

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY



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INTERVIEW

CHAIR, NUFFIELD IRELAND
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Call for entries

Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise | 5th November 2026

Farmer Awards

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**ANIMAL HEALTH DAIRY
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**DAIRY FARM
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**TECH INNOVATOR DAIRY
FARMER OF THE YEAR**

**MULLINAHONE CO-OP YOUNG
DAIRY FARMER OF THE YEAR**

**GERMINAL SUSTAINABLE DAIRY
GRASSLAND FARMER
OF THE YEAR**

Farm Network Awards

BEST DAIRY ADVISOR

**GREEN ACRE MARKETING
DAIRY SOCIAL MEDIA
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**CORMAC TAGGING
DAIRY DISCUSSION /
SUPPORT GROUP
OF THE YEAR**

**DAIRY INNOVATION
RECOGNITION AWARD**

**BEST DAIRY RESEARCH
PROGRAMME/PROJECT**

DAIRY VET OF THE YEAR

Dairy Produce Awards

BEST ARTISAN DAIRY PRODUCT 2026

BEST DAIRY PRODUCT INNOVATION 2026

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OF THE YEAR**

**PTSB BEST DAIRY PRODUCER /
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AUGUST 2026

EDITORIAL

LOW BAR FOR FARM VIABILITY



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

While over half of Irish farms are described as economically viable in Teagasc's 2025 National Farm Survey, the threshold for viability is not particularly high. Farm viability, for the purposes of the survey, is defined as the farm being capable of providing for the remuneration of family labour at the minimum wage and a 5 per cent return on capital (ROC) invested in non-land assets. That primarily refers to livestock and machinery. There is no ROC expected for land. A minimum-wage employee working full time can hope to take home €24,300 before overtime. That's hardly a fortune. However, by comparison with a farmer, they deploy no business assets, have no capital invested, and have little or no managerial or decision-making challenges in their roles. There is another worrying feature from the 2025 farm survey. Are the higher viability figures an aberration or an indicator of a rising tide for farm incomes in the coming years? Last year saw higher livestock prices and high milk prices though not, notably, high grain prices. Even still, two-thirds of tillage farms met the viability criteria, probably helped by a beef enterprise in the background for some. If farmgate prices had remained elevated, then these viability figures could have been expected to remain stable, at least, even at that low base threshold. Unfortunately, in the meantime, farmgate prices have been altered significantly. Milk prices began to drop well before the end of 2025, and though they have stabilised, it is at levels far below the average for 2025, and at or below the critical breakeven figures for most milk production models. Higher calf and cull cow prices have provided a temporary income buffer. Beef finishers, after a positive 2025, which saw their viability figures improve by 18 per cent on the previous year, have just come through a drastic period of price correction in the first half of 2026, with finished cattle

prices unable to meet the costs involved in assembling those cattle last autumn and bringing them to slaughter. Some of the enterprise categories, then, can be expected to match the viability figures for last year. For others, the current expectation is that viability will reduce. Certainly, depending on how far above the threshold an enterprise is or was last year, income levels will fall substantially, unless the closing five months of 2026 bring extraordinarily positive commodity price changes. Most milk production enterprises should maintain viability, albeit at much reduced income levels. For livestock production, across the categories, some measure of viability stability should be maintained. Primary producers – those involved in calf production – are maintaining good returns, while those further along the chain are paying more for calves, weanlings, and stores. The prices are higher, and the margins are getting tighter. The most efficient calf-to-beef producers, as shown on the boards at the Teagasc Grange open day, are capable of making high margins, certainly relative to other cattle production enterprises. Grain production incomes remain in the doldrums, even as the numbers described in the farm survey as 'vulnerable' dropped from 16 per cent to 10 per cent last year. So how are the many thousands of precariously positioned farms managing? The survey provides an explanation. Seventy-six per cent of economically vulnerable farms have a pension coming into the household, often the lower value, non-contributory old-age pension. Without that basic income, the lack of an off-farm job contributing to household income would place many defined-vulnerable farms in an extreme poverty category. Debate around continuing to BISS-fund older farmers must take this stark fact into account.

CONTENTS

4 Upfront

7 News

10 Farm Safety

Ciaran Roche, FBD Risk Manager

12 Interview

Gráinne Dwyer
Chair, Nuffield Ireland

14 Agri-Economics

Agriculture's Economic Impact is
Undervalued: Ciaran Fitzgerald

16 Agri Aware Celebrates 30 Years

- Interview: Marcus O'Halloran,
Executive Director

- Interview: Why it Pays to be a Patron

24 What Does the Vet Say?

Research, News, and Updates

28 Farming and AI

Is Ireland Ready for *that* Type of AI?

31 Animal Nutrition

Heat Stress: Why Buffer Feeding &
Grass Management Matter

48 Interview

Niall Collins
Minister of State at the DAFF

50 Management Hints

54 Machinery

67 Opinion: ICMSA

Denis Drennan, President

68 Rural Life

Collaboration's ripple effect on
water quality

70 Opinion: A Word in Your Ear

Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

33 FOCUS: AGTECH & RESEARCH

34 SYNCHRONISED BREEDING -
A POWERFUL TOOL

36 BACK DOWN TO EARTH

39 FARMING THE MCCARTHY WAY

42 RESEARCH ROUND-UP

43 SOIL FERTILITY: INVESTMENT
OR EXPENSE?

Cover Image: Brian Ireland cutting a crop of Orcade winter barley on the farm of Adrian Ging, Danesford, Co. Kilkenny.



Editor: Matt O'Keeffe Deputy Editor: Bernie Commins Machinery Editor: Noel Dunne Production: Martin Whelan Advertising Manager: Brian Murphy Commercial and Advertising Manager: Anna Douglas Accounts: Tricia Murtagh Administration & Subscriptions: Eleanor Connolly Chief Executive: Rebecca Markey Printing: W&G Baird Publishers: IFP Media Subscription: €46 per annum Irish Farmers Monthly, Castlecourt, Glengageary, Co. Dublin. Tel: +353 1 7096900 Email: berniecommins@ifpmedia.com www.irishfarmersmonthly.com Copyright IFP Media 2026. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form without the express written permission of the publishers.



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JURY MEMBER FOR IRELAND

NEVER LEAVE MONEY ON THE TABLE

Fewer than 30,000 farmers and contractors availed of the fuel support scheme introduced by the Government on foot of the surge in energy prices earlier this year. There was much controversy at the time, with road protests, fuel-supply-depot barricades, and much disruption to inner Dublin traffic caused by protesters. Meanwhile, the farm and contractor organisations did the hard yards of sitting down and negotiating the terms of a support scheme. How much the outcome was influenced by street protests as against a negotiating strategy is for people to decide for themselves. Was it money well spent? Again, that depends on one's perspective. It will, ultimately, reduce financial wriggle-room when it comes to securing further agriculture-related supports from Government at the next budget. Anyway, we can understand the value of the scheme to larger scale



Around one-third of the total farmer/contractor cohort targeted for the fuel support scheme applied for it.

farmers and contractors. The latter group can use upwards of 90,000 litres of diesel, annually. What is, perhaps, more curious is why around one-third of the total farmer/contractor cohort targeted for the fuel support scheme applied for it. Never leave money on the table, is a much-used adage, especially free money. There are

obviously thousands of farmers who don't use enough diesel to make it worth their while applying – an easy process in this case – for whatever free money they were entitled to. It's hardly because they are too well off, as the Teagasc Farm Survey shows thousands of farmers with incomes far below the minimum wage.



Dale Crammond, president of the Agricultural Science Association.

'ROOTS OF RESILIENCE' – ASA CONFERENCE

Graduates from our agriculture-related third-level faculties gather next month to discuss the future of the Irish food production system. The Agricultural Science Association's (ASA) annual conference, always a popular networking event, happens at Killashee Hotel on September 3. The official theme is 'Roots of Resilience: Safeguarding Our Food Production Model for the Next Generation' and it will examine our competitiveness, the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and the much-discussed topic of generational renewal. If that wasn't enough on a conference plate, delegates will also

hear about the many challenges for Irish food production in such diverse areas as environmental and water constraints as well as the many facets of sustainability in food production. While that might seem to be an almost overwhelming list of challenges facing Irish food producers there is another reality that Irish food production has an enviable reputation globally for high quality, high production standards, high levels of independent research and advice, and high levels of best practice adoption and commitment among our farm family food producers. Conference registration details can be found on the ASA website.



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WHEN IS 'ENOUGH' ENOUGH?

We note that Aer Lingus's 11 per cent margin on revenue is not enough. It compares poorly – by a couple of percentage points – with its fellow member companies in the International Airlines Group (IAG). Compare that margin with what most Irish dairy co-operatives are operating at, and milk and grain producers have a lot to be grateful for that their processing businesses, owned and controlled by supplier members, work off another business model altogether. Yes, milk processing is notoriously low margin, with co-ops skimming off only a sufficient margin to ensure there is good business practice, reinvestment, and R&D. Likewise, while many of the meat processors are privately owned and not subject to scrutiny on their profit margins, those examples in the public realm give some indication of the margins they work off. The Foyle Food Group reported a profit of €20m for last year on revenues of €638m. That's an operating profit margin of a little in excess of 3 per cent. The bigger meat processing groups including ABP, Dawn, and Kepak, with larger throughputs, and greater purchasing and sales power could be expected to have higher profit margins but only marginally so. That leaves many Irish agricultural food-processing businesses in a far different, tighter margin space compared to the highfliers in aviation and elsewhere. A 2-4 per cent profit margin is the norm not only for Irish meat processors

but is recognised as the ballpark figure for counterparts across the world. Informed estimates suggest that Cargill, for instance, has a margin of 3.1 per cent on sales of over \$160bn. Margins in those low single-digit figures are precarious. Let's not feel too sympathetic for meat processors. They know how to squeeze a margin and, if necessary, squeeze their suppliers and buyers to ensure their businesses operate profitably over the long term.

Back to Aer Lingus and other PLCs that have an expectation of high double-digit margins. This is demanded by their shareholders, with share price suffering if performance is not at least equivalent to industry averages. Ultimately, anyone with a pension pot is reliant on these companies securing ever higher profits and profit margins annually so that pension funds can grow and deliver well-resourced pensions. Likewise private investors expect high returns from their shareholdings. All that doesn't, however, excuse perfectly profitable companies who, in seeking ever higher profits, throw employees on the dungheap to deliver those profits. We have seen it in recent times with tech companies. The false dawn of massive returns from AI developments means that employees, by the thousands globally, must be sacrificed on the redundancy pyre to satisfy the greed of already stinking rich owners. When is 'enough' enough?

KARINA TAKES TOP UCD AGRICULTURE JOB

Congratulations to Professor Karina Pierce on being appointed dean of agriculture and head of the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science. Karina takes on the role, replacing Professor Frank Monaghan, from September 1. Professor Pierce has had a stellar career trajectory culminating in this appointment. She graduated from the UCD School of Agriculture in 2001 and completed her doctorate in animal nutrition four years later. With a strong body of research to her name across grass-based milk production, she has also gained the necessary management experience for her new role, through her directorship of the UCD dairy business degree programme and as director of external relations for the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science. The latter is a key area for ensuring that graduates are fit for purpose in the multi-faceted, agri-related workplace. A former Nuffield Scholar, Karina has also devoted her energies to voluntary roles including serving as president of the Agricultural Science Association. She is a member of the board of Bord Bia and has also been previously appointed as a member of Agri Aware, the Teagasc Authority and Nuffield Ireland management boards. We wish her the very best in one of her biggest roles so far.



Karina Pierce will officially take up the roles of dean of agriculture and head of the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science on September 1.



Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

The long-awaited EU Commission Livestock Strategy has finally landed. It is basically a commitment from Brussels to support the livestock sector into the future. The first takeaway is that nowhere in the 21-page document is there a suggestion to reduce cattle numbers. This is a far cry from the soundings coming from the same corridors less than a decade ago. In fact, the bovine population across Europe has declined by 10 per cent since 2005. While the strategy does recognise the impact that livestock has on emissions, it also recognises the value of a sustainable livestock system to rural areas across the EU.

If anything, the aim of this strategy is to put the livestock sector on the right footing to withstand the many challenges that exist. Low profitability and rising costs, changing market conditions, and outbreaks of animal diseases have prompted this pledge from the EU Commission.

It estimates that livestock farming employs seven million people across the EU, generating €400bn in turnover. The strategy proposes to help farmers rely less on imports and more on domestic resources, reduce emissions, preserve food safety, and improve animal welfare. It talks about developing harmonised methodology to calculate livestock emissions on farms and even proposes developing mobile slaughterhouses to reduce animal transport and regenerate rural areas.

Nice words like 'sustainability,' 'resilience,' and 'competitiveness' are sprinkled throughout the strategic plan but, of course, these goals can only be achieved through proper funding. Interestingly, it talks about reducing risk exposure, enabling farmers to recover more quickly after crisis. This will include exploring 'a new scheme for insurance and re-insurance.' The livestock strategy was published the same day as the protein strategy, which aims to make the EU more self-sufficient by increasing EU-grown protein from 25 per cent in 2025 to 35 per cent by 2035. One chimes with the other.

Reaction included a cautious welcome from the farmer groups and disappointment from the green NGOs, which tell its own story. But it was somewhat of a one-day wonder and gentle distraction from the bigger focus, which, of course, is the debate over the multiannual financial framework and the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget where all eyes have now refocussed.

It falls to the Irish presidency to navigate those choppy waters over the next few months. The livestock strategy is noble in its ambition but like everything else, unless the Commission is willing to have another look at the proposed CAP budget cuts, it will send out the signal that it is merely paying lip service to livestock farmers.



Lessons learnt from drought-prone farms

Dr. David Lawrence
Head of Nutrition, Agritech.

For some livestock farmers, this year has been likened to the landmark years of 2018 and 1976, but for many others, it has been just another year of dealing with low mid-season grass growth due to drought conditions.

Three key learnings from farms that suffer drought on an almost annual basis are:

1. Never take forage stocks for granted and always have a back-up plan.

While silage stocks were ahead of target entering July, we now must build grass for grazing through the autumn and rebuild some winter forage stocks. Calculate your fodder budget this month and ensure you have a plan to be comfortable for the coming winter. This may mean purchasing additional silage and concentrates now to allow grass supply to build. A fodder budget may also expose the limit of what stock your farm should carry for the winter, helping to inform early decisions on culling or selling store cattle, for example.

2. Maintain animal performance as much as possible.

Dairy cows require higher levels of concentrate to maintain milk production on silage than on grass. A sudden increase of concentrate or the sudden introduction of silage has impacted rumen health on many farms. Consider mycotoxin binders and rumen buffers to maintain rumen health and maximise production efficiency from additional inputs. Calves may begin to scour and lose thrive due to shorter, high-protein grass following drought. Rumen buffers can help with this, along with additional long, dry roughage such as straw.

3. Set up the farm to grow high-quality grass when soil moisture returns.

There is a good growth response to rain following drought due to the contribution of soil nutrient mineralisation (known as the Birch Effect). Avoid "catching up" on nitrogen application to drive growth. Rather, dial back your application rate and go more often if the conditions agree. Getting a good graze out now is a key step in resuming grass growth. If you must utilise higher covers of grass, topping or pre-mowing are good ways to set the sward up for future growth, as the plant will resume growth by producing leaf rather than stem in most cases.

For further advice, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit www.agritech.ie



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InTouch

CATHAL BOHANE
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

ACT EARLY TO MAINTAIN GRASS IN THE DIET

Recent dry and very-high-temperature weather put pressure on grazing platforms, particularly in the southern half of the country. Grass growth slowed to around 30-40kg DM/ha/day, and any surplus grass on farms is likely to disappear quickly. At the same time, high temperatures are also reducing grass quality as swards head out, creating a challenge for high-performing cows and cattle during a key production and breeding period.

1. Protect grass supply

The priority is to keep average farm cover above 650kg DM/ha, or above 180kg DM/LU, and if growth rate continues at these reduced levels, you will need a rotation length of up to 25 days. This may require reducing demand by removing surplus stock, bringing silage ground back into the grazing block, increasing meal feeding, or introducing buffer forage before grass supply becomes critical.

2. Match buffer feeding to the grass deficit

When buffer feeding, quantity comes before quality. Start by measuring available grass and calculating the feed gap. Where cows remain at grass full-time, concentrate feeding will typically sit around 0.11-0.16kg per kg of milk produced. If cows are housed by night, or grass intake falls below 10kg DM/cow/day, concentrate levels may need to rise to approximately 0.22-0.27kg per kg of milk. Once meal feeding reaches practical limits, any remaining deficit should be filled with forage. Good-quality baled silage is often the most flexible option, as it can be introduced or removed more easily than pit silage.

3. Ensure access and comfort

Feed access is critical. Ideally, every cow should have a feed space, especially where smaller amounts of buffer feed are offered. Feeding during the hottest part of the day can help keep cows closer to shade, water, cooling areas, or sprinklers. Where more than 4-5kg DM/cow/day of buffer feed is required, offer it in more than one allocation, as cows are unlikely to consume this volume in one feeding period.

4. Monitor cow response

Watch milk yield, butterfat and protein closely, as changes can signal reduced intake or nutritional imbalance. Rumen fill reflects intake over the previous 24-hours, gut fill indicates intake over the past week, and body condition score shows the longer-term impact of feed supply over the previous month.

KEY MESSAGE

Act early. Do not wait until grass has run out before responding. Maintaining a consistent level of grass in the diet will protect production, cow condition, and fertility during difficult grazing conditions.

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'REINVEST UNSPENT FARMER SUPPORTS' – MACRA

Macra has called on Government to ensure that unspent funding previously committed to supporting farmers through the fuel crisis remains within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and is immediately redirected towards the mounting challenges now facing the sector. The organisation said Irish farmers are, once again, facing exceptional financial pressures, with soaring fertiliser costs, an emerging fodder crisis following a prolonged period of hot, dry weather, and increased demand on existing support schemes. Macra has warned that these challenges cannot be addressed without adequate financial backing from Government.

Macra national president, Josephine O'Neill, said: "Farmers are under increasing pressure from multiple fronts, with soaring input costs and prolonged dry weather placing enormous strain on farm businesses, yet funding already identified for the sector is sitting unused. Government must act quickly by keeping this money within the DAFM and directing it towards the issues that are having the greatest impact on farm families today. This is about responding to current realities and ensuring farmers have the support they need to continue producing food sustainably."

The organisation welcomed the European Commission's recently announced fertiliser support package, under which Ireland is expected to receive approximately €15.3m. Macra is urging Government to provide the maximum national co-funding permitted under the scheme, increasing the total support package available to almost €46m.

Macra said any fertiliser support must be paid directly to farmers and targeted towards those sectors most exposed to rising input costs and market disruption, ensuring that the funding delivers meaningful assistance where it is needed most.

The organisation also welcomed the DAFM's commitment to honour all valid applications under the 2026 Straw Incorporation Measure, despite claims exceeding the scheme's original €10m budget. Macra said the decision recognises the importance of supporting sustainable farming practices and tillage production but stressed that the additional funding required must not come at the expense of other essential agricultural supports.

With concerns also mounting over winter fodder supplies following one of the driest summers in recent years, Macra said Government must act now rather than waiting until shortages become critical.

"The warning signs are already there. Many farmers have seen grass growth slow significantly over recent months and winter fodder stocks are under real pressure, with many farmers now forced to feed silage already. Waiting until shortages emerge will only increase costs and uncertainty. We need to plan ahead and ensure that practical supports are available if challenges continue to escalate." Macra believes the unspent funding originally allocated to support farmers through the fuel crisis presents Government with an opportunity to respond proactively to the challenges now facing agriculture.

The organisation said this funding should remain within the DAFM and be used to co-fund the EU fertiliser support package, bridge the additional funding required for the Straw Incorporation Measure and, if required, establish a targeted fodder support scheme to assist livestock farmers through the winter months.

"The solutions are there. Government can maximise the EU fertiliser package, protect existing schemes such as the Straw Incorporation Measure and prepare contingency support for fodder if it becomes necessary. The key is ensuring that existing agricultural funding stays within the sector and is used where it will make the greatest difference, without delay."

Macra warned that Irish agriculture continues to face unprecedented uncertainty, with rising input costs, volatile commodity markets, ongoing CAP negotiations and increasing climate-related challenges all placing pressure on farm viability. Macra has called on Government to act quickly to provide certainty to farmers ahead of the autumn planting season and winter housing period.

"Farmers cannot plan on uncertainty. They need certainty, they need support, and they need it now. The resources are available. Government's job is to make sure they reach the farmers who need them before today's pressures become tomorrow's crisis."



LUCKY JESS!

Congratulations to members of the Irish Cave Rescue Organisation (ICRO) who recently rescued retired sheepdog, Jess, from a sea cave by Porturlin Harbour near Belmullet, Co. Mayo. Two ICRO rescuers descended by rope some 50m down a grassy slope and over the cliff edge to reach Jess. The dog was put in an animal rescue harness and given food, then hauled up from the base of the cliff and returned to her family safe and well after her adventure. At the start of July, ICRO - with members of the North West Mountain Rescue Team - assisted in the rescue of a calf from a cave in Co. Fermanagh. Three ICRO team members descended seven to eight metres into the cave and after skillfully corralling the calf and attaching a sling harness, the animal was carefully hauled to the surface. ICRO is a voluntary rescue service responsible for cave rescue on the island of Ireland. This is not the first time that ICRO has been involved in animal rescues such as these; their specialist skills in rope-rescue techniques and technical rigging of vertical pitches make them highly qualified to carry out such endeavours. Photo: Irish Cave Rescue Organisation.

IFA CALLS FOR SPECIAL MEETING ON WILDFIRES

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) is seeking a meeting of the National Emergency Co-ordination Group (NECG) to discuss wildfire planning and prevention. The call came against a backdrop of multiple days of wildfire outbreaks on Sliabh na mBan in South Tipperary. The IFA president, Francie Gorman, said there are stark lessons to be learned about how the wildfire there was handled. "We need to see an emergency response approach to ensure the full resources of the State are deployed urgently," he said. He paid tribute to the local farmers and contractors who 'put in a sterling effort with tractors, tankers

and diggers creating firebreaks' on the hill. Alongside all the emergency services, they 'worked through the night to draw water and clear vegetation to protect their neighbours,' IFA south Tipperary chair, Darragh Scott, said. The IFA president said the management of mountain areas was becoming a big issue: "There are also lessons to be learned here about how the mountain has been managed or not managed. The lack of management has created a tinder box of vegetation which will create a huge risk if a fire starts. There must be a discussion about how we are managing these areas," he said.



