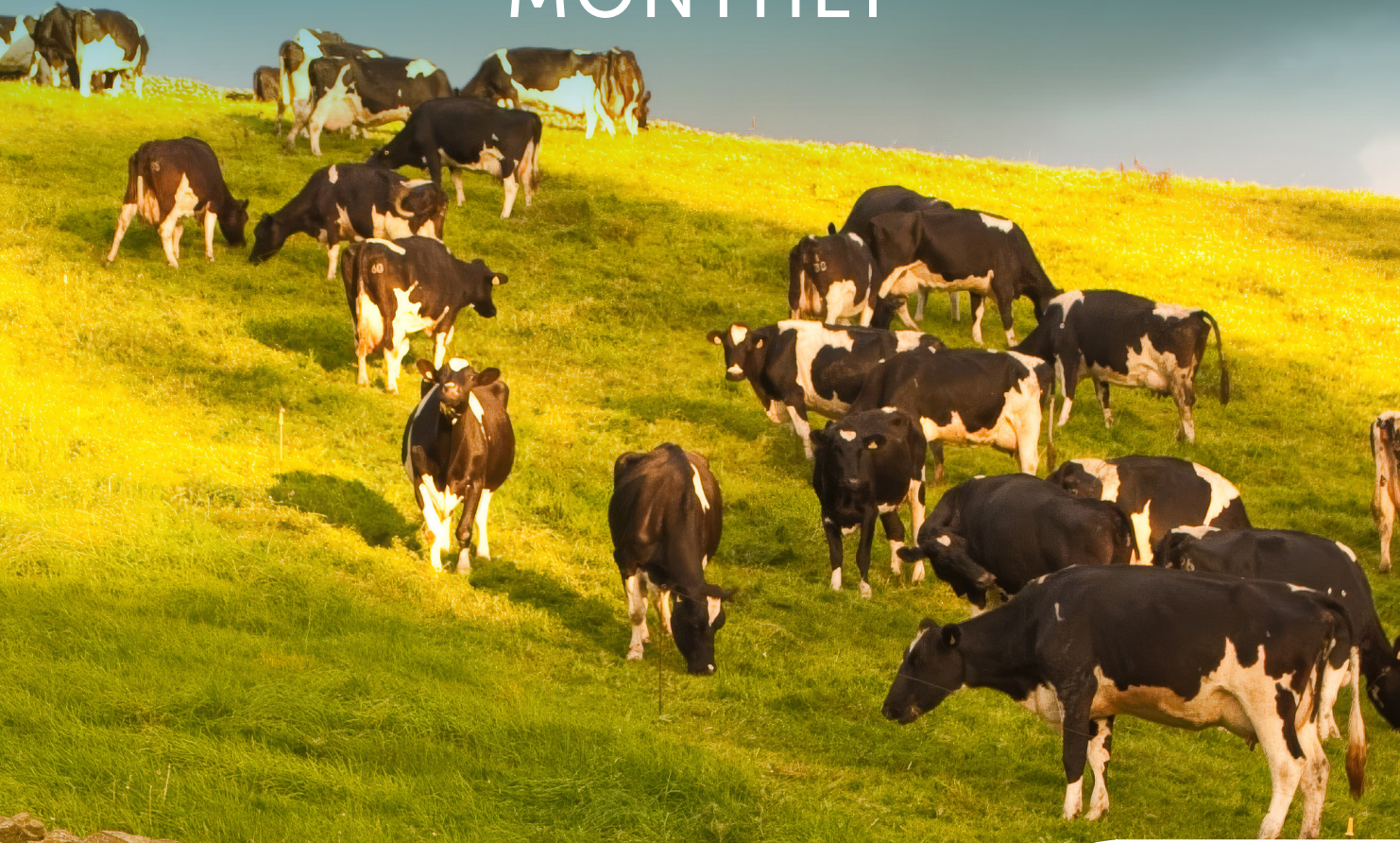


IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY



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DAIRY**

BIG INTERVIEW

AGRICULTURE MINISTER,
MARTIN HEYDON

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APRIL 2026

EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

FEED, FERTILISER, AND FUEL CHALLENGES

The three Fs have come centre stage again this year. As we enter the second quarter of 2026, there has not been such uncertainty since the Covid-19 pandemic. We have already seen higher feed costs this year, with an extended winter period on most farms. Fertiliser prices are up on foot of the Middle East wars and may have risen further by the time this editorial is read. In any case, the production and supply of fertiliser have already been disrupted and will take months to settle, even amid a peace deal emerging between the US/Israel and Iran. That means increased prices are at least baked in for the period when fertiliser use is maximised on Irish farms. Without wishing to be alarmist, the possibility of fertiliser scarcity is another imponderable. As ever, we are at the end of a long and unreliable supply chain for whatever fertiliser stocks are available. Fuel cost increases would also take time to soften in the event of peace breaking out. Apart from the infrastructural damage already done to oil and gas refining facilities, the shipping disruption will mean that every country will be jockeying for available supplies. Looked at globally, China can outbid India for whatever resources it needs to grow food and keep its economy functioning. Ireland is in a vulnerable position with little purchasing power or supply resilience. Every sector is feeling the brunt of input cost increases. Irish electricity costs were already among the highest in Europe and may now be set to increase substantially. The primary producer is, as ever, in the front line. Despite assurances that renewable energy would provide some supply certainty and cost benefits, the reality is quite the opposite. In summary, Irish food producers are extraordinarily vulnerable to the repercussions of the latest US intervention in the Middle East.

Bluetongue disease is another uncertain challenge, the likelihood being that it is well entrenched in the Irish environment and will add a semi-permanent cost to livestock production, with vaccination only mitigating potentially devastating consequences for our livestock.

Is it any wonder that increasing numbers of Irish landowners are pondering their options? Weekly, we see new proposals for solar farms and other renewable energy infrastructure and supply developments. The potential for locked-in contracts with annualised inflation-linked lease increases stretching out several decades cannot be easily dismissed.

It should be acknowledged that the world would seem to be in a more precarious position with regard to food security than many would have predicted at the start of 2026. Small surpluses across several food products including grain and milk have lulled consumers into a mindset that food will always be cheap and available in abundance. Despite protestations of a cost-of-living crisis in relation to food, the reality is that the average consumer spends little more than one tenth of their income on food. That can hardly be regarded as an excessive strain on a household budget for the mainstay of their vital living requirements.

Beef supplies are supposedly scarce, yet this year's return to finishers bears no resemblance to their production costs or the price of cattle purchased last autumn. Forever and a day, food producers have been assured that prices would eventually rise to reflect the cost of production and a viable return to the producer commensurate with their labour, capital and input costs. With a few occasions of exception, that has not been consistently the case. Should we be optimistic that change is finally coming?

CONTENTS

- 4 **Upfront**
- 6 **News**
- 10 **Big Interview: Martin Heydon**
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- 12 **Farm Safety**
FBD Risk Manager, Ciaran Roche
- 14 **Agri-economics**
Economist, Ciaran Fitzgerald
- 16 **What Does the Vet Say?**
Latest news in the veterinary and animal health world
- 18 **Feature: Bioeconomy Policy**
What can we learn from other EU countries?
- 36 **Management Hints**
- 40 **Machinery**
- 51 **ICMSA**
President, Denis Drennan
- 52 **Rural Life**
Collaboration and Community -
Waterford Festival of Food
- 54 **A Word in Your Ear**
Editor, Matt O'Keeffe

21 FOCUS - DAIRY

- 22 **A Producer's Perspective**
- 24 **Silage Quality in Times of Uncertain Weather**
- 26 **Dairy Technology - Discerning the Hype from the Hot Air**
- 30 **Driving Genetic Gain in Irish Dairy Herds**
- 34 **Global Dairy Outlook**



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NATIONAL CULTIVATE WEEK

As farmers know, April is one of the busiest months of the year. It's also a time when important decisions are made about farm business strategies and investments. We – and I include the general public as well as farmers – do too little shopping around for goods and services. Loyalty should be a two-way street. The credit unions, to their credit (couldn't resist), have expanded their financial offerings significantly

to farmers in recent years through their Cultivate programme. According to Cultivate's own lending data, loan applications for last April accounted for one in 10 applications across the year. With bank branches closing across rural Ireland, credit unions have stepped up their presence in the farm loan market. National Cultivate Week runs from April 20-26 and participating credit unions will be hosting events in their branches

throughout that week. What makes Cultivate different, the credit unions say, is that every lending decision is made locally. Farmers can borrow up to €100,000 unsecured for up to 10 years, or €300,000 secured, for up to 30 years. At a time when BOI and AIB command such market presence and PTSB is on the point of being sold to an international buyer, the competition in the lending market is more welcome than ever.



BEEF PRICE DISCONNECT

Cattle numbers in Ireland, Europe, and globally, are reduced. Demand for steak is down as consumers cut their spend, either in the supermarket or the restaurant. Prices for lesser cuts, as well as mince, are holding reasonably firm. On the other hand, sheep and lamb prices are at record levels and, again, supply is tight with the Irish flock greatly reduced. The big question is why beef price returns to finishers have collapsed. Even allowing for consumer restraint, the diminished supply should be counteracting price reductions to farmer suppliers of beef. The reality is quite different. Finishers are realising large losses from their investments in expensive cattle last autumn. We are assured that beef processors are returning what the market can justify. Without any financial transparency, given that Irish meat processors are privately owned, there is no way of confirming that, unless the Agri Regulator's powers are greatly enhanced. Ultimately, beef finishers cannot operate in a loss-making situation indefinitely. Something has to give, especially as Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments continue to be eroded through flattening and a likely lower CAP Budget in the years ahead. Calf, weanling, and store cattle prices are only where they need to be to deliver a return to producers, so price reductions at mart-side should not be an easy option. Right now, the disconnect between buying cattle for finishing and the end price is nowhere near being resolved.



FARM ACCIDENTS

We continuously highlight the need for greater awareness around farm safety. Accident and fatality numbers have increased since the start of the year, compared to the same period last year. That is the unfortunate fact. In his column this month, Noel Dunne digresses from his machinery brief to talk about his own experience of an accident. His outcome was positive, but it could so easily have been fatal. Even in the most mundane farm-related tasks, the risk of death

and serious injury is always there. We hear of the lucky escapes. We also hear of the heart-rending loss of life that is all too common on our farms. There are no easy solutions, but constant vigilance is required. Either we concentrate harder on being aware of, and mitigating, the risks involved in our farming activities or we will be regulated out of business by those bodies with responsibility for improving our dismal farm accident record.

A SAFE BET

Michael O'Leary's annual Gigginstown House Angus sale should allow the Ryanair boss, if he's that way inclined, to have sufficient funds to bet on a few of his horses at the Punchestown racing festival a little over a week later. With 25 purebred bulls and 20 heifers up for sale at a time when young stock, pedigree or not, are fetching good prices, the event should be a success. There is unlikely to be any 'low-flying prices' on offer in contrast to the normal Ryanair motto, when the gavel falls on O'Leary's 2026 crop of Angus cattle.

Mention of Punchestown brings to mind the fact that many farmers will, I hope, take the spring opportunity of a day or two off from worries of high fertiliser and fuel prices to watch top class horseracing, even if their ability to gamble a few euros this year will be greatly diminished. Perhaps the Harvest Racing Festival at Listowel in the autumn will have more positive vibes.



GLOBAL FOOD INSECURITY

Is it an exaggeration to suggest that we are on the cusp of famine? Not, perhaps, in Ireland or western Europe, but recent disruptions to the movement of gas through the Strait of Hormuz will have repercussions, including impacting the production of fertiliser, for months ahead, even if peace breaks out in the immediate future. Up to 40 per cent of global gas supply has been disrupted. Gas extraction and refining facilities, damaged in the conflict, will take months or longer to repair and renew. Meanwhile, the main planting season across the Northern Hemisphere is upon us. India and China with a total population of two and a half billion people are particularly vulnerable to food shortages. Any decline in fertiliser availability will impact crop yields. Substitution of alternative food products is neither feasible nor practical, in many instances, especially in those populations where grains are the staple diet. Sadly, there doesn't seem to be any realisation among those who initiated this conflict of the potential long-term consequences for millions of people across the planet.

NUFFIELD TRIENNIAL NEXT MONTH

Grainne Dwyer (pictured) heads up the organising committee of the Nuffield International Triennial to be held in Ireland across nine days in May. With visits including 30 farms, research and agri-business facilities, as well as cultural venues across the entire island, the tour includes an Agri Summit Conference at the Killenard Hotel on May 22, which has a list of impressive speakers from home and abroad. The event, which hundreds of international and Irish scholars will attend, offers a showcase of all that is positive about Irish agriculture. The triennial was last hosted in Ireland back in 2008.



2026's wet start has refocused the mind...

Colin Pollock,
Technical Support Manager, Agritech

After an incredibly wet spring, with grazing being more off than on during March, the significance of having a reserve of available, high quality silage in yards has fallen sharply into focus.

For many this spring, milk protein percentages have proven a struggle, particularly where average quality silage has made up a large proportion of the diet. Youngstock turnout was delayed and we are now trying to make up ground to ensure breeding target weights are met. Unfortunately these issues has led to an increased meal bill where silage quality was poor.

Remember, grass silage makes up approximately one quarter of the annual feed budget on the average Irish dairy farm and is even greater in beef situations.

Quality > Quantity

At one point, every farm will have 80% DMD grass available to them in the field. However, the decision is often made too late regarding the cutting date.

Where silage stocks are depleted, the temptation to chase bulk may creep in. However, it is well proven that high quality silage allows for flexibility in feed plans. Earlier cutting also allows for quicker and earlier regrowths for subsequent cuts, leading to increased annual yield per hectare.

Once seed heads appear typically by late May, DMD will be around 70% at most, and will drop by 1% DMD every two to three days after that.

With the renewed value now placed on our main home grown forage, achieving a good fermentation to preserve it is critical. The use of a silage additive has long been proven to improve fermentation, lending to less waste/losses.

Agritech's GrasZyme Sugarboost is proven to: Increase ADG by 110g/head/day in beef situations, Increase Dry Matter intakes by 0.4 kg/head/day and milk protein percentages by 0.09% - while also reducing fermentation losses by 6.1% (equating to 30t on a 500t pit).

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InTouch

CATHAL BOHANE
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

GETTING THE BEST START AT BREEDING

The cycle begins all over again this month (April). No sooner have we finished calving cows than we are looking at putting them back in calf again. Now is the time to reflect on your calving period and how breeding went last year. While serving cows is a month away on many farms, we have entered the pre-season and what we do now will get us off to the best possible start, come breeding.

When it comes to fertility, getting your head around all the parameters involved can be a complicated task. Split calving and cross-breeding decisions have been made to work around fertility issues. Put simply, fertility is all about pregnancy rate, which is submission rate multiplied by conception rate.

Submission rate, measured over a three-week period, refers to the percentage of cows eligible for breeding, that are in heat, and that have been served. The target here is >90 per cent. Conception rate reflects how many of those services result in a confirmed pregnancy. There is a target of 65 per cent conception rate to first and second service. It is important to calculate these figures for your farm.

1. How many cows did you serve in the first three weeks as a percentage of cows that are greater than six weeks calved (submission rate)?
2. How many of those cows held in the first three weeks – conception to first service – and in the second three-week period – conception to second service?

To hit the targets above you will end up with 85 per cent of cows in calf and calving in a six-week period. As you can imagine, small weaknesses in either figure can quickly become bigger losses overall. Submission rate can slip due to missed heats, poor tail paint use, or inadequate observation. Get the basics right by having a protocol for visual observation using paint/aids, rising to wearable technologies. Management can also cause issues around cow flow and comfort. Conception rate can drop due to nutrition (NEB, minerals), cow and uterine health, and quality of, and timing of, the service.

Pre-breeding checks in the month of April are the most cost-effective ways to protect pregnancy rate. Try to have all cows confirmed to be cycling at the beginning of May. Veterinary intervention might be needed for the final few, especially cows that might have had issues around calving that would affect their energy balance and uterine conditions. Also, it gives you an opportunity to reflect on cows you don't want to breed or get replacement from if they have any negative breeding characteristics.

Ultimately, strong fertility performance is not about good luck. It is about having a protocol/method and removing the bottlenecks in the system to improve the chances of cows going in calf.

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PRODUCT NEWS

TACKLING PROBLEM WEEDS

Irish grassland farmers can tackle problem weeds with confidence this season thanks to Casper, a broad-spectrum herbicide from Syngenta. Designed for flexibility and reliability, it provides effective control of a wide range of annual and perennial broad-leaved weeds in both newly sown leys and established grassland. Launched to the Irish market in 2025, Casper contains two active ingredients – prosulfuron (50g/L) and dicamba (500g/L). Together, they deliver an exceptional balance of weed control and crop safety, according to a statement from Syngenta.

Casper supports higher yielding, better-quality pastures by eliminating competitive weeds. The product offers control of a broad weed spectrum, including difficult perennial species such as broad-leaved dock, curled dock, spear thistle, buttercups and nettles. An extended application window from April through to October allows farmers to optimise spraying around grazing and cutting schedules, targeting weeds at their most susceptible growth stages.

Casper is recommended for use on both newly sown and established grassland. It is not clover-safe. On newly sown leys, it targets annual broad-leaved weeds including black nightshade, chickweed, field bindweed, fat hen, fumitory, groundsel, scarlet pimpernel, shepherd's purse, small nettles and thistles, with moderate control of cleavers and poppy. On established leys, it targets key problematic weeds including docks, thistles and nettles. By removing competitive weeds, it helps increase grass production, improve pasture nutritional value and enhance palatability for livestock.

INDUSTRY NEWS

MSD ANIMAL HEALTH ENHANCES TECH SUPPORT FOR IRISH FARMERS

MSD Animal Health has expanded its technical and customer success team to support Irish farmers using SenseHub monitoring technology.

