

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY

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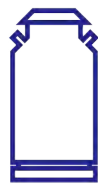
A DEFINING SIX MONTHS

DAMIEN O'REILLY'S SPECIAL REPORT
ON IRELAND'S EU PRESIDENCY

CIRCULAR BIOECONOMY

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AGRI-FOOD COMPANIES





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**DAIRY FARM
MANAGER OF THE YEAR**

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

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

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**GREEN ACRE MARKETING
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**CORMAC TAGGING
DAIRY DISCUSSION /
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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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**DAIRY MARKETING CAMPAIGN
OF THE YEAR**

**PTSB BEST DAIRY PRODUCER /
CO-OP OF THE YEAR**

**CALOR GAS BEST DAIRY SUSTAINABILITY
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JULY 2026

EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

DEFENDING EUROPE'S FOOD SECURITY

Commenting on the actions and utterances of President Donald Trump is a dangerous exercise.

No sooner are his comments published in print media than he has changed his mind, in quite extraordinary ways. Writing an editorial, then, can sometimes leave hostages to fortune. Anyway, it would appear that the Iran/US/Israel/Lebanon conflicts are nearing an end, of sorts at least. That being the case, as farmers, we may hope that a return to some kind of normality in terms of oil and fertiliser supplies and prices is in sight. The timeline, however, should the war really be over, will be an extended one. The oil and gas supply lag time can be calculated in months if not years, especially when infrastructure repairs are considered. Higher farm input costs are baked in for the foreseeable future and must be borne at a time of low food commodity prices. This is at odds with higher retail food prices where the cost of food production is, seemingly, well down the total consumer price chain.

If there is a silver lining on the clouds of horrific wars being engaged in around the world, it is an increasing realisation that food availability is far from secure. Global food production is based on a model that is extremely reliant on inputs from politically unstable sources. Whether that will concentrate the minds of European leaders sufficiently to protect our EU food production model and encourage continued food supply from indigenous sources is questionable. Minds are focused elsewhere. Whether it is on climate change and the imposition of carbon taxes, as well as the CBAM-enforced reduction in fertiliser imports from carbon-heavy producers, or whether it is on an acknowledged necessity of expanding the EU's military defence capabilities, the basic need to protect food production and supply may be down the list of priorities. This matters greatly as Ireland takes on

a six-month-duration presidency of the Council of the European Union. It is a role that, while watered down in importance with the appointment of permanent council presidents, currently António Costa, still offers a degree of influence for the Irish incumbents. Our ministers chair meetings and may be able to advance agendas of importance to our country, however subtly.

The ongoing agenda is varied and complex. For Europe's farmers, the development of a new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a priority. The EU's agricultural budget could fall from €386bn currently, to €300bn under proposals for the next CAP budget. Addressing that shortfall should be a priority for the Irish presidency but it's not the only one. Of importance too, is EU policy around where and at what cost, fertiliser is sourced. The carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), as currently structured, will be an enormous financial burden on farmers, unless and until indigenous fertiliser manufacture is adequate to meet demand. Even then, a captive fertiliser market is not in EU farmers' best interests. Current calculations show that CBAM, without abatement through an emissions trading scheme, will cost Europe's farmers €800m this year, rising to €12bn by 2034. Carbon tax has already cost Irish farmers €1bn since 2020, with further annual increases planned by Government.

Meanwhile, the developing European Financial Markets strategy must include opportunities for European citizens and businesses, including farmers, to manage their financial requirements more competitively. An increased EU defence budget must define defence as including food as well as armament security. A sustainable indigenous food production strategy must be a primary aspect of defending the European Union. The Irish presidency comes at a critical time for the European Union.

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JURY MEMBER FOR IRELAND

OLD SCIENCE IS STILL GOOD SCIENCE

For generations, Irish farmers have been spreading lime. The countryside is scattered with old lime kilns dating back hundreds of years, confirming that there was an understanding of the benefits of lime application back to at least the mid-1700s. While it was also used for whitewashing, its beneficial effects on soil fertility were well understood, even then. In the last century, lime spreading peaked in 1982 when 1.75 million tonnes were spread. That figure is acknowledged as the optimum maintenance requirement for Ireland's agricultural land base. This was confirmed at Teagasc's open day at Johnstown Castle last month. Also confirmed is the fact that currently, one million tonnes are spread annually, a shortfall of three quarters of a million tonnes on the amount needed to keep soils at



An old limekiln pictured in Co. Antrim.

optimum pH. There are regular discussions around productivity and whether we can sustainably produce more food from our farms. If the liming deficiency were rectified, then we would surely be able to increase productivity at minimal cost. So certain were the Teagasc staff at the open day of the benefits of increased lime application in

deficient soils that they were handing out a pseudo-cheque to attendees to emphasise how cost-effective liming is to grass or grain production. Clearly, despite the emergence of new technologies, AI and innovative research findings, tried and tested science, dating back at least 300 years, is still fully applicable – if you'll pardon the pun.



GO FIGURE THE FIGURES

EU agricultural output decreased in value by 2.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2026 compared to the first three months of 2025. It follows an ongoing trend of output value reduction over the past 12 months. Leading the value decline were milk, grain, and beef prices, all suffering high double-digit percentage price reductions. Meanwhile, consumer food prices have not shown the same decline. In Ireland, the average consumer price for a kilogramme of sirloin steak reached €21.82 in April 2026, well ahead of the €19.48 per kilogramme of April 2025. While the price of fresh milk in shops has fallen in the same period, it has not reduced in price by anything resembling the drastic reductions suffered by primary milk producers at the farmgate. Yet again, food producers can legitimately complain that the statistics rarely come out in their favour when retail food prices – falling, rising

or static – are compared to the prices they receive for their produce leaving the farm. Consumers are buying less beef, paying more for what they are buying, and ending up with the same spend, but with less product to put on the barbecue or in the oven. Meanwhile, beef finishers are in disbelief at the losses they are enduring on cattle bought in last year and sold in recent months. Our beef production may be environmentally sustainable, but its economic sustainability is in question. No one can quite figure out what has gone wrong. Cold stores are full of beef, the processors say; market returns do not justify higher prices, they add; and ultimately, it appears to be the producer who takes most of the pain. Never, in recent memory at least, have we had a situation where global, European and Irish declines in beef production and output have resulted in a major fall in producer prices. Go figure!

TREADING A FINE LINE

Financial results from Farmer Business Developments plc were published at the organisation's AGM last month. The farmer-owned holding company (as well as hotel and resort owner) is in good financial stead with increased profits for 2025, a low debt-to-assets ratio, and positive expectations for 2026. On foot of demands for more liquidity in the shares of the non-plc entity, the board of Farmer Business Developments has decided to allow limited share trading on what is usually described as a 'grey market'. This will facilitate those existing shareholders who wish to reduce or cash in entirely on their shareholding, as well as offering access to shares for new investors. Where the line is being drawn, however, as emphasised by Pat Murphy, chair of Farmer Business Developments, is in the maintenance of farmer control over the business. This, he insisted, is critical to ensuring that any broadening of the shareholder base will not dilute the ethos of the company, which is to preserve farmer ownership. There is already some dilution of the farmer ownership base through ongoing inheritance of shares by some non-farming descendants of founding shareholders, so while broadening the shareholder base through an internally controlled 'buy and sell' mechanism is welcome, there is a fine line to be walked to ensure that farmers remain firmly in control of the company. In addition to a 24 per cent shareholding in FBD Insurance, Farmer Business Developments also has several Irish hotels, two Spanish leisure resorts, and a valuable landbank near Berlin airport among its assets. Would-be buyers of shares can expect close scrutiny from the board as it attempts to satisfy all demands from share sellers and buyers.

100 YEARS OF LEGISLATION



One hundred years of agriculture education was marked by Taoiseach Micheál Martin at Government Buildings recently during a special commemorative event with University College Dublin (UCD) and University College Cork (UCC). The event was to mark the centenary of legislation that established the Faculty of Agriculture at UCD and the Faculty of Dairy Science at UCC. Senior representatives from Government, higher education, research, industry and the wider agri-food sector gathered to celebrate the contribution of both institutions to the development of Irish agriculture. Pictured with Micheál Martin were UCD president, Orla Feely and UCC professor, Sarah Culloty with UCD students Jenin Zaru, Shane Maher, Rachel O'Reilly and UCC students Bo Zhang, Megan McTernan and Lucas Janowski. Photo: Jason Clarke.

DUBLIN HORSE SHOW HAS NEW SPONSOR

The Dublin Horse Show has a new title sponsor and this year's 151st instalment – the Gallagher Dublin Horse Show – runs from August 5-9. Gallagher, one of Ireland's largest insurance brokering and risk-management groups has agreed a three-year partnership with the RDS to support the renowned horse show event. Gallagher was founded in 1927 in Chicago and today operates in more than 130 countries. It is known for its investment in sport from grassroots to elite level, including rugby, NFL, major league baseball, motorsport, football, basketball and women's sport. Originally from Limerick, the Gallagher family now employ over 71,000 people worldwide, under the leadership of CEO and chair, Pat Gallagher, grandson of the original founder. This year also marks the one-hundredth year of the Nations Cup, where teams compete for the Aga Khan Trophy. The RDS also elected a new president in May, with Hilary Hough succeeding John Dardis, and appointed a new CEO, Paul Kelly, in March.

CALVES WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN VEAL

Recent weaned calf prices are reflecting the costs of bringing calves to four months of age. Add milk replacer, concentrates, housing, and the rest, and current prices are needed to offset all the management costs involved. Still, a lot of ringside observers were scratching their heads at some of the prices at which calves were knocked down by mart auctioneers last month. Recently, a four-month-old, weaned calf being bid up to €760 was greeted with

enthusiasm, even if many would-be bidders couldn't quite justify paying the equivalent of €5.89 per kilogramme (kg) for the 129kg AAX crossbred. That's within €1.40/kg of finished beef prices, including breed bonuses, which this particular calf could eventually qualify for, if sold for finishing on an Irish farm. So, who was doing the buying? On the day, exporters were evident, with most of the calves being bought for 'the boat'. A logical conclusion is that these calves will be

slaughtered for the continental veal market within months. A rack of veal in a Dutch supermarket is currently retailing at €55/kg, with the 'crème de la crème' veal osso buco priced at €50/kg. Still, add on road and ferry transport costs, as well as an exporter margin, rearing costs to finish, including all veterinary and ancillary costs, and the margins are still fairly tight for everyone involved, from the producer to the restaurateur.

ROADSIDE ABUNDANCE BUT IMPORTS-RELIANT

Last month saw the, now annual, phenomenon of roadside stalls selling Wexford potatoes and strawberries all over the southeast and even further inland. This has been one of the most successful food-marketing strategies ever witnessed in this country, with minimal retailing capital investment and maximum price premiumisation of two of Ireland's most beloved examples of early-summer food indulgence. Neither the spuds nor the red berries come cheap but, boy, are they gorgeous! Meanwhile, unfortunately, we still need to import thousands of tonnes of potatoes, especially for chipping. Likewise, our imports of fruit generally, including soft fruits such as strawberries, shows

that without the availability of a premium price, the economic viability of fruit and potato production is tight. Costs are high, especially for out-of-season soft fruit production, and scale is needed to deliver decent returns. That, in turn, involves high capital and running costs. The recent demise of a large Irish carrot-producing enterprise shows that, when margins are squeezed and production costs increase, there are predictable consequences. Our vegetable growers are increasingly reliant on immigrant workers to manage their crops, which are still highly labour-intensive. While the minimum wage has increased to €14.15 per hour, even with productivity and experience bonuses, it's increasingly

difficult to attract labour for manual work jobs. It's not a solely Irish challenge. The UK is in a similar predicament, with calls for restricted migration being matched with high demand for immigrant workers. President Trump's efforts to reduce the numbers of illegal migrants crossing the Mexican/US border is creating the Law of Unintended Consequences for thousands of American dairy and vegetable farmers, highly reliant on lower-cost immigrant labour to milk their cows and harvest their fruit and vegetables, because US citizens are increasingly unwilling to do that work at the wages on offer. The economic reality is that higher wages are unaffordable at the prices consumers are willing to pay for their food.



InTouch

CATHAL BOHANE
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

STRONG GRASS MANAGEMENT, STRONGER COW PERFORMANCE

Managing grass quality well is one of the most important drivers of milk solids, cow performance, and herd fertility in Irish grass-based systems. This year, many farms have seen actual grass growth run behind predicted growth, creating pressure on feed supply and forcing more supplementation. However, if conditions improve and growth moves ahead of demand, surpluses can build quickly. If those surpluses are not identified and removed early, grass quality will decline, leaving cows grazing stronger covers with lower feeding value.

The key aim should be to offer leafy (three leaf), digestible grass at the correct pre-grazing cover (1,300-1,400kg DM/ha) and to avoid letting paddocks get too strong. Once covers build, grass becomes stemmy, heading begins, and digestibility falls. Cows may then be forced to graze out heavier paddocks to regain control, but intake potential drops even when there appears to be plenty of grass available. Milk protein is particularly sensitive to this loss in energy intake, as it depends on both total dry matter intake (DMI) and quality of feed. Maintaining quality starts with regular grass measuring – even if you are not into budgeting then knowing the cover they are going into and an idea of what is ahead of them for the next 10 days is really useful. Controlling rotation length and adjusting based on growth rate multiplied by days, and remembering the residual, will allow you to target the ideal cover. Finally, remove surplus paddocks early for bales/silage or increase your stocking rate with other animals when growth begins to run ahead of demand. Delayed action increases the risk of cows grazing poorer-quality material simply to bring paddocks back under control, reducing energy intake at a time when many herds still depend on grass to support milk solids and body condition. Weather also remains a major factor, as variable conditions can lower grass dry matter and grazing efficiency. In these situations, quick decisions on supplementation are essential to protect milk protein and avoid an energy deficit.

From a fertility point of view, this matters because cows need consistent energy intake during breeding to minimise body condition loss and support strong cycling activity. When cows are forced to clean out strong paddocks, the drop in grass quality can reduce energy supply just when fertility performance is most vulnerable. Diets based on lush grass can also be low in effective fibre, so balancing the diet remains important to support rumen health and avoid milk fat depression. Keeping good levels of digestible fibre and a live yeast such as Yea-Sacc has been proven to help this.

The most successful systems combine tight grazing control with flexible feeding, using concentrates, fibre sources, or silage strategically when grass quality or access is compromised. In practice, farmers who react early when growth starts to exceed demand are best placed to maintain grass quality, protect milk protein, and support fertility.

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NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO STRENGTHEN DEMAND FOR LAMB

Bord Bia has launched a national campaign to support the Irish lamb sector through a €450,000 investment to boost consumer demand.

The campaign is designed to drive long-term growth for Quality Assured Irish lamb by encouraging younger consumers, aged 25 to 44, to choose lamb.

Bord Bia conducted research to better understand and address the barriers that can limit lamb consumption among younger consumers. The campaign showcases a range of cuts and cooking methods to highlight the versatility of lamb as a midweek choice, not just for special occasions. The campaign is now live and reaching younger consumers through the media channels they engage with most every day: TV, video on demand, online video, digital audio, and key social channels. Bord Bia continues to engage with existing consumers aged 45-60, it says.

Seamus McMenamin, sector manager, sheepmeat and livestock at Bord Bia, said: "The investment underlines Bord Bia's continued commitment to supporting Irish sheep farmers. Supporting demand for Quality Assured Irish lamb in Ireland is critical to the long-term sustainability of the sector. This campaign is focused on ensuring lamb remains relevant for the next generation of consumers, by addressing key barriers and showcasing how versatile and accessible it can be as part of everyday meals. By encouraging more frequent consumption among younger households, we are helping to build a stronger, more resilient future for Irish sheep farmers." The lamb campaign is part of Bord Bia's broader Quality Mark promotions for Irish meat, eggs and horticulture, which emphasise the link between choosing food with the Quality Mark and supporting Irish farmers, growers and producers and, in turn, local communities, according to Bord Bia.

NEW EU LABELLING RULES FOR HONEY

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has welcomed the introduction of new EU labelling rules for honey, which came into effect in June. Under the new rules, all countries of origin for blended honey must be clearly indicated on the label, in descending order of weight, along with the percentage contribution of each country. This information must be presented in the principal field of vision of the product, ensuring it is easily visible to consumers at the point of purchase, according to the FSAI.

Country of origin declaration applies to honey produced, packaged, labelled and for sale on the market after June 14, 2026. Before this date, origin declaration for honey had more general descriptions such as 'a blend of EU honeys' or 'a blend of EU and non-EU honeys,' without further detail on the specific countries of origin. Honey produced, packaged, labelled and on the market on or before 14 June 2026, will legitimately remain on the market for several months with this previously acceptable origin declaration so it will therefore take some time before consumers see this change on the labels. Commenting, Greg Dempsey, chief executive, FSAI stated that improved origin labelling for honey will enhance transparency, support informed consumer choice and strengthen trust in honey products available on the Irish market.

"The new EU labelling requirements for honey represent a positive development for both consumers and for food businesses. Providing clearer information on the country of origin of honey supports informed decision-making by consumers, while also promoting fairness and greater transparency across the supply chain. The new EU rules provide clarity for food businesses on how country of origin information must be declared on honey. All food businesses placing honey on the market after 14 June are required to ensure that their labelling complies with these new requirements."

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Professor Frank Monahan, dean and head UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science; Professor Karina Pierce, director of external relations, UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science; Professor Orla Feely, UCD president; and Mark Duncan, author of *A History of Agriculture at UCD*.

UCD is ultimately a story about people. It is the story of generations of students, academics, researchers, farmers, industry leaders and policymakers who have worked together to improve agricultural productivity, food quality, environmental sustainability and rural livelihoods. As we celebrate our first century, we also look ahead to the role the school will play in addressing the challenges of the next 100 years."

Mark Duncan, author of *A History of Agriculture at UCD*, said: "Researching this book revealed the remarkable influence that UCD graduates, staff and researchers have had on Irish agriculture and wider society. From the earliest days of agricultural education in Ireland to today's globally connected agri-food sector, the school has continually adapted to meet the changing needs of the country. This history is not simply about an institution; it is about the people whose ideas, leadership and innovation helped transform Irish agriculture over the past century."