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All roads lead to the Tullamore Show and FBD National Livestock Show on August 9, where 45 livestock show titles are up for grabs. FBD risk manager, Ciaran Roche is no stranger to the showing spectacle, and he has some great advice. "As sponsors of the FBD National Livestock Show at the Tullamore Show, we've seen firsthand the incredible work that goes into getting animals ready for a show. However, it is important not to forget about safety in the excitement of the day.

"Show organisers make a significant effort to ensure the safety of everyone who attends their show. They put event-management plans in place, conduct risk assessments, implement safety controls, and ensure that they have adequate numbers of stewards on site to manage safety before, during, and after the event. It is essential that all members of the public, whether showing livestock or attending the show, follow these safety procedures, pay attention to safety signage, and cooperate with show stewards."

VEHICLES AND LIVESTOCK

Vehicles and livestock pose the most significant hazards at any agricultural show, says Ciaran. To help prevent vehicle-related



YOU MUST ENSURE THAT THE LIVESTOCK ARE USED TO BEING HANDLED, TRAINED TO WALK WITH A HALTER, USED TO GETTING IN AND OUT OF A TRAILER

accidents, he advises that it is essential to follow the route dedicated for livestock traffic and to drive at a safe speed, while always staying vigilant for pedestrians, especially young children.

Safe handling of livestock starts at home and ever before you arrive at a show, there are a few essential boxes that must be ticked, says Ciaran. "You must ensure that the livestock are used to being handled, trained to walk with a halter, used to getting in and out of a trailer, and that they have an appropriate temperament for showing. In addition, you must ensure that you wear safety footwear with a steel toe and soles with a good grip." Ciaran continues: "After arriving on site, check livestock before unloading to ensure that they

are not agitated. If livestock are agitated and not calming down, it is best not to unload that animal or animals.

"Only unload livestock at the dedicated unloading bay and follow the instruction of show stewards. Ensure livestock are safely controlled at all times by competent and physically able persons. Only walk livestock on the designated pathways and lead them with a halter. Always keep livestock physically secured when in stalls and don't do anything that might spook them.

"Remember that livestock can be temperamental and easily agitated. It is essential that you keep a close eye on your animal, stay alert to the potential risks associated with the environment, and that safety is managed at all times."

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Gráinne Dwyer, chair, Nuffield Ireland.

FROM SCHOLAR TO LEADER

GRÁINNE DWYER WAS THE FIRST WOMAN TO BE AWARDED A NUFFIELD IRELAND SCHOLARSHIP IN 1999. NOW, SHE IS CHAIR OF THIS MUCH-RESPECTED ORGANISATION. HERE, SHE SPEAKS TO MATT O'KEEFFE ABOUT THE ROLE, HER AMBITIONS, AND FARM LIFE

Earlier in the summer, Nuffield Ireland hosted the Nuffield International Triennial 2026, an all-island tour, with visits to more than 30 farms, industry organisations, and cultural venues. It was a great success, but the logistics associated with its organisation were quite considerable, Gráinne explains. "We had 130 international scholars travelling around Ireland for nine days in June. We had three tours a day showcasing the best of Irish farming and agri-businesses." Gráinne acknowledged the cooperation of everyone who supported the various events and farm walks, all of which culminated in the Nuffield International Triennial 2026 Agri-Summit at Killashee House Hotel. Here, delegates heard from national and international speakers including former EU commissioner, Phil Hogan, former minister, Simon Coveney and various European economists, policymakers and academics including Dr Rogier Schulte, of Wageningen University. It was the ultimate nine-day showcase of Irish agriculture for Irish and global Nuffield scholars. "It was two years in the planning. Identifying and coordinating a selection of national and international speakers was quite a challenge, as well as securing farms and businesses to visit around the country. There are now one hundred and twenty-seven Irish Nuffield scholars inducted since the scholarship was adopted in Ireland, with many of them very involved in ensuring that the Triennial was a success. They saw the magnitude of the event and took pride in the fact that we, as a relatively small Nuffield location, were hosting such an event."

NUFFIELD SCHOLARSHIP

The international nature of the triennial speaks to the impact of the Nuffield scholarship programme, which provides those undertaking it with a range of valuable travel and networking opportunities. Gráinne outlines the scholarship's mechanics and purpose. "A scholarship is a two-year programme where you undertake 10 weeks of international travel in small groups, as well as some personal travel. There's a bursary of €18,000 towards the costs involved. You research a topic of interest, and then you've two years to investigate and study that topic, compile a report, and deliver a presentation at Nuffield's annual conference. Many of our scholars also disseminate it across the agri-

IDENTIFYING AND COORDINATING A SELECTION OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS WAS QUITE A CHALLENGE, AS WELL AS SECURING FARMS AND BUSINESSES TO VISIT AROUND THE COUNTRY



Gráinne Dwyer, chair of Nuffield Ireland pictured at Nuffield Ireland's agri-summit with former EU commissioner, Phil Hogan; principal policy advisor at Copa-Cogeca, Ksenija Simovic; and economist and author, David McWilliams. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

industry, because the scholars usually choose a timely and relevant topic that's important to the industry. We're looking for individuals with a little bit of life experience. They should have a thirst for knowledge, an enquiring mind, and show leadership potential within the industry." In return, the scholarship exposes participants to international perspectives and expertise on wide-ranging aspects of agriculture. Gráinne continues: "You could be learning about rice, maize, or GMOs. You are studying any one or a mix of those wider subjects that ultimately give you an informed mind. Jim McCarthy and the late Pádraig Walshe were the first Irish Nuffield scholars and both have contributed hugely to Irish agriculture. Both were men and farmers and that was the general profile at the time." Gráinne, as mentioned, was the first Irish female scholar. She explains the emphasis now on gender balance in the programme: "Comparing statistics across the Nuffield countries, our female representation is only 25 per cent, while the rest of the Nuffield world is at 50 per cent, so we are encouraging more women to get involved. We'd also like to encourage those involved in production, across dairy, beef, sheep, aquaculture, horticulture. You don't have to be a farmer, obviously, and looking at the profile of individual scholars, they're right across the agri-industry, research, advisory, support, service industries. We do see an opportunity for more farmers to learn about international agriculture and bring that back to their colleagues. A successful Nuffield scholarship

is about disseminating information that you have researched and no better way to do that than peer-to-peer. Farmers are very good at that in discussion groups and generally talking to other farmers. You would hope then that the wider industry would gain from that experience."

GRÁINNE'S AGENDA

With the triennial programme completed, it's back to basics for the Nuffield chair, but she is no less busy: "Our [scholarship] applications are open until the end of August, with details on the Nuffield Ireland website. Autumn will be busy, inducting our new scholars and helping them understand what is expected of them. Then we will have our annual conference on November 6 in the Hodson Bay, where the 2024 scholars will deliver their reports.

"Longer term, I would like us to consider a young Nuffield or a young agriculture leadership programme, maybe aimed at those coming out of university or agricultural college, which would whet their appetite for undertaking a full scholarship in time. I'd like us to do something with the current alumni. We have a critical mass of 127 scholars now, and we need further engagement with them. This is on the back of the Triennial, where scholars whom we haven't seen for a few years have come back and said they want to get involved."

MANY FACETS

Outside of Nuffield, Gráinne is immersed in

farm life, farming near Borris-in-Ossory with her husband, Jim and son, Jonathan. She has also had a long career in communications. "Like a lot of women, I came into farming on marriage, but I suppose I was always involved in the industry. I was communications manager with Animal Health Ireland for a long number of years. I've always enjoyed working with farmers. I get a great buzz from working in the agri sector because most people have this huge positivity and can-do attitude. A Nuffield scholarship is trying to capture that. If you have that can-do attitude and you see that problems can be solved, definitely you should seriously consider a scholarship because that's where you will be able to develop that view of life and you will be surrounded by others with similar attitudes. That, in itself, is a very positive experience. "I know there are problems and challenges and all kinds of restrictions and regulations but, still, over the past 10 years, and specifically in dairy since the elimination of quotas, there has been opportunity. Like most other milk producers, when the quotas ended, we grew our business. That has allowed us to bring our son Jonathan into the enterprise. It has been a huge benefit to us in securing our future and that of our son, Jonathan. Without that growth opportunity, building a succession strategy would have been difficult if not impossible. It's now Jonathan's opportunity to further develop the farm and enterprise. I think what younger farmers sometimes forget is that they are facing these challenges too, but they've never faced the challenge of milk quotas. Working for most of my life in dairy farming, the biggest challenge for us was milk quotas," says Gráinne.

ALL ABOUT GRASS

Grass-based milk production has always been and is still core to the Dwyer farming model, Gráinne says: "We graze the cows almost 300 days in the year. It's the foundation of everything we do here. We calve and dry off our cows based on grass growth at both ends of the season. We try to get as much grass into the cow's diet as we can. It's the most efficient way of feeding the cow, given our temperate climate. We have introduced clover into the grass swards now, and we'll continue to refine our production model based on research and advice. Grassland production is still as important today as it was 35 years ago, and optimising our grass-based milk production continues to be our focus."



Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

AGRICULTURE'S ECONOMIC IMPACT IS UNDERVALUED

IRELAND'S AGRI-FOOD SECTOR NEEDS TO ACTIVELY COMMUNICATE ITS ECONOMIC PROWESS AND ITS FUTURE RELEVANCE, WRITES CIARAN FITZGERALD

Hardly a week goes by without some promotion of the foreign direct investment (FDI) sector highlighting and hailing the billions of euros of gross value added (GVA) generated by the multinationals in the Irish economy. There is a general acceptance of this proposition, even though the economic reality and close scrutiny of the actual net benefit to the Irish economy would indicate that up to 80 per cent of the GDP contribution has very little domestic economic impact, being mainly composed of inter-company transfers, payment for intellectual property (IP) and profit repatriation. That is not to take from the employment, corporation and income tax contributions from the main multinational corporations based in Ireland. Nevertheless, hats off to the multinationals for promoting a message of critical economic impact and future relevance.

A DEEPER ECONOMIC IMPACT

In contrast, the agri-sector rarely, if ever, communicates its unique and, frankly, much deeper Irish economic value. Instead, there is a preference to churn out bi-annual publications highlighting incomes



THE AGRI-SECTOR MUST PROVIDE CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION THAT ARTICULATES CURRENT AND FUTURE ECONOMIC RELEVANCE AND RESILIENCE

low-average incomes and a long-term problem relating to succession. This is agriculture talking to itself and talking itself down. This combination of over statement of FDI value and understatement by the agri-food sector of its value systemically undervalues an Irish agri-food and drink sector that is acknowledged as accounting for 60 per cent of indigenous industry output (Enterprise Ireland) and accounting for net exports of €19bn of food and drink products annually (Central Statistics Office [CSO]) to over 120 global markets. This is, in itself, a measure of capability in delivering against global

consumer demand evolutions, a marketing phenomenon almost unique to Irish food and drink companies and not found in many other indigenous Irish business sectors.

HUGE INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC VALUE

Moreover, the agri-food sector provides the biggest annual Irish economy expenditure impact of any business sector, indigenous or multinational, of €22bn annually (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, annual report), through unique Irish economy multipliers of 2.0 on average, according to the CSO, as against 0.8 by the FDI sector. This, in turn, supports 220,000 jobs directly and indirectly (CSO) and yet these economic facts are largely absent from any public discourse about the future evolution of the Irish economy. Indeed quite the opposite.

Capping/constraining livestock numbers in Ireland and hence reducing future output from the agri-sector continues to be promoted as a core policy response to global environmental challenges, rather than adopting a pragmatic strategy of seriously investing in decarbonisation supports.

This is despite very strong, independently verified hard data from multiple reports from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which clearly demonstrate that constraining Ireland's meat and milk output will mean higher global emissions because production will increase in locations of much higher emissions profiles with continuing and increasing environmental destruction in Mercosur, India and Pakistan, for example. A pragmatic approach is required.

A national industrial development policy that ignores and indeed stifles local economic impact drivers that have a global capability, and solely depends on future investment where the key decision making is primarily external, is not a sensible nor in any way a comfortable place to be. Indeed, most countries that experience a boom, whether from a low tax regime or a natural resource discovery will create long-term industrial development/rainy-day policies and funds (a la Norway) as a future-proofing strategy and certainly won't deliberately constrain their largest indigenous business sector.

A DUAL STRATEGY

To be clear, as I have said repeatedly, there is no conflict between being supportive of investment in decarbonising Ireland's agri-sector, while continuing to hone our corporation tax strategy. Indeed, both strategies make long-term economic development sense.

However, if the agri-sector continues to either remain silent or insist on using standard economic metrics like GVA (hugely distorted by international standards) then the twin dismissal that the sector is increasingly irrelevant at 1 per cent of GDP, while it majors in environmental impacts, will prevail.

EVALUATING THE VALUE OF FOOD PRODUCTION

And it's not that we don't have plenty of metrics that demonstrate the depth of economic impact across the Irish economy. As an



THE AGRI-SECTOR MUST PROVIDE CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION THAT ARTICULATES CURRENT AND FUTURE ECONOMIC RELEVANCE AND RESILIENCE

illustration, in addition to the headline billions mentioned previously, every year, Tirlán publishes the value of its milk payments to farmers, broken down on a per-county basis. Given that over €3bn was paid out to Tirlán's milk producers in 2025, surely others can follow in highlighting the positive financial impact on local communities as well as the broader Irish economy of milk production across rural Ireland. In total, Irish dairy farmers produced almost nine billion litres of milk in 2025, all of which was collected throughout the year and processed into 300,000 tonnes of butter, 260,000 tonnes of cheese and 600,000 tonnes of various milk powders, as well as large volumes of infant formula of which Ireland is a global leader in this category. Figures from the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation and the Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) system show 4.1 million cattle movements in 2025, of which 1.9 million were made up by sales to the marts, 1.3 million on a farm-to-farm basis, with 1.6 million cattle sold off farm to meat factories, resulting in exports of 550,000 tonnes of meat worldwide (AIM report, 2025).

Irish meat plants processing these cattle employ over 19,000 people directly and indirectly, and support over 30,000 specialist beef finishers as well as tens of thousands of livestock producers who supply beef cattle on an ad hoc basis.

All of these transactions are real, as are those involving the harvesting, warehousing and processing of just over two million tonnes of grain annually, including 664,000 tonnes of wheat, 1,365,000 tonnes of barley and 282,000 tonnes of oats.

NOT A ONE-TRICK-PONY

All of these figures point to vibrant multi-faceted economic activities and, in particular, to a rural Ireland that is currently full of economic transactions, contributing billions of euros in added-value to the Irish economy. It is imperative that this fact is communicated relentlessly.

If more depth or macro-economic analysis is needed, the CSO multiplier figure of 2.0 can be interrogated and a more accessible description of the multiplier effect communicated to the general public as well as to policymakers and economic commentators. Despite much global criticism, Ireland is not a one-trick-pony, single-entity tax haven, but if we allow our agri-food sector to decline as will surely happen if the nitrates derogation is lost, it will become one.

While clearly the Government must show greater awareness of the importance of a balanced Irish economy, the agri-sector must provide continuous communication that articulates current and future economic relevance and resilience.

'WE'VE MADE HUGE INROADS IN THE LAST FEW YEARS'

AGRI AWARE CELEBRATES 30 YEARS IN EXISTENCE IN 2026. HERE, **BERNIE COMMINS** CHATS TO ITS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, **MARCUS O'HALLORAN**, ABOUT THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SUCH AN ORGANISATION ESPECIALLY IN TODAY'S WORLD, WHERE UNDERSTANDING OF FOOD PRODUCTION SEEMS TO BE INCREASINGLY DIMINISHING



Agri Aware
executive director,
Marcus O'Halloran.

If the frequency at which I receive updates to my inbox is anything to go by, Agri Aware sure is one busy organisation, I say to Marcus.

Of all the agri-organisations, it is certainly one of the most active. To give you a flavour: it kicked off 2026 with an excellent industry-briefing event, Food for Thought, featuring a stellar lineup; it marked World Milk Day at Bloom 2026, with special guest Carina Roseingrave, Ireland's ambassador for the International Year of the Woman Farmer, and exhibited its renowned farmyard, as it does annually; it took said farmyard to the Cork Summer Show, where it exhibited for the first time ever; and there have been many announcements of new patrons supporting its work. And on top of all that, its pièce de résistance – its incredible interaction with schools, nationwide – is thriving. Marcus comments: "We have doubled down on a lot on the school programmes that we are doing also, we're trying to make sure that that level of participation is as strong as ever. Going to the Cork Summer Show for the first time saw us reach a different audience in Munster, primarily families, and increase our reach to the urban audience."

Agri Aware is Ireland's agri-food educational body; a charitable trust that was established in 1996 to enhance agricultural literacy among the general public, and to bridge the gap between producer and consumer. Never

has that gap seemed so big and never has agri-education been so necessary. Thirty years later, Agri Aware is playing a blinder in this space.

"We are trying to make sure that we maximise the impact or potential impact that we have within the year. But 30 years, or not, this work would have been getting done anyway," Marcus says. "The programme of work for the year was to increase the amount that we were doing and increase the space we were doing it in."

PLOUGHING A NEW FURROW

The next big event on Agri Aware's calendar is, of course, the National Ploughing Championships (The Ploughing) in September and, while this is a staple for the educational body, this is the first year in a few years that it will exhibit exclusively. Marcus explains: "We are really trying to connect with the public in a different way at The Ploughing this year; it won't be a typical ploughing activation that we would have done up to now."

There is more to be revealed on this, with a new campaign expected to be launched by Agri Aware when The Ploughing returns to Tullamore this year, Marcus says. It will mark a departure in the way that Agri Aware seeks patronage support, which currently comes from industry, primarily.

The Ploughing is increasingly evolving into an



Agri Aware demonstrating the milking process to visitors at the Cork Summer Show

event that attracts urban and rural dwellers, farmers and non-farmers, producers and consumers. It offers great potential to spread agri-awareness, and garner support in return says Marcus: "A significant proportion of the attendees are under-18 also and we are really trying to connect with that audience. But you will come across people from every walk of life there too, because there's so much on offer for them. In the past, it might not be the place to reach our target audience but for the activation this year, it is our target audience, and we are hoping that we can make an impact there."

BRIDGING A GROWING GAP

Research results quoted last year by Bord Bia highlighted the growing gap between the public and our farming heritage. Some 55 per cent of people surveyed said they had no connection to a farm. Cue Agri Aware's bridging of this knowledge gap. Its 2025-2028 strategy points to enhancing agricultural literacy and food-production awareness, strengthening public perception of farming, and developing advocates for the sector as

ways to ensure that people remain connected to our farming roots.

"The reality of it is, we're moving from the second to the third generation of people that are removed from a farm," says Marcus.

"So, this heightens our goal of education, particularly in the primary and secondary school spaces where we've made huge inroads in the last number of years."

For context, since 2020, Marcus explains, the number of participants in the schools programmes has catapulted from about 35,000 to between 130,000 and 150,000 in 2026 – about a fivefold increase in the uptake of these programmes. The reasons for this, Marcus cites, are a combination of Agri Aware's ambition for children and teens to understand where their food comes from, as well as teachers' awareness of what children and teens have in their lunchboxes!

"The job [Agri Aware's] is as big as it ever has been, if not bigger, and the initiatives need to grow with that. But the ambition of the industry to support it needs to grow, also," says Marcus. He continues: "We have a larger industry with larger exports, but we need to

remember that we must look after our home piece too.

"We need to ensure that while Ireland urbanises, we can continue to produce food, and that the urban population understands that we're doing that in a safe manner for the environment, for the animals, and that the food that they consume is nutritious. It's of huge importance to keep this programme of work moving. I'm a farmer and I see that this job [what Agri Aware does] has massive benefit to me for my future because if my neighbours are disconnected from how we produce food, then that's a challenge, and it can lead challenging conversations."

Marcus observes that, from a policy perspective, it appears that Europe wants the same amount of food produced by fewer producers; as that is happening, those who are moved away from the land must understand what is happening on the land.

SCHOOLS IN

Tapping into Ireland's student populous is a very effective way of promoting that understanding at an influential age. At



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Agri Aware

primary level, Agri Aware leads a number of programmes that are interlinked with the national school curriculum. Incredible Edibles has been teaching children how to grow their own fruits and vegetables for 19 years; the Come Farm With Me video series educates children about the importance of Irish agriculture in producing quality sustainable food; Safe Farm Futures teaches farm safety in an engaging and age-appropriate way; and the Host Farmer Initiative gives students a chance to set foot on a working farm, seeing, hearing, experiencing and smelling agriculture in action.

BC: What are some of the things that stay with you from the school visits to farms?

MO'H: When you have city schools out on a farm, more than half of the students have never been on a farm before, and at times it is a lot higher than that. Then, we show them five 20-litre drums and we ask them what they think they represent, and when we tell them that a cow drinks that much water in a day, they are gobsmacked!

Marcus comments on the eagerness of students to learn about the workings of a farm: "What is wonderful is the amazement that they have about the whole process. You always get a great sense of satisfaction after doing these events because you actually feel like you've made an impact on these students who wouldn't necessarily see any of this in their daily routine. Then, suddenly, their mind has been opened to how food production starts. The chicken doesn't just come from Tesco and the beef doesn't just come from Dunne's; food doesn't just come from a shop shelf."

For secondary schools, the education and exposure continue with initiatives like Intro to Ag, launched nationwide in 2025 with over 13,000 students expressing initial interest in the programme for the 2025/2026 academic year. The Agri Aware and BiOrbic Environmental Innovators transition year programme, presents various challenges that our global food system faces and invites students to investigate innovative solutions. Agri Aware collaborates with the *Irish Farmers Journal* (IFJ) and Irish Agricultural Science Teachers' Association (IASTA) each year to provide the agricultural science resource for Leaving Certificate students as a supplement



Agri Aware delivering educational talks at one of its many farm visits for primary schools.

in the IFJ for 30 weeks during the academic year. This is just a flavour of the programmes and educational resources provided by Agri Aware.

