www.irishfarmersmonthly.com

DECEMBER 2025

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY

FOCUS
SUSTAINABILITY
PAGE 27

BIOMETHANE MILESTONE
FROM FARM TO PHARMA

LANDMARK REPORT
SPOTLIGHT ON €4.8BN FARM MACHINERY SECTOR

PIG HEALTH
HIDDEN THREAT IN THE FEED BIN

CALF HEALTH
RIGHT FEED, RIGHT TIME

McHale

FIXED CHAMBER BALER

CALL TODAY

Finance* Available

* Offer Available in Ireland Only.
Terms and Conditions Apply. For Full Details Contact McHale.

F5 550

15 Knife Fixed Chamber Baler

F5-550
i-Control 5 Control Console

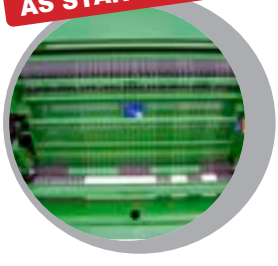
AS STANDARD

2.1m Profi-Flo Pick Up with Adaptive Intake

AS STANDARD

15 Knife Chopper Unit
(25 Knife Selectable Knife Option)

AS STANDARD



Dual Feed Netting System

Additional Features

- In-Cab Density Adjustment
- Quick Attach Wheels
- ISOBUS Compatible (Optional)
- Camless Pick Up (Optional)

CALL TODAY

Irish Sales Rep.- James Heanue- 087 247 2399

McHale Superior Forage Solutions

www.mchale.net

DECEMBER 2025

EDITORIAL

Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

A CHANGED LANDSCAPE

My December editorial usually prompts a look back at the year just ending. That year, 2025, also marks a quarter century since the beginning of the third Millenium AD. It has been a time of remarkable change in Irish farming, not least in the very landscape in which we farm. We are seeing ever more wind turbines dotting the countryside, very visible because of the preference for higher, windier locations. While solar farms are a relatively new phenomenon, their proliferation in recent years suggests they too will become a dominant visual imposition with further large acreages in planning or construction. We make no judgement on these developments. It is the prerogative of landowners as to how they utilise their resources, assuming they operate within legal and environmental constraints.

While clover has always been a minor species in our grassland profile for forever and a day, it is now becoming an integral part of our grassland composition, with mainstream advice that it should occupy up to 25 per cent of sward make-up. Clover is not as in-your-face as wind turbines or solar panels, but it does mark a significant change in the make-up of our grassland from 25 years ago. After many years of consistent planting since the 1980s, forestry now occupies a significant portion of our landscape, especially in marginal and upland areas. Despite a fall-off in planting in the past decade, afforested land, still predominantly made up of Sitka spruce, now covers up to 11 per cent of our countryside.

Inside Irish farmyards, there has been transformative investment in infrastructure, including massive expansion of manure and slurry storage facilities. Driven by regulation and the demise of milk quotas a decade ago, this farmyard development has included ancillary facilities to house an expanded dairy herd as well as milk extraction and storage capacity. While not as obvious as some other infrastructure developments, the increasing numbers of automated milking systems (AMS) could also have a transformative effect on many farms in the coming decades. It is a development which may lead to increasingly confined cow management, and, as yet, there has been little debate or reflection around potential impacts on the reputation of Irish dairy as a grass-based production model, or, at a basic level, the texture, colour or composition of our world leading butter brand, Kerrygold. Even without further AMS adoption, our improving cow genetics are tempting producers to increase concentrate inputs, many of them imported, to increase margin, or at least volume output. A significant proportion of our beef cattle are now finished in confined systems. It provides year-round supply, while somewhat negating an increasing consumer focus on grass-fed beef. Again, this should at least give pause for thought as to the direction of Irish livestock dietary management.

Elsewhere, the past 25 years have seen an increasingly ageing farm population, resulting in much debate but little enough remedial action. It is a challenge acknowledged across Europe and more widely. Perhaps it is not solvable, though no one wants to hear that kind of supposedly defeatist language. Yet farmer demographic history bears out the point. Compared to 25 years ago, our tractors and ancillary machinery are larger and more efficient. Our livestock genetic advances have delivered in every productivity factor. Artificial intelligence has already impacted on Irish farming. It must be a tool for our use, not an instrument that diminishes our individuality, vitality and imagination.

Christmas beckons. In the midst of all the change we are experiencing, we wish our readers a quiet period of reflection on the past and the future.

CONTENTS

Editor: Matt O'Keeffe **Deputy Editor:** Bernie Commins **Machinery Editor:** Noel Dunne **Production:** Martin Whelan **Advertising Manager:** Brian Murphy **Commercial and Advertising Manager:** Anna Douglas **Accounts:** Tricia Murtagh **Administration & Subscriptions:** Eleanor Connolly
Chief Executive: Rebecca Markey **Printing:** W&G Baird **Publishers:** IFP Media **Subscription:** €46 per annum
Irish Farmers Monthly, Castlecourt, Glenageary, Co. Dublin.
Tel: +353 1 7096900 · **Email:** berniecommins@ifpmedia.com · www.irishfarmersmonthly.com

▲ Former ambassador of Ireland to the US, UK, Germany and Malaysia, Dan Mulhall, delivering the 2025 Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

▲ Mark Faherty; Kerry Group, Mary Buckley; Kerry Group; Dan Mulhall, former ambassador of Ireland; Stella Meehan, chair of the Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland – southern section; and Tom Moran, chair of Kerry Group, pictured at the Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

MICHAEL DILLON MEMORIAL LECTURE

Last month, the Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland (Guild) held its biennial Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture at the K Club in Kildare. The lecture was given by Dan Mulhall, a former ambassador who had a stellar career in the Irish diplomatic service, including serving as Irish ambassador to the US, UK, Germany and Malaysia. In March 2019, he was made a freeman of his native city of Waterford. The former ambassador's lecture covered the challenges facing EU exports, with the introduction of a 15 per cent tariff on specific goods it sells into America. He also stressed that final details of the US/EU Agreement are not yet officially completed, and that is creating trade uncertainty, especially in pharma and IT, areas of special importance to the Irish economy. Diversification, he said, should be the name of the game both for Ireland and Europe. Our future trading environment, he added, is unlikely to be as favourable as it has been since the end of the Cold War.

Recognised as having a passionate interest in and knowledge of the life, work and patriotism of WB Yeats, laureate of the 1923 Nobel Prize in Literature, Dan carried his keen intellect lightly and provided his audience with much to ruminate over as they celebrated the life and legacy of Guild founder member, Michael Dillon.

The black-tie event, which was supported by the Kerry Group, was attended by journalists from across the island of Ireland. Previous speakers include former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, former attorney general, commissioner and Goldman Sachs chair, Peter Sutherland, and Ray MacSharry, another notable former minister and EU commissioner.

A full house at the 2025 Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland's Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture, which took place at the K Club last month. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

Stella Meehan, chair of the Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland – southern section took the opportunity to chat to Dan Mulhall, former ambassador of Ireland, after he delivered the 2025 Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

Pictured at the launch of Tirlán's €126m whey-processing investment: Ann Meaney, Tirlán chief marketing and customer experience officer; John Murphy, Tirlán chair; Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon; Sean Molloy, Tirlán chief executive officer; and Michelle Collins, Tirlán director of research and development. Photo: Dylan Vaughan

WHEY TO GO

While the ongoing milk-price reductions to producers are, so far, falling short of a crisis, it is a serious reversal of recent price trends. In any case, it is important for everyone involved to think long-term as far as possible, even as short-term challenges tend to concentrate the mind. To that end, the announcement last month of Tirlán's intention to develop an advanced whey protein manufacturing facility at its Ballyragget campus in Kilkenny is an example of long-term strategic thinking. The fact that Tirlán Co-op is long-term debt-free makes it almost unique in the Irish milk-processing sector, allowing it to reinforce its long-term economic sustainability, while other organisations must engage in short-term actions to sustain their businesses and supplier member incomes.

Building on its existing expertise in whey production, Tirlán is intent on adding further value to its whey stream with a €126m investment in the production of an advanced nutritional whey protein product portfolio, including clear whey protein, a much-in-demand ingredient in whey-based products. These include sports nutrition, lifestyle products, infant formula and medical nutrition. Even the recent spectacular growth of weight reduction therapies has positive implications for whey demand, with dense protein supplementation required as appetites are suppressed.

Ultimately, the rationale from the co-operative is to add value to the litres of milk produced by its suppliers, delivering a higher milk price and so adding to the sustainability of Irish milk production farms. The development has obviously been in gestation for some time, with R&D, planning and financing all in place before the announcement. The new facility, which will be water neutral and carbon efficient, is expected to be operational by the middle of 2027. That in turn offers further options to Tirlán, including supplying existing global customers such as Glanbia Plc, as well as potentially developing novel consumer products of its own in the whey space.

INTEGRATING AGRICULTURE AND PHARMA

As a country with deeply embedded family-run food production farms as well as a more recently developed pharma industry with global reach, a cooperative venture between the two sectors would seem to be a very positive development. That is precisely what is happening between Carbon AMS, together with its financing partner Sustainable Development Capital, and Alexion, AstraZeneca Rare Disease. The concept of using agricultural feedstocks to produce biomethane is well understood and practised widely around the world. The 15-year agreement between Carbon AMS and the AstraZeneca company provides a blueprint for further such developments in Ireland. The pharma company will transition to biomethane to supply 100 per cent of its heating needs at its Dublin and Athlone operations, making it the first pharmaceutical company in the country to switch to renewable gas for its heating requirements. It is the long-term commitment of AstraZeneca that provides the reassurance for the development of the biomethane production facility, expected to be operational by the end of 2026.

The biomethane production facility will initially have capacity for the generation of 42 GWh of biomethane annually using grass and other farm-sourced feedstocks through long-term contracts with adjacent farmers. AI technologies will make the plant the most advanced AI-controlled industrial facility in the world, the promoters claim, allowing the deployment a range of automated processes to maximise sustainability, efficiency and performance. Carbon AMS, under the direction of its CEO, Richard Kennedy, intends the Duleek-based biomethane production facility to be the first of several similar facilities the company will develop across the country.

Alternative income streams are a critical aspect of economic and social sustainability for many Irish farms. This biomethane project offers an example of the potential opportunities for farms to diversify and improve their incomes. While native biomethane production in Ireland, as an alternative to Natural Gas importation, will represent a relatively small proportion of our overall gas energy needs far into the future, the development of these renewable gas production facilities will at least reduce our dependence on unreliable and fossil-based imports as well as increasing our energy sustainability credentials.

Turn to pages 34 and 35 where Bernie Commins interviews farmer, Brugha Duffy, about his involvement and future plans.

European Commissioner for the Environment, Jessika Roswall, and Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon, visiting to the farm of Pat Durkin and his daughter Kayleigh Durkin in Kildare.

SECURING CERTAINTY

News came in just as were about to sign off for press that that the European Commission had proposed a three-year extension to Ireland's nitrates derogation, subject to certain conditionality. And we will know very soon (December 9) if the Member States are going to support such an extension. We truly hope that they do. While the implications of any further reduction would be calamitous for those directly affected, a negative outcome would have impacts for our entire farm sector. The recent visit by European Commissioner for the Environment, Jessika Roswall at the request of Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon, we hoped, would bode well. While here, efforts were made to facilitate her seeing – firsthand – farming in Ireland. She visited a Kildare farm where she learned about water-quality improvement actions being delivered under the Nitrates Action Programme, participation in the European Innovation Partnership Farming for Water, the use of low emission slurry spreading equipment, and the incorporation of clover at farm level. That particular farm is also a participant in the AgNav programme, measuring and monitoring its carbon footprint closely. It was the cream of the crop but it highlighted the standards that are possible here and that most farmers are striving to achieve. Hopefully that made a good impression and an imprint on the commissioner's mind!

It is understood that one of the conditionality elements of the new three-year extended derogation will involve conducting environmental assessments at catchment level to demonstrate compliance with the Habitats Directive. This is a massive undertaking, and according to Minister Heydon, it will require a significant investment of time and resources to complete. But, it is one of the main conditions upon which the Commission offers this three-year extension, and choice is a luxury we are running out of! Despite the controversy around that directive, it seems now to be the one thing that the derogation hinges on. Minister Heydon issued a call to action to all stakeholders on the back of the Commission's end-of-November announcement to 're-double their efforts to take the right action in the right place.' "We must maintain the momentum of action now to ensure that we see continuous improvements in the data for agriculture-related water quality." he said.

Twenty-five years ago, who would have predicted that a major focus for Irish agriculture would be on stocking rates and nitrogen inputs. We believed we had an irrefutably positive grass-based production model for milk, beef and sheep. And, we have. The difficulty has been in persuading regulators and other interested parties of its validity. That difficulty is growing bigger and bigger by the day.

COUNTRYWIDE

It's hard to believe it's three years since Philip Boucher Hayes replaced Damien O'Reilly as presenter of RTÉ Countrywide. The show has wide appeal across both rural and urban Ireland, and continues, although with some fall-off, to be in the top-20 RTÉ Radio programmes as measured by listenership numbers. The production team at Countrywide has been led by Eileen Heron over the last 10 years. She started working in RTÉ in 1988, and her early career saw her work with the late Gerry Ryan. She won an IMRO award for Countrywide in 2022. Eileen is leaving RTE in December, we wish her well.

IGA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The annual Irish Grassland Association (IGA) National Dairy Conference takes place on January 9 at the Charleville Park Hotel in Cork. Milk price corrections, increasing grass productivity, and alternative milk production structures will all feature during the proceedings. Farmer input will come from Christopher Cahill, John MacNamara, and Kevin Moran, who will bring their unique perspectives on dairy farming, while Michael O'Donovan and Laurence Shalloo will provide advisory and research information for attendees at the first conference of 2026. On the previous evening, Michael Ward, businessman and farmer, will be joined by former IGA president, Paul Hyland, for a fireside chat.

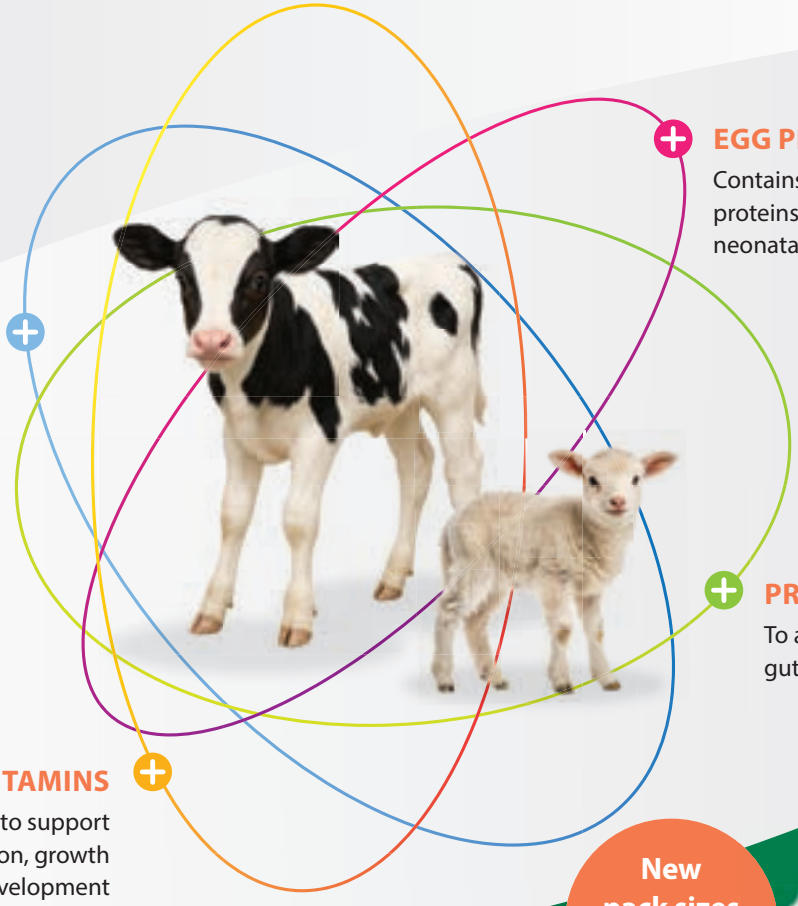
A WINNING IMAGE

An image titled 'Bee the Change' was selected as the overall winner of Teagasc's Vision of Research and Innovation photography competition last month. The winning image was taken by taken by Fiona Hutton, Teagasc plant pathology research laboratory manager, currently working at the Department of Crops, Environment and Land Use, at Oak Park This photograph, taken at the Crops and Technology Open Day last June, shows a flowering phacelia cover crop alive with pollinators such as this bumblebee, an example of how good soil management and biodiversity can thrive together. The TillageCare project is helping to show how practices such as cover cropping and the use of organic manures can improve soil health, store more carbon, and reduce nutrient losses to water. By combining research, farmer experience, and data from real fields, the project supports industry and policymakers in developing a roadmap towards climate-neutral Irish crop production.

The photo competition, which has been running since 2015, is open to all Teagasc staff and students with entrants aiming to visually capture the wide variety of research innovations related to their area of work.

Provita
Animal Health Naturally

Natural colostrum with added science



EGG PROTEIN
Contains high quality, functional proteins known to support the neonatal immune system

NATURAL COLOSTRUM
High-quality, EU-sourced and certified disease-free

PROBIOTICS
To aid development of gut-based immunity

VITAMINS
Vitamins A, D3, and E to support immune function, growth and development

New pack sizes available

Calves and lambs are born with low energy reserves, poorly developed immunity and a sterile gut. When you can't guarantee the quality or quantity of maternal colostrum, you may need to consider a supplement or substitute.

Provita Colostrum delivers essential nutrients to support their first hours of life and protect their future.

Norbrook®
www.norbrook.com

Manufactured in NI by: Provita Eurotech Ltd, 21 Bankmore Road, Omagh, Co. Tyrone, BT79 0EU.
Distributed in ROI by: Norbrook Laboratories (Ireland) Ltd, Rossmore Industrial Estate, Monaghan, Country Monaghan. | 6100-LA(C/S)-v1a-ROI-21/11/25

InTouch

CATHAL BOHANE
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

BLOCK CALVING BOTTLENECKS

Grazing season has drawn to a close on all farms at this stage. Excess rainfall in November brought an abrupt end to animals being outside. All stock is now housed and focus turns to full winter feeding for dry cows and replacements.

With calving to begin around February, the in-calf heifers will now also be classified as dry cows. To follow previous articles, there are a few simple things to look out for and to complete to make sure this period and subsequent calving are successful.

BODY CONDITION

They should, ideally, be in a calving condition around 3-3.25. Holstein cows will be on the lower side of this, and British Friesian type cows will be on the higher side of this. I outlined in previous articles how to arrive at this score. There are also plenty of videos online to help you arrive at this score. If your cows are too thin or too fat, change will need to happen slowly at this stage, but it is important you know that it needs addressing and have a plan for it.

SILAGE QUALITY

Everyone should have a silage analysis and based on the ME or UFL (energy) of the silage and the intake of these cows – once they have settled on a diet after a week or 10 days – will determine if they will gain or lose condition during the dry period. While articles will quote 11kg of intake for a dry cow, in reality they will consume more than this once offered ad lib feed. If overall energy intake is not determined, you could end up with thin cows in February with no reserves for the demands of production or fat cows which increases the risk of metabolic issues at calving

SILAGE POTASH LEVEL

If your K level is >1.8 per cent in your silage mineral test then you might need to address this with minerals and additional magnesium. Feeding a high-quality mineral is important for the full dry period and if cows are still milking for the next week or two the addition of a mineral is important here too. Feeding a good mineral all the time will achieve better results than just penning it all on the dry cow mineral.

BOTTLENECKS

In a spring calving system, especially when cows calve, dry cows are the ones that must compete for space – lying, water, feed, etc. Have a look in the holding and the calving area and see if you can identify one change that you could make to a gate, feed barrier, additional lying area out the back of a shed, or additional water access, that can remove a bottleneck. This will alleviate stress in the system for the cow, reducing issues around the transition period and, ultimately, will result in less work for yourself. While it is easy to blame the minerals or the diets, restrictions on the animal's comfort and flow in the system can sometimes be the biggest culprit.

It can be sometimes hard to get our head around some of these reports, measurements and changes and to understand these you need to be doing it consistently. For this reason, it is important to speak to a trusted advisory source if you are unsure about these points. They can also give you a more honest appraisal of where you are at and what the best solution is.

AHI ANNOUNCES CALFCARE ROADSHOW

Sixteen farm families will host a national series of on-farm calf-rearing events in collaboration with Teagasc's DairyBeef500 Programme and supported by Feed For Growth/Volac Milk Replacers Ireland Limited. The CalfCare roadshow, organised by Animal Health Ireland (AHI), will span winter 2025 and spring 2026.

This year's theme, 'Healthy Calves, Your Profitable Future' highlights the connection between good calf health, animal welfare, and farm profitability, according to AHI. It shows how steps taken before the calf lands right through weaning and the first year of life will ensure the next generation of the herd are ready to deliver for the farmer.

Running from Monday, December 8, 2025 to Thursday, January 22, 2026, the roadshow will deliver practical, science-based insights to support farmers in achieving the highest possible standard in calf development. Supported by the agri-food industry including dairy co-ops and meat processors, each event will showcase best practice in calf husbandry, management, and performance.

Commenting on the return of the series, Dr Michelle McGrath from AHI said: "There is no middle ground when it comes to producing a healthy calf be that for sale or for entering into your own herd. The health and wellbeing of the calf is critical to rearing a quality calf. Taking the important steps outlined at the AHI CalfCare series will help ensure that calves are healthy and well-reared in order to be profitable for farmers."