The event included a conversation between the author and Professor Karina Pierce on what he discovered when writing the book, followed by a panel discussion with representatives from Government, industry, education and the student body reflecting on the past, present and future of agriculture and food systems in Ireland. The launch forms part of a wider programme of centenary events celebrating 100 years since the establishment of the Faculty of Agriculture at UCD in 1926 and recognising the contribution of generations of students, staff, alumni and partners to Ireland's economic, social, scientific and rural development.

University College Dublin (UCD) has marked a major milestone in its history with the launch of *A History of Agriculture at UCD*, a landmark publication celebrating 100 years of agricultural education, research and innovation there. The book, written by Mark Duncan, was launched by UCD president, Professor Orla Feely at a special centenary event in O'Reilly Hall, attended by alumni, staff, students, industry representatives, Government stakeholders and guests from across Ireland's agriculture, food, forestry and horticulture sectors.

Published as part of the centenary celebrations of the UCD School of Agriculture & Food Science, *A History of Agriculture at UCD* chronicles the origins, evolution and impact of agricultural education at UCD and its role in shaping Ireland's agriculture, food, forestry and rural development sectors.

The publication traces the school's origins from the Glasnevin Model Farm and Albert Agricultural College through to the establishment of the Faculty of Agriculture at UCD in 1926 and its development into one of the world's leading centres for agricultural and food science education and research. Today, the UCD School of Agriculture & Food

Science delivers 17 undergraduate and 16 graduate taught programmes and educates approximately 3,000 students, including 2,150 undergraduates, 450 graduate taught students, 200 executive education students and 190 graduate research students. The school has 85 academic staff and 195 staff in total across academic, research, technical and administrative functions.

UCD is ranked 27th globally for agricultural sciences and 15th globally for food science and technology by US News & World Report. Commenting on the 100-year chapter, Professor Orla Feely, president of UCD, said: "This centenary provides an opportunity to reflect on the extraordinary contribution that agricultural education and research at UCD have made to Ireland over the past century. Through the dedication of our staff, students and alumni, UCD has played a central role in advancing agricultural knowledge, supporting rural communities and driving innovation across the agri-food sector. This publication captures that remarkable story and preserves it for future generations."

Professor Frank Monahan, dean of Agriculture and head of the UCD School of Agriculture & Food Science, said: "The story of agriculture at

26,000 FREE VET VISITS AVAILABLE UNDER NEW TASAH

Some 26,000 free vet consultations are available to farmers across the country for 2026 under a recently opened Targeted Advisory Service for Animal Health (TASAH) by Animal Health Ireland (AHI). This TASAH

is aimed at supporting the responsible use of animal medicines, upskilling around biosecurity, as well as being proactive about disease prevention on cattle, sheep, pig, poultry and horse farms. TASAHS also support farmers who have suffered a TB or BVD breakdown. The TASAH programmes, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), provide farmers with a free, on-farm visit from their local TASAH-trained veterinary practitioner. Each consultation is tailored to the individual farm, giving farmers dedicated time with their vet to identify risks,

plan ahead and put practical animal health measures in place.

Since the first TASAH consultations were first delivered in 2016, a total of 85,576 have been completed. The service has grown rapidly in recent years, according to AHI; 78,420 of those consultations took place between 2022 and 2025, representing over 235,260 hours of free, expert veterinary advice delivered directly to farmers since 2022.

Dr Natascha Meunier, programme manager at AHI, said: "The strength of the TASAH model is its simplicity. It puts the farmer and their own vet at the centre of the conversation. Every farm is different, and these consultations give farmers the time and space to work through the issues that matter most on their own holding, whether that is parasite control,

biosecurity, disease investigation or herd health planning. The advice is practical, it is tailored, and it is completely free to the farmer. "We are hugely grateful to the thousands of farmers and veterinary practitioners who have engaged with TASAH over the years. Their commitment is what turns good advice into healthier herds and flocks. I would also like to sincerely thank the DAFM whose funding has been critical in making this service available at no cost to farmers, and without whom none of this would be possible."

Farmers wishing to avail of a TASAH consultation in 2026 can register for and nominate a trained private veterinary practitioner to carry out the visit via the AHI website. Places are limited, and farmers are encouraged to register early.



Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

The EU Commission has announced a €540m package to support farmers struggling with rising fertiliser costs. It follows the fertiliser action plan unveiled in May. The good news is the relatively speedy recognition by the Commission that this is a deeply concerning situation. The bad news is that it does not seem to go far enough. The package comes with some tweaking to State aid rules which will give leeway to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to bolt on a 200 per cent national top up. When the sums are done, it would shake out at around €48m in total for Ireland.

The geopolitical disruption in the middle east has compounded existing fears for medium- to long-term fertiliser prices which already existed because of the Commission's carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), which came into force in January and which is being heavily fought against by the farming and co-op lobby here in Brussels. That remains the main battle and while noble in intention to resist carbon leakage from non-EU imports, it is to all intents and purposes a tax on food production.

Once food price is mentioned, politicians take notice, hence the pressure on the Commission to intervene. But the lines between rising food prices and protecting the environment are somewhat blurred in this instance. I took a call from a journalist some weeks ago asking about the fertiliser price crises following comments from the president and chief executive officer of Yara, Svein Tore Holsether who said 'the interruption to supplies of fertiliser and its key ingredients due to the war in Iran could cost up to 10 billion meals a week, globally'. Once I explained that it's the next sowing season that is uncertain, the reporter lost interest. It is only when the problem is here that people sit up and take notice; that's why the lobbyists in Brussels are proposing sensible solutions right now to stave off a crisis later this year and into 2027. Postponing CBAM in these times of geopolitical uncertainty makes sense but the Commission remains not for turning. There is a safeguard mechanism built in, intended to address exceptional disruptions in fertiliser markets in times of crises but the trigger threshold is simply too high, say experts, who estimate that CBAM will impose an additional €820m cost on European farmers during 2026, with the burden increasing progressively as the levy is phased in towards full implementation in 2034.

At time of writing, there is an easing of tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, but we live in fickle times with global food security most vulnerable. And time will tell if this latest Commission package will be enough to tackle the predictions from Mr Holsether.



Give the time needed for reseeding

Dr. David Lawrence
Head of Nutrition, Agritech.

To maximise the return on investment, we need to establish a long-lasting, productive sward, so care needs to be given at the outset.

The cost of reseeding has risen dramatically in the last 5 years; however, the investment in reseeding is fully recuperated within the first 2-3 years of the sward's life, and with good management practices swards can maintain a high level of productivity well after 8 years. Reseeded pasture grows on average 3t DM/ha more grass than old permanent pasture and has a much higher response to nutrient applications.

Successfully burning off grass with glyphosate accounts for half the effort involved in the new sward establishment. We must maximise its effectiveness on weed control (ensure we spray mainly undamaged and disease-free leaves). Old grass swards may have softer grasses that grow close to the base of the sward. These can be shaded out by taller-growing species, so it is important to consider the water volume in the sprayer to get good coverage and to ensure the sward is not too advanced when spraying. Removing the residual herbage after spraying is critical at this time of year as the window to bury trash by ploughing has closed for derogation farms.

Minimum tillage techniques such as disking or power-harrowing require a sod that will break down into a consistent soil seedbed. Glyphosate should be given enough time to do its work here, and lime is needed to help this process along. Perform a kick test before cultivating. If you can easily kick the trash off the top of the soil, you are ready for tilling. If you need to dig the sod off with multiple kicks, you are likely to run into trouble with sods not breaking down resulting in a poor seedbed. Be mindful of dry weather and avoid exposing soil for prolonged periods. Roll immediately after sowing to ensure soil-seed contact and to maintain as much moisture in the soil as possible.

Last autumn, many new reseeds remained ungrazed or poorly grazed for months due to wet weather and poor underfoot conditions. Reseeding in the mid-season offers an opportunity to avoid that scenario, thus helping the process of establishing a long-lasting sward.

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



TRACKING A TRIO OF CUCKOOS

The public is being invited to follow the journey of three Irish cuckoos as they are being tracked on their migration to Africa, in conservation efforts to understand their decline and safeguard their future.

Using satellite technology, the Cuckoo Tracking Project will trace the routes of three cuckoos – Cuach Sean from Wicklow Mountains National Park, Cuach Rua from the Burren National Park, and Cuach Cores from Killarney National Park. Their fortunes can be followed on the website of the British Trust for Ornithology. Since 2011, the Cuckoo Tracking Project has been following the journeys of a number of cuckoos from Ireland and the UK using satellite technology, in order to investigate the many facets of these fascinating birds' lives and to better understand the causes behind their decline. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is a partner on this project which is led by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). This year, the project is tracking seven new birds in

total from Ireland and the UK. Satellite data shows that Cuach Sean was the first of this year's birds to cross the Channel and was the farthest south of this year's group. After leaving Wicklow and following a brief stop in Somerset he pressed on into France. He stopped in the foothills of the Alps, east of Chambéry and the most recent update showed he was in northern Italy, close to the town of Andora on the Italian Riviera. Cuach Rua left a little later, stopping near The Ballagh in Co. Wexford, then crossed over to Wales. Cuach Cores was trailing behind, however, and was still in his breeding grounds in Killarney National Park, where he was tagged three years ago, while the other two were making progress on their journeys. Over the past 15 years, the project has been providing useful insights into the pressures faced by the cuckoo population. Commenting on the project, Sam Bayley, NPWS conservation ranger said: "This project has been an amazing opportunity to get a detailed

understanding of both the cuckoos' breeding home range, migration routes, and wintering grounds. The more we learn the more we can understand the pressures and strains on this species which has seen a 26 per cent decline in the last 40 years in Ireland. Working closely with our colleagues at British Trust for Ornithology not only allows us to compare data, but also enables everyone to follow their stories as it happens through the online blogs. It is a great way to share the struggles they face." Minister for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity, Christopher O'Sullivan, said: "The call of the cuckoo represents the start of summer for many people and is a familiar and much-loved sound in the countryside. I'm really excited about this project, which will help us learn more about these fascinating and mysterious birds so that we can better protect them. I'm encouraging everyone to keep an eye on the website and see which routes they're taking, how fast they're travelling, where they end up – and who arrives first! Armed with greater understanding, we will be in a better position to protect the beloved cuckoo, so that generations to come can enjoy the sound of the cuckoo for many more summers." Follow the fortunes of Cuach Sean, Cuach Rua and Cuach Cores on the British Trust for Ornithology's website.



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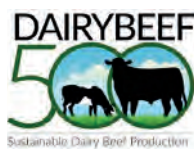
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FAO PRIORITIES FOR 'BIG PHIL'

Taken in 2019, Phil Hogan, when he was EU Commissioner for Trade, meeting FAO director-general, QU Dongyu on the sidelines of the Council of Ministers of Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRIFISH). Photo: fao.org.

PHIL HOGAN IS IRELAND'S CANDIDATE TO BE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UN'S FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO). THE FORMER IRISH MINISTER AND EU COMMISSIONER CERTAINLY HAS THE EXPERIENCE TO TAKE ON THE JOB AT A CRITICAL TIME FOR FOOD SECURITY, GLOBALLY, AND HE SPOKE TO **MATT O' KEEFFE** ABOUT HIS AMBITIONS FOR THE ROLE IF SUCCESSFUL IN HIS BID

When the Government considered candidates to put forward for the role of director-general of the FAO, there were a number of criteria to satisfy. Having experience in senior political leadership and intergovernmental negotiations, and a knowledge of agriculture and food security were some of the requirements. Phil Hogan's name was the 'highest ranked' candidate, according to a Government statement, to tick those boxes – and a few more. "I'm honoured that the Government has nominated me for the role," he says. "It's a very important time for food security. We often take it for granted but in parts of the world now there's a lot of stress in relation to providing sufficient food. "My experience as a European commissioner, and my interactions with international organisations including the FAO, led me to believe that my pragmatic approach to bringing people together to focus on particular issues could be of value. Also, Ireland has a long engagement with food and agricultural issues around the world. We have a very good reputation over the years through our Missionaries and our research and advisory personnel who have assisted

countries and communities in developing food production capabilities and I hope I can build on that," he says. He would also be keen, he says, to promote greater cooperation between the FAO and the other two UN Rome-based agencies, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP). "First of all, we should try to eliminate the silo mentality. There are three agri-related UN organisations based in Rome and they don't always work closely together. We haven't the luxury of people doing their own thing when we could get better outcomes through coordination and cooperation. In my view there's a lot of money wasted that could be deployed more beneficially to the field of action where the problems are."

LOOMING FOOD CRISIS

One such major problem is a looming food crisis, he says, which must be seriously considered, and addressed, in light of the impact of ongoing wars and conflict. He explains: "When you see what's happening in Ukraine where 20 per cent of the world's



GLOBAL AGRICULTURE IS BUILT ON SOIL FERTILITY, THROUGH ARTIFICIAL FERTILISER IN THE MAIN. IT'S NOW BOTH SCARCE AND VERY EXPENSIVE

cereal production is produced, with another 20 per cent produced in Russia, anything that happens there impacts global food supply. If we didn't have the Black Sea access for product to go out, you'd have a problem. The challenges are further compounded with what has happened in the Strait of Hormuz, which could deteriorate again at any time." Phil is singing from the same hymn sheet as the current director-general of the FAO, QU Dongyu, who, at the recent 181st Session of the FAO Council, highlighted the importance of this critical chokepoint, which has been impacted by Iran's decision to block it in late February. He noted at the time, that around

35 per cent of global crude oil exports, 20 per cent of liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, 20-30 per cent of global fertiliser exports, and approximately 50 per cent of global sulphur exports transit through the strait. These are vital for food production, affecting energy and agricultural inputs significantly.

Phil continues: "Little did we think that Irish farmers were going to be impacted by what's happening so far away, but that's the reality. When fertiliser is not produced in sufficient quantities and productivity goes down, starvation and hunger increase. Whatever you think about these conflicts, they have a huge impact in terms of food security. Global agriculture is built on soil fertility, through artificial fertiliser in the main. It's now both scarce and very expensive and huge population centres, particularly on the African and Asian continents, are particularly vulnerable."

Producing fertiliser closer to home and easing the reliance on 'vulnerable sources' are required, he says. "We have gone through a major shock in recent months in relation to European food security. Up to now, we have taken for granted that our farmers can produce high-quality food for Europe and, additionally, that we can feed a lot of the world. Sometimes, people put restrictions and regulatory burdens on us that hinder our food production capability. We need a balance between sustainability and increased food production."

SELF HELP

The food security-conflict theme is certainly not a new one, stretching back to the foundation of the FAO in 1945, which was set up to address global food and agricultural challenges after World War II. At that time, Africa and Europe were facing major food scarcity challenges, Phil says. It wasn't until 1962 that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was launched to help provide affordable, safe and high-quality food to people in Europe. "We have learned from experience that food security is an important issue, and we also have learned that you must have a local dimension to food production. The FAO can play a big role in deploying expertise and mentoring, and agricultural advisory services to countries and farmers, in Africa especially, to ensure that they grow more food locally. The impact of the various conflicts would be lessened, food security would be strengthened, and we wouldn't have a big starvation and migration crisis

resulting from food scarcity. The population of Africa now, as well as one billion more people by 2050, must be fed."

OPTIMISM

After tenures as both trade and agriculture commissioner in Europe, Phil believes he can drive positive outcomes as head of the FAO. With challenge comes opportunity but also optimism, he says. "Technology, including the advent of gene editing, for instance, is capable of revolutionising food production, and doubling productivity in the coming years. We are going through an agricultural revolution and we must deploy the best possible technological innovations on our farms and help farmers embrace this new reality. It's not easy and it won't happen overnight but you have to start somewhere and Africans are already embracing this more than Europeans in many ways. Artificial intelligence is the new great hope for advancement. It worries people but equally it brings potential opportunities to improve quality of life for so many people around the world in the context of food security." He continues: "For generations we've had fewer farmers and hugely increased productivity. There is less available fertile land than ever. Technology will bring further rationalisation with more farmers getting involved in other aspects of the food sector so it won't be just farming, per se. Family members might get involved in food processing, distribution and other aspects with the help of technology so it's an evolving situation where, by 2036, there will be technological innovations currently on the horizon that will revolutionise agriculture."

LAND USE

Fertile land use, globally, is increasingly becoming an issue and in Ireland, local authority development planning will have to consider this, says Phil. He explains: "The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment will need to structure a whole-of-Government policy around renewable energies to ensure we don't neglect the primary role of land in the production of food."

CAP REFLECTIONS

EU political leaders must decide whether they want food security elevated in political



LITTLE DID WE THINK THAT IRISH FARMERS WERE GOING TO BE IMPACTED BY WHAT'S HAPPENING SO FAR AWAY, BUT THAT'S THE REALITY

discourse and priorities, says Phil, and he believes that the Irish presidency of the Council of the European Union will play a role in the discussion that will dictate the priority to be given to funding for farmers and the food industry in the next seven years. He explains: "The multiannual financial framework (MFF) and CAP funding will be decided by the end of the year or early next year, but the policy should be decided firstly as to whether food security should be higher up the political food chain. If that is the case, that's the first step.

"Secondly, there'll be various pots of money for the competitiveness, security and defence funds and the agricultural research funds should add to the traditional income supports for farmers, ultimately providing a good budget for agriculture across all its facets. I have always said that the farmer must be centre-stage. Nobody else can deliver on food security unless farmers are at the heart of the CAP and are incentivised to produce. They must be supported in the technological innovation required as part of our agri-revolution and, finally, farmers should embrace new income opportunities. Whether it is biomethane production or carbon farming, there are new income streams that the farmers should consider. It shouldn't be just about the traditional commodities. There are other ways of generating income streams for farms."

FOOD OR DEFENCE SECURITY?

It will be an 'either-or' situation, Phil says: "The net contributors to the EU budget don't want to pay any more. A static budget means dividing it up as best you can, based on the political priorities. That's why it's important that food security becomes part of security and defence generally, and is treated as equally important."

Uachtaránacht na hÉireann ar
Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpach 2026
Irish Presidency of the Council of
the European Union 2026

Tánaiste, Simon Harris; Taoiseach, Micheál Martin; and
Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee at a Government
press conference to launch Ireland's presidency term.