FARM-TO-FORK EXPERIENCE AT LIDL FARM

This collaborative initiative between Lidl and Agri Aware is based at Lidl's regional distribution centre in Newbridge, Co. Kildare. The 8.5-acre educational resource caters for children from first to sixth class, giving them the chance to explore where their food originates, the important work farmers do to produce it, and the journey that food takes after it leaves the farm. It offers children an amazing opportunity to enjoy hands-on activities, get outdoors to see what's happening on the farm, as well as exploring the inner workings of the Lidl warehouse. Throughout the 2025 tours, a total of 4,241 students attended the Farm-to-Fork Experience at Lidl Farm, and since launching in 2022, over 12,600 students have visited the site.

INDUSTRY SUPPORT

Campaign fatigue is a real threat to any organisation trying to maintain a consistent message and keep that message clear, unambiguous, fresh, and engaging. I ask Marcus if he ever feels like he, as executive director of an agri-education body, is fighting an uphill battle in an often misinformation-dense world? "I don't," he says. "And the reason I don't is because I've seen the uptake [of participants] in the last number of years. As our budget has grown, the numbers have increased with that, and it shows that there is a demand out there for this kind of information and we are able to bring a cohort of the public with us on that." But, Marcus says, increasing the size of that cohort is not possible without greater funding streams. He explains: "We're operating off an annual budget of €1.2m but to really start shifting the dial, €2.5m would go a long way. We have 70 patrons who are very loyal and very, very supportive of our mission. But there are

hundreds' more companies out there that could be supporting that mission too. And it is my job is to try to increase that (turn to page 20 for more on this topic).

TEAM EFFORT

The Agri Aware team comprises hands-on educators, the majority of whom have agricultural degrees, and all of whom are highly qualified to teach about Irish farming systems and food production. That team has grown over the last three to four years and currently sits at 12 members. Marcus comments: "With that comes a greater profile of work and we have specific staff that are educators, all our team are equipped to go and speak about dairy production, beef production, tillage production, they can go into a classroom, they can go to an event; they're all taken on the promise that they are actually capable of doing that work and so the majority of our team, if not all, are agricultural science graduates." I comment that Marcus, too, is hands-on in his leadership role as I spot his face in many of the photographs distributed to agri-media following school visits and other events. He replies: "I try to get to as many as possible, but my job is definitely about ensuring that the finances are secured [so we can do what we do] so I probably work a little bit more on new contracts and patron development so that the team is fully equipped to do everything, but I am also involved in every conversation about every new initiative."

Commenting on the founders of Agri Aware and all those who have strengthened it over 30 years, Marcus says: "We are so lucky to have had so many great board members, and farmers themselves, over the past 30 years. We have tripled the number of staff over the last five to six years, we have greatly increased the budget we have to do work we do, but it's all down to the time that so many people have given, and their dedication over the last 30 years."

Celebrating 30 years of enhancing agricultural literacy.



Congratulations to Agri Aware on three decades of connecting communities with the story of Irish agriculture and food.

As a founding patron, Ornuia is proud to have supported Agri Aware's important mission from the beginning - helping to educate, engage, and inspire future generations about the vital role agriculture plays in our economy, communities, and everyday lives.



Agri Aware attended the Cork Summer Show for the first time in 2026, giving it an opportunity to reach a new audience. Pictured are: Catherina O'Mahony, Cork Summer Show project manager; Marcus O'Halloran, executive director, Agri Aware; Gerard Murphy, president of the Munster Agricultural Society; and Ann O'Mahony, Cork Summer Show competitions coordinator.

AGRI AWARE: WHY IT PAYS TO BE A PATRON

SINCE HIS APPOINTMENT IN FEBRUARY 2020, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AGRI AWARE, MARCUS O'HALLORAN HAS HELPED TO INCREASE PATRON SUPPORT OF THE ORGANISATION FROM 42 TO 70. THIS FINANCIAL SUPPORT IS THE BEDROCK OF THE ORGANISATION'S EXISTENCE. HERE, HE TELLS **BERNIE COMMINS** WHY IT PAYS - FOR COMPANIES AND THE WIDER AGRI-SECTOR - TO SUPPORT THE ORGANISATION AND THE WORK THAT IT DOES

Marcus was appointed executive director of Agri Aware just as the Covid-19 outbreak was about to accelerate into pandemic mode; a very strange time to take the reins of anything. And, as was its impact on so many organisations and businesses at the time, the pandemic would influence and sharpen Agri Aware's focus in a number of ways.

Marcus recalls that time: "Agri Aware had a budget of about €440,000 back then, and was spending that in a lot of different areas; it was all things to all people. But you can't be all things to all people, with four staff, and a budget like that. So, we focused heavily on the education side of things to maximise our

impact in that space."

The pandemic forced many sectors to embrace technology in a way that was previously unheard of. Schools were some of the first to go digital, and Agri Aware saw the opportunities that lay there. "What that meant for us was that we had a window of opportunity to upgrade our programmes so that they were accessible online. And that just exploded. Like, in the first year of that, there were 180,000 participants (students) in some of our programmes, which was insane. That time gave us a chance to look at how our programmes fit into the schools' curriculum. It gave us that time to reflect on where we were going in the future."

That led to an increase in programme offerings, including a collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on a booklet called Dig In, a partnership with Horse Sport Ireland, and several other initiatives along the way. And there has been a bit of a snowball effect ever since, Marcus explains: "We received some funding, it gave us more media reach, that created more awareness, made more impact, which created more work, and the cycle just continues nonstop."

PAYING OFF

Currently, Agri Aware has an annual budget of €1.2m, which is a result of that snowball effect,

and the trust that the sector places in what it does. That trust, as mentioned, comes in the form of financial support that agri-businesses provide as patrons of the organisation. There is also a small amount of semi-State and Government funding, Marcus says.

"We now educate somewhere between 130,000 and 150,000 people on a yearly basis, and our media reach has grown significantly. In my first year at Agri Aware, our media reach was four million, and the following year, it was seven million. So far this year, it is 73 million," he says. The advertising value equivalent (AVE) of that, he adds, is about 750,000 with an 80 per cent positive sentiment rate. "The goal is a media reach of 100 million, and that 20,000 people get out to visit a farm on a yearly basis," says Marcus. Sector support is crucial for the survival of Agri Aware and without patrons, it could not do what it does, and it will not be able to achieve these ambitious goals. But why should the sector support it? Marcus says it is about the bigger picture of the future of farming, and ensuring that nutritious and quality food continues to

THE ORGANIC TRUST

The Organic Trust is one of the most recent patrons of Agri Aware. Irene Bermingham, member relations and communications manager at the Organic Trust explained that the decision to support Agri Aware was very much influenced by its members: "We carried out member research last year, with one message coming through loud and clear – our members wanted more opportunities to talk about organics, to help consumers better understand organic production and to inspire the next generation to grow, rear and chose organic food. That feedback has shaped our approach with education becoming a key priority. Alongside supporting our members on their own educational journey, we are committed to helping consumers build a greater understanding of organic food and farming. Our patronage with Agri Aware is a natural fit, giving us the opportunity to bring those conversations into schools and communities, while showcasing the passion, care and high standards which define organic production."

be produced here. "It can be a challenge," he says. "You're going into organisations and asking them to buy into the bigger picture as opposed to spending that money on promoting their business, for example," he says. But the bigger picture is a sector in which their business not only operates but thrives. He continues: "Ultimately, what we

do is teach people about the farmer's social licence to produce, and we're educating a generation of consumers every single year about that, and building trust. I don't find it difficult to ask people for that money because I'm a farmer myself and I can stand on my head as to why we need this. And if we take our eye off the ball, we'll have missed



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Marcus O'Halloran, executive director of Agri Aware, with Stephen Connolly, CEO of the Organic Trust.

generation, suddenly. Most companies are happy to pay it because they see the value in protecting farmers' social licence to produce. "I would appeal to every other agri-business in the country that isn't supporting Agri Aware to consider it because, ultimately, the work we do is for them; ensuring that people appreciate their food ultimately ensures that a farmer can keep paying for nuts, or paying the contractor."

In addition to educating the public and promoting Irish agriculture, Agri Aware can offer patrons a unique opportunity to directly tell their story to an audience that they wouldn't ordinarily have access to. Marcus explains: "Over the course of the Cork Summer Show and over Bloom, we 'activated' 32 different patrons, out of 65 [that Agri Aware had at the time]. That meant that they were able to tell their story, as an organisation or business, to a public audience. And that's important. So, companies like Grassland Agro, for example, can explain that they help farmers to look after the soil; a company like Tirlán can talk

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about what they are doing to help farmers improve water quality, and so on. We can offer this numerous times throughout the year; that is access to an audience that they don't have because their audience is generally farmers."

PUBLIC DONATION ROUTE

Marcus says plans are afoot to launch a new opportunity whereby members of the public will also be able to financially support the agri-education body. "We want to harness the positivity from the farming sector in particular – your audiences [agri-media] – as well as anybody who interacts with us, be it a teacher or someone who follows us online; they will have that opportunity to become a donor." While some of the finer details of this latest initiative have yet to be ironed out, I ask Marcus what the public would get in return: "I think when you're enhancing Agri Aware's mission and ensuring that the next generation understands where their food comes from, that is possibly the biggest thing you could get from it."

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RESEARCH, NEWS, AND UPDATES

ALIGNING WITH OUR RESEARCH AND AGTECH FOCUS THIS MONTH, BERNIE COMMINS LOOKS AT SOME EXCITING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENTS IN, AND NEWS FROM, THE VETERINARY WORLD



AI IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

One Health and artificial intelligence (AI) are the focus of six new projects between University College Dublin (UCD) and the University of California, Davis. Backed by €120,000, the

transatlantic research aims to tackle global challenges in health and food systems through an initiative under the long-standing UCD Squared partnership between the two universities. The newly funded projects will address major global challenges across three key thematic areas: One Health, sustainable food systems, and AI and data science. One Health recognises the close interconnection between the health of people, animals, plants and the environment, and is a central focus of the collaboration between UCD and UC Davis. One of the six projects is titled 'AI in Veterinary Medicine for One Health' and is led by Dr Conor McAloon from UCD and Dr Pranav Pandit from the University of California, Davis. As part of this project, researchers will develop predictive models and a 'digital twin' system to detect and simulate livestock disease outbreaks. This approach aims to enhance early intervention, strengthen disease surveillance, and support more resilient agricultural and public health systems. The project reflects the growing role of data-driven technologies in veterinary science, particularly in: anticipating and managing disease risk; protecting animal health and food production systems; and advancing the integration of animal, human, and environmental health.



EGG-COUNT DEVICE HAS GLOBAL REACH

A novel faecal-egg-count device used to identify parasitic infection in farm animals is now used by 850 veterinary practices, globally. Not only that, but it has completed more than 350,000 faecal scans since it was commercialised about eight years ago. The device, OvaCyte (pictured above), was developed by a University College Dublin (UCD) multi-disciplinary research team, including Professor Theo De Waal, from the School of Veterinary Medicine. And, recently, the research team was named recipient of the 2026 NovaUCD Licence of the Year Award. OvaCyte, was licensed to CF Pharma, a pharmaceutical company headquartered in Co. Kilkenny, and is being sold globally by

Telenostic, a CF Pharma spin-out, to identify parasitic infection in animals on farms. OvaCyte consists of a cassette designed to allow for the flotation and concentration of parasite eggs, for accurate scanning, identification, and analysis, and is a smarter way to diagnose intestinal parasites in animals on farms.

Telenostic, an Enterprise Ireland High-Potential Start-Up, is now looking to expand into the US companion animal market and is exploring applications in human diagnostics and global markets including in Asia and Australia and New Zealand. The company currently supports 20 jobs in Ireland and expects this figure to grow over the coming years.

SKILLS INSTITUTE

Duggan Veterinary Group recently launched a skills institute in Thurles, comprising purpose-built facilities, designed to deliver practical, hands-on training to empower veterinary professionals to advance their skills. Its focus, according to Duggan Veterinary Group, is on providing real-world learning, expert-led courses, and modern teaching environments. The Institute currently offers five core course formats on topics such as small animal ultrasound, cardiorespiratory emergencies, surgical mastery, feline dentistry, and emergency and critical care for dental nurses.



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ESRI RESEARCH: VETERINARY CARE IN IRELAND

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has recently engaged the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake research on the provision of animal health and veterinary care services in Ireland.

The research programme will comprise a series of projects and is overseen by a steering committee, which is chaired by Joe O'Flaherty, chair of the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council, and formerly of Animal Health Ireland.

The first project is titled 'Barriers to Preventative Herd Health Planning within the Dairy Sector in Ireland and Potential

Lever for Change', which aims to better understand the challenges farmers face on animal health issues (eg. calf health, mastitis, biosecurity, TB, etc.) and what motivates how farmers' management of them. As part of this work, the ESRI will survey a sample of farmers. Survey invitations are being issued by SMS text message to farmers' mobile phones, with a link to the ESRI's online survey, which can be completed either via phone or laptop. The department asks all farmers to keep an eye out for the SMS, as it is an opportunity for farmers to give their perspective on a variety of animal health challenges.

A second project will focus on companion animals. Using a representative survey of households, this project will gather information on the population of companion animals – those that live permanently in or around the family home and are kept for companionship, enjoyment, work, or psychological support. This includes dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, reptiles, birds, ornamental fish, etc. The research will cover topics such as the demand for veterinary care, veterinary and ancillary expenditures, and incidence of dog bites.

AWARD-WINNING TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR VETS AND NURSES

On Feirm Ground 2 is an award-winning training programme for vets and nurses – and other agricultural professionals – equipping them with skills and confidence to engage and signpost farmers in distress.

Farmers face some of the highest rates of poor mental health in Ireland. They are also among the least likely to ask for help. But they trust the veterinary profession and most vets and vet nurses want to respond well should they find themselves in a situation where a farmer has opened up to them. That is where On Feirm Ground 2 comes in.

This is a training programme built specifically for agricultural professionals; not generic mental health content reworked for a farming context. This is built from the ground up, for the world that vets and vet nurses already work in. The EARS model will be the focus of this training programme. This is a simple four-step framework to 'engage, acknowledge, reassure,

and signpost'. It equips agri-professionals with confident, practical response for any unexpected conversations. The programme also considers the wellbeing of vets and vet nurses taking part. Veterinary practice carries a real emotional load and members of the profession cannot support others if they are running on empty. On Feirm Ground 2 gives participants concrete strategies to manage that. The programme includes:

- ▶ 8 CVE credits recognised for your professional portfolio;
- ▶ A two-hour self-paced e-learning module plus a six-hour in-person workshop;
- ▶ It is completely free to attend as it is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Health, and the Health Service Executive. Over 1,500 agricultural professionals across Ireland have completed the programme. Workshops are running now.

CALLING IRISH VETS!

The South East Technological University (SETU) Department of Veterinary Medicine is gathering real-world insights on the most common clinical cases vets manage daily in first-opinion practice. Your responses will help SETU: identify the conditions that are truly most common in Irish practice; inform the design of future CPD topics that are directly relevant to your daytoday work; and shape veterinary programme content so graduates are better prepared for realworld caseloads. This survey is aimed at vets who see first-opinion cases on the island of Ireland. It should only take about eight to 10 minutes to complete and is fully anonymous. You will find the survey here:



EVENTS FOR THE DIARY

▶ Wheels 'n' Heels Without Borders

All roads lead to the Copper Coast on Saturday, September 12 for this annual fundraiser. Bike/hike start time: 10am. More details: vetswithoutbordersireland.ie

▶ Vet26

Vet26 Conference takes place on October 2-4, inclusive, in the INEC, Killarney, Co. Kerry. Vet26 is Ireland's largest veterinary conference, and 300 delegates across

the profession are expected to attend.

▶ Heifer draw

Vets Without Borders Ireland's heifer draw is back this year, taking place on November 24, in support of Vets Without Borders Ireland's work with the goat farming community in Nepal. This year's prizes are: a Limousin heifer or €1,000 cash prize; a weekend away hotel voucher for Monks in Ballyvaughan; as well as some cash prizes.



The annual Vets Without Borders Ireland heifer draw supports its work with the goat farming community in Nepal.

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IS IRELAND'S FARMING SECTOR READY FOR THAT TYPE OF AI?

AIDÁN CONNOLLY, PRESIDENT OF AGRITECH CAPITAL AND AUTHOR OF *THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE*, AND CAMILA ULLOA, A MARKET RESEARCH ANALYST IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, LOOK AT THE EVOLUTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN IRELAND'S FARMING SECTOR AND HOW IT IS ENABLING A SHIFT TOWARD PREDICTIVE AGRICULTURE WHERE SYSTEMS CAN ANTICIPATE OUTCOMES AND INFORM DECISIONS BEFORE ISSUES ARISE

Across Ireland's agri-food sector, a significant transformation is taking shape, although it is not always visible through new machinery or infrastructure. Instead, it is emerging through a more fundamental shift in how decisions are made across farms, processing systems, and supply chains. AI is becoming embedded within existing operations, not as a standalone technology but as a layer that connects information, improves interpretation, and reshapes outcomes over time. This transition reflects a broader evolution within farming and agriculture, where the value of technology is increasingly defined by its ability to support better decisions rather than simply generate more data, a shift reflected in work on digital agriculture initiatives from the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and increasingly visible in

how AI tools are being used on farms to turn data into real-time, actionable insights.

DATA MANAGEMENT

For many years, farming has invested heavily in collecting data. Irish farms now generate substantial volumes of information through milk recording systems, herd-management tools, grass-measurement tools, and environmental-monitoring systems. While this has created a strong digital foundation, data alone has not consistently translated into improved performance, highlighting the need for more effective use to realise its full value. The next step is using that data in a structured and continuous manner, where AI links multiple data streams and converts them into insights that can be applied directly within everyday farm management.

FROM DATA TO DECISIONS

This transition is particularly relevant in Ireland, where pasture-based production systems depend heavily on timing, coordination, and responsiveness to changing conditions. Grass growth, weather variability, animal performance, and input costs are closely interconnected, and managing these relationships has always required a high level of expertise, often under time pressure and with incomplete information. AI does not replace that expertise, but enhances it by supporting more consistent and timely decisions. In practical terms, this means that information is not only available but also actionable at the moment it is needed, with AI-enabled tools increasingly supporting more accurate and real-time decisions on farm, from adjusting feeding strategies to responding to changes in grass growth. The



THE QUESTION FOR FARMERS, PROCESSORS, AND THE WIDER AGRI-FOOD SECTOR IS NOT WHETHER TO ENGAGE WITH IT, BUT HOW AND WHEN TO STEP ON IN A WAY THAT DELIVERS VALUE

Institutions such as Teagasc, through its advisory and research systems, and Bord Bia, through sustainability and market intelligence programmes, have established strong foundations for data collection and knowledge transfer, supporting the scaling of more advanced digital tools.

PRECISION TO PREDICTIVE DECISION-MAKING

The industry has spent much of the past decade focusing on precision agriculture, where the goal has been to improve the accuracy of specific tasks. AI is now enabling a shift toward predictive agriculture, a transition described in *The Future of Agriculture* (Aidan Connolly), where systems can anticipate outcomes and inform decisions before issues arise. In livestock systems, this includes identifying health risks at an early stage, while in crop systems it involves adjusting inputs based on expected conditions rather than reacting after the fact. This shift reflects a broader structural change in agriculture, where data-driven systems are increasingly used to move from reactive to proactive decision-making across food production systems.

For Irish farmers, this shift has direct implications for managing variability within grass-based systems. Weather patterns, soil conditions, and grass growth all influence performance, and anticipating these changes allows for more efficient use of resources, with farm-level evidence showing how weather variation affects grass growth across seasons. This contributes not only to improved productivity but also to better environmental outcomes, particularly in nutrient management, which is increasingly central to Irish agricultural priorities, as reflected in recent initiatives to reduce nutrient losses and improve water quality.

Irish dairy sector provides a clear example of this opportunity. With over 8.5 billion litres of milk processed annually in Ireland, even small improvements in decision-making can have significant impacts on efficiency and profitability at scale. By linking grass-growth data, feed planning, and milk output, AI-enabled systems can help farmers align biological performance with economic outcomes in a more integrated way.

THE PACE OF CHANGE

The pace of change in AI is often misunderstood as something that will arrive in a single step, yet the reality is that it is already unfolding across multiple layers of the system. In many ways, it resembles an 'AI bullet train'. The train is already moving, and the question for farmers, processors, and the wider agri-food sector is not whether to

engage with it, but how and when to step on in a way that delivers value. Technologies are being adopted incrementally, from monitoring systems that track animal health to software platforms that integrate production and financial data. These developments are not replacing existing practices but are gradually reshaping how decisions are made by providing clearer and more timely information, with digital tools increasingly supporting farm management and decision-making through the use of data-driven insights.

Ireland is particularly well positioned to benefit from this evolution because of the structure of its agri-food sector. The close integration between farmers, co-operatives, advisory services, and export markets creates an environment where data can flow more effectively and where improvements in one part of the system can influence others.

Grasshopper is one of the most accurate grass cover measurement systems available on the market today. The Grasshopper algorithm was developed and validated over a three-year period by True North Technologies and at the Moorepark Grassland Research Station in Ireland.



IRELAND'S MOVE TO EXECUTION

The shift toward predictive agriculture is only one stage in a broader transformation, where AI moves beyond generating insights to support decision-making and execution within everyday workflows. This involves connected systems that bring together data from animal health, grass growth, inputs, and performance to enable more consistent and timely decisions. While fully developed digital twins are not yet widely deployed across Irish agriculture, early initiatives are beginning to emerge, creating data-driven representations of farm performance. At the same time, advances in generative AI are changing how information is accessed and used. Large language models and emerging agentic systems are beginning to support decision-making and execution, linking data, recommendations, and actions within daily workflows. This reflects a shift toward an 'AI assembly line' where value is created by connecting data, decisions, and execution into a continuous process, with

these tools already improving forecasting, monitoring, and decision support in practice. This shift is also reflected in current industry discussions.