Alan Dillon, DairyBeef500 programme manager at Teagasc, added: "We're delighted to once again partner with AHI for the CalfCare series. Whether it's dairy or dairy-beef calves, it's vital to reinforce the importance of excellent calf management for both dairy and beef systems. Following the strong engagement with last year's events, continued collaboration across sectors will deliver real on-farm benefits."

Úna Hickey, national sales manager at Feed For Growth/ Volac Milk Replacers Ireland Limited, said: "The AHI 2026 CalfCare Roadshow gives farmers an opportunity to refresh their knowledge on best practice of calf nutrition, housing, and husbandry. We are eager to, once again, support the AHI CalfCare events as getting it right from the start means healthier calves and a more profitable future."

All CalfCare events start at 11am and will be hosted on participating farms nationwide.

Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

Farmers from across Europe will take to the streets of Brussels seven days before Christmas to highlight deep worries about the EU Commission's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and budget reforms, excessive regulations, and the signing of the Mercorsur trade deal.

The protest being organised by COPA and COGECA and its members will coincide with the EU heads of state council meeting taking place at the same time on the multiannual financial framework (MFF). All the talk here in the Belgian capital in recent months has been about security and defence. The further you go east, the more pronounced it is.

On a recent visit to Estonia, it was chilling to learn that all citizens there are on notice to find a place of sanctuary upon a three-minute warning that the Russians are about to attack. On another visit to Finland earlier in the year, farmers explained why they place special badges on their tractors to let the army know that they can be commandeered if needed if under attack. Finland has the longest border of any EU member state with Russia.

So, naturally, the EU budget is focused very much on bulking up security and defence. It cannot be at the expense of supporting agriculture, yet the proposed funding and structure of the next CAP looks like that. The proposed package announced during the summer sees the funding for CAP cut by around €70m in real money. While the original Pillar 1 is ringfenced, other funding programmes, which farmers used to be able to access under Pillar 2, will now go into one big pot under the control of each member state. It would result in a very 'uncommon' agricultural policy across the EU.

Since his appointment a year ago, Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, Christoph Hansen, has been saying all the right things and there is clarity in his vision-for-agriculture document and the more recent strategy on generational renewal. But farmers and co-operatives are not seeing action; in fact the cutting of financial support under CAP shows a lack of respect for food-security concerns.

It is why upwards on 10,000 farmers from across the EU will gather in Brussels on December 18 to show solidarity with each other and vent their frustration about what they see as the EU Commission talking the talk but not walking the walk when it comes to respecting farmers, fishers, and food producers. Protest is always a last resort to highlight a crisis, and by mobilising so many farmers in late December to travel to Brussels, it shows how concerned farm organisations are about the potential impact of EU decisions regarding European food production.

Wishing all readers a very happy Christmas!

icos
Irish Cooperative Organisation Society

Planning for Spring '26

Colin Pollock
Technical Support Manager, Agritech

Many herds are currently engaged in drying off cows, as the focus shifts towards dry cow management across most farms. It's also important to consider nutrition plans when cows calve down this coming Spring, accounting for the following:

- A planned & well executed dry cow mineral programme.
- Calving down the cow in the correct Body Condition Score (BCS).
- Excellent animal husbandry in the week pre-and post-calving (no additional stressors) and
- Careful transition diet planning.

2025 silage results are surprisingly variable. Do you have sufficient high-quality forage available for when cows calve down come Spring '26 ? If not, what's your back-up plan?

Negative Energy Balance (NEB): In the weeks post-calving, cows produce more milk than their feed intake can provide for, resulting in Body Condition loss due to Negative Energy Balance (NEB). Typically, a cow reaches peak milk output 6-8 weeks post-calving but will only reach peak dry matter intake 10-12 weeks after calving. Such a cow's diet must be energy dense enough to ensure body weight loss of less than 0.5 BCS between calving and breeding.

Dry matter intake typically increases by 0.75 – 1.0 kg/week post-calving, underlining the need for an energy-dense transition diet. This can prove difficult to control where silage quality is poor. In such a scenario, farmers must be prepared to fill the gap; otherwise, production will be compromised in the short term, while in the longer-term, issues including poor fertility could be evident by May. Adequate concentrate supplementation is paramount, with ideally high energy grazed grass forming a strong component of the diet.

Monitoring NEB:

- Low milk protein %: when energy is restricted in the diet – often caused by poor quality silage, delayed turnout and/or insufficient supplementation levels relative to cow output.
- Body condition loss across the herd (<25% of cows with a >0.5 unit of BCS loss in early lactation).
- A Bulk tank milk fat: protein ratio ≥ 1.4 (calculated by dividing the milk fat % by milk protein %); signals poor energy balance in the herd's diet where compact calving occurs.

For more information contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit www.agritech.ie

DAFM ANNOUNCES SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Ireland's participation in two significant European research partnerships on 'Agriculture of Data' (AgData), and 'One Health Antimicrobial Resistance' (EUP OHAMR) was recently announced.
The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) will participate in the first transnational co-funded research call of the AgData Partnership. This partnership aims to harness the power of digital technologies, earth observation, and integrated agricultural data to drive innovation and sustainability in agriculture. The partnership seeks to enhance climate, environmental, and socio-economic sustainability and to support the sector's green transition.
The Department will also participate in the first transnational co-funded call, aimed at combatting the growing global challenge of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through a One Health approach. The call seeks to improve treatment outcomes for humans, animals, and plants affected by bacterial or fungal infections by generating new treatment options while reducing the risk of developing resistance. Detailed information on call scopes, eligibility criteria and funding guidelines is available on the DAFM's website.
Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, with special responsibility for Research and Innovation, Noel Grealish said our involvement in both partnerships reflects our 'commitment to leveraging innovation and collaboration to address critical challenges in agriculture and public health'. He continued: "By working closely with our European partners, we can advance technological innovation, animal and human health, and deliver better outcomes for farmers, consumers, and the wider society."
The minister added: "My department's support for Irish researchers to participate in Horizon Europe Partnerships, ensures that we are at the cutting edge of research in Ireland. By pooling expertise and resources in Ireland and across Member States, we can accelerate progress, support cutting-edge research, and build a more sustainable and competitive agri-food sector for the future."

NEW INDUSTRY RESEARCH COLLABORATION ON GHG MITIGATION

A new research collaboration, based at the VistaMilk Research Ireland Centre based in Teagasc Moorepark, has been launched to accelerate greenhouse-gas (GHG) mitigation in Ireland's pasture-based dairy sector. According to Teagasc, the Greenhouse Gas Hub will see collaborative, co-funded research take place between the VistaMilk Research Ireland Centre, the Teagasc Climate Centre and five leading dairy co-operatives: Carbery Group, Dairygold, Kerry Dairy Ireland, Lakeland Dairies, and Ornua.
The Greenhouse Gas Hub will focus on developing solutions to reduce enteric methane emissions from pasture-based dairy systems. The partnership aims to build a real-time understanding of these emissions at farm level, according to Teagasc. This evidence base will support strategies that help the sector meet national climate targets and reduce the carbon footprint, while maintaining farm economic viability, food safety, and animal welfare.
VistaMilk is a collaborative research centre that brings together expertise from 13 research institutes across Ireland, and it is uniquely co-funded by Research Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). This initiative builds on a strong body of research carried out during the first phase of VistaMilk, including work to improve the accuracy of methane emission predictions for dairy production systems. That research, Teagasc says, has provided evidence that enteric methane emissions from pasture-based systems are 8-10 per cent lower than previously thought. Additional studies have also delivered new insights into how enteric methane varies in response to pasture characteristics, genetics, feeding, and management.
Professor Laurence Shalloo of VistaMilk and Teagasc said that the findings on pasture and enteric methane in VistaMilk Phase I have been 'game changing' and have helped reinforce a significant refocus on enteric methane in pasture-based settings globally. He added: "This partnership represents a vital, industry-driven model of collaborative scientific research, strengthening the link between evidence and real-world impact. The impact of this research helps our understanding of enteric methane from grazing dairy cows, as well as helping develop strategies to reduce enteric methane in a cost-effective manner."
Teagasc explains that the joint initiative marks a new level of cooperation between research and industry. Each organisation brings its own strengths: VistaMilk provides scientific depth and technological innovation; the dairy industry partners contribute real-world market insight and supply-chain knowledge. Together they represent a sector committed to driving practical, science-based solutions.
For farmers, the Greenhouse Gas Hub promises better access to data on emissions, clearer guidance on effective mitigation options, and tools that can be integrated into daily farm management. For industry, it supports robust sustainability reporting, improved environmental performance, and greater transparency for customers and markets. At a national level, the collaboration reinforces Ireland's international reputation as the leader in low-carbon, pasture-based dairy production.
The new project formally launched on November 20, 2025. Early research-backed trials will evaluate a range of strategies to reduce enteric methane emissions within pasture-based systems. The most promising approaches will then be assessed over long term system studies to assess their total environmental and economic impacts. A stakeholder advisory group will help guide priorities, ensuring the research remains relevant and impactful across the sector


AXA
Tractor insurance
to drive you forward
You can now insure your tractor
separately to your farm insurance.
Plus, there's no excess on tractor claims.
Get a quote today
axa.ie/farm
0906 435 070 | In Branch
AXA Insurance dac is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. Policy terms & conditions apply.

'HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT' NO LONGER

Karol Kissane, Ifac; Maurice Kelly, president, FTMTA; and Michael Farrelly, executive director, FTMTA.

BERNIE COMMINS ATTENDED THE LAUNCH OF A 'LANDMARK' ECONOMIC REPORT INTO THE VALUE OF THE FARM MACHINERY SECTOR. SHE SPOKE TO MICHAEL FARRELLY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FARM TRACTOR AND MACHINERY TRADE ASSOCIATION (FTMTA) ABOUT THE FINDINGS AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR THIS EXTREMELY VALUABLE AND PREDOMINANTLY RURAL SECTOR

If ever a sector needed a report like this, the farm machinery sector did. Despite its economic value of €4.76bn to the economy, unlike other sectors, it never had a spotlight shone on it previously.

It was, Michael said 'hiding in plain sight'. The report, titled, *Economic Report on the Value of the Farm Machinery Industry in Ireland,* has certainly addressed that.

It was prepared by Ifac using a combination of primary research including a national survey of 77 FTMTA members (46 per cent) and a review and analysis of published official data from sources such as the Central Statistics Office, Eurostat and the EU Commission, and it is the first definitive economic assessment of the Irish farm machinery sector. It has captured its value as an indigenous, export-led, technology-driven industry that has created just under 25,000 jobs – directly and indirectly – and exports to 61 countries.

While the significance and weight of the industry would have been felt among the key players within it, there were no specifics, no numbers to back that up. "People were asking how big is the industry? How many people are employed? We didn't have the answers," said Michael. "So it's critically important to commission this report and just get a baseline for once and for all about what the industry is worth? What is its economic contribution? And how many people are involved?"

The FTMTA now wants the sector to be officially recognised as a 'strategic enterprise and manufacturing sector within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment'. And it now seeks greater engagement with policymakers to ensure that future policies reflect the industry's unique mix of manufacturing, distribution, technology and service activity across rural Ireland.

FINDINGS

Among the research findings, the report outlined that Irish farm machinery companies are exporting to over 60 countries including Europe, the US, Australia, and beyond. It revealed that 67 per cent of businesses

KNOWING ITS WORTH

The value of the farm machinery sector of €4.76bn is biting at the heels of the tourism sector. For comparison, the FTMTA says, international tourism brought in €6.2bn in 2024 according to the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC). "This report serves to highlight the industry's strategic importance to rural Ireland, positioning it as one of Ireland's most valuable yet often overlooked indigenous sectors," says the FTMTA

BOVIGEN®
SCOUR

SCOUR PROTECTION THAT LASTS

One-shot protection for the next generation

- Provides protection against Rotavirus, Coronavirus and *E.coli* F5 (K99)
- Reduces the severity[1] and duration[2] of diarrhoea
- Reduces viral shedding[1]
- A wide window of administration (12 to 3 weeks pre-calving) allowing for flexible planning and bulk vaccination
- Available in 5 and 30 dose vials
- Zero-day withdrawal period

WITH 10 DAY SHELF LIFE AFTER FIRST BROACH

FOR DAIRY AND BEEF PRODUCTION

1. Bovigen SPC **2.** Géollot, S. et al (2018). Serologic and colostral response and vaccine efficacy in calves following a single injection of Bovigen® Scour in seronegative pregnant cows. 10.13140/RG.2.2.30920.37129.

Bovigen® Scour emulsion for injection for cattle contains inactivated antigens: Bovine rotavirus strain TM-91, serotype G6P1, Bovine coronavirus strain C-197, *Escherichia coli* strain EC/17 (F5 / K99 antigens). POM

Further information available from the package leaflet, SPC or from Virbac Ltd. Woolpit Business Park, Windmill Avenue, Woolpit, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP30 9UP.
Tel: +44 (0) 1359 243243 Email: enquiries@virbac.ie Web: https://www.virbac.ie

Use medicines responsibly. www.apha.ie
Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone.

Shaping the future of **animal health**

Virbac

plan to invest in the next 12 months, with 53 per cent of those projects valued at more than €300,000 – mostly in new premises, equipment, technology and staff training.
But as well as highlighting the many positives, crucially, it also caught some of the challenges facing the sector. For example, there is a serious gap between investment and the financial supports that are available to companies. Ninety-four per cent of businesses, it found, fund investment without grant aid. This signals a real need for reform, said Michael: "Some of the feedback we get is that the process for applying for grant funding is so onerous, and that you have to commit to the project before you will get the funding, so it's cart before the horse, sometimes. Maybe there are ways that we can streamline that process and make it a bit easier."

SKILLS GAP

The report also reinforced the ongoing skills-gap issue that remains a key constraint to the sector. This needs to be urgently addressed, Michael said, and it all points to creating greater awareness of the industry and the high-quality jobs that are available, as well as a reform of the apprenticeships route. He explained: "My son recently qualified with a degree in mechanical engineering. Now, I wonder how many of his college mates would think of applying for a job in the farm machinery sector? In terms of degree level students, it is about us making people aware of the quality jobs that are out there, whether that is in engineering, IT, finance, procurement, or HR.
"When you get down to the technician level and apprenticeships, there are two challenges there. The first challenge is that the courses need to be updated and modernised and made more relevant to the industry. And it's critically important for us to have a national functioning apprenticeship scheme for agricultural mechanics.
"Then the second challenge is that these days there is a general expectation that school leavers should get a degree when we know that people with apprenticeships are highly sought after and highly paid. So we need to attract more people in there."
However, competing with other sectors such as pharmaceuticals, for example, is tough said Michael, which is why engagement with all relevant stakeholders is key, he said. "That is Solas, the Department of Education, Enterprise Ireland, local government, so that everybody understands the challenges, but also understands the significance of this industry. Everybody is focused on growth and there is a very positive story coming from this sector, and we can drive it forward. But to do that, it's going to be critically important to have the right people there for it. So I think we must adopt that partnership approach with schools, educators, government, to help people understand that it is this vibrant, indigenous sector," said Michael."

THE FTMTA IS ASKING GOVERNMENT TO FOCUS ON THREE KEY AREAS:

- Recognition and engagement: to be officially recognised as a strategic enterprise and manufacturing sector within the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment.
- Support for promotion of the industry: to work together to communicate the scale, professionalism and innovation of the farm machinery sector as a high-tech, export-driven industry that offers long-term careers and regional prosperity.
- Training and development of young people: to expand apprenticeships, engineering and agri-tech programmes, alongside coordinated efforts between industry, government and education providers to attract young people into technical. commercial and professional roles.

FOLLOW THROUGH AND TIMELINE

Now that the report has been published and a spotlight finally directed at the sector, the FTMTA has really put it up to itself to follow through on all its recommendations. Michael addressed this by saying: "This is a benchmark, it's a line in the sand, and we need to drive on here from this moment. And that's going to take investment from everybody – from our executive council members, from the FTMTA wider body, and from everybody involved, not just us as the people that run the association.
Asked if there was a priority timeline in place for FTMTA president, Maurice Kelly said: "We see this as a work in progress for the next five years, minimum. We need to engage with the CSO on the figures because Ifac had to do a lot of work to get those figures [for the report] so we need the CSO to record them differently and divide them into categories and sub-categories so that we can pick up everything to do with our farm machinery sector.
"This is a hugely important document for us to be able to engage with government bodies and we see that bringing rewards such as increased employment and exports."

MINISTERIAL SUPPORT

While ministers from the agriculture and enterprise departments were invited to the launch, none were in attendance. Michael explained that Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Peter Burke, had confirmed his attendance, but was not present due to a rescheduled cabinet meeting. Michael said he sees this particluar department as being key for the farm machinery sector: "At the end of the day, while we sell into and serve and help the agricultural sector, we are really SMEs and that's where we want the focus to be on. Unfortunately, we fell victim to that moved cabinet meeting, but I am sure that we'll be meeting with the minister very soon."

KNOW THE NUMBERS

€4.76bn
Total economic value of the farm machinery sector to the economy

€2.57bn
Total direct output from the farm machinery sector

25,000
Direct and indirect jobs

61
Number of countries farm machinery manufacturing companies export to

€700m+
Annual value of international exports from the farm machinery sector

€226m
Tax take from the sector

Denis Drennan
President ICMSA

'HAMLET WITHOUT THE PRINCE'

As the recommendations of the Commission on Generational Renewal's report are examined, it's important to begin that process by stating our determination to be positive and open-minded about them. We contributed to the Commission on the same basis that we contribute to any forum dealing with the interests and welfare of Irish farm families: in good faith and with a focus on workable, evidence-based solutions. That was the basis for our involvement, and that is why there can be no disguising the vacuum at the heart of the report's conclusions.

INCOME ISSUE

A report such as this that does not – or will not – deal with the question of income is reduced to a performance of 'Hamlet without the prince.' Like every other occupation, income is the central component. We've looked at the report's conclusions and we can't see anything in there that's going to give young people considering farming as a career a consistent income. That's the central problem and if we're not going to address that, then we're not addressing anything, really.

The report, regrettably, seems to proceed from the now very obsolete idea that farming is a 'way of life'. That's not going to cut it with future generations who are absolutely going to opt for a career, farming or other, based on income and free time in a way that previous generations would have found difficult to understand.

The future of farming is based on the long overdue realisation that it needs to deliver an income on a consistent basis in line with other sectors of the economy and that is not the situation now. Where we see the kinds of falls and fluctuations in income that we're experiencing right now, then it becomes harder to convince young people to consider farming.

> IT'S STAGGERING THAT WE HAVE 42 PER CENT OF FARMERS HAVING NO IDENTIFIED SUCCESSOR, THIS ISSUE NEEDS IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

COMPLEXITY

Compounding that uncertainty about the income, we have massive over-regulation and administrative complexity that overwhelm so many farmers. Seeing their parents trying to deal with such regulation and weighing it up against other professions and potential incomes lead the younger generation to vote with their feet. They are picking the perceived easier option. And who can blame them?

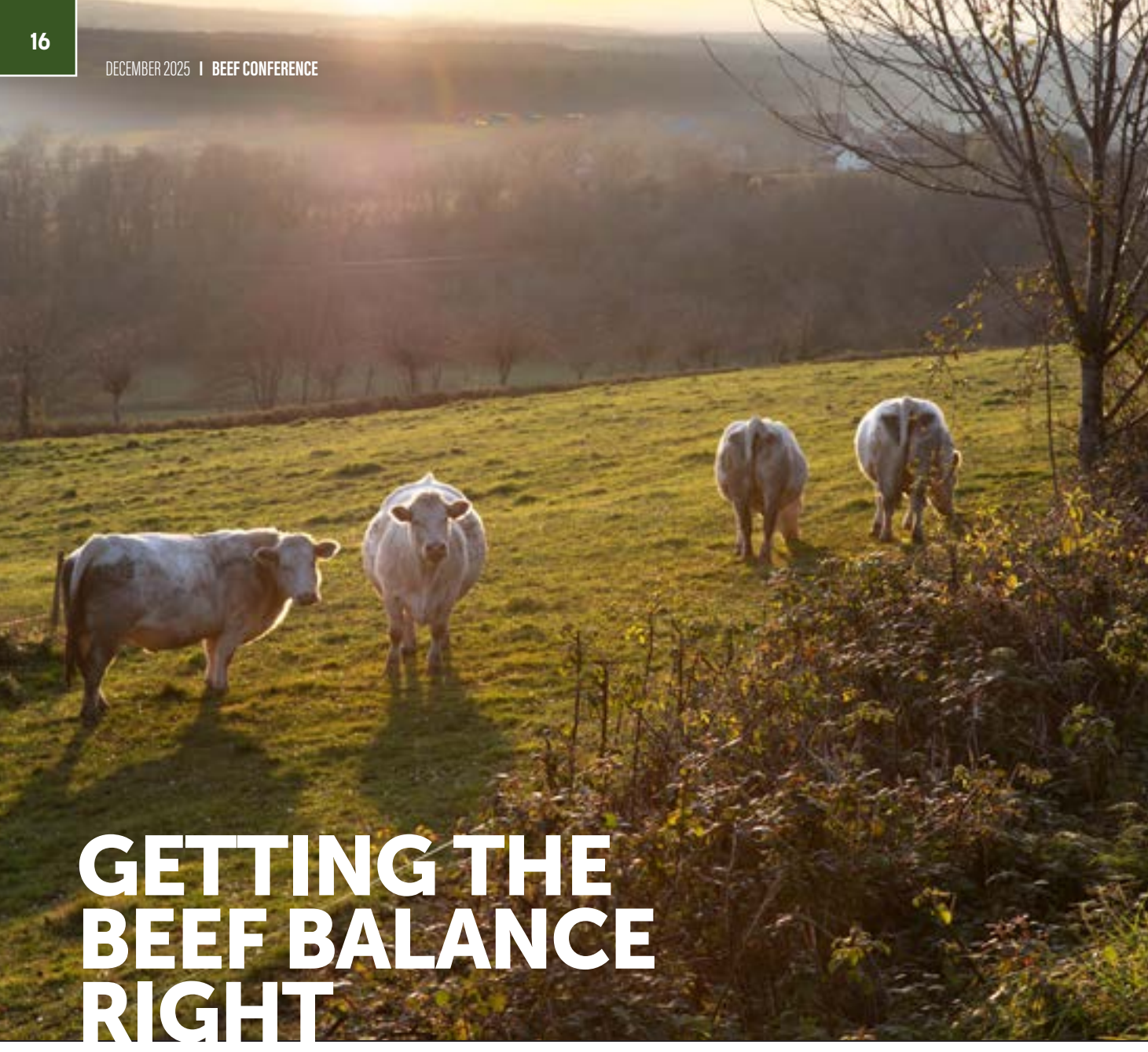
Since the 2026 Budget was announced, it's almost a certainty that dairy farmers have lost around €10,000 as a result of month-on-month drastic falls in milk price. The ICMSA would have expected the report to make some reference to the farm organisations' decade of lobbying for a measure to deal with excessive income volatility for sole trader farmers. The absence of any reference to unpredictable and excessive swings in farmer income is a near-disqualifying aspect of the Commission's report. How can you have generational renewal without addressing the biggest obstacle to entering farming: income volatility?