DEFINING SIX MONTHS AS IRELAND TAKES PRESIDENCY REINS

DAMIEN O'REILLY HAS HIS FINGER ON THE PULSE OF THE 'BRUSSELS BUBBLE' SINCE HIS APPOINTMENT AS EU AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER AT ICOS. HERE, HE SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ON THE SIX-MONTH IRISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Living and working in the so-called 'Brussels bubble' and the agricultural bubble within that, it's easy to become oblivious, proportionately, to everything else going on in the world. Days are consumed with meetings and reading documents emanating from the EU Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament regarding farming and food as if there is nothing else going on in the institutional corridors in the Belgian capital. For the past number of weeks, colleagues from other Member States have been putting their head around the door seeking any news on what the Irish presidency will consist of. Of course, they are talking about the Irish presidency priorities regarding agriculture and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and generational renewal and animal welfare legislation, and so on.

MORE TO IT THAN CAP

When the presidency-policy document did land, it was a reminder that there is more to the EU than CAP and farming. Back in the early days of the European Economic Community (EEC), the CAP was the only show in town, with most European funds pumped into farming, food, and rural areas. In a sign

of how the shape of an enlarged EU looks in 2026, the proposed budget as set out in the multiannual financial framework (MFF) from 2028-2034 sees the CAP allocation dipping to around 25 per cent of total EU funds for the first time. Looking in from the outside, that is not surprising considering the world we live in today. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has focused minds across Europe on security and defence. Outside of our agricultural bubble, it's all the talk in Brussels.

The presidency of the Council is responsible for driving forward the Council's work on EU legislation, maintaining the continuity of the EU agenda, and ensuring orderly legislative processes and cooperation among Member States. Irish ministers host and chair meetings of their EU counterparts, but this is not about selfishly pushing through proposals and legislation that is good for Ireland. Its remit is to act as honest brokers in planning, coordinating, and chairing meetings, representing the Council, negotiating with other EU institutions, communicating about its activities and serving to find agreements in the Council.

THE AGENDA

The EU's Strategic Agenda 2024-29 agreed

by European leaders in late 2024 is framed around three pillars: values, security, and competitiveness. Europe must act urgently to enhance its competitiveness and productivity. This was the main message in the report on the future of European competitiveness published last September by former European Central Bank president, Mario Draghi. It was a wake-up call that the EU can no longer depend on the guard rails of the single market to meet head-on slowing productivity and rising energy costs. Alongside issues such as migration, climate change, AI, energy costs, defence and security, competitiveness is a focused priority. And it has prompted the Government to make the following promise at the launch of the presidency priorities last month: "The Single Market is the foundation of Europe's economy and prosperity. The Irish presidency will work to eliminate barriers, tackle regulatory burdens, boost internal market trade, drive digital transformation and ensure a level playing field for businesses operating across the EU. We will make it easier for business to start-up and scale seamlessly across the Union, including through the EU Inc. proposal."

In late 2023, as the last Commission and Parliament terms were winding down and

campaigning for the current term was ramping up, farmers took to the streets across Europe, fed up with rising costs and strangling bureaucracy. The shift to a slightly more right-wing Parliament the following summer, at the expense of the Greens among others, prompted a response from the new Commission college under President Ursula von der Leyen. A series of omnibus packages were announced aimed at reducing the administrative burden smothering businesses and farmers. We are yet to see the fruits of those proposals, but it was a quasi-admission by the Commission that much of the aspiration tied into the 2020 Green Deal to decarbonise Europe to net zero emissions by 2050 was simply unimplementable at ground level. The 2040 and 2050 climate targets, importantly, remain, but the roadmap should be a little smoother if the omnibus packages work.

THE WOOD FROM THE TREES

But back to the present. Whatever about the Irish presidency priority list, which is effectively a manifesto promising to tick



Captured in July 2025, a COPA COGECA farmer protest in Brussels, which included ICOS and the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA).

all the boxes which defines the EU project, the not-so-pleasant elephant in the room between now and New Year's Eve is the monumental challenge of agreeing on the EU's budget proposal for 2028-2034. The Lithuanian presidency in the first half of 2027 will take the baton because there is little hope of final agreement during the Irish presidency. The Commission published its MFF last July, pricing it at around €2 trillion. Within that, around €300bn has been ringfenced for CAP, an estimated cut of 25 per cent from the current round. Putting on the agriculture bubble hat, that is where our eyes will be focused as the taoiseach and his ministers try to bring some rhyme and reason to what will be an almighty row over who funds what and what funds who. It is only when the overall budget is agreed that we will see the wood from the trees regarding how much will be allocated for CAP. Already, we are resigned to the idea that the old two-pillar CAP structure will be no more, with efforts switching to making sure that there is enough money left to keep farmers on the land and environmental schemes funded over the next 10 years. Food security is strategic for the EU, but it can't be guaranteed if the necessary subsidies are not there.

Speaking in Brussels last month as he prepared to take the chair of the AGFISH Council, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon stated: "The CAP remains essential to a sustainable future for the agri-food sector. The next EU budget will be very different in many ways, given the new and urgent demands. However, as a first principle, the CAP must remain a core expenditure priority, given the economic, social and environmental benefits it brings across all Member States."

That is the least farmers, co-operatives and indeed consumers across the EU expect, considering the value of the CAP in terms of keeping farmers on the land, rural areas enriched and food prices affordable. But with the proposal as it stands to slash the fund below €300bn in ringfenced monies and the effective erasing of the two-pillar system, there is huge concern.

GENERATIONAL RENEWAL

The Commission says it is strongly committed to generational renewal. Agriculture Commissioner, Christophe Hansen has published a strategy and Maria Walsh MEP is leading the line in the Parliament on the subject, but how can young people



THIS IS NOT ABOUT SELFISHLY PUSHING THROUGH PROPOSALS AND LEGISLATION THAT IS GOOD FOR IRELAND

be attracted into a sector with so much uncertainty around 'supports'? That is the circle that needs to be squared, and Ireland has an opportunity over the next six months to lead the charge.

As mentioned at the beginning, Brussels is not all about CAP and the Irish presidency is not all about it either. Security and resilience, competitiveness, climate action, rule of law, digitalisation, health, human rights, trade, future enlargement of the EU and, of course, securing a budget to pay for all these daily challenges in a volatile geopolitical world will be front and centre on the agenda between now and Christmas. But in the agricultural bubble within the Brussels bubble, shaping a resilient and effective roadmap for the future of farming in Europe, sustainability, land use, carbon farming, attracting more women and young people, simplification and prioritising food security will be closely monitored.

This will be the eighth time that Ireland has held the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union – the Council. The Council is one of the EU's main decision-making institutions. It represents governments of the 27 EU Member States. National ministers meet in the Council to debate, amend and adopt EU laws and coordinate policy. Ireland last held the presidency in 2013, and previously in 1975, 1979, 1984, 1990, 1996, and 2004. Over six months, Ireland will host:

- ▶ An informal meeting of EU heads of State or Government;
- ▶ A meeting of the European political community, bringing together leaders from 47 European countries, the largest event of its kind ever held in Ireland;
- ▶ 22 informal ministerial meetings;
- ▶ 250 additional presidency events; and
- ▶ 30,000+ visitors.



AGRICULTURAL VEHICLE ROAD SAFETY DURING HARVEST TIME

CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, URGES ALL OPERATORS OF AGRICULTURAL VEHICLES TO MAINTAIN SAFE SPEEDS AND ENSURE PROPER LIGHTING WHEN TRAVELLING ON PUBLIC ROADS DURING HARVEST TIME

Ensuring safe operation of agricultural vehicles on the road is a critical responsibility for farmers and agricultural contractors. It's imperative that they avoid rushing the job, as not taking enough time and care can result in disastrous consequences. The repercussions of serious accidents extend beyond physical harm, affecting the quality of life, mental health, and financial wellbeing of those affected, and their families.

KEY FACTORS

Agricultural-vehicle accidents are often the result of several key factors:

- ▶ **Excessive speed:** Driving too fast for conditions.
- ▶ **Inexperienced operators:** Lack of adequate training and experience.
- ▶ **Distraction and fatigue:** Reduced attention and alertness.
- ▶ **Poor visibility and lighting:** Inadequate visibility and insufficient vehicle lighting.
- ▶ **Overloading:** Trailers carrying excessive or oversized loads.
- ▶ **Mechanical issues:** Poor vehicle condition and maintenance.

DRIVE SAFELY ON THE ROAD

You must ensure that vehicles are operated at a safe speed, are well lit up, and that they are maintained in a roadworthy condition. It's essential that all lights, mirrors, indicators and wipers are fully functioning, clean and visible.

There must be safe access and egress from all farmyards and fields to avoid road traffic accidents. In addition, farmers and contractors must be careful not to drag muck onto the public road as this may cause vehicles to skid, lose control or overturn. Operators must be competent, free from distractions, and well-rested. Using hand-held mobile phones while driving is illegal and dangerous as it significantly increases the risk of accidents.

FATIGUE - A MAJOR FACTOR

Fatigue is more than feeling tired. It is a decline in

mental and/or physical performance generally due to insufficient sleep. It can be caused by sleep loss, extended wakefulness, high workload, or disruption of your internal body clock. Fatigue reduces your ability to carry out your work safely and effectively. Noticing the signs and symptoms of fatigue in yourself is an important first step to enable you to do something about it. You may notice fatigue because you make more mistakes, make poor judgements, and take greater risks. To help reduce fatigue it is important that you manage your workload, get adequate sleep, stay hydrated, and take regular breaks.

VIGILANCE

Operators of large tractors, trailers, and machinery must exercise extra caution, especially on narrow country roads. We would also encourage pedestrians and cyclists to wear high-visibility vests, use the correct side of the road, travel in single file, and stay alert for approaching vehicles.

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

Regular maintenance of agricultural vehicles and implements is crucial for safety. Key areas to check include:

- ▶ **Lights and indicators:** Ensure all lights and indicators are functioning properly.
- ▶ **Brakes and tyres:** Check for effective braking systems and well-maintained tyres.
- ▶ **Windows, mirrors, and wipers:** Keep them clean for maximum visibility and maintain the wipers in good working order.
- ▶ **Steering and hydraulics:** Regularly inspect and maintain these systems.

IMPORTANCE OF PROPER LIGHTING

Using agricultural vehicles with inadequate lighting poses significant safety risks. Rear-end collisions often occur due to misjudging speed differences, and side-impact collisions can happen during wide turns. Ensure vehicles are equipped with full lighting systems, including side lamps, headlamps, rear lamps, stop lamps, direction indicators, amber beacons, and number-plate lighting.

SECURING LOADS

Overloading trailers can lead to instability and inadequate braking distances. Regulations specify maximum weight loads, vehicle lengths, and widths for public roads. Farmers and contractors should familiarise themselves with these standards; guidance is available on the Road Safety Authority website. Over-sized loads, particularly on narrow, winding roads, must be driven with extra caution. A warning vehicle should precede large machinery like combines to alert oncoming traffic. All loads must be well secured to prevent materials from falling or spilling onto the road.

USE OF SIGNAGE

Strategically placed warning signs can significantly reduce accident risks. During harvest time, place signs along roadways and at farm/field entrances, especially concealed ones, to alert passing traffic about large machinery using the roadway.

ROAD CLEAN-UP

The Roads Act 1993 mandates keeping public roads clear of hazardous materials. Agricultural machinery operators must try to maintain roads in a clean manner, washing down vehicle tyres when necessary to prevent mud and stones from being carried onto public roads. Remember, always drive at a safe speed and be considerate of other road users. Proper vehicle maintenance, appropriate lighting, secure loads, and vigilance can prevent many accidents. By following these guidelines, farmers and agricultural contractors can significantly improve road safety for everyone.

For more farm safety information, scan the code



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Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

FUTURE-PROOFING THE IRISH BEEF SECTOR

AGRI-FOOD ECONOMIST, CIARAN FITZGERALD EXPLORES WHETHER EU POLICY ALIGNS PRICE AND COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP) SUPPORTS WITH INCREASING REGULATORY AND DECARBONISATION COSTS

It was interesting to hear the EU Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare, Olivér Várhelyi, state recently that EU food standards and rules do not end at the EU border. While I'm sure this is the case for hygiene and safety, European consumers' desire for sustainability verification is not currently applied to imported products as witnessed by the increasing imports of beef from high-carbon-emitting countries, which are dampening beef prices across the EU. This dampening of finished beef prices has resulted in mixed supply and demand signals for the Irish and EU beef sector in recent times. On the demand side, as European and UK retailers find ever increasing sources of beef from non-EU suppliers like New Zealand, Brazil, Paraguay and Australia, Irish and European beef and finished cattle prices have stalled or even fallen back, as is the case with Irish beef producers.

IS SUCKLER FARMER CONFIDENCE MERITED?

On the supply side, suckler cow numbers in Ireland have increased for the first time since 2016 with figures from the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) confirming that suckler cow numbers increased by 15,154 head (a 2 per cent rise) to 761,709 as of late March, still well reduced on the numbers of suckler cows on Irish farms a decade ago. While, clearly, one year of positivity does not yet represent a trend, it does seem that the combination of positive cattle prices and the impact of targeted State supports such as the €52m Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme and the National Beef Welfare Scheme have helped stabilise and even increase farmer confidence.

POLICY RESPONSES

The positive impact of targeted supports is in line with the profile of the breeding herd. Less than 25 per cent of beef suckler farms operate a calf-to-finished-beef system, while 26 per cent of dairy-calf-to-beef farms are finishing cattle also, according to Teagasc. The impact is

also in line with an analysis of the variations in suckler cow numbers going back to the early 1970s. Following the collapse in cattle prices in 1974, suckler cow numbers in Ireland declined to just over 450,000 head by the end of the 1980s. In the McSharry CAP reforms of 1992 direct payments to farmers, including a suckler cow payment, were introduced and intervention supports were diminished and eventually wound down.

This direct support system saw Irish suckler cow numbers increase to over one million head by the end of the 1990s and it was the dilution of these direct payments, firstly under decoupling rules in 2005, and more particularly in the CAP reform plan of 2021, that has seen Irish suckler cow numbers decline, despite the beginnings of increased finished cattle prices around that time.

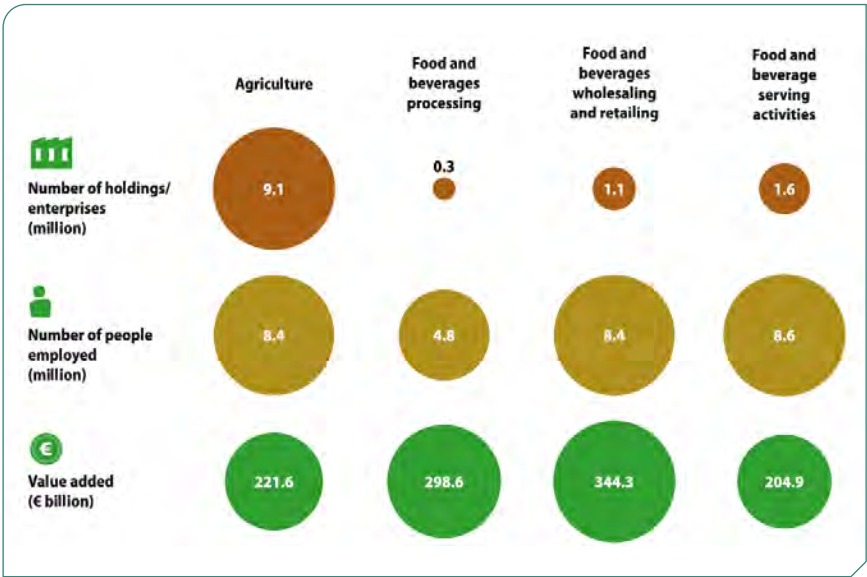
So, it would seem that the key lesson to be gleaned is that targeted suckler supports have a bigger impact than finished cattle prices over the long term, given the continuation of the low percentage of suckler calf producers bringing their stock to slaughter. But clearly a combination of both is helpful, which is why the current CAP review is important.

POLICY SUPPORT OPTIONS

Given the overarching role that decarbonisation/sustainability now plays as the key route-to-market, a meaningful CAP reform surely must focus its firepower in this area. For Ireland this means focusing on the incentivisation of early finishing, given how core it is to our current national decarbonisation strategy.

IRELAND'S CLIMATE GOALS AND THE BEEF SECTOR

The Irish Government's Climate Action Plan mandates a 25 per cent reduction in agricultural emissions. Lowering the age at slaughter is a core strategy in Teagasc's Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) because a shorter lifespan means less enteric methane produced and



Source: Eurostat; Key figures on the European food chain – 2025 edition.

less manure management required (Teagasc): 2025 target – reduce the average slaughter age to 24-25 months; and 2030 target – reduce the average slaughter age to 22-23 months.

CURRENT REALITY AND SETBACKS

Despite steady reductions seen up to 2022, progress has stalled and partially reversed: the national average age for finished steers hovers between 26 and 26.5 months, and average finishing ages for heifers have actually increased. To get back on track, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) launched an Improved Liveweight Performance Action Plan, focusing on genetics, animal health, and diet. However, official plans, specifically detailing how to mandate and support these slaughter age targets, have experienced administrative delays according to Teagasc (<https://teagasc.ie/news-->

events/daily/reducing-age-of-slaughter-in-beef-cattle/). A key question must be whether the limited and reducing levels of support in the CAP have the firepower to deliver a fundamental shift in important decarbonisation measures like finishing age. CAP financing accounts for less than 30 per cent of the EU's total expenditure. But based on data from the Eurostat chart above (*Key figures on the European food chain – 2025 edition*), this is hardly an excessive level of support. There is a continuing disconnect between EU regulators and the weak laissez-faire approach to food pricing, which is left solely in the hands of price-dominant, large, grocery retailers. Unless this issue meets joined-up thinking in a new CAP, the commissioner's reference to standards being applied across imported as well as local food will remain shallow and hollow.



The Improved Liveweight Performance Action Plan aims to improve the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the herd. Developed collaboratively by Teagasc, Bord Bia, Animal Health Ireland, the Irish Cattle and Breeding Federation, Bord Bia, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, this plan sets out a comprehensive approach to optimising liveweight performance.



Bord Bia beef sector manager, Mark Zieg.