INSIGHT AND ACTION

While these developments are already beginning to take shape, one of the most important challenges remains the translation of insights into consistent action. Many digital systems can generate alerts or recommendations, yet fewer are fully integrated into workflows in a way that ensures those recommendations are implemented. This points to a broader pattern across the sector, where the challenge is not the technology itself, but how work is organised around it. One way to think about this transition is through the DRIVE framework, outlined in the white paper *Artificial Intelligence in the Agri-Food World* (co-written by Aidan Connolly and John W Power, president, LSC International Inc.), which shows how value is created when systems are properly connected:

- ▶ **Data** is collected across the farm, from animal performance to feed, environment, and operational inputs;
- ▶ **Refinement** turns that data into structured, usable information through analytics and integration;
- ▶ **Insights** identify patterns, risks, and opportunities that are not immediately visible;
- ▶ **Value** is realised when those insights are translated into decisions that improve performance; and
- ▶ **Execution** ensures that decisions are consistently applied within daily workflows.

In many cases, agriculture has made significant progress in collecting data and generating insights, but the connection to value and execution remains inconsistent, which limits the overall impact of digital technologies on farm performance. This becomes particularly relevant in the context of labour constraints, which continue to affect Irish farming systems. Where decisions are not consistently translated into action, the burden falls back on labour, increasing the need for monitoring and manual intervention. Technologies that support clearer and more timely execution can help address these challenges, but only if they are fully integrated into existing workflows.

ADOPTION, TRUST, AND VALUE

As with any technological transition, adoption will depend on clear and demonstrable value. Farmers need to see tangible benefits in terms of efficiency, cost reduction, or improved performance before investing in new systems. At the same time, trust plays a critical role, as decisions supported by artificial intelligence must be transparent and reliable. Understanding how recommendations are generated, and being able to evaluate their impact, is essential for building confidence in these tools, with industry discussions increasingly highlighting the importance of maintaining a clear role for human judgement alongside emerging technologies.

UNLOCKING VALUE FROM WHAT ALREADY EXISTS

The future of AI in agri-food is not defined by entirely new systems, but by the ability to connect and enhance what already exists. Ireland's agri-food sector has strong production systems, established data networks, and a collaborative structure that supports innovation. AI brings these elements together to improve decision-making and deliver measurable outcomes. The opportunity lies not in the technology itself, but in how it is applied. As the sector moves from insight to execution within everyday workflows, value will depend on how effectively data, decisions, and actions are connected in practice. By building on its existing strengths, the Irish agri-food sector is well positioned to remain competitive in an increasingly complex and data-driven global environment.

References available on request.

AUTHORS

Aidan Connolly, is president of AgriTech Capital, author of the book 'The Future of Agriculture,' now in four languages, and a recent white paper on AI in agri-food systems.

Camila Ulloa is a market research analyst in agricultural economics. Her work combines industry analysis and applied research on innovation, sustainability, and emerging trends across agriculture and food systems.

Heat stress lowers feed intake, milk production, and daily liveweight gain.

PARTNER PROMOTION

HEAT STRESS: WHY BUFFER FEEDING AND GRASS MANAGEMENT MATTERS

THE RECENT EXTREME SUMMER TEMPERATURES MEAN THAT HEAT STRESS IS A GENUINE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE ON IRISH DAIRY AND BEEF FARMS, WRITES FEIDLIM ROCHE, ALLTECH'S SOUTHEAST INTOUCH FEEDING SPECIALIST

Recent weeks have been challenging for both farmers and livestock. While Ireland has traditionally escaped the extreme summer temperatures experienced across southern Europe, warmer weather is becoming increasingly common. As a result, heat stress is now a genuine management challenge on Irish dairy and beef farms.

Even a few consecutive days of high temperatures can reduce animal performance, particularly when warm nights prevent livestock from cooling down. While sunshine can initially boost grass growth, prolonged dry conditions quickly reduce growth rates. At the same time, heat stress lowers feed intake, milk production, and daily liveweight gain. Fortunately, a few practical management decisions around grazing, buffer feeding and water supply can help minimise these losses.

RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

High-yielding dairy cows are particularly susceptible to heat stress due to the large amount of metabolic heat generated during milk production. Signs to watch for include:

- ▶ Reduced grazing activity, particularly during the afternoon.
- ▶ Increased respiration and panting.

- ▶ Livestock gathering around water troughs.
- ▶ Lower feed intake.
- ▶ Reduced milk yield and milk solids.
- ▶ During hot weather, cows naturally adjust their grazing behaviour, eating more during the early morning and late evening while avoiding the hottest part of the day.

BUFFER FEEDING

Maintaining dry matter intake (DMI) is one of the biggest challenges during periods of heat stress. Although grass growth may initially be strong, several days of high temperatures combined with drying soils can quickly reduce growth rates and tighten grass supplies.

Among the Keenan InTouch customers I work with across Kilkenny and Wicklow, grass growth generally remained good as we moved into July. However, some farmers left themselves short by removing extra bales from the grazing platform. As a result, a number of these farms introduced buffer feeding for seven to 10 days to slow the grazing rotation and allow grass covers to recover while keeping up production. Overall, the majority were supplying cows with excellent-quality grass alongside 3-4kg of



EVEN A FEW CONSECUTIVE DAYS OF HIGH TEMPERATURES CAN REDUCE ANIMAL PERFORMANCE, PARTICULARLY WHEN WARM NIGHTS PREVENT LIVESTOCK FROM COOLING DOWN

concentrates, with feeding levels adjusted according to cow performance. Introducing a well-balanced buffer feed offers several advantages:

- ▶ Maintains dry matter and energy intake when grazing time is reduced.
- ▶ Supports rumen function during periods of inconsistent grazing.
- ▶ Helps sustain milk yield and milk solids.
- ▶ Reduces the impact of fluctuating grass quality.
- ▶ Takes pressure off grazing paddocks during periods of slower grass growth.

Timing is equally important. Offering fresh feed during the cooler parts of the day,

PARTNER PROMOTION

particularly after evening milking, will generally encourage higher intakes than feeding during the hottest part of the afternoon.

MANAGING GRASS DURING HOT WEATHER

Heat stress not only affects the animal but the grass plant, too. Where soil moisture becomes limiting, grass growth can slow dramatically. Rotation length may need to be extended to match reduced growth, while avoiding overgrazing will help plants recover more quickly once rainfall returns. Maintaining suitable pre-grazing covers is equally important. Heavy, stemmy swards reduce intake at a time when cows are already eating less because of the heat.

MANAGE DISTANCES

Walking distances should also be considered. Long walks to distant paddocks increase energy expenditure and add to heat load, particularly during the middle of the day. Where practical, grazing the paddocks closest to the parlour during warmer periods can help reduce stress.

WATER - THE MOST IMPORTANT NUTRIENT

During hot weather, water becomes the most critical nutrient in the diet. A lactating dairy cow can consume between 90-100 litres of water per day during warm conditions. Trough capacity, water flow rates, and cleanliness should all be checked before temperatures rise. Adequate drinking space is equally important. Livestock should always have unrestricted access to clean, fresh water without having to queue, as even short periods of restricted access can negatively affect production and animal welfare.

RUMEN HEALTH

Changes in grazing behaviour and reduced feed intake increase the risk of rumen upset. Cows often consume larger meals after extended periods without grazing, placing additional pressure on rumen function. Providing sufficient effective fibre through buffer feeding, maintaining consistent feeding routines and avoiding sudden dietary changes will help stabilise rumen pH and support animal performance throughout periods of heat stress. Incorporating a live yeast like Yea-Sacc in your parlour nut will reinforce rumen function, help stabilise pH, and minimise mobilisation of the cow's body reserves.

PLANNING AHEAD

While Irish summers remain unpredictable, periods of prolonged warm weather are becoming more frequent. Having a plan in place before temperatures rise can help protect both animal welfare and farm performance.

Simple measures such as providing plentiful clean water, maintaining grass quality, introducing buffer feeding where necessary and encouraging feed intake during the cooler parts of the day can significantly reduce the impact of heat stress.

Managing heat stress is becoming another essential component of good grassland management. Farms that adapt quickly will be better placed to maintain production, protect animal health and make the most of every grazing season, whatever the Irish summer delivers.

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SYNCHRONISED BREEDING – A POWERFUL TOOL

ONE OF THE MOST PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF COMPLEX TECHNOLOGY BEING USED TO IMPROVE SUCKLER BREEDING OUTCOMES WAS HIGHLIGHTED AT BEEF2026, WRITES MATT O'KEEFFE

Head of the animal and bioscience research department at Teagasc Grange, David Kenny, and his colleagues provided an insight into how the strategic use of oestrous synchronisation and timed artificial insemination (AI) in suckler herds can be adopted at any scale of operation. The technology was described as 'offering a powerful tool for herd management and genetic improvement of beef cattle'. The fact that we have around 750,000 suckler cows in the country points to large-scale potential breeding improvements, if synchronised breeding techniques

were widely adopted. However, there was a strong warning around the use of synchronised breeding programmes, in that it should be considered only when cows are in moderate-to-good body condition and there is a sufficiently high level of technical expertise. The first premise is applicable in all breeding situations whether this technology is going to be adopted or not, and the second should not preclude any herd owner, per se, as technical expertise can be acquired personally, or hired for the exercise involved. Taking the use of synchronised breeding a further step, David insists that where sex-sorted semen is to



THE FACT THAT WE HAVE AROUND 750,000 SUCKLER COWS IN THE COUNTRY POINTS TO LARGE-SCALE POTENTIAL BREEDING IMPROVEMENTS

be used, AI should be based on observed heat activity and timed accordingly. This is not advice restricted to suckler farmers only, for while sexed semen is now widely adopted across dairy herds, it is a technology that requires even more rigorous attention to detail than conventional AI breeding for maximising successful outcomes.

SCALE SHOULDN'T MATTER

The benefits of synchronised breeding should not be confined to larger-scale herds. It has application, perhaps even more so, on smaller scale suckler enterprises where the owner/manager often holds down an off-farm job. It provides an opportunity to maximise the benefits of complex breeding technologies with well-identified positive outcomes, while minimising time commitment. For breeders who want to secure the best available genetics through the use of AI, a couple of days, or parts of days devoted to incorporating a synchronisation programme, is far less time consuming than regularly observing heats and rounding up cows for insemination, and far more profitable in terms of financial outcomes. Whether it is five, 10 or 50 cows, the technology should have application on a suckler farm. It does not eliminate the need for a stock bull, but the research outcomes from Grange, which utilised data from 2,200 cows in eighty-five suckler herds across the country, conclusively proves the benefits of adoption of the technology.

At a basic, practical level, the technology allows a breeder to tighten up the calving pattern in a herd and allocate time far more efficiently to ensuring the best possible outcomes at both the breeding and calving periods.

STATISTICAL CHALLENGES

The statistics around suckler breeding, generally, are revealing. The Teagasc researchers highlight Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) figures showing that less



EVEN WITH THE USE OF BEST BREEDING PRACTICES OUTSIDE OF TECHNOLOGY INTERVENTION SUCH AS SYNCHRONISED BREEDING PROGRAMMES, THERE ARE NATURAL HEADWINDS CHALLENGING PROGRESS

than 20 per cent of suckler heifers calve for the first time at the target average age of 24 months. In addition, visitors to Beef2026 were reminded that the average calving-to-calving interval for Irish suckler beef cows is 400 days. The target timescale is in the region of 170 days. Another statistic of note is the fact that the use of AI on suckler cows in this country is less than one-in-five. This sub-20-per-cent figure illustrates how difficult it is to substantially raise the genetic merit of suckler cow offspring, or indeed, suckler-heifer calf replacements in anything approaching an optimal timescale.

NATURE'S HEADWINDS

In fairness, even with the use of best breeding practices outside of technology intervention such as synchronised breeding programmes, there are natural headwinds challenging progress on suckler farms. For instance, as was discussed at Grange, and resulting from a major piece of breeding research conducted by Teagasc, the average calving-to-ovulation interval for suckler cows is 50-55 days. That is twice as long as applies to dairy cows. First calving suckler cows have an even longer interval, running on average up to 70 days. This is simply a natural phenomenon, ascribed mainly to two factors, David noted:

the cow-calf bond; and the cow's body fat reserves, as measured through body condition scoring. As mentioned at the top of this article, the general emphasis on body condition fitness extends from ovulation to calving and beyond. Moderate-to-good body condition advises that a cow is not too fat to go in calf, in turn is not too fat at calving, and, therefore, will not lose excessive weight post-calving, but is kept at a balanced condition score, as far as possible, throughout her breeding lifespan. Easier said than done, as many breeders will legitimately point out. Genetically superior cows as well as offspring, and optimised feeding and grazing management will help minimise this ongoing challenge.

CRITICAL CONCEPTION DATES AND RATES

Another interesting piece of research around beef cow breeding, is the fact that cows typically achieve conception rates of 60-70 per cent to either natural service or AI, assuming the cow is at least 35 days post calving. Cows inseminated earlier than 40 days post calving, research confirms, have below 40 per cent average conception rates. A read back of the relevant data in the Grange booklet highlights this outcome provided all other influencing vectors are positive, including semen quality, proper AI technique, and bull fertility. The latter is a perennial problem on suckler farms, with often unavoidably low observation during the breeding season to ensure the bull is functioning, has adequate libido, and that his semen is healthy. After purchase, it is generally advised that the bull is allowed to 'acclimatise' to his new surroundings, has his semen tested for adequacy and vitality, has his general health, including his feet, checked and confirmed that he is healthy, and that he is well matched in size and to the numbers of the cows to be inseminated. And that's only the start. There is nothing simple to optimising outcomes from suckler farming, as any breeder will tell you.

When the biological engine is functioning well, it does remarkable things for the soil.

BACK DOWN TO EARTH

RESEARCHERS, SCIENTISTS, AGRONOMISTS AND PROGRESSIVE GROWERS ARE RETHINKING WHAT SOIL MEANS TO THE FUTURE OF FARMING. DR PAUL O'HORA OF NEWRY-BASED ORGANIC CROP NUTRITION SPECIALISTS, SOILWORX, IS ENGAGING WITH FARMERS AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND TO TRANSLATE EMERGING SOIL SCIENCE INTO PRACTICAL ON-FARM CHANGE

Regenerative agriculture has become one of the defining buzzwords of recent years. But beyond the boardroom and the headlines, farmers are adopting practical changes that are delivering measurable improvements to soil health. It's those actions, not the terminology, that will shape the future of farming. Healthy soil is the basis of food security, sustainable farming and a healthy planet. For farmers who work it day in and day out, it's critical to productivity, profitability and resilience in an increasingly uncertain economic and environmental climate. Yet for much of the twentieth century, soil's value was widely ignored. A quiet revolution is



Dr Paul O'Hora, SoilWorx.

now changing that. Researchers, scientists, agronomists and progressive growers are rethinking what soil means to the future of farming. And as that understanding deepens, what they are discovering makes compelling reading.

MORE THAN A GROWING MEDIUM

For much of the last century, soil was largely treated as a passive medium and not a living ecosystem. Yet beneath the surface sits a dynamic, layered world of microorganisms, fungi, organic matter, minerals and moisture that collectively determine how nutrients cycle, crops grow and respond to stress.



CROPS BECOME MORE RELIANT ON EXTERNAL INPUTS TO COMPENSATE FOR WHAT A HEALTHY SOIL SYSTEM WOULD OTHERWISE PROVIDE

believes a shift in how farmers think about soil is already under way.

"Farmers are understanding that soils aren't just a medium to grow crops. They are, by and large, their biggest asset," he says. "We're slowly but surely seeing the soil's role in supporting crops, water management, biodiversity, and more, recognised."

THE BIOLOGY BENEATH

Central to this new understanding is the role of soil biology – the vast community of bacteria, fungi, nematodes, earthworms and other organisms that drive nutrient cycling, structure formation, and plant health. "When this biological engine is functioning well, it does remarkable things," Paul explains. "Microorganisms break down and mineralise organic nutrients locked up in the soil, making them available to crops far more efficiently than synthetic inputs alone. Some soil microbes fix nitrogen directly from the atmosphere, reducing dependence on manufactured fertilisers. The rhizosphere, the zone immediately surrounding plant roots, is a site of sophisticated biochemical exchange, where plants trade sugars for nutrients in relationships refined over millions of years." When soil biology is compromised, these processes stall. Nutrient cycling slows. Water retention drops. Crops become more reliant on external inputs to compensate for what a healthy soil system would otherwise provide. "The result is a farm that costs more to run and delivers less," says Paul.

"Soil has a physical structure that in itself has multiple properties that support life," he adds. "Dig deeper and you find soil biology as a complex ecosystem with finely-tuned mechanisms. This is why soil health is such a careful balance of its physical, biological and chemical characteristics."

RESEARCH AS THE FOUNDATION

Understanding the complexity of soil systems

is one thing. Giving farmers the confidence and tools to act on that understanding is another. This is where investment in independent research comes in. SoilWorx's ongoing collaboration with Rothamsted Research, one of the world's oldest and most respected agricultural science institutes, reflects a commitment to evidence-led decision-making. Some of Rothamsted's long-term field trials have been running for 150 years or more, generating datasets that prove how soils change over time and how different management practices affect their health and productivity.

For Paul, the value of this kind of independent, multi-year research cannot be overstated. "Data is absolutely key," he says. "Gaining a baseline is everything. Only then will you start to see the effect of any changes you make. Independent research, conducted over years rather than a single season, is vital to make evidence-backed decisions on changes to farming technique."

The EU's LUCAS soil monitoring survey, which generated more than 40,000 datapoints across European soils, demonstrates what becomes possible when baseline measurement is taken seriously. With robust data, patterns emerge and interventions can be targeted. Progress can also be tracked, which is why Paul laments the UK Government's decision to remove Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) payments for soil measurement.

TRANSLATING SCIENCE INTO PRACTICE

Research findings are only valuable if they reach the farmers who can act on them. But for many, the gap between field trial and farm gate remains a barrier, making local agronomic advice and demonstration essential.

Precision nutrient management offers a compelling example of research-led practice at scale. By measuring soil nutrient content

The European Environment Agency estimates that 62 per cent of European soils show signs of degradation. Around a quarter suffer from unsustainable erosion rates. Between 2009 and 2018, losses of soil organic carbon in the upper 20cm of agricultural land released the equivalent of around 28 million tonnes of CO₂ per year.

Behind those statistics lie the same issues. Intensive farming practices, compaction from heavy machinery, repeated cultivation and insufficient organic matter return have stripped soils of the biological activity that once sustained them.

Dr Paul O'Hara of Newry-based organic crop nutrition specialists SoilWorx is working at the forefront of this challenge, engaging with farmers and research institutions across the UK and Ireland to translate emerging soil science into practical on-farm change. He



and following established guidelines like AHDB's RB209, alongside precision application technology, Paul has seen farmers reduce input costs, improve nutrient-use efficiency, cut nutrient leaching and lower ammonia emissions – often without sacrificing yield.

"This is only possible because of years of R&D by institutions such as Rothamsted, AHDB, and others," says Paul. "The climate and technology are changing, and so must farming techniques. Research answers the challenges of the future, giving farmers another tool in their toolbox when they need it."

COMPLEMENTARY CASE FOR BIOLOGY AND REGENERATION

One of the more persistent misconceptions in modern farming is that biological and regenerative approaches are in opposition to conventional mineral agronomy – that choosing one means abandoning the other. The more nuanced reality is that these approaches can and should work in concert. "Every farm and every field is unique," says Paul. "Exploring approaches that work specifically for your farm, even if it is a hybrid approach, could be beneficial. In the UK and across the EU, funding pathways exist to help farmers explore new practices while de-risking the investment."

Where biological practices improve soil structure and microbial activity, they also create the conditions in which conventional inputs perform more effectively. Paul comments: "Better nutrient cycling means less waste. Improved water retention means greater resilience in dry periods. Reduced

erosion means less nutrient loss from the system. These are not competing objectives; they are mutually reinforcing ones," Paul explains. The caveat, Paul is quick to stress, is that none of this works over a single season. "This all needs to be a long-term plan," he says.

TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL, NOT A SUBSTITUTE

Ag-tech is increasingly part of the conversation around soil health. In-situ soil-testing, drone-mapping, and AI-driven data aggregation are making it possible to build detailed, real-time pictures of soil condition across an entire farm, identifying areas of compaction, erosion or variability that would once have taken seasons to detect.

The European Joint Research Centre has highlighted how integrating drone data with precision agriculture technology allows farmers to adapt inputs such as water, fertiliser, crop protection with far greater accuracy, improving both efficiency and environmental outcomes. Looking further ahead, autonomous and drone-based application systems could reduce compaction caused by heavy machinery, enabling more targeted, lighter-touch nutrient delivery. Yet Paul is adamant that technology is there to assist, not replace. "Technology is accelerating to aid farmers," he says. "But it's not a substitute for the human touch, for physically walking the field and interpreting the data."

THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

As pressure grows on farm profitability, the economic case for soil health investment

can't be ignored. Research by The Andersons Centre has highlighted crop inputs as the biggest cost in regenerative and conventional farming alike, and fertiliser costs have shown a persistent long-term upward trend, with significant spikes in recent years. Farms with healthy, biologically active soils have the potential to reduce that reliance, improving margins while delivering environmental benefits: cleaner waterways, improved air quality and greater carbon storage. Greater investment in soil-focused research remains a priority. Paul points to the continuation of EU soil assessment frameworks as a positive step, alongside the potential for policy to support the recycling of food waste streams back to land.

On the ground in Ireland and the UK, farmer awareness of the need to understand and manage soil health continues to grow. More growers are moving beyond basic testing, building detailed nutrient management plans that consider soil biology alongside conventional chemistry.

Paul's message to any farmer not yet engaged with soil health monitoring is direct: "If you don't have a baseline, start today. Talk to an expert about what you can do to maximise your soil's potential. Data is key and don't be afraid to try something new."

Established in 2020 and based in Co. Down, SoilWorx provides high-quality, organic, slow-release nutrients that build enduring soil health, increase yield quality, reduce nutrient run-off, and deliver measurable return on investment, according to the company.

Jim McCarthy says he is farming a silt-clay loam soil in northeast Romania with 6 per cent organic matter, giving them about 150kg of nitrogen a year - for free!