The issue is critical for young farmers and new entrants, and the existing ineffective option – income averaging – excludes new entrants for the first five years. The Commission must do better than this. We must make farming a real option for young people.

STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The ICMSA has called for 1 per cent interest rates for young farmers, alongside stronger supports for start-up finance. In fairness, there are three recommendations around access to finance in the report, and if all three were implemented, it would certainly be a step in the right direction. But as it stands, young farmers are likely to be carrying historic farm debt, mortgage costs, and future investment costs. It's a lot for anyone starting out and that burden needs to be alleviated. We also support the report's focus on promoting and normalising female succession on Irish farms and proactive measures are required.

We see many farmers with no successor choosing the solar farm route. We'd encourage them to look seriously at share farming instead. We must protect good agricultural land from being lost to non-farming uses. It's staggering that we have 42 per cent of farmers having no identified successor, this issue needs immediate attention, and we just can't go on tweaking and rejigging slightly; we must recognise that there's a real crisis getting the next generation onto their farms. The minister must lay out a three-year plan with implementation timelines and must, as an absolute priority, indicate how we are going to deal with the single biggest obstacle to generational renewal,



GETTING THE BEEF BALANCE RIGHT

MATT O'KEEFFE HIGHLIGHTS THE ROLE OF MYOSTATIN IN MUSCLE GROWTH AND CARCASE TRAITS IN CATTLE AS DISCUSSED AT LAST MONTH'S NATIONAL BEEF CONFERENCE, AS WELL AS WHAT IS DRIVING GLOBAL BEEF PRICES

Genetics, feed additives, artificial intelligence (AI) and other innovations are now becoming commonplace as components in sustainable food production. Last month's National Beef Conference attendees heard a presentation on the role of the myostatin gene in beef breeding from Dr Katie Quigley, geneticist, Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF). One of the biggest challenges in beef breeding has been the need to balance muscling with calving ease. Too big of a focus on one over the other, can have serious consequences ranging from higher birth difficulties and mortality to lower carcase weight and poor conformation. Neither outcome is optimal, so research into the identification of genetic components that optimise both traits has significant commercial advantages. The myostatin gene naturally regulates muscle growth and development. Research has shown that DNA variations within the myostatin gene are linked to calving difficulty and carcase merit. One of the most positive aspects of research outcomes into these myostatin variants is that they are found in many beef cattle breeds, including Aubrac, Belgian Blue, Charolais and Limousin.

It should be noted that the role of the myostatin gene, or its variants, is not the only driver of calving difficulty or carcase quality. Feeding, for instance, can be a significant influencer, as much so or potentially even more so than breeding, depending on management circumstances. As genetic research continues to advance, aided by AI technologies, the benefits for beef breeding can only increase over time.

> **ONE OF THE MOST POSITIVE ASPECTS OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES INTO THESE MYOSTATIN VARIANTS IS THAT THEY ARE FOUND IN MANY BEEF CATTLE BREEDS**

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

The medium-term outlook for beef prices is as good as could reasonably be expected, according to Rupert Claxton, meat director at Gira, whose National Beef Conference presentation focused on global beef markets and what is driving prices. He delivered an upbeat market assessment on global supply-and-demand trends that producers should secure reasonable beef prices for at least the next 12 months. He did include some comments on the challenges facing the sector, while also delivering advice on overcoming or at least mitigating those challenges.

Firstly, he confirmed that global beef supply is tight and, despite expectations to the contrary, consumer demand is holding up well. In a note of caution against any lax attitude towards existing market outlets, Rupert noted that several UK retailers, to which much of Ireland's beef is still consigned, have included beef options from a variety of non-European sources during 2025, indicating a test-marketing initiative to establish consumer acceptance levels.

As a general market observation, Rubert said he expects little deviation from the current trend, either in Europe or globally. Long-term drought conditions continue to impact US cattle numbers, with additional market requirements being met from Canada and Mexico as well as Australia and New Zealand. He noted that Brazil is also exporting into the US, despite a current 76 per cent tariff imposition. That is a frightening assertion and suggests an ability by the Brazilian beef sector to supply product at prices that would put European and Irish producers out of business overnight.

Rupert believes that, in any case, the EU cattle herd is in long-term structural decline. At the opposite side of the equation, while he acknowledges that there will be a recovery in cattle production globally, increasing global demand for beef-sourced protein, most notably in Asian and Middle Eastern markets, should, to a considerable extent, negate those expected supply increases over the longer term. All things being equal, this market assessment suggests that a continuation of elevated pricing, though not perhaps, at current levels, can be reasonably expected. He suggested to cattle producers attending the Beef Conference that Ireland is well placed to produce more beef in a manner that is both environmentally and commercially (economically) sustainable. That being the case, he asserted that the status quo production/processing model needs re-engineering. That should, he proposed, include infrastructure rationalisation to deliver efficiencies, including a reduction in slaughter capacity, scaling up of cattle breeding farms, and further increases in specialised slaughtering units.

MAKE 2026 THE YEAR OF CHANGE

THE NEW YEAR IS AROUND THE CORNER AND NOW IS THE TIME TO MAKE RESOLUTIONS THAT MATTER, WRITES CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER

For farmers, one promise stands above the rest: to come home safely every day. Farming, a cornerstone of our communities and economy, is also one of the most hazardous occupations. Tragically, the high rate of serious and fatal accidents in agriculture remains a pressing issue. Agriculture continues to be the sector with the most fatal accidents in the workplace.

DEVASTATING IMPACT

The toll of farm accidents is immeasurable, ranging from loss of life, life-changing injuries and emotional suffering to financial loss, and the ripple effect extend far beyond the individual. Our hearts go out to every farm family and community that have been affected by these tragedies. The time to act is now. Let's make 2026 the year of change; the year we prioritise safety on our farms.

PRO-ACTIVE SAFETY MEASURES

Farmers play a vital role in shaping a safer agricultural sector. While many hold positive attitudes towards health and safety, the challenge lies in addressing unsafe practices embedded in farming culture over many years. Often, shortcuts are taken when time, stress or financial constraints come into play. These unsafe norms must be eradicated. The key message is simple: unsafe practices are never acceptable. By fostering a safety-first culture, we can pave the way for safer practices across the industry.

CHANGING BEHAVIOURS

Behavioural change isn't always easy, but it is essential. Many unsafe habits are passed down through generations, perpetuating a cycle of risk. Breaking this cycle requires a gradual but committed effort. We must engage both the farmers of today and the next generation to create lasting change. Adopting a dual approach, combining cultural and behaviour-based safety strategies, is particularly effective:

- **Cultural change**:
  This works to elevate the value of safety, shaping attitudes and perceptions regarding safety across the industry.
- **Behaviour-based safety**:
  Focuses on identifying and modifying specific actions, such as using guarded PTOs, implementing safe practices for working at heights and ensuring proper vehicle maintenance and safe driving techniques.

Farmers must also address the factors that hinder safety, such as distractions, stress, and tight schedules. Planning ahead is crucial – whether it's scheduling maintenance for machinery or organising daily tasks.

THREE STEPS TO FARMING SAFELY

Farming safely doesn't happen by chance. It requires intention and action. Here are three essential steps:

- **Acknowledge the risks**
  Understand and accept that accidents can happen. A positive, proactive attitude toward safety is the foundation.
- **Conduct a risk assessment**
  Identify potential hazards, evaluate risks, and establish control measures to mitigate them.
- **Implement and maintain safety practices**
  Follow through with safety measures and embed safe work behaviours into your daily routine.

A SAFER FUTURE FOR FARMING

Let's make safety a non-negotiable aspect of farming. By prioritising safety, we protect not just ourselves but also the livelihoods and wellbeing of our families today and the safe future of the next generation of farmers.

For more farm safety information, scan the code

Alltech®

Your challenges evolve.

Your solutions should too.

The next generation mycotoxin solution:

MYCOSORB® A+ EVO

Superior protection against the most challenging mycotoxins, including **DON**, **fusaric acid** and ***Penicillium***-derived toxins.

Advanced binding efficacy

Broad-spectrum mycotoxin protection

Backed by extensive scientific research

Contact your local Alltech representative or call InTouch on:
+353 (0)59 910 1320 to learn more.

MYCOSORB® A+
EVO

Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

FOOD PRICE INFLATION REALITIES

In his column this month, agri-food economist, Ciaran Fitzgerald, examines some of the realities around food inflation as well as the challenges associated with the increase in the agricultural output price index

This month, I have two main reflections for readers. Foremost are the missed opportunities for Irish agriculture because of obsessive constraints on food production in the name of environmental compliance. Then, there is the red herring that is the analysis of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Consumer Price Index changes as a proxy for farmer incomes.

Continuing increase in food output values

As illustrated in Table 1, the 2025 preliminary estimate of agricultural output should see a continuing increase in the value of Irish output across most of the product categories. This is really good news from an overall Irish economy perspective because the value of Irish agricultural output is now likely to exceed €13.5bn. While this number is of itself impressive – given that pre milk quota abolition (2009-2014), Irish agricultural output was stuck at around the €6bn mark – the economic reality of this €13.5bn figure is that because Irish agriculture is so embedded through its expenditure in the local rural economy, the broad economic multiplier impact is in excess of a €20bn figure.

We can glean two major takeaway points from the agricultural output figures. This increase in the value of output is not necessarily the driver of food price inflation and, secondly – and more importantly from an Irish economy perspective – the severe constraints put on livestock numbers in the name of 'environmental compliance' means that a significant opportunity to increase Irish agricultural output, boost the Irish economy and, in particular, meet the ever increasing global demand for sustainable grass-fed meat and dairy products are currently compromised.

Table 1: Agricultural output price index 2025 – preliminary estimates (excl. VAT). Source: CSO.

Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025/2024
Agricultural Output Price Index	100.0	112.4	145.4	131.3	142.4	164.0	15.1%
Animals	100.0	109.6	126.4	132.7	139.0	179.6	29.2%
Cattle	100.0	113.3	132.8	137.1	143.8	202.3	40.7%
Sheep	100.0	121.6	126.4	122.9	144.5	152.4	5.4%
Pigs	100.0	90.7	104.8	124.7	123.2	119.4	-3.1%
Poultry	100.0	101.4	113.9	118.0	118.4	121.5	2.6%
Milk	100.0	116.7	170.2	124.3	146.6	154.5	5.4%
Crop Output	100.0	109.4	136.2	150.1	142.4	136.0	-4.5%
Cereals (including seeds)	100.0	117.5	165.4	177.1	139.6	135.2	-3.1%
Potatoes (including seeds)	100.0	103.8	113.2	135.3	173.3	147.6	-14.8%
Fruit and Vegetables	100.0	102.0	110.9	123.4	130.2	131.1	0.7%

Food inflation

In terms of the food inflation issue, Economics 101 will suggest that food prices as measured monthly by the consumer price index will, over time, correlate with agricultural output prices. This, unfortunately outdated and simplistic assumption, does not reflect real-world experience, primarily because retailer pricing policy has a bigger impact than local raw material prices and increasingly because we as consumers don't necessarily consume food produced locally.

Furthermore, a combination of pricing regulations and retailer buying power has left the agriculture sector as an outlier when it comes to recovering increased costs from market returns over the long term. In Ireland, we export up to 95 per cent of our beef and dairy output and therefore, the Irish consumer price index, insofar as it does represent food price inflation, only reflects 5 per cent to 10 per cent of local Irish agricultural output.

The recent example whereby the October price index for liquid milk is increasing while producer milk prices – reflecting global price movements – are falling, demonstrates this disconnect.

Retail price realities

The consumer price index measures changes in prices that food retailers (supermarkets and discounters)

charge to Irish consumers and as any in-depth examination of retail grocery pricing has shown over the last 20 years or so, prices of individual food items reflect retail price policies.

Specifically, particular pricing reflects retailer footfall strategies. In other words retailers 'promote' (loss lead) certain fresh foods, including milk, cheese, beef, pork and fresh vegetables, which are regularly discounted to the extent of low- or no-margin prices or even below-cost in order to attract customers into the shop. The retailers, because they sell up to 15,000 items, or SKUs as they are known, can recover this discount offer by charging bigger margins across a vast range of products. The fresh food supplier cannot do this and is effectively subsidising retailer profits.

To underpin this chronic low-margin reality, Irish and UK/EU law prohibits grocery suppliers from setting prices through what is called a ban on resale price maintenance. As mentioned previously, this constraint does not apply to pharma companies or indeed mobile phones, cars, electricity or a range of other non-food products.

Preference towards retailer

Irish competition law favours retail buying power and the Competition Act was amended in 2006 abolishing a ban on below-cost selling. Competition law has no remit to reflect on the impact of low pricing on farm products or indeed regarding the sustainability of food supply chains. Retail food prices will also reflect processing costs whereby agricultural raw materials are converted into meal components and will also reflect distribution costs which, because of Ireland's relatively low population density, are high.

Finally, people/employment costs, which have risen quite substantially in recent years, are very relevant to what is a relatively labour-intensive business. Furthermore, food is consumed not just in homes based on grocery purchases, but through eating in restaurants, hotels and, increasingly, takeaway outlets.

Analysing food inflation data

With these caveats and insights in mind, the latest figures from the CSO showing food inflation in October 2025 are quite interesting, as illustrated in Table 2. The chart shows the annual change in prices as well as the changes since 2016. Grocery food by this measure shows annual increase in prices paid to supermarkets and discounters across a range of food products of 4.5 per compared to overall inflation across the board of 2.9 per cent.

This price index also shows grocery prices having increased by 20.7 per cent since 2016, while overall inflation has been 25.8 per cent. So, food price inflation has been lower than general inflation since 2016 and, indeed, when CSO figures back to 2011, show negative real food price inflation over that period.

The price index for restaurants and hotels has increased by 3.3 per cent in the year and by 40.0 per cent since 2016 – almost double grocery food price increases and double overall inflation, which of itself suggests that the people costs of 'serving food' are a bigger driver of inflation than the basic food ingredients, despite recent upward price movements in meat and dairy.

Very clearly, any analysis of food price inflation should reflect the core fact that this price is the price paid to retailers by consumers and also, by law, no recognition of the cost of production is mandated in this price setting.

Table 2: Consumer price COICOP division indices - October 2025. Source: CSO.

COICOP Division[1]	Weights	Consumer Price Index (CPI)		Percentage changes		
	2025	Dec. 2023=100	Dec. 2016=100	1 month	3 months	12 months
01 Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages	10.457	106.3	120.7	0.3	0.6	4.5
02 Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco	3.928	107.4	137.1	0.8	1.3	2.0
03 Clothing and Footwear	4.324	94.4	89.0	-0.1	11.3	3.6
04 Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas and Other Fuels	16.091	102.8	167.3	1.1	1.4	2.9
05 Furnishings, Household Equipment and Routine Household Maintenance	5.033	98.2	91.6	0.2	0.2	-0.4
06 Health	5.566	103.5	116.3	0.0	0.2	2.4
07 Transport	11.145	100.1	124.7	-0.3	-2.2	1.6
08 Communications	2.706	102.7	94.7	-0.1	-0.1	1.4
09 Recreation and Culture	8.654	106.0	122.8	1.6	-1.7	2.9
10 Education	1.663	111.2	113.7	8.7	8.7	8.4
11 Restaurants and Hotels	20.022	107.5	140.0	-0.3	0.0	3.3
12 Miscellaneous Goods and Services	10.412	104.5	104.4	-0.1	0.5	2.4
All Items	**100.000**	**103.9**	**125.8**	**0.5**	**0.7**	**2.9**

PARTNER PROMOTION

FEED RIGHT TO FIGHT CALF SCOUR

CALF SCOUR IS THE MAIN CAUSE OF DEATH IN YOUNG CALVES. HERE, EMMA SARGENT MVB, RUMINANT VETERINARY AREA MANAGER, MSD ANIMAL HEALTH, GIVES AN OVERVIEW OF FEEDING YOUNG CALVES, AND WHY GETTING MILK-FEEDING PRACTICES RIGHT WILL PAY DIVIDENDS

Calving season is fast approaching, and a busy few months lie ahead on the farm. Disease outbreaks in the calf shed can be an unwelcome and costly problem. Calf scour is the number one cause of death in young calves, accounting for more than one quarter of all losses in the first month of life. Rotavirus and cryptosporidiosis are the two main culprits, together accounting for over 37 per cent of cases[1].

A COSTLY DISEASE

Recent research estimates the economic impact of cryptosporidiosis at €195 per reared dairy heifer, with costs attributable to high mortality rates, increased rearing costs and reduced milk production in the first lactation[2]. Affected beef calves can weigh up to 34kg, less on average, than their healthy counterparts at six months of age, which translates to losses in direct sales of greater than €200 per calf at current trade. Given the significant long-term impacts that calf scour can have on the efficiency and productivity of our herds, it is wise to adopt a preventative approach to protect our youngstock.

CALF HEALTH IS A BALANCING ACT

Calf health relies on maximising calf immunity while minimising infectious pressure i.e. exposure to disease. It is impossible to eliminate all pathogens on-farm, but good management practices can give your calves the best chance to fight off disease, as well as significantly reducing the build-up of infectious agents in the environment.

FOCUS ON FEEDING

Pre-weaning nutrition is a critical component of calf health, as it directly influences immune system development, gut maturation, efficacy of scour vaccines and resilience to disease. In addition, feed conversion efficiency (FCE) is at its highest in the first weeks of life, when calves can convert

feed into growth exceptionally well – up to one kilogramme of bodyweight for every two kilogrammes of feed. After this early window, FCE falls from roughly 50 per cent to around 36 per cent post-weaning, and to under 10 per cent by adulthood. Maximising this period of efficiency with high-quality, high-quantity colostrum and transition milk feeding delivers more growth per litre, builds stronger immunity and gut function, and sets calves up for better health and higher lifetime production. In short, what you feed your calves (and how you feed it) will pay dividends for the rest of their lives.

COLOSTRUM

Colostrum is the first and most important feed for the calf; it contains protective antibodies which are essential for immunity. Each hour after calving, colostrum antibody levels reduce due to the dilution effect of further milk production. The calf's ability to absorb antibodies also declines, so aim to feed at least three to four litres within two hours of birth. Colostrum quality can be assessed using a Brix refractometer – only colostrum reading above 22 per cent should be used or stored for the first feed. Colostrum management can be monitored by blood sampling healthy calves less than one week of age. Speak to your vet regarding testing.

TRANSITION MILK

Prolonged transition milk feeding (milk from the first six milkings) is an area of focus in recent years. Transition milk provides protection at a local level in the gut. Further proven benefits include increased energy intake, increased immunity, reduced antimicrobial use, increased benefit from pre-calving vaccination, improved average daily gain, promotion of gut development, reduced calfhood sickness and death and improved reproductive and lactation outcomes for dairy heifer calves[3].

PRE-CALVING VACCINATION

Pre-calving vaccination has been successfully used for many years to protect calves against common scour pathogens. These vaccines work by raising specific antibodies in the dam before calving, which are passed to the calf through colostrum and transition milk feeding. For this reason, a high standard of colostrum management, as well as ongoing transition milk feeding, is essential to optimise vaccine efficacy.

NUTRITIONAL STRESS

Underfeeding can be a significant stressor for calves, as they require energy from milk to grow and keep warm. Well-fed calves are also better able to fight disease. Aim to feed a minimum of 15 per cent of the bodyweight of the calf per day in transition milk or good quality milk replacer. Increase amounts being fed by one litre for every 10-degree Celsius drop in temperature below 15 degrees Celsius to avoid energy deficits – a maximum/minimum thermometer in the calf shed is a useful tool to monitor this. Changes in feeding routine can also be a source of stress for young calves: keep time, temperature, volume and concentration of feeds consistent and do not withhold milk from scouring calves for best results.

