Rubin's working sections feature a pendulum-type suspension to ensure optimal following of the field contour. On very uneven terrain or when working on slopes, the optional iQ-Contour pendulum compensation guarantees optimum surface adaptation. In addition, the hydraulic depth adjustment makes it possible to respond to changing conditions and the working depth can be changed while driving. During the turning process, the implement is supported by the roller, which has particularly strong bearings.

Thanks to its wide contact area, the machine is firmly supported and minimises soil compaction. The Rubin is also innovative when it comes to transport. The machine is folded in from the cab, with the roller's patented folding system ensuring that the width is reduced to three metres and the height to four metres to meet the requirements for road transport throughout the EU. Despite its large working width, the Rubin does not require an expensive system carrier. Tractor and implement can be flexibly deployed and are safe on the road, even at a speed of 40km/h.



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AGRIGEAR CELEBRATES TWO MILESTONES

Cavan-based tyre company, Agrigear, had cause for double celebrations recently as it marked 40 years in business, as well as 25 years in partnership with Indian tyre company, BKT. Agrigear, owned and run by Fred Clarke and his family, and an excellent team of product specialists, recently hosted a celebration conference and dinner in the Slieve Russell Hotel in Cavan, attended by their dealers nationwide, Irish machinery manufacturers, and members of various media outlets. Special guests on the day were Rajiv Poddar, joint managing director of BKT and Lucia Salmaso, managing director Europe, along with senior BKT management. We wish Agrigear the very best for the future! Below is a flavour of the wonderful celebrations that took place



Rose Clarke, director Agrigear; Piero Torassa, BKT; Rajiv Poddar, joint managing director, BKT; Kirk Walker, BKT; Lucia Salmaso, managing director, BKT; Joyce Clarke and Fred Clarke, managing director, Agrigear; Sandesh Jain, BKT; Shekhar Yadav, BKT; and Gaurav Aneja, BKT. Photo: Agrigear.



Rose Clarke, director Agrigear; Rajiv Poddar, joint managing director, BKT; Lucia Salmaso, managing director, BKT; and Fred Clarke, managing director, Agrigear. Photo: Agrigear.



Rajiv Poddar, joint managing director, BKT makes a presentation to Fred Clarke, managing director, Agrigear in celebration of the 25th anniversary of BKT and Agrigear's partnership. Photo: Tyre Trade Journal.



Fred Clarke, managing director, Agrigear makes a presentation to Tamer Çerçioğlu in recognition of long-term supplier relationship with Jantisa Wheel Rims. Photo: Tyre Trade Journal.



▲ Fred Clarke, managing director, Agrigear makes a presentation to Martin Moloney, the first Agrigear agent appointed in Ireland. Photo: Tyre Trade Journal.



► Fred Clarke, managing director, Agrigear makes a presentation to Rajiv Poddar, joint managing director, BKT in grateful appreciation of the loyal support of BKT. Photo: Tyre Trade Journal.

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GET WINTER READY

WITH THE WEATHER CHANGING AND THE NUMBER OF DAYLIGHT HOURS GETTING SHORTER, NOW IS THE TIME TO ENSURE YOUR FARM IS WINTER READY, SAYS **CIARAN ROCHE**, FBD RISK MANAGER



Good planning and preparedness will help ensure your safety and the safety of others on the farm. Farm building maintenance, lighting, electrical safety, housekeeping, weather conditions and manual handling are all areas that need to be considered to ensure your safety on the farm this winter.

FARM BUILDING MAINTENANCE

Farm buildings and facilities should be inspected regularly, especially before and after extreme weather conditions. For example, if roofs are subject to excessive weight, the joists can give way. In very heavy snowstorms accompanied by acute snow accumulation of roofs, it is advisable to monitor the roofs and observe the integrity of the joists and the roofing material.

On foot of building inspections, maintenance and repair work should be carried out as appropriate. Remember, building maintenance work can be very dangerous – especially work at height – so it is essential that all work is properly planned, organised, supervised and carried out in a safe manner. Appropriate equipment for work at height should be carefully selected. Scaffolding and mobile elevated work platforms should be used as required. Never take chances and, where necessary, employ a specialist contractor.