A statement from the company explained that the team focuses on helping farmers maximise the value of their technology investment long after installation, while also raising awareness of the additional solutions available within the SenseHub Ecosystem.

The company explained that this includes a range of technologies designed to support farmers in achieving their herd-performance goals – no matter what the herd size or goals. At the core of this initiative is a simple principle: the relationship with the farmer does not end when the system is installed. From the moment a SenseHub system goes live on a farm, the customer success team provides ongoing support, training and troubleshooting to ensure farmers are confident using the technology and ensure they are getting the most out of their SenseHub system.

Two new members have recently joined the team. Mark Maloney is now technical and customer success specialist for the southeast, providing on-the-ground support to farmers and helping them integrate SenseHub technology into daily herd management. Donal Murphy takes up the role of tier-one support, where he will manage first-line queries and ensure farmers receive timely and practical solutions when they need them.

Farmers who adopt SenseHub technology also gain access to the SenseHub Community, a 24/7 support network connecting users with expertise and advice. This is complemented by both online and in-person training, with a series of training sessions planned later this month.

The expansion of the customer success team reflects a broader shift in livestock technology, where companies are increasingly measured not only by the products they sell, but by the results farmers achieve using them, the company said.

Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) and other area-based schemes

In-person Farmer Clinics

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will host a series of 16 in-person Farmer Clinics to assist farmers in making their applications online for the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) and other area-based schemes.

Farmer only clinics will be supported by Department staff and will be particularly useful for farmers who do not have an FAS approved advisor to assist them with their application. No registration required.

Farmers planning to attend the clinics must bring details of their MyAgFood.ie account and the mobile phone used for login, and details of herd number, PPSN etc to verify their identity.

Time: 10am – 4.30pm

Date	Time	Venue
Wednesday 1st April	10am – 4.30pm	The Woodstock Hotel, Ennis, Co. Clare
Thursday 2nd April	10am – 4.30pm	Castle Hotel, Macroom, Co. Cork
Tuesday 7th April	10am – 4.30pm	Carraig Hotel in Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary
Wednesday 8th April	10am – 4.30pm	The Shearwater Hotel, Ballinasloe Co. Galway
Thursday 9th April	10am – 4.30pm	Great National Hotel, Ballina, Co. Mayo
Tuesday 14th April	10am – 4.30pm	Kilmore Hotel, Cavan, Co. Cavan
Wednesday 15th April	10am – 4.30pm	Jackson Hotel, Ballybofey, County Donegal
Thursday 16th April	10am – 4.30pm	The Rose Hotel, Tralee, Co. Kerry
Tuesday 21st April	10am – 4.30pm	Knightsbrook Hotel, Trim, Co. Meath
Wednesday 22nd April	10am – 4.30pm	Woodlands Hotel, Adare, Co. Limerick
Tuesday 28th April	10am – 4.30pm	The Landmark Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim
Wednesday 29th April	10am – 4.30pm	The Shirley Arms Hotel, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan
Thursday 30th April	10am – 4.30pm	Ashdown Park Hotel, Gorey, Wexford
Tuesday 5th May	10am – 4.30pm	Ard Ri House Hotel, Tuam, Co. Galway
Wednesday 6th May	10am – 4.30pm	Firgrove Hotel, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork
Thursday 7th May	10am – 4.30pm	Randles Hotel, Killarney, Co. Kerry

For more information and full list of remaining dates and nationwide locations, visit www.gov.ie/agriculture/events



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Food and the Marine

FBD LAUNCHES QUAD-SAFETY COMPETITION

FBD Insurance has launched a new nationwide safety competition, giving quad-bike operators the chance to win a high-quality helmet. The four-week 'Heads Up!' campaign encourages farmers and quad-bike users to showcase their everyday safety practices by sharing photos or videos demonstrating safe quad-bike use, from wearing helmets to carrying out regular maintenance, using the hashtag #FBDHeadsUp. The competition is running now until April 19. Each week, 10 winners will be selected through a draw, with featured entries highlighted across FBD's social media channels.

Ciaran Roche, FBD Insurance risk manager said: "Quad bikes are a vital part of farm life, but they

also present very real risks. Through the 'Heads Up!' campaign, we want to support farmers in taking straightforward, effective steps that make a real difference to their safety. This initiative reflects our ongoing commitment to farm safety by encouraging farmers to share their own experiences and lead by example within their communities."

The campaign will be promoted across FBD's social media and digital platforms, alongside press ad placements in agriculture publications, throughout the busy spring farming season, ensuring strong visibility and engagement with rural audiences. The competition closes at midnight on Sunday, April 19.

NEW APPOINTMENT AT AGRITECH

Agritech has appointed Dr David Lawrence to head of ruminant nutrition at Agritech. From Tullow, Co. Carlow, David completed a Bachelor of Agricultural Science Degree in Animal and Crop Production at University College Dublin. Following this, David completed his PhD with University College Dublin and Teagasc, based at Moorepark.

During David's PhD, he examined feed-to-yield systems and aspects of grassland management which was centered on improving production techniques for autumn-calving dairy herds.

Dr Lawrence joins Agritech from Brett Brothers, in Callan, Co. Kilkenny where he worked as a ruminant support specialist for over 11 years, delivering tailored advice to dairy beef and sheep farms across the southeast.

Commenting on his recent appointment to Agritech, David explained how his approach to supporting farmers has always been to consider each farm scenario individually: "I look at the farm, the farmer and the outcome needed on an individual farm basis to provide a solution that is rewarding for the farm business and those involved.

"I focus on optimising animal performance and pasture production to achieve this. I very much look forward to bringing solutions to Agritech's broad client base."

David actively farms at home with his brother, where they manage a herd of suckler cows, a flock of ewes and some dry stock. "As someone who has spent their life in agriculture and finds it an immense privilege to work with livestock, farmers and the wider industry as a career, I am excited about my new position at Agritech," he said.

Welcoming the appointment, Agritech's managing director, Brian O'Slatarra said: "David's appointment further adds to the immense expertise that now stands with the Agritech brand, and the science-based solutions we bring to farmers. "His nationwide role will mean Agritech can provide technical support and knowledge to the entire Agritech sales team and their customers."

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Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

When I arrived in Brussels in late 2022, I attended as many networking events as I could to get to know people and how the EU machine works. What struck me from meeting different people at these events was the impact Phil Hogan made during his tenure as a commissioner for agriculture and then trade. Once people heard I was Irish, they'd ask among other things if I knew Phil Hogan. I remember one high-profile lobbyist in the dairy sector grabbing me by the lapels one evening and saying, animatedly: "What did you guys do to Phil Hogan?" They were, of course, referring to 'Golfgate' and the pressure he came under to resign from his role in Europe.

While it may not be appreciated or known back in Ireland, Hogan still commands a lot of respect around Brussels. He has left an indelible footprint from his six years in the Commission. I have seen it firsthand; people go out of their way to greet him when he is in town. Everyone in agriculture and trade circles in Brussels knows him. So it is no surprise, really, that he has been backed by the Irish government to run for the role as director general of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization based in Rome.

The next steps between now and the end of May is for him to gather up as much support from across Europe to fend off other European candidates, as the talk in Brussels is that the EU would prefer to have just one strong agreed candidate when the official applications open in June or July. It has been 50 years since the FAO had a director general from a European country. At present, Hogan is in a race for the EU's approval with two others: the current FAO deputy director general, Maurizio Martina from Italy, and Spanish agriculture minister, Luis Planas. The election itself will be decided by FAO member states through a secret ballot next year with 194 member states determining the outcome.

The FAO was established in 1945 in response to the severe food shortages experienced globally during the Second World War. October 16 is celebrated annually as UN World Food Day. The FAO leads international efforts to defeat hunger, aiming to achieve food security for all, promote sustainable agriculture, and reduce rural poverty. China's Dr Qu Dongyu is the current director general, having been elected in 2019 and re-elected for a second four-year term in 2023. His successor will be the 10th director general. With the current geo-political uncertainty, it is a role which will take on new importance. We will know towards the end of May whether Hogan gets the full backing of the EU for the Italian job!



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1. Teixeira et al. J Dairy Sci.2014; 97:4216-4226 2. Arthington and Havenga. J Anim Sci.2012; 90:1966-1971 3. Roberts et al. Prof Anim Sci.2016;32(6):842-848 4. Bittar et al. Prof Anim Sci. 2018;34(1):59-66 5. Hong et al. Bio Trace Element Res. 2024;https://doi.org/10.1007/s12011-024-04251-z 6. Bates et al. Vet Rec.2019;184(22):680.

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A LONG LIST OF CHALLENGES

EDITOR, **MATT O'KEEFE**, INTERVIEWED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE, **MARTIN HEYDON** IN LATE MARCH, COVERING EVERYTHING FROM THE TILLAGE-FARMER SUPPORT SCHEME – ANNOUNCED DAYS EARLIER – TO THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP), TRADE DEALS, AND US-INSTIGATED PRICE UNCERTAINTY

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine had indicated that a tillage-support payment would be made to farmers before the end of March, and in fairness to the minister, he delivered on this. What has been promised is a tillage sustainability support scheme totalling €29.1 million and benefitting just over 8,500 farmers. He explained: "I fought very hard for this in budget negotiations. It was really important to me that the money would be used in a targeted way for tillage farmers. I was very mindful that, as the spring planting season starts after difficult weather and difficult conditions, grain price challenges and increased production costs, a shot of confidence was required. I'm determined that there should be long-term support for the sector. The money will pay some bills, and it's an important point of support for the tillage sector, coupled with the protein aid scheme and the straw incorporation measure. I am promoting ongoing efforts around improving and developing quality assurance schemes to increase the value of our native grains. Ultimately, we need to make tillage farming more economically sustainable."

VACCINE COST SUBVENTION

When the first case of bluetongue was confirmed back in January, it certainly wasn't

the best news to start the year with, but it was 'pretty inevitable,' Minister Heydon said. Since then, 12 herds have had bluetongue detected, in counties Wexford, Wicklow, Laois, Louth and Monaghan. "We are going to have to learn to live with it," the minister said. Vaccine approval and availability have been relatively straightforward, with some minor teething issues regarding quantity and costs. The vaccine will be included in the beef and sheep welfare schemes, which is a welcome development. The minister explained: "I have changed our approach in terms of approving the use of vaccines for 2026. I wanted to support farmers who adopt a vaccination approach, particularly from a breeding perspective, and for cattle and sheep farmers it makes sense to consider vaccination. Farmers can avail of the option to vaccinate within the beef and sheep welfare schemes." Market access assurance is also a priority for the minister. He explained: "I am also working on ensuring continuing market access, especially for live exports, including working closely with Minister Muir in Northern Ireland and adapting health certificates for many key export markets. We've progressed the market access piece and that's important in terms of prices for cattle and sheep this year. Vaccine availability is another priority and where a



TILLAGE SCHEME

Eligible crops under the scheme are barley, wheat, oats, rye triticale, and oilseed rape. The eligible crops must have been declared by the applicant on their 2025 Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS).

MORE SCHEMES

There have been calls by the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (ICMSA) to extend bluetongue vaccine availability to additional schemes. Its livestock chair, Michael O'Connell, has called for it to be part of the Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme (SCEP): "Farmers who are members of the SCEP scheme must be part of the Bord Bia Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme but, in reality, this serves no purpose to the majority of these farmers who are selling weanlings. Put bluntly, customers in Italy aren't worried whether our weanlings are quality assured or not. We believe the introduction of an option of vaccination to the scheme – as opposed to being a member of SBLAS – could potentially prove very useful in the long run." He added: "If we face issues regarding bluetongue cases, we will, find issues with farmers meeting the criteria requirements in SCEP such as the requirement to calve at least 50 per cent of the yearly reference number." The ICMSA has also called for it to be included in the National Dairy Beef Weighing Scheme.

commercial decision is made to vaccinate, I want to ensure ready availability."

DEFENDING GOVERNMENT POLICY ON FUEL COSTS

The fuel package announced by Government last month, in response to increased financial pressures arising from the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, attracted much criticism from within farming circles. The price of green diesel rose by 50 per cent in March, but the Government's drop of 3c/L amounted to a reduction of just three per cent. There was also an additional 2c/L drop in the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) levy. The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) president, Francie Gorman, said this would 'do little or nothing to help farmers and agri-contractors deal with the escalating cost of fuel. Carbon tax accounts for 17c of the 22c tax on green diesel. In the last two years, that has increased by almost five cent per litre;

and it is due to go up by 2.3c on May 1. The IFA has called for the immediate suspension of the carbon tax element on agricultural diesel and gas.

But Minister Heydon defended Government actions: "Feed price is actually the biggest driver of costs on farms, followed by fertiliser price. Fuel price impacts all those things as well. I'm aware of that. The Middle East war is the latest in several crises in recent years, including the Ukraine conflict and Covid-19. Where we end up, in terms of the impact of costs on farmers and contractors, especially fuel and fertiliser prices and supplies will be determined by how long this conflict lasts." He continued: "This has the potential to get very serious very quickly for farmers. I don't underestimate the cost of fuel on that side. I made my case with Government colleagues and what Government agreed to was, in full recognition, that we can't cushion everybody from the worst excesses of this conflict. This is an initial step, focussing on excise duty. There's only 5.7 per cent excise duty on green diesel. This is a three-cent cut, coupled with the two cent NORA cut per litre. I understand that isn't the extent of what farmers would have hoped for. The measures taken are in place for an initial two months. There's no Government in the world that can cushion all the impacts of this conflict from their people."

Bord Bia

Asked for his thoughts on the governance review of Bord Bia that is ongoing, Minister Heydon said: "It is not about a head on a plate."

And on the cost of fertiliser, he had this to say: "The role that the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) will play in that is something that I'm working hard on with the departments of finance and environment. The war impact on fertiliser is potentially very significant. There is no mechanism to suspend the CBAM measures, but discussions are ongoing.

"On the broader point around carbon tax, agriculture is one of those sectors that benefits from the tax. The €170 million I received as part of my department's budget for this year is from the carbon tax. Its suspension would impact farmer supports."

Tariff tension

Asked for an update on the impact of proposed US tariffs, Minister Heydon said: "The US tariffs uncertainty has not settled. We have to come up with a new approach. We want to move to frictionless trade, with as few barriers to trade as possible."



THERE'S NO GOVERNMENT IN THE WORLD THAT CAN CUSHION ALL THE IMPACTS OF THIS CONFLICT FROM THEIR PEOPLE

CAP AMBITIONS

Much has been said and written about the future funding of CAP and a potential shortfall of 20 per cent. Where will the money come from to offset this, and is increased national funding an option? Minister Heydon said: "I will use my role as president of the agri-ministerial council to ensure that we get as good a deal as possible for Ireland and for the CAP in the multi-annual financial framework (MFF). Eighty per cent of funding is ring-fenced, but that can't be our end point. Food security is a key part of the context, and we see the impact that the conflict is having on energy security. The CAP has served us well in the past, and I am ambitious to ensure a properly funded, simplified CAP will be put in place. In the design of that next CAP, I need to secure two things. One is to protect the commonality of the CAP, the strength of us being in a single market. Also having what's called subsidiarity, which is the ability and flexibility for member states to make their own decisions and design their own schemes that are suitable to their own needs."

Mercosur

Asked for his thoughts on the Mercosur trade deal, Minister Heydon said: "I have been and remain opposed to Mercosur in its current form."



HOW TO STAY SAFE ON YOUR QUAD BIKE

CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, OUTLINES THE RISKS POSED BY QUAD BIKES, BUT PROVIDES ESSENTIAL STEPS TO ENSURE SAFETY WHILE USING THEM TO CARRY OUT TASKS ON THE FARM

In November 2023, significant changes in regulations regarding quad bike operation under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations, came into effect. These regulations were in response to concerns over the number of serious and fatal work-related accidents involving quad bikes, or all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), particularly in the agriculture and forestry sectors.

REGULATIONS

The regulations mandate that all quad bike operators in the workplace must complete a quad bike training course, in accordance with the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) standard or an equivalent qualification. Additionally, operators are required to wear appropriate head protection while operating a quad.

UNDERSTANDING QUAD BIKE SAFETY

A quad bike is an extremely useful piece of equipment for farm work, designed to handle diverse terrain types. It is important to remember though that improper operation can pose significant risks of death or severe injury to operators. The most important safety considerations with quads are training, experience, wearing personal protective equipment, maintenance and a good knowledge of the terrain.

COMMON CAUSES OF ACCIDENTS

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

- ▶ Being thrown off during vehicle overturns or after loss of control;
- ▶ Collisions with structures, trees, poles,

other vehicles;

- ▶ Being trapped/asphyxiated under an overturned machine;
- ▶ Being drowned under a quad bike overturned in a water course; and
- ▶ Pedestrians being struck or run over by a quad.

These incidents often stem from factors such as lack of formal training or experience, excessive speed, carrying passengers or unbalanced loads, and poor maintenance.

PRACTICAL SAFETY MEASURES

1. Training

All quad bike operators must undergo training to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for safe operation. Training should cover the use of any towed equipment or attachments.

2. Personal protective equipment

Head protection, in the form of an approved helmet, is essential to reduce the severity of head injuries. To ensure that you are correctly protected, reference the manufacturer's recommendations for the ideal helmet, ensuring it fits snugly and securely. Helmets with face shields or goggles not only protect the eyes but also enhance visibility. Operators should also consider additional PPE such as gloves and safety footwear.

3. No passengers

Quad bikes are designed for single riders. Carrying passengers increases the risk of accidents and should be avoided. The extended seat is designed for active riding, allowing operators to shift their body weight for various slope conditions. It is not intended for carrying additional passengers.

4. Avoid overloading

Overloading can disrupt weight distribution and impair braking. Operators should adhere to manufacturers' towing capacity and loading limits.