MSD Animal Health offers the broadest neonatal calf scour vaccine portfolio, including both Bovilis Rotavec Corona (providing protection against rotavirus, coronavirus and *Escherichia coli*) as well as Bovilis Cryptium, the vaccine to protect calves against cryptosporidiosis scour. Bovilis Rotavec Corona may be administered as a single dose, three weeks to 12 weeks before calving. When calves are fed colostrum and transition milk for the first two weeks of life, the antibodies have been shown to reduce the incidence and severity of scour and calves also shed less rotavirus and coronavirus[4]. Bovilis Cryptium may be administered as a two-dose primary course, four to five weeks apart in the three-to-12-week period before calving. When calves are fed colostrum and transition milk for five days, the antibodies have been shown to reduce the clinical signs caused by *Cryptosporidium parvum* for up to two weeks. A single booster dose is required before all subsequent calvings. Conveniently, Bovilis Rotavec Corona and Bovilis Cryptium can be administered at the same time, at different sites. Speak to your veterinary practitioner to determine the best vaccination protocol for your herd.

HYGIENE

It is important that colostrum and milk collection and feeding utensils (bucket, bottle, stomach tube, teats, etc.) are kept clean, as contamination here can act as a direct source of infection for the calf, as well as reducing colostrum quality and impacting absorption of antibodies. Fatty buildup on feeding equipment also provides the ideal medium for bacterial growth. Soaking equipment in a dilute peracetic acetic solution helps here, along with regular hot water and detergent scrubs.

HEALTHY CALVES GROW INTO PRODUCTIVE COWS

By focusing on early nutrition and clean feeding practices, you're not just avoiding disease, you're investing in the future of your herd. Make colostrum a priority, continue transition milk feeding for as long as possible, keep feeding equipment clean and compliment your efforts with vaccination to give your calves the strong start they deserve.

REFERENCES

1. All Island Disease Surveillance Report 2023.
2.Burger, B. 2025. Cost assessment of cryptosporidiosis in calves. European Buiatrics Conference, Nantes.
3. Denholm, K. 2024. Benefits of extended colostrum feeding in dairy calves and how to implement it on farm. *In Practice*, 46: 380-387.
4. Crouch, CF, Oliver, S & Francis, MJ. 2001. Serological, colostral and milk responses of cows vaccinated with a single dose of a combined vaccine against rotavirus, coronavirus and *Escherichia coli* F5 (K99). *The Veterinary Record*, 149(4), 105-108.

THE HIDDEN THREAT INSIDE THE FEED BIN

DR HAZEL ROONEY, EUROPEAN PIG SPECIALIST, ALLTECH TECHNOLOGY GROUP, WRITES ABOUT THE RISK POSED TO PIG HEALTH FROM MYCOTOXINS

For pig producers, every tonne of raw material represents an investment in performance, pig health, and ultimately, profitability. Yet, within the feed bin can often lie an overlooked risk that can quietly undermine these goals: mycotoxins. Invisible to the naked eye and also odourless, these toxic compounds can infiltrate even the highest-quality raw materials, compromising pig performance and eroding margins long before any outward signs of trouble appear. As pressure mounts on producers to balance cost control with high herd productivity and health, managing this hidden threat has never been more important.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE MYCOTOXINS?

Mycotoxins are naturally occurring chemical compounds produced by certain moulds and fungi that grow on crops in the field or during storage. Cereals, forages and feed by-products can all be vulnerable. Ireland's temperate climate, often marked by wet summers followed by mild autumns, provides the perfect conditions for these moulds to thrive. Even small fluctuations in humidity or temperature during storage can accelerate their growth. While contamination may begin in the field, improper handling or storage of harvested grains can exacerbate the problem inside the feed bin. That's what makes mycotoxins such a persistent challenge – they are invisible, widespread and easily overlooked until pig performance is notably affected. With changing weather patterns and increasingly volatile harvests across many regions in Europe, the risk from mycotoxins continues to require close attention.

WHY ARE PIGS PARTICULARLY AT RISK?

In terms of livestock, pigs are among the most sensitive to mycotoxins. Their digestive tract, and particularly the intestinal barrier, are highly responsive to these toxins even at low contamination levels. This means that pigs can experience health and performance insults long before clinical signs are obvious. Low-level, chronic exposure is the most common and most deceptive form of contamination. It can manifest in many ways, such as:

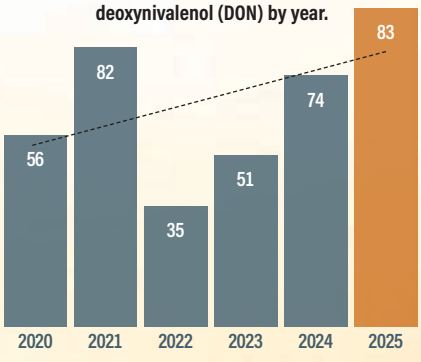
- Reduced feed intake and growth rates;
- Impaired immune response, leaving pigs more vulnerable to secondary infections;
- Reproductive challenges in breeding sows and gilts; and
- Subtle digestive disturbances that increase nutrient losses.

Because these effects are often subclinical, they can slowly eat away at farm efficiency without being easily traced back to a single cause. The result is a gradual decline in productivity and profitability across the herd.

THE EVOLVING MYCOTOXIN LANDSCAPE

Recent Alltech 37+ analysis of Irish and European raw materials continues to show a complex and evolving picture. While deoxynivalenol (DON) and zearalenone (ZEA) remain the most frequently detected mycotoxins in small grains, other mycotoxins such as fumonisins and ochratoxin A are also increasingly found in feed materials, and often in combination. This 'mycotoxin cocktail' effect poses an even greater concern, as multiple mycotoxins acting together can have a cumulative or even synergistic impact, amplifying their negative effects on the gut health, organ function and immune performance of pigs. In practical terms, that means that even when individual toxin levels are within acceptable limits, the combined challenge can still cause losses for both the pig and the producer.

Table 1: Occurrence (%) of deoxynivalenol (DON) by year.



Alltech 37+ analysis of DON in European wheat and barley, 2020-2025.

EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD

A recently published meta-analysis conducted by Weaver et al. (2024) reviewed multiple studies to examine the effects of mycotoxin challenges on growing pigs. The results clearly demonstrated that pig performance was impaired even when mycotoxin contamination levels were below EU and US regulatory thresholds. For instance, pigs exposed to mycotoxins showed an average reduction in average daily gain of nearly 80g. Feed intake also declined, compounding the problem. Importantly, pigs that received Mycosorb, Alltech's mycotoxin management solution, during mycotoxin exposure maintained significantly better growth rates under both moderate and high challenge conditions. While no single technology can eliminate the risk entirely, these published findings highlight how a proactive, data-driven approach to mycotoxin control can protect herd performance and efficiency. Backed by nearly 30 years of research, Mycosorb's safety and efficacy have made it a globally trusted component of integrated mycotoxin management programmes.

OPTIMAL MYCOTOXIN MANAGEMENT

For Irish pig producers, managing mycotoxins effectively starts with recognising that prevention is always more cost effective than cure. A structured mycotoxin control programme can be built around three simple steps: 1) identify the risk; 2) quantify the risk; and 3) mitigate the risk.

1. **Risk identification:** Testing raw materials for possible mycotoxin contamination is the cornerstone of effective mycotoxin control. Because mycotoxins are invisible, visual inspection alone is unreliable. Alltech 37+ testing, conducted in a state-of-the-art laboratory in Dunboyne, Co. Meath, provides a comprehensive mycotoxin analysis. It screens feed ingredients for more than 50 types of mycotoxins across seven groups, providing producers, vets and nutritionists with a clear picture of their feedstuffs' current contamination status.
2. **Risk quantification:** Knowing which mycotoxins are present in a given sample is only part of the story; it's also important to understand what your test results actually mean for pig health and performance. For example, Alltech's unique risk equivalent quantity (REQ) metric utilises data from the Alltech 37+ analysis to assess the potential impacts in pigs across different life stages, from breeding gilts and sows to weaners and finishers. This detailed quantification allows producers to make informed choices concerning diet formulation, raw material sourcing and the necessity for further action.
3. **Risk mitigation:** Once the risk has been identified and quantified, the next step is mitigation. Alongside good feed storage practices, such as maintaining dry, well-ventilated bins and regular cleaning and maintenance schedules, the inclusion of mycotoxin binders, such as Alltech's Mycosorb technologies, can help to significantly reduce toxins' harmful effects within the pig. Mycosorb, as well as Alltech's new technologies Mycosorb A+ Evo and Mycosorb Evo, the next evolution in mycotoxin management, are designed to bind a wide range of mycotoxins within the gastrointestinal tract, reducing absorption and helping maintain pig health and performance.

> **THEY ARE INVISIBLE, WIDESPREAD AND EASILY OVERLOOKED UNTIL PIG PERFORMANCE IS NOTABLY AFFECTED**

Ultimately, controlling mycotoxins is about more than safeguarding feed. It's about protecting pig health, productivity and profitability. When pigs can utilise feed efficiently and maintain a strong immune system, the benefits are evident at every level: improved growth rates, optimal reproductive performance and greater ability to cope with disease challenges. The threat from mycotoxins may be hidden, but its effects are anything but. As Irish pig producers continue to navigate volatile markets, shifting weather patterns and evolving feed supply chains, adopting a proactive approach to mycotoxin management is an investment that delivers measurable returns. For more information on mycotoxin testing, risk assessment tools, and proven mitigation strategies, visit www.knowmycotoxins.com

HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR CUSTOMERS

Wishing you a happy & safe Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Thank you for your business in 2025.

Branch Christmas Opening Hours:

Tue 23rd Dec	Normal Opening Hours
Christmas Eve	**Closed**
Christmas Day	**Closed**
St. Stephen's Day	**Closed**
Sat 27th Dec	**Closed**
Sun28th Dec	**Closed**

Mon 29th Dec	Normal Opening Hours
Tue 30th Dec	Normal Opening Hours
Wed 31st Dec	Normal Opening Hours
Thurs 1st Jan 2026	**Closed**
Fri 2nd Jan 2025	Normal Opening Hours Resume

SUPPORT.
IT'S WHAT WE DO.

FBD INSURANCE

FOCUS

SUSTAINABILITY

LOWERING OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT – ONE STEP AT A TIME

MATT O'KEEFFE REVIEWS THE *TEAGASC NATIONAL FARM SURVEY 2024 SUSTAINABILITY REPORT* AND THE STRIDES THAT HAVE BEEN MADE ON IRISH DAIRY FARMS IN REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

One particularly impressive highlight gleaned from a review of the *Teagasc National Farm Survey 2024 Sustainability Report*, featured the strides that have been made in lowering carbon input per kilogramme of output across all agricultural enterprises. The standout figure is that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions fell by 0.25t/hectare (ha) compared to the 2023 figure.

Some of the sectors have made more spectacular improvements than others, and some reductions have been more consistent across recent years, but, by any objective assessment, notable improvements are being made and built into our food production systems. The standard for carbon measurements is the CO_2 equivalent per hectare (CO_2 eq/ha). That measurement provides a common means of comparing static, reducing or increasing carbon usage from year to year. Looking across the six years up to and including 2024, the trends have been clear.

DAIRY STEP-CHANGE

Apart from 2022, which showed a marginal increase for exceptional reasons, the trend in milk production has moved from static in the early years of 2019 to 2021 to significant GHG reductions for 2023 and 2024, when CO_2 eq/ha was 8.6t CO_2 eq/kg FPCM (fat and protein corrected milk) has reduced from 0.86kg in 2019 to 0.83kg last year. Further measurements using financial parameters found equally strong developments. The CO_2 eq/€ of output last year was 1.8kg. This is a reduction from 2.7kg five years previously. Moving on to other GHG emissions measurements, the nitrogen (N) balance , measured in kilogrammes per hectare (kg/ha), reduced from 179.4kg in 2019 to 165kg in 2024, although that figure was an increase on the previous 12-month period but the trend is downward. In terms of ammonia (NH_3 kg/ha) in 2024 that was 43.3kg compared to 50.3kg in 2019.

THE HOOFPRINT

Moving across to cattle production, the statistics also reveal clear progress being made in improving environmental sustainability. While being in no way spectacular, it is the overall trend that is important. Here, CO_2 eq/ha last year was 4t, a decline of 0.2t on the figure five years previously. The CO_2 eq/kg of liveweight also decreased from 11.2kg in 2019 to 10.3kg in 2024. There were bumps in the figures across the six-year period but, again, the trend is clearly downward. The most spectacular figure in terms of continuous reductions measured was in the CO_2 per euro of output, which showed year-on-year reductions from the baseline 2019 figure of 5.1kg, coming down to 4.8kg the following year, again reducing by 0.7kg in 2021, followed by reductions of 0.8kg, and 0.7kg, to deliver a CO_2 per euro of output of 2.4kg for 2024. Ammonia, NH_3 kg/ha, over the six years also reduced, from 23.3kg to 21.1kg in 2024. The nitrogen (N) balance, while hiccupping along the way, ended up with a reduction from 59.2kg in 2019 to 54.6kg in 2024. That represents a reduction of 4.6kg from the baseline year.

INNOVATION DRIVING DOWN EMISSIONS

So, how and where are the incremental improvements in carbon input reductions being achieved? Adoption of novel technologies are central to success in this regard. The increase, for instance, in the use of protected urea as the go-to N input of choice has been quite remarkable, most especially on milk-production farms. The Teagasc sustainability report confirms the high adoption rate. Moving from a negligible figure five years ago, over 40 per cent of total chemical N was applied in the form of protected urea last year, with anecdotal

Driven by regulation and financial supports, 85 per cent of slurry produced on dairy farms was spread using LESS in 2024.

evidence that the percentage has well passed 50 per cent in the current year. As its use becomes increasingly obligatory across most farms from 2026 onwards, the benefits of using protected urea both as an economically viable alternative to CAN or conventional urea, as well as a major driver in reducing GHG will continue to be seen in the years ahead.
Likewise, the adoption of low emission slurry spreading (LESS) technologies has been nothing short of spectacular. At this stage, driven by regulatory compulsion as well as generous government financial supports, 85 per cent of slurry produced on dairy farms was spread using LESS in 2024. By the end of this year, practically all dairy-produced slurry will be utilised using LESS technologies, due both to obligatory regulation and the retirement of ageing conventional spreading equipment. The adoption of LESS on drystock farms has been significantly slower, but rising, year on year, as more farms gear up over time, and contractor services renew their slurry spreading equipment with LESS machines.

TILLAGE EFFICIENCY

Our tillage farms are the stand-out sector in terms of low carbon footprint. The CO_2 eq/ha figures continue to reduce year on year and are consistent with the general acceptance that tillage farms are among the most economically efficient across all sectors. Sheep farms, while generally operating as relatively low carbon emitters, are challenged on a number of other sustainability fronts, including a reducing national flock, a deteriorating farmer-age profile, and low average productivity.

ADDITIONAL DATA REQUIRED

The National Farm Survey is delivering enormous amounts of data across the fundamental sustainability parameters including economic, environmental, and social, as well as the recently added innovation statistics. In discussing the environmental figures in this article, note should be taken of the survey compilers' admission that further developments, in terms of measuring biodiversity, for instance, are contingent on more data sharing. Measures of biodiversity, as the report states, especially those designed to accurately ascertain small changes over time on individual farms, are 'technically challenging to implement and require considerable human, financial and data collecting and collating resources'.
Teagasc does affirm the intention to 'include a measure of biodiversity quantity in future sustainability reports, as soon as the necessary relevant scientific work needed to establish indicators and consistently collect the related data has concluded'.
This may take on an added urgency in the coming years as data around habitats and biodiversity health are likely to become more central to maintaining critical permissions to farm, none more so than the nitrates derogation, provided further extension negotiations are successful at this time.

> **BY ANY OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT, NOTABLE IMPROVEMENTS ARE BEING MADE AND BUILT INTO OUR FOOD PRODUCTION SYSTEMS**

MEASURABLE PROGRESS

In general terms, Irish agriculture is making progress in reducing its carbon footprint. However, it is unclear if sufficient progress will be made to deliver on its 2030 emissions targets is unclear. What is, perhaps, more important is that definable, measurable progress is being made, with many of the driving factors delivering incremental improvements, year-on-year. Further novel technologies, still to be perfected for practical farm use, should lower our carbon footprint even further in the coming years. That Irish agriculture is far ahead of most European farm sectors in its progress and certifiable measurement of that progress, is of limited value, but is true, nonetheless.

File image of a biogas plant on a farm in Germany. According to the European Biogas Association (EBA), the total number of biomethane plants in Europe has increased from 1,548 to 1,678 between 2024 and 2025. The EBA says that while the biomethane sector is growing, it is not growing fast enough. France now leads biomethane production in Europe, having overtaken Germany.

FROM FARM TO PHARMA – A BIOMETHANE MILESTONE

BERNIE COMMINS SPOKE TO MEATH-BASED SUCKLER AND BEEF FARMER, BRUGHA DUFFY, ONE HALF OF THE FARMING TEAM WHOSE LAND IS FACILITATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND FULLY AGRICULTURAL BIOMETHANE FACILITY

At the end of November, Ireland's first large-scale biomethane facility took another step in the right direction when Carbon AMS, the company developing the plant, announced that it had signed a 15-year gas purchase agreement with Alexion, AstraZeneca Rare Disease at the site of the facility in Duleek, Co. Meath.

It means that the pharmaceutical (pharma) company will transition to biomethane to provide all of its heating needs at its Dublin and Athlone operations, making it the first pharmaceutical company in Ireland to switch to renewable gas for heat.

It is a sustainability milestone for the pharma company and at the heart of this story are two farmers, Brugha Duffy and Donal Hartford, and a 7.2-acre field just outside Duleek in Co. Meath. Under the business name Lunderstown Green Energy, operated by Brugha and Donal – Lunderstown, after the location in which the biomethane plant is being constructed on Donal's farm – both men had a value-added vision for their lands and embarked on a diversification journey a few years back. But it had to be the right kind of diversification.

MOST ADVANCED AI

The new facility is planned to be the most advanced AI-controlled industrial facility in the world aimed at maximising sustainability, efficiency and performance for biomethane production, according to Carbon AMS

NEW DIRECTION

Brugha has a suckler and beef enterprise, which he runs on a part-time basis, and he is also a mechanical engineer. His experience in both professions led him to consider the biomethane route. "I was farming in partnership with my uncle and since about 2015, I've been effectively running the farm. I was always thinking about where we were going with it and what the long-term goal was. The biomethane option piqued my interest," he says.

"It was at the back end of 2018 and I was getting a load of beet off Donal to feed the cattle, and I remember asking if he would be interested. He was and he said 'let's give it a go and see how far we get with it'. And that is when we started putting the feelers out."

As well as being neighbouring farmers and now business partners, Brugha and Donal are also related – their parents are cousins. They go back a long way and their families are deeply embedded in the community in which they sought to construct the biomethane plant.

KEEPING IT LOCAL

Donal and Brugha were open and communicative from the get-go, about the project. Being from the area, they ensured that they spoke to neighbours and nearby farmers and addressed any concerns. Brugha explains: "We made it clear that if you aren't happy, just come and talk to us, we can't stop you from objecting, but we can at least talk it through. There are farmers down in Donal's yard every day getting beet off him or whatever, so it was easy to keep people up to date that way.

"We went to local councillors also and spoke to them as representatives of the non-farming community so if anyone went to them with concerns, they could pass them on to me and Donal."

EXPLORATION

Pre-Covid-19, Brugha and Donal crossed paths with Pat Harte, chief technical officer with Carbon AMS, a Sligo-based company that specialises in developing 'grass-to-gas' anaerobic digestion plants. They operate more than 20 facilities, primarily across Northern Ireland, with some plants also

Connected. Collective. Co-operative.

Ornua
THE HOME OF IRISH DAIRY

Whether it's home soil, or new terrain, the ground beneath our feet connects us.

As a dairy co-operative, we are proud to help nurture lives and livelihoods by bringing safe, trusted, quality food to peoples' tables around the world. We are committed to ensuring we continue to do so by operating in a responsible way, that safeguards producers and protects our planet. This means taking extra steps to improve our environmental impact, strengthen communities, and bring quality sustainably-produced food to the world.

COMMON GROUND.

WHERE WE STAND ON SUSTAINABILITY

Find out more: **ornua .com/common - ground**

located in Scotland.
Brugha explains: "We were working with him over the summer of 2019 to the end of that year just teasing things out – what size plant and how to go about it."
It became very obvious that if they wanted to pursue the biomethane route, scaling up would be required, as would partnership. He explains: "The cost involved in building a biomethane facility is so high. So we had to scale up to make the plant viable. We had the land bank, but we would need to bring in help with the rest." They also engaged with Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) in the same year to confirm if a grid connection was possible.


Meath farmer and engineer, Brugha Duffy.

GOING FOR IT

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic poured water on things for a while, giving Brugha and Donal time to gather their thoughts after the initial exploratory phase, and finally decide on diversification. At the end of 2020, they set their sights on working towards applying for planning permission in 2021, and Lunderstown Green Energy was set up as a single entity to finance this process, which Donal and Brugha had committed to. If it didn't work out, they were willing to take the hit, says Brugha.
As expected, the planning process for a development like this wasn't straightforward – ridiculously, it failed the first stage because the planning notice 'wasn't perpendicular to the road' – but it could have been a lot worse, says Brugha: "I can't remember how many reports and project drawings and surveys we had to do but in terms of what other people have experienced with planning for these type of plants, we were blessed. It went very well and we hadn't any objections." A planning application was submitted in December 2021 and was finally passed in July 2022. Only then could things progress with a partner – Carbon AMS.