LIGHTING

Adequate lighting is invaluable, especially during the winter months when most activities are carried out during the dark evenings. You should only replace lights around the farm if you have a safe way of doing so. If not, it's

always best to call in a certified electrician who has the right safety equipment to carry out the work. When checking lights, make sure that all the fittings are at least splash-proof with an IP44 rating. The protection level for fittings in milking parlours and dairies should be IP45. Check that all lights are working and that they provide adequate light.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

It's always a good idea to check how electrically safe your farmyard is. Electrical fittings can become damaged due to wear and tear and some electrical fittings are not suitable for the outdoors. Now is the time to have them repaired or replaced with fittings that have the correct IP ratings. Always use an electrical contractor for this work. Check that your RCD (residual current device) is working correctly, both mechanically and electrically. This test button should be pressed at regular intervals, approximately once a month. Remember to reset the switch after testing. Using portable electrical tools and equipment such as a power washer can cause electrocution. Always visually check that leads are not damaged. Never handle electrical equipment with wet hands or near water.

KEEPING THE YARD TIDY

Keeping the farm tidy and free from clutter makes a huge difference in terms of safety. By making sure that the yard is tidy, you are ultimately reducing the likelihood of slips, trips and falls. Clear drains regularly, particularly in anticipation for stormy weather.

SNOW AND FREEZING CONDITIONS

Farmers should be prepared for potential freezing and snowy conditions that the winter often brings. Ensure water supplies are protected by insulating exposed water pipes. During freezing conditions, milking equipment must be fully drained down after milking, and frost-protection heaters should be provided to ensure that milking equipment and other critical plant does not freeze up. Ensure anti-freeze levels are adequate in farm vehicles and de-ice all windscreens and mirrors before operation. Remember to grit pathways and yard surfaces during icy spells, to prevent the risk of falls on icy surfaces.

MANUAL HANDLING

Farming, by its very nature, is a physically demanding occupation. This can especially be the case during the winter months, when the housing of livestock can lead to increased workload around the farm, whether it be carrying meal bags, forking silage or rolling bales. Always plan work activities so as to avoid and reduce manual handling activities. Ask yourself if it can be done differently in order to eliminate the manual handling, or to minimise the distance travelled, or the weight of the load, or the twisting movements required. Where manual handling cannot be avoided, use manual handling aids where possible, get help if required and always use a safe lifting technique.

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'THEM BONES NEED CALCIUM, AND THAT'S A NATURAL LAW'

RECENTLY, SOME OF US IN THE OFFICE RECALLED THAT OLD TV ADVERT FROM THE '90S - YOU KNOW THE ONE WITH THE ODD WOODEN MANNEQUIN SINGING THE PRAISES OF A PINT OF MILK? STRANGE AS IT WAS, THE TUNE WAS CATCHY AND THE MESSAGE WAS SIMPLE: A PINT OF MILK HELPS YOUR BONES, AND THAT'S A NATURAL LAW - AND RESEARCHERS AT AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY TEND TO AGREE

Calcium has always been synonymous with bone health and dairy products have a deserved reputation as calcium providers. But it can be hard to quantify just how effective and beneficial it can be. Well, a groundbreaking study has found that increasing dairy consumption in older people can drastically improve their health, with potential economic savings also being presented as a result. This may not be a surprise to IFM readers, but this study, completed in Australia, offers some really interesting scientifically proven facts. The study began with a dietary intervention, whereby 7,000 older residents across 30 residential care homes were given an increase in the amount of dairy they consume every day. It found that residents who consumed 3.5 servings of dairy per day, saw a 46 per cent reduced risk of hip fractures, 33 per cent reduced risk of all fractures and 11 per cent reduced risk of falls - following the two-year study. The authors attributed the findings to the additional calcium and high-quality protein found in dairy foods. They then calculated the cost-saving potential if the dietary changes were to be rolled out nationwide: according to the research, the benefits also extend to the Australian economy and the fracture prevention potential from increasing dairy intake is estimated to equate to over €39m savings in health spend there.

"What the study shows is that when older adults almost double their intake of dairy products they maintain weight, bone density and nutritional status," says Dr Sandra Iuliano, a senior research fellow in the Department of Medicine, at the University of Melbourne, who led the study. "What we've done is slow the decline of bone and muscle by changing

the diet of older adults, despite the fact that they're losing muscle naturally because they're old."