5. Maintain your quad

Regular maintenance checks ensure that the quad bike is in good working order, minimising the risk of accidents due to mechanical failures.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS

- ▶ Familiarise yourself with the terrain to mitigate risks associated with slopes, obstacles, and unfamiliar terrain.
- ▶ Adhere to road-use regulations if operating quad bikes on public roads.
- ▶ Remember, the minimum age for operating farm type working quad bikes is at least 16 years of age; it is usually clearly stated on the quad.

Quad bike safety is paramount in preventing accidents and protecting lives. By adhering to regulations, undergoing training, and implementing practical safety measures, operators can ensure a safer working environment. Remember, safety should always be the top priority when operating quad bikes.

For more farm safety information, scan the code



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- Securing a load to your quad bike.
- Wearing a helmet while on your quad bike.



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INSURANCE



Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

WHITHER THE IRISH DAIRY SECTOR?

IN THE FIRST OF A THREE-PART SERIES ON THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF THE IRISH DAIRY SECTOR, AGRI-FOOD ECONOMIST, CIARAN FITZGERALD EXAMINES NEW CONSTRAINTS ON THE SECTOR THAT HAVE REPLACED MILK QUOTA AS THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO OUTPUT

Over the course of three articles, I will attempt to examine the context and policy/investment challenges presented by the regulatory constraints on Irish dairy. Previous reviews of the Irish dairy industry development have focused on rationalisation and mergers, product development, the butter versus cheese product mix, innovation/R&D and, particularly in the 1980/1990s, improved access to investment capital which created the dairy PLC concept. The current output constraints are largely influenced by Irish policy rather than EU milk quota policy.

Before we look at rationalisation or investment support options it's important to emphasise that these constraints, as they currently stand, will diminish the Irish economic impact of the dairy sector. This will happen while – as verified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – emissions from global dairy production will rise, as Ireland's low-carbon, grass-production system is replaced by low-regulation production internationally as global dairy demand continues to rise.

MISSING THE DEMAND OPPORTUNITY

In national policy terms, we seem to have swung completely from a dairy-growth policy that was accused of being blind to environmental

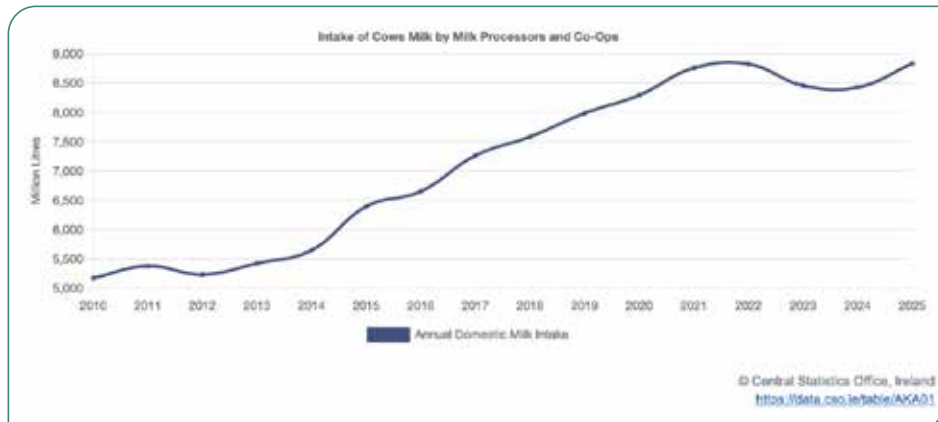


THE CURRENT OUTPUT CONSTRAINTS ARE LARGELY INFLUENCED BY IRISH POLICY RATHER THAN EU MILK QUOTA POLICY

impact to an 'environment first and last' policy that seems blind to both detrimental global emissions and the local economic impact of constraining Irish dairy output. This should be recognised for what it is; a missed opportunity for economic expansion and job creation. And, ultimately, if the restraint policies continue, it will lead to a decline in output and jobs, particularly impacting the Irish rural economy.

INERTIA HAS REPLACED FORWARD MOMENTUM

Following the surge in Irish milk output after EU milk quota abolition in 2015, milk deliveries in Ireland peaked in 2022 at 8.8 billion litres

Figure 1: Annual domestic milk intake 2010-2025. Source: Central Statistics Office.

and declined over the following two years with a recovery to 8.8 billion litres in 2025.

While weather conditions have played a part, the base-level production constraint is very real, with a number of state bodies and government departments still insisting that Irish dairy cow numbers are targeted for reduction as part of a broad national decarbonisation policy.

Two key points are often missed when examining the increase in milk output between 2015 and 2022. Dairy growth has delivered a huge and continuous contribution to the real Irish economy with exports increasing in value from €2 billion to €6 billion per year in value over the 10-year period from 2015 to 2025, while Irish economic expenditure tripled in value also to over €5 billion annually.

In addition, the Irish dairy sector succeeded in marketing all four billion litres of this increased production without subsidy, reflecting not just the capability of the sector but also the huge and ever-increasing global demand for Irish grass-based dairy products. This latter point is a tribute to the capability of dairy processors and marketeers and a reflection of the ever increasing demand for Ireland's grass based dairy output in a global market where consumer awareness of sustainability challenges is evolving.

IDEOLOGY TRUMPING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Moreover, unlike the official EU regulated quota agreed in 1984, this current quota is, first and foremost, driven by domestic political policy and environmental ideology deriving from a combination of sectoral carbon-emissions-reduction targets, and the constrained stocking rate numbers implied by the new Nitrates Directive. As we know, this constraint on production and output could get even more drastic if the An Taisce legal case against the directive were to succeed, with production required to reduce from the current 8.5-9.5 billion litre range to below six billion litres. Additionally, this production constraint comes on top of huge increases in dairy-processing costs through energy price and processing de-carbonisation requirements.

As signalled by the decision a few years ago of Nestlé to close its Wyeth Nutritionals infant formula business in Askeaton, Ireland



THIS REGULATORY-BASED REDUCTION IN DAIRY AND MEAT OUTPUT IS NOT GOING TO 'FREE UP' OR RELAUNCH A SURGE IN PLANT-BASED PRODUCTION AS A SUBSTITUTE, EITHER

is a very high-cost location for any form of manufacturing that uses mostly indigenous raw materials, people or services. In plain speaking terms, current Irish industrial development policy is much more 'business friendly' for global businesses with a minimal Irish economic footprint, 'super-normal profit levels' or inter-company global transfers, than to those companies such as dairy processors that use local Irish raw materials, people and services and have a huge multiplier impact on the local and national economy.

So, if milk output is diminished further, this resulting reduction in Irish economic output, jobs and value-added will not be seamlessly compensated for by increased inward investment from the foreign-direct-investment (FDI) sector. This regulatory-based reduction in dairy and meat output is not going to 'free up' or relaunch a surge in plant-based production as a substitute, either.

DEBUNKING MYTHS

Only by debunking this plant-based myth and focusing on maximising real Irish economic impacts is an objective assessment of industrial development options likely to deliver a set of policy and investment measures that are a true fit for future Irish agricultural development.

With that purpose in mind, I would suggest that the core question for the Irish dairy sector should be: what would it take for you to sustain or expand your business's economic footprint in the Irish economy? This is a question, I would suggest, has not been put to an indigenous Irish company in recent years.



WHAT DOES THE VET SAY?

THIS MONTH, BERNIE COMMINS PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE VETERINARY AND ANIMAL-HEALTH WORLD INCLUDING: NEW RESEARCH PUBLISHED ON A RARE CONGENITAL NASAL ABNORMALITY, A MILESTONE FOR THE BEEF HEALTHCHECK PROGRAMME, SIMPLIFICATION OF SOURCING BLUETONGUE VIRUS VACCINE, AND MORE



From the School of Veterinary Medicine at University College Dublin (UCD), researchers and clinicians recently published a case report in *Veterinary Record*, relating to a rare congenital nasal abnormality case. Diprosopus dirrhinus, or nasal duplication, was confirmed when an 11-week-old, 92kg Holstein Friesian heifer calf, from a commercial dairy farm, was referred to UCD Veterinary Hospital (UCDVH) for an assessment. The nasal deformation was present from birth, according to the farmer-owner, 'but did not affect the overall health and growth rate of the calf compared to calves of the same age.' This is a very rare case indeed, with just two similar cases described previously in Holstein calves, according to the report: one with triple nostrils and another with quadruple nostrils. This particular case, the authors said, adds to the limited literature, but also highlighted the role of imaging in diagnosis and surgical decision-making.



Figure 1. (a) Lateral view of the head of a female Holstein Friesian calf at four weeks of age with diprosopus dirrhinus. (b) Cranial view of the head of the calf at 11 weeks of age showing the turbinate-like structure dorsal to the nasal bridge. Source: *Veterinary Record*; <https://doi.org/10.1002/vrc2.70391>.

The nasal deformation was described as a 'turbinate-like structure' measuring approximately 14cm in length and 5-8cm in width, located 3-6cm dorsal to the nasal septum.

The veterinary team at UCDVH used computed tomography (CT) to help visualise and plan the surgical procedure to remove the abnormalities. This was done successfully under general anaesthesia. Histopathology confirmed that the structure contained respiratory epithelium, cartilage and bone consistent with nasal tissue.

The authors wrote that on a six-month follow-up phone call with the farmer, the calf was 'described as thriving well, with good weight gain and no evidence of respiratory disease. The surgical site had healed well with a pale scar line visible over the bridge of the nose.'

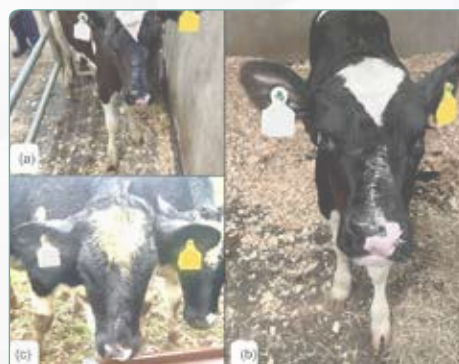


Figure 2. (a) Incision site one week post-surgery. (b) Incision site after suture removal. (c) Six-month follow-up showing pale scar line.

Reference

Marian R, Duggan MJS, Kearney CM, Puggioni A, Ryan EG. Diprosopus dirrhinus (nasal duplication) in a female Holstein Friesian calf: Clinical findings, diagnostic imaging and surgical management. *Vet Rec Case Rep.* 2026;14:e70391. <https://doi.org/10.1002/vrc2.70391>



The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has made some practical changes regarding the sourcing of the bluetongue virus (BTV 3) vaccine.. The revised approach requires veterinary practitioners to notify the DAFM of the herd numbers to be added to their vaccine licence, but they no longer need to wait for

DAFM's confirmation before supplying the vaccine to farmers. A cost concern of farmers having to purchase a 50ml bottle of vaccine when they only need a small number of doses has also been addressed. Now, vets can prescribe in animal doses and prescribe for multiple farms from the same bottle to facilitate this, effectively allowing farmers share bottles of vaccine. The changes have been welcomed by Animal Health Ireland (AHI) health chair, David Hall: "These changes are a clear step in the right direction. Farmers and vets need a system that allows vaccines to get onto farms quickly without being tied up in excessive administration." At time of writing, there were 1.15 million doses of vaccine in the country, with 600,000 of them secured by farmers.

David added: "Farmers must remain vigilant for signs of the disease and continue to report any concerns to their vet or local department and continue to submit samples of stillborn calves and lambs to the regional veterinary laboratories.

RESEARCH: DETECTING AND SIMULATING LIVESTOCK DISEASE

One Health and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are at the centre of six new projects between University College Dublin and the University of California, Davis. Backed by €120,000, this transatlantic research tackles global challenges in health and food systems through the 2025-2026 UCD Joint Research Fund, an initiative under the long-standing UCD Squared partnership between the two universities. One of the projects, led by Dr Conor McAloon, clinician and lecturer at the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine, and Dr Pranav Pandit (UC Davis), involves researchers developing predictive models and a digital twin system to detect and simulate livestock disease outbreaks.



Dr Natascha Meunier.

'REAL, MEASURABLE BENEFITS FOR FARMERS AND VETS'

Animal Health Ireland's (AHI) Beef HealthCheck (BHC) programme has delivered real, measurable benefits for farmers and vets in its 10-year existence, according to BHC programme manager and vet, Dr Natascha Meunier. AHI recently celebrated the programme's tenth anniversary, marking a number of milestones:

- ▶ The BHC programme has assessed more than 7.7 million animals;
- ▶ It has issued more than one million reports to 64,000 farmers across Ireland;
- ▶ Now, it covers approximately 65 per cent of the national kill across 17 factories; and
- ▶ In 2025 alone, almost 92,000 reports were issued covering 783,000 cattle from 22,100 herds.

Dr Meunier added: "Healthy animals are the bedrock of everything we do as an export-focused beef-producing country. At a time when production is contracting globally, the health advantage Ireland can demonstrate through programmes like this is not marginal, it is central to our ongoing success." The programme is run in partnership with Meat Industry Ireland and meat factories nationwide.

LIVER FLUKE: THE CASE FOR TAILORED PARASITE CONTROL

Looking at recent liver fluke data, AHI pointed to why having a tailored parasite control plan is so important. Despite a weather-driven spike in liver fluke prevalence in 2024, the 2025 data show active infections down 29 per cent year-on-year. This, according to AHI, is a direct reflection of farmers acting on the intelligence the programme provides alongside the industry promoting effective liver fluke management. Notably, 11.2 per cent of herds sending 10 or more animals to slaughter over the past decade have shown no evidence of liver fluke. This reinforces the case for tailored parasite control and prudent anthelmintic use, AHI says.

CAO: STRONG VETERINARY INTEREST

CAO applications for veterinary medicine were up this year, according to Central Applications Office (CAO) statistics, reflecting the demand for additional veterinary places available for the 2026-2027 academic year.

According to the CAO, total mentions of level 8 veterinary medicine courses were up by 198 per cent this year, with 2,692 selecting it, compared to 902 in 2025. First preferences also significantly increased by 75 per cent with 1,082 selections, compared to 618 in 2025.

Total CAO-form mentions of veterinary courses that include veterinary nursing and veterinary bioscience, for example, were also up 96 per cent at 3,890, compared to last year. First preferences of these courses were up by 53 per cent, with 1,443 selections.

Level 7/6 veterinary courses also experienced higher demand but less pronounced than the above. Total mentions stood at 3,210 while first preferences were 1,115 representing increases of 18 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively.

SETU AND TEAGASC'S NEXT STEPS

South East Technological University (SETU) and Teagasc recently entered a new phase of partnership with the signing of a service level agreement (SLA). This strengthens SETU's long-established relationship with Teagasc in Kildalton and at the Botanic Gardens and sets the foundation for expanded collaboration in veterinary medicine, according to a statement. As part of this a 1,000m² specialist facility dedicated to animal biology and anatomy education will be delivered at Teagasc Kildalton College, complementing the existing animal handling resources at the college. Technology-enhanced teaching spaces at SETU and Teagasc Kildalton College will allow students to apply their learning in real-world contexts while developing skills essential for professional veterinary practice.



BIOECONOMY POLICY IN EU COUNTRIES AND WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THEM

DR JON PAUL FAULKNER OUTLINES WHAT LESSONS IRELAND CAN TAKE FROM GERMANY, FRANCE, AND BELGIUM AS WE TRY TO TURN A REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE BIOECONOMY IN IRELAND INTO FARM-GATE OPPORTUNITY

Across Europe, the countries that have built the strongest bio-based industries did not get there by technology alone.

They also built governance: clear national direction, strong regional delivery, farmer participation, and routines for learning and course-correction.

For Irish farming, the bioeconomy is about turning biological resources such as grassland productivity, slurry, residues, forestry thinnings, and food by-products, into higher-value products and energy, while keeping rural areas competitive and cutting dependence on imported fossil inputs. The difficulty is that bioeconomy development sits across agriculture, enterprise, energy, waste, climate and spatial planning. If policy remains fragmented, projects struggle with planning risk, unclear sustainability rules, weak market signals and a lack of coordination between feedstock supply and processing demand. Looking at three European front-runners – Germany, France and Belgium – one message

The CoBioEcon project is a collaboration between University College Dublin (UCD) and the University of Galway, and funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM), that is co-designing a regional strategy for the bioeconomy in Ireland.

stands out – bioeconomy progress depends on three linked capacities:

- ▶ Multi-level coordination (national direction that reaches regions and value chains);
- ▶ Participatory governance (farmers and communities shaping priorities, being consulted throughout the process and not just at the end);
- ▶ Reflexive science-policy interfaces (structures that keep evidence and real-world feedback connected to decisions).

WHAT IS THE BIOECONOMY?

The bioeconomy means using renewable biological resources from land and sea such as crops, forests, animals, fisheries and microorganisms, to produce food, materials, chemicals and energy, ideally within circular systems that minimise waste.

GERMANY: COORDINATED DECENTRALISATION

Germany pairs a strong national strategy with deliberate regional delivery. A distinctive feature is the funding of regional 'bioeconomy innovation spaces', which are territorial labs where regions specialise (for example, lignocellulosic biomass and green chemistry, or marine biomass and algae applications). These spaces do two things well. First, they connect local biomass realities to applied

R&D and demonstration, so innovation is shaped by feedstock logistics, skills and market routes. Second, they act as feedback loops where regional learning helps refine national direction, rather than strategy remaining a static document.

For Ireland, the lesson is not to copy German institutions, but to recognise the value of coordinated decentralisation. A clear national framework, should be paired with empowered regional platforms that can build project pipelines, broker partnerships and turn 'potential' into investable propositions.