> **IT WILL TAKE 2,000 ACRES OF LAND TO GROW THE FEEDSTOCKS TO FUEL THE PLANT**

FEEDING THE FUEL

The biomethane facility is currently under construction and is expected to be completed in 2026, generating the first supply of biomethane towards the end of that year. It will initially produce 42GWh of biomethane, annually. It is the first of its kind in Ireland, and the first in the Republic of Ireland for Carbon AMS. Brugha and Donal remain very much involved in the project. In addition to providing the 7.2-acre site on which it is being built, they, along with other farmer suppliers will feed the plant what it requires – close to 50,000 tonnes of feedstock, annually – with grass silage being the predominant feed but also including maize, beet, farmyard manure, slurry (mostly cattle and a smaller quantity of pig, and only when approved by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine), and distillers' grains. It will take 2,000 acres of land to grow the feedstocks to fuel the plant, according to Brugha.
"Between the farms at home and the farmers already agreed to work with us – from within a 15km radius – we can supply the majority of what is needed next year. However, once we reach full production, we will need to engage or work with other farmers. And how that will look will vary from farmer to farmer depending on what crops they grow, the acreage involved, and how much work the farmers wanted to do themselves to supply the feedstock," he says. As well delivering new renewable gas to the national grid, the plant will also supply biogenic CO_2 to consumers, and will incorporate a digestate nutrient recovery facility, also.
"I love farming. I've been doing it since I was four years old. However, the economic realities of it mean I'm working as well. So, I want to streamline it, try and get more out of the farm, and hopefully have a better standard of life or way of living.
"For Donal, he has been farming all his life since the 70s and 80s with his father and the prices he was getting 30 or 40 years ago haven't changed all that much, so why shouldn't he give this a go?"
Brugha says what they can guarantee any farmer who wants to grow feedstock for the biomethane facility is a price certainty: "Rather than putting in a potentially money-losing crop of spring barley, put in a field of maize, we'll agree on a price and that is what you'll get at the end of the year."

Teagasc Education

Teagasc is the primary provider of accredited further education for the land–based sector.

Scan QR for more details!

www.teagasc.ie/education

DID YOU KNOW

Teagasc deliver Level 5 & Level 6 Further Education Courses in Agriculture, Horticulture, Equine and Forestry.

In addition to Higher Education Level 6 & Level 7 Apprenticeships delivered through a network of agricultural and horticultural colleges and regional advisory offices.

Teagasc also provide short courses and continuous professional development across the land-based sector.

Teagasc College & Private Agricultural College locations

Teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

REAL ACTIVISM IN ACTION

MATT O'KEEFFE EXPLORES THE QUALITIES THAT MAKE FARMS SUSTAINABLE, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE RECENT AWARD-WINNING SOMERS FARM IN WEXFORD, AS WELL AS ASSESSING THE KEY ATTRIBUTES OF THE OTHER CATEGORY WINNERS IN THE RECENT TEAGASC FBD ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS 2025

In last month's issue, Matt O'Keeffe highlighted – in his A Word in Your Ear column – who he believed to be the real environmental activists in Ireland right now. Don Somers was the focus of that, having won the Teagasc FBD Environmental Sustainability Awards 2025, and those awards are the focus of this piece. As well as scooping the overall win, the Somers' farm was also rewarded for its work on improving water quality, picking up a separate category win. Both accolades were achieved on the back of farm management practices that show how intensive tillage farming can be carried out without adverse impacts on the surrounding environment.

ENHANCING WATER QUALITY

To avoid imposing risks to water quality, especially as Don is farming close to the Barrow river, he has reduced nitrogen inputs by 20 per cent. Achieving this through improved soil management, careful nutrient planning and optimising organic manure application, Don has still maintained efficiency, yield potential, and overall margins. Science plays a big part in decision making and farming operations. He uses precision tools like GPS and yield mapping to optimise production and productivity, applying inputs to the levels required – no more and no less – while avoiding risk to the surrounding environment. After each harvest, Don puts in catch crops where the ground will not be reseeded until the following spring. As a general observation, this established and regulated practice is being reviewed at official level to ensure a blanket approach to cover cropping does not have negative impacts on birdlife winter-feeding needs. Riparian buffer zones have also been put in place, with the explicit dual aims of protecting water quality and improving biodiversity alongside watercourses.

NO-PLOUGH SYSTEM

The Somers farm extends to 183 hectares. Farming with his uncle Jim, Don grows winter and spring cereals using a minimum-tillage system since 2018, with a firm focus on protecting soil structure and biology. Fertiliser planning is based on crop nutrient removal and regular soil tests. Organic manures, including poultry litter, farmyard manure, and dairy sludge, are analysed and applied with his own spreader and weigh cells, boosting soil organic matter while reducing costs. High-tech science is involved in many aspects of soil management, while simple observational practices still play a part in soil preservation, with regular inspection of soil structure and earthworms. Don chops and reintegrates half the straw to improve organic soil matter. This reduces fertiliser demand, acts as a barrier to nitrogen leaching, and improves soil structure, seedbed preparation, and water absorption.

The precision technology, mentioned above, which include yield maps and nitrogen sensors, allows for variable nutrient application, while improving efficiency and crop health, and, at the same time, reducing the environmental impact of the tillage enterprise. Integrated pest management is in place to maintain biodiversity on the farm.

REDUCING EMISSIONS

Margaret Dollard and her son Patrick won a category award for reducing greenhouse gas emissions on their Kilkenny farm. They achieved this distinction by placing a lot of emphasis on soil fertility. Over 90 per cent of soils on the Dollard farm are optimum for phosphorous (P) and 100 per cent of soils have optimum pH. Despite having potassium (K)-fixing soils making it difficult to build fertility, a little-and-often approach has delivered positive results. Over 60 per cent of the farm has clover-rich swards and this has allowed the Dollards to reduce chemical nitrogen (N) use by 20 per cent. Most of the nitrogen applied is protected urea, with no reduction in growth or sward productivity. They maintain grass and silage quality with regular harvesting of surplus grass across the growing season.

The other successful ingredients include good genetics and attention to animal health on the dairy beef farm to deliver steer finish

Michael Berkery, FBD; with Tom Tierney, a tillage farmer from Kildare who was awarded for enhancing biodiversity on his farm; and Tom O'Dwyer, head of Knowledge Transfer Climate and Biodiversity Department, Teagasc.

Michael Berkery, FBD; with Kay O'Sullivan who won an award for organic production; and Tom O'Dwyer, head of Knowledge Transfer Climate and Biodiversity Department, Teagasc.

at an average 21.5 months with two thirds of the animals finished before the second winter at a carcass weight of 325kg. Stocking rate is 2.51LU/hectare (ha) with over 11 tonnes of grass produced per hectare. The result from a greenhouse gas emissions perspective is a carbon footprint of 7.6kg of CO_2eq/kg LW.

BIODIVERSE FARMING EXCELLENCE

Tom Tierney, a tillage farmer from Kildare won an award for enhancing biodiversity on his farm. Improvements in hedgerows, field margins, and reductions in pesticide use, alongside the enhancement of low-input grassland (LIG) and the creation of pollinator sites since 2019 all contributed to Tom securing the biodiversity accolade. Into the future the adoption of continuous cover forestry will also benefit biodiversity, while maintaining commercial viability. Tom is also using compost to help improve the fertility and biological status of his soils, improving below-ground biodiversity.

ENTERPRISE DIVERSITY

The diversity award went to Cork-based beef and sheep farmer Emer O'Keeffe, for her achievements in making her farm more economically and environmentally sustainable. The farm was converted to organic production three years ago. There has been an emphasis on improving farm infrastructure, including fencing, roadways and housing, as well as a reseeding programme based on incorporating multispecies and clover. Part of the O'Keeffe farm has been switched into hazelnut production, with investment in a plantation of two-hundred and fifty commercial varieties of hazelnut which will be processed and sold locally. Direct-selling their own lamb and beef is another diversification to improve sustainability.

THE ORGANIC ROUTE TO SUSTAINABILITY

Another Cork category winner in these sustainability awards, for organic production, was Kay O'Sullivan, an organic beef and sheep farmer. The O'Sullivan farm is operated as a closed unit with all feed produced on the farm. Multispecies swards are used to good effect in raising farm productivity, with redstart utilised to finish lambs outdoors, while red clover provides excellent silage quality. Cattle are finished without concentrates at under 20 months, also contributing to profitability figures. Grass productivity is impressive with the O'Sullivan farm growing 11.4t DM/ha. The carbon footprint for this farm is 7.6 kg CO_2eq/kg LW.

SOIL HEALTH WINNER

The Improving Soil Health category delivered a sustainability award for Galway milk producers Conor and Vincent O'Brien. This was all about balance, according to the adjudication panel. While maintaining efficient dairy production, the O'Briens have prioritised the protection of soil biodiversity through the optimal utilisation of the natural potential of their low-input and extensively grazed farm. Sixty-six per cent of the farm has good overall soil fertility, with over 90 per cent of the farm measured as being at optimum levels for soil pH. This is confirmed with soil analysis showing 56 per cent in Index 3 and 4 for P and 66 per cent is Index 3 and 4 for K. Attention to soil conditions and the relevant management of stock and machinery traffic during wet times has kept soil on the O'Brien farm in optimum productivity. The farm hosts three contrasting types of grassland, including conventionally managed, low-input, and an extensively grazed pasture. Diverse swards support more diverse soil bacterial and fungal communities, delivering optimised nutrient cycling, soil structure, and overall resilience, allowing the O'Briens to grow grass efficiently and sustainably. The farm combines strong technical output with sustainability. Stocking rate is 2.4 LU/ha, with cows producing 430kg of milk solids annually. Grass utilisation last year hit 8.7t DM, with the herd genetics achieving an EBI of €251 and DBI of €74. The important carbon footprint milk production on the Loughrea dairy farm is 0.9kg CO_2 eq/kg of FPCM.

SUSTAINABLE IRISH BEEF IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

NUFFIELD IRELAND'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE, HELD LAST MONTH, DELIVERED ON ITS REPUTATION OF PRESENTING INSIGHTFUL PAPERS FROM ITS 2024 CROP OF SCHOLARS, WRITES MATT O' KEEFFE. HERE, HE REVIEWS AND CRITIQUES ONE SUCH PAPER

Wexford-based beef and tillage farmer, Michael Martin, for instance, provides a global view of the place of Irish beef production in terms of competitiveness and sustainability. While noting that Irish beef production has several advantages, it is competing against countries that have vast scale and are improving their sustainability credentials and developing brand recognition at speed.

Michael identifies opportunities as well as challenges for the Irish beef sector. EU market access, for instance, provides an affluent consumer market of unrivalled global comparison. Our production and processing sectors are highly regulated, delivering strong buyer and consumer trust. In addition, the social sustainability of Irish beef production is recognised and appreciated, though whether that extends to a fully-fledged consumer willingness to pay a premium for that trust and social connection is not as clearcut.

SCALE IS RELATIVE

Irish beef processing is large-scale in the context of Ireland, with four processors purchasing 80 per cent of total production. Even in European terms, Ireland is the largest beef exporter in the EU. But the fact remains that, in global terms, the scale of our beef-processing industry is moderate, at best. Ultimately, Michael notes, size does matter. The figures speak for themselves. The large-scale producer countries dominate global meat trading. To counteract that scale of dominance, Michael promotes the need for the Irish beef sector to 'amplify its collective voice'. While there has been considerable rationalisation of Irish processing, there is, perhaps, less evidence of significant cooperation between the main processors. At the same time, they have developed their international beef-processing footprint, particularly in our major UK and EU markets. A wider engagement in global meat processing has been achieved recently by Dawn, with the acquisition of a majority shareholding in a leading New Zealand meat processor. The full implications and benefits of this for the Waterford-based processor will only become clear over time.

A GLOBAL ASSESSMENT

Michael set out to assess global beef production and trends, and to gain a clearer understanding of consumer attitudes towards sustainable beef production. In his paper, he includes an evaluation of Ireland's position as a beef producer and the risks of losing its social license. Identifying EU market opportunities was also an important objective of Michael's Nuffield Study, as we approach an almost inevitable Mercosur trade agreement with global beef production powerhouses, including Brazil and Argentina.

Another key finding from Michael's study relates to the strategic advantages of our EU membership, as alluded to above. This may become increasingly important as livestock numbers continue to decline across the continent in the wake of increased regulation, an ageing and diminishing farm population, and continuing demands to reduce environmental pressures, leading to lower stocking rates and reduced inputs. Higher beef prices globally as well as locally, may arrest this decline. We may even see a reversal of production trends, though the headwinds against increased production would suggest that price and profitability are notable but not definitive factors in cattle production. Nevertheless, as Michael confirms, with production declining in major beef-consuming EU countries, most notably Germany and France, market opportunities should open for Irish product. Reductions in our cattle population may reduce those opportunities somewhat.

SUSTAINABILITY CATCH-UP

While European and Irish beef production have very high sustainability standards, Michael notes in his paper that strides are being made by South American producers and processors to improve their sustainability credentials.

However, after last month's exposé by the *Irish Farmers Journal* of serious shortcomings on the regulation, supervision and use of various animal treatments and antibiotics, there remains a major gap between EU regulatory standards and those of many of our South American counterparts.

CONSUMER CONUNDRUM

Michael recognises the critical role of subsidisation in maintaining and improving animal welfare and quality. This is 'unmatched by unsubsidised systems outside of the EU'. The consumer paradox, however, Michael confirms, is that, while buyers and consumers demand sustainable beef, they resist paying full production costs.

This contradiction may become even more obvious should the Mercosur trade agreement be fully implemented in the coming decade. While the additional volumes of beef from South America may be relatively modest in the overall scheme of European production, any significant consumer preference for a lower-priced, high-quality beef import, could have an inordinate effect on price at both

Michael Martin (second from left) pictured with his 2024 co-scholars Nick Cotter, John Keane, Molly Garvey and Niall Hurson.

farm and supermarket shelf levels. Likewise, if lower-priced imported high-end beef cuts are available for foodservice or retail outlets to maintain or improve margins, then it is likely that the choice will be towards a cheaper input without any perceived loss of quality. Unless consumers insist on local/EU provenance, there will be little pushback on imported alternative beef offerings. Right now, while consumer preference surveys suggest a bias towards local provenance, it is not a solid guaranteed demand. Rather, it is, all things – especially price – being the same, consumers will buy local. That is not a very reassuring outlook as South American beef imports increase over the coming decade. The reassurances of protection triggers, should European beef prices fall – always assuming a direct link can be made of price undermining from ex-EU imports – are of some comfort, but only relevant after the price damage is done.

THE ELUSIVE BRAND

Michael advocates the introduction of beef-finishing bonuses for smaller finishers. While this has merit, it is unlikely to be enacted across the board, as benefits to processors are difficult to identify, though Angus, Hereford and other breed bonuses, do confer some benefits for all relevant producers. He suggests improving beef marketing and consumer engagement. That should be a given, with Bord Bia already heavily involved in Irish beef promotion internationally. Whether, ultimately, promotion should extend to a singular Irish beef brand, is another question, not so much because of its likely positive benefits, but because history would suggest it is a non-runner for the privately owned beef-processing industry.

GENETIC-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

This Nuffield study confirms the dominance of dairy beef in the Irish production system. While suckler beef retains a major role in the supply chain, two-thirds of Irish beef is now sourced from dairy herds. Genetic improvement of dairy beef has accelerated in recent years, with the need for economic and environmental sustainability improvements driving progress. Earlier slaughter, along with improved carcase weight and conformation are central to achieving the necessary sustainability improvements.

The calf sales market is already driving milk producers towards beef breeds that maximise market return, so a proposal to support and empower them to make the right genetics choices is probably unnecessary.

Michael's overall summary is clear: "Ireland can lead European beef production by combining sustainability with competitiveness. To do so, it must bridge production and perception, ensuring that Irish beef stands for quality, responsibility and resilience". As with most challenges in the Irish beef industry, it is easier said than done.

BUT THE FACT REMAINS THAT, IN GLOBAL TERMS, THE SCALE OF OUR BEEF-PROCESSING INDUSTRY IS MODERATE, AT BEST

NEW NUFFIELD CHAIR

Nuffield Ireland's 2025 conference, titled Cultivating Opportunities from Obstacles, was opened by the organisation's recently appointed chair, Grainne Dwyer.

Grainne, a dairy farmer from Borris in Ossory, Co. Laois, has taken over from Joseph Leonard and steps into the role after joining the board of Nuffield Ireland in 2023. Alongside farming, Grainne has built a successful career in the agricultural industry with her work with the Irish Grassland Association, Nore Conference Services, and Animal Health Ireland.

In 1999, Grainne became the first female recipient of a Nuffield Scholarship during which she researched the role and recognition of women in the agricultural sector. She remains a passionate advocate for women in agriculture, championing greater inclusion and recognition within the industry.

A TRANSFORMATIVE YEAR FOR HORSE SOURCE

This year, 2025, has marked a transformative year for Horse Source, Horse Sport Ireland's (HSI) digital passport application and registration platform. Following a launch period in 2024, the system has now hit its stride, delivering reliability and efficiency for sport horse breeders, nationwide. So far in 2025, nearly 11,000 applications have been processed, reflecting an ongoing confidence in the service, and ensuring that Horse Source is delivering for Irish sport horse breeders.

To date, over 5,500 foal passport applications have been received on the system, with the remainder made up of essential services such as change of ownership, amendments, importations, and other vital documentation. The volume speaks to the strength of Ireland's sport horse breeding industry, but also to the improved capacity and responsiveness of the platform itself.

TECHNOLOGICAL SHIFT

Speaking about the new HorseSource.ie platform, HSI CEO, Denis Duggan, said: "It was a major technological shift for the sector. Irish Sport Horse and Irish Draught Breeders can now apply online and have confidence that their passport is processed promptly. Like any new system, there were hurdles to overcome. Breeders needed a service they could rely on, especially at key times of the breeding season.

"We took that feedback seriously and acted quickly. Passport processing times over the past 10 years were regularly over three months. Today, on HorseSource.ie we are issuing passports within three weeks of receiving a valid DNA sample from the breeder."

FASTER AND MORE EFFICIENT

Those actions have directly shaped Horse Source's impressive turnaround, explained Mr Duggan: "We increased staffing across the department and built a dedicated customer care team. This allowed us to respond faster, resolve issues more efficiently, and support breeders in a way that matches the scale and importance of their work." He continued: "At the same time, we invested in improving the technology behind Horse Source, enhancing the overall customer experience."

These improvements have had a tangible impact on breeders' daily operations, particularly for those preparing foals for the sales. Mr Duggan added: "A key priority was ensuring that breeders heading to the sales could secure foal passports and paperwork in a seamless, timely manner.

"We knew how critical that was for their businesses. This year, we've seen a significant improvement in turnaround times, helping breeders keep their operations running smoothly."

Commitment to the community

HSI's commitment to the equestrian community in Ireland goes far beyond addressing past challenges. The organisation remains focused on developing the Horse Source system even further. With new, innovative features already in development, HSI aims to build a platform that continues to support industry needs, enhances traceability, and gives stakeholders the confidence and efficiency required to solidify trust in the national federation.

"Irish breeders, horses and athletes are at the heart of a world-leading sport horse industry," said Mr Duggan. "They deserved a system that reflects that standard and HSI delivered that. HSI is committed to continuously improving Horse Source so that it becomes a tool breeders can depend on; not just this year, but long into the future."

With strengthened infrastructure, responsive support, and ongoing innovation, Horse Source stands as a system Irish breeders can genuinely be proud of, a modern, efficient service built around the needs of the people who drive Ireland's sport horse success.

2026 BREEDING GRANT APPLICATIONS OPENING SOON

Applications will shortly be opening for the 2026 Breeding Grant Initiative. This supports funding for breeding and production initiatives for young horse classes and production events.

In 2025, over 100 applications were received from shows and events throughout the country, with 86 applications receiving funding from the €600,000 initiative.

The Breeding Grant Initiative is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine through National Breeding Services and is subject to 2026 approval.

Farmer Newsletter

Winter 2025

Sustainable Quality Assurance Scheme members' communication

What's inside?

- Market outlook for beef, sheep and livestock
- Irish dairy's grass-fed advantage
- Farmers share their experience of AgNav
- Irish lamb lands in the US
- Plus the latest Bord Bia news and events

Pictured: John Casey, Causeway, Co.Kerry. Photo credit: Pauline Dennigan.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

Origin Green
IRELAND

Contents

Pictured: Irish chef Mark Moriarty, who prepared delicious lamb dishes for the event.

Irish lamb lands in the US

Bord Bia launched Irish lamb in the US at a high-profile event in New York on 23rd October, marking the first time Irish lamb was served in the US since access was granted in 2022. The first shipment of Irish lamb, from Irish Country Meats, was received by US wholesaler Marx Foods, and Bord Bia plans to strengthen its US presence with further promotions and trade shows.

Gold medals for Irish steak

Ireland landed a record-breaking 68 medals at the prestigious 2025 World Steak Challenge. With 24 gold medals, Ireland was the top-performing country overall, winning golds for fillets, ribeye, and sirloin. Bord Bia is a partner in the World Steak Challenge, which is now in its eleventh year.

From pasture to pavilion

Bord Bia was delighted to welcome two of our dairy farmer members to Anuga, the world's largest food trade fair. Katie Gleeson, from Clonmore, Co. Tipperary, is an award-winning content creator, a National Dairy Council ambassador, and a member of Dairy Women Ireland. Martin Crowe is an award-winning dairy farmer from Doon, Co. Limerick, who also runs Crowe Agricultural Consultants. Martin was recently named a Farming for Nature Ambassador.

The visit showcased the vital role of trade fairs for Irish exporters, allowing them to meet existing and new customers from around the world. Katie and Martin also visited German retailers stocking Irish beef and dairy to see how Irish produce, particularly Kerrygold butter, is prominent across all the major German supermarkets.