IN AUSTRALIA, THE TYPICAL DIET IS NOT HUGELY DIFFERENT FROM OURS. OLDER PEOPLE OFTEN DON'T HAVE HUGE APPETITES, SO CAN SOMETIMES MISS OUT ON THE NUTRITION THEY NEED TO MAINTAIN STRONG BONES AND GOOD MUSCLE STRENGTH THAT HELP WITHSTAND THE RISK OF FALLS AND FRACTURES.

COST OF PREVENTION

Professor Frances Dockery is a consultant geriatrician at Beaumont Hospital and joint clinical lead for the National Fracture Liaison Service database in Ireland. She says that the cost of this simple dietary addition is far smaller than the cost of treating fractures and similar injuries: "You have to show value for money in a health service," she says. "The bottom line was that [serving more dairy] was a cheap intervention with great gains. When you compare that to the cost of a fall or fracture to the person and to the health service, [serving more dairy and protein] is a cost-saving strategy. Interestingly, the cost of intervention in this research study was just 70c per resident, per day. "In Australia, the typical diet is not hugely

different from ours. Older people often don't have huge appetites, so can sometimes miss out on the nutrition they need to maintain strong bones and good muscle strength that help withstand the risk of falls and fractures. This study has implications for older people in general, not just those in residential or nursing homes because preventing falls and fractures is really important for everyone as they age.

"There are lots of studies on drug treatments for preventing fractures, which can often be costly and are for select people only who might benefit, but what's nice about this study is that it's low cost, feasible, with great benefits for all the older residents."

IRELAND'S AGEING POPULATION

In Ireland, over 300,000 people are thought to have osteoporosis which is a treatable condition, but often the first time they know about it is when they fracture (break) a bone. Fractures account for two per cent of the overall health costs here, which is estimated to be €400m per year.

"We have a rapidly growing population of older people," says Frances. "We have one of the highest life expectancies in Europe which we can be very proud of. Rising fracture numbers may come with this however, and fractures can really threaten healthy ageing because they impact a person's independence. There are already at least 30,000 fractures annually in Ireland, so preventing them is hugely important in an ageing population."

Professor Dockery says that a fracture is more than just a painful, physical injury, it can have a knock-on effect on lifestyle and general health: "Falls and fractures are a leading reason for people to enter nursing

homes for example," she says. "Falls can be disastrous because people lose confidence. They mobilise less often because they are so fearful of falling again. If you don't walk, you don't fall, so we see peoples' reluctance to remain active, losing all their fitness and independence. We try to encourage exercise for everyone. It's healthy for muscle and bones but trying to convince someone who has fallen to exercise more is not always easy – it's hard to overcome the fear of falling again but with the right support it can be done.

"For people who break their hip, at least one in five people may not survive more than a year. Of the survivors, only about half get back to their usual level of function so, it can be a life-changing injury. And if you have any fracture from a simple trip or fall, you're at much higher risk of another in the years ahead so anyone over 50 years of age who has had a fracture should get checked out for their risk of another.

"This is exactly what a Fracture Liaison Service (FLS) does and these services are all over Europe. The FLS assesses people aged over 50 who have had a recent fracture, checks them out for osteoporosis and falls risk and gives them the right treatments if needed. In Ireland we're proud to have

a long-life expectancy but we want to see healthy ageing, so systems such as the FLS are important for that, and we monitor closely how each FLS is working in Ireland."

SOURCES OF CALCIUM

Dairy, of course, is not the only source of calcium and protein and some people can't tolerate dairy or don't wish to take dairy products. Other foods such as dark green vegetables, soft bony fish (like sardines), nuts and fortified drinks or cereals also provide calcium, but there is a lack of research to show these foods could have the same impact as this dairy intervention study. Older people tell you that their appetite is not what it used to be. That's also why that dairy study is appealing – just an extra portion or two of dairy brought up calcium and protein intake really well, it was sustained over time and it was really effective. Maybe plant sources will do the same, but it's likely that much larger

quantities are needed for the same amount of protein and calcium which may not work so well in older people with smaller appetites but we don't have the studies yet to see if it is feasible or beneficial. Until then we should follow the evidence in advising our older people on dietary choices to help prevent falls and fractures. If I see a similar plant-based trial that's as good, I'll definitely recommend that too."