FRANCE: CO-FINANCED DELIVERY

France leans heavily on the regional scale. National strategy sets priorities, but regions develop 'territorial bioeconomy visions' and regional biomass schemes that map resource availability and identify where and how biomass should be mobilised. Importantly, these biomass plans align with wider regional spatial and development instruments, so bioeconomy is treated as part of territorial planning, not a niche innovation agenda. France also uses State-region planning contracts to agree investment priorities and co-financing commitments across multi-year periods, creating clarity for infrastructure, skills and innovation support. For Ireland, the transferable point is planning alignment. If bioeconomy is not embedded in regional and local development instruments,



FOR IRELAND, THE OPPORTUNITY IS CLEAR: BUILD THE GOVERNANCE THAT MAKES GOOD PROJECTS POSSIBLE, REPEATABLY, FAIRLY AND AT SCALE

and if co-financing is uncertain, projects face avoidable delays, community opposition and investor hesitation.

BELGIUM: MISSION-ORIENTED PROGRAMMES

Belgium's federal structure produces different regional approaches, but it offers a practical lesson: bioeconomy delivery improves when it is integrated with circular economy governance. In Flanders, mission-oriented innovation programmes link biobased innovation to climate-neutral goals, supported by coordinating platforms that connect ministries, industry, municipalities and research bodies. In Wallonia, competitiveness clusters organise public-private collaboration in areas like sustainable chemistry and circular innovation.

For Ireland, the transferable lesson is functional rather than constitutional: cluster governance, shared roadmaps, and performance indicators can keep multiple actors aligned, even where responsibilities are distributed.

FROM CONSULTATION TO CO-DESIGN: WHY PARTICIPATION MATTERS

Bioeconomy projects require real trade-offs, land use, water quality, biodiversity, odour, traffic, and the balance between food, feed, and energy uses of biomass. Front-runner countries invest in participation because it reduces conflict and improves project design. France stands out for structured participatory methods that bring farmers, cooperatives,

local authorities, businesses, and citizens into scenario-building and priority-setting. Belgium shows a different route: practice-based participation, where farmers help test and refine climate and circular practices and feed data back into advisory systems. Germany has broadened participation through national advisory bodies and through stakeholder-convening within regional innovation spaces. The common thread is treating farmers as partners in shaping the bioeconomy's direction, because the bioeconomy cannot be delivered to farming; it must be delivered with farming.

LEARNING SYSTEMS: SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACES

Markets move, technologies evolve, and environmental constraints tighten. Countries with mature bioeconomy governance build mechanisms that allow policy to learn and adapt. Germany has strategic advisory capacity and technology assessment routines. France uses interdisciplinary research capacity to support scenario-building and integrated assessment for territorial planning. Belgium embeds life cycle and systems assessment in programme criteria, with indicators and regular review. For Irish policy, the message is straightforward: without an institutionalised learning system, bioeconomy policy becomes reactive. With one, policy can remain adaptive and credible, particularly important where sustainability, land-use impacts, and community benefits are under scrutiny.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR IRELAND: FIVE PRACTICAL MOVES

Ireland has ambition in its bioeconomy strategies and action plans, but delivery remains constrained by fragmentation across departments, agencies, and spatial scales. Drawing from the European lessons, five moves would materially improve Irish delivery:

1. Establish a national coordination body with delivery authority, able to align agriculture, enterprise, environment, energy, and regional development, and to unblock cross-department barriers.
2. Create regional bioeconomy hubs, translating national aims into region-specific pipelines (feedstock mapping, projects, skills, finance).
3. Build farmer-led co-design into programmes from the outset, especially where land-use trade-offs are likely, moving beyond consultation to shared priority-setting.
4. Develop a dedicated science-policy interface for the bioeconomy to coordinate evidence, foresight, and sustainability assessment (carbon, biodiversity, water, and social impacts).
5. Align market-making tools with rural value capture, strategic public procurement for biobased materials, targeted incentives where appropriate, and funding that de-risks first-of-a-kind facilities (including anaerobic digestion and biomaterials pilots), so farmers capture value beyond supplying biomass.

Germany, France and Belgium show that leading biobased infrastructure is the visible outcome of governance capacity. Where coordination is strong, regions can specialise. Where participation is real, conflicts are managed and trust grows. Where learning systems exist, strategies stay credible and investment becomes easier. For Ireland, the opportunity is clear: build the governance that makes good projects possible, repeatably, fairly, and at scale, so the bioeconomy becomes a practical rural development pathway, not just a policy aspiration.

GET IN TOUCH

If you are a farmer, co-op, SME, or local authority exploring biobased opportunities, such as anaerobic digestion, nutrient recovery, biomaterials, or new fibre crops, and want to inform regional strategy work, you can contact the team at www.cobioecon.com.

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DAIRY



A PRODUCER'S PERSPECTIVE

Limerick dairy farmer, Martin Crowe.
Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.



LIMERICK-BASED DAIRY FARMER, AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANT, AND A DIRECTOR OF KERRY CO-OP, MARTIN CROWE, WAS THE SOLE FARMER REPRESENTATIVE TAKING PART IN BORD BIA'S ANNUAL DAIRY MARKETS SEMINAR RECENTLY. MATT O'KEEFFE CAUGHT UP WITH MARTIN ON THE DAY

In an era when farmers must produce within the strict boundaries and pressures of achieving high standards around animal health, welfare, sustainability, and climate action, it can sometimes be easy to forget why these things matter so much. Martin spoke to how these processes – although they require time and attention – are worth the effort. The Bord Bia audits are a good example of this.

"Like most farmers, my only interaction with Bord Bia is my audit every 18 months, which is a hassle, and there is no point in saying otherwise. But we're not being asked to do anything more than we're supposed to be doing anyway, so that side of the house is not so bad. "Then I got the opportunity to go to the Anuga trade fair last October. If anyone ever gets the chance to go, I'd strongly recommend it. It's a phenomenal experience, with the food halls across dairy, beef, organics and so on. The dairy hall was the size of three or four football pitches, and all indoors; the scale would blow you away. Bord Bia had a substantial presence and that impressed me. The challenges from competitors were easily seen, with dairy marketeers from across the world present at Anuga. The different sales angles and strategies were all evident, with Bord Bia well able to compete for attention." This side of Bord Bia impressed Martin, he said, and it helped him to understand why what he does on the farm matters when we are competing on a global food-production stage.

SEMINAR REFLECTIONS

Martin participated in a panel discussion around why on-farm 'proof points' matter and how they translate to real value. For him, trust is a critical component of consumer confidence in the food that farmers produce. Going back to those processes mentioned earlier, they



Martin in conversation with Roz O'Shaughnessy, Bord Bia, at the recent dairy seminar. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.



WE CAN ALWAYS TALK DOWN OUR INDUSTRY, BUT WE NEED TO BE POSITIVE AND HAVE A BELIEF THAT IT WILL GET BETTER

all contribute to the one thing that matters most, said Martin, and that is trust. "We need to develop it further from a relatively high base in the Irish dairy sector, so that we can gain more market share for our produce. In an Irish context, we need to emphasise our green, grass-fed credentials. One of the first things I consider when I'm going to buy anything, be it a loaf of bread or a bag of fertiliser, is the trust I have in the product."

Martin said he found the other presentations and speakers at the Bord Bia seminar very interesting, and he took away some fascinating insights about the dairy sector. He was struck by the incredible demand for protein, globally: "The importance of dairy proteins in the future, for instance, and their increasing intake by consumers, impressed me. There is a huge demand for proteins in drinks and sports nutrition. It's a huge area that we're going to have to exploit more as milk producers and processors.

"I also now have a greater insight into the fact that there is a lot of psychology attached to sales and commerce. The study of how and why consumers make purchasing decisions is central to success in selling dairy and other products. The whole trust issue around food is massive. Richard Kottmeyer spoke about mathematically engineering customer demand to add value to ingredients, and he highlighted the importance of trust in our food."

THE AGRI-CONSULTANT

In his role as an agricultural consultant, Martin shared the concerns of farmers: "We're after a fairly tough spring. Weather-wise, it's been hard with the rain making grazing difficult. Slurry storage has been under pressure. Reduced milk price is another big concern. At the same time, calf prices have improved and that has negated the poor milk prices to some extent. Cull cow

MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Reflecting on the outlook for the dairy sector, Martin was optimistic as well as realistic: "The global outlook, as given by one of the speakers is relatively positive, perhaps not in Europe (in terms of exponential growth in consumer demand) but globally, significant year-on-year growth is expected. Christophe Lafougere of Gira was very positive. He gave me hope. We can always talk down our industry, but we need to be positive and have a belief that it will get better."

prices have been good as well, and if we could get the weather, we could look forward to a reasonable year."

Commenting on beef finishers, Martin was conscious of their importance: "They need to be able to survive as well. They're a very important part of the livestock industry in Ireland. For us dairy farmers, it's important that they are there to buy our stock, our beef calves. We need the finishers to be doing well, and the price of beef right now doesn't deliver that well-being."

WAR

One of the big imponderables, Martin agreed, is the war in the Middle East and its impact on food production for the months ahead, even if a ceasefire came into being: "Hopefully it will stop soon. People have to eat three times a day, so they need food and the war will reduce food production. Fertiliser and fuel price and supply challenges are making things very uncertain. I don't know where it's going to end. Fertiliser availability will be a big issue in the months ahead. At the same time, there's plenty of good quality silage around. Maybe farmers with silage reserves could reduce fertiliser inputs a small bit this year. That would reduce demand"

THE CROWE DAIRY HERD

Martin has a pedigree British Friesian herd, and he spoke about its performance this spring: "They're performing well. Calving went very well for me this year. They're great cows to calve easily. They're a healthy and robust breed. We have a few coloured cows now as well, and they are performing well. At the end of March, the cows were delivering 24 litres a day out of grass. As of March 24, we were 70 per cent through the first rotation. April 5 starts the the second round and grass is plentiful and growing reasonably well. Cows are out day and night. Animal performance hasn't been affected too badly so far, even with the wet conditions through February and March."

DUAL ROLE FARMER

In his role as a director of Kerry Co-op, Martin has a good insight into dairy processing and marketing: "I'm on the board of Kerry Co-op, though not on the board of Kerry Dairy Ireland. It gives me insight. We work for the betterment of all the milk suppliers in the Kerry region and get the best milk price back to producers, which is the most critical part. Shareholders have been reasonably positive around the separation of Kerry Group from Kerry Dairy Ireland. We're 12 months independent now and milk prices have held up well compared to other processors. The payments were good all last year, and there's likely to be a top-up for last year's supply.

"Probably there is room for more rationalisation across the country. What form that will take, I'm not sure. Kerry Co-op would need to see the potential benefits to milk producers. Is there too much processing capacity around the country? Will some of it need to be shelved? Would further rationalisation and cooperation deliver better returns for producers? These are all questions that will have to be asked."



SILAGE QUALITY IN TIMES OF UNCERTAIN WEATHER

ALLTECH'S FARM RESOURCE EFFICIENCY COMMERCIAL MANAGER, DECLAN O'NEILL, HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A SOUND SILAGE STRATEGY NOW TO HELP WITHSTAND ANOTHER POTENTIAL UNCERTAIN WINTER AND SPRING

Poor grazing conditions, low soil temperatures, and reduced grass growth in early spring of 2026 have highlighted the importance of having adequate stocks of high-quality silage in the face of uncertain weather patterns. Silage quality, animal output, health and overall profitability are all intrinsically linked; therefore, it is crucial we plan our silage strategy now to ensure we have adequate high-quality feed reserves as we face perhaps another uncertain winter and spring. On average, in 2026, cows were turned out to grass three weeks later than in 2025. Thus, silage played a major role in the diet of the early lactating cow.

UNCERTAINTY FOR THE LACTATING COW

The reality of an Irish spring calving system is that farmers need to budget for dry cow silage for 10 to 12 weeks. However, with uncertainty about wetter shoulder periods in

the autumn and spring – when cows are still milking – and about summer droughts, having adequate reserves of higher-quality silage is a key management strategy for farmers to remember. The dry matter digestibility (DMD) of your silage for dry cows should be between 68 per cent to 70 per cent, and for milking cows and young stock, it should be over 74 per cent. Every five-unit increase in silage DMD can result in an additional 1.1 litres of milk per cow daily when cows are lactating on a predominantly silage-fed diet. UFL indicates energy in silages. The higher the UFL number, the more feed energy for milk solids. Dry-cow silage should be between 0.72UFL/kg to 0.75UFL/kg and milking-cow silage should be between 0.83UFL/kg to 0.88UFL/kg. Another factor to look at is crude protein (CP), which is linked to DMD, with younger grasses at cutting time having a higher level



ON AVERAGE, IN 2026, COWS WERE TURNED OUT TO GRASS THREE WEEKS LATER THAN IN 2025. THUS, SILAGE PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE DIET OF THE EARLY LACTATING COW

of CP. It should be over 12 per cent for dry-cow silage and over 14 per cent for lactating-cow silage. A dairy cow in milk generally requires approximately 1.5 tonnes to 1.6 tonnes of fresh pit silage at 74 per cent (or more) DMD per month.



A DAIRY COW IN MILK GENERALLY REQUIRES APPROXIMATELY 1.5T TO 1.6T OF FRESH PIT SILAGE AT 74% (OR MORE) DMD PER MONTH

content in mowed grass. Silage in the range of 30 per cent DM will pack better in the clamp, have less effluent runoff, and aid in nutrient and dry matter retention. Be careful not to over-wilt, as dry silages can be a haven for yeasts, moulds and mycotoxins.

- ▶ **Preservation:** Good preservation occurs when lactic acid bacteria present on the grass crop ferment available sugars to lactic acid. In Irish conditions, an inoculant such as Alltech Egalis Ferment – which contains one million lactic-acid-producing bacteria per gram of forage applied – will drastically aid the fermentation characteristics of grass silage. This is due to Irish grasses being lower in lactic acid naturally due to restricted sunlight and high moisture content that dilutes the natural lactic acids. Using Egalis Ferment causes a rapid decline in pH which preserves the feed value of the stored silage, helping you retain as much nutritional value as possible from the field to the pit. Silage treated with this maximises feed-out, optimises palatability and DM intake, promotes energy content and supports digestibility, thus offering broad support in multiple aspects of animal health and performance.

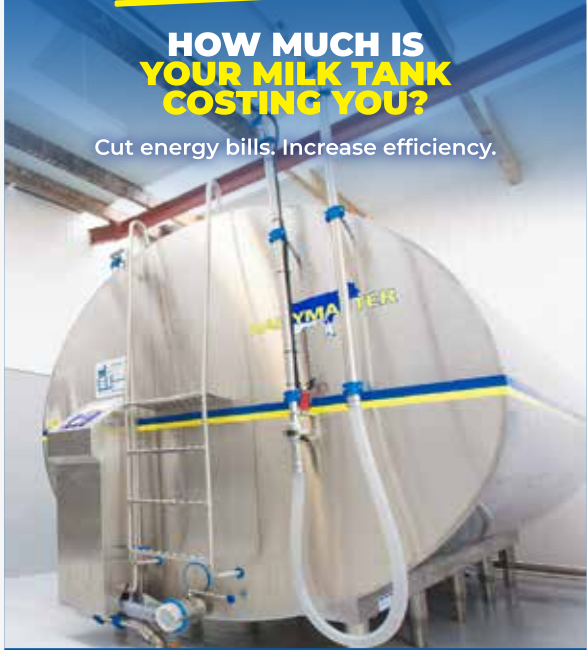
HOW TO GET SILAGE TO 74 PER CENT (OR MORE) DMD

- ▶ **Grazing:** To obtain good-quality, high-DMD silage in early May, it is essential that the sward is grazed down to the stem in spring before applying fertiliser. Swards with yellow/dead material must be grazed off; otherwise, silage DMD can be negatively affected by up to five per cent. Reseeded swards should be grazed at least twice before closing for silage.
- ▶ **Reseeding:** This will yield higher quality silage, up to three tonnes more DM/ha compared to old, low-perennial ryegrass swards. Reseeding with modern varieties can increase DMD by two units, with high-quality, leafy swards being critical for animal performance. Newly reseeded swards are also up to 25 per cent more responsive to applied nitrogen. A rule of thumb is that silage ground should be reseeded every eight to 10 years, with a payback period of less than three years.
- ▶ **Cutting stage:** Instead of giving a hard and fast cutting date to mow silage, it is better to talk about the stage of growth of the sward. Cutting grass young increases digestibility and protein content; however, yield quantity will be lower, you will have a higher-feed-value silage, and it will facilitate quicker regrowth for grazing for second-cut silage. Once the emergence of seed heads has occurred, the silage is at a 69 per cent to 70 per cent DMD, which is okay for dry cows but sub-optimal for lactating cows. An important fact to remember is that for every two days post seed heading, the silage quality will drop by one per cent DMD.
- ▶ **Wilting:** The ideal dry matter (DM) we are looking for in silage to optimise consolidation and fermentation is 28 per cent to 32 per cent, which can be hard to obtain in Irish weather. When possible, a rapid wilt of no more than 24 hours will remove unwanted water