Pictured l-r: Minster of State Noel Grealish, Martin Crowe, Katie Gleeson, Bord Bia CEO Jim O'Toole.

Pictured (l-r): Jason Stanley (organic farmer); Brian McGee (DAFM); Tom Dunne (organic farmer); Julian Pawlowski (ACA Organic specialist); Tara Bane (Bord Bia Organic Manager); Padraig Brennan (chairperson, Organic Strategy Forum).

400+ farmers attend organic roadshow

Over 400 farmers attended a series of discussion and information sessions in October and September, focused on maximising opportunities in organic beef and sheep farming. The events took place in Portlaoise, Ballinasloe, Donegal, and Adare, and covered topics such as market outlets, profitability, and available supports. Speakers included representatives from Teagasc, Bord Bia, processors, and experienced organic farmers.

Pilot audit feedback

Bord Bia is updating the audit process for our Sustainable Quality Assurance schemes for beef, lamb, dairy, horticulture, eggs, poultry, and pigmeat. Pilot audits to test the proposed new and changed criteria finished in late September for beef and dairy. All participants were invited to give confidential feedback to help shape the final version of the standard. The feedback will be reviewed by the technical advisory committees, who are responsible for agreeing the final criteria.

The draft new criteria aims to better reflect what's happening on Irish farms today, support access to key export markets, and help ensure Irish produce remains competitive on the world stage. The proposed updates also aim to make audits more streamlined and practical for farmers.

New appointments for agri-food reputation initiative

Our Food Connects - an initiative developed by Ireland's agri-food sector to rebuild public understanding and trust in Irish food and farming - has announced the appointment of its first full-time team members. Tom Cronin joined the organisation this summer as Executive Director, followed by Richard Cooper, who takes on the role of Technical Content Lead.

Our Food Connects was established to bridge the growing gap between those who produce food and those who consume it - ensuring the real story of Irish farming is heard, understood, and valued. Today, only one in ten Irish people have a direct family link to a farm, and six in ten say they don't know enough about what farming is doing for the environment. In this context, Our Food Connects provides a much-needed platform to share credible insight, tackle misconceptions, and present the challenges and progress of Irish farming openly and honestly.

With its core team now in place, Our Food Connects is focusing on building partnerships, developing structures, and shaping a new brand identity to drive the initiative forward.

Meet the team

Tom Cronin, who leads the initiative, has over two decades of leadership experience across sustainability, food and beverage, and strategic communications. According to Tom, "Ireland's food sector is one of our greatest national assets. Its future will be defined by our ability to work together to protect our land, water, and communities, and by how we engage with the Irish public to deepen their understanding and appreciation for food and farming".

As Technical Content Lead, **Richard Cooper** will lead the creation of content and materials that bring together the science and the story of Irish farming - ensuring information is credible and connected to real farm experience. Richard's experience spans farm operations, food manufacturing, research programme management and commercial roles in the sector.

Our Food Connects is governed by an interim board representing the Irish agri-food sector, and includes representatives from farm organisations, Bord Bia, UCD, the National Dairy Council, and meat and dairy processors.

Cattle forecast

- **Tight supplies: Reduced cattle availability in second half of the year with 2025 kill potentially down by at least 180,000.**
- **Heavier carcases: Average weights up 7kg on last year with beef volumes remaining stable.**
- **Exports rise: Beef export value up 24% to €2.2 billion.**
- **Inflationary pressure: Consumers are shifting to cheaper beef cuts amid inflation.**

Cattle supplies for processing were very tight during Q3 (July, August, September) and into Q4 (October) with strong competition for the cattle available. A firm beef trade in the first half of the year encouraged producers to process prime cattle younger and lighter than previously anticipated which has had knock on impacts on cattle supply in the second half of the year. In addition, there have been two successive years of a very strong live trade which has further contributed to an overall reduction in cattle numbers on farm.

A key factor in the declining beef kill during the summer and early autumn has been a sharp drop in cow throughput, and in particular dairy cow throughput. A relatively firm milk price, good grazing conditions in most of the country and the lack of replacement dairy females available have all contributed to this decline in dairy cow culling. Cow throughput is expected to pick up in November as more producers start to dry cows off.

Given recent developments in the trade, there is a possibility that throughput could decline by up to 180-200,000 head this year. A further decline of 40,000 to 50,000 head is anticipated for 2026.

Carcase weights

With good production conditions on farm and the increased focus on genetic improvement of beef cattle coming from the dairy herd there has been a notable increase in average carcase weights in recent months. The average steer carcase weight in September 2025 was 358kg, up 7kg from year earlier levels while the average heifer carcase weight increased by a similar margin to 311kg over the same period. Cow carcase weights increased from 291kg in September 2024 to 302kg in September 2025.

Beef exports

A strong domestic beef trade and higher deadweight prices contributed to a 24% increase in the value of Irish beef exports between January and August to €2.2 billion. This strong value increase was despite a 2% decline in the overall volume of beef exported. The UK and Europe remain the primary outlets for Irish beef exports in 2025 (48% and 46% respectively) while the level of trade with international markets has declined. This strong focus on markets closer to home is reflective of declining beef production in the UK and EU and stable demand for beef.

Food inflation

While demand for beef has remained relatively firm in the key export markets there has been a shift in the type of beef that consumers are looking for. Insights from Bord Bia's overseas offices has indicated that high levels of food inflation combined with other cost of living pressures has seen consumers shift away from steaks and other higher value cuts into more affordable and versatile beef options. There have also been indications of some category switching within the meat aisle with some consumers switching out of beef and towards lower value proteins such as chicken and pork.

Sheep market update

- **Tight supplies:** Sheep throughput down 20% (420,000 head) to 1.6 million by mid-October due to fewer lambs, hoggets, and ewes.
- **Falling production:** Reduced output across the EU, with Ireland also seeing fewer live imports from Northern Ireland.

Tight supplies of sheep for processing have continued to be one of the main talking points in the sheep sector this year. A combination of reduced domestic production, a contraction in the breeding flock and lower levels of live sheep imports from Northern Ireland for direct slaughter have all contributed to a notable decline in factory throughput.

Throughput of sheep in DAFM approved facilities totalled 1.6 million head up to mid-October 2025, back by 420,000 or 20% on 2024. The reduced hogget carryover accounted for 140,000 of the decline in throughput while a further 211,000 is due to the reduced spring lamb kill. The balance of 70,000 less can be attributed a reduced ewe/ram kill.

Reduced production is apparent across all sheep producing regions of the EU. However, despite reduced supplies of sheep there has been no associated uplift in demand for product. The high price point of lamb relative to other proteins during a period of high cost of living and food inflation has continued to have a negative impact on demand.

There has been some increase in sheepmeat imports into the EU from the Southern hemisphere however increasing prices in both regions have impacted their competitiveness on the EU market. Reports have indicated that increasing availability of lambs for processing in the UK and in some of main export markets are having an impact on customer demand for Irish lamb.

Live exports

- **Live trade eases:** numbers exported fell back in Q3 due to tight supplies and strong prices, though 328,000 cattle were exported up to mid-October - similar to 2024.
- **Beef sired calf exports rises:** Calf trade up 13% to 223,000 head, driven by more beef-sired calves and strong demand from Spain, the Netherlands, and Poland.

Following a very strong start to the year for all categories of cattle the live trade has been much more subdued in recent months. A combination of tighter cattle availability, strong prices and the lack of any international trading have all contributed to the lower levels of trade in Q3 (July, August, September) relative to last year.

The number of calves traded increased by 13% to 223,000 head with an increase in beef-sired calves available compared to previous years. This is due to an increase in beef sired calves from the dairy herd and a decline in dairy sired male calves.

Ireland has maintained its bluetongue free status in 2025 which is a key factor in the stable demand for Irish cattle in key export markets. Up to the middle of October 2025 Ireland traded 328,000 live cattle - similar to the same period in 2024. However, there has been a notable shift in cattle types and end markets. Calf exports to Spain, the Netherlands and Poland have increased, however all other categories of cattle (weanlings, stores, adult cattle) have declined. Demand for older animals has remained steady in Northern Ireland, Spain, Italy, and Greece, but is weaker in other markets due to the higher price of Irish cattle compared with competitors.

While the short-term outlook for live cattle trading remains fairly positive there are several headwinds on the horizon that may have a negative impact on the trade in the longer term.

Irish dairy's green advantage

Irish dairy has built its strong global reputation on quality, sustainability, reliability and our unique grass-fed credentials. Our success in export markets depends not only on finding new buyers, but on protecting the strong and hard-fought position we occupy on the global stage.

Today's consumers want proof that the food they consume is both nutritious and responsibly produced. When it comes to making purchasing decisions, they seek out assurances of environmental care and high animal welfare standards.

Grass-fed milk production sits at the heart of what makes Irish dairy unique, benefiting farmers, cows, consumers, and the environment.

Grass-fed isn't just how we farm - it's how we stand out.

Market demand

Grass-fed dairy satisfies market demand across four main areas:

1. **Health benefits**

   Grass-fed dairy has higher levels of beneficial nutrients compared to indoor based dairy, supporting healthy lifestyles.

2. **Improved animal welfare**

   Irish dairy cows can lead more 'natural' lives out on pasture. Healthier cows also contribute to better quality milk.

3. **Improved environmental sustainability**

   Ireland has one of the lowest dairy carbon footprints in the EU, largely due to our pasture-based production systems, which typically have lower carbon footprints than mixed or indoor systems.

4. **Consumers will pay a premium for grass-fed dairy**

   Half of consumers globally said that grass-fed would influence their choice of dairy. Over 60% of consumers in key markets claim that they would pay more for grass-fed. ***Over 60% of consumers in key markets claim that they would pay more for grass-fed.***

The Bord Bia Grass-Fed Standard

Bord Bia, in collaboration with the wider Irish dairy industry, developed the Grass-Fed Standard in 2020. As the world's first independently verified grass-fed certification, the Bord Bia Grass-Fed Standard provides proof that Irish dairy is truly grass-fed and naturally sustainable.

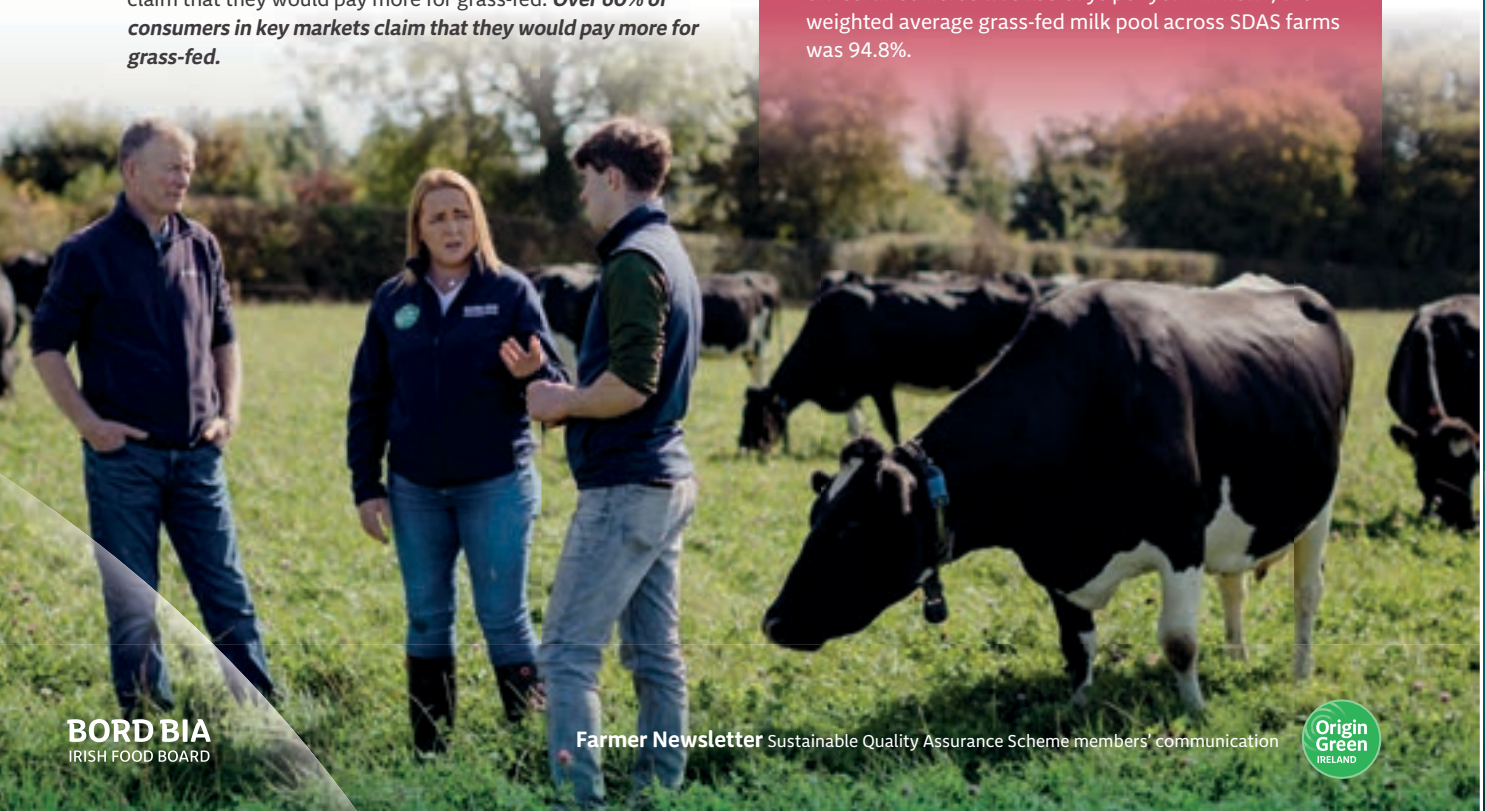
The Grass-Fed Standard asks no requirements of farmers other than to be a member of the SDAS. The data is collected through the sustainability survey conducted by farmers as part of their audit. The percentage of grass in the herd's diet is calculated on a fresh weight basis and includes grass-based forage.

Milk processors that wish to use the grass-fed logo are audited against the standard every 12 months and must comply with these requirements:

- Sourced from farms that are members of the Bord Bia Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS).
- Each individual herd must achieve at least 90% grass-fed diet over a three-year period.
- The combined milk pool must achieve a weighted average of at least 94.5% grass-fed (herds producing more milk count more toward this average.)
- Cows must be permitted to graze outdoors on grass for at least the national average grazing days, plus or minus 80 days (to allow for challenging grass growth conditions).

Grass-fed and grazing statistics

From 2022-2024, the average grazing days on Bord Bia certified herds was 253 days per year. In 2024, the weighted average grass-fed milk pool across SDAS farms was 94.8%.



Ornua™
THE HOME OF IRISH DAIRY

Grass-fed success in the US market

Consumers worldwide increasingly see grass-fed dairy as the 'gold standard' for quality and authenticity. This is particularly prominent in markets like the US, where Kerrygold is the second most popular butter in the market. Irish grass-fed milk gives Kerrygold its golden, creamy texture which consumers actively seek out as they cannot find it elsewhere in the butter category.

From one pallet of butter in 1999, to the number one imported butter brand and fastest growing in the market, Kerrygold's strength is the result of decades of strategic marketing investment, strong long-term retail partnerships, and consistent delivery of a consumer experience that is unmatched.

It is the model for best-in-class production from paddock to parlour to plate, underpinned by robust standards designed to protect and enhance the foundations of Ireland's unique value proposition: grass-fed.

Protecting our natural advantage

Grass-fed is more than a production method, it's Ireland's competitive differentiator. It connects farming heritage and efficiency with the modern consumer's appetite for taste, quality, and sustainability. As global competition intensifies, protecting and communicating the value of Ireland's grass-fed system will be vital to sustaining our reputation, our premium position in world markets, and our ability to realise value for producers.

Grass-fed farming

For farmers, grass-fed systems are more cost-efficient and profitable, reducing reliance on feed and lowering input costs. Healthier cows, nourished naturally on grass, are not only more productive, but typically require fewer veterinary interventions. This helps strengthens farm resilience, viability and supports long-term competitiveness.

How Irish farmers are using AGNAV

AgNav is a free and easy-to-use technology for Irish farmers, developed by Teagasc, Bord Bia and ICBF, and supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Farmers can use AgNav to develop farm-specific sustainability action plans to reduce on-farm emissions and improve water quality.

Katie and Phil Gleeson, Templemore, Co. Tipperary

It's great to have a platform that pulls together all the existing data and gives you a clear picture of what's happening on your farm. If it's measured, it's managed, and we can figure out how to reduce emissions further as we go about our everyday actions.

One thing we're really focusing on now is herd genetics. We're using sexed semen on our best cows to improve milk solids and yield, and we're being very selective with the bulls we use. Through the herd EBI section in the AgNav Forecaster, we can actually see the improvements we're making - not just in performance, but in our carbon footprint too.

Michael O'Donnell, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary

I was introduced to AgNav by my Teagasc climate advisor last year and I'm using it to try to improve efficiencies on the farm. I logged in with my ICBF login and all the information from my previous Bord Bia audit was there.

It's actually very simple to use and you can play around with the Forecaster tool. For example, you can change the dates for when you let animals out to grass in spring and when they're brought in, and you'll see the difference that this makes to your emissions.

Michael's AgNav Actions

- Extended grazing season.
- Incorporation of clover.
- 100% protected urea.
- Enhance soil fertility.
- Use of LESS.
- Spring slurry application.

Pat O'Driscoll, Coppeen, Co.Cork

I was first introduced to AgNav at a Dairygold meeting in November last year. I then had AgNav training with my Teagasc Signpost Climate advisor, Anthony Dineen. I was really impressed by the level of detail on AgNav - it looks at the farm inputs and what's leaving the farmgate to come up with a nutrient balance figure. Having access to our own AgNav data is a real step forward.

Pat's AgNav Actions

- Improve herd EBI.
- Reseeding 10% of the farm annually.
- Use of low emission slurry spreading (LESS).
- Use of protected urea.
- Spread slurry in spring and early summer.
- Enhance soil fertility.

Assess, analyse, act

AgNav shows an assessment of current farm performance using data from Bord Bia, ICBF, Teagasc, and farmer-completed surveys. Farmers, or their advisors, can use the AgNav forecaster to analyse how changes in farming practices and management can impact farm emissions and nutrient balance. Farmers can then identify which actions are most appropriate for their farm to create a personalised farm sustainability action plan.

Get started

Currently, AgNav is available to all dairy and beef farmers if they are registered with ICBF and have completed a Bord Bia Sustainability Survey, and all tillage farmers that are members of a recognised assurance scheme. Dairy and beef users can log in using their ICBF log-in. Beef and dairy farmers may also sign-up through an affiliated processor sustainability scheme. AgNav tillage users will need to register before they can use AgNav. AgNav support and advice is available to farmers by joining the free Signpost Advisory Programme. **www.agnav.ie**

MESSAGES

- Review your 2025 management achievements now.
- Become an 'active' farm manager and planner in 2026.
- Examine and act now on cow condition.
- Take steps to identify and prevent lameness.
- The milking machine is the most important machine – service it now.
- Good silage pit management reduces losses.
- Feed dry cow minerals from December 20 – 40 days before expected calving dates.

By Matt Ryan

REVIEW 2025 NOW

- This has been a very good year for dairy farmers but next year looks challenging.
  - Milk price is predicted to be 40c/L or less and costs are now near 40c/L.
  - Weather, generally, was very good and price of inputs did not increase significantly.
  - Invest surplus cash wisely – advisable to maintain a 'hard times kitty'.
- To review the year, do the profit monitor or some similar financial analysis – this is a MUST-DO task in December.
- Examine your ICBF data (information on calving, fertility, EBI, milk recording, etc.) on the ICBF website, comparing it with 2024 and other discussion group members.
- Analyse your grass yield data on PastureBase.
  - Has the grass grown increased from 2024 and how do you compare with other good farmers.
  - What factors, other than weather, contributed to your performance?
  - Identify the poorest yielding paddocks for the last three to four years and plan to reseed,
  - Get your adviser or discussion group to critique your performance against a high standard of benchmarks.
  - You are now in a good position to make your plans for 2026.

YOU MUST 'ACTIVELY MANAGE' YOUR FARM IN 2026

- Most farmers do not 'actively manage' their farms.
- This involves making long-term plans compatible with personal, farm, and environmental goals while making short-term plans for managing grassland, breeding, and all components of animal welfare.
  - Farmers can sometimes manage things on the hoof. This is not efficient nor effective management and leads to profit that will always be below that which is possible.
  - It also frustrates family and staff.
  - Let's spell out what you must do and put timelines on the tasks.