CHEAP INTERVENTION

When it comes to looking after our bone health, good practice starts early. Protein and calcium intake are hugely important lifelong from our childhood right through to old age. Ultimately, Professor Dockery says, the benefits and the cost-effectiveness of a simple addition to diet is an important finding and is a refreshing change from adding yet another pill or supplement for health benefits.





Pat McCormack,
President, ICMSA

AN URGENT QUESTION THAT DEMANDS AN ANSWER

How does Ireland keep its dairy dividend? The question itself is always interesting and worth consideration. However, right now, it has acquired an urgency that means answering it – or at least giving some signal that you understand the question – is now approaching emergency status. Put as bluntly as the scale of the challenge demands, I am deeply concerned that at exactly the time when we, as both a sector and society, need to be positive and pro-active about the one commodity in which nature has given Ireland an incomparable advantage, we seem to be set on undermining ourselves and, in the name of some very questionable environmental precepts, effectively dismantling the economic engine that keeps most of Ireland outside the cities and larger town not just economically viable, but economically possible.

CHIPPING AWAY

The Irish dairy sector – the jewel in our farming and food-production crown – is in the process of being dismantled, herd by herd, restriction by restriction, measure by measure. That process has been underway since the current Government came into power and the ground has been pre-prepared by the platform given to a whole slew of commentators and 'activists' whose knowledge of farming is in directly inverse proportion to the volume with which they broadcast their opinions. They seem to know nothing but that doesn't seem to bother them – and certainly doesn't affect the frequency with which they are offered newspaper columns or radio shows. At some juncture that is hard to pinpoint, the Irish State seems to have lost faith in its own ability to calculate and 'do the hard yards' in terms of policy development and analysis. That vital work

was subcontracted, or more likely, just handed over to these ever-increasing and ever-expanding NGOs and pressure groups, most of whom were in receipt of State funding that, as far as I can see, seemed to undermine decided State policy at times.

A FATAL BLOW?

Our best efforts notwithstanding, Irish farming suffered a serious reverse this year and Irish derogation dairy farmers suffered a, perhaps, fatal blow. The decision to mount a non-defense of our derogation and reduce from 250kg of N to 220kg of N is effectively a destocking measure of precisely the kind that the Government repeatedly assured Irish farmers was not on the agenda. It's worth noting that again: the reduction to 220kg of N means either destocking or increasing land platform. Set against the raging inflation of leasing or purchasing land, the lowering of the nitrogen limits is a compulsory destocking measure for the 3,000 farms affected – that's how it was intended and that's how it's going to work. There was no defense mounted by the Irish Government, despite data already emerging from water improvement measures showing measurable effects. We should have asked the Commission for a pause to allow the most recent measures to be analysed and to develop up-to-date data. But we didn't. We are entitled to ask why, and the clear suspicion must be that the Irish Government – or elements within it – were perfectly happy to jump the gun on this and retreat from the derogation. Of course, Irish Government restrictions are now regular and often and they never come alone. This year also saw the introduction of 'banding' which will place further stocking pressures on dairy farmers already at the end of their tether through

six months of low prices and mystifyingly high input prices.

NO SURRENDER

All this should entail ICMSA and our members running up the white flag and surrendering our sector and livelihoods to the new orthodoxy. It won't happen and it will never happen. We'll go on arguing against this nonsense every day and with every breath and it's not just because we know that its acceptance will mean the end of economically vibrant rural communities; it's because we know that it is absolutely not the unarguable scientific case that it is usually presented as. ICMSA long ago realised that this debate – and it is an existential debate for our farmer members and their communities – will have to be fought and won on data and hard facts. We can't rely on sympathy and understanding of non-rural communities; the outright propaganda and prominence afforded these 'environmental activists' by the general media has seen to that. We are on our own. Fine, we'll do it on our own.

ALMOST TIME

This is one of my last editorials as president of the ICMSA. I leave more convinced than ever that our futures and our livelihoods are both worth fighting for and can be won. The anti-farming fever will break and our position that the kind of environmental progress required is both possible and compatible with commercial family farming, will be vindicated. The ICMSA will lead, as we always have done. Not by hysteria or invective; but by example and evidence. The names may change. But the tradition, the heritage, the responsibility to look at the problem and come forward with the best workable solution for Ireland's family farms, that will never change.