FARMING THE MCCARTHY WAY

JIM MCCARTHY HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN SO MANY PROJECTS AND FARMING ENTERPRISES OVER THE YEARS, THAT IT IS ALWAYS A PLEASURE AND AN EDUCATION TO CHAT TO HIM. **MATT O'KEEFFE** SEIZED THAT OPPORTUNITY RECENTLY, GETTING AN UPDATE ON HIS VAST ROMANIAN FARMING ENTERPRISE

The closing of one door in 2012, when Jim and his business partner sold their agri-business company led Jim in search of another door to open. He explains: "In the first week of January 2012, we sold the Argentine investment to Almarai, the Saudi Arabian organisation. I was too young to retire and so I went off researching further farming opportunities (with the help of Kieran Mahon and the Davy Group). We put a prospectus together and raised the money to go farming in Romania. We chose Romania because it has the black earth soil of Ukraine and southern Russia, with the European Union legislation umbrella to protect us. In addition, we could get land ownership. Having been renting land all my life, to own a significant amount of land was important to me."

OPTIMISING THE FARMING MODEL

Jim believes in changing strategy when circumstances demand it, and the Romanian venture has evolved over the years as crops and practices have been modified, he explains: "We've been developing the business since acquiring it. We're now farming over 20,000 hectares, 50 per cent of which we own, and 50 per cent of which we rent. We were growing about 2,500 acres of beet, initially. But because of price volatility and the challenges of a disease called macrophomina, in addition to problems with

crops after the beet, we abandoned sugar beet production."

Originally farming almost 2,000 hectares, organically, that, too, has changed. Jim explained: "That involved a lot of hoeing for weed control. It's lovely rolling countryside but continuing the hoeing practice was an issue. In our wet months of June, July, and August the rain comes as thunderstorms. If you're on sloping land, and you've been steering hoeing crops of sunflowers, corn, soybeans, and so on, and you get huge thunderstorms, there's a lot of water run-off, bringing the topsoil with it; a big investment in land and you're watching it wash away. That didn't make a lot of sense, so we abandoned the organic practices as well as the sugar beet."

NO PLOUGHING

Another thing you will not find on a Jim McCarthy farm in Romania is a plough; he is a firm no-plough advocate for a number of reasons, he explained: "What many people don't realise is the lovely smell released from the soil when ploughing is carbon dioxide. Ploughing aerates the soil and frees up organic matter. When you oxidise the organic matter, essentially, you add two oxygen atoms to a carbon atom, and that's carbon dioxide, and it goes off in the air. There's a huge amount of work done by Professor Don



WE CHOSE ROMANIA BECAUSE IT HAS THE BLACK EARTH SOIL OF UKRAINE AND SOUTHERN RUSSIA, WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION LEGISLATION UMBRELLA TO PROTECT US

Reicosky, now retired from the University of Minnesota, on the loss of carbon dioxide through ploughing and cultivation. Where we farm in Romania, the rainfall was normally 550mm, but now it's fallen to 490mm over the last 11 years. It is also much hotter. Up to 25mm of moisture evaporates with ploughing, and another 12-14mm is lost through cultivation. That takes from your yield because, for the likes of grain maize, in the summertime, an additional 25mm equates to 0.6 of a tonne extra yield per hectare. The ambition is to put land together that has great porosity, that will infiltrate the water quickly, and hold it, and the more organic matter you have, the more water you'll hold. If you could raise your soil organic matter by 1 per cent, over the full growing season, that will give you an additional 27-30kg of nitrogen; it'll give



Jim McCarthy. Photo: Nuffield Ireland.

you an additional 6-7kg of phosphorus, and an additional 3-4kg of sulphur. And it'll also hold 22mm more rainfall."

BUILDING ORGANIC MATTER

Jim draws on his Irish and global knowledge of soil management when it comes to optimising Romanian soil: "I farmed in the Castledermot area for many years, on sandy land, where you couldn't get beyond 2 per cent organic matter. Now we're farming this silt-clay loam soil in northeast Romania that's 6 per cent organic matter. This land is giving us, free of charge, about 150kg of nitrogen a year. We're using very little applied nitrogen now. We've brought that land from 3.7 per cent to 5.8 per cent organic matter in 13 years, by stopping ploughing, having



WE'RE NOW FARMING OVER 20,000 HECTARES, 50 PER CENT OF WHICH WE OWN, AND 50 PER CENT OF WHICH WE RENT

continuous cover cropping, leaving roots in the soil, and we're not releasing any carbon dioxide. "Sequestering carbon is like putting money in the bank. Your soil will be healthier and grow more. When you're continuously ploughing and cultivating, you're removing organic matter. The sad part for tillage farmers

in Ireland is we don't have enough diverse crops that'll improve the soil profile with their root architecture," he said. Jim continued: "Thirty per cent of our Romanian farm is seeded to grain maize because it produces this huge root ball that keeps the land open. The following spring, with the wonderful digitalisation of agriculture, we're able to place the sunflower seed precisely beside the old maize row. There's increased water infiltration and microbial activity. Because the microbes are eating the old corn roots, we won't have to bury them with the plough. "We have 25 per cent wheat

planted annually, although we make no money from it. Wheat is a break crop, but it's so important, in our climate, where it gets very hot, to have the land covered with residue. That's another reason we gave up farming organically.

"Because of scale and no-till, we buy two types of tractors, 200hp and 400hp, to pull 12-metre no-till seeders. We have one tractor per 1,600 acres. We harvest 40,000 acres of grain with six combines.

"Five hundred kilometres south of our farm, there is lighter land where they continue to plough and cultivate, and they now have a problem with desertification. That's becoming an issue in many parts of the world. We give the Brazilians a hard time about their soil practices, but in 1970, they discovered that they had 200 million hectares of cerrado soil, which had a pH of 4 and so high in aluminium that it was toxic to most plants. But they discovered a way to farm it. Since 1996, we've flatlined our production in Europe, but the Brazilians have gone from producing 30 million tonnes of soybean to 180 million tonnes, which they follow in the same year with safrinha corn, which has gone from 35 million tonnes to 140 million tonnes, and they've greatly improved their land at the same time."

EATING BETTER AND LIVING LONGER

Jim has a broad perspective on the development of agriculture over the ages: "Cave excavations show that 10,000 years ago, 50 per cent of all people were dead by the age of 30. That had only improved by five years in 1850. That was 16 years before my grandfather was born. Now in Ireland, it's well over 80, and it's because we've adopted science and nutrition. We're well-fed, and anyone that tells you modern farming is killing the world doesn't know what they're talking about.

"Irish farming is a huge success story. In particular, our grass-based milk-production model in Ireland is unrivalled in the world. Most environmentalists won't tell you how good dairy farmers in Ireland are growing 16 tonnes of grass. You must sequester a tonne and a half of carbon dioxide to grow a tonne of grass-dry matter. Therefore, efficient dairy farmers in Ireland are sequestering huge amounts of carbon and storing it. The carbon is released when the consumer eats the product, but the farmer is blamed for the production. This is the skewed thinking in Europe."



Workers deploy a drone to spray fungicide on Jim McCarthy's Romanian farm.



YOUR FAVOURITE BRAND REMAINS ON TOP!



Avonmore Milk remains the No.1 Dairy Brand.

No.2 across all brands in Ireland.

Source: Kantar, Top 100 Brands at Home 2026.



Make every day *this* good!

RESEARCH ROUND-UP

THE WORLDS OF AGRICULTURE AND RESEARCH ARE VERY MUCH INTERTWINED. THIS MONTH, BERNIE COMMINS PROVIDES A ROUND-UP OF SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH PROJECTS UNDERWAY AND THE RESULTS THEY ARE STRIVING FOR



FEED ADDITIVES

MORE FOR LESS

A new research project is exploring the long-term effectiveness of methane-reducing feed additives in grass-based systems. Such additives, studies show, can achieve reductions of 8-30 per cent under indoor conditions, but their grass-based impact is uncertain.

The RU-MIT-LESS research project is led by Teagasc, in collaboration with University College Dublin (UCD) and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), and is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). It will investigate the strategic use of a range of methane-reducing feed additives throughout the beef-production cycle, including early-life interventions as well as any benefits associated with combining different additives. The project will also evaluate how these technologies can be incorporated into practical and economically viable beef-production systems, as well as investigating the societal barriers to the uptake and usage of feed additives within the Irish beef sector, and the effectiveness of new technologies for measuring methane emissions.

Commenting, Teagasc researcher, Dr Paul

Smith said: "While previous research has demonstrated the methane-reduction potential of feed additives during indoor feeding periods, there is still much to learn about their long-term effects. RU-MIT-LESS will investigate a range of feed additives, both individually and in combination, across different stages of the beef production cycle, including early-life interventions. The project will evaluate their impact on methane emissions, animal performance, and farm profitability, providing the evidence needed to support future adoption by Irish beef farmers. Furthermore, this project will focus on understanding the opinion of multiple actors throughout the beef sector, to the usage of feed additives for reducing methane emissions."

Joint research call

The 2026 call has been made for proposals under the next phase of the Ireland-New Zealand Agriculture and Climate Joint Research and Technology Initiative. This is phase two of the bilateral research partnership, which began originally in 2022.

The joint research call between the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and New Zealand's Ministry for Primary Industries will provide up to €6m in combined funding for collaborative research aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from pasture-based livestock systems, while maintaining productivity, profitability and resilience at farm level. The call for proposals is now open, and applications must be submitted through the DAFM's online application system by September 30, 2026.



LATEST CROPS RESEARCH SHOWCASED

The latest crops research from the Teagasc Crops Research Centre in Oak Park, Carlow was showcased during a visit by the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Noel Grealish recently.

The latest from the Teagasc potato breeding programme was outlined by Dr Dan Milbourne, with Minister Grealish sampling how the latest potato varieties tasted when made into chips. The details of the DAFM-funded CRISSP and VICCI research projects were discussed with the minister and Dr Milbourne outlining how work in VICCI enabled the development of genomic and marker assisted selection approaches to combine excellent processing characteristics (eg. good fry colour) with disease resistance in potato varieties. While this technology is now routinely used in the Teagasc/IPM Potato Group Ltd breeding programme, the CRRISP project involved applying traditional and genome-based breeding to a pilot potato breeding programme in Kenya. This feeds into both Teagasc's international development commitments and supporting responsible expansion of Irish potato seed production into East Africa.



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Conference 2026



Roots of Resilience

Safeguarding Our Food Production Model for the Next Generation

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Thursday 3rd September 2026

Killashee Hotel and Spa, Naas, Co. Kildare

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PROTEIN PERFORMANCE

A new factsheet summarising the results of multi-year field trials evaluating cereal and pulse varieties under Irish growing conditions has been published by the Protein-I project. Conducted across research sites and commercial farms throughout Ireland, the trials assessed the agronomic performance and grain quality characteristics of winter wheat, spring wheat, winter rye, winter barley, and spring peas.

The factsheet provides growers, researchers, and industry stakeholders with practical information on the performance of selected cereal and pulse crops and their potential suitability for human food applications. The findings highlight key agronomic considerations, quality characteristics and crop-specific opportunities and challenges observed during the trials. The research was carried out as part of the Protein-I project, a collaborative initiative focused on supporting the development of sustainable, healthy nutrition systems and increasing knowledge around Irish-grown plant protein crops. Protein-I is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

The project has demonstrated that with hybrid rye varieties, European milling market specifications can be achieved. These specifications can also be achieved for spring wheat and several milling-specific varieties. However, when the required quality is achieved, a yield penalty is observed in milling varieties for which there is currently no monetary compensation.

BIOECONOMY ON THE RISE

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon recently launched the €5m BioScaleUp bioeconomy demonstration initiative, and officially opened the €4.7m National Biorefinery Pilot Plant (NBPP) at the National Bioeconomy Campus in Lisheen, Co. Tipperary. In doing so, he commented:

"These facilities will help take agricultural, food, forestry, and other biobased side streams, often seen as waste and turns them into new valuable products for sectors as diverse as food ingredients, bio-packaging and bioenergy.

"The new NBPP provides dedicated open-access pilot-scale infrastructure to help researchers, start-ups, SMEs and established companies test, validate and scale biobased products and innovative processes moving biobased innovation from laboratory scale towards commercial deployment. In practical terms, it will support innovators to move from grams to kilogrammes, generate process data at scale, reduce technical and financial risk, and bring new biobased products and processes closer to market." The launch is also a major step in the transformation of the former Lisheen Mine into a centre for future-facing green innovation, biobased enterprise, and regional development. It demonstrates how Just Transition investment can help create new opportunities for communities, primary

producers, researchers and businesses while supporting Ireland's climate, agri-food, circular bioeconomy and enterprise objectives.

The bioeconomy demonstration initiative will demonstrate and scale six innovative biobased technologies at the NBPP, showing how renewable biological resources, residues and side streams can be converted into higher-value products. These will include food and feed ingredients, proteins and bioactive compounds, natural colours, aromas and flavours, peptides, amino acid ingredients, green chemical inputs for bioplastics and textiles, biomaterials, biomethane and other renewable energy applications.

20 research highlights

Teagasc has highlighted the impact of its research achieved *in 2025* in a new publication called *Teagasc Research Impact Highlights* in 2025. It showcases 20 examples of how Teagasc research is delivering real impact across Ireland's agri-food sector. It highlights the work of its researchers and staff in advancing innovation across animal health, climate and sustainability, crops and horticulture, food, policy, economics and knowledge transfer.

ASH DIEBACK RESEARCH

Teagasc researchers are furthering ash dieback research, which is being undertaken through the AshforFuture project, an all-island initiative focused on developing ash trees with improved resilience. Through a citizen science initiative, AshforFuture has received over 450 reports of healthy ash trees from across Ireland, leading to the identification and propagation of nearly 400 potentially tolerant genotypes for genetic evaluation and field testing. The project has already identified a small number of highly tolerant trees, which will form the formation of future breeding populations and seed orchards aimed at supporting the long-term restoration of ash in Ireland.

New regulation

In April, the European Council adopted new rules on genomic techniques (NGTs), establishing a framework to support a more competitive and sustainable EU agri-food sector. The regulation is designed to enhance food security, reduce external dependencies and ensure a level playing field for European operators, while maintaining high standards for human and animal health and environmental protection. It also supports EU sustainability objectives by enabling the development of more resilient and resource-efficient crops.



LIVE
WEBINAR



Collaborative
Farming



Inheritance
& Succession



GENERATIONAL RENEWAL WEEK

7 - 11 September 2026



Register
Now



Generational Renewal Week will highlight career paths for young farmers and support for older farmers in stepping back. It covers tax, succession, and collaborative models like partnerships, share farming, and leasing to help families to start the transition.

What's Happening?

LIVE
WEBINAR

Generational Renewal Live Webinar

Monday, 7th September | 8pm

Chaired by EmmaLouise Coffey, this live webinar on Generation Renewal features Emma Dillon, two farm families, and Farm Management Team members sharing practical insights on navigating the succession process.

LIVE
WEBINAR

Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal) Webinar

Tuesday, 8th September | 8pm

Everything you need to know about the Fair Deal Scheme, with Ultan Hynes, Head of Service for the Nursing Home Support Scheme at the HSE.



Exploring Collaborative Farming Options - Dairy Farm Walk with Kieran Kennedy, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary E45K599

Wednesday, 9th September | 12pm

See how young farmer, Kieran Kennedy has built a successful dairy farming career without owning land himself. Dairy farm walk showcasing successful collaborative arrangements without a family successor.

LIVE
WEBINAR

Options, Taxes & Reliefs Webinar

Thursday, 10th September | 8pm

Explore transfer options, tax reliefs and collaborative approaches through practical family farm case studies.



Beef, Sheep & Tillage Farm Walk with Tyner Family, Shillelagh, Co. Wicklow Y14 KT73

Friday, 11th September | 6pm

Visit the Tyner family farm to hear how they are bringing the next generation into the business through a Registered Farm Partnership and Succession Farm Partnership.



NEW THIS YEAR

This year, over 50 Teagasc advisors will visit primary schools nationwide to deliver interactive sessions showcasing the positive impact of Irish agriculture and inspiring the next generation to explore opportunities in farming.



Lime corrects soil acidity, but it does much more than that.

SOIL FERTILITY – AN INVESTMENT OR EXPENSE?

SPREADING LIME, AS WE KNOW, IS NOT A NEW PHENOMENON BUT THIS LOW-TECH APPLICATION YIELDS HIGH-VALUE RESULTS. HERE, YARA AGRONOMIST, PHILIP COSGROVE, OUTLINES THE TANGIBLE BENEFITS OF CORRECTING YOUR SOIL pH, AND WAYS TO ACHIEVE THIS

Soil fertility is a key constraint on many farms across the country reaching their crop-production targets. Farmers who have been proactive and invested in building soil fertility recognise the value it's bringing to their farms. From a national perspective soil fertility improvement is a key action in both our Climate Action Plan and our Nitrates action Programme to improve water quality.

SOIL pH AND LIMING

Maintaining our grassland mineral soils at or above a pH of 6.3 is a key component of soil fertility and could be considered the foundation on which to build good phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) soil fertility. The tangible benefits of correcting your soil pH are increased grass production from improved nutrient use efficiency. Soil pH affects, most notably, the chemical and biological properties of soil, with figure 1 demonstrating the relative availability of a host of necessary plant nutrients at different soil pH levels. Narrowing of the line depicts a decrease in availability while a broadening

indicates an increase in availability. Soil pH has the greatest influence on soil P availability. Optimising soil pH maximises the release of nutrients from plant residues and manures through a process called mineralisation. For N this can amount to

80kg/ha annually. Earthworm activity, a good indicator of soil health, is also improved by correcting low soil pH.

Liming will give you a return on investment worth €5 to €10 in extra grass for every €1 spent on lime (Teagasc, 2026). Lime, we know, corrects soil acidity, but it does much more than that. The calcium in lime can also improve soil structure and provides a source of calcium for crops as the lime reacts with acids in the soil over time. Don't be tempted

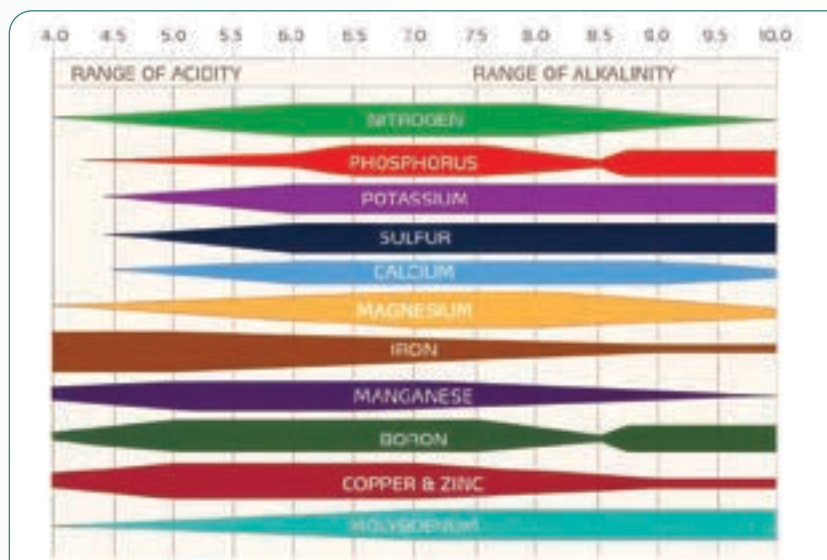


Figure 1. The relationship between nutrient availability and soil pH.



LIMING WILL GIVE YOU A RETURN ON INVESTMENT WORTH €5 TO €10 IN EXTRA GRASS FOR EVERY €1 SPENT ON LIME

to apply liming products to correct soil pH unless a recent soil test states there is a lime requirement. There is no bad time to apply lime, the only exception being on silage fields, where it is advised to leave three months between lime applications and harvesting silage, as lime residues on grass could inhibit the silage fermentation process. Slurry should be applied seven to 10 days before liming and not the other way around to prevent very high ammonia-N losses. Beware, white and red clover are not as forgiving as perennial ryegrass to low soil pH. Correcting low soil pH on reseeded can be the difference between success or failure, so soil sampling beforehand and applying lime if necessary is worthwhile. If lime can be applied months in advance of a reseed, then this is preferable to allow lime to work. Nationally, Teagasc estimate that lime sales need to be close to two million tonnes annually to meet our annual liming requirements. Lime use increased significantly in 2021 and 2022, but more recently the trend has reversed. The latest national lime use figures published by the Central Statistics Office, show that lime sales in 2025 were 0.9 million tonnes, down from nearly 1.4 million tonnes in 2022. The latest Teagasc soil fertility report (2025) points to an improvement in soil pH on Irish farms, which is positive considering the reduction in lime use.

SOIL P AND K FERTILITY

Both P and K are necessary at certain levels in the soil to sustain plant growth in line with optimum N fertilisation. P plays a major role in the energy supply for many plant metabolic processes and enzyme activity. This energy is needed for the active uptake and internal redistribution of other nutrients, so even though P demand is small compared to N, its availability is essential. A rule of thumb for P

offtakes from liveweight gain and milk, is 1kg for every 100kg increase of liveweight gain or 1,000 litres of milk. K regulates the movement and storage of solutes throughout the plant, affecting nutrient uptake, photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation in clover, and stomata regulation, which is key at times of drought stress. During rapid grass growth, the large uptake of N as nitrate ions is normally balanced by a similar uptake of K ions, which maintains the electrical neutrality of the plant. Grass silage K offtakes are considerable, with first cuts removing 125kg/ha (100 units/acre) and second cuts removing 100kg/ha (80 units/acre). Unfortunately, there are no free lunches when it comes to replenishing soil P and K. So, what is removed through grazing or silage crops must be replaced otherwise soil P and K levels will decrease on paddocks where offtakes exceed inputs. The most effective means to maintain sufficient levels of P and K in soils to optimise grass (and other crops) is to soil test regularly. It's now a requirement on most farms who wish to use phosphorus-containing fertilisers to soil test every four years to comply with the latest nitrates regulations. Soil test reports assign an index number of 1-4 for both P and K (see table 1), with 1 indicating a very low soil status for that nutrient and 4 meaning there is plenty. Index 3 is the optimum index, which means there is adequate soil P or K to maintain crop performance, but it is necessary to apply maintenance levels annually of P and K to replace offtakes to maintain this index.

Response to fertilisers	Index description	Soil index
Definite	Very low	1
Likely	Low	2
Unlikely	Medium/Adequate	3
None	Sufficient/High	4

Table 1. Soil index system.
Source: Teagasc, Green Book.