IRISH BEEF: UNDER PRESSURE BUT WELL POSITIONED

IRISH BEEF EXPORTS ARE FACING SOME PRICE PRESSURE AFTER EXCEPTIONAL HIGHS IN 2025, ACCORDING TO BORD BIA BEEF SECTOR MANAGER, MARK ZIEG, BUT IRISH BEEF REMAINS A PREFERRED PREMIUM IMPORT SUPPLIER FOR MANY CUSTOMERS, HE TELLS *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY*

According to Mark, it is a challenging market at the moment, coming off the back of a year of real highs in terms of price and market demand across most markets during 2025. He explains: "The rate of price increase in Ireland outperformed the UK and the rest of Europe. The UK, in particular, remains a key market for Irish beef – it is 60 per cent self-sufficient and the rest is predominantly coming from Ireland. European production decreased last year with depressing cattle supplies in the UK and Europe, and prices were up more than 30 per cent.

"It would be hard to maintain this level of growth and we have also seen a reaction from the consumer against that, with resistance to higher prices and also evidence of consumers looking for alternative protein sources, such as chicken or pork. We did see the inflation impact, with retailers and foodservice customers passing on those higher prices gradually to the consumer so things have slowed up somewhat."

MERCOSUR

Commenting on the Mercosur trade deal, Mark says: "We are already seeing import

pressure with the UK and EU imports from Australia and New Zealand and the Mercosur countries will fill some of the gaps we have been filling. So, Mercosur will put us under some pressure. For example, Brazilian beef will sell for below two-thirds of Irish prices, but as EU production has dropped by more than 700,000 tonnes in the last eight years, it would be opening up for more imports anyway, so there might not be such a huge impact considering steady consumer demand for beef.

"For Ireland, maintaining our high standards will be key. Our quality assurance

sustainability and animal welfare continue to be important, no matter what. We work with retailers on promotions, emphasising quality and sustainability. Lidl's successful Irish beef promotions across Europe is a good example."

LOCAL SOURCING

Earlier this year, a leading Dutch supermarket, Jumbo, confirmed that it was implementing a new supply chain policy centred on local sourcing and that it intends to slowly remove Irish beef from its shelves. Mark explains what this means for Ireland: "We have seen this coming for a while: retailers and blue-chip companies stating their commitment to their locality. But, in Jumbo's case, for example, they flagged this with us a number of years ago, so we have been aware of this strategy, and we are working with them on this. The Netherlands is under particular pressure in terms of cattle numbers so when it comes to filling gaps for those retailers we need to ensure that Ireland is the preferred import option. Countries supporting local is nothing strange and we don't want to challenge domestic supply: we just need to make sure that Irish beef continues to be the preferred option for high quality and sustainable imports. Currently, we are still supplying Jumbo and I would imagine we will continue to do so in the future. Production is projected this year across Europe to be down 3.5 per cent."

LATEST CONSUMER RESEARCH

Bord Bia conducts quarterly research monitoring shopper behaviour in the meat category, which examines the context behind shoppers' decisions, rather than the value and volume impacts that are tracked by other surveys and data sources. Markets covered include Ireland, Britain, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium. For the first quarter of 2026, beef showed real resilience despite sustained high prices. "After year-on-year declines noted throughout 2025, shoppers' consideration and purchase of beef have stabilised and even improved on Q1 2025 levels, which was the key period for inflation-related impacts," says Mark. He adds: "Long-term demand



MINCE AND BURGERS ARE CRITICAL ENTRY POINTS, OFFERING AFFORDABILITY AND CONVENIENCE, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNGER AND LOWER-INCOME SHOPPERS

remains strong, with future consumption intent unchanged. Meanwhile, positive perceptions (taste, health) continue to anchor the category despite inflation. In all markets, except Ireland and Italy, we have seen steady growth in the last four quarters of expensiveness as a barrier, but some declines last quarter in the UK and Belgium. Expensiveness is still the top-of-mind barrier and continues to increase. Encouragingly, however, more shoppers, especially younger cohorts, now believe beef is 'worth paying more for'. This younger cohort is driven by convenience and shifting health perceptions." He continues: "Mince and burgers are critical entry points, offering affordability and convenience, especially for younger and lower-income shoppers. It is evident that there is a strong positive association with a growing number of people agreeing that beef 'is a great source of protein' and 'is a relatively healthy protein'."

Commenting on consumer trends identified, Mark notes that health and nutrition are emerging as key drivers, especially in the UK. Younger shoppers are increasing category engagement due to gym/fitness focus and protein prioritisation and purchase intent remains strong with the majority planning to maintain or increase beef consumption despite current substitution behaviour.

"While price sensitivity and protein substitution continues, as consumers adjust to inflation, declining European production is creating demand and opportunity for growth," says Mark. He adds: "We need to leverage Ireland's unique grass-fed, quality assured offering to maintain our status in many markets as a preferred supplier."



AS EU PRODUCTION HAS DROPPED BY MORE THAN 700,000 TONNES IN THE LAST EIGHT YEARS, IT WOULD BE OPENING UP FOR MORE IMPORTS ANYWAY

schemes and Origin Green initiatives prove our credentials when it comes to sustainability and welfare issues. This will not only lead to efficiencies in productions over time, but will ensure that Irish beef is positioned as a high quality, trusted source of protein. When I am talking to customers and I can demonstrate and prove how we can meet these higher standards it is always a very positive thing. We can show customers that we can support them in their sustainability objectives and our consumers trust Irish beef. When the market is difficult, sometimes value or price will become the number-one purchasing motivation, but

Circularity is not one single thing; for some companies it means turning brewers' spent grain and yeast into new food ingredients.



CIRCULAR BIOECONOMY: LESSONS FROM EUROPEAN AGRI-FOOD COMPANIES

PROJECT LEAD ON THE COBIOECON PROJECT, DR JON PAUL FAULKNER EXPLAINS WHAT IRISH FARMING AND FOOD PROCESSING CAN LEARN FROM CIRCULAR PRACTICE IN GERMANY, FRANCE, AND BELGIUM

The latest stage of the CoBioEcon project looks at what circular practice means in a selection of agri-food companies in Europe. Fifteen interviews were carried out with practitioners in specific regions of Germany, France, and Belgium. These regions were selected because they have dedicated regional bioeconomy strategies and share similarities with Ireland in terms of agricultural and natural capital profile.

WHAT IS CIRCULAR PRACTICE?

Circular practice means keeping resources in use for longer and reducing waste. In agri-food, this includes using by-products for food, feed, fertiliser or energy; recovering water and heat; returning nutrients to the land;

redistributing surplus food; and designing supply chains so fewer materials are wasted. One of the strongest findings is that circularity is not one single thing. For some companies, it means factory improvements, such as recovering water from crops, using residues for biogas, or turning brewers' spent grain and yeast into new food ingredients. For others, it means stronger relationships with farmers, better crop rotations, organic or regenerative sourcing, and closing nutrient loops between farms and processors. For others, it means giving food, products or materials a second life through donation, resale or upcycling. In short, circular practice is not just about waste. It is about how value moves through the food system.

FARMERS AND PROCESSORS NEED EACH OTHER

The European examples show that circular practice works best when farmers and processors have long-term relationships. If processors want lower-waste, lower-carbon or more regenerative supply chains, farmers need clear market signals, fair contracts, and practical support. Farmers cannot be expected to carry the cost of transition while others capture the value.

In the companies examined, farmer-processor relationships were often central. Some processors worked with farmers on crop rotation and soil management. Others depended on nearby farms to supply raw materials or receive organic residues,

compost, or digestate. Circularity is not delivered by a single company acting alone. For Ireland, this points towards regional cooperation around slurry, grass-based residues, dairy and meat by-products, horticultural surplus, composting, anaerobic digestion and nutrient recovery. These are practical questions about who has what resource, where it is located, who can use it, and whether these economics can be profitable.

SIDE-STREAMS SHOULD BECOME FEEDSTOCKS

A major lesson from the interviews is that what is often called 'waste' can become a feedstock. Bio-innovation companies are using fermentation, fungi, biotechnology, and upcycling to turn low-value biological materials into higher-value ingredients, proteins, food products, or industrial inputs. This is relevant for Ireland because our agri-food system produces large volumes of biological material. Some of this is already well used, but more could be done to identify higher-value routes for residues and by-products before they move to lower-value uses. The basic hierarchy should be clear: prevent waste first, keep edible food in the food chain where possible, then consider feed, materials, nutrients and energy. Anaerobic digestion has a role, but it should not become the default answer to every side-stream. Some materials may have higher value uses. Others may be better suited to soil, feed or energy.

LOGISTICS MATTER

One of the less obvious findings is that logistics can make or break circular practice.



THE BASIC HIERARCHY SHOULD BE CLEAR: PREVENT WASTE FIRST, KEEP EDIBLE FOOD IN THE FOOD CHAIN WHERE POSSIBLE, THEN CONSIDER FEED, MATERIALS, NUTRIENTS AND ENERGY



Lead researcher on the CoBioEcon project, Jon Paul Faulkner.

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

Biological resources are seasonal, bulky, variable and often perishable. They may need refrigeration, drying, storage, sorting, or rapid movement. If transport costs are too high, or if material quality declines too quickly, circular systems become unprofitable. This is why regional hubs are important. Ireland needs places where farmers, processors, co-ops, local authorities, researchers, and SMEs can coordinate biomass flows, test new uses for residues, pool infrastructure and reduce duplication. These hubs may be brokerage platforms, shared storage systems, local processing sites, or practical networks linking producers with users of by-products. The key point is proximity. Circular bioeconomy projects need to be designed around real geography, not just national ambition.

POLICY AND THE GREEN OPTION

Companies repeatedly stressed that circular practice depends on incentives, rules, and markets. It is not enough to tell businesses to be circular if regulation makes reuse difficult,



ANAEROBIC DIGESTION HAS A ROLE, BUT IT SHOULD NOT BECOME THE DEFAULT ANSWER TO EVERY SIDE-STREAM

funding too complex, or customers unwilling to pay for better products. For Ireland, this means policy needs to align agriculture, food safety, waste, energy, enterprise, and planning. Funding must also be accessible to SMEs, co-ops and community enterprises, not only to large companies. Public procurement could help create demand for bio-based and circular products, especially where early markets are weak.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR IRELAND

The lesson from Germany, France, and Belgium is not that Ireland should copy their systems. The lesson is that circular practice works when it is regionally grounded, economically viable, and built around cooperation. Ireland should focus on five practical priorities: build regional circular bioeconomy hubs; support long-term farmer-processor partnerships; identify high-value uses for agri-food side-streams; remove regulatory barriers to safe reuse; and make sure farmers and rural communities capture value from the transition. The bioeconomy will only work if it is practical at farm and processor level. It must help reduce waste, build new income streams, support soil and water quality, and keep more value in rural areas. That means designing it with farmers and agri-food businesses from the start.

Get in touch

If you are interested in being part of developing a regional bioeconomy strategy, please contact Jon Paul Faulkner at jon.faulkner@ucd.ie and/or the CoBioEcon team via www.cobioecon.com

Getting ready for your Bord Bia audit

In a competitive global market, Bord Bia Quality Assurance, under the Origin Green programme, plays a vital role in protecting Ireland's reputation for high-quality, sustainably produced meat and dairy. Your participation in Bord Bia audits is the cornerstone of this reputation. Here we have advice and tips on preparing for your Bord Bia audit, including what to expect and the most common non-compliances found.

Set the date

A key step in preparing for your renewal audit is to schedule a date and time with the auditor as soon as you are contacted. This ensures that certification remains active while the renewal process is ongoing. Check when you are due a renewal audit by calling the Bord Bia Helpdesk on 01 5240410 or online at gas.bordbia.ie/livestock/Verify

What to expect on the day?

When the auditor arrives, they will first explain the process during the opening meeting and answer any questions you may have. They will then walk around the farm with you, looking at stock, housing, equipment and the farmyard. Most aspects of the audit are completed through observation of good farm practices and conversations with you about your typical farm practices.

Following the farm walk, the auditor will carry out some paperwork and record checks to confirm that the information gathered during the walk matches the records on file.

During the audit, the auditor will discuss any findings with you as they arise and will go through everything again with you before leaving the farm (the closing meeting).

The audit lasts, on average, 90 minutes, but the better prepared you are, the shorter the audit will be.

What happens after the audit?

At the end of the audit, the auditor will explain if any issues are identified as non-conformances. You will not fail the audit on the day if any issues arise. Instead, you will be given up to 28 days to address the issue (or issues) and provide evidence that corrective action has been taken. For example, if an auditor identifies that a lagoon is unsafe, they may request a photo within 28 days showing that the lagoon has been made safe.

Evidence can be sent by text message to the Bord Bia Helpdesk or if preferred by email or post. You can also upload evidence by logging onto farm.bordbia.ie. You can nominate an individual, such as a relative or neighbour, to do this on your behalf.

This 'close-out' process does not apply if no issues are found during the audit.

Key areas to watch out for

Most non-compliances identified during audits relate to record keeping, particularly the recording of animal remedies, including both usage and purchases.

Top tip: Before your audit, ensure that you have a full and complete record of all medicines purchased and all medicines administered at least back to the last audit date.

For **animal remedy usage**, you must record the following:

- Date of administration.
- Name of medicine.
- Quantity given.
- Identification of animal.
- Name of person giving the medicine/remedy or the name of the prescribing vet.
- Date of the end of the withdrawal period. A common mistake is to insert the number of withdrawal days instead of date of end of withdrawal period.

Where an individual animal is treated, the identity of the animal must be clearly documented, for example using the tag number or freeze brand. Where the remedy is administered to a group of animals, it must be possible to clearly identify each animal in the group (e.g. all calves born 1st January to 31st March only).



Animal remedy purchase records can be kept in a variety of ways, e.g. using computer-based records, by using a manual such as the Bord Bia Farm Book, or by retaining vet's prescriptions back to the date of last audit.

The following details must be included:

- Date of purchase.
- Medicine name.
- Quantity purchased.
- Name and address of the supplier.

Top tip: most veterinary practices can print an account statement that will show all medicine purchases over any given time period.

How to keep records

Farmers can keep records in the way that suits them best. This may include keeping invoices or statements, using farm software, or any other system that captures the required information. Records only need to be kept in one location.

Note: keeping accurate and up-to-date animal medicine usage and purchase records is a legal requirement under Conditionality (previously known as cross-compliance).

Sustainability Survey

A Sustainability Survey also needs to be completed before the audit. The questions cover topics including housing dates and concentrates fed and takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. All data provided must be from the previous calendar year, for example if your audit takes place in July 2026, you report from the previous January to December 2025.

The survey can be done online at farm.bordbia.ie. Alternatively, farmers can contact the Helpdesk on 01 524 0410 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm) to complete over the phone.

Audit satisfaction

A recent survey conducted with farmers after their audit found:

- 91% considered the audit process to be straightforward.
- 97% believed that the audit took a reasonable amount of time.
- 99% found the auditors themselves to be professional.
- 80% found uploading information easy to do.

Bord Bia Helpdesk

The Helpdesk can help you to prepare for the audit and answer any queries about the process.

01 5240410. Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD



BEYOND THE CLINIC: A CALL TO IRELAND'S VETERINARY PROFESSION

PROFESSOR PATRICK POLLOCK IS HEAD OF VETERINARY MEDICINE AND SURGERY AT ATLANTIC TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY (ATU). HERE, HE OUTLINES ATU'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF VETERINARY EDUCATION IN IRELAND



Ireland's veterinary profession stands at a critical inflection point.

Demand for veterinary services continues to rise across companion animal, farm, and equine sectors, while rural practices face sustained pressure from workforce shortages, recruitment, and retention challenges, and the increasing complexity of professional expectations. At the same time, society looks to vets to lead not only in clinical care, but also in animal welfare, food safety, antimicrobial stewardship, sustainability, and emergency preparedness. These pressures are not temporary; they reflect structural shifts in how veterinary medicine is practised and valued.

Against this backdrop, ATU, has taken a significant step forward. In December 2025, ATU Veterinary received Reasonable Assurance of Accreditation from the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI). This confirms that our proposed Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery (BVMS) programme, curriculum, facilities, and Governance are likely to meet the standards required to allow our graduates register with the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) provided we deliver on our plan. This milestone allows us to proceed with confidence towards welcoming our first cohort of students in September 2026. In achieving this, ATU has established a new Department of Veterinary Medicine, which will be supported by referral hospitals in Letterkenny and a dedicated farm and herd health hub in Mountbellew. Our ambition is both simple and far-reaching: to educate resilient, practice-ready graduates who can serve Ireland's communities, strengthen rural veterinary provision and lead confidently within a One Health framework. This article sets out our vision and, crucially, extends an invitation to the profession, to practices,

industry partners and public stakeholders, to help us build it.

DESIGNED FOR IRELAND'S REAL NEEDS

The ATU veterinary curriculum has been deliberately designed around the realities of contemporary Irish practice. It is grounded in three interlinked principles: community, capability, and connection.

- ▶ Community is reflected in sustained partnerships with primary-care practices, farms and service providers across the north and northwest, embedding students in the places where veterinary need is most acute.
- ▶ Capability is developed through a systematic, outcomes-focused approach to 'day one competences' and entrustable professional activities (EPAs), supported by high-fidelity clinical skills training.
- ▶ Connection is achieved through an explicitly integrated One Health perspective, linking animal health with public health, environmental stewardship and societal responsibility.

EARLY, CONTINUOUS CLINICAL IMMERSION

Clinical immersion begins early and continues throughout the programme.

- ▶ From year one, students rotate through skills laboratories and supervised exposure to practice environments.
- ▶ This is not an add-on approach to extramural studies, but a planned, assessed, and curriculum-embedded model of clinical experience.
- ▶ By revisiting clinical settings with increasing responsibility and complexity, students build confidence, competence and professional identity, reducing the transition shock that so often characterises the move from graduate to practitioner.

SIMULATION AS A FORCE MULTIPLIER

Simulation plays a central role in this approach.

- ▶ A modern simulation and clinical skills centre will support OSCE-aligned rehearsal of core procedures, including venepuncture, anaesthetic set-up, introductory ultrasonography and dentistry positioning, alongside structured training in communication, handover, escalation and consent.
- ▶ Larger-scale simulation exercises, such as foaling emergencies, shelter-capacity surges and disease-outbreak table-top scenarios, will develop students' ability to make sound decisions under pressure, individually and as part of a team.

ONE HEALTH

Recognising the expanding societal role of the profession, One Health, sustainability, and disaster preparedness are explicitly threaded throughout the curriculum and assessed as core outcomes. Irish vets already contribute substantially to biosecurity, antimicrobial resistance mitigation, food systems resilience, wildlife health, and emergency response.