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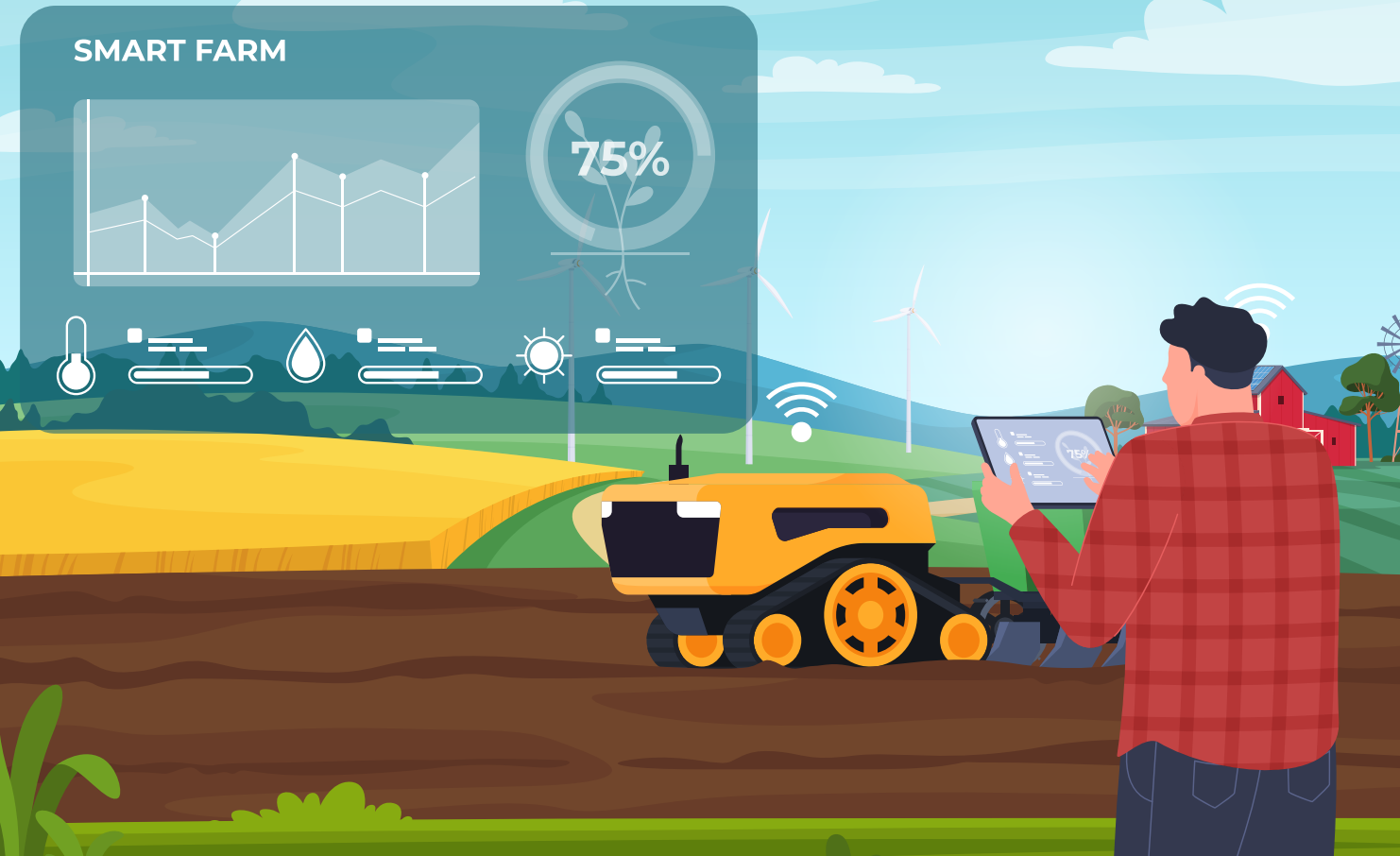
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TECHNOLOGY – DISCERNING THE HEAVY HITTERS FROM THE HOT AIR



TECHNOLOGY IS THRIVING IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, BUT WHAT TECHNOLOGY IS TRULY DELIVERING VALUE ON DAIRY FARMS TODAY, AND WHAT IS STILL JUST HYPE? THIS QUESTION WAS ADDRESSED AT A RECENT GLOBAL BRIEFING ON DAIRY TECHNOLOGY AND, HERE, WE SHARE THE MAIN TAKEAWAYS INCLUDING PREDICTIONS ABOUT WHICH TECHNOLOGIES WILL CONTINUE TO GAIN TRACTION IN 2026

The IFCN Dairy Research Network, in collaboration with Progressive Dairy, recently hosted the Global Dairy Tech Briefing 2026, which brought together experts, technology specialists, and dairy farmers from around the world to assess the true impact of technology on dairy-farm profitability and resilience. Against the backdrop of rising production costs, labour shortages, and increasing market volatility, this was a timely event. In the past five years, global dairy farm

production costs have increased by 22 per cent, the briefing heard; fundamentally reshaping farmers' investment decisions. More and more, farmers are concerned with prioritising efficiency, reliability, and sustainability on existing operations, ahead of expanding herd size.

TECHNOLOGIES GAINING TRACTION

A clear message from the briefing was that technology adoption is no longer about novelty, but about return on investment.

The IFCN is a global dairy research and consultancy network based in Kiel, Germany. Founded in 2000, it now brings together more than 100 researchers and provides expertise in the form of data services to more than 120 companies in the global dairy supply chain. Milk processor, Lakelands Dairy, is an industry partner alongside Alltech, for example; Teagasc's Fiona Thorne from the Rural Economy Research Centre, is listed as a research partner; and the The European Dairy Association (EDA), the voice of the European milk processing industry in Brussels, is an institutional partner.

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AUTOMATED FEEDING SYSTEMS REMAIN RARE DUE TO THEIR COMPLEXITY, COST, AND THE ZERO-TOLERANCE REQUIREMENT FOR SYSTEM FAILURE

TOP TECH GAINING GROUND IN 2026

1. AI-POWERED CAMERA/VISION TECHNOLOGY

Computer vision cameras with AI capabilities emerged as the most frequently mentioned technology. Respondents highlighted applications for monitoring cow locomotion, facial recognition, and general herd observation. This suggests that producers see significant value in automated visual monitoring systems.

2. ROBOTIC SYSTEMS

Robotic milking systems and general automation continued to generate strong interest, with several respondents mentioning parlour automation and robotic solutions for both rotary and parallel parlour setups.

3. RUMEN BOLUSES/IN-COW SENSORS

Internal monitoring devices, particularly rumen boluses and temperature sensors, were cited multiple times. Producers noted these tools' abilities to detect illness early and evaluate treatment effectiveness through precise body temperature tracking.

4. VIRTUAL FENCING

No-fence or virtual fencing systems appeared repeatedly, indicating growing interest in flexible, technology-driven grazing management without physical infrastructure.

5. METHANE REDUCTION TECHNOLOGIES

Methane-reducing feed additives garnered notable attention, reflecting the industry's increasing focus on sustainability and environmental impact as both a market opportunity and operational priority.

With this in mind, we learned about the technologies that are gaining traction and the ones that are less so. Results of a survey carried out in January 2026 revealed that robotic milking systems, rumen boluses and sensor technologies, AI-powered camera systems, and software that improves feed efficiency and ration optimisation are all set to continue to grow in 2026. Details of the survey are covered in more detail in the panel left, 'Top Tech Gaining Ground In 2026'.

AUTOMATION

Automation, rather than humanoid robotics, defines the current phase of dairy technology, the briefing emphasised. While robotic milking has become mainstream in many regions, automated feeding systems remain rare due to their complexity, cost, and the zero-tolerance requirement for system failure. Panellists agreed that technology will not replace people on dairy farms, but will make existing labour more efficient by shifting human effort from manual monitoring to decision-making and problem-solving.

ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Despite increasing technology adoption, many farms struggle with fragmented data systems and underutilised tools, the briefing heard. Farmers expressed a strong demand for integrated solutions that provide simple, intuitive access to all farm data.

Looking ahead, 2026 is expected to mark a turning point for AI in dairy farming, particularly through natural-language interfaces that allow farmers to interact with herd-management systems conversationally, rather than through complex dashboards or command lines. AI's most immediate value lies in:

- ▶ Unlocking insights from existing equipment and correct data;
- ▶ Acting as a 'memory bank' for farm decisions and outcomes; and
- ▶ Supporting faster, better-informed management decisions.

Smaller farms are expected to benefit first from AI-driven decision support, while larger operations will see growing value as AI models entire farm ecosystems.

WATER AND CALVES

The briefing also highlighted water quality as a frequently underestimated but critical nutrient, with significant performance gains achievable through improved hygiene and



HERDI - AI FARM ASSISTANT

Last year, multi-award-winning agri-tech company, Herdwatch, revealed details of its new AI assistant, Herdi, which aims to facilitate farmers in delivering spoken instructions and recording important information and updates on the app on their phones. This innovation resulted in the Tipperary-based company winning at the **British Farming Awards in late 2025**, where it was recognised for its 'pioneering role in bringing practical AI to livestock farming, with the world's first context-aware AI farm assistant'.

treatment systems. In calf rearing, post-weaning nutrition was identified as one of the highest-return investments in dairy farming, directly influencing lifetime productivity. However, it was stressed that advanced digital technologies only deliver value once foundational infrastructure is in place.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A key takeaway from the Global Dairy Tech Briefing 2026 is that the future of dairy farming will be driven not simply by using more technology, but better-integrated, reliable, and economically viable technology. Farms that succeed will be those that fully leverage existing systems, invest step by step, and focus relentlessly on efficiency, people, and animal well-being.

*Information compiled by Bernie Commins.
Source: ifcndairy.org.*

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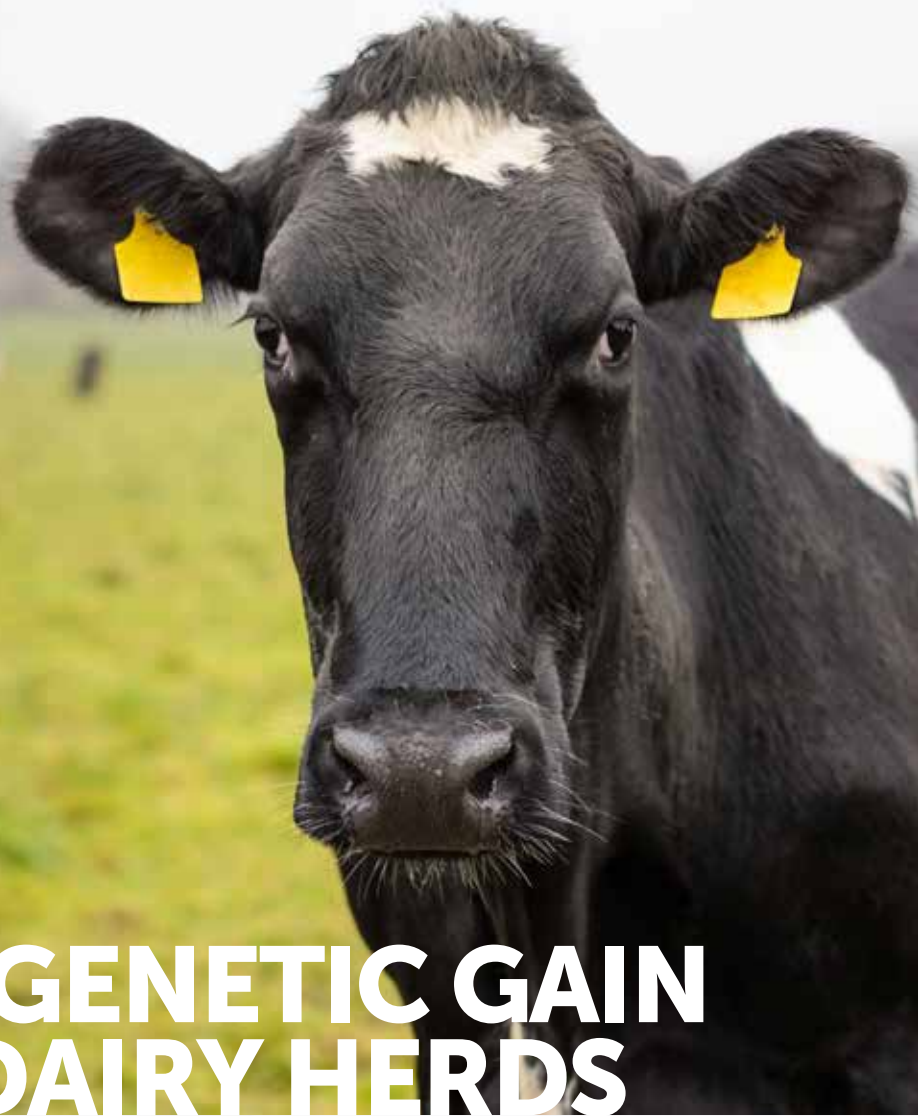


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DRIVING GENETIC GAIN IN IRISH DAIRY HERDS

WITH DAIRY-BREEDING SEASON UPON US, **MATT O'KEEFFE** SPOKE TO TEAGASC'S BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY ADVISOR (DAIRY), **NIGEL KENNINGTON**, ABOUT SOME OF THE PRACTICAL ISSUES THAT FARMERS FACE WHEN GETTING THEIR COWS BACK IN CALF

"Setting up a breeding plan is key to success," said Nigel. "Bull selection, cow selection, beef sire selection all come into play in making informed decisions and setting yourself up for a successful breeding outcome. A lot of farmers are signed up to HerdPlus (Irish Cattle Breeding Federation service) and that provides the background data required for breeding decisions. I can't over emphasise the importance of adopting and implementing the best breeding decisions. It makes a massive long-term difference to the productivity of the herd."

ROLE OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES

Nigel discussed the various technologies that have been brought to bear in breeding, including the widespread use of sexed semen: "While the number of dairy sires

could be reduced with widespread adoption of sexing semen, there is a lot of work going on in the background, researching and studying selective breeding across both dairy and beef sires. Sexed semen is proving its worth in offering greater scope for targeted breeding decisions," he said. He continued: "In terms of heat detection, there is a range of options, depending on the inclination and preference of individual farmers. Basically, whatever works best on a particular farm is the best option. Tail painting is widely practised, and while it does involve additional work and time in terms of detection, farmers find that it delivers high levels of both heats detected and, ultimately, high levels of conception." Other farmers, he said, have opted for more expensive heat-detection-monitoring technologies including



BULL SELECTION, COW SELECTION, BEEF SIRE SELECTION ALL COME INTO PLAY IN MAKING INFORMED DECISIONS AND SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR A SUCCESSFUL BREEDING OUTCOME

cow collars and eartags. He explained: "Again, these can offer high levels of detection and successful breeding, without as much hands-on work involved." Still on the subject of applying technology



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WE ARE ENCOURAGING FARMERS TO TAKE THE FUTURE GENETICS OF THEIR HERDS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS BY MAKING THE APPROPRIATE BREEDING DECISIONS

to improve breeding outcomes, Nigel addresses scanning within the breeding protocols: "Pre-breeding detection, now largely completed on earlier calving herds, is very useful in identifying those cows that are not coming in heat, and allows action to be taken early in the breeding season to get those cows cycling, if at all possible. At that stage, even before breeding begins, as well as through the first weeks, scanning individual cows not showing heat, to determine their reproductive health status has a role to play. It can ultimately be the difference between maintaining those cows in the herd or having to replace them because of a fertility issue that could have been corrected if detected in time."

STUDYING HERD GENETICS FIRSTHAND

Nigel has a body of genetics-related data from the farms where he provides advice and support: "I would have looked at data across a large number of farms where I provide advice, with a view to building a genetic profile of the herds. I ranked them in the top 25 per cent and the bottom 25 per cent using traits such as milk and fertility. When you study the figures, you see a huge variation between herds and even within herds. The top 25 per cent of herds have a fertility sub-index of €83, with the bottom 25 per cent having a fertility sub-index of €20.

"On the ground, that translates into an 83 per cent, six-week calving period for the top genetic merit females, and 69 per cent for the bottom genetic merit cows. That's a 14 per cent difference in breeding performance, specifically the number and percentage of cows calving in that critical first six-week calving period. In terms of calving interval, the same differences come up, with 370 days for the top 25 per cent of herds for fertility, and 392 days for the lower genetic merit

cohort. That's 21 days of a difference, a full reproductive cycle for a cow, in terms of the time it takes a cow of lower genetic merit fertility to go back in calf. Obviously, the longer it takes a cow to go back in calf in a compact spring-calving system, the more the likelihood of her falling out of the herd. "I looked at the same data for milk production outcomes. The top 25 per cent had a milk sub-index of €34, while the bottom group had a minus €3 performance. In terms of milk solids, the best genetics delivered 499 kilogrammes of milk solids, with the lowest group only delivering 457 kilogrammes. That's a difference of 42 kilogrammes, directly related to milk price returns per litre, or per kilogramme. Even in a poor milk price season, at €4 or €5 per kilogramme of milk solids, the end result is €200 to €250 of a loss of potential income generated per cow across the production season."

EBI HAS DELIVERED

In terms of where these genetic gains are coming from, the Economic Breeding Index (EBI), which has had its share of criticism over the years, has delivered huge gains for those milk producers who have adopted it, argues Nigel: "After 25 years of ongoing development, EBI has clearly driven genetic gain, with the bottom line being increased productivity and profitability. There was an opinion that EBI would reduce milk production if it solely concentrated on fertility. Those higher genetics cows are delivering 300 litres of extra milk, 5,900 litres per cow versus 5,600 for the lowest genetics group. In terms of milk fat content, the best genetics cows produce 4.62 per cent fat, against 4.28 per cent for the lowest cohort. Protein figures are the same, with the highest 25 per cent genetically improved cows producing 3.74 per cent protein, while the lowest genetics group

are lagging at 3.56 per cent protein content. These aren't just figures on a page. These are the figures gathered from 90 herds across my region," says Nigel.

ASKING THE HARD QUESTIONS

The differences in fertility and productivity are not solely between herds, Nigel notes: "Many herds have significant differences within them. Our goal is to drive better genetics within herds as much as between herds. Improvements can be made through improved bull selection. We are always encouraging farmers to look for improvements within their herds. Questions should be asked as to whether certain females in the herd should be bred for replacements or not. Ultimately, they may not be appropriate to breed the next generation of the herd. They can be bred to beef bulls, while there is a greater concentration on bull and cow selection for replacements, which will accelerate the rate of genetic gain. Looking again at the data from the herds in the survey, the average genetic gain each year was €7, but that varied from nil to €16 of a yearly gain across the herds. Ultimately, we are encouraging farmers to take the future genetics of their herds into their own hands by making the appropriate breeding decisions."