Farm financial planning

- December: Complete the 2025 Dairy Profit Monitor (DPM).
- December: Review the 2025 DPM with your group or adviser.
- December: Farm physical plan with targets for 2026; that is, the stock you are allowed carry under the Nitrate Directive.
- December: Five-year financial plan.
- December: Annual cost control plan for 2026.
  - Last day of every month, review all bills, pay them and update your cost control plan.
  - Decide what items/commodities need to be purchased and order.
- In October, for the following year or as now for this year, calculate your fertiliser, meal, milking parlour needs, etc. and get three quotations from merchants before purchase.
- Farm grassland planning for 2026.
  - January: Spring rotation plan (on PastureBase).
  - January: Spring grass feed budget (on PastureBase).
  - January: Farm grassland plan for whole year (programme available), to conform with the nitrate allowances.
  - January: Do your annual fertiliser plan based on soil results.
  - February 1 and every Monday for whole year: Walk the farm and measure grass and make weekly paddock grazing plan.
  - April to November: Use the grass wedge to manage grass quality and availability.
  - August: Do winter fodder budget (on PastureBase).
  - August: Do autumn rotation plan (on PastureBase).
  - August: Do autumn feed budget (on PastureBase).
- Farm breeding and fertility plan for year.
  - January: Cow and heifer breeding plan.
  - April 1: Sire advice planner to choose AI bulls.
- Farm mastitis management plan for year
  - January: Make spring/summer mastitis plan.
  - September: Make dry cow mastitis plan.
- Farm body condition scoring (BCS) plan for year
  - Six times per year as follows.
  - Early October: Mid-December; Mid-March; Mid-April; Mid-May; Mid-June.
- Farm vaccination/dosing plan for year
  - With veterinary help make a herd health plan for all stock.
- Farm work and holiday rote plan for year
  - Do weekly rota for all staff every Friday, including family.
  - Stitch in holiday two-week break for all staff, including yourself.
- Staff requirements
  - December: Plan your annual labour requirement, giving yourself extra 'cover' for next spring.
- List out by month (and date) when insurance, car tax, bank loans etc have to be paid.
- Do we have to do any building this year?
  - If so, set the plans in motion to do so early in year. Decide on your needs (use your discussion group to guide you), do drawings, get planning permission and get a contractor to do it if at all possible (too many farmers are doing this themselves with adverse effects on family life and personal health).
- Make similar plans for other tasks that need to be planned.
  - Reseeding dates (April-May) with clover, mixed species or conventional ryegrass.
- All of these specific dates MUST be written up on an annual wall planner for 2026.
  - Ask your discussion group for help or talk to your adviser/ consultant.
- The following quotation is worth remembering: "The great thing about doing no analysis, preparation or planning is that a poor income the following year comes as a complete surprise."
  - How true that is in dairy farming. Let's do something about it!

- There is at least a week of 'office work' in what I am recommending. It is hard work but the pay-off is huge – €500 to €1,000 per hour. Yard work, etc. won't deliver more than €20-€40 per hour, therefore, prioritise the above and get help with it.
- I can guarantee that with this active management plan you will maintain your income next year despite all the gloomy pressures.

EXAMINE COW CONDITION AGAIN NOW!

- The second BCS of the cow's annual (six in total) assessment takes place NOW.
  - It will be a combination of visual and/or handling.
  - In-calf heifers and weanlings need the same visual attention.
- The outcome of this task will be to group and feed differently animals of different scores to achieve the required condition score at calving.
- We are nearing the start of calving, so it is vital to carefully examine cow body condition so that you don't have too many thin or fat cows at calving.
  - Such an examination now verifies the quality of your silage and feeding programme this autumn, and if not up to scratch you must do something about it!
- Thin cows need your attention. Why?
  - They will calve down thin.
  - They will milk less: over 450L for every 1 BCS below target, and will have lower constituents.
  - They will be thinner at bulling time and consequently 17-20 per cent more of them will not go into calf.
  - Separate out and feed 1-3kg meal per day. This is a must-do job!
- Fat cows are a liability. Why?
  - This could be a big problem next spring as silage quality is very good and cow BCS, in most cases, is good.
  - A fat cow has a body score of 3.5 or more.
  - They will get fatter from now to calving.
  - They may suffer more calving problems.
  - At or after calving they will suffer from more health problems such as milk fever (cost = €300/case), tetany (cost = €600/clinical case), ketosis (cost = €190/clinical case) and acidosis (cost = €270/case).
  - Feed intakes post calving will be reduced by 2kg DM/day resulting milk yield being reduced by 450L or more and also lower fat and protein percentage.
  - Fertility will be poorer because they will lose too much weight between calving and bulling – 0.5 BCS loss, results in submission rates being reduced by up to 49%, and six-week pregnancy rates reduced by up to 20%.
  - You will be wasting valuable (very expensive) food on them.
  - What must you do? You must separate them from other cows, restrict their feed to 5-6kg DM per day (20-30kg of 20% DM of fresh silage daily) plus 1-2kg DM straw.

PREVENT LAMENESS AT ALL COST!

- Lameness adds huge financial losses to a farm business.
  - Digital lameness: €106 per case.
  - Inter-digital lameness: €98 per case.
  - Sole ulcers: €144 per case
- These are the direct costs of lameness but the cost of thin cows not milking to potential; not going back in calf and wasting feed are not included.
  - Therefore, lameness must be prevented and controlled.
- What are the causes of lameness?
- Treatment of lame cows is a waste of money if a preventative-care programme doesn't exist on your farm.
  - The causes must be rectified immediately – a really important maintenance task for this winter/spring.
  - Run scrapers often to keep passageways clean and have one cubicle for every cow.
- Good ventilation entails having 1 sq. ft. inlet per cow and 2 sq. ft outlet per cow all the time and not just opening doors when you think the atmosphere in the cubicle house is stuffy.
  - Go and check this sooner rather than later as it a major problem on farms.
- Experiments have shown that not all cows that had sole ulcers were lame and that first calving heifers were likely to be severely affected by lameness.
- Routine hoof pairing must be part of a preventative-care programme.
  - It is suggested that farmers should use an expert for this purpose during December – the Farm Relief Services.
  - It will help to reduce the number of expensive firefighting calls and ensure low culling rates due to lameness.
- Mortellaro – digital dermatitis – has become more common recently.
  - It is a virus condition around the feet resulting in the foot being badly swollen (not hot) between the claws, with a bad smell.
  - An alamycin spray every day for a few days will clear it up, using the following procedure – wash, dry, spray and dry.
  - In more severe cases, a footbath of lyncomycin, tetracyline, or opticide will cure the problem, but do not overuse antibiotics and alternate these products to prevent resistance developing – use them under veterinary supervision.
- An ordinary footbath (4L of formalin or 4-5kg bluestone or zinc sulphate in 200L of water) on three consecutive days, morning and evening every month is recommended where lameness is an ongoing problem.
- Walk through all cattle/cow pens twice per week to identify animals with tender feet or who are off colour.
  - This enables you to act in time.
- Remember if an animal is lame in the two back feet she won't show obvious symptoms, except stiffness.
  - It is important to analyse others causes of lameness.
  - Poor farm roadways – walk all roadways, identify problem areas/sections and repair when weather suitable.
  - Poor concrete areas used by cow; identify and repair as soon as possible.
  - Identify problem cows and cull if they are consistent offenders. With cull cow prices being good, any cow with health issues should be culled.
  - You must educate whoever is bringing the cows to and from the parlour on the correct way to way to 'drive' cows – quads tend to add to the problem. Install a Batt-Latch so that cows can come in themselves (cost €450-€800) – a great gadget!
  - Genetics plays its part, therefore, breed replacements from cows and bulls with good health ratings.

MANAGE THE SILAGE PIT

- Silage pit management greatly influences the 'freshness' of silage being fed daily.
  - Remember air rots silage, so, you must manage the pit face to minimise air penetration.
  - Use a shear grab or saw to cut down or remove silage from the face, so that air penetration is minimised. This is particularly important if the Ph is poor.
  - Only disturb small areas of the pit at each feeding.
  - Do not leave layers of 'tossed' silage exposed to the air.
  - Prevent water running down the face of the silage pit by rolling back the polythene.

- But weigh down this polythene tightly on top and at the sides.
- Too many farmers pull down the polythene over the face of the pit. This is wrong, as it causes the glasshouse effect, which results in quicker rotting and fungal growth, nothing could be worse for silage intake, resulting in silage intakes being reduced by 1-3kg DM.

- Moorepark research has shown the following:
  - Cows spend six hours per day eating silage.
  - Cows have three feeding activity peaks: sunrise, feed placement, and feed push-up.
  - Cows will generally only spend 10 minutes queuing for silage – they then get fed up.
  - Severe wind and rain on exposed feeding area reduced silage intakes by 4kg DM per head per day.
  - Cows housed in groups of 24 eat 1-3kg DM per head per day more silage than those in groups of eight, because they eat faster, more frequently but spend less time eating.
  - Cows spend longer feeding during the day.
- The implications may be worth applying and remember thousands of euros are lost annually on poor silage pit management.
  - Beware of the risks when feeding mouldy silage.
  - It can cause abortion in pregnant cows; therefore, do not feed them with it.
  - It will cause serious chest problems for some farmers, therefore, always wear a face mask.

SERVICE THE MILKING MACHINE

- Your milking machine works on average 1,200+ hours per year (= 53 full days/year). Your car does half that work and how many times is it serviced?
- Most milking machines have one or two major faults. Your milking machine should be serviced twice per year. The consequences of not servicing it are very serious.
  - Slower milking.
  - Huge increase in clinical mastitis.
  - Huge increase in SCC levels.
  - More cull cows.
  - Reduced milk yield (6-10%).
- This month (December) and January are the ideal times to do it.
- Get it serviced by a qualified IMQCS technician. You must get a full written report from the technician, and you must act on the recommendations.
  - I must stress the importance of this because it is not being done as regularly as it should.

FEED MINERALS FROM 40 DAYS BEFORE CALVING

- Farmers starting to calve cows from February 1 will need to start feeding dry cow minerals from December 20 (40 days before calving).
  - It is a very cost-effective investment.
  - Late calving cows don't need minerals for another four to six weeks (save money).
- Dry cow minerals are necessary to prevent:
  - Retained placenta (cost = €400/case), due to selenium, vitamin E, or iodine deficiency.
  - Calf deaths (cost = €450+/calf), due to copper/iodine deficiency.
  - Milk fever (cost = €300/case) due to too much calcium.
  - Urine drinking due to sodium (salt) deficiency.
  - Reduced appetite due to several minerals and vitamins.

- Poor thrive due to several minerals and vitamins.
- Feed 100 grams per cow of pre-calving mineral.
  - Follow the suppliers instruction on the quantity to feed,
  - Spread half in morning and half in evening on top of the silage.
- Make sure your mineral mix meets your deficiency requirements on the farm:
  - Most silage is deficient in iodine, copper, sodium, selenium, cobalt, phosphorous, and magnesium.
  - More recently the major elements, particularly phosphorous, are deficient in silage.
  - A silage analysis can identify your problem minerals, and it costs €90, good value!

CHECK OUT YOUR GRAZING FACILITIES

- Not enough roadways?
- Paddocks too long and narrow?
- Mucky roadways?
- Mucky gaps?
- Not enough entrances to paddocks?
- Poorly maintained roadways?
- No water in paddocks. Water troughs very poorly sited?
- Big silage fields with no water trough in middle?
- Fences poorly maintained?
- Paddocks too small because of extra cows in herd?
- Without having these facilities optimised (near perfect) farmers will not be able to optimise grass utilisation in February, March, April or in the autumn.
  - The return on money spent on these facilities will be 15-20%.
  - Go out to your paddocks today and make a list of what you need to do.
  - The Farm Relief Service can do most of your maintenance work.
- Get a 25-inch map of your farm.
  - Work out with your adviser or mapping specialist where to put a roadway, the number of paddocks you need, two or more entrances to paddock, water troughs, etc.
- Poor road surfaces slow down the movement of cows to and from paddocks:
  - Time your cow's movement and compare with that of your neighbour or even their movement through various sections of the roadway.
- To get the most from silage fields, cow walks 1-2m wide should be strategically placed through big silage fields.
  - As silage fields must be grazed early and late in the year, cow walks are essential.

Bits and pieces

- Grass management: It is essential to do your final grass measurement of the year now. This will enable you to:
  - Establish accurately on PastureBase the amount of grass grown on the farm this year on the farm and on each individual paddock.
  - Establish the amount of grass grown on the farm over the winter, which is a key planning piece of information.
  - The following are the target closing covers (heaviest covers in brackets) for various stocking rates on the milking platform:
    - 2.5 cows/ha: 650-750kg DM (1,400-1,500).
    - 3.0 cows/ha: 750-850kg DM (1,500-1,600).
    - 3.5 cows/ha: 750-900kg DM (1,600-1,700).
  - Clover paddocks should have no more than 500-600 average farm scivers (AFC) on December 1.
  - Because of all the rain in November (animals housed) and the good growth rates, some farms have a lot higher covers that those listed. What to do if and when fields are dry for traffic?
    - Clover swards should definitely be grazed.
    - Graze off any excessively high covers as they will only rot over the winter.
    - Ballyhaise always leaves a few high covers, 1,700-1,900kg DM so as to have a 'bulk' of grass when 50-60% of cows are at grass.
  - If you need lime and the ground conditions are good, spread lime.
  - If you have ragwort, now is a good time to spray with MCPA or 24 D
- Use ICBF mastitis information and milk recording to cull off chronically infected cows. That is cows with two to three clinical cases during the year plus two to three SCC readings over 500,000.
- Feed (1-2kg meal) to replacement R1s to gain 0.7kg/day and reach 320+ kg on May 1.
- Have you your health and safety plan in order.
- Have you made a will or does it need to be updated.

Quote of the month

"In any farm business where the person at the helm has insufficient personal ability, which is not offset with top advice or a very good property or a very low debt or a very capable spouse, or a combination of these, then what you have is a family business that is heading for failure."

Season's greetings

To all my readers, I wish you a very happy Christmas.

FROM THE CAB

The electronically controlled rear hitch has a lifting capacity of 7,200kg and the rear PTO offers flexible configurations.

A rendering of the internal view of the cab. The SmartPilot+ joystick integrates ergonomic controls. These allow the operator to manage the engine, transmission, PTO, hydraulic system, front loader, and headland management functions.

LANDINI 6-125 RS – A REAL CONTENDER

ARGO TRACTORS' LANDINI 6-125 RS FEATURES INNOVATION, COMFORT, AND CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY, ACCORDING TO THE COMPANY, MAKING IT A REAL CONTENDER IN THE BEST UTILITY CATEGORY IN THE TRACTOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS. THIS MONTH, IT GETS OUR 'FROM THE CAB' TREATMENT

The Landini 6-125 RS is equipped with a 3.6L FPT F36 engine, four cylinders and 16 valves, turbo with wastegate, engine brake, and Hi-eSCR2 emissions treatment system complying with Stage V regulations. The fuel tank holds 175L, while the AdBlue tank has a capacity of 23L. The fully opening single-piece bonnet ensures quick access during routine maintenance and integrates a protective grille. Two transmission configurations are available: Robo-Four (16+16, 4 powershifts), and Robo-Six (24+24, 6 powershifts). Both feature Smart APS (Auto Power Shift) as well as an optional creeper and 13 speeds ranging from 4km/h and 12km/h. The front PTO operates at 1,000rpm, while the rear PTO offers flexible configurations (540/540E, 540/1,000, or extended combinations) including a smart-modulated multi-disc electrohydraulic clutch and remote controls on the rear fenders.

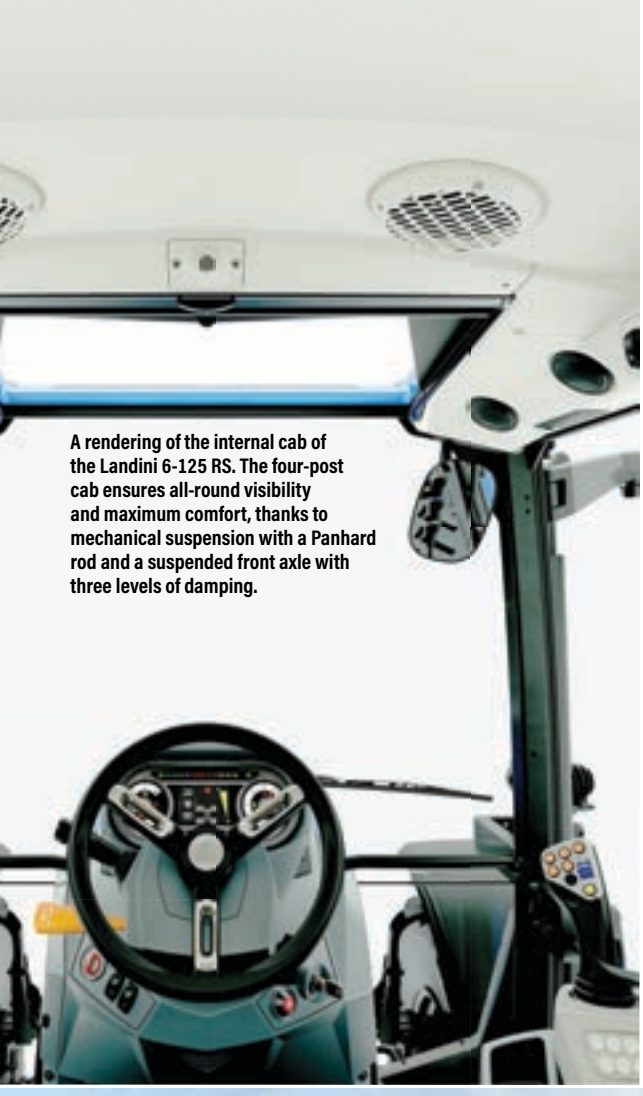
HYDRAULIC SYSTEM

The powerful and versatile hydraulic system delivers 120L/min, with a separate steering circuit at 47L/min. Furthermore, it accommodates up to five rear spool valves (3+2 EHS) plus three mid-mounted valves. The front hitch (category 2) has a lifting capacity of 2,250kg, while the electronically controlled rear hitch (category 3) offers 7,200kg. The system integrates seamlessly with the original L30 front loader (2,000kg capacity, maximum lift height of 3.87m).

KEY FEATURES

Key features of this new model include operator comfort and integrated technology, says Lemken.

The four-post cab ensures all-round visibility and maximum comfort, thanks to mechanical suspension with a Panhard rod and a suspended front axle with three levels



A rendering of the internal cab of the Landini 6-125 RS. The four-post cab ensures all-round visibility and maximum comfort, thanks to mechanical suspension with a Panhard rod and a suspended front axle with three levels of damping.

of damping. The SmartPilot+ joystick integrates ergonomic controls. These allow the operator to manage the engine, transmission, PTO, hydraulic system, front loader, and headland management functions (MyHMF). Other highlights are automatic climate control, FOPS panoramic roof, Alpine DAB+ radio with 7" touchscreen, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

PRECISION FARMING

Designed for precision farming, the Landini 6-125 RS comes ready for Isobus and GNNS-assisted satellite guidance (PSM ready), complete with an antenna and monitor kit. The Landini Fleet and Remote Diagnostics system features consumption analysis, real-time telemetry, geofencing, and remote diagnostics. This allows optimising uptime and service costs. In addition, Landini Farm Management supports prescription maps, traceability, and sustainability. "The Landini 6-125 RS is the product of intensive research and development that reflects Argo Tractors' commitment to combining technological innovation, reliability, and maximum working comfort," says Antonio Salvaterra, Argo Tractors marketing director. "We aim to support agricultural professionals with versatile, fully connected tractors that are capable of delivering high performance while keeping running costs down. This is in line with sustainable farming and an integrated, traceable agri-food supply chain."

NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

DRAWING A LINE

Well, readers, as we draw a line under 2025, I am very glad to see the back of it, from a personal perspective. When a family member gets very ill, it focuses the mind, and makes you re-evaluate what is really important. You put love before egos and 'pressing' matters that aren't so important after all. The kindness of neighbours and friends, I think is unique to rural Ireland, and is so appreciated. That is what is important. The stews and sandwiches dropped in, the friendly call and nod in the local shop, the genuine question of whether there is anything they can do – day or night – all point to the heartwarming fact that community spirit in rural Ireland is alive and well.

Living in rural Ireland is so different to city living. It is truly special and I will never think otherwise. There is still a 'door-is-always-on-the-latch' mentality. Neighbour knows neighbour. You unite on local issues. You follow the local GAA. You do the tractor run or you support it. In 10 years, our local tractor run has raised more than €365,000. This year, in July, we donated €54,000 to the oncology unit in St James's Hospital. Little did my family know that our relative's life would be saved in that unit a few short months later. And I also availed of that same hospital services just a few weeks ago. People in rural Ireland look after its rural people with a strong sense of love and kindness that is unrivalled.

Before I sign off for the year, we have to get down to a little bit of business! The machinery industry held well against a backdrop of uncertainty in both domestic and world markets in commodity prices. While in Europe, there was a drop of 28 per cent year on year in sales, Ireland remained steady though and tractor sales will be in line with 2024 – not a bad result.

Tillage 2025 was under pressure coming from an ideal planting season to a season of damning input costs and volatile prices for the finished crop. Yields varied and were up in some cases down in others. Winter barley was disappointing in some parts with yields of 3.3t/acre, while oilseed rape ran at around 2.3t/acre and winter wheat came in at 4.3t/acre. Spring barley sat at 3t/acre, and more, depending where you are. Straw ran at €250 per hectare for those who were in the incorporation scheme and 4x4 bales of straw averaged at €20, or more, per bale. All in all, this had led to a crisis in the tillage sector and will need serious addressing by the government going forward if we are to have native grain in our native drinks and food.

Elsewhere, beef prices are up, sheep are up, and the dairy industry is steady for now with price stabilisation anticipated in the new year. Agritechnica was a huge success, LAMMA will hit us in the first week of January, and the spring farm machinery shows will kick off in the new year also. The flagship FTMTA show is in November next year and I keep telling you to book your stands now as it is selling out fast.

Prior to that the Ploughing returns to Screggan in Tullamore, Co. Offaly! We have so much to look forward to in 2026!

Thank you all for reading my column, and to my advertisers, thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for your ongoing kindness and support for our publication. Without you, we wouldn't be here.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas and new year. Until then, farm wisely and farm safely.

The Solitair NT has been specially designed for use with conservation tillage systems.