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MATT O'KEEFFE
EDITOR

DAIRY IN OUR AGRICULTURAL DNA

Muiris O'Sullivan and Liam Downey's contribution to *Archaeology Ireland's* latest publication highlights historic Irish dietary patterns. Delving into data from as far back as the Neolithic period, the two historians provide a fascinating insight into what early settlers on the island consumed and, consequently, how they farmed thousands of years ago. As an aside, the latest addition to Ireland's National Park inventory – The Dowth estate in Meath – provides ample evidence of the role of farming, including dairy production, in ancient Ireland.

O'Sullivan and Downey quote AT Lewis, a former director of the National Museum, from an article he wrote in 1960, in which Lewis outlined the centrality of corn and milk in the Irish diet: 'From prehistoric times to the close of the 17th century, corn and milk were the mainstay of the national diet.' The two authors of the *Archaeology Ireland* article built on that statement, to support their theme on the importance of milk production over thousands of years, by delving into a range of historical and archaeological sources. From prehistory, they conclude: "Cattle production was the dominant dimension of agriculture in Ireland. The vast bulk of the cattle population consisted of cows. The preoccupation with dairy cows is reflected in the prime importance of milk and dairy products in the general diet. Butter appears to have been a central part of the

Irish diet from prehistoric times. Other forms of milk products, ranging from simple curds to cheese, were known from earlier times. Cheese of one kind or another appears to have formed an appreciable part of the Irish diet from at least as far back as the Early Christian period. Curds were one of the main components of 'whitemeats', a common food item in ancient and medieval Ireland."

THE FAT OF THE LAND

Muiris and Liam continued their exploration of the importance of Irish dairy over thousands of years: "The prominence of milk and dairy products, particularly butter, in the historical diet has been affirmed by a significant corpus of more recent research. The fat embedded in the matrix of Neolithic Irish pottery vessels has been identified by Smyth and Evershed (2015) as being largely composed of milk-fat residues. Accordingly, they concluded that 'dairying in Ireland began in the Neolithic and that it was being practised by some of the earliest farming communities on the island'."

BOG BUTTER

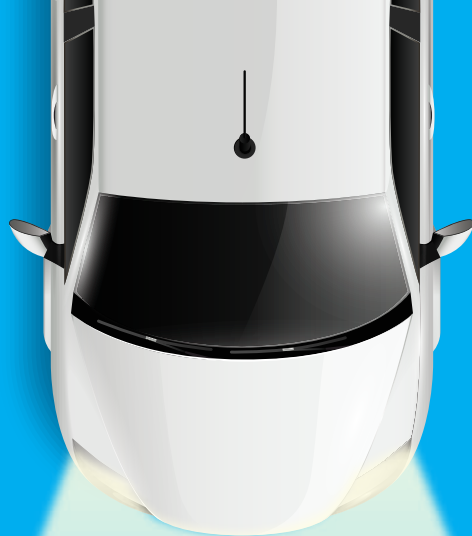
O'Sullivan and Downey point out "the general consumption of butter from prehistory has been further substantiated by radiocarbon dating of bog-butter finds (*Archeology Ireland*, Spring 2006; Synott and Sikora, 2018). Over half of the samples of bog butter were prehistoric in date,



THE DIET OF THESE PEOPLE IS MILK, SWEET AND SOUR, THICK AND THIN, WHICH IS ALSO THEIR DRINK IN SUMMERTIME

predominantly from the Iron Age, and a comparable proportion dates from the medieval period." Even after the arrival of the potato, dairy continued to be a valuable nutrient in the Irish diet. William Petty was the author of the Down Survey, associated with the Cromwellian Land Settlement, and his writings in 1672 around the Irish diet of that period are quoted by O'Sullivan and Downey in their article: "The Irish feed chiefly upon milk and potatoes. The diet of these people is milk, sweet and sour, thick and thin, which is also their drink in summertime... in winter, eggs and butter made rancid in bogs."

The cultural heritage of food is being increasingly seen as an important marketing attribute. Liam Downey and Muiris O'Sullivan have highlighted a wealth of evidence to support our reputation as an island that has an historical tradition of milk and meat production dating back to the earliest period of farming by our Irish ancestors.



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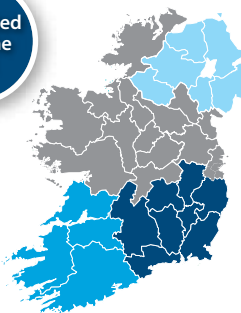


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