Knowing your soil P and K fertility is the starting point to putting a nutrient management plan (NMP) in place for every paddock on your farm. Some may need investment to improve P and K fertility, and this will take a number of years applying build-up rates to hit index 3, while those in index 4 paddocks don't require any P or K

The most effective means to maintain sufficient levels of P and K in soils to optimise grass (and other crops) is to soil test regularly.



to maintain optimum herbage production. The NMP allows you to optimise the organic nutrients you have at your disposal so that you only purchase the P and K fertilisers that are needed. Commonly, paddocks that are dry and/or close to the farmyard have often very high soil fertility, because of the over application of slurry over the years as it was convenient. Having an NMP in place can help farmers better distribute slurry and other manures to those areas of the farm that will benefit most. When deciding on where to target manures like slurry, remember that two thirds of the nutrient replacement value of slurry lies in its P and K content, so it makes sense to direct it to parts of the farm that need P and K rather than using it for its N replacement value. The priority area for slurry should be silage ground, grazing paddocks that may have been taken out for silage and areas of the farm with low soil P and K indexes. Don't underestimate the importance of soil fertility to your farm business. Put a NMP and liming plan in place and see soil fertility as an investment. Finally, record everything you do. This allows you to assess nutrient inputs, soil fertility and paddock performance to inform future nutrient inputs.

'PUT SAFETY AS A FIRST PRIORITY BEFORE TAKING ON ANY JOB'

NIALL COLLINS, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND MARINE (DAFM), HAS A RANGE OF RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FARM SAFETY. TALKING TO *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY*, THE MINISTER HIGHLIGHTED THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY - BOTH HIGH AND LOW - IN REDUCING FARM ACCIDENTS AND FATALITIES

The DAFM spends €3m annually on improving awareness around farm safety and farmer wellbeing. He explains: "A significant part of the budget spend is directed towards farmer health and wellbeing. Farming can be an isolated occupation, so preserving mental health and general wellbeing is very important. We use social media to communicate with farmers around mental and physical health as well as encouraging higher farm safety standards and awareness on farms. "Outside of our financial supports, there is a big role for the farming community to support each other. Telecommunications technology, allied to social media can be very positively used to provide social support and interaction for farmers by farmers themselves. An ability to phone someone for support or in an emergency from anywhere on a farm has been a hugely important and often under-appreciated technological development. The basic postal communications also still have a role, and we have had leaflet drops to farmers to raise their vigilance around safety."

SAFE ANIMAL HANDLING

Describing some of the more practical support measures that the DAFM finances to specifically enhance safety around livestock handling and management, he said: "We support the purchase of cattle handling and cow calving pens and restraining facilities. Support for this infrastructure is delivered



Minister of State, Niall Collins.

under TAMS 3. This is basic infrastructure technology that has been specifically developed with human safety as a priority, as well as animal welfare promotion." Calving cameras are also financially supported by the DAFM, he explained. "These fall under the Farm Safety Capital Investment Scheme (FSCIS), which also falls under the remit of TAMS 3, and allows for 60 per cent financial support for purchase and installation. Alongside TAMS, farmers can avail of accelerated capital allowances of 50 per cent per annum over two years for eligible safety equipment.

PROGRESS ON PTO INCIDENTS

The recently appointed Minister of State highlighted some positive farm safety outcomes: "Machinery maintenance and improving safety around its use is another priority. The DAFM has an ongoing 60 per cent grant scheme for the purchase of up to

four PTO shaft covers on any farm. Fatalities and injuries around power shafts have reduced in recent years and that's a clear indicator that our efforts, both in raising awareness around the dangers as well as financially supporting farmers in ensuring that their PTO covers are on good working order, have produced positive outcomes.

GETTING THE SAFETY MESSAGE EARLY

The Limerick-based TD instanced a visit to Pallaskenry Agricultural College to highlight the benefits of getting the farm safety message out as early as possible in a farmer's career as possible: "The students were aware of some of the support measures around farm safety, but weren't fully aware of all of them. I would encourage everyone involved in farming and in advisory and servicing roles to acquaint themselves with every aspect of safety, supports, best practices and the need to be continuously aware of the dangers around farm work. We have farm safety ambassadors spreading the message including Agri Kids, Rural Link, the farm organisations, and Teagasc as well as ourselves in the department. We have all kinds of technologies high and low level that we should adopt as far as possible. Ultimately, the message is to be continuously aware and alert of the risk factors around every activity on a farm. Put safety as a first priority before taking on any job, every single day of the week"

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MESSAGES

- How to deal with the after-effects of drought conditions.
- August is an important month for setting in motion the autumn grazing plan!
- Use all the autumn grazing strategies to build grass!
- Reseeding pays for itself in two years!
- Weigh replacements and take remedial action!



By Matt Ryan

DEALING WITH AFTER EFFECTS OF DROUGHT

- ▶ Some parts of the country are still suffering from drought and its after-effects.
- ▶ Every week, *The Farmers Journal* provides information on the soil moisture deficit for all areas around the country.
 - ▶ At levels between 50-75mm, grass growth is restricted, but new research shows that it sets in at lower levels on light soils.
 - ▶ Above 75mm drought conditions exist where no growth takes place.
 - ▶ This information should be used to size up the growth potential of your farm and the actions you need to take.
 - ▶ PastureBase is proving very accurate in predicting the following week's potential grass growth.
- ▶ In these circumstances, measure grass twice every week.
- ▶ Remember, there is a void for grass supply for seven to 12 days when rain comes, and the following actions must be considered:
 - ▶ Feed more meals, the amount can be calculated based on the amount of grass you have but it could rise to 3-6kg, or even higher. Research from Teagasc Moorepark (from last drought) showed dairy ration and soya hulls to be best.
 - ▶ Where high meals are fed (4kg), feed a 16% protein ration.
 - ▶ Think of zero grazing silage ground from an outside farm (cheap).
 - ▶ Feed baled silage where silage is plentiful. If it is very good, milk yield and protein will decrease very little (Moorepark).
 - ▶ Reduce stocking rate now. If you have too many cattle, sell them now, as it will reduce the demand for grazed grass and winter feed later on. Cows not in calf, high cell count cows fall into to this category also.
 - ▶ It might seem like a rather radical suggestion but once-a-day milking (OAD) may be a good option: it reduces the demand for grass/feed, cow body condition will be maintained, milk yield will decrease 26% (milk solids/cow decrease by 20%), and workload will be reduced.
- ▶ Should you apply nitrogen (N)?
 - ▶ Yes. When rain comes, immediately apply 20-35 units per acre as we are now in the period where we must try to build up autumn grass.
- ▶ When the drought is coming to an end with the arrival of rain – this is very important advice – you MUST be very pro-active:
 - ▶ Apply N immediately, remembering that it will take three to four weeks to have adequate pre-grazing covers.
 - ▶ So, you must continue feeding meal/silage so that the rotation

is 30-35 days.

- ▶ If you don't do this, you will have to house stock in Sept/Oct, which could put pressure on winterfeed stocks.
- ▶ Some of the suggestions made in this section will be appropriate for anyone who is tight on grass.
 - ▶ Refrain from topping/cutting silage bales, as grass shortage means paddocks will be well grazed out. A few seed heads may look bad but in an overall context they have no adverse effect.
- ▶ Water availability is essential for animal welfare and performance:
 - ▶ Water is the animals' most important nutrient.
 - ▶ When temperatures increase from 18°C to 30°C, water consumption increases by 29%.
 - ▶ Cows provided with shade during summer consume 18% less water per day.
 - ▶ Cows will drink at least 5-6 times their milk yield per day – more if eating meal or very dry roughage.
 - ▶ Limiting water availability severely and rapidly depresses performance.
 - ▶ Drinking rates vary from 1-3.5 gallons/minute.
 - ▶ As cows consume water up to 14 times per day, it is important to have water available within 300m and it should be available at or near milking parlour.

AUGUST GRAZING ADVICE

- ▶ It is important to list out the targets for the remainder of the autumn grazing period, see Table 1.
- ▶ Advice is very much tied up with how farmers have come out of the drought.
- ▶ For starters, rotation length is very important – 25 and 30 days for August 15 and September 1, respectively.

Table 1: August-September target grass covers (kg DM/ha) per cow and average farm cover (AFC) and rotation length.

Date	2.5 cows/ha		3.0 cows/ha		Rotation length (days)	Rotation length (days)
	Cover/Cow	AFC	Cover/cow	AFC		
August 1	200	500+	200	600	20	
August 15	250	550	250	750	25	
September 1	300	750	330	1,000	30	30
September 15	400	1,000	350	1,050	35	35
September 30	400	1,000	375	1,100	40	40

- ▶ Over the last number of years average farm cover (AFC) has been below target on the August 15 on 50-60% of farms, so it is important to focus the advice.
- ▶ Farms with adequate grass supply:
 - ▶ These farmers, recently, have had above average growth rates which is likely to continue.
 - ▶ They have the opportunity to graze leafy, high-quality grass at covers of 1,500-1,600kg DM.
 - ▶ There may be an opportunity/need to remove some paddocks for bales if pre-grazing yield becomes greater than 1,600kg DM/ha.
 - ▶ Ensure tight grazing to 4cm, to maintain high quality regrowths so as to avoid a stemmy 'butt' in the last two rotations.
- ▶ Farms with low grass supply:
 - ▶ Many farms are in this situation for various reasons; it is now most important to do something about it from early August.
 - ▶ Reduce demand by:
 - ▶ Supplementing with meal, silage or zero graze grass from outside blocks.
 - ▶ Remove stock from milking platform:
 - ▶ Replacements.
 - ▶ Calves.
 - ▶ Sell off cows due to be culled – lame, not in calf, cows with high SCCs, poor yielders, etc.
 - ▶ Add silage ground back into the milking platform.
 - ▶ Feeding silage will reduce grass intake more than meal.
 - ▶ Hold rotation length at 25 days.
 - ▶ If herd demand is 50kg (some supplement fed) and growth rate is 30kg DM/day recorded/projected, there is/will be a deficit of 20kg DM/ha/day. The result is that the AFC will decrease by 140kg DM/ha/week.
 - ▶ Therefore, demand must be reduced to 30kg DM.
 - ▶ Feeding an additional 7-8kg DM of supplement (mostly silage, if available) will hold AFC at a stocking rate of 3LU/ha (7x3 =21kgDM/ha).

STRATEGIES TO BUILD AUTUMN GRASS

- ▶ This is one of your key management tasks in August.
- ▶ You will not build autumn grass unless you plan it because grass growth will be decreasing while demand will remain the same. The options are:
 - ▶ Reduce demand on the milking platform as outlined above.
 - ▶ Strategically use N as per Table 2.
 - ▶ Grass build-up starts in August:
 - ▶ In the south on August 10.
 - ▶ In the north on August 15.
 - ▶ Increase grazing rotation length from 20 day in late July to 30 days in late August.
 - ▶ Plan a third-cut-graze from late July to grazing on September 10.
 - ▶ Ensure P and K levels are optimum.
- ▶ Before using N, take stock of how much N you have used so far this year relative to what you are allowed to use and score the clover content of each paddock.
 - ▶ Overuse of N will result in penalties.

- ▶ Because of the drought or not using much N on outside blocks you may be able to use slightly more than that recommended in Table 2; whatever extra N you have would best be used in August as growth rates are better than September.
- ▶ To encourage clover growth, follow the N recommendations.

Table 2: Recommended rates of N for different stocking rates

April average clover content	August kg N/ha	September kg N/ha	Total for year	
% clover	(units/acre)	(units/acre)	kg/ha	units/acre
None (all grass)	21 (17)	23 (19)	212	172
5%	20 (16)	20 (16)	175	142
10%	15 (12)	20 (16)	150	122
15%	10 (8)	20 (16)	130	130
20%	SW*	15 (12)	105	85

***SW= Soiled water**

- ▶ Study Table 2 and decide what level of N you can use for your own farm.
- ▶ Farmers stocked at less than 2.24 cows/ha should only put on N once, in late August, over the next two months.
 - ▶ All other farmers should apply 17 units/acre in August (protected urea).
 - ▶ Response is much better in August.
- ▶ This N should all be blanket spread as there is no reduction in grass yield for August-September blanket-spread applications.
- ▶ The August N should be applied early in the month as you will grow 10-15% more grass because growth rates are higher early in the month than in late August.
- ▶ The targets from now August 1 to year end are (according to Teagasc Moorepark) include:
 - ▶ Three grazing rotations per paddock, if you wish to achieve the advised 10 annual grazings in the year.
 - ▶ Not more than 150kg meal/cow.
 - ▶ Achieve at least 150kg milk solids (MS) per cow.
- ▶ It is now an opportune time to review how your grassland management KPIs compare with Moorepark targets to August 5 so as to grow 16 tonnes DM/ha, spreading 212kg N and feeding 500kg meal to produce 480kg MS/cow.
 - ▶ To achieve this standard, you must have the following by early August:
 - ▶ 10,650kg DM grown = 67% of annual amount.
 - ▶ Seven grazings complete = 70% of annual amount.
 - ▶ 170kg N used = 80% of annual amount.
 - ▶ 350kg meal fed = 70% of your annual amount.
 - ▶ 330kg MS/cow sold = 69% of your annual amount.
 - ▶ Use the percentages to extrapolate your yearly achievement from your present figures.
- ▶ The following possible ways to build up grass should be applied:
 - ▶ Reduce stocking rates by taking away calves or cattle, selling cull cows, drying off very poor yielders. Stock cows at 2.9 cows/ha for grazing.

- ▶ Reduce second cut silage particularly if you have enough pit silage.
- ▶ Introduce meals (expensive option) but will be necessary at high stocking rates. A grass budget will tell you when to start but early rather than too late. An alternative to meal is to feed good quality round bales and this is the preferred option for high stocked farms.
- ▶ Apply more nitrogen (stay within your limits) in August as you get a better response than in September.
- ▶ Graze out pastures well (3.5-4.0cm) as there is a temptation to leave too much after each grazing in August.
- ▶ Set up a third cut-graze bank of grass.
- ▶ Protect regrowth by not having cattle or cull cows grazing after cows or spending more than 24 hours in each paddock.
- ▶ It's a very good idea to set up this third-cut-graze plan because:
 - ▶ It brings in a bank of high-quality grass for grazing in September.
 - ▶ Allows you use 2,000-3,000 gallons (16-24 units N) of slurry per acre on it at closing, saving bag N.
 - ▶ Allows you to put on 55-65 units of N discount the slurry N) to cover the six-week closed-up period and the extra N will grow extra grass which will feed 10-12 cows for one extra day for every acre closed up.
 - ▶ The way you do it is set aside 10-15% of the milking platform for this purpose by stocking the cows at 2.9-3.0 cows/ha for grazing.
 - ▶ These fields should have been cut for silage or topped or very well grazed out (skinned) leaving no butt, apply the slurry plus 25-35 units of N per acre and leave for six weeks and it should result in seven to 10 days' grazing in late September.
 - ▶ An interval of seven days should be allowed between spreading slurry (spread first) and applying nitrogen, so as to avoid losses of N by denitrification.
 - ▶ If grazing grass is tight during this period, some of this area can be grazed.
 - ▶ However, at low stocking rates (2.2 cows/ha or less) because the demand will be low, 40-45kg DM/day, it will not be necessary to do any of the above to build up grass. It will happen naturally.
- ▶ Consult your PastureBase data to identify these fields.
- ▶ Reseeding with perennial ryegrass and white clover will pay for itself in 2 years by growing much more quality grass.
 - ▶ You will have more spring and autumn grass (500-800 kg DM/ha).
 - ▶ You will grow 2-3 tonnes/ha more grass compared with old grasses, worth €500 per year more profit per hectare.
 - ▶ Silage quality will be 5-8 DMD units better.
 - ▶ Less stem/seed-heads and topping during summer.
 - ▶ New grasses respond 25% better to fertiliser than old grasses.
 - ▶ At high stocking rates, trials have shown an increase of 7.7% in milk production with perennial swards over old permanent swards.
 - ▶ The return on money invested in reseeded is an amazing 96%.
- ▶ Every day extra you keep grass in the cow's diet is worth over €2/day in profit.
 - ▶ Perennial ryegrass is the best way to grow more grass in the shoulders of the year.
- ▶ Reseeding must be done in August:
 - ▶ September is too late as it results in weed grasses dominating with poor perennial establishment (50-80% of the sown grasses).
 - ▶ Clover will only prosper if sown in August.
 - ▶ Anecdotal evidence of September/October reseeds doing well is false because even weed grasses look green.
- ▶ It is important to do the job correctly and the following must be adhered to:
 - ▶ Kill off old grasses and weeds.
 - ▶ Leave for six to seven days before eating off or baling and then ploughing or tilling with one or two pass system, leaving a fine, firm seed bed by rolling prior to sowing (neglected in most situations).
 - ▶ Apply lime, up to three tonnes/acre (required pH is 6.3-6.7) if necessary and three to four bags 10:10:20 (more if Index 1) plus 1 bag CAN before sowing.
 - ▶ Sow the seed, only 1cm deep if clover included, lightly chain harrow in, or use a ring roller, but it must be rolled after sowing.
 - ▶ Watch out for pest attacks in autumn sown crops, particularly, slugs, leatherjackets, fruit fly, and rabbits.
 - ▶ Spray for weeds, particularly docks with clover-safe spray 4-5 weeks after sowing when the docks are the size of a 20cent piece.
 - ▶ Graze early, at 600-700kg DM/ha, and often to promote tillering.

RESEED: EARLY AUGUST

- ▶ With plenty of winter feed made this year, and N restrictions in operation, it is an opportune time to reseed underperforming fields.



It would be a good idea to roll again before this grazing to prevent pulling by stock.

- ▶ Being a bit old fashioned, but from experience, and where there are no stones, I favour shallow ploughing (less than 15cm).
- ▶ The next big decision is which varieties of grass to sow,
 - ▶ It is best to take independent, professional advice on this as it is an investment that will influence your profit for the next 10-20 years.
 - ▶ In principle, put in three varieties and clover for grazing mixes, and even in silage ground being cut twice.
 - ▶ Sow 14-15kg/acre to ensure thick establishment,
- ▶ Consider red clover?
 - ▶ Very high production for the three to six years, delivering an annual production of 13-16 tonnes DM/ha.
 - ▶ It fixes more than 300kg N/ha (240 units/acre).
 - ▶ But it has a high requirement for P and K.
 - ▶ Very suitable for a four-cut silage system with zero grazing in the autumn, outside silage blocks.
 - ▶ White clovers are more persistent in sward, with a recommendation to oversow every five to six years and reseed every 10+ years.
- ▶ Consider multi-species and learn from the experience on your farm. Many farmers are quite happy with their contribution to farm.

WEIGH REPLACEMENTS

- ▶ Replacement heifers are key to profitable dairy farming, and quality heifers will result from achieving weight targets evenly throughout their lifetime.
- ▶ Why?
 - ▶ They will reach optimum service weights.
 - ▶ They will have earlier onset of puberty.
 - ▶ Greater milk production in first lactation.
 - ▶ Every 50kg extra first calving liveweight resulted in 300kg extra milk in the first lactation.
 - ▶ They will survive longer in the herd if they don't calve down too light or too heavy relative to their mature weight.
- ▶ Table 3 lists out the weights of heifers and weight gains expected.

Table 3: Liveweight targets (*) for replacements relative to mature cow weight to achieve optimum first-calving weight.

Mature cow weight	450	500	550	600	650
R1 (6 mth)	135	150	165	180	195
R1s ADG** (kg/day)	0.57	0.63	0.68	0.73	0.78
R2 target weight (kg) 18 mth	315	350	385	420	455

*Because most R2s (replacement heifers = 1-2 years) are calving down at one year and 11 months, these targets must be 5% better.

**Average weight gain from weaning to six months (R1s = replacement 0-1-year-old).

Two messages arise:

1. Light animals must be managed to achieve targets on November 1.
 2. Heavy, 20kg+ over target, must be managed so that so that they do not get too fat/heavy because they will struggle to go in calf and will milk less over their lifetime.
- ▶ The appropriate actions are obvious. Act now.
 - ▶ This message essential for farmers who rear their own as well as contract rearers.

GENTLE REMINDERS:

- ▶ Most of the work is done now, so take a two-week holiday and trust whoever you have left in charge to manage in your absence:
 - ▶ Give clear instructions.
 - ▶ Take the two weeks so that you totally relax and give yourself some head space.
- ▶ Mastitis/SCC financial losses:
 - ▶ Over €60 per cow per year.
 - ▶ Anyone over 150,000 SCC should consult their milk quality adviser.
 - ▶ Do a milk recording now to monitor individual cow SCC levels which can be used for drying off management.
- ▶ Intensive dairying removes approximately 0.5 tonnes/acre of lime annually; now is a very good time to lime paddocks as the rotation length will be 30+ days.
- ▶ Animal health reminders:
 - ▶ Keep a close eye on calves for symptoms of hoose and stomach worms.
 - ▶ Lamé cows should not be walked long distances to paddocks.
 - ▶ Replacement R2s should get the first of their leptospirosis vaccines in late August. Make sure to have ordered this vaccine in time for the cows' and heifers' September due date.
- ▶ If worried about your financial position, you should do a simple financial plan:
 - ▶ Estimate the amount of sale you will take in between now and Christmas.
 - ▶ Do the same for likely spending and subtract from sales.
 - ▶ Generally, farmers find this reassuring and removes some financial stress.
- ▶ Do an autumn rotation plan on PastureBase to make the management of grazing easy from mid-September.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways."

JF Kennedy.



JOHN DEERE UPDATES FOR 2027

JOHN DEERE HAS ANNOUNCED A NUMBER OF TRACTOR MODEL UPDATES FOR 2027, AND THEY GET THE 'FROM THE CAB' FOCUS THIS MONTH



6R SERIES

The model year 2027 (MY27) update to its 6R large and extra-large frame tractor range, introduces technical refinements aimed at road transport performance, operator environment, precision farming capability, and long-term operating efficiency. The updated range comprises four large-frame models (6R 180, 6R 200, 6R 220, 6R 240) and two extra-large frame models (6R 230 and 6R 260), with outputs up to 305hp with IPM. Contributing to improved road transport performance is the Sport Package Pro, combining chassis, steering and braking updates to improve stability, ride quality and

steering precision on and offroad. Central to this package is the updated TLS Pro front axle suspension that combines adaptive, adjustable damping and suspension with automotive-grade components and reinforced suspension cylinders.