- ▶ Our programme makes these responsibilities visible, valued and teachable, equipping graduates to engage confidently with national and international One Health priorities.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND WELLBEING

Professional skills and wellbeing are treated as integral to clinical competence, not peripheral concerns.

- ▶ Communication, ethics, emotional intelligence, negotiation and reflective practice are taught alongside clinical sciences.

- The aim is not merely technical proficiency, but the development of calm, ethical clinicians who can lead teams, listen to clients and colleagues, and sustain themselves over the course of long and demanding careers.

A fair and holistic approach to admissions The admissions process to the new veterinary medicine programme has been designed to be fair, modern and aligned with the values of the veterinary profession. In addition to academic criteria, ATU veterinary incorporates the Casper test, a situational judgement assessment that evaluates empathy, integrity, and professional judgement. These are qualities the public rightly expects of its vets and are closely linked to professional satisfaction, retention and mental wellbeing. The response to the programme has been very encouraging, with strong levels of interest and applications from across Ireland and beyond, including applicants from almost every county in Ireland. Engagement with the Casper assessment has been positive, with a broad spread of results that will help identify candidates with the professional attributes required for veterinary practice. Applicants have also engaged constructively with the experience requirement and many candidates have used the experience form to reflect thoughtfully on their exposure to veterinary practice and animal care, demonstrating a genuine understanding of the profession and the responsibilities it entails. We have worked closely with applicants to ensure expectations are clear and accessible, and the process has helped encourage meaningful early engagement with the realities of veterinary work.

ADDRESSING SECTOR-WIDE CHALLENGES

This educational model is intentionally and strategically aligned with the structural challenges facing the profession. By locating clinical facilities in the northwest and embedding learning within regional practices and farms, ATU veterinary aims to strengthen rural capacity and address uneven workforce distribution. Evidence consistently shows that graduates are more likely to work where they train; our placement network is, therefore, designed to mirror areas of service need. Graduates who have repeatedly rehearsed core procedures, communication strategies, and triage decision-making in realistic settings are safer and more effective from their first days in practice. This benefits



Professor Patrick Pollock is a globally recognised equine surgeon and educator. He previously led major veterinary hospitals at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow and became the world's first professor of remote and rural veterinary medicine.

employers, clients, and animals alike, while improving early-career retention. The Mountbellew farm and herd health hub will focus on preventive medicine, fertility, nutrition, data-informed herd management, and farm biosecurity, supporting the sustainability of large-animal practice. In parallel, the Letterkenny referral service will enhance access to advanced diagnostics and continuity of care west of the Shannon. A strong emphasis on antimicrobial stewardship, surveillance literacy, and risk communication equips graduates to contribute meaningfully to public health and food security agendas. At the same time, embedding wellbeing, teamwork and reflective practice into assessment fosters professional habits that protect against burnout and strengthen workplace culture.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Success will be judged not only by accreditation milestones, but by impact. As our graduates progress through the programme we will move towards full accreditation aligned with VCI, the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) and Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) standards, supported by robust quality assurance and continuous improvement processes. Graduates will demonstrably meet 'day one competences' and EPA thresholds, with validation from employers and external examiners. Outside of the university, regionally, and in the profession, we expect to see improved access

to referral care, stronger local EMS and CPD ecosystems, and enhanced retention in early career practice. Ultimately, public trust will be reflected in veterinarians who communicate clearly, act ethically, and understand their role within the wider social contract.

A PARTNERSHIP MODEL

With reasonable assurance now in place, ATU veterinary is formally part of Ireland's veterinary education system. The national providers of veterinary education cannot address workforce sustainability, rural capacity or One Health challenges alone. We are committed to working collaboratively with existing providers, including University College Dublin (UCD) and South East Technological University (SETU), and we need the heads, hands, and hearts of the profession to support our mission. Practices can support the programme by hosting EMS students and nominating mentors, supported by ATU staff and feedback tools. Colleagues may wish to contribute as guest teachers, skills demonstrators, OSCE or DOPS examiners.

There are opportunities to co-create regionally relevant CPD, participate in a Rural Practice Summit addressing out-of-hours provision and graduate onboarding, and collaborate on audit projects feeding directly into teaching and professional development. Support for simulation, equipment, scholarships or hardship funds, as well as outreach and community engagement, will further strengthen the programme's reach and relevance.

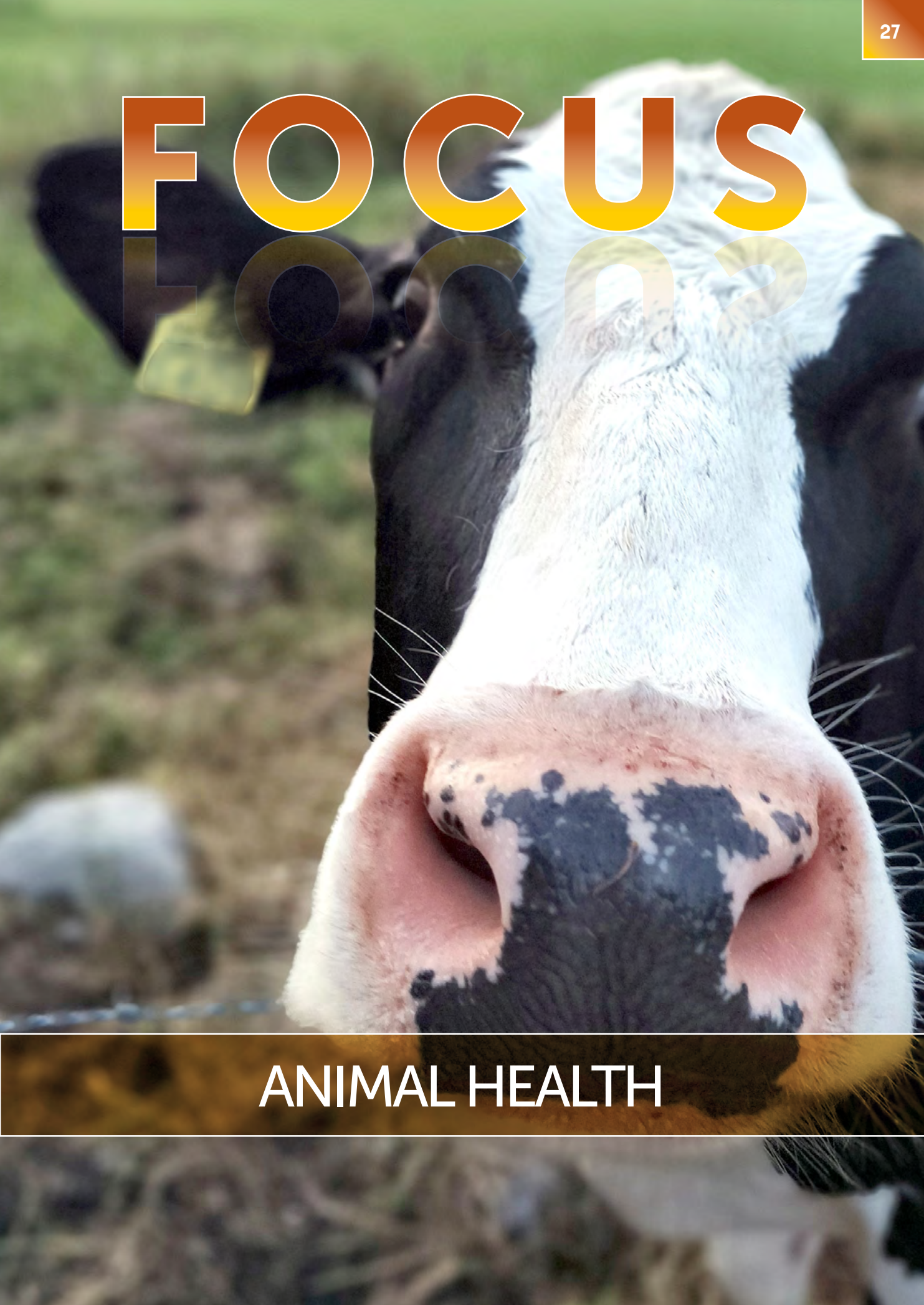
In return, ATU veterinary commits to keeping teaching practical and relevant, streamlining administrative processes for placements, sharing CPD and teaching resources, providing access to a developing telehealth network, publicly recognising partner practices and reporting transparently on outcomes.

This is a profession-first endeavour. Our success will not be measured simply by the number of graduates produced, but by the difference they make, for animals, farmers, clients, colleagues and communities. Ní neart go cur le chéile – we are stronger together

CALL TO ACTION

If you can host students, examine OSCEs, deliver a skills day, co-author CPD, sponsor equipment or share your expertise, we would welcome your involvement. Please contact ATU veterinary by email: veterinary@atu.ie

FOCUS

A close-up photograph of a cow's face, focusing on its nose and the white blaze running down its forehead. The cow has black and white patches. A yellow tag is visible on its ear. The background is a blurred green field.

ANIMAL HEALTH



The bulls on John Pringle's farm are finished under 16 months of age.
Photo: Bernie Commins.

A HEALTHY SUCKLER SYSTEM IN CO. WICKLOW

TEAGASC ADVISOR, PETER LAWRENCE, SPEAKS TO MATT O'KEEFFE ABOUT THE ANIMAL-HEALTH AND FARM-MANAGEMENT MEASURES IMPLEMENTED AT SUNNYHILL FARM, CO. WICKLOW, RUN BY THE PRINGLE FAMILY, CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST PROFITABLE SUCKLER SYSTEMS IN THE COUNTRY, ACCORDING TO TEAGASC

John Pringle, his wife Linda, and their children Lucy, William, and Scott run their 58 hectare (ha), single block, mixed farm in Kilacloran, near Aughrim. The layout of the farm is long and narrow and rises from approximately 330ft to 640ft above sea level at the highest point. The block comprises: 52.8ha of permanent grassland; 3.2ha of low input grassland; and 2ha of swedes. John runs a suckler calf-to-beef system consisting of 50 spring-calving suckler cows. The males are finished as under-16-months bull beef, while the heifers, not retained for breeding, are finished at around 21 months. Simmental is the dominant breed on his farm with most of the sucklers being bred by

Simmental sires. John keeps two stock bulls. One is a high replacement index Simmental bull with good carcass traits that breeds replacements and, in recent years, John has added an easy-calving Shorthorn stock bull. He also has a mid-season ewe lambing flock of around 230. The farm is well paddocked with approximately 30 grazing divisions. Depending on grass growth and demand, John can also sub-divide some of the larger paddocks with temporary fencing if required. During the year there are three main grazing groups; two groups of cows and calves grazed with ewes and lambs, and one group of fattening heifers grazed with replacement hoggets.

A SUCCESSFUL SUCKLER FARM

The Pringles have participated in the Teagasc FutureBeef programme for three years, and theirs is an example of a great family farm, says Peter. "John's parents are still very active, with his father, Billy, there to give a hand with the day-to-day jobs. So, it's a real family work unit and a traditional mixed farm. In terms of stocking, it's almost 50:50 with sheep and sucklers. There's a mid-season lambing enterprise with 230 ewes. John keeps about 60 ewe lambs as replacements and calves down 50 spring-calving sucklers from late February, finishing calving in mid-April. He has put a huge emphasis on suckler cow breeding and invested a lot of time and



JOHN AND HIS FAMILY PUT A HUGE EMPHASIS ON MITIGATING PROBLEMS WITH A PREVENTION-RATHER-THAN-CURE POLICY

start with. It's about getting the weaning rates and weights right. It's about getting as much weight on the calf from grass and milk as possible, so John has a good head start when the calf is weaned. After that, it's just keeping that weanling on target."

Peter says that one of John's milestones – as well as his biggest targets – is achieving the 500kg live weight on the bull calves. He continues: "Then it goes on to an ad-lib-type feeding system for the final push to get them up to around 720kg live weight for a kill out of 400kg carcass weight. John can get a lot of live weight from good quality silage. He has adopted some red clover swards and makes high-quality bales for the bulls. Also, if he has a surplus of leafy, highly digestible grass paddocks, especially in the first half of the year, they are earmarked for the bulls because it's really good value feed."

HIGH OUTPUT EWE FLOCK

Attention to detail doesn't stop with the cattle herd. The Pringles carry that across to their sheep flock too, Peter says: "John has been aiming for an ewe that has been scanned with 1.8 lambs joined to the ram. Again, genetics plays as big a part as flock management. Over the years Belclare genetics have been used. Some Texel and Charolais genetics have also been used and recently Vendeen rams are being put to the hoggets and ewe lambs for easy lambing."

CONCLUSION

Peter sums up the Pringle farming policy: "There is no perfect suckler cow. But John's approach is to breed a suckler cow that produces a weaned calf every year. That's his main ambition and target. The Simmental breed works for him. He has a liking for the breed and there's good beef merit traits with the breed in fairness, and milk as well. The whole thing for John is that there's plenty of milk for the calf and that's working for him. He's getting good growth rates in his bulls and heifers."



Teagasc advisor, Peter Lawrence (right) with farmer, John Pringle (left) pictured at a recent walk on John's farm. Photo: Bernie Commins.

money in improving genetics. That's the foundation of any successful suckler farm. The template is that the replacement heifers coming into the herd every year are better than the previous generation. John breeds his own replacements and puts a huge emphasis on maternal traits in his replacement stock."

DISEASE PREVENTION

For many years the Pringles have operated a closed-herd policy for disease prevention and biosecurity, Peter explains: "In Wicklow, TB is always an issue and never too far around the corner, so there is a great awareness around keeping it out of the herd. The fact that all cattle are finished on the farm, works well into this closed-herd policy. The bulls finish under 16 months of age within the 400kg carcass weight spec, as well as ticking all the boxes for conformation and fat scores for targeted market outlets." The Teagasc advisor further outlines the precautionary approach to herd health and animal welfare taken on the Pringle farm: "Firstly, in relation to herd health, John and his family put a huge emphasis on mitigating problems with a prevention-rather-than-cure policy. This is particularly the case in relation to minimising antimicrobial resistance, both with antibiotic use and their practices around worming.

Vaccines are used for the prevention and reduction of pneumonia as well as scour in calves." Peter says that John was very vocal on the risk posed by bluetongue disease, advocating strongly in favour of vaccination for all susceptible animals on the farm. "You could describe John as an early adaptor," says Peter.

PUTTING TECHNOLOGY TO WORK

Describing the Pringles' adoption of breeding technologies, Peter says: "In terms of synchronisation, John has put a huge emphasis, as I mentioned, on breeding good sucker cows and having good females coming into the herd as replacements. Over the last couple of years John has worked with synchronising to facilitate AI and bring in new genetics and high-reliability bulls with good milk and fertility traits. He's investing in the future of the herd the whole time."

FINISHING EFFICIENTLY

Commenting on the performance efficiencies on the Pringle farm when it comes to finishing the beef stock, Peter says: "The whole thing with John's bull beef system is hitting the targets all the way through. I go back again to his suckler-cow breeding. That's working for him; it's all about getting the right calf to

ON THE Y-FRONTLINE: AN INNOVATIVE SOIL- HEALTH INDICATOR

BERNIE COMMINS LOOKS AT THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY SOIL AND ITS ROLE IN OVERALL ANIMAL AND FARM HEALTH, AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF A RECENT FARM WALK IN THE GARDEN COUNTY, ON THE FARM OF JOHN PRINGLE

Underpants – some a little worse for wear – hung in a corner of John Pringle's field in Co. Wicklow. It was a beautiful evening, and there was great drying out, but that had nothing to do with the array of underwear blowing in the summer breeze and, anyway, they were all filthy.

These undergarments served, instead, as an excellent visual representation of the importance of healthy soil. More on the specifics of the underpants, shortly. The link between soil health and animal health may seem tenuous, but healthy soil is the foundation – literally – of the grass-based system upon which which farmers pride themselves in Ireland. The FAO puts it like this: "Soils underpin the pastures and crops that feed livestock, directly impacting animal health. Livestock raised on contaminated soils are directly exposed to these contaminants through direct ingestion of contaminated soil or contaminated pasture and water. Poor land management can bring humans and wildlife into closer contact, increasing the risk of zoonotic diseases, which are diseases that jump from animals to humans, like brucellosis or anthrax."

Closer to home, Teagasc says: "Soil supports plant growth and sustains life by providing nutrients, water, a structure, and a habitat for organisms. Good soil health is amongst the greatest legacies we can give to society, both now and into the future. Soils are at the heart of our food systems and are essential for environmental and planetary

health. They have a direct impact on farm productivity, input costs, long-term resilience, and the well-being of both local and global communities that depend on them." Now, back to the underpants.

GROUNDTRUTH PROJECT

The underwear on display on the Pringle farm was there as part of a research project led by Teagasc and the VistaMilk Research Ireland Centre, called GroundTruth. Part of this involves the 'underpants degradation test', which offers a powerful indicator of soil biological activity. The test involves burying underpants that are 100 per cent cotton in different soil types and examining their decomposition after several weeks. The more degraded the underpants, the more 'biologically vibrant' the soil is, according to Teagasc. The more intact the underpants are the less biological activity in the soil, potentially pointing to issues like compaction, poor organic matter, or disrupted soil ecosystems.

THE LIFE BENEATH OUR FEET

Karla Burke, Teagasc researcher at Johnstown Castle, was present at the Pringle farm walk to share, and explain the background to, the fine display of underpants. Karla has been researching soil microbiology – bacteria and fungi – for the last three years, and has been soil-researching John's farm for two years. But, first, she outlined the significance of 'the life beneath our feet': "Soil is core to

everything we do on the farm, every decision you make on the farm is affecting your soil. If there are no bacteria and fungi – the life beneath our feet – in your soil, carrying out key ecosystem functions, then there is no nutrient cycling going on. You can apply as much nitrogen and phosphorous as you want but if you don't have a healthy soil ecosystem, you are at nothing."

As mentioned, Karla has in-depth knowledge of the soil on John's farm and he is 'doing it all right', she said. "His soil biology is fantastic considering he is on a very dry farm. John keeps the soil nice and loose and that is huge for the bacteria, fungi, and earthworms too."

SOIL TYPE ON JOHN'S FARM

The soil type is comprised of a shallow layer of topsoil over shale and, on the highest part of the farm, a vein of rock is located just under the surface. Overall, it is a dry farm as the soils are free draining which allows John to get stock out to grass in spring relatively early.