MODERNISING PRECISION SEEDING

LEMKEN INTRODUCED TWO NEW PRODUCTS AT AGRITECHNICA THIS YEAR. HERE, WE HIGHLIGHT THOSE PRODUCTS – THE SOLITAIR NT SEED DRILL FOR CONSERVATION TILLAGE SYSTEMS, AND THE FAYA MF PRECISION SEED DRILL

First up, the new Faya MF is, according to the company, a classic precision seed drill that offers a single-row seeding solution to complement the tried-and-tested Azurit with Delta Row seeding. This new seed drill gives farmers and contractors who require both maximum placement precision and a high area output, a tailor-made solution for sowing row crops, says Lemken. The Faya MF is available now as a pre-series machine, with series production scheduled to begin in 2027. At the heart of this precision seed drill, which will be available in eight-, nine-, or 12-row versions, is a modular frame design with a working width of six metres and a two-section folding mechanism. Depending on the specific crop and the farm's production methods, this allows a variety of row and spacing combinations to be implemented, ranging from a narrow 45cm to a maximum of 80cm. The system also enables swift conversion between 12x50cm and 8x75cm. This increases the machine's capacity utilisation and makes it economically attractive for a wide range of crops, from beet to maize.

Lemken has expanded its precision-seeding portfolio with the new Faya MF.

HIGH-SPEED PRECISION

For seed singling, Lemken uses an overpressure system housed in robust die-cast aluminium with a wear-free sealing concept, which offers the advantage of reducing energy requirements. Overpressure reliably pushes the seeds towards the singling discs, while a scraper prevents seeds from doubling up. The implement offers three options for controlling the scraper: mechanical control per row, electrical control via the control terminal, and automatic control with grain sensor integration. Overall, this achieves a very high level of placement precision, even at forward speeds of up to 16km/h. The singling discs can be fitted easily and without tools.

The seeding coulter is particularly effective in terms of seed placement. The offset double disc coulter has a particularly small opening angle, a geometry that was originally developed for direct seeding. This reduces soil movement and compaction of the furrow walls, decreases the required tractive power, and ensures precise depth control for even field emergence. Lateral depth control wheels, which can optionally be fitted with scrapers, stabilise the system even further. The seeding coulter can be subjected to a coulter pressure of up to 350kg and can be controlled mechanically, hydraulically or automatically. The Faya MF also features practical 70L row hoppers for seeds, the option of under-root fertilisation via a combination unit, and the Lemken iQblue seed Isobus control system, including automatic width section control and an automatic tramline mechanism.

THE NEW SOLITAIR NT

The Solitair NT has been specially designed for use with conservation tillage systems and enables precise placement with minimal soil disturbance, according to Lemken. This machine offers farmers and contractors the tried-and-tested experience of the South African Equalizer coulter system, which has been successfully used on large farms around the world.

The centrepiece of the six-metre machine is the ProDisc single disc coulter: its 10-degree undercut and seven-degree inclination to the direction of travel ensure reliable soil penetration, low tractive power requirements, and precise sowing. The wide depth control rollers ensure a consistent seed depth, even in variable fields. Up to 340kg coulter pressure can be conveniently adjusted electro-hydraulically or optionally controlled automatically for homogeneous field emergence. The Solitair NT offers maximum flexibility in terms of seed placement options, Lemken says. Single-shot sowing for up to three components, as well as A-B sowing with a double hopper, allows simultaneous drilling and fertilising, the application of companion and undersown seeds, and the clean separation of different seed components. The optional 500L MultiHub further expands the range of application strategies available: an additional component can be applied either via the seeding coulters or a baffle plate – all with Isobus control via Lemken iQblue drill. Half-side control is possible with all of these methods in order to ensure resource-efficient work.

A row cleaner, which clears organic material out of the way directly in front of the seeding coulter, is a beneficial option for direct drilling to minimise hairpinning. The row cleaner can be moved into an integrated parking position without the need for tools. This makes it quick and easy to adapt to different seeding conditions.

UNDER PRESSURE

Tom Murphy
Professional Agricultural Contractors of Ireland

We are at that time of the year when the majority of agricultural contracting work is done and collecting outstanding monies is top of the to-do list. This is never an easy task. While most farmers settle their account within the agreed terms, there are always a few that drag out payments or those who are constantly behind. Even one or two outstanding invoices can have serious knock-on effects that can impact the contractor's ability to meet their financial payments on time. This is nothing new, but the net result is it can affect the contractor's credit rating both with his bank and finance houses on which they rely to keep their business going.

CARRYING THE BURDEN

I cannot think of any business that supplies high-cost services that does not require an upfront deposit and full payment on completion. Contractors carry a heavy financial burden, having to spend in advance on labour, fuel, insurance and repayments on highly expensive machinery, without which the majority of famers would not be in business. My plea to any farmer delaying payment is to recognise that, just like themselves, agricultural contractors are under fierce financial pressure. If they want to have their services next year and into the future, the solution is in their hands. Having said that I am the first to recognise that

contractors have often been their own worst enemy. From the very first days of agricultural contracting, I saw my grandparents paying the contractor as he left the farm. Later as the contractors got increasingly busy, they rushed from farm to farm and payment was left for another day.

THE CONTRACTOR WON'T WAIT

But times have changed and with escalating costs, prompt payment has become increasingly important. Sometimes this doesn't happen and the attitude can be, 'sure the contractor will wait'.

I will never break the confidence of any contractor seeking help from PAC Ireland, but I can say this year there has been an increase in those looking for advice on how to deal with large outstanding debts and negotiating with banks and financial institutions to reschedule loan repayments. I cannot stress enough how important it is, that at the earliest sign of not being able to meet a repayment and before defaulting, you make contact with your lender. PAC Ireland helps members to do this and assists in drawing up a sensible solution to a problem that can easily escalate and become unsolvable if a head-in-the-sand approach is taken.

DO NOT BECOME A STATISTIC

As we head into the festive season, it is a time to reflect on the safety of our contracting businesses and farms. Dark mornings and evenings, along with extreme weather conditions, bring specific dangers. Remain vigilant and be mindful of the safety of your workers, your family and yourself.

> **MY PLEA TO ANY FARMER DELAYING PAYMENT IS TO RECOGNISE THAT AGRICULTURAL CONTRACTORS ARE UNDER FIERCE FINANCIAL PRESSURE**

Do not become a statistic. Of course, we keep in our thoughts and prayers those who have lost a loved one, and those whose lives have been changed by serious injury.

Wishing you all a warm and peaceful Christmas.

AGRITECHNICA: AUTONOMY, ELECTRIC POWER, AND CHINESE GROWTH

MICHAEL MORONEY WAS AT AGRITECHNICA LAST MONTH AND HERE HE GIVES US A TASTE OF THE TRENDS AND A FLAVOUR OF THE INNOVATIONS ON SHOW

At a big farm-machinery show such as the world-leading Agritechnica, there are so many new machine introductions across so many exhibition halls, that it is not possible to do full justice to the creators of such a wide range of new machines. The best we can do is identify trends, and some were obvious from my recent visit to the Hannover Messe, the home of Agritechnica. The most obvious trends were autonomous tractors to cope with labour shortage on European farms, electrification of tractors and machines to lower emissions from agricultural production, and a noticeable increase in tractors and machinery manufactured in China.

AUTONOMY

More and more companies were showing autonomous tractors, and this included some mainstream producers such as Fendt, Kubota, New Holland and John Deere. The original AgXeed has been enhanced through field trials and don't be surprised if we see one in Ireland.

ELECTRIC

Electrification is also on the increase. It is becoming increasingly popular in the construction industry and some of that technology is now transferring to agriculture. Expect to see much more as improved battery technology evolves and there will be linkages with hydrogen power to deliver those zero emissions targets for European agriculture.

CHINESE GROWTH

Of the 2,849 exhibitors at this year's Agritechnica show, the majority were of German origin, followed by Dutch and Italian manufacturers, with Chinese-origin manufacturers in fourth place. Chinese origin machines are now more modern, have greater use of technology and they are present with conventional diesel power, hybrid drives and electric drive systems, coupled with the full array of driver control systems. It is clear that the success of Chinese-built cars in the European market has spurred the Chinese farm machinery to challenge the market strongly.

Here, we give you a mere flavour of the trends from Agritechnica 2025. It is a show that has attracted the interest of thousands of Irish farmers and contractors and the entire farm machinery industry. It is a venue where Ireland's farm machinery technology needs to be showcased strongly.

Norman Egar, Association of Farm and Forestry Contractors in Ireland (FCI); Hartmut Mathias, German Agricultural Contractors Association (BLU); Ann Gleeson Hanrahan, FCI; Klaus Pentzlin, European Confederation of Agricultural, Rural and Forestry Contractors (CEETTAR) president; Rainer Stompen, BLU president; John Hughes, FCI; and Richard White, FCI at the BLU stand at the Agritechnica Show in Hannover, Germany.

Mastek's Adam Quigley, design engineer, with Paul Quinn, managing director, pictured at the Mastek stand.

Fearghail Connolly and Mike Malone of Malone Farm Machinery at their stand at the recent Agritechnica Show held in Hannover, Germany.

Thomas McPartland and Richard Fitzpatrick of Slurryquip pictured at the Northern Ireland stand at Agritechnica.

Fendt brought its Xaver autonomous tractor to the Agritechnica and to add to the tractor's environmental credentials it was fitted out with a mechanical weeding machine.

The AgXeed is probably the original of the autonomous tractors and the company showcased its Amazone partnership at Agritechnica.

Fendt had the latest incarnation of the electric power e-Tractor on show with 100hp capacity and front and rear linkages, tailored to the smaller scale vegetable and wine grower across Europe.

Deutz-Fahr launched a new tractor range packed with advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) similar to those used in cars!

One of the bigger Chinese farm machinery displays was this Zoomlion brand that has recently bought the German farm machinery manufacturer, Rabe, and had this impressive Chinese-built combine harvester on view along with tractors and telehandlers.

Romanian-built tractors under the Universal brand were popular in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s and a new tractor brand called Targo emerged at Agritechnica with a 100hp tractor.

MATT O'KEEFFE MET WITH BEEKEEPER, IAN MERNAGH TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FAMILY BUSINESS, WHICH IS A HIVE OF HONEY-FOCUSED ACTIVITY IN CO. WEXFORD

BEEKEEPING BUSINESS

Wexford beekeeper, Ian Mernagh.

Based near Wexford town, the Mernagh family of Killiane Castle Country House and Farm, manage more than 70 bee hives. What began 10 years ago as a hobby with two hives, has blossomed into a local enterprise built on a huge interest in preserving and promoting Ireland's native dark bee, or honeybee as it is more commonly known. Ian explains the importance of bees to humanity's wellbeing – they are the planet's invisible workforce:

"Without bees, we wouldn't have food in 18 months. A third of the world's crops depend on them for pollination, and without their labour, our food systems would quickly collapse. Over centuries, honey and beeswax have sustained households, as sweetener, healer and tradeable commodity."

KEEPING IT NATURAL

Today, in Killiane Castle farm, that heritage continues. The Mernaghs have expanded their apiary activities to develop sustainable skincare products, blending honey and beeswax with hand-foraged Irish botanicals such as rosehips and plantain to create lip balms, hand salves and moisturisers. Ian continues: "We're bringing back recipes used generations ago; remedies that have simply been forgotten."

Irish plantain, Ian explains, was once called Slánlús, the 'goodbye plant' for its healing qualities. Rural people would chew its leaves and place them on cuts to aid healing. While plantain is ordinarily described as a weed plant, found widely in our gardens and on roadside verges, lately it has become an integral element of multi-species swards for grazing. By reintroducing traditional ingredients into his honey-based products, Ian aims to restore the link between natural Irish remedies and modern wellness products. Provenance is central to the products Ian and his family have developed:

"Every product is made entirely with Irish ingredients. There are no imported almond, coconut, or palm oils. The philosophy is simple: keep it local, keep it natural."

A DELICATE BALANCE

Running 70 hives might sound almost industrial, but sustainability guides every decision, Ian says: "The colonies are spread across south Wexford, never more than a dozen hives to a site. Overcrowding would force honeybees to compete with solitary bees and bumblebees, something we're determined to avoid. Local farmers, many of whose fathers and grandfathers once kept bees, gladly host hives on their land. There is another, equally important aspect to hosting beehives, as they assist in pollinating crops. So, it's a practical as well as a nostalgic involvement."

LOCAL HONEY FOR LOCAL HEALTH

The belief that local honey eases allergies, particularly for hay fever sufferers, is one Ian supports. The key, he explains, is pollen: "Honey made from the same plants that cause irritation helps the body adapt naturally. But local must mean truly local. Wexford honey suits Wexford noses while Mayo's heather honey works best for Mayo."

> **WITHOUT BEES, WE WOULDN'T HAVE FOOD IN 18 MONTHS**

Ian's honey also attracts an unusual fan base in the horse industry: "Trainers and owners buy pure honey to treat cuts and sores, and it works just as well for people". The Wexford beekeeper emphasises purity above all: "There's plenty of adulterated honey on shelves," he warns. "But real honey heals."

ALL ABOUT NECTAR

Ian presents a small metal tin, reminiscent of an old-style salve or snuff box, filled with a smooth blend of honey and beeswax. It is one of the products in the family's All about Nectar skincare range. But it truly feels like this is much more than skincare with rosehips, native herbs, and honey slowly infused into locally produced rapeseed oil, creating a rich, natural balm. This, and all the products in the All about Nectar range embody the business's circular ethos, he explains: "Local ingredients, minimal imports, and respect for the environment".

Ian provides the science behind the products: "The ingredients have been recognised for generations for their natural healing attributes. Honey has antibacterial qualities and is deeply moisturising. Beeswax forms a natural protective barrier. Rosehips are packed with antioxidants and vitamin C and plantain, as I explained, has traditionally been used for cuts and inflammation."

SAVING THE IRISH HONEYBEE

Beyond the jars and balms, Ian has a greater mission, that of protecting Ireland's native Irish honeybee (Apis mellifera mellifera). Ireland is the last stronghold in Western Europe for this hardy subspecies, perfectly adapted to the Irish climate. The Irish bee has challenges, however, Ian warns: "Imported foreign queens threaten to dilute its genetics. I breed bees myself and I have noticed that up to a third of new queens show signs of hybridisation. These mixed strains often produce unpredictable offspring and must be removed to protect the native line. Every foreign queen imported means we lose a bit of what makes the Irish bee unique."

Hybridisation, he explains, can increase aggression in colonies. Contrary to popular belief, Irish bees aren't inherently aggressive, with temperament depending on selective breeding. Through years of careful queen selection, Ian has built calm, resilient colonies well-suited to Ireland's conditions.

Each spring, Ian selects his best queens and breeds from them to create new colonies. These are sold to beginners and to experienced beekeepers hoping to replace aggressive bees with gentler strains.

He's also exploring artificial insemination (AI), a high-tech solution that would let him control breeding more precisely. Normally, a virgin queen mates with a dozen drones during flight, often from unknown hives, described by Ian as 'a genetic lottery'. He continues: "AI would guarantee pairings with known native Irish males, preserving the bloodline. Using AI to selectively breed beelines is already being practised across Europe and we believe it has an important role to play in Ireland, both in boosting the population and resilience of our native bee and in improving positive traits in our bee colonies including temperament and health."

CONSERVATION

This research aligns with wider conservation efforts involving Teagasc and University of Galway, where scientists such as Dr Grace McCormack are working to safeguard Ireland's native bee. Ian outlines the reasons why selectively breeding bees in general, and our native bee, in particular, is so important: "We can ensure that our bees are better adapted to Ireland's weather, are more disease resistant, and that our bees can continue to contribute to pollination, biodiversity and our food security."

The All about Nectar product range has expanded to include pure honey, balms and salves, candles, and even mint honey chocolates. The business website allows people to view the products and purchase individual items as well as various hamper selections of their own choosing. There really is a buzz about this business!

A WORD IN YOUR EAR

MATT O'KEEFFE
EDITOR

LIVING IN THE REAL WORLD IS UNCOMFORTABLE

Our long-standing neutrality policy is self-serving. There is nothing negative in that. All countries are self-serving in their actions, whether in economic, defensive, or other facets of national life or policy. Ireland's neutrality, however, is unique as we want to have it every way. There is an expectation that the UK or the European Union or the US will leap to our defence if we are militarily or infrastructurally attacked. Our defence spending is among the lowest in the EU, so our ability to defend ourselves is minimal. Other practitioners of neutrality tend to take defence more seriously, at considerable cost. Switzerland, pre-eminent among European neutral countries, invests 0.76 per cent of its GDP on military capability, more than double our spend. An observation of particular importance is that Ireland is a member of the European Union and Switzerland is not. We could reasonably be accused of benefitting from EU membership while being unwilling to devote sufficient resources towards the defence of the Union. Only the most ill-informed would say that the EU is not under threat, whether from a militant Russia, terrorism or cyber or infrastructure attacks. Piggybacking on other nations' costly investment in defence is largely ignored by those who place our neutral stance on a pedestal at the very top of the high moral ground.

NUCLEAR STANCE

This virtue signalling bears comparison with our stance on nuclear power generation. It is banned by legal statute. That doesn't, however, prevent us from importing UK-produced nuclear energy. This contradiction will become even more obvious when the proposed underwater electricity connection to the nuclear-rich French energy system is completed. Meanwhile, as those electrical and telecommunications connectors to the UK, Continental Europe or the Trans-Atlantic interconnectors to North America come under increasing risk of disruption, we will have to rely almost entirely on the goodwill of others. Calling this freeloading is an accurate if distasteful description of our current position. It will not change, given the reluctance of our political leaders to show much leadership on the matter, bar some tentative efforts to dismantle one of the three locks preventing us from even fully engaging in peacekeeping roles across the world.

SPEAKING OUT

Dan Mulhall, who held Irish ambassadorial roles in Germany, UK, US and Malaysia, during his 40-year diplomatic career, was guest speaker at the Guild of Agricultural Journalist of Ireland's biennial Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture last month. Released from diplomatic niceties in his retirement from the Irish diplomatic service, Dan was forthright in his questioning of the outspoken condemnations, most notably in relation to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, we regularly hear from our government and opposition representatives. Apart from deviating from the accepted norms of neutral countries, the provocative utterances of almost every public representative across the political spectrum, put our selfish economic and political interests at risk. Yes, of course, there is a case to be made for speaking out against injustice and worse. There is also the reality that we have no power to change the actions of far more powerful global forces. Jeopardising our best interests on the basis that it is the 'right thing to do' is not a logical stance for a virtually defenceless country that relies on the goodwill of others for our economic wellbeing. Pain and suffering should always be called out whether it impacts our economic wellbeing or not. Fine, except, if your own job in Intel or Pfizer is jeopardised, or the value of your produce is reduced, such virtue-signalling becomes a personal concern, not an abstract concept. We must live in the real world, not the one we would like it to be.

> IRELAND'S NEUTRALITY, HOWEVER, IS UNIQUE AS WE WANT TO HAVE IT EVERY WAY

Reminder

Don't forget to apply for your foal passport

Apply by 31st December for 2025 Foals
Yearling Prices Apply Thereafter

HORSE SPORT IRELAND

horse source

www.horsesportireland.ie

Sick of Calf Scour?

BOVILIS® Cryptium®

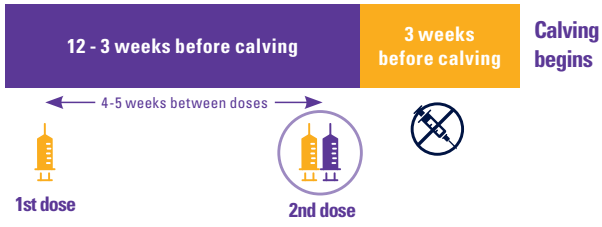
BOVILIS® Rotavec® Corona

Protect your calves against the most common causes of calf scour[1]

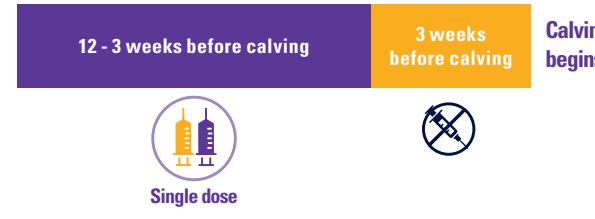
✓ *C. parvum* ✓ Rotavirus ✓ Coronavirus ✓ *E. coli*

VACCINATION PROTOCOL

PRIMARY COURSE



BOOSTER



Vaccine key: **Bovilis® Cryptium®**, 2ml, SC* **Bovilis® Rotavec® Corona**, 2ml, SC* or IM**

Bovilis Cryptium & Bovilis Rotavec Corona can be given at the same time, at different injection sites

SPEAK TO YOUR VET TODAY

*SC: Subcutaneous administration **IM: Intramuscular administration

Bovilis® Cryptium® contains inactivated *Cryptosporidium parvum* Gp40 antigen. Legal Categories: ROI **POM** NI **POM-V**

Bovilis® Rotavec® Corona contains inactivated Rotavirus and Coronavirus and *E. coli* K99 F5 and F41 antigens. Legal Categories: ROI **POM** NI **POM-VPS**

Withdrawal periods: Zero days.

1. All-Island Animal Disease Surveillance Report, 2023. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine of Ireland, Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute and Animal Health Ireland.

MSD Animal Health Ireland - Livestock

MSD Animal Health Ireland @msd_ah

For more information visit bovilis.ie

Use medicines responsibly.

Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone.
For further information see SPC, contact prescriber or MSD Animal Health,
Red Oak North, South County Business Park, Leopardstown, Dublin 18, Ireland.
Tel: +353(0)1 2970220. Email: vet-support.ie@msd.com
Web: www.msd-animal-health.ie

MSD Animal Health

IE-BOV-251000012. OCT 2025