ULTIMATELY, WE ARE ENCOURAGING FARMERS TO TAKE THE FUTURE GENETICS OF THEIR HERDS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS BY MAKING THE APPROPRIATE BREEDING DECISIONS

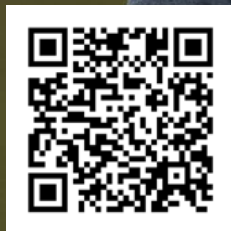
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Dairy Markets Seminar 2026

HUNGRY FOR PROTEIN

Christophe Lafougere,
managing director of Gira.
Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

THE GLOBAL APPETITE FOR WHEY PROTEIN WAS HIGHLIGHTED AT THE RECENT BORD BIA DAIRY MARKETS SEMINAR. BERNIE COMMINS WAS IN ATTENDANCE AND SERVES UP AN OVERVIEW OF A GLOBAL DAIRY ANALYSIS BY CHRISTOPHE LAFOUGERE FROM FOOD AND DRINK CONSULTANCY AND MARKET RESEARCH FIRM, GIRA

According to research (Source: Precedence), the global protein market was calculated at USD \$11.12 billion in 2025 and is predicted to increase from USD \$11.52 billion in 2026 to approximately USD \$15.81 billion by 2035. The demand is spanning various aspects of lifestyle now from fitness to general health and well-being, with increasingly expanding marketing budgets boosting companies' targets to sell more products enriched with this must-have component.

Protein consumption is not a new phenomenon, but its growing demand is a certainty of the global dairy market, according to Christophe, and the demand for whey proteins, in particular, continues to expand geographically; this is good news for dairy companies that have a close eye on this protein ball.

AROUND THE WORLD

Looking to the world outside of Europe and the US, Christophe highlighted a strong demand that will come from South America,

China, Japan and South Korea, South East Asian markets, the Middle East, North Africa, and Mexico: "They will all continue to eat more proteins, and to use proteins, but they will come from imports," he said. China, he said, will start to produce a little more whey but it is not yet self-sufficient. It needs more cheese and so, China will have to import whey for the foreseeable future. India, too, is increasing demand; it imported 21,000 tonnes in 2025, and that has grown from the previous years, he said.

CHEESE - A CO-PRODUCT

Commenting on cheese production and its connection to protein demand and supply, Christophe explained: "More and more, cheese is, and will be, the preferred option when you've got milk to process. Up to now, it was mainly because we had new market consumers asking for more cheese. But now, the cheese is becoming, let's say, the co-product of whey production. And I assure you that we will need more cheese in the future because there will be a huge need

US: the market is 'on fire'

In the United States, Christophe described the whey protein market as 'booming': "As one of our clients in the US says, that market is on fire, we can't have enough whey proteins." That market, he said could grow by at least five per cent in terms of consumption for the next five years. "That is conservative and most probably, it will be higher than that."

for more proteins in the future." He said that current cheese production levels over the next five years will not be enough to sustain the growth that we are seeing in the protein market.

CAPACITY ISSUES

In the US, cheese production between 2025 and 2030 is expected to increase by around 600,000 tonnes. "Already in 2025, the total capacity increase in the US has been over 300,000 tonnes, so we have already made half of that in 2025 [alone]. In Europe, interestingly, we were expecting around 200,000 tonnes of additional cheese from 2025 to 2030, and in 2025, without adding any new capacity, we have already [produced] 170,000 tonnes. So we are close to full capacity. In France, at the

moment, there is no more capacity [for cheese production] to the point that if we have a problem in a cheese plant, we would have to dump the milk."

A similar situation exists in Denmark, whereas in countries like China and Brazil, cheese production is also increasing as demand for whey protein does the same.



India: protein power

The demand for whey protein in India also shows no sign of abating and India's largest food and fast-moving consumer good company, Amul, has recently created a range of enriched protein products, Christophe said. They have developed high protein wheat flour, shakes, yoghurts, and paneer cheese. He commented: "So even in a country that is quite poor [in parts], you've got more and more [of these] products now being produced."

INDIA

Christophe commented that although India is a closed market in many respects, there are potential opportunities for greater exports as a result of the recently concluded free trade agreement between Europe and India. Christophe highlighted the lower tariffs that are applied to lactose and whey powders, as well as the fact that in 2025, around 21,000 tonnes of whey protein concentrate 80 (WPC80) and whey protein isolate (WPI) were exported to India.

Christophe said: "We've got clients who are doing big business in exporting high added value proteins to the market. And actually, in a discussion I was having with the CEO of Amul (India's largest food and fast-moving consumer good company) he was saying, they will need much more of these in the future."

According to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, in 2024, Irish agri-food exports to India totalled €40.5 million – almost double the value of exports in 2023 (€21.9 million). This was predominantly led by exports of Irish whiskey, with some additional exports under animal feed and dairy.

On the flipside of that agri-food imports from India in 2024 totalled €77.9 million. Leading imports fall under the categories of coffee, tea, cocoa and spices (€17.7 million), crude animal and vegetable material (€11.9 million), and fish products (€11.2 million).

Q Fever

Do you recognise these signs?

Weak newborns Abortion
 Infertility
 Retained placenta Stillbirths
 Metritis
 Premature calving



A disease that has the potential to have a significant impact on livestock health and production.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Q Fever causes reproduction and fertility issues to cattle!
- It is caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii*
- Animals shed bacteria at calving in vaginal mucous, also in milk and faeces
- Infection is caused through inhalation of the bacteria
- It is a zoonosis, risking the health of those working with livestock
- *Coxiella b.* is persistent, surviving up to 5 months in soil²
- *Coxiella b.* can be carried on the wind^{3,4,5}

Speak to your vet about diagnosis and vaccination if you are concerned about Q Fever.

References: 1. López-Gatius F., Almería S., García-Ispuerto I. (2012) Serological screening for *Coxiella burnetii* infection and related reproductive performance in high producing cows. Research in Veterinary Science Aug 93 (1) 67-73. 2. Welsh et al., 1959. Q fever studies. XXI. The recovery of *Coxiella burnetii* from the soil and surface water of premises harboring infected sheep. Am. J. Hyg. 70: 14-20. 3. Hawker JI, et al. 1998. A large outbreak of Q fever in the West Midlands; windborne spread into a metropolitan area. Commun Dis Public Health. 1998; 1:180-7. 4. Nusinovici S, et al. 2015. Q Fever infection in dairy cattle herds: increased risk with high wind speed and low precipitation. Epidemiology & Infection 143:315 (2015): 3316-3326. 5. Clark et al., 2018. Airborne geographical dispersal of Q fever from livestock holdings to human communities: a systematic review and critical appraisal of evidence.

This information was provided by Ceva Animal Health (Ireland) Ltd, makers of COXEVAC® suspension for injection for cattle, sheep and goats contains inactivated *Coxiella burnetii*, strain Nine Mile 372 QF Unit/ml. *Q-fever Unit: relative potency of phase I antigen measured by ELISA in comparison with a reference item. LEGAL CATEGORY: IE For further information, please refer to the product SPC, data sheet or pack insert. Use medicines responsibly.

Ceva Animal Health (Ireland) Ltd, 10 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin, Dublin 2, D02 T580
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COX3BADIE

MESSAGES

- Mr Trump has created new challenges for Irish farmers for 2026!
- There are several grassland challenges that must be addressed.
- Sulphur (S) will make nitrogen (N) work better to grow more grass.
- Lime will reduce your fertiliser bill.
- It will not pay to feed high levels of meal this year because of the meal-to-milk-price ratio!
- Make a silage closing-up plan.
- Sow white and red clover in April to reduce nitrogen costs.
- Sexed semen is a must-do task – plan it carefully.
- Sire advice will allow you to choose your own bulls – not the salesman!



By Matt Ryan

TRUMP HAS INCREASED THE 2026 CHALLENGE!

- ▶ A very difficult grazed-grass, weather-affected spring has been made very, very challenging by Mr Trump.
 - ▶ Still, we must overcome this challenge in the coming weeks.
- ▶ Input costs will have increased dramatically because of the war effect on oil availability.
- ▶ Fertiliser has gotten very expensive and is likely to be scarce. Can we take steps to mitigate its effects? We must try.
- ▶ All tractor work – whether it is your own tractor, or a contractor's – will be much more expensive.
- ▶ Electricity-driven work will increase in cost.
- ▶ Undoubtedly, other inputs will be more expensive, particularly if the war continues over a long period.
- ▶ Farm incomes will be under more pressure.

DEALING WITH THE GRASSLAND CHALLENGES

- ▶ Challenge 1: Not completing the first rotation until April 15-22.
 - ▶ As farmers are advised to start the second rotation when the first three to four paddocks have a cover of 1,200kg-1,400kg, a few checks should be made before acting:
 - ▶ Measure farm grass cover twice per week to be aware of farm cover changes.
 - ▶ On many farms, this cover will be there before the first rotation has been completed.
 - ▶ Where growth is unpredictable and the second rotation might be short – needs to be more than 25 days – it would be best to overlap grazing some of the older covers with the second round available paddocks.
 - ▶ In many situations farmers will have to cut some of the ungrazed paddocks for silage, and possibly bale, between April 16-25.
- ▶ Challenge 2: If, on April 1, grass covers on the first two to three paddocks for the second rotation is only 700kg-750kg DM, the following must be considered:
 - ▶ Undoubtedly, the start of the second rotation must be postponed until cover of 1,200-1,300kg DM are on the first three to four paddocks.
 - ▶ However, growth rates will determine the date.
 - ▶ While no two years are the same, one can predict this expected growth, based on the average for the last two

years for your farm on PastureBase.

- ▶ For example, if on April 1, your best paddock for the second rotation has a cover of 1,000kg, and the average growth rate on your farm for early April was 30kg DM/day, then you will have to delay the start of the second rotation by 10 days.
- ▶ No matter how tight grass is, cows must be allowed out for at least three hours per day with the remainder of the diet made up of 4kg-5kg meal and good quality silage (the silage as a last resort at this time of year).
- ▶ Challenge 3: What to do with badly poached paddocks?
 - ▶ It is best sorted by the cows' feet grazing these paddocks' on the second rotation on very dry days, even if you have to graze at lower covers to match the weather.
 - ▶ If severely damaged, reseeding should be considered.
 - ▶ But, under no circumstances is rolling part of the solution.
- ▶ Challenge 4: A lot of paddocks were poorly grazed out during wet days.
 - ▶ Poorly grazed out paddocks must, on the second rotation, be grazed at covers of 1,000kg-1,200kg, otherwise, they will be poor for the year due to lack of tillering. Remember, we are only three to four weeks from stem elongation and grass going to seed.
- ▶ Challenge 5: Many farms have received very low levels of fertiliser N, P and K to date:
 - ▶ By mid-April, all areas of the farm should have received 60-65 units N/acre – get it on across the whole farm. Protected urea is the recommended product.
 - ▶ The advice for P is to apply 50 per cent of the requirement in March and early April and the remainder from May to June. And the advice for K is to apply maintenance (index 3) dressings at this time but apply 'build-up' K in mid-summer. Therefore, two to three bags of 10:10:20, or 18:6:12 +S or 13:6:20 +S per acre, and are better value than 24:2.5:10 and 27:2.5:5 type fertilisers.
 - ▶ S must be applied from March. Table 1 highlights the huge benefits of applying sulphur:
 - ▶ In an era of restricted N use we must use S from March.
 - ▶ Apply 20kg/ha (18-20 units/acre)
 - ▶ For each silage cut apply 15kg/h-20kg/h

Table 1: Benefits of sulphur in grass production Source: Teagasc.

Trait	Benefit
Grass yield	+2.6t/ha
Nitrogen uptake	+38kg/ha
N leaching reduction	-22kg N/ha
N use efficiency	+25%
Cattle slurry S content	0.6 units/1,000gallons

- ▶ Challenge 6: Making the best use of the extra slurry available.
 - ▶ Knowing that 'good slurry' contains nine units of N, five units P and 32 units of K per 1,000 gallons, we must apply it on the fields most in need of P and K.

LIME MUST BE SPREAD NOW

- ▶ All the talk is about the cost and availability of N, P and K but there is very little talk of lime. In this era, it is THE most important of all fertilisers.
- ▶ The optimum pH is 6.3-6.5.
- ▶ Low pH levels will:
 - ▶ Impede the release of soil mineral N from organic matter.
 - ▶ Lime will release up to 70kg N/ha/year (56 units/acre).
 - ▶ It increases the availability of P and improves the efficiency of both applied bag P and slurry P.
- ▶ For every €1 spent on lime, the return is €7 = 700% return!
- ▶ Table 2 highlights the care required when using lime on the farm.

Table 2: Timing lag advice for lime, urea, CAN, slurry and fertiliser compounds.

First application	Second application	Time between first and second application
Lime	Urea	Avoid urea for 3-6 months
Lime	CAN	No issue
Lime	Slurry	3-6 months if concerned about N uptake
Urea	Lime	1 week
CAN	Lime	No issue
Slurry	Lime	1 week
Slurry	Any fertiliser (urea, CAN NPK compounds)	1 week
Any fertiliser (urea, CAN, NPK compounds)	Slurry	1 week

REDUCE MEAL COSTS IN APRIL

- ▶ I will always promote reducing meal-feeding to economically justifiable levels.
- ▶ Using a Teagasc Excel Programme, I consulted a farmer whose herd is in the top 5% in Ireland to see if it would pay him to feed 1,009kg (last year's figure) instead of 609kg of meal to each cow this year. The scenario was:
 - ▶ Milk price is 48c/L (10c/L lower than 2025).
 - ▶ Meal cost is €308/t.
 - ▶ Milk yield is 5,440L/cow.
- ▶ Spending €123/cow extra on meal [1,009kg instead of 609kg] results in an extra 228L/cow of milk. This is worth €109/cow.
 - ▶ This represents a loss of €14/cow/year. He had €11/cow from this exercise last year because milk made 58c/L.
- ▶ Feed minimum levels of meals in April; if grass is plentiful, it will produce 27L/day.
 - ▶ For every 4.5L a herd is yielding above that, feed 2kg of meal.
- ▶ A few facts about meal:
 - ▶ Every €1 spent on meal equals an actual cost to the farmer of €1.60.
 - ▶ Every 1kg extra meal fed reduces grazing time by 15 minutes.

- ▶ The return on money invested in meal feeding is only 3%.
- ▶ You must get yourself feeding the meal level by mid-April that you intend feeding cows in May:
 - ▶ This enables you to achieve better cow conception rates/less embryo loss because they will not be exposed to diet energy change during breeding.
- ▶ There are many ways to feed magnesium (Mg), which is a must, but one kilogramme of meal with adequate Mg would be easiest.
- ▶ New regulation: the kilogrammes of N/cow produced calculation can be reduced from 92 to 87 if farmers use meal with less than 13% P (this is for farmers in the middle band milk yield):
 - ▶ The regulation now is to feed less than 14% protein rations from April 15 onwards. The following can give you some ideas:
 - ▶ Barley (10%-12%), maize grain (8%), oats (13%), citrus pulp (6%-9%), sugar beet pulp (8%-10%), molasses (4%-6%), soya hulls (9%).
 - ▶ Consult your nutritionist or feed merchant before feeding them on their own.
 - ▶ If you are having to feed 3kg-4kg meal in April, you will end up feeding approximately 1t/cow/year again in 2026 – can you afford it?
- ▶ Dairy farmers rely on meal feeding for a number of reasons, from my experience.
 - ▶ They choose to ignore independent research results.
 - ▶ They evade responsibility on two fronts:
 - ▶ They allow the milker feed whatever quantity they want.
 - ▶ They never check the accuracy of the feeders.
 - ▶ But with margins so tight, farmers can do better!

PLAN TO CLOSE UP FOR SILAGE

There are a few considerations:

1. Provide as much grazing ground as possible for cows to minimise meal feeding in April and May; this focus is on the milking platform by grazing potential silage ground twice before closing.
 2. Make as much 'first cut' as possible because it is far cheaper than second and third cuts or baled silage.
 3. Make quality silage – over 75% DMD for milking cows.
 4. Making enough silage – 68-70% DMD for dry cows.
- ▶ Consideration 1: This option must be very seriously considered this year because it will save on:
 - ▶ Meal feeding during April.
 - ▶ Feeding pit silage or maize silage during April.
 - ▶ The way to maximise first cut on milking platform is to graze cows, cattle and calves at high stocking rates on the grazing area during April-May. This also leads to better grazing practices.
 - ▶ Grazing the silage ground twice will result in closing from April 15 and finish April 25, and so it will average around April 22 closing.
 - ▶ Fields/paddocks earmarked for silage, regardless of how much grass is on them, must be grazed from April 1-15 or later on some farms.
 - ▶ With good growth rates, the cutting date will be somewhere near June 10-14; early enough for a good cut of quality silage.
 - ▶ By grazing potential silage ground twice before closing, one

should strive for a split cutting date to facilitate the early availability of aftergrass.

- ▶ Quality will be very good because of the short growing period and no 'rotten butt'.
- ▶ Some farmers, for the second time, will start grazing the silage ground on the April 5 and will finish on April 15; this will facilitate cutting in late May/early June.
- ▶ Consideration 2: Plan for as much first cut as possible.
 - ▶ First cut is 15%-25% cheaper than second cut; therefore, close up as much ground as possible in early April.
 - ▶ To make that decision you must also decide on the stocking rate for cattle – 1,800kg-2-200kg weight per hectare and calves at 22calves/ha.
- ▶ Consideration 3: Make quality silage; over 75% DMD for milking cows.
 - ▶ Close on April 1 at the latest for cutting on May 20-25 to deliver quality silage.
 - ▶ You need 2t-3t per cow of this silage; therefore, approximately 33 acres per 100 cows.
- ▶ Consideration 4: Make enough silage for your winter period.
 - ▶ Cows need 1.6t, R2s need 1.3t, and weanlings need 0.8t each per month.
- ▶ Fertilisers for first cut.
 - ▶ 3,000 gallons of slurry (= 25-30 units of N) per acre onto bare ground, otherwise, that slurry will contaminate the silage.
 - ▶ With the slurry you only need 30-50 units per acre of protected urea and S.