In relation to pH, 66 per cent of John's farm has an optimum pH, and the rest is all above a pH of 5.5. John applied two tonnes of lime per acre to all the land with a pH < 6.2 in the spring. Having the correct pH increases grass production annually, releases up to 80kg N/ha/year, unlocks soil phosphorus and potassium, and increases the response to freshly applied N, P and K.



One of John's bullocks, which he finishes at 16 months'. Photo: Bernie Commins.

Classifying a soil as 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' is not easy to do, explained Karla: "We base it on 'indicators' and this is part of the GroundTruth project. So, for example, an earthworm count is a good biological indicator. A lot of earthworms means there are a lot of bacteria and fungi and that means that your soil is cycling so well. The visual evaluation of soil structure, or VESS, testing is also a very good indicator." Speaking at the Pringle farm, Mark Plunkett, a soil specialist with Teagasc also spoke about the importance of soil as a major resource to a farm: "In the world we are living in, soil health is going to become more and more important, especially with the way fertiliser prices are going. Focussing on soil chemistry and pH, soil structure, and the biological health of the soil are all key. These are the three legs of the stool," he said. "All three things need to be right – which they are here on John's farm."

UNDERPANTS DEGRADATION TEST

Acknowledging the 'showstopper' of dirty underpants on display at the Pringle farm walk, Karla explained: "Last year, as part of the GroundTruth project, we had farmers, gardeners, and schools, burying 100 per cent cotton underpants and leaving them underground for about two months. And that resulted in a range of lovely looking underwear," she joked. "The idea was to look at different management effects on biological activity, so the more degraded that the underwear was, the better and more positive the bacterial and fungal activity were."

SOME RESULTS

- ▶ One pair of underpants were buried in a garden compost heap in Co. Kilkenny: "This compost is full of organic matter, and the underpants were eaten down to the elastic," said Karla.
- ▶ In contrast, underpants that were buried in compacted grassland in Co. Wexford were not very degraded. Karla commented: "This really shows the effect of compaction on soil microbiology. The bacteria and fungi weren't able to break it down and cycle it back. The biology suffers from the compaction."
- ▶ Another pair were buried in an organic farm with only organic manure spread on the ground for a 10-year-period. And the result? Nothing but the elastic left!

Q Fever

Do you recognise these signs?

Weak newborns Abortion
Infertility
 Retained placenta Stillbirths
 Metritis Premature calving



A new UCD study of 2,687 Irish dairy herds found that 62% were exposed to Q fever¹



DID YOU KNOW?

- Q Fever causes reproduction and fertility issues to cattle²
- It is caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii*
- Animals shed bacteria at calving in vaginal mucous, also in milk and faeces
- Infection is caused through inhalation of the bacteria
- It is a zoonosis, risking the health of those working with livestock
- *Coxiella b.* is persistent, surviving up to 5 months in soil³
- *Coxiella b.* can be carried on the wind^{4,5,6}



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

References: 1. Corridan K., Wall P., McGrath G. et al. Q fever in the Irish dairy herd. Ir Vet J (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13620-026-00343-5>. 2. López-Gatius F., Almería S., García-Ispuerto I. (2012) Serological screening for *Coxiella burnetii* infection and related reproductive performance in high producing cows. Research in Veterinary Science Aug. 93 (1) 67-73. 3. Welsh et al., 1959. Q fever studies.XXI. The recovery of *Coxiella burnetii* from the soil and surface water of premises harboring infected sheep. Am. J. Hyg. 70: 14-20. 4. Hawker JI. et al. 1998. A large outbreak of Q fever in the West Midlands: windborne spread into a metropolitan area. Commun Dis Public Health. 1998; 1:180-7. 5. Nusinovic S. et al. 2015. Q Fever infection in dairy cattle herds: increased risk with high wind speed and low precipitation. Epidemiology & Infection 143:15 (2015): 3316-3326. 6. Clark et al. 2018. Airborne geographical dispersal of Q fever from livestock holdings to human communities: a systematic review and critical appraisal of evidence.

This information was provided by Ceva Animal Health (Ireland) Ltd, makers of Coxevac® COXEVAC® suspension for injection for cattle, sheep and goats contains inactivated *Coxiella burnetii*, strain Nine Mile z72 QF Unit/ml. *Q-fever Unit: relative potency of phase I antigen measured by ELISA in comparison with a reference item. LEGAL CATEGORY: IE For further information, please refer to the product SPC, data sheet or pack insert. Use medicines responsibly.

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COX38ADIE



Around 200 people attended the recent walk on John Pringle's farm. Photo: Bernie Commins.

DIY SOIL TESTING

If you want to test your own soil, there are a lot of resources and ideas on the GroundTruth website. In addition to burying underpants, you can try an earthworm count, a visual evaluation of soil structure (VESS), or a flower insect timed count all of which are described on the website.

ANIMAL HEALTH

John provided some animal-health-management updates for 2026:

Scour

- ▶ John had no calf scour issues this year and believes that vaccinating with Rotavec Corona played a big part in this. He uses plenty of straw bedding and cows had plenty of good quality colostrum. He feeds 0.5kg soya/head/day alongside



Photo: Bernie Commins.

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silage for three weeks pre-calving. But the vaccine is worthwhile, he says, particularly in spring if stock must remain housed for longer than planned.

Cryptosporidium

- ▶ John opted against a cryptosporidium vaccine but prioritised a bluetongue vaccine this year. A combination of minerals, soya, plenty of straw, and washing and disinfecting the shed before calving does the trick for cryptosporidium.

Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR)

- ▶ Cows are vaccinated for scour and IBR one month pre-calving.
- ▶ Pneumonia
Calves are vaccinated with Bovipast for pneumonia in the autumn. They are also done for IBR and are wormed pre-housing around the same time.

Boluses

- ▶ Mineral testing showed deficiencies in selenium, iodine, copper, so all cows and heifers receive two mineral boluses pre-breeding.

Bluetongue vaccine

- ▶ Given the location of the Pringle farm on the east coast, John felt it was important to act early on vaccinating for bluetongue. John has spent many years breeding the type of cow he wants in the herd, and he said he was not willing to risk potential fertility losses if the disease became an issue. The timing of vaccine availability created some extra work, with cattle and sheep in separate groups requiring two doses, but protecting fertility is worth the effort, he says.

PRIORITISE ANIMAL HEALTH NOW FOR FUTURE GAINS

DR MJ DORAN, INTOUCH FEEDING SPECIALIST SOUTHEAST, ALLTECH IRELAND, DISCUSSES THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIORITISING ANIMAL NUTRITION AND HEALTH WITH AN EMPHASIS ON PREVENTING SUMMER SCOUR SYNDROME IN CALVES, AND LAMENESS IN THE ADULT HERD

So far, 2026 will go down as one of the most challenging years in recent times.

Inclement weather conditions in the first three months compounded by decreasing farmgate beef and milk prices have put considerable financial strain on Irish and European farmers. During times of financial challenge, farmers will often question if investing in animal nutrition and health is worth it in a bid to cut costs and improve profit margins.

CALVES

Spring-born dairy and dairy-beef calves have been weaned and introduced to grazing, while suckler-bred calves will be not-so reliant on grass as a nutrient source just yet. Success of a farm's calf-rearing system will depend on two things: the pre-weaning stage; and weaning/post-weaning stage. It is important to note that these stages are interlinked. Ill thrift and regular disease outbreaks in a spring-born calf now can often be linked back to failings of the pre-weaning stage. Pre-weaning targets include:

- ▶ High-quality colostrum intake (>22 per cent on Brix, offering 4L for 40kg calf at first feed);
- ▶ Access to clean water, coarse ration, and effective fibre-like straw; and
- ▶ Optimal housing environment and immune system development through appropriate milk feeding rates and timely vaccinations and doses, etc.

Hitting these targets should help to achieve daily growth rates in excess of 0.8kg in calves' first grazing season. Where these targets are not met and disease outbreaks such as scour and pneumonia occur, this leaves calves more vulnerable to disease outbreaks in the post-weaning period.

SUMMER SCOUR SYNDROME

Summer scour syndrome (SSS) is an increasingly prevalent disease that is commonly found in weaned calves that are reliant on grazed grass as their primary nutrient source. Anecdotal evidence suggests that inadequate rumen development is to blame for the condition, which, in turn, can be linked back to the pre-weaning stage. The latest research on SSS suggests that disease cause is multifactorial. It is a disease that is exacerbated when calves ingest lush, high-protein pasture with a low fibre content. Abruptly changing from a coarse ration to a pelleted feed can also aid disease onset as calves will achieve higher intakes of pelleted feed and gorge themselves. SSS symptoms include:

- ▶ Weight loss;
- ▶ Diarrhoea;
- ▶ Mouth ulcers;
- ▶ Poor coat condition;
- ▶ Excessive drooling;
- ▶ High blood ammonia concentration (ammonia poisoning); and
- ▶ Mortality.

High blood ammonia concentration occurs when pasture rich in crude protein is consumed over a prolonged period. Consequently, SSS can occur. Figure 1 illustrates blood ammonia concentrations in calves in three case farms (CF1, CF2, and CF3) where SSS symptoms were observed. Blood samples from non-case farms (NCF1 and NCF2) were taken and blood ammonia concentration was measured. Blood ammonia concentration measured above the normal range in case farms and were five to 10 times higher than in non-case farms.

When diagnosing SSS, group faecal testing

should be conducted through a vet to rule out possible coccidiosis and stomach worm infections. Thiomolybdate toxicity should also be considered. Once SSS is diagnosed by a vet, remedial actions such as removing the group from pasture and introducing a physical fibre source like hay or straw will reduce blood ammonia concentration and associated symptoms. Other practices that aid in preventing SSS include:

- ▶ Providing a physical fibre source like hay, straw or haylage to calves whilst grazing;
- ▶ Only grazing old pastures;
- ▶ Strip grazing to ensure that calves are regularly eating the plant to 4cm. This ensures that calves are regularly consuming the stem component of the plant;
- ▶ Offering nutritionally improved straw. This is straw treated with sodium hydroxide and processed into pellets. The sodium

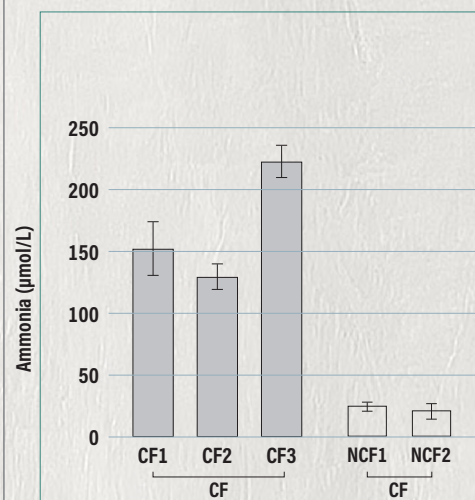


Figure 1: Mean blood ammonia concentrations on case farms (CF) and non-case farms (NCF).

Source: Male Here et al. 2024.

C	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
22	66	66	67	68	69	69	70	71	72
24	68	69	70	70	71	72	73	74	75
26	70	71	72	73	74	75	77	78	79
28	72	73	74	76	77	78	80	81	82
30	74	75	77	78	80	81	83	84	86
32	76	77	79	81	83	84	86	88	90
34	78	80	82	84	85	87	89	91	93
36	80	82	84	86	88	90	93	95	97
38	82	84	86	89	91	93	96	98	100
40	84	86	89	91	94	96	99	101	104
No heat stress Moderate heat stress Severe heat Dead Cows									

Figure 2: Temperature humidity index.

Source: National Animal Disease Information Service.

hydroxide benefits rumen health. This can be mixed into the pelleted/coarse ration; and

- Using a live yeast (like Yea Sacc) in the pelleted ration.

COWS

Spring calving herds will now be in mid-lactation or approaching 150 days in milk. Cows typically reach peak milk production after 60 days. The length of the calving spread will be a factor in how long a herd can maintain peak milk production before a decline is observed. Other factors include dry matter intake quantity and quality (function of grass quality and quantity allocated, and concentrate fed) and health status. Common health issues affecting adult grazing dairy cows over the summer are:

- Heat stress; and
- Lameness.

With warmer, drier summers forecast for years to come, livestock heat stress will become a more prominent issue on farms. It is a condition that occurs when cattle absorb or generate more heat than they can release. Bovine heat stress typically occurs when the temperature humidity index exceeds 70 (see figure 2). It is important to note that temperature humidity index is a function of ambient temperature and humidity. Beef cattle and dairy cows are most at risk as they produce a lot of metabolic heat. Symptoms of heat-stressed cattle include:

- Seeking shade;
- Minimising movement;
- Drinking more water;
- Reducing feed intake (>25.5°C);
- Panting;

- Lower immune function; and
 - Changes in rumen health.
- Due to the changes in rumen health, heat stress can also trigger acidosis and lameness. Milk yield losses can be as much as 10-25 per cent along with reduced milk components and poorer reproductive performance. In the context of beef cattle, reduced dry matter intake can result in decreased average daily gain and feed efficiency. For more on heat stress turn to page 36.

Lameness normally occurs when there is an issue affecting the hoof, causing the animal discomfort and possibly infection. It can be caused by environment (wet weather, poorly maintained roadways and collecting yards, long walking distances, etc.), nutritional imbalances, and acidosis. The main types of lameness observed in cows are white line disease, sole ulcers, and digital dermatitis. Foul (footrot) are also common. Herds that have a 15 per cent, or more incidence rate of lameness per year are considered to

have a herd lameness problem that requires further systemic investigation. Recent data published by Animal Health Ireland (figure 3) details the costs associated with lameness. Most lameness cases occur eight to 10 weeks post calving and as mentioned, nutrition can play an important role. Nutrition is particularly responsible for hoof horn strength and horn wall keratinisation. Keratinisation is a process that builds a hardened, waterproof outer layer on the hoof over time. Zinc is an important element in the hoof hardening process and inadequate dietary zinc levels can decrease this process. Zinc uptake in older cows is lower compared with heifers so using a highly bioavailable organic form of zinc like Bioplex Zinc is essential. Figure 4 details lameness scores in control and Bioplex Zinc treated groups 30 days after dietary introduction. Bioplex Zinc-treated cows had a 24 per cent reduction in lameness score compared to the same group before they were fed Bioplex Zinc.

Type of Lameness	Digital Dermatitis	White Line Disease	Sole Ulcer	Total Cost
Low Prevalence (%)	5	5	5	
Total cost of a single case	201.14	226.67	536.52	
Low Prevalence Cost for 100 Cow Herd	€1,005.70	€1,133.35	€2,682.60	€4,821.65
Moderate Prevalence (%)	10	10	8	
Total cost of a single case	201.14	226.67	536.52	
Moderate Prevalence Cost for 100 Cow Herd	€2,011.40	€2,266.70	€4,292.16	€8,570.26
High Prevalence (%)	20	20	10	
Total cost of a single case	201.14	226.67	536.52	
High Prevalence Cost for 100 Cow Herd	€4,022.80	€4,533.40	€5,365.20	€14,191.40

Figure 3: Hoof lesion types and associated costs.

Source: Animal Health Ireland.

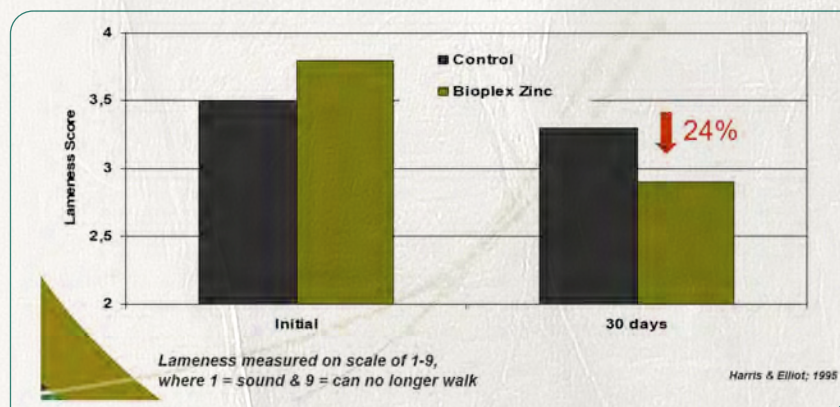


Figure 4: Impact of Bioplex Zinc on lameness score.



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FERTILITY CHALLENGES IN DAIRY HERDS ARE OFTEN LINKED TO ENERGY BALANCE, NUTRITION, AND GENETICS. HOWEVER, HEAT STRESS IS AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FACTOR AFFECTING THE ABILITY TO GET COWS BACK IN CALF, EXPLAINS EMMA NEVILLE, DAIRY ADVISER AT THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL ENTERPRISE

Emma Neville, CAFRE dairy adviser on the farm of Jonathan Gillespie discussing heat stress reduction measures.

HEAT STRESS – AN OVERLOOKED THREAT TO DAIRY-COW FERTILITY

While heat stress is often associated with extreme temperatures, even moderate increases in temperature and humidity can have a significant impact. High-yielding dairy cows, particularly those producing 35-50L per day, generate large amounts of metabolic heat and can begin to experience heat stress at temperatures as low as 18-20°C. This makes them vulnerable well before conditions feel uncomfortable for humans. Heat stress occurs when there is an imbalance between heat production and heat loss. As dairy cows have a limited ability to dissipate excess body heat, rising temperatures result in increased respiration rates, reduced feed intake, and elevated body temperature. These changes not only impact milk yield and quality but also have serious consequences for fertility.

IMPACT ON FERTILITY

Heat stress disrupts several key reproductive processes, leading to reduced conception rates during the summer months. Elevated body temperature interferes with normal reproductive function which in turn results in impaired follicle development, reduced oestrous behaviour, delayed ovulation, and oocyte quality decline. Collectively, these effects lead to poorer conception rates and increased embryonic loss with high-yielding cows particularly vulnerable due to their greater metabolic heat load. One thing to note is that the effects of heat stress are not short-lived as research has shown that it can take two to three cycles for quality to recover following a bout of stress. This helps explain why reduced fertility is often seen in the

autumn, even after temperatures are cooler. Although Northern Ireland – and the rest of the island – rarely experiences prolonged periods of very high temperatures, humidity levels are consistently high. Combined with a lack of adaptation to heat, this means cows can experience heat stress more frequently than you think. The Temperature-Humidity Index (THI) is a useful tool for assessing risk:

- ▶ THI < 68: No heat stress;
- ▶ THI 68-72: Mild stress begins;
- ▶ THI 80-90: Moderate to severe stress;
- ▶ THI > 90: Severe stress.