For MY27, a redesigned steering column with foot-operated memory adjustment improves ergonomics and ensures a consistent driving position. A new 33cm contoured leather steering wheel and a flatter steering column angle enhance steering precision and comfort, according to the company. A new displacement-based braking system and

automotive-style pedals deliver progressive deceleration and easy changing of pedals without lifting the heel.

The MY27 6R tractors introduce the CommandView 4 versatility cabin, designed to improve ergonomics, visibility, and acoustic comfort. Increased cab volume and a revised layout provide more legroom and a more natural seating position. A redesigned cab frame with forward-sloping C-pillars and a curved rear window improves rear implement visibility by up to 20 per cent compared to the previous model, according to John Deere. Interior noise levels are specified at 66 dB(A). All MY27 6R tractors are delivered with StarFire 7500 integrated receiver, G5 CommandCenter and JDLink modem, enabling immediate access to guidance, automation and even supervised autonomy, subject to licence selection.

Available functions include AutoPath Rows and Boundaries, AutoTrac Turn Automation, Passive Implement Guidance, and satellite map visualisation. In-field Data Sharing synchronises multiple machines working on the same job, while DataSync transfers documentation wirelessly to the John Deere operations centre. Daily maintenance on the 6R is simple and cost-effective, according to John Deere, with ground-level service checks, extended service intervals of up to 750 hours for the engine and 1,500 hours for transmission and hydraulics, just 14 lubrication points, and a factory-fitted reversible fan.



8R SERIES

John Deere's 8R, 8RT and 8RX tractors have also been updated to deliver higher productivity, greater efficiency, and improved ease of operation, according to the company. The updated models are available as 8R tractors from 280hp to 410hp and as 8RT and 8RX models from 310hp to 410hp. The updated tractors combine strong drawbar performance with enhanced cab comfort and advanced precision farming capabilities, making them a powerful and versatile solution for demanding large-scale farming operations with tasks ranging from heavy pull to semi-load applications and occasional transport.

With up to 20 per cent more drawbar power, the 8R 410 delivers strong pulling performance for heavy draft applications, allowing operators to work with wider implements and cover more hectares efficiently. Across the range from 280hp to 410 hp the 9L PowerTech JD9 engine together with a wide selection of transmission options converts engine output into efficient, usable traction. This gives growing farms the pulling capacity needed to take on more acreage with an 8R tractor, without the immediate need to add another machine.

Operator comfort and intuitive control are central to the new design. The updated CommandView 4 cab introduces a range of improvements aimed at reducing fatigue and simplifying daily operation. New features include door cinch soft-close technology, push-button start with pin code protection, 320° wiper and wireless phone charging.



6M SERIES

The MY27 update of the 6M tractor series includes a revised cab layout, a more consistent operating concept across tractor series, expanded precision agriculture functions, and a new e19 full powershift transmission.

This new transmission features 19 fully powershifted gears designed to deliver efficient performance in both field and transport applications, according to John Deere. It integrates a dual-clutch design and advanced proportional control valves to ensure smooth, uninterrupted gear changes and a more dynamic driving experience.

The e19 transmission features an integrated engine and transmission management system that continuously adapts gear selection and shifting behaviour based on multiple tractor inputs, supporting efficient operation and fast gear changes with no torque interruption under varying load conditions. The system allows clutch-free operation similar to a stepless transmission. An inclination sensor adds terrain awareness to gear selection making gear changes faster and more predictive. Skip Shift jumps multiple gears for rapid speed changes, while Scroll Shift keeps clutches partially engaged for even faster transitions, reduced heat, and less wear. Compared to the CommandQuad Plus transmission, the e19 can deliver up to 5 per cent productivity improvements, with up to 5 per cent reduced fuel consumption.

The cab has been revised with a clearer layout and a more flexible control configuration. Options range from a right-hand console with mechanical or electric SCVs to a compact CommandARM with G5 CommandCenter and CommandX Plus joystick. The operating logic now follows the 6R, 7R and 8R series, supporting easier transfer between machines.

The updated 6M models support iTEC headland management, automating repeatable sequences such as PTO engagement, hitch movement, hydraulic functions, travel speed, and gear selection based on distance.

The 6M Series can be equipped with StarFire 7500 receivers, G5 displays and JDLink connectivity. SF-RTK enables positioning accuracy down to 2.5cm. Standard G5 functionality includes Section Control and Variable Rate Control, with optional upgrades such as AutoTrac Turn Automation, AutoPath and Passive Implement Guidance. Machine and field data are synchronised wirelessly with the John Deere operations centre via DataSync. Further details on the full range of updates across all models are available on the John Deere website.



NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

WEATHERING THE HEATWAVE

Well readers, the recent spell of dry and sunny weather brought good and bad times. Lovely to see the sun shining and the dry days giving farmers and contractors the chance to get the harvest in. But the prolonged nature of it, the intensity of the heat, the drought conditions, and the many wildfires that have been burning in some of the most beautiful parts of the country have given us all some food for thought. As I look around the yard and the garden, hedges are looking limp, grass is burnt, and there is dust everywhere. But as I pen this month's column, temperatures have dropped and there is a feel of rain in the air. We now need a change in weather fortunes. We need rainfall; not too much, but enough to bring on grass growth. Opening pits of silage this early in the year will bring untold costs as we head into possibly a long damp winter. Farmers have enough to contend with as it is.

I actually can't remember a time when winter crops were harvested so early. Usually, from around July 15 to the end of that month is the key time for all that work to take place – depending, of course, on where you are located in the country. The first picture I got of this year's harvest was from Brian Ireland who was cutting a crop of Orcade winter barley on the farm of Aidan Ging in Danesford, Co. Kilkenny (incidentally, that is this month's cover image). The crop was cut on July 1-2, yielding 4t/acre with 18 per cent moisture content. This tonnage per acre was a bit higher than average with most crops coming in at 3-3.5t/acre. The way things sit at the moment, farmers will have plenty of time on their hands come September, so there will be ample opportunity to visit the National Ploughing Championships in September. One farmer told me he is planning a two-day visit to this year's event. "We won't be under pressure, so we might as well take an extra day," he said, laughing. Hopefully many more farmers will take a leaf out of his book and enjoy some deserved downtime in Tullamore.

Now, I don't follow soccer so the whole World Cup thing went over my head, but I read that Erling Haaland, the Manchester City and Norwegian star – or God, as some people call him – has already revealed plans for life after football. The 25-year-old who has previously hailed milk as a 'superfood' said he wants to own his own farm eventually when he hangs up his boots. He spent his teenage years around farming and he loves the lifestyle, apparently. I think I like this guy. He is grounded.

And finally, some machinery industry news. I learned, with interest, that after 80 years, the Czech Republic's Zetor is to move production to Asia. High and rising costs are attributed to the decision to relocate with production set to be carried out in both India – where it has an existing partnership and where most of its tractors have been manufactured in recent times – and in China, once a new partnership is established.

I wonder if others will follow suit? Maybe. Maybe not. But one thing is for sure, the cost of machinery production goes onto the price of the finished product, and that means the farmer, ultimately, pays. Or in other words, the cow or the crop pays, and with the current prices being paid to farmers for commodities in Europe, that is one thorny subject.

Signing off for now but until next month, farm wisely and farm safely.



Willie Deegan pictured in his Claas Trion harvesting his barley crop.

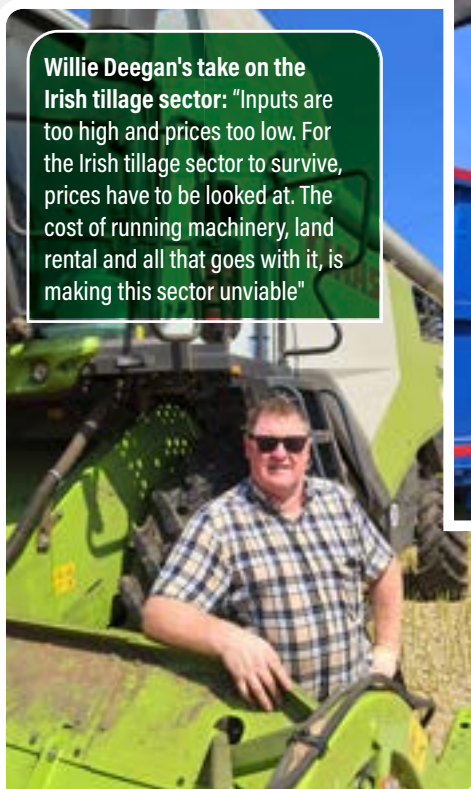


HARVEST TIME IN CO. LAOIS

ON A GLORIOUS DAY IN CO. LAOIS, NOEL DUNNE VISITED TWO FARMERS IN THE THICK OF HARVEST 2026. FIRST UP IS WILLIE DEEGAN WHO FARMS 500 ACRES – 100 HE OWNS, 400 HE LONG-TERM LEASES – SPLIT BETWEEN BARLEY AND OILSEED RAPE. HE RUNS HIS OWN CLAAS TRION COMBINE, WHICH HE CHANGES EVERY FIVE YEARS.

NEXT UP IS JAMES MILLER WHO FARMS 70 PRIME ACRES OF TILLAGE LAND. JAMES GROWS WINTER BARLEY AND OILSEED RAPE AND, THIS YEAR, HE HARVESTED GLUTEN-FREE OATS FOR THE FIRST TIME. HIS BALED STRAW WENT TO THE WEST OF IRELAND, AND ALL CONTRACTING WORK WAS CARRIED OUT BY HARRIS CONTRACTORS

Willie Deegan's take on the Irish tillage sector: "Inputs are too high and prices too low. For the Irish tillage sector to survive, prices have to be looked at. The cost of running machinery, land rental and all that goes with it, is making this sector unviable"



▲ Unloading the last tank of oilseed rape seed at Willie Deegan's farm. This crop was destined for Quinns, one of the largest grain merchants in Ireland, and then on for pressing into oil for human consumption, while the pulp residue is used for animal feed. Oilseed rape is now a go-to crop for rotation purposes

▲ Willie Deegan, Stradbally, Co. Laois pictured just after harvesting his crop of oilseed rape at the Garrons, Co. Laois. Cut in perfect conditions, the crop of Armada yielded 1.9t/acre at 8.2 per cent moisture.

James Miller's take on the Irish tillage sector:

"It's the same old story year-on-year; prices paid for grain is not keeping in pace with rising input costs. We need €20-€30 more per tonne. The world markets have a huge bearing on prices in this country."



- Over at James Miller's farm, he is wrapping up the oat harvest before it goes off for milling. He was happy with the results of the crop of Enya, which came in at 4t/acre at 15 per cent moisture content.



- Harris contractors in Athy harvested and transported all of James's grain. This system suits him - it is cut and taken away to merchants with no fuss - and he finds it cost effective. All the barley straw is baled and goes to the same customer base in Mayo each year.



- James's crop of Orcade winter barley yielded 3.5t/acre at 15 per cent moisture. The crop was sown, and harvested, in ideal conditions.
- Orcade is known for its high BYVD tolerance.





Tom Murphy
Professional Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland

THE MISSING LINK

The silage season is almost over. The bales are, hopefully, stored away safely.

And, the silage pits are full. Watching agricultural contractors filling the pits is a site to behold, if it were not for the absolute danger that some of them put themselves in when compacting silage into pits to heights never envisioned when they were constructed. The amount of quality silage per acre and the number of cuts has increased beyond the capacity of many farm silage pits today. Yet contractors are expected to put their lives at risk if they want the job. One thing I can guarantee, if a Health and Safety Authority (HSA) inspector happened to arrive on site and saw a contractor teetering on top of a pit that is clearly not constructed for the

capacity being compacted into it, you could expect serious action to be taken. The sad thing is that it will probably take a fatality before action will be taken to stop what I can only describe as a life-threatening practice. For me the best interests of agricultural contractors are paramount, and I will be pursuing this issue.

SUCCESS

The HSA is responsible for promoting safety in the agriculture, which has the highest fatality rate of all sectors in the Irish workplace. In the July issue of *Irish Farmers Monthly*, I wrote about the difficulties of designing safety policies and guidelines for agriculture when access to important statistics is limited. Certainly, fatalities in agriculture are known because they require an HSA investigation, but serious injuries go unrecorded, unless the HSA is informed.

The only data the HSA and Farm Safety Partnership (FSP) had to work with is that gained from the National Farm Survey that Teagasc carries out each year. Between 1,000 and 1,200 farms are sent a questionnaire on a range of issues including farm accidents. Participation is voluntary but participants are not obliged to give information regarding any

farm accidents requiring hospital treatment or admission.

REPORT

Over many years, I have been a pain in the neck at FSP advisory committee meetings, asking why we cannot get information from hospitals relating to serious farm accidents presenting to emergency departments or for admission. I was told this was not possible due to data protection, even though it was not necessary to reveal patient names. My plea was for them to find a way, change the law, put pressure on whoever, because this information is the missing link when farm safety policies are being drafted.

Well, I am delighted to say my persistence has paid off. The Hospital In-Patient Enquiry body through the national health information system, has prepared a report giving in-depth information about all agriculture-related accidents treated in hospitals. Why it has taken so long is for another day, particularly as that group was established in 1971. The report will be studied by the HSA as a matter of urgency and used to inform and formulate future safety policies. It should also be compared with the Teagasc National Farm Survey to identify any shortcomings.



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Agri Aware





The selection process for the 2027 Tractor of the Year has commenced, powered by a 26-member jury comprised of machinery journalists from across Europe.

TOTY 2027: THE CHALLENGE HAS BEGUN

THE ROAD TO TRACTOR OF THE YEAR (TOTY) 2027 OFFICIALLY BEGAN IN NAPLES RECENTLY WITH 'LET THE CHALLENGE BEGIN,' THE ANNUAL EVENT THAT BRINGS TOGETHER MANUFACTURERS, JURY MEMBERS, PARTNERS, AND INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS TO LAUNCH A NEW ANNUAL EDITION OF THE AWARDS

Over the course of the event, 23 tractors from the world's leading manufacturers were presented to the international jury, comprising 26 independent journalists representing agricultural media outlets across Europe. 'Let the Challenge Begin' marked the starting point of a structured evaluation process that will culminate in November 2026 at EIMA International, where the winners of the TOTY 2027 awards will be announced. According to organisers, TOTY has evolved far beyond the traditional concept of an industry award. It has become an international platform where product innovation, technical evaluation, communication and market positioning converge. In an agricultural environment increasingly focused on productivity, sustainability, and operational efficiency, the value of a tractor is no longer measured solely by technical specifications. Reliability, accessibility, ease of use and scalability have become decisive factors in determining a machine's relevance in the field, and TOTY reflects this evolution, according to organisers.

MEDIA FOCUS

The award benefits from a unique international media network powered by its 26-member jury. During the latest edition, more than 100 articles were published by specialised agricultural journalists worldwide, while the official TOTY social media channels generated over 2.4 million views, according

to organisers. A spokesperson said: "Together, these activities created continuous visibility for participating manufacturers and positioned Tractor of the Year as one of the most influential communication platforms in the global agricultural machinery industry. "This media exposure is complemented by a growing programme of physical events. The official award ceremony held during Agritechnica attracted more than 250 representatives from manufacturers, institutions and industry organisations, while the TOTY Arena at EIMA International established itself as one of the exhibition's most successful attractions."

UNIQUE OPP FOR MANUFACTURERS

For manufacturers, participation represents much more than a competition. "TOTY offers a unique opportunity to position products within an international narrative focused on innovation, efficiency and future farming needs," said the spokesperson. Each tractor is not only assessed by the jury but also presented, explained, and contextualised within the broader transformation of agricultural mechanisation.

2027 INSTALMENT

The 2027 edition features six categories designed to represent the diversity and technological evolution of modern agriculture.

- ▶ **HighPower** is dedicated to tractors above 300 horsepower, machines designed for



THE VALUE OF A TRACTOR IS NO LONGER MEASURED SOLELY BY TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

the most demanding field operations.

- ▶ **MidPower**, covering the 150-280 horsepower segment, recognises the versatility and efficiency required by a wide range of farming applications.
- ▶ **Utility** focuses on compact and efficient tractors between 70-150 horsepower, increasingly important for multifunctional farming operations.
- ▶ **Specialized** rewards solutions developed for vineyards, orchards and challenging operating environments.
- ▶ **TotYBot** highlights autonomous technologies that are reshaping agricultural practices.
- ▶ **Sustainable** TOTY recognises the most significant innovations in environmental sustainability and operational efficiency.

Following the Naples kick-off event, the evaluation process now continues throughout the summer and autumn with the collection and analysis of additional technical information, field experience and operational data. Jury members will then complete their assessments before selecting the winners. And as mentioned, the journey will culminate in November 2026 at EIMA International, where the official TOTY 2027 ceremony will take place. BKT remains main sponsor of TOTY.



The Spirit is at home in lighter, variable soils, as well as more demanding conditions that would traditionally require slower, more cautious operation.

VÄDERSTAD KEEPS THE SPIRIT ALIVE

For the 2026 model year, Väderstad pushed the Spirit seed drill's capabilities and the new Spirit 400-900C/S models are equipped with a redesigned seed coulter capable of applying up to 120kg of coulter pressure, which is a significant increase over the previous standard of Replace with 80kg. In addition, there is also integrated patented TriForce II suspension at every seeding row.

At first glance, a coulter might seem like a small component in the vast machinery that is a modern seed drill. But to farmers and agronomists who understand the intricacies of crop establishment, it's one of the most critical. The coulter dictates where and how each seed touches the soil, and even small inconsistencies in depth or soil contact can lead to uneven emergence, weaker competitive crop stands and, ultimately, lower yields.

The newly engineered Spirit seed coulter focuses on addressing this challenge at its core, Väderstad says. By enhancing the coulter's ability to maintain consistent pressure and contact with the soil, Spirit improves seed placement accuracy across variable terrains from flat to undulating, stony fields that would traditionally disrupt depth control.

The TriForce II suspension is, according to the company, a uniquely triangulated rubber-suspended coulter arm designed to absorb and adapt to the dynamic movements of real fields. Unlike conventional double-disc drills that rely on simpler four-bar suspensions, TriForce II introduces a dual-gear response to terrain fluctuations that has been described

by Väderstad engineers as akin to having both a 'low' and 'high' gear in the coulter suspension.

What does this mean in practical terms? When a Spirit drill equipped with TriForce II rolls across uneven ground, each seed coulter independently follows the contour without losing its preset pressure. Whether the drill is moving into a depression or rising over a small contour, the triangular suspension structure flexes to maintain soil contact. This ensures that the seed is placed at the intended depth regardless of what's happening around it. This advanced suspension has two key agronomic implications:

1. Consistent seed depth

Uniform seed depth over the entire working width reduces variability in crop emergence, which in turn supports competitive crop stands and more predictable growth patterns

2. Higher working speeds

Because the TriForce II maintains stable pressure even when challenged by terrain contours or forward speed, operators can maintain efficient field speeds without compromising precision.

The system also expands the operational envelope of the drill, making the Spirit at home in lighter, variable soils, as well as more demanding conditions that would traditionally require slower, more cautious operation. From a farmer's perspective, an improved coulter and suspension system translates into several tangible advantages:

1. Uniform emergence and stronger yields

By stabilising coulter pressure and depth,

TriForce II helps deliver even germination across the field. Uneven crop emergence, which is often a symptom of inconsistent seed placement, can lead to weak patches, increased weed pressure and loss of yield. Spirit's targeted precision addresses this from the ground up, giving every seed the same opportunity to thrive.

2. Reduced risk across variable conditions

Fields rarely offer a uniform surface. Slight undulations, residual wheel tracks, stones, clods and varying moisture levels all conspire to challenge the drill's ability to place seed consistently. TriForce II's adaptive suspension mitigates these factors by maintaining stability in pressure and depth, meaning fewer surprises at emergence and more confidence in every hectare drilled.

3. Operational efficiency

With the ability to maintain consistent pressure at higher ground speeds, operators are no longer forced to choose between speed and precision. Spirit owners can achieve more drilling per hour without sacrificing quality. This is a significant advantage during narrow sowing windows, particularly in regions with unpredictable weather or tight crop rotations.

4. Cab-controlled adjustments

For added convenience, the Spirit platform now offers optional hydraulic depth settings directly from the cab. Gone are the days of manual adjustments at the rear of the drill. Operators can fine-tune depth on the move, making quick responses to changing soil or moisture conditions seamless and efficient.



NEW FRONT TOOL FOR ULTRA- SHALLOW TILLAGE

Väderstad's new front tool option for the disc cultivators Carrier XT 425-625 and Carrier XL 425-725 is ideal for ultra-shallow tillage and mechanical weed control. The new third disc axle configuration increases disc density from two rows to three, reducing the disc spacing to just 8.3cm. This results in 50 per cent more tools in the ground, delivering highly intensive mixing, crumbling, and residue management, according to the company.

"With three rows of CrossCutter discs, we can improve cultivation performance and significantly improve the versatility of shallow tillage systems," says Väderstad UK managing director, Andy Gamble. "Key benefits include high weed-killing rates, preserving soil moisture, and reducing fuel consumption, making them a good option for both conventional and organic farming systems." Field tests have shown that the new front tool is able to create a stronger stale seedbed, promote weed germination and more effective weed knockdown in a second pass. According to Andy, this approach supports sustainable farming practices by reducing the need for chemical herbicides, such as glyphosate. "We have designed the third disc axle front tool to deliver higher intensity and better mixing, which in turn encourages stronger emergence of weeds and leftover seeds," he says. The third disc axle holds the standard Carrier disc arms, and can be fitted with either the CrossCutter Disc, CrossCutter Disc Aggressive, 450mm disc or 470 TrueCut discs. This significantly improves cultivation versatility and to operate in a wide range of farming conditions.

Field tests have shown that the new front tool is able to create a stronger stale seedbed, promote weed germination and more effective weed knockdown in a second pass.

The new Inspire

Precision that stands apart



Introducing

TriForce II®

The new patented TriForce II coulters arm suspension brings an unmatched ability to maintain set coulters pressure when stressed by field irregularities. The result is seen in a more consistent seed depth, leading to an even germination and more uniform crop emergence.