SOW CLOVER IN APRIL

Complaining about the price of N will get you nowhere, but sowing clover will help to alleviate some of the cost.

There are two ways to sow clover in April and May:

Over-sow it.

In a full reseed – plough, till and sow.

Table 3 lists out the protocols.

Table 3: Protocols for incorporating clover. Source: Teagasc.

Over sowing clover	Reseeding
Select paddock with no weed burden, good fertility, high PRG, open sward and reseeded within last five years	Select paddocks that have below average yield, poor quality and with a weed problem
Use 2.5kg/acre medium leaf clover	Select grass varieties from PPI and 2kg/acre medium leafed white clover, plus 1kg red clover
Organise contractor for late April/early May [moisture present at sowing will help establishment]	Sow in April-early May using contractor for lime, 10:10:20 (three bags/acre), ploughing, and sowing
Reduce N to 15kg/ha for two months post sowing	Six weeks post sowing, be prepared to spray with clover-safe spray
For three rotations, graze at 1,000kgDM/ha PGC	For remainder of season graze at 1,000kg DM/ha cover to encourage tillering
Record over sowing event in PastureBase	Record reseeded event in PastureBase

PPI = Pasture Profit Index; PRG = perennial ryegrass; PGC = pre-grazing cover.

- ▶ White clover reseeding/stitching-in on milking platform is an absolute to do
Task this year. Why?
- ▶ Red clover should be seriously considered for sowing on outside silage blocks:
 - ▶ Teagasc research over six years has shown that, with no nitrogen, it grew slightly more silage than swards getting 480 units of bag N/acre.
 - ▶ Silage will be high quality, lowish in % protein, but is hard to preserve (needs 48-hour wilting).
 - ▶ Because of its growth habit it should not be grazed – this reduces its life span.
 - ▶ It has a life span of four to five years with the need for a four-year break before next reseeding of a 10-year reseeding cycle.
 - ▶ A suggested, mix is: 9kg perennial ryegrass + 4kg red clover + 1kg white clover; buy from a reputable source.
 - ▶ Potash (300 units/year) and phosphorous (40 units/year) are essential, and soil pH must be 6.5+.
 - ▶ It is best to sow red clover in April by ploughing or preferably min-till.

USE SEXED SEMEN - OBEY ALL THE RULES

- ▶ Some farmers have had very variable results from sexed semen. However, most farmers have got on ok. Therefore, because of the following benefits, we must continue the practice. The benefits include:
 - ▶ Fewer male dairy calves.
 - ▶ Better EBI replacement heifers,
 - ▶ Better DBI non-replacement calves,
 - ▶ Improved sustainability metrics.
- ▶ Order straws early and remember these straws are a fragile product and require very careful handling.
- ▶ Choose your sexed semen cows carefully:
 - ▶ Heifers must:
 - ▶ Be on target weight – confirm by weighing.
 - ▶ Be in BCS over 3.25.
 - ▶ Be cycling regularly (preferably on third).
 - ▶ Be at grass for more than six weeks.
 - ▶ Cows must:
 - ▶ Be in lactation one to four.
 - ▶ Be greater than 50 days calved,
 - ▶ Be in BCS of 3 or greater.
 - ▶ Not have lost more than 0.5 BCS from calving to mating.
 - ▶ Be cycling regularly.
 - ▶ Have had no postpartum disorders or uterine infections since calving.
- ▶ You need to use two straws for every replacement calf required.
- ▶ Choose your sexed semen bulls carefully – their EBI is as good as conventional semen. You will need seven AI bulls per 100 cows and one extra for every 50 cows thereafter.

- ▶ Fixed time AI (FTAI) is now very common when using sexed semen on heifers:
 - ▶ Dr Stephen Butler at Teagasc Moorepark found that an eight-day, eight-hour, fixed-time AI (FTAI) protocol was found to deliver a 9% higher conception rate compared to a conventional 10-day protocol when using sexed semen.
 - ▶ You must have your vet on side from the beginning – so give him plenty of notice.
 - ▶ Your AI technician must be ready and aware of the importance of the task.
 - ▶ If you are going to FTAI cows it is a 10-day protocol.

SIRE ADVICE MAKES CHOOSING BULLS EASY

- ▶ Use Sire Advice to 'match-up' your dairy cows with the most appropriate dairy and beef AI bull:
 - ▶ You will avoid inbreeding,
 - ▶ Maximise genetic gain from both the dairy and beef matings.
 - ▶ By using the DBI your beef calves will be more valuable.
 - ▶ You can assign each cow to either sexed semen, conventional semen, beef semen or for culling to avoid the cost of an AI service.
- ▶ Use ICBF sire advice to choose your AI bulls from the active bull list.
 - ▶ It is a very simple-to-use programme that enables you to mate the best cows with the best AI bulls,
 - ▶ It has been updated by ICBF – more farmers should use it.
- ▶ I recommended the following when choosing (average) a team of black and white (B&W) AI bulls:
 - ▶ EBI €290; fertility €110; calving €45; maintenance €35; health €20; MS 25kg,
 - ▶ percentage fat 0.33; and percentage protein 0.25.
 - ▶ Get as near to those targets as you can.
- ▶ This is the most valuable way to spend two hours this April.
- ▶ With collars, no stock bull should be necessary on a dairy farm. This creates:
 - ▶ Safer farms.
 - ▶ Lower risk of spreading disease.
 - ▶ More valuable calves for sale.

APRIL DATE TO NOTE:

- ▶ Important compliancy date for April:
 - ▶ April 15: The maximum crude protein content allowed in concentrates fed to bovines aged two years and upwards, including dairy cows, at grass is 14% from this date.

BRIEF NOTES:

- ▶ Lame cows must be cared for before the breeding season.
- ▶ The 'why wait' programme has merit on farms where a 'scattered' calving pattern exists.
- ▶ All calves must be out on grass to avoid house viruses and gain more weight.
- ▶ Farmers with a low EBI herd should consider a 'contract mating agreement' with a very good farmer so that he can buy heifer calves of the highest quality next year. Quality replacements rarely come on the market and will be more unlikely in the future given the value of dairy-beef calves.
- ▶ If you have under-weight R2s, it could pay you to feed them some meal with grass so that they can be mated from May 15-20. They will be valuable next year!
- ▶ It still is worth doing a Metricek on all cows.
- ▶ No cows or R2s should be injected in April.
- ▶ If, after doing all other checks, you consider minerals to be an issue in fertility management, take a grass sample from the first three to four paddocks to be grazed on the second rotation. Blood sampling has merit but very dependent on level of meal being fed.
- ▶ There should be no need to advise any sensible farmer that paying €400 to €600 per acre for rented ground is madness – doing this will only lead to one end result – you will be broke!

Message for the month

"We are what we do. Excellence is not an act; it is a habit. It is not a once-off. You have got to be excellent every minute of every day."



ICMMSA

THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION

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DESIGNED FOR HIGH DEMAND

JOHN DEERE HAS ADDED THREE NEW HIGH-HORSEPOWER TRACTOR MODELS TO ITS 8R AND 8RX SERIES, WITH RATED ENGINE OUTPUTS OF 440HP, 490HP AND 540HP, AND IT GETS OUR 'FROM THE CAB' FOCUS THIS MONTH

John Deere says that these new models are designed for the demands of heavy draft applications and long working days typical of larger European farm operations. All models are equipped with the JD14 13.6L engine, which can deliver up to 634hp through Peak Power Intelligent Power Management (PP IPM). This makes the top model 8R/8RX 540 the world's most powerful standard-design tractor.

SUPERIOR TRACTION AND POWER

The JD14 engine in the 8 series high-horsepower lineup provides up to 2,695Nm maximum torque and a constant power range from 1,450-1,900rpm. PP IPM provides an additional 40hp across the main engine speed range down to 1,600rpm, delivering extra power in demanding applications with high-load PTO and electrically or hydraulically driven implements.

The new 8R tractor models are available with tyres up to 2.3m at the rear and 1.85m in the front. Both the single- and dual-wheel configurations, including dual front tyres up to 710mm wide, can be equipped with the John Deere single-line Central Tyre Inflation System (CTIS), which automatically adjusts tyre pressures at any speed and temperature. Its simplified layout allows the axle hub to incorporate heavy-duty sealing components, which are covered by the protection plan PowerGard™. The new 8RX models use an updated four-track system with redesigned undercarriages and Soucy CustomFit™ P series belts. Their low-tension belt design aims to reduce belt stress and extend operating life. Depending on configuration, the track system provides a contact area of up to 4.87m² and

thus ground pressures as low as 0.4 kg/cm², helping to minimise soil compaction.

TRANSMISSION, SUSPENSION, AND FUEL

The stepless eAutoPowr™ transmission The stepless eAutoPowr™ transmission system present on the 8R and 8RX models uses an electro-mechanical split system present on the 8R and 8RX models uses an electro-mechanical split-path layout that replaces hydrostatic components with maintenance-free electric motor generators, improving energy flow efficiency in the transmission by up to 8 per cent, the company says compared to conventional hydrostatic solutions. The new Heavy-Duty Independent Link Suspension (HD ILS) front axle ensures efficient power transfer and a turning radius of around 7 m, supporting smaller headlands and precise path-to-path operation. The HD ILS features automatic as well as manually adjustable load-based suspension adaptation for a more comfortable and personalised cab experience.

Fuel tank capacities of 936L on the 8R models, and up to 1,123L on 8RX machines, support long working days, with operating times of up to 14 hours at 85 per cent load, eliminating refill stops in 12-hour shifts.

CAB AND OPERATOR ENVIRONMENT

The CommandView 4 cab is equipped with a redesigned CommandARM with integrated Convenience Display, allowing operators to recall seat settings and personalise the cab environment by controlling, for instance, radio, air conditioning or phone. Furthermore, the new CommandARM features

two new joystick options: the CommandX Plus for basic operation, or the advanced CommandX Pro for expert-level control. Both provide enhanced configurability, including new phone and infotainment control, new G5Plus display navigation, and extended precision-agriculture functionalities. Further cab refinements include inductive phone charging, a 330° front wiper, right-hand side door wiper, push-button-start with pin code protection and door cinch soft closing. Additionally, the CommandView 4 Plus cab on the new 8RX high-horsepower models offers 15 per cent more legroom and a 20 per cent wider panoramic field of view in comparison to the 8R standard series cab. The Premium and Ultimate seats now include on-screen adjustments with electronic independent forwards/backwards and up/down CommandARM positioning and full-width cushion length control. A top-mounted seatback vent in the Ultimate seat circulates cabin air, delivering extra airflow around the operator for a cooler, more comfortable ride. All new 8R and 8RX models are equipped in-base with a StarFire 7500 receiver, a G5Plus CommandCenter display and JDLink connectivity. With flexible licence options, operators can access supervised autonomy features that support consistent work quality and reduce operational mistakes. Features like AutoPath Rows and Boundaries create guidance plans for the entire field and all seasonal operations, while AutoTrac Turn Automation delivers precise turns in any field shape. Passive Implement Guidance ensures centimeter-level accuracy by reducing implement drift, and AutoTrac



NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

Implement Guidance In Reverse enables precise maneuvering of wide implements, regardless of operator experience. In-Field Data Sharing and seamless data transfer to the John Deere Operations Center offer coordinated operation without manual data exchange.

VERSATILITY

The 8 series high-horsepower lineup delivers articulated-level pulling power with standard-tractor versatility, enabling quick field-to-field moves while handling the largest implements. With up to 418 L/min hydraulic flow large drills are easily powered. The tractor comes with an optional Category 5 drawbar and a double-acting rear hitch with up to 10.8t lift capacity at 610mm, while two new double-acting front hitch options offer up to 4.8t at 610mm. Together with a 130kW front PTO the new 8R and 8RX models are designed to handle all heavy-duty implements from large-scale mulchers to PTO-driven silage distributors. The Type 4 rear PTO with 1,000, 1,000E, and 1,300 speeds and up to 548hp maximum PTO power even in stationary applications, offers surplus power for demanding jobs.

The new 8R/RX tractors feature an optional Jake Brake engine brake with up to 300kW of brake power. When engaged, it automatically responds whenever actual speed differs from pre-selected speed, delivering smooth deceleration with one pedal ease, while protecting the main brake for longer life.

Operating modes

Three selectable operating modes allow operators to tailor engine and transmission performance to specific tasks:

- ▶ **Eco mode:** prioritises fuel efficiency and comfort with reduced engine speeds, ideal for transport or light-duty work.
- ▶ **Standard mode:** balances power, efficiency, and responsiveness for most field operations.
- ▶ **Max mode:** Unlocks full engine potential and fastest response for heavy draft applications and dynamic load changes.

EFFICIENT PERFORMANCE

Transport speeds of 60km/h at 1,440rpm or 50km/h at 1,200rpm are available on wheeled versions, depending on market regulations. The new ILS Roll Control automatically adjusts front axle suspension stiffness during cornering and higher transport speeds, reducing leaning to curves and minimising forward dip under heavy braking. Reactive Command Steering provides precise, car-like handling with a self-centering steering wheel to handle intersections smoothly and for convenient line-holding. The new function comes additionally with Variable Ratio Steering, reducing steering wheel turns at higher speeds, while adjustable return-to-centre force and steering resistance allow the system to be tailored to operator preference, particularly during repeated headland manoeuvres.

THE NEAREST OF MISSES

Well, my friends, a few weeks ago, one Friday evening, I had a near miss that stopped me in my tracks – and almost did a lot worse than that.

I decided to do a bit of tidying around the garden and the yard – cutting branches, clearing leaves – a bit of a spring clean after the winter. I pulled out the quad, checked it over, filled it up, and attached the trailer, and off I went about my business. After I had filled the trailer, I headed to an area down the field where I usually deposit cuttings. I put them near a section of the bank of a river to create bug hotels and cover for wildlife. As I was turning the quad, to empty the trailer, the vehicle somehow lunged forwards and sideways at speed, and me and the quad ended up falling down a four-foot drop into the river, which was about three feet deep at the point of entry. I ended up in the water with the quad on top of me, trapping me. I was completely submerged; the weight of the quad and the trailer worked against me, pushing me back down as I tried to escape. Then, I realised that my foot was trapped and, in a state of desperation and panic, I was prepared to break my ankle in an attempt to free it, when, luckily, my shoe slipped off my foot and I was able to get free. Pure luck! I got out of the freezing water as fast as I could and crawled up the bank. I then walked the short distance back to the yard, got a hammer, went back down to the river, freed the trailer from the quad and managed to turn the bike upright – I was concerned about the electrics and keeping them as dry as possible. I was in total shock. I went home. It was only later that night that it dawned on me what had actually happened.

The next morning, I phoned a good friend. I told him what had happened, and I asked if he could bring down the tractor and loader so we could get the quad out of the water. I could tell by him that he wasn't in good form. He told me that a farmer who we all new well had died in a farm accident just the night before. Another good friend of mine was at the farm at the time of the accident, doing a contracting job. It was so unsettling. I was calling them for help after my accident, but they were dealing with the worst possible outcome of another farming accident – the loss of a life. It was a terrible moment to learn about this tragedy. I was just shocked to think that these two accidents occurred almost at the same time and while I had a lucky escape, my neighbour, tragically, had not been so lucky. Last month, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) carried out a national farm safety inspection campaign focusing on the safe use of tractors, machinery, quad bikes, and other work vehicles on farms. Over the last 10 years, 73 people have died in vehicle-related incidents. According to data from Teagasc's national farm survey, about 4,500 farm accidents occur every year, but we all know many farm accidents happen that are never reported. It is a serious, serious issue. I am lucky to be here today to share my story.

A dear friend of mine, long since passed, the great Moss Keane, former Irish and Lions rugby player, used to say 'accidents are caused, they don't happen'. I will leave it for you to decide if he is right. I have worked with quads for many years and in the space of seven months, I have had two incidents involving them, with the latest proving almost fatal. On both occasions, I think there was a slight lapse of concentration on my part. I have done a quad safety course, but there is no getting away from the fact that human error occurs, and these powerful machines must be respected. They are not toys, and they can cause great and grave damage. Until next month, farm safely, farm wisely.



ADVERTORIAL

CLAYDON HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF ITS OPTI-TILL SYSTEM

The cost saving and ecological benefits of establishing crops with the Claydon Opti-Till System are two of the many reasons why farmers are reviewing their operations and switching from conventional and min-till farming methods.

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Claydon Evolution and Hybrid direct drills incorporate unique leading tine technology



which makes them exceptionally versatile. Moving the optimum amount of soil, but only where needed in the seeding and rooting zone, the leading tine creates tilth and drainage, aerates the soil and alleviates compaction to produce the perfect growing environment for fast germination. Soil between the seeded bands is left undisturbed, helping to support farm traffic, whilst conserving moisture for the plants to tap into.

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BORN TO **FARM**



Tom Murphy
Professional Agricultural
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DIFFICULT START

As we look back at the start of 2026, farmers and agricultural contractors were faced with many challenges. With the ground waterlogged and no sign of the rain abating, it was almost impossible to remember when we had a dry day.

Now, because of Mr Trump's actions in Iran, we now also face massive fuel and fertiliser price increases. Agricultural contractors have no control over sudden fuel-price increases and, therefore, can have difficulty pricing work accurately. I always advise contractors to discuss with their farmer, before work begins, what will happen if there are unexpected fuel increases. Failure to do this can result in disputes that are hard to resolve.

SHOCKING 2025 FATALITY FIGURES

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has

confirmed that there were 23 fatalities on Irish farms in 2025. This is a significant increase from the 12 fatalities reported in 2024. Shockingly, this represents 40 per cent of all workplace fatalities in the farming sector that employs just 4 per cent of the workforce. The main causes of fatalities were, falls especially while mending roofs, interactions with livestock, and machinery/vehicles.