In practice, the threshold of 68 is easily exceeded on warm, humid days, particularly in poorly ventilated sheds.

REDUCING THE IMPACT

Early detection of heat stress is essential. By observing key behavioural changes farmers can make timely management adjustments. Indicators include reduced dry matter intake of around 10-30 per cent, increased water consumption, panting at a rate of 40-60 breaths per minute, reduced lying time, and cows clustering in shaded or cooler areas. Together, these changes reduce energy intake and increase stress levels, both of which have direct negative effects on fertility. Maintaining fertility during warmer periods therefore requires a proactive approach, with appropriate adjustments in both housed and grazing systems to minimise the impact of heat stress.

In fully housed herds, ventilation and airflow are critical with simple, cost-effective measures making a significant difference. Improving air movement within the shed,

installing fans to increase air velocity, avoiding overcrowding, and ensuring constant access to clean, fresh water all help to reduce heat stress, while monitoring the THI using shed sensors or online tools allows anticipation of high-risk periods.

Feeding strategies should also be adapted, with an emphasis on offering high-quality, easily digestible rations, feeding during cooler parts of the day, and maintaining adequate fibre to support rumen health. Farmer Jonathan Gillespie from Killylea in Co. Armagh has implemented a range of these measures within his fully housed system; a change of roofing to help maintain lower shed temperatures, close monitoring of cow behaviour enables feeding times and ventilation to be adjusted in response to changing conditions. Grazing systems are also impacted by heat stress especially if there is no shade present on high temperature high humidity days. Ensuring easy access to clean water at a high-pressure refill and positioning troughs to minimise walking distances and increase intakes will improve resilience to warm and humid conditions.

CONCLUSION

Heat stress has many negative impacts on dairy cows fertility from disrupting ovarian function and reduced oestrous expression to lower feed intakes overall decreasing conception rates and embryo survival. These physiological disruptions explain why conception rates fall during summer months even in temperate regions. However, by applying practical management strategies, farmers can minimise the impact and protect herd fertility into the breeding season.



IBR: KNOW THE STATUS AND TAKE ACTION

INFECTIOUS BOVINE RHINOTRACHEITIS (IBR) IS A HIGHLY INFECTIOUS RESPIRATORY DISEASE OF CATTLE THAT CAN HAVE SERIOUS HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY IMPLICATIONS. WITH ITS ERADICATION IN THIS COUNTRY STILL A WAY OFF, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO KNOW THE STATUS OF YOUR HERD SO YOU CAN MANAGE RISK, IMPROVE BIOSECURITY, AND PUT A VACCINATION PLAN IN PLACE

IBR is caused by the bovine herpesvirus type 1 (BoHV-1), which is one of eight herpesviruses known to infect cattle. In Ireland, approximately 75 per cent of herds have animals that have been exposed to IBR and while, infected animals can recover, they

WHAT'S THE STATUS?

According to AHI, once an animal becomes infected with IBR, the virus becomes latent and the animal remains an infected carrier for life, developing antibodies that are detectable in blood and milk samples. Therefore, the identification of antibody-positive animals provides a useful and reliable indicator of having been infected with IBR. Any animal with antibodies to the virus is considered to be a carrier and a potential intermittent excretor of the virus. The only exceptions are calves with maternally derived antibodies from their dam, and non-infected cattle vaccinated with non-marker vaccines. To find out the status of your dairy herd, a bulk tank milk test will inform you, while a snapshot blood test will help to determine the status of your beef herd.

become infected carriers for life. IBR remains latent in animals unless, or until, they come under some health or environmental stress. Then they can shed the virus at that stage, infecting other animals in the herd, or neighbouring herds, where transmission distances are close enough. The disease is present at roughly similar levels in both suckler and dairy herds in the country. A rough estimate is that the virus is transmissible, in favourable environmental circumstances, to other animals within five metres, so not only is there a close-proximity transmission route, but there are also air and windblown transmission properties to consider. Younger animals are particularly susceptible to serious outcomes from IBR infection, including death or long-term compromised health.

In milking cows, an IBR infection results in milk loss, while abortion is also a potential outcome in some cases, as well as stillbirth, or the birth of weak calves that die shortly after birth. Presuming the animal does recover from the infection, a return to normal health takes up to three weeks.

EXPORTS

An IBR eradication programme is hugely important to secure cattle and semen/embryo exports into the future as more countries



A ROUGH ESTIMATE IS THAT THE VIRUS IS TRANSMISSIBLE, IN FAVOURABLE ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO OTHER ANIMALS WITHIN FIVE METRES

2026 BEEF WELFARE SCHEME

Minister Martin Heydon, speaking in the Dáil recently, stated that the €28m 2026 Beef Welfare Scheme will open for applications in mid-August. This scheme currently allows farmers to avail of funding to investigate the IBR status of their herds.

adopt a policy of only accepting animals from IBR-free countries. Additionally, the increasing restrictions on antibiotic usage will impact our ability to treat the secondary health effects of IBR infection in the future. So the impacts are threefold, including: health and welfare; economic impact; and livestock-trade implications. In a recent issue of the *Veterinary Ireland*

Journal, Dr Maria Guelbenzu, Animal Health Ireland IBR programme manager, gave an overview of the first countries to achieve national IBR-free status: Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, all of which are now officially recognised as IBR-free. Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic, as well as several regions of Italy, have also achieved IBR-free status. "In total, 14 countries or regions currently benefit from additional EU guarantees for cattle trade through recognised IBR-free status or an approved programme," she wrote.

She continued: "Most of these countries/regions achieved freedom through programmes based on the identification and removal of seropositive animals without the use of vaccination. However, this approach is only feasible where the prevalence of BoHV-1 infection is already very low."

VACCINATION

During its recent National Biosecurity Week, AHI highlighted the 'critical role' vaccinations play in protecting herd fertility, calf health, and farm profitability, saying that it remains

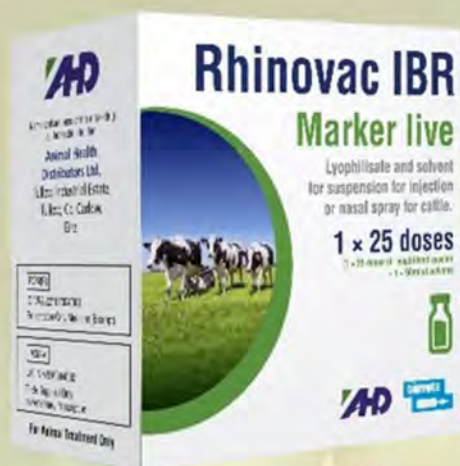
one of the most effective and cost-efficient tools available to farmers in preventing costly disease outbreaks that can undermine breeding performance and herd productivity. Effective vaccination programmes help reduce risks posed by IBR, and other diseases, and form a cornerstone of strong farm biosecurity, it said. On the topic of IBR and vaccination at the Teagasc National Beef Conference in 2023, Dr Guelbenzu said: "IBR vaccines are very good at preventing clinical signs and reducing the amount of virus shed following infection and reactivation, but they do not prevent viruses from causing a limited infection. A range of IBR vaccines containing either live or inactivated virus are licenced for use in Ireland. All of them are 'marker' gE-deleted vaccines. This means that, when used with an appropriate test, it is possible to distinguish between animals positive due to vaccination and animals positive due to infection with IBR. Vaccination makes it less likely that a latent carrier will reactivate and shed the virus, and less likely that a naïve animal will become ill and spread the virus after exposure. Vaccination of negative herds can also be

used as a way to reduce the impact of virus introduction, should this occur. Since animals remain infected for life, older animals in a herd are more likely to be latently infected. Therefore, if we want to prevent those animals being the source of infection for other, typically younger stock in the herd, we must include them in our vaccination plan."

TASAH UPDATE

Currently, according to AHI, while provision exists within the Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH) framework for an IBR consult, there is currently no active IBR programme in operation and, as a result, IBR-specific TASAH visits are not currently available to farmers. An AHI spokesperson said: "AHI continues to work with industry stakeholders on IBR control and eradication activities through the national IBR programme. Should an IBR TASAH become available in the future, details will be communicated to farmers and veterinary practitioners."

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BE AWARE OF SUMMER MASTITIS RISK

ONE-IN-FIVE DAIRY REPLACEMENT HEIFERS NEVER MAKE IT TO THE MILKING PARLOUR. THAT ALARMING STATISTIC, HIGHLIGHTED AT A RECENT VETERINARY CONFERENCE IN IRELAND, REVEALS THE PRECARIOUS JOURNEY FROM CALF TO CALVED-DOWN HEIFER OVER THE TWO-YEAR PROGRESSION FROM NEWBORN TO MILKER, WRITES **MATT O'KEEFFE**

Though recent statistics do not fully explore or reveal the individual causes of losses on dairy farms of replacement stock, summer mastitis cannot be ruled out as a significant contributor. While it shares part of its name with classic mastitis, as experienced in milking cows, or newly calved cows, the similarity ends there, as does the treatment of the disease.

There is usually no redemption in terms of saving the infected quarter and death is possible where detection is delayed. Prompt intervention with intramuscular and/or intravenous antibiotic treatment is essential to reduce morbidity and avoid mortality. In Ireland, the main risk period is from July to September, coinciding with the months when the major vectors of the disease are most active. Cases of summer mastitis outside of this primary period are not, however, unusual.

CAUSES AND RISKS

Top of the vector list are flies, followed by injury to the teat or an adjacent location, though one often follows the other, as flies are attracted to an infection or raw wound. The specific bacterium that infects the udder quarter is *Corynebacterium pyogenes*, with other bacteria contributing to the acceleration of the infection in the udder.

Calves and heifers are often consigned to outside blocks of land and sometimes subject to irregular stock monitoring. Early detection and treatment of summer mastitis are critical to achieving relatively positive health or mortality outcomes. The quarter is almost always lost, even with early intervention. With later detection, there is a high risk of death. Even where mortality is avoided, the long-term thrive and health of the animal are often compromised. Subsequent abortion is



TOP OF THE VECTOR LIST ARE FLIES, FOLLOWED BY INJURY TO THE TEAT OR AN ADJACENT LOCATION, THOUGH ONE OFTEN FOLLOWS THE OTHER

another common side-effect of the disease. The risk of spread to other animals in the cohort is also higher where early detection and segregation are not achieved.

SUSCEPTIBILITY

Suckler cows, where all quarters are not suckled regularly and emptied fully, are susceptible to summer mastitis. Chafing of

OUTLIERS

The general rule is that summer mastitis is a disease of dry cows and in-calf heifers. However, cases in maiden heifers, especially relatively mature ones, are not unknown and very occasionally, instances have been noted in male animals, bullocks and bulls.

the teat by suckling calves can also compromise the udder, attracting flies. One thing can lead to another. A cow with a sore teat may not allow the calf to suckle that quarter, in turn heightening the possibility of the disease entering the teat canal. Even the location of the animal can heighten the likelihood of summer mastitis infection. Wooded areas are more likely to harbour insects carrying the infective bacteria, as well as areas of scrubland, where scratches of the teats can attract unwanted fly attention.



EVEN WHERE MORTALITY IS AVOIDED, THE LONG-TERM THRIVE AND HEALTH OF THE ANIMAL ARE OFTEN COMPROMISED

PREVENTION

Prevention is absolutely the aim. There are various preventative measures, though none are 100 per cent effective, or dependable. Ultimately, the aim is to reduce risk as far as possible. Long- or short-acting chemical fly repellents have a role to play. The use of Stockholm tar has been a tried-and-tested alternative fly repellent. Mature cows during a dry period in summer, either fattening or in the run-up to calving, can be treated with long-acting antibiotic

tubes, with appropriate periods observed before either meat or milk can be consumed. Regular monitoring of animals with specific attention to udder health and noting possible indicators of summer mastitis, including a stiffening of limbs and movement, even before udder or teat swelling is visible, are important, especially during the critical high-risk months.

FINANCIAL LOSS

The financial losses associated with summer mastitis are significant. In addition to the primary value of an animal lost to the disease, there are the follow-on losses of production over an estimated lifespan of a cow intended to enter a dairy herd. In any case, even where the animal is retained, productivity losses from a lost quarter, in addition to compromised long-term health, add up to serious financial losses.

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Pathogen	Percentage
<i>Staph. aureus</i>	34.5%
<i>E. coli</i>	17.9%
<i>Non-aureus Staph</i>	6.7%
<i>Strep. uberis</i>	19.3%
<i>Strep. dysgalactiae</i>	3%
<i>Bacillus spp.</i>	5.8%
<i>Trueperella pyogenes</i>	1.1%
Others	14.8%

UBAC®

McCarthy, C. 2024. Bovine Mastitis. All-Island Animal Disease Surveillance Report, p27 - corrected to exclude contaminated and no-growth samples.

STARTVAC® Inactivated vaccine, Bovine mastitis, in injectable emulsion. **COMPOSITION PER DOSE (2 ML):** Inactivated *Escherichia coli* (J5) 50 RED60; Inactivated *Staphylococcus aureus* (CPB) SP 140 strain expressing SAAC** 50 RED80***. Adjuvant: * RED60: Rabbit effective dose in 60% of the animals (serology). **SAAC: Sline Associated Antigenic Complex. ***RED80: Rabbit effective dose in 80% of the animals (serology). **INDICATIONS:** Cows and Heifers: To prevent Mastitis. For herd immunisation of healthy cows and heifers, in dairy cattle herds with recurring mastitis problems, to reduce the incidence of sub-clinical mastitis and the incidence and the severity of the clinical signs of clinical mastitis caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*, coliforms and coagulase negative staphylococci. The full immunisation scheme induces immunity from approximately day 13 after the first injection until approximately day 78 after the third injection (equivalent to 130 days post-parturition). Further information available from the SPC or on www.hipra.com. For more information about side-effects, precautions, warnings and contra-indications please refer to the SPC, the packaging or product leaflet. **LEGAL CATEGORY:** POM - Veterinary medicinal product under veterinary prescription. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION HOLDER:** Laboratorios Hipra, S.A. la Selva, 135, 17170-AMER (Girona) SPAIN. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION NUMBER:** EU/2/08/092/003-6.

UBAC®, emulsion for injection for cattle. COMPOSITION PER DOSE: Lipoteichoic acid (LTA) from Biofilm Adhesion Component (BAC) of *Streptococcus uberis*, strain 5616z 1 RPU, Montanide ISA 907.1 mg, Monophosphoryl Lipid A (MPLA). **INDICATIONS:** For active immunisation of healthy cows and heifers to reduce the incidence of clinical intramammary infections caused by *Streptococcus uberis*, to reduce the somatic cell count in *Streptococcus uberis* positive quarter milk samples and to reduce milk production losses caused by *Streptococcus uberis* intramammary infections. Further information available from the SPC or on www.hipra.com. For more information about side-effects, precautions, warnings and contra-indications please refer to the SPC, the packaging or product leaflet. **LEGAL CATEGORY:** POM - Veterinary medicinal product under veterinary prescription. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION HOLDER:** LABORATORIOS HIPRA S.A. Avda. la Selva 135. 17170 Amer (Girona) Spain. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION NUMBER:** EU/2/18/227/001-004. Use Medicines Responsibly. Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone.

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MESSAGES

- July – time to organise quality grass!
- Get started on the autumn build up of grass.
- End the breeding season on July 12-15.
- Winter feed – assess availability versus requirement and act!
- Check replacement heifer progress.
- Spray off docks now for clover-sowing next year.
- Be aware of the July scheme deadlines.
- Know the rules associated with TB.



By Matt Ryan

JULY: TIME TO ORGANISE QUALITY GRASS

- ▶ Rapid growth periods over last few weeks have resulted in poor-condition grass heading into the period where we must extend the rotation.
- ▶ July 1 is midpoint in the grass-growing year, so it is appropriate to review grass yield on the pasture profit index (PPI), and all the reasons affecting that yield.
 - ▶ Look through reports on the following and compare with 2025 and 2024: annual tonnage, farm cover, farm summary, fertiliser usage, and the number of grazings.
- ▶ The following are the mid-season targets:
 - ▶ Average farm cover (AVC) must be greater than 600kg dry matter (DM) per hectare (ha) or 170kg DM/ha.
 - ▶ Or drystock farms should have 12-15 days' reserve ahead of them.
 - ▶ Rotation length: 21-25 days.
 - ▶ Pre-grazing cover (PGC) must be in the 1,200-1,450kg DM/ha range depending on stocking rate (SR).
- ▶ Based on PastureBase data over the last number of years, many dairy farmers are operating with covers far higher than these targets.
 - ▶ The consequences are:
 - ▶ Loss of milk yield and reduced percentage protein;
 - ▶ Reduced grass yield during the remainder of the year due to poorer tillering; and
 - ▶ Reduced grass quality.
 - ▶ Dairy farmers must be allocating 18-20kg DM/cow/day, depending on cow size.
- ▶ As we are only one or two rotations from growing autumn grass, it is essential that swards are free of stem and 'dead butt'.
- ▶ As soon as possible, let the target for AFC, PGC and rotation length revert to the targets above.
- ▶ You should take out 'strong' paddocks for baled silage if over the targets – use PastureBase to guide you.
- ▶ Of course, if you are under the targets, you must take steps to rectify that quickly:

- ▶ Reduce the demand by reducing the stocking rate (SR) and/or feeding extra meal (although this is very hard to justify), or silage;
- ▶ Graze silage fields if cover is less than 2,500kg DM/ha.
- ▶ These solutions may need to be applied if your farm is affected by some level of drought.
- ▶ As you do the grass measurements, assess each paddock for stem, dungpads, trash, clover content, varieties of grass in sward, weeds and graze-out.
- ▶ If stem, dungpads and post grazing heights (PGH) are too high, then you will have to:
 - ▶ Identify some paddocks for silage cutting on next rotation, or top some paddocks post grazing; but
 - ▶ Do not take all these remedial actions at the same time or it could result in slower growth rates.
- ▶ Identify paddocks/fields for reseeding as you walk through them and with the help of PastureBase.
 - ▶ Begin the reseeding process in late July to get at least one grazing before winter.
- ▶ Weed in pastures eat up fertiliser and reduce grass yield; they must be sprayed now. Docks, in particular, are very problematic in clover. They must be sprayed at least once this year in fields earmarked for clover seeding next year.
- ▶ The following are the nitrogen (protected urea) recommendations for July (two rotations) grass based on clover content:

Urea+S (kg N/ha)	Units/acre	Urea	(kg N/ha/year)
No clover	28	28	212**
5% clover	20	20	175
10% clover	15	10	150
15% clover	10	SW	130
20% clover	*SW	SW	105

* = Soiled water.
** = Chemical N fertiliser can be increased to 230kg N/ha/year in paddocks with no clover as long as the whole farm N does not exceed 212kg N/ha/year.