Introduced on Spirit and Inspire seed drills.

VÄDERSTAD

Where farming starts

NEW GRASSLAND KIT FROM PÖTTINGER

NOEL DUNNE TRAVELLED TO GRIESKINCHEN IN NORTHERN AUSTRIA WITH PÖTTINGER TO SEE THE LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE 2026/2027 GRASS AND TILLAGE RANGES. HERE, HE HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE GRASS-RELATED OPTIONS, WHILE NEXT MONTH, THE TILLAGE RANGE WILL BE FEATURED, INCLUDING A NEW MANOEUVRABLE RAKE COMING ON THE MARKET IN 2027, WHICH WILL BE OF GREAT INTEREST TO IRISH FARMERS



Pöttinger recently launched a smaller loader wagon range in the rotor class, the eight-model Profi 5000. Its floating pick-up conserves the sward, reduces dirt intake, and prevents tine wear. It is equipped with up to 31 knives, each 4mm thick, capable of achieving a chop length of 45mm. These metrics enable smooth and efficient running while using less power. Now, as standard, the machine is equipped with the Easy Move swing out knife bank with central knife-release system making maintenance quick and fast. An automatic loading system is now standard on the new Profi 5000.



The updated NovaCat T trailed mower is a highly flexible robust mower that has a low horsepower requirement. It has perfect ground tracking for tidy mowing and with a fully movable suspension on the cutter bar it is an ideal machine for bumpy, uneven ground. The mowers are supported by their own chassis, are available with a working width of 4m, and the cutting height can be adjusted from the driver's cab. The mower is available with various tine and roller conditioners making it very versatile.



Aimed at the farmer market, the new five-model Boss 5000 Master wagon will be available in five sizes from 29m³ to 45m³ and has a 5 per cent larger loader chamber capacity. The larger wagons have a pick-up width of 2.1m, while the standard machine's pick-up width is 1.8m. It has new, larger tyres to aid soil conservation. Its Evomatic loading system consists of four conveyor tine elements and achieves 25 per cent greater loading performance compared to the previous design. An Easy Move swing out knife bank is also an optional extra on the 16- and 31-knife bank models.



There have been some digital upgrades to the NovaCat V 10000 ED/RC Collector mowers. Auto swath placement ensures that these mowers along with cross conveyor belt systems deposit the forage crop more evenly than before. This system leads to 40 per cent less raking, lower fuel consumption, larger swathes, and larger turning circles on headlands.



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PÖTTINGER



Lemken says the new drill was developed for farms that want to sow reliably, accurately, and efficiently.



TAKING MECHANICAL SEED DRILL TECHNOLOGY UP A GEAR

WITH THE NEW SAPHIR XMR MECHANICAL SEED DRILL, LEMKEN INTRODUCES THE SUCCESSOR TO THE PROVEN SAPHIR 10

The new seed drill builds on the strengths of the previous series while setting new standards for precision, ease of use, and area coverage. It was developed for farms that want to sow reliably, accurately, and efficiently – even under tight time pressure, according to Lemken. At the heart of the Saphir XMR is the metering system, developed from the ground up. It delivers precise seed metering and is built for ease of use. The metering wheels can be removed individually without tools, making it just as easy to switch between different seed types as it is to clean and maintain the machine. Different seed wheels ensure that both fine and larger seeds are sown precisely and evenly. As standard, the system includes a double-sided electric drive with half-width section switch. By reducing overlap at headlands or on irregularly shaped fields, this helps save seed and reduce costs.

In addition to its precise metering, the Saphir XMR stands out for its ease of use, says Lemken. Well-designed adjustment options make it easy to adapt quickly to changing operating conditions. Depth is adjusted via a central lever, while coulter pressure and sowing depth can be adjusted separately. The patented tramline control system is also designed for flexibility: operators can easily

select different tramline patterns and working widths. The iQblue drill offers an Isobus-based operating concept with logical, clear access to all key machine functions. Depending on the specification, functions such as calibration testing or residual seed emptying are available with digital support. To ensure reliable seed placement, Lemken adopts the tried-and-tested parallelogram-guided double disc coulter with pressure roller. This design ensures consistent seeding depth and good soil contact even under varying soil



DEPENDING ON THE SPECIFICATION, FUNCTIONS SUCH AS CALIBRATION TESTING OR RESIDUAL SEED EMPTYING ARE AVAILABLE WITH DIGITAL SUPPORT

conditions and at higher driving speeds, for uniform crop emergence. In addition, coulter pressure can be easily adjusted to up to 45kg using the grid adjustment mechanism. The mechanical drill continues to be available with row spacings of 12.5cm or 15cm.

PERFORMANCE

The Saphir XMR covers large areas and can work for long intervals with tank sizes of 900, 1,200, or 1,500 litres. The generous opening, with a rigid, waterproof plastic lid, makes filling with big bags or a front loader easy. The MultiHub can be installed as an optional 200-litre auxiliary tank for micro-granules or catch crops. The Saphir XMR can be mounted as a proven, high-performance combination on the Zirkon EMR and Zirkon XMR power harrows. For the first time, a 600-series roller is available for this purpose, offering significantly reduced rolling resistance and improved reconsolidation, particularly on light soils. Thanks to the semi-mounted design, hydraulic cylinders lift and swivel the seed drill forwards simultaneously. This reduces rear axle load and ensures stable weight distribution – an important advantage for smooth road transport.



The mechanical drill continues to be available with row spacings of 12.5cm or 15cm.

KVERNELAND INTRODUCES THE NEW TERSUS 4000

Kverneland has expanded its forage and crop residue management range with the new Tersus 4000 flail chopper model.

Designed for effective mulching with tractors of around 150hp, the Tersus 4000 combines high-capacity performance with a robust design to deliver reliable, consistent results in demanding day-to-day work, according to the company. The Kverneland Tersus range targets demanding users, highlighting durability, reliability, and ease of operation. It features a streamlined headstock, a central body gearbox with a flexible cardan shaft, a top transmission and direct side-belt tensioning for stable, intensive use. Practical design aids quick adjustment, cleaning, and maintenance.

Optimised for grass, crop residues, and biomass, the Kverneland Tersus 4000 flail chopper delivers clean cuts and even residue. A robust rotor with durable flails operates smoothly under high loads, supported by balanced construction and maintenance-free ground-contour roller bearings for longevity and low-maintenance operation. Reinforced drivetrain components minimise the risk of breakdowns, reducing downtime. The Kverneland Tersus 4000 comes in three variants of different

working widths, covering a wide spectrum of working requirements:

- ▶ Kverneland Tersus 4023: 2.35m working width, suited to compact and versatile operations.
- ▶ Kverneland Tersus 4028: 2.80m working width, combining capacity and maneuverability and staying within the overall 3m transport width.
- ▶ Kverneland Tersus 4032: 3.25m working width, designed for high-output and large-area coverage.

All models are suitable for tractors from 80-170hp and are equipped with a 500mm hydraulic side shift as standard, enabling precise work along field edges, headlands and obstacles. Commenting, Luc Souquet, senior product manager, Kverneland Group Ravenna said: "With Kverneland Tersus, we introduce a robust, high-output flail chopper range designed for customers who rely on dependable performance day after day. The machines deliver consistent shredding quality across a wide range of applications, while remaining straightforward to operate and maintain."



KEY CUSTOMER BENEFITS

- 1. Durable construction**
Heavy-duty frame and reinforced housing for long service life.
- 2. Smooth operation**
Optimised rotor design reduces vibration and wear.
- 3. Versatile use**
Hammer or universal Y flails for crop residues, grass and biomass.
- 4. High uptime**
Reinforced drivetrain minimises downtime during the season.

The Solitair XMF seed drill

Simple. Unique.

Active seedbed preparation and the **seed hopper installed at the rear** make the foldable, pneumatic LEMKEN Solitair XMF seed drill unique in this working width segment.



AMAZONE UPGRADES ZG-TX COMBI SPREADER

Amazone has updated its ZG-TX combi spreader with new features designed to improve accuracy and make operation easier, according to the company. These include an integrated weighing system and FlowControl automatic rate control for lime spreading. Designed for spreading both fertiliser and lime, the ZG-TX has become a popular choice for large farms, contractors, and machinery hire businesses. The ZG-TX range of optional features along with its ability to accurately spread both lime and fertiliser makes it a highly versatile machine. The new integrated weighing system gives operators accurate hopper fill level information and makes it easier to set spread rates for both lime and fertiliser. The system uses two weigh cells mounted between the axle and frame, along with a sensor in the drawbar, to continuously measure the load. All information is displayed on the Isobus terminal. When used with the optional work lights, the system can also help during filling. The lights flash to indicate the hopper fill level and show when the target weight has been reached, helping operators avoid overfilling

and reducing the amount of waste left in the hopper. Another new feature is FlowControl automatic spread rate regulation for lime. Thanks to newly developed gearboxes, the system can now use torque measurement technology, which has already proven effective in fertiliser spreading applications. Operators simply enter the target application rate, and FlowControl automatically monitors and adjusts material flow during operation. This helps maintain a consistent spread rate and improves accuracy, even when working with lime products that vary in quality or characteristics. The new weighing system and FlowControl technology are now available on all Isobus-



The ZG-TX combines versatile technology with precise application. The specification levels range from the simple lime spreader to a fully equipped combi spreader for the flexible application of mineral fertiliser and lime through only one machine.



The robust weigh cells ensure an accurate hopper fill level indication and enable easy rate calibration without the need for manual weighing.

equipped ZG-TX models, including the ZG-TX Super, with a maximum permissible weight of 21 tonnes, and the ZG-TX Special, which has a maximum permissible weight of 12.5 tonnes. The new features help operators achieve greater accuracy, improve efficiency, and maintain consistent application rates across a wide range of spreading materials and operating conditions, according to Amazone.

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Denis Drennan
President ICMSA

HOW TO GET OUT OF THE 'CAP TRAP'

We have to move forward in the debate on the Common Agricultural (CAP) policy post-2027 on two principles.

The first is that the budget must be sufficient to ensure that the key issues for EU farm policy can be adequately addressed, and that means an increased CAP budget. The second issue, and no less important, is that CAP must be firmly focussed on 'active' farmers producing food in a sustainable manner. By 'active' farmers, ICMSA refers to those who satisfy our minimum 1 LU/hectare stocking density. We'll repeat that for emphasis: CAP payments should be going to farmers who are producing food and dependent on food production for income. They are the people who must be supported.

We believe in the value of debate and will listen to objections and other definitions. But we cannot continue with a status quo that is failing the present generation of food-producing farmers and shutting out the next generation by rewarding those who accumulate land for the purposes of 'farming the schemes.' We need a real and workable definition of an 'active' farmer in the next CAP and ICMSA believes a minimum stocking density is the correct and most practical method of arriving at that definition. Here are the measures that the ICMSA believes will make CAP work again.

BUDGET

- ▶ An increased budget is critical – CAP needs to focus on farmers.
- ▶ To sustain family farms, the CAP budget needs to be increased significantly and index-linked. Other sources of funding

need to be found to fund environment targets and nature restoration.

- ▶ Both Pillar I and Pillar II need to be retained.

PILLAR I

- ▶ We believe that land-based payments reflecting current per-hectare rates should be maintained. Farmers who are actively farming the land must retain this payment.
- ▶ Active farmers only should be allowed to claim payments. The definition of an active farmer needs to be tightened from the current CAP. We propose 1 LU per hectare on all land except commonage where a lower stocking rate SR would be reasonable.
- ▶ Eco scheme monies must be kept with BISS and CRISS funding in a Pillar I type scheme.

PILLAR II

- ▶ A young farmer installation aid coupled with a retirement scheme to incentive generational renewal introduced.
- ▶ There needs to be a suitable agri-environmental scheme (AES) of €15,000 for all farmers. All farmers should be part of this scheme irrespective of how few actions they complete. Farmers' time is not currently rewarded adequately at present and needs to reflect the hourly rate of a dairy manager with Farm Relief Services.
- ▶ The new AES should only be paid on owned land or land that was leased prior to the opening of the new CAP scheme.
- ▶ There should be fewer overall schemes with options available for farmers to

partake if they wish, get paid for what element they participate in, but receive no penalty if do not fulfil that element of the scheme

- ▶ Pillar II schemes should include ANC, a retirement scheme, an installation scheme, and an on-farm investment scheme. All other schemes should be an action in the farm level AES.
- ▶ A dairy-beef scheme with higher payments should be part of the new AES.
- ▶ Leader and knowledge transfer need to be reformed.

MARKET INTERVENTIONS

- ▶ A voluntary milk supply reduction scheme should be introduced if milk price drops below a certain price.
- ▶ Crisis payments need to be speedily activated, and thresholds below which farm viability is impaired.
- ▶ A risk management scheme should be trialled to ensure milk prices remain above the average costs of production in the EU.
- ▶ EU regulations should be amended to allow farmers to seek independent adjudication on terms and conditions on the purchase of their produce.
- ▶ A payment should be made to farmers who are partaking in sustainability schemes.

COMPLIANCE

- ▶ There needs to be simplification and rearrangement of schemes and more based on collaboration rather than compliance.
- ▶ There needs to be fewer on-the-spot inspections with a greater notice period for those inspections.
- ▶ There should also be a fairer penalty system introduced, particularly in relation to the punitive two-year exclusion from the nitrates derogation.

Stephen Connolly, agri-sustainability manager at ABP, speaking at the ABP demonstration farm.



COLLABORATION'S RIPPLE EFFECT ON WATER QUALITY

BERNIE COMMINS AND STEPHEN CONNOLLY, AGRI-SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER WITH LEADING EUROPEAN MEAT PROCESSOR, ABP FOOD GROUP (ABP), DISCUSS ITS INVOLVEMENT IN A COLLABORATIVE SCHEME AIMED AT SUPPORTING FARMERS IN THE ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES THAT MINIMISE THE IMPACT OF AGRICULTURE ON WATER QUALITY

The River Suir in the south of Ireland, is one of eight priority catchments that has been identified by the country's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a 'catchments of concern' due to the impact of agriculture. It, along with the others, has a tailored action plan – the Suir Catchment Better Farming for Water Action Plan – with clear targets and timelines to deliver measurable water quality improvements. Delivering these improvements involves key stakeholders all working together including farmers, agri-food industries, local authorities, the wider community, and industry leads. ABP is one of the industry leads in the Suir Catchment Better Farming for Water Action Plan because, as Stephen points out: "Water quality is something that's really important

for us, not just in our farm-supply base, but also in our factories." And, collaboration is key, he adds: "We can't do it alone. We need to work with everyone in the industry, whether it be dairy, beef, tillage; all different farming systems feed into the same water base."

ABP COMMITMENT

Stephen continues: "One important thing ABP has done is it has put boots on the ground. There are five people within our agri-team who are fully trained in water quality now." He explains that this helps to provide farmers with support in terms of: identifying water issues, putting a plan in place to address them, and, where applicable, applying for water-quality-improvement grants. Recently, Stephen says, ABP had assisted in submitting an application for €186,000 of funding [as part

of the Water European Innovation Partnership (EIP) project] for just over 20 beef and sheep farmers in the Boyne catchment area. This is an indication of the potential support, and resources available, for family farmers in the Suir catchment area.

Helping farmers to address water issues involves a targeted approach, says Stephen: "Teagasc has done a lot of work using data to identify where the real priority areas are. So, we work very closely with Teagasc to identify these areas, with respect to our suppliers in those areas. We link in with them, and we build a plan," he explains. He continues: "It has to be very targeted; if it is not, it won't work."

As a farmer himself, Stephen sees the two sides of this coin: "Farmers really do want to make sure that we have a positive impact

on biodiversity and water quality, and we continue to produce a high-quality [meat] product. We've probably one of the most sustainable products in world so that is really positive." Independent national water-quality data will inform the measures that farmers will adopt, he says.

INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

In terms of our international reputation as food producers, how important is good water quality in Ireland when trying to garner attention from new customers, and trying to enter new export markets? Stephen says: "The sustainability of our product is hugely important to our customers. And it's important to say that we are in a really good place [in Ireland], whether it be water quality, biodiversity, carbon footprint, it is really positive. But we always need to do more, we always need to stay ahead."

In the wider carbon footprint context, water quality is something that everyone can relate to, he comments: "Sometimes it can be hard to understand 'carbon footprint' and how that impacts your day-to-day life. With water, we use it everyday; we drink it, we cook with it. So that is a very obvious one to the customer and they want to know that there hasn't been a negative impact. This type of collaboration [Better Farming for Water initiative] is a real positive for industry."

At this juncture, Stephen also references the online sustainability platform, AgNav – created through a partnership between Teagasc, Bord Bia, and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation – which is available for dairy and beef farmers. "There is nowhere else in the world where farmers have that database available to them, and we are encouraging farmers to adopt some of the water-quality measures from AgNav also," he explains.

The adoption of AgNav water-quality measures by ABP farmer suppliers, alongside other sustainability practices, is now a rewardable action by ABP under a



WATER QUALITY IS SOMETHING THAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT FOR US, NOT JUST IN OUR FARM-SUPPLY BASE, BUT ALSO IN OUR FACTORIES

recently launched initiative, Stephen explains: "Farmers involved in our breed bonus programmes – Certified Irish Angus and Hereford Prime – will receive a bonus payment if they use AgNav, which incorporates water quality measures." Farmers also get a minimum genetic-standard top-up payment, which also improves the sustainability of beef produced, he adds. "These are examples of things that can work really well; combining water quality, sustainability and biodiversity while supporting the farmers' incomes."

REGENERATIVE FARMING

Also located within the Suir catchment area is a first-of-its-kind regenerative farm, or 'monitor farm', located in south Tipperary on the Coady family farm, in partnership with with ABP and Sysco, one of Ireland's largest foodservice specialists. In 2024, a five-year collaborative sustainable farming project was launched here to pioneer regenerative farming methods, and it follows farmer, Aoibhín Coady's journey as she trials a wide range of sustainable agricultural practices, including water-quality- improvement measures, says Stephen. One of the '8-Actions for Change' within the Better Farming for Water campaign involves fencing off water courses to prevent cattle from entering them but this requires an alternative method of providing drinking water.

On the Coady farm, solar pumps have been installed, says Stephen, to provide a source of clean drinking water for cattle, while blocking

them from entering the water course. "This is a typical farm, and they are doing great work," says Stephen "They are finishing the cattle at a younger age, they are incorporating clover into their swards, they are measuring grass, we have developed nutrient management plan, and we have the solar pumps there now to keep the animals out of the water courses. All these little things are improving sustainability on the farm," he adds.

DEMO FARM

ABP established a demonstration farm in 2015 in Co. Carlow. This dairy-beef farm facilitates research into more sustainable farming practices, and a key focus is on economic and environmental sustainability in relation to animal breeding and grassland management. Celebrating 10 years in 2025, ABP released research results that showed that producing animals with earlier finishing times significantly reduced carbon emissions by 32 per cent. One of its ongoing research aims involves participation in the Water EIP programme to enhance water quality without without compromising productivity.

GLOBAL DEMANDS

ABP has global demands for its high-quality products, but what environmental standards do customers expect in the production of those products? Stephen explains: "Every customer is different, but the environmental footprint of their beef and their lamb is something that is very important to them, and that ties in water quality and biodiversity," he says. "With these initiatives [AgNav and Better Farming for Water] we are in a really good place, I would say, we have so much data available and that gives us a huge point of difference when we talk to our customers. They trust our product, which is really important to us."



MATT O'KEEFFE
EDITOR

BOUGHT AND PAID FOR

There seems to be plenty of enthusiasm for paid leave for farmers. That would presumably include holiday pay, sick pay, and maternity/paternity leave. These are usually allowances paid to employees in a business or public service. Employers, business owners, and other self-employed individuals generally do not qualify for these financial supports. Farmers are self-employed business owners, not paid employees. It is said that one shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth. In this case, why question the logic of accepting financial support that could deliver a better lifestyle? An obvious reason might be because one of the primary benefits of being a farmer is that you are, as far as is possible, in an age of extreme regulation, your own boss. Yes, that independence has been diluted by all kinds of rules that restrict farmers from 'doing their own thing'. At the same time, farmers can still make many unilateral business decisions that ultimately determine their progress through life. Accepting paid leave does not entirely eliminate that self-determinism but it does make farmers even more financially dependent than ever, with, in this case, no direct connection between the funds provided and food production or environmental services provided. Will farmers have completely subscribed to a 'command economy' existence when even their holidays are paid for?

ANOTHER FINANCIAL SUPPORT?

Farmers already accept financial supports



of all kinds, from the European Union and our own Government, tied into demands and restrictions on how they farm their land and manage their livestock. Is paid leave just another financial life-support mechanism or is it a further erosion of the self-determinism that we supposedly hold dear as independent business owners? Probably both, being honest. If this Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)-related proposal is brought in for farmers, other self-employed citizens would legitimately expect that they, too, should qualify for paid leave. The butcher, the baker, and the taxi owner will want to be treated the same as farmers in this regard. Farmers may argue that their situation is different. There is a problem with lifestyle, in so far as not enough young people are willing to become farmers, given the long hours, relatively low average incomes, and lower lifestyle expectations in general. However, those criteria apply across many businesses.

STRIKING THE BALANCE

Worklife balance, or imbalance, figures highlighted by Pearse Kelly at Teagasc's Beef2026 open day at Grange last month showed how many part-time farmers devote large chunks of their lives outside their off-farm employment to managing their farms. Early mornings, late evenings, weekends and, quite often, part or all of their paid leave time are devoted to farming activities. Ultimately, this is a personal decision. There may be some element of perceived responsibility for keeping the farm operating, but there is also a large element of personal inclination. This can put pressure on families and marriages, but people can decide for themselves how they wish to allocate their work/life timespans.

Sickness, poor health, age, child and elderly care, as well as economic returns, are all influencers of how much time a person can allocate to farm work. Some of these potential restrictions are supported by social welfare, insurance, family support and an ability to retain temporary or permanent staff. Again, we come back to whether government or EU should be directly involved in the financing of paid leave for whatever reason, for self-employed individuals. The underlying rationale may be altruistic and well intentioned. There may also be a degree of populism in it. The full implications for farmers, for other self-employed, for labour support services and of its potential social value have not been fully evaluated.



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