It is recognised that farmers work under considerable stress. Financial stress is always prevalent, and the availability of labour – or lack of it – also weighs heavy, causing many farmers to work much longer hours than would be normal. Striving to get it all done means that farmers are often rushed and fatigued, which can lead to impaired judgement. But trying to save a few minutes can have long-term consequences of injury or even lead to death; leaving a family devastated.

There is a problem in Ireland with an ageing farm population. The average age of farmers is now 59 years, with 33 per cent of all farmers being 65 years or older. This demographic remains the most vulnerable of all as they continue to work well past retirement age. By mid-2025 over 65s accounted for 75 per cent of farm fatalities and for more than 50 per cent of farm fatalities and over the last 10 years. All farming families must be aware of the limitations of people in this age group. It is horrendous that someone who has given their life to farming is

killed or involved in a life-changing accident when they should be reaping the rewards of a lifetime's work. Trying to instill the safety message every day is difficult, especially for routine tasks, but it is usually while doing these that accidents occur. Always have safety to the front of your mind and, older farmers, ask yourself would you allow your children or grandchildren to take that risk that you're about to take? Stop and think and don't become a statistic.

INTERESTING TIMES

Interesting times ahead in the Netherlands where they are implementing a pretty radical scheme, which will see €25 billion spent to reduce the national herd, including cattle, pigs, and poultry. Estimates suggest that a cut of up to one third of livestock numbers may be required to meet EU mandated nitrogen emission targets. Initially the government is offering a voluntary buyout scheme but is not ruling out a compulsory buyout. In the simplest of terms, the government wants to cut meat imports and exports and keep animals only to satisfy the demands of its own population. It's worth bearing in mind that in December 2025 the Netherlands bid for a nitrate derogation was turned down while Irelands request was granted – but for how long? Could we be forced to introduce a similar scheme? I might say that could never happen here; but do I believe it?

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SIP UNVEILS ENHANCED MOWER LINEUP

SIP has announced the expansion of its AS and Silvercut mower ranges, bringing high-performance 'clean cut' technology to farms of all sizes.

The AS range is optimised for maximum manoeuvrability with small-to-medium tractors, offering a low centre of gravity and working widths from 2.16m up to 3.40m. The range includes front- and rear-mounted options and features a welded cutter bar with quick change, fast fit blades. High performance, wear

resistant Hardox steel cutting disc and skids ensure exceptional mowing performance and a long service life, according to the company. The unique Disc Drive Safety System (DDSS) with four brass pins, ensures that work continues unimpeded in the event of a disc overload. The dual spring suspension system provides constant ground adaption to ensure exceptional mowing performance. The front-mounted options have the centre of gravity close to the tractor and

working widths of 2.20m, 2.6m and 3m. For large-scale farmers and contractors, the Silvercut series introduces advanced hydro-pneumatic suspension, ensuring consistent ground pressure even at high speeds.

"Our goal is to combine longevity with field-fixable reliability," said a company spokesperson. This is achieved through the DDSS, which uses sacrificial brass pins to absorb impact forces without damaging the cutter bar.



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NEW FOR THE SEASON FROM APV

APV has a number of innovative solutions for the efficient maintenance, reseed and regeneration of grassland. New for this season is the GK 300 S Grassland Combi, which combines slit and broadcast seeding in a single step, taking grassland reseeding and sowing to a new level. The seed is deposited precisely at different depths: slit seeding technology with 24 coulters ensures precise placement in the soil at a depth of 1-3cm, while broadcast seeding provides full-area coverage on the surface. This results in faster growth with lower seed requirements. The system is highly flexible offering the option to mount one or two pneumatic seeders with different hopper sizes, says APV.

New in the pneumatic seeder range is the PS 500 fertiliser twin and the Smart Twin. The PS 500 allows two different types or seed or fertiliser, or seed and fertiliser to be spread at the same time. This is made possible by the divided hopper, available in either 70:30 or 50:50 split, and the divided seeding shaft. The Smart Twin is available in sizes from 120L to 500L can apply seed at different rates or stop application on one side, in conjunction with Isobus, thanks to the divided seed shaft. This is based on application maps.

And in the mechanical cultivation area, APV has a number of products that are practical, productive, and precise, such as the AS Tined Weeder, which ensures uniform aeration of the soil surface and effective weed control; the VS Tined Weeder Pro with its innovative tine-spring system that guarantees constant pressure distribution across the entire working width – even under changing ground conditions. Also in the range is the RC Rotary Crusher, which works with rotating hoeing elements that break up soil crusts, interrupt capillary action and thus improve water storage and the RW Rotary Weeder, which enables particularly gentle crop cultivation and ensures optimum nutrient activation.

The GK 300 S Grassland Combi combines slit and broadcast seeding in a single step.



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“Everything that we do here on this farm, whether its milking cows or feeding cows, we like to do it as accurately as possible. The ZA-V has allowed us to do that, it’s completely eliminated the guesswork out of spreading fertiliser.”

“It’s done everything we wanted to do and a bit more so we’re very happy with our purchase. I’d have no hesitation in recommending a ZA-V spreader to another farmer, it’s a great piece of kit.”



For more info on ZA-V or to request a demo Call Val on : 087 244 0893



FOUR YEARS ON...

ANDREW (ANDY) MULHARE FARMS IN EXCESS OF 200 ACRES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HIS MOTHER, THERESA, IN COURTWOOD, CO. LAOIS. THE FARM IS SPLIT BETWEEN TWO LOTS - 130 ACRES ON THE HOME PLOT AND JUST OVER 70 ACRES WITHIN A 5KM RADIUS. THE ENTERPRISE COMPRISES SUCKLER, BEEF, AND TILLAGE, WITH ALL EXCESS STRAW SOLD OFF-FARM. AWAY FROM THE FARM, ANDY WOULD BE WELL-KNOWN AS AN AGRI-CONSULTANT, A JOB HE HAS DONE FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS. BUT IT WAS ANDY'S FOUR-YEAR-OLD MASSEY FERGUSON M5711 - COMPLETE WITH FL.3723 LOADER - THAT NOEL DUNNE WAS INTERESTED IN WHEN HE VISITED RECENTLY. HERE, HE FINDS OUT HOW THE MACHINE HAS BEEN PERFORMING



◀ Andy says he likes the cab interior and layout controls, which are simple to use. Its spacious cab suspension system makes it smooth in the field and on the road.

The back end of the M5711 is perfect for Andy's requirements. Access is easy and visibility is good. ▼





◀ Andy's Massey is fitted with an FL.3723 loader, ideal for silage work, bale lifting, and general yard work. The tractor's size, tight turning circle, and versatility makes it ideal for small spaces and tight yards.



As Andy runs a mixed farm enterprise with around 80 acres of tillage to cover, consisting of malt, feed and spring barley, at 115hp the M5711 can plough, till, sow, and roll with ease. Andy says: "I don't need big kit. I can tip along there handy enough. The tractor lends itself to the conditions I am farming in, and the land is fairly dry."

In the corner of Andy's yard, the Mulhares' very first Massey was spotted - the workhorse that was the 390. In its day, this was the go-to tractor for dairy and livestock farmers. There wasn't a mixed farm in Ireland back in the '90s that didn't have a 300 series on it. Andy's late father Andy (senior) bought this tractor from well-known local Massey Ferguson dealer, EV Condell back then. He changed from Ford at the time, and in the Courtwood area where the Mulhares farm, Massey was gaining a strong foothold. Today, Andy continues to deal with the second generation of Goodwins who own EV Condell.



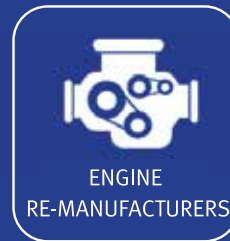
Andy says the bonnet design aids visibility as there is a clear view from the cab down to the front for moving and stacking bales.



▶ Andy with local contractor, Willie Walsh, who happened to be in the yard on the day trying out the new Newrock slurry agitator. Andy uses two local contractors - Walshes for slurry application and hedgecutting, and the Wilson brothers for sowing, bailing, and dung spreading, etc. "You can't beat the service the lads give, and it frees me up to run the farm and do the consultancy work," says Andy.



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Denis Drennan
President ICMSA

LAST CHANCE TO MAKE CAP RELEVANT AGAIN

Ireland is set to assume the presidency of the EU for a six-month period beginning on July 1 and ending on December 31. It seems very fair to assume that the international situation will not have resumed any degree of calm by the time we get to sit in that big seat. No doubt, there will be a chorus of voices and groups demanding that Ireland elevates their own 'pet' projects and causes. In the midst of all this noise, it is the ICMSA's intention to push – and push as hard as we can – on the issue of the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

It's probably not the most fashionable or 'of the moment' issue, but it is, undoubtedly, the issue that will have the most direct influence, for good or bad, on the family farms we represent and on the rural districts of which they are the backbone.

It is simply a matter of fact to observe that for a whole variety of reasons, the issue of what Ireland wants from the next CAP has not been given the attention it requires. It is an area of dizzying complexity but one that is, nevertheless, capable of being reduced to a few simple principles and the most notable principles that ICMSA wants front and centre is: a) the budget for the next CAP must be adequate; and b) it is beyond time that payments under CAP were inflation-linked. There are obviously other specific areas that we will be urging the Irish Government to impress upon the European Commission.

Not least of those will be the laughably misnamed 'simplification' agenda that has achieved notoriety by managing the difficult task of making an already confusing system even more confusing under the guise of making it simpler.

SETTING OUT OUR STALL

Recently, the ICMSA met both Piotr Serafin, European Commissioner for Budget and Christophe Hansen, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, and we laid out to them plainly that we will be campaigning – both through our domestic Irish forums and avenues and through our membership of European Milk Board (EMB) – that the absolutely overriding priority must be to secure an adequate CAP budget under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations during 2026 and that this budget must, as a bare minimum, reflect the fact that inflation on farm inputs has drastically reduced the already inadequate real spending power of the direct supports. Again, this is just a fact and cannot be seriously disputed by any serious observer.

At that meeting, we also told both commissioners that the EU continuing to invent new environmental stipulations in the expectation that they would be funded out of the CAP budget had been a disaster and it was high time that we remembered that CAP had originally been conceived as a way of ensuring security of affordable food for the

populations of the great European cities. Given the global uncertainty today, this original objective needs to move up the agenda very smartly.

In the kind of highly unstable international situation, we see around us now, it might be time to concentrate on securing the supply of food, and parking the more fringe environmental issues and green bolt-ons until a degree of stability and predictability allows us that luxury.

TOO MUCH

We firmly believe that the current CAP is already expected to do too much from a policy perspective and, as a result, is failing in its primary function of delivering a sustainable income to the farmers producing high quality food daily. The CAP must refocus on the issue of sustainable farm incomes that will help sustainable food production. That must be the focus of the next CAP, and the aim must be moving farmers to a position where they can earn incomes in line with other sectors of the economy. These are realisable aims that can be achieved through a strong index linked budget with policies focussed on those producing high quality food. The current budget proposal from the EU Commission is hopelessly inadequate and will have to be revised substantially upwards. That is ICMSA's 'starting point' and we will do everything in our power to ensure that it is Ireland's starting point on July 1.

A group enjoying a farm tour at O'Sullivan's farm in Colligan as part of the West Waterford Festival of Food.



COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY AT THE HEART OF WATERFORD FESTIVAL

THE WATERFORD FESTIVAL OF FOOD RETURNS THIS YEAR OFFERING 'UNIQUE DINING EXPERIENCES WITH TOP CHEFS, A BIGGER PROGRAMME WITH OVER 100 EVENTS AND EXPANSION INTO WATERFORD CITY, AND THE RETURN OF IRELAND'S LARGEST MARKET' ORGANISERS SAY

One of Ireland's longest-running food festivals, Waterford Festival of Food, returns for its 17th year from April 23-26 with a fantastic line-up of chefs, collaborations and immersive culinary experiences, across west Waterford, and a new expansion into Waterford City.

What began as a celebration of local produce in Dungarvan has grown into a nationally recognised festival that continues to attract some of the most influential voices in Irish food while remaining deeply connected to the landscapes, communities and producers of Waterford, say organisers.

COLLABS

The 2026 programme features a fantastic series of one-night-only chef collaborations. At the House of Waterford, the home of Waterford Crystal, the culinary team from Ashford Castle will collaborate with chef, Eric Matthews, for an elegant multi-course dinner staged within one of the county's most striking settings. Chef, Paul Flynn, will welcome the team from Uno Mas, the acclaimed Spanish-style Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurant in Dublin, to The Tannery for a rare and highly anticipated takeover; an event that will mark The

Tannery's final festival appearance ahead of its planned closure later this year. Sham Hanifa will bring his bold, flavour-driven cooking to Cass & Co, while the team from Café Paradiso are travelling from Cork for a special pop-up at the Tannery Cookery School. At Mount Congreve Estate, Jean-Baptiste Du Bois presents '350 Metres & Beyond', a shared-table lunch shaped entirely by the estate's garden-to-plate philosophy. Appearances from Caitlin Ruth and Rory O'Connell of Ballymaloe Cookery School further underline the strength and range of the 2026 line-up.

CITY BOUND

For the first time in the festival's history, Waterford City will become an integral part of the festival story. The weekend opens with



A butcher demonstration as part of the Waterford Festival of Food.

Food Sparks at SETU Waterford Campus, a symposium exploring collaboration, sustainability, and innovation within the Irish food sector. Expect guided city taste tours, immersive storytelling suppers at Waterford Medieval Museum, and sociable tapas trails that highlight the city's evolving dining scene. The expansion marks a natural progression, broadening the festival's footprint, while reinforcing its connection to Waterford's wider cultural and culinary identity. Beyond the headline dining experiences, the programme continues to move across rivers, orchards and mountains. Bus Bia tours will travel through the Blackwater Valley to meet cider makers, distillers and artisan cheesemakers, while foraging experiences in the Comeraghs and apple blossom walks at Cappoquin Fruit Farm will place seasonality centre stage. River cruises departing from Villierstown Quay will pair local produce with heritage and landscape, and wellness events - from sunrise yoga and sauna sessions at Clonea Beach to retreat-style experiences in Ardmore and seasonal workshops in Tourin Gardens - reflect a festival increasingly attuned to not only the relationship between food, nature and wellbeing, but the growing demand from festival goers for such events! In Dungarvan, the festival markets remain the defining heartbeat of the weekend. Saturday sees Davitt's Quay animated by the Quayside Market and the annual RNLI Duck Race, while Sunday transforms Grattan Square into Ireland's largest outdoor food market, with more than 80 producers and makers filling the town centre. Demonstrations and talks at Dungarvan Courthouse and surrounding venues feature a mix of nationally recognised chefs and respected local voices, maintaining the festival's longstanding balance between profile and authenticity.

FAMILY TIME

Family programming continues to sit at the core of Waterford Festival of Food, with Dungarvan Castle, the 13th-century King John's Castle overlooking the harbour, once again serving as one of the festival's most joyful and inclusive gathering points. Across two full days, the castle grounds will host farm animal encounters with Nore Valley Park, hands-on cookery workshops, seed planting sessions, creative craft classes and interactive food education designed specifically for younger festivalgoers. From Snack Attack workshops and Lámh cookery demonstrations to the ever-popular Kids Bake Off, Lego Playtime and the Family Farm Bus, the programme offers both high-energy fun and quieter, thoughtful engagement. Events such as Picnic na dTeidí, the dog show and a lively karaoke and disco add to the atmosphere, ensuring there is something to capture the imagination of every age group. Sustainability and accessibility remain embedded throughout the weekend, according to organisers, from reusable cup systems and refill stations to autism-friendly programming, quiet hours and inclusive design delivered in partnership with Autism

REMEMBERING PAUL

For 2026, the family events are dedicated to the memory of long-serving board member Paul Clerkin, who recently passed away. Affectionately known as the King of the Castle, Paul's steady presence and calm authority helped shape this strand of the festival from its earliest years, ensuring that generations of families felt at home within the weekend.

Friendly Dungarvan. A dedicated quiet hour each morning, accessible funfair rides and the return of the Sensory Express Bus ensure the experience remains welcoming to families of all needs and abilities, reinforcing the festival's longstanding commitment to inclusion.

Speaking ahead of the festival, Waterford Festival of Food CEO Eunice Power said the 2026 edition reflects both continuity and confident growth. "While Dungarvan will always be the heart of this festival, expanding into Waterford City allows us to explore new venues and new collaborations, while staying true to the producers and communities that have shaped us for 17 years. What excites me most this year is the depth of collaboration across the county, from established restaurants to new talent, and the way the programme moves naturally between landscape, heritage and contemporary cooking. It feels like a confident step forward for the festival and for Waterford's food culture. We look forward to welcoming people to experience it with us this April."





COUNTDOWN TO BREEDING

WEBINAR

This webinar took place as part of **BREEDING WEEK 2026** and focused on maximising the success of the **BREEDING SEASON**

Topics discussed included:

- Preparation needed to maximise breeding performance ahead of the season
- Correct implementation of synchronisation programmes
- General best practice guidelines for dairy breeding

Scan here to view the Webinar and access all **BREEDING WEEK 2026** material



Other information included:



"Breeding the Next Generation of Sires"
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The webinar was chaired by **Stuart Childs, Teagasc Dairy Specialist**

Panellists included:



Stephen Butler
Teagasc



Doreen Corridan
National Cattle Breeding Centre

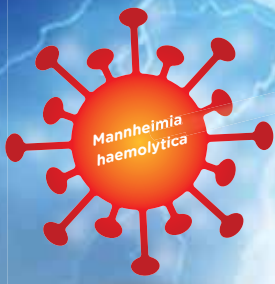


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