- ▶ Because of outside parcels of land being understocked, more N than specified here should be applied on the milking platform (MP); but stay within the overall farm nitrogen limit of 212kg N/ha.
- ▶ On sulphur deficient farms you will get a response of 10-50% more grass by spreading five to 10 units/acre of sulphur in July.
- ▶ Apply a compound with P and K so as to improve/maintain soil fertility, particularly in paddocks where grass was managed by taking surplus bales.
 - ▶ If you have no P allowance, apply K by way of 29:0:14 compound.
 - ▶ Soiled water must be used in paddocks where P and K are low, as well as on clover swards.
 - ▶ Now is a good time to apply lime, particularly, after silage cuts.

AUTUMN BUILD-UP OF GRASS

- ▶ This year, because of increased cost, it will be more important than ever to build grass so as to be able to extend grazing on your farm by 15-20 days:
 - ▶ It will be worth over €2/cow/day in extra profit.
- ▶ Start to build up autumn grass from July 20-26 either by:
 - ▶ Reducing stocking rate.
 - ▶ Because of the winterfeed situation, this must be a high priority. Start now by selling off poor yielder, high SCC cows and cows not in calf.
 - ▶ Increasing nitrogen.
 - ▶ Closing up for a third cut to graze on July 20-26 is the best option.
 - ▶ Stock cows on the grazing area at 3.2-3.6 cows/ha; apply two bags 0:7:30 and 50-60 units N per acre after the second cut.
 - ▶ If, with this plan, you find yourself tight with grazed grass, you can always go and graze some of this 'closed-up' area.
 - ▶ Slowing down rotation length to 26-30 days.
 - ▶ As first cuts were taken early, it is important to cut second cuts six weeks after the first cut. Yield will not improve and the quality, usually low, will deteriorate fast.
 - ▶ It may be necessary to feed one to two kilogrammes of extra meal to reduce daily grazing demand during this 'build-up' period.
- ▶ If you are using grazing ground for this purpose, give it the following attention:
 - ▶ Post grazing, top it very tightly in July.
 - ▶ Apply 40-50 units per acre and do not graze for five to six weeks, probably September 10-14.

TARGET: JULY 12-15 END TO BREEDING!

- ▶ May calvers have no part to play in profitable dairying!
 - ▶ The cut-off date for no May calvers is July 20 but target a cut-off

date of July 12-15.

- ▶ Don't stop bulling until mid-July, even if you think you have enough replacements. But you must have enough acres for them.
- ▶ However, if you are tight on the number of replacements because disease, mastitis or lameness issues, you should keep bulling cows with Jersey/Fr until late July.
- ▶ All cows now being bullied should get an AI Jersey bull (sexed), or very short gestation beef bull, such as Aberdeen Angus or Hereford.
- ▶ But remember, cows bulling late in the season indicate a fertility problem.
- ▶ There are two to three weeks left in the bulling season.
 - ▶ Make use of that time.
 - ▶ Use a short gestation bull.
- ▶ Stay focused on heat detection and you will save a lot of money.
 - ▶ Every cull cow will cost €1,000-€2,500, depending on her age and EBI.
 - ▶ Every 5% culling over the Moorepark optimum rate of 18% results in a cost of €50 for every cow in your herd.
- ▶ All farmers should scan all cows now (even though a bit late).
 - ▶ You will know cows that are not in-calf.
 - ▶ It will identify weak pregnancies.
 - ▶ Remedial action, based on veterinary advice, should be undertaken.
 - ▶ Use fresh semen from a bull with a calving interval of minus 6-10 days, or a Jersey, because the calves will 'pop' out and the cow will jump up immediately after calving and come bulling quicker.
 - ▶ Using a stock bull now is bad business as you don't know his gestation length and he may be infertile now after a busy season.

DO WINTER FEED BUDGET NOW!

- ▶ A long winter and light first cuts may leave some farmers very short of winter fodder.
- ▶ You must address this question for your farm now so that you can take remedial steps.
 - ▶ Do the sums on a dry matter basis.
- ▶ Next winter, each cow needs 11kg DM per day. Weanlings need 4.7kg DM per day and in-calf heifers/store animals need 8.5kg DM per day.
 - ▶ Discount for any meal feeding planned.
 - ▶ Also, decide on the length of your winter, adding on another two to three weeks, to be sure.
- ▶ Measure your pit(s) in feet and do the following calculation: Length x width x average height, then divide by 45 (45ft³ contains one tonne [t])

- ▶ If the quantity of silage in the pit is 300t (300,000kg), that equals 60,000kg DM ($300 \times 1,000 \times 0.20$), if the silage is 20% dry matter.
 - ▶ The first cuts will be 15-25% DM, while bales will be 35-45% DM this year.
 - ▶ You will now be able to make plans for making up the deficit.
 - ▶ Options available:
 - ▶ Sell off livestock, buy meal, straw, fodder beet/kale, rent ground for late second cut silage, rent silage pit and housing for the winter.
 - ▶ To see which option is the least expensive, cost all options out and use various combinations to make up the deficit.
 - ▶ Some farmers sell off cull cows in late July/August to allow more autumn grass, which will be used to extend the grazing season to late November.
 - ▶ It is still not too late to plan and take a late second cut – this will probably be the cheapest of all options.
 - ▶ The yield will be 5-6t/acre of fresh silage.
- DON'T NEGLECT REPLACEMENT HEIFERS.**
- ▶ Weigh both R1s and R2s now to establish their weights relative to targets for July 1?
 - ▶ Calves should be 27% of mature weight = 150kg (for 550kg herd).
 - ▶ In-calf heifers: 67% of mature weight = 370kg.
 - ▶ Therefore, give special management treatment to all animals below the target weight.
 - ▶ Research has shown that moderate calves on July 1 can make good weanlings on November 1 if grazing management is top drawer.
 - ▶ It is all about feeding high quality grass to calves and heifers.
 - ▶ If you have them on good grass, they will gain 0.8kg per day (100kg in 125 days).
 - ▶ Practice the leader-follower system.
 - ▶ Calves graze in front of the heifers or cows.
 - ▶ Calves will do really well with no adverse effect on the heifers.
 - ▶ Parasites will have no effect on the calves as they will be diluted, therefore, little or no dosing,
 - ▶ Or let the calves graze some of the cow paddocks.
 - ▶ Let them into covers of 900-1,100kg DM.
 - ▶ Let them graze out the area in three to four days and then move on to next area.
 - ▶ Some baling may have to be done on these paddocks next time round.
 - ▶ All farms have late 'weak' calves.
 - ▶ Let these graze in front of the main bunch of calves on the very best of grass or if that isn't possible, give them fresh grass in front of cows or heifers.
 - ▶ 1-2kg of meal could be justified but don't keep them near the house in a calf paddock to feed meals because parasites will prevent thrive.
 - ▶ You could adopt the 'buddy-buddy' system where two small calves are put in each cow paddock and are left there, even as cows come to the paddock. They will thrive really well and no meal or dosing is needed.
 - ▶ It is essential to give best quality grass and no meal rather than poor quality grass with meal.
 - ▶ Strong calves should not be fed meal.
 - ▶ The response is poor, requiring 8kg of meal to give 1kg weight gain.
 - ▶ To prevent stomach worms with minimum dosing, keep calves on aftergrass as long as possible.
 - ▶ Give a white or yellow dose in early July and move to aftergrass.
 - ▶ Under target weight R2s (they should all be in-calf now) should be grazed in front of main bunch or run with the calves so as to get best grass.
 - ▶ It is absolutely essential to get the weights as described above from the contract rearer.
 - ▶ You don't want any animals underweight or any excessively over target weights.
 - ▶ The use of excessive quantities of dosing in calves, as distinct from grazing management to control parasites, will result in young and old cows with low immunity and they will have to be dosed regularly as cows.



ICMSA

THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION

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SPRAY FOR WEEDS

- ▶ At a time when farmers need to grow as much grass as possible (16t+ DM/ha), it doesn't make sense to have weeds growing where grass should grow.
- ▶ With the need to promote more clover on our farms we need to embark on a serious attack on perennial weeds this year in fields into which we intend sowing clover next year.
- ▶ Weeds and docks are costing farmers serious money, probably €10-€25 per acre in lost grass production.
- ▶ Docks are a major economic cost to farmers because one dock (big one) every 35m² reduces grass growth by 1% per acre.
 - ▶ As a rough guide, every big dock in that area causes losses of €10- €15.
 - ▶ Decide on the spray to use; a decision mainly based on clover content of pasture.
 - ▶ Any serious economical-minded dairy farmer must protect clover if they have it.
 - ▶ Best results are achieved by spraying three to four weeks after cutting silage.
 - ▶ Grass growth is slow relative to the growth of the dock.
 - ▶ Grass ground cover is low resulting in lower loss of grass yield.
 - ▶ Spray in July or August when there is great heat in the ground.
 - ▶ Spray on warm, sultry days.
 - ▶ Give serious consideration to spot spraying where docks are not too plentiful.
- ▶ Where weed infestation is low, we should spot-spray to minimise cost. This will be more effective and will be a lot better environmentally.
- ▶ The best time to spray for ragwort is December-January with Forefront T.

TB TESTING & CATTLE MOVEMENT RULES

- ▶ With TB, a stressful and costly disease for some farmers, the DAFM has issued the following rules:
 1. **12-month TB test**
 - ▶ Cattle under 36 months:
 - ▶ Can be treated as normal.
 - ▶ Must be within a 12-month TB test.
 - ▶ Applies to all herds, both dairy and suckler.
 2. **Six-month TB test**
 - ▶ Suckler cows over 36-months:
 - ▶ Must be within a six-month TB test.
 - ▶ Individual/private test on animal must be completed within the last 30-days.
 - ▶ Required for breeding herds.
 3. **Only for controlled finishing units (CFUs)**
 - ▶ Cattle outside six-month but within 12-month test can be sold.
 4. **Dairy females over 36-months**
 - ▶ Require a 30-day pre-movement TB test when being

purchased by another dairy farmer.

FINALLY

- ▶ After the drought, and with the advent of rain grass will 'fly' but nitrogen and sulphur will be required seven to 10 days after rain comes to drive on growth so that you are in a position to extend the grazing rotation in August.
- ▶ At 2,000 milkings, liners should be changed.
- ▶ It should be possible for all farmers to organise a one-to-two-week holiday in August. If not, you have some serious questions to answer!
 - ▶ A 16:8 hour milking interval, allows you a respectable working day.
 - ▶ Milk 13 times per week – no effect on yield but gives you another afternoon off.
 - ▶ Take every second weekend off by using relief milkers – build up a reserve of young people for that task.
- ▶ Castrate all male calves.
- ▶ Deal with cow lameness by doing a locomotive test and taking lame/ish cows from main herd and after treatment put them in a paddock near the parlour.
- ▶ Empty all slurry tanks fully, now, preferably with trailed and shoe system to avoid soil compaction.
- ▶ Have you taken any action since last month's advice to do a financial budget? No? Well you can't say in November that you weren't warned!
- ▶ Dock growth is best controlled three weeks after cutting silage or topping paddocks – they are actively growing then

JULY: IMPORTANT DATES

- ▶ **Area Monitoring System (AMS):** Notifications relating to the AMS commenced on June 24 2026, for a minority of farmers. The first round of AMS notifications is for the potential presence of artificial surfaces, for example: buildings, farmyard extensions and farm roadways, in land parcel(s). Further rounds of AMS notifications will issue from July 2026 onwards.
- ▶ **Fodder brassica/fodder root crop:** Must be established using non-inversion techniques (ploughing is not permitted) on the designated field before July 31.
- ▶ **Late meadow bonus payment:** ACRES participants have the opportunity to apply for a late meadow bonus payment (of €50 per hectare) on meadows cut between July 1 and August 31.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Sometimes when you are unlucky you may be lucky, and sometimes when you are lucky you may be unlucky." My friend, Ned English's perspective on life!

THE NEW FARMALL M

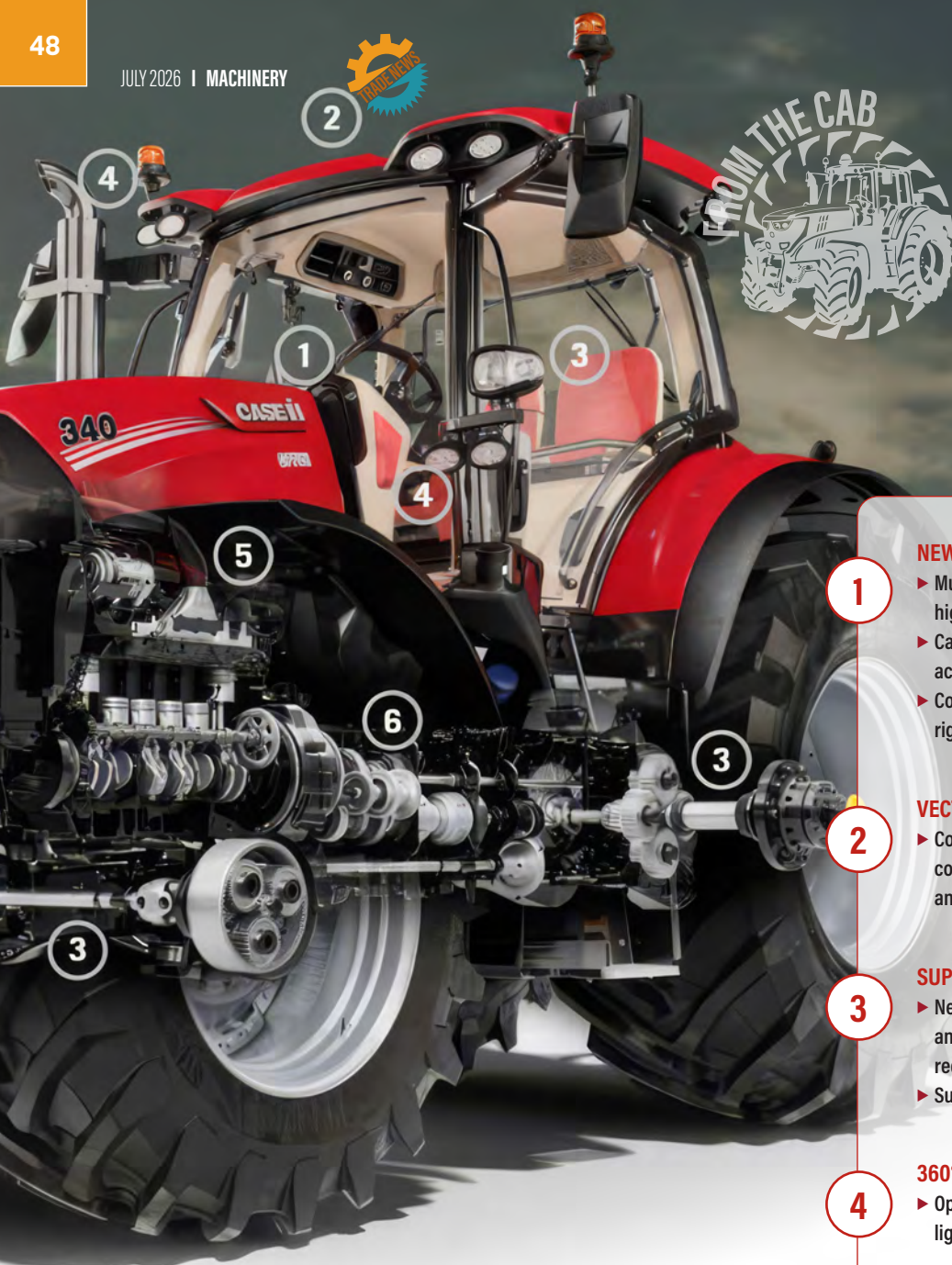


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- ▶ Case IH dial button encoder for quick access to the work and setting menus
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DISPLAY

The Pro 1200 monitor gives you an overview of all tractor functions. The large 12-inch display features an easily customisable multi-touch screen with superior HD visibility, day or night, and a familiar Android-based interface.



NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

2026 – PART TWO

Well readers, we are into part two of 2026 already.

Where has the first half of the year gone? First-cut silage is done and second-cut is well on the way. Crops in the field are looking healthy between the sun and the showers.

As the tillage farmers' thoughts now turn to harvest 2026, we wait with anticipation to see what the yields will be like, what demand there will be for straw, and what price grain will make. It will be very interesting to see what price it settles at.

There is calmness in the air as farmers and contractors get on with the business of farming inside the gates. It is a marked contrast from the troubles and protests outside the gates a few short months ago! The sources of those protests have not disappeared – conflict, supply issues, fuel prices, commodity prices – all these situations shake confidence when it comes to making purchasing decisions. Now, in saying that, tractor sales are up year on year, but are back 24 per cent in May 2026 compared to the same period in May 2025. Imported tractors are back slightly year on year, while telehandlers remain the same, year on year. The big-ticket items like self-propelled harvesters still remain strong. There were 41 registered in the first five months of 2026. Putting this into context, only 49 sold in total in 2024. Mowers, balers, grass kit, and tillage kit sales are remarkably good, according to reports from around the country. But there is still an element of caution being exercised when it comes to buying new machinery, for now, anyway.

As I said in last month's column I am back in the air once again, travelling over and back to Europe. Things are kicking off now in relation to the 2027 Tractor of the Year and first stop on this journey is Naples in Italy. I am preparing my travel itinerary as I pen this column. A big talking point, when the jury panel of 25 journalists meet, will be the state of agriculture in our respective countries. We will be swapping notes and comparing prices and, no doubt, there will be one common thread winding its way through all our conversations and that is, commodity prices and input costs (a definite theme this month). No matter where you farm on a European or worldwide platform – leaving out climate conditions – comparable problems arise.

When I get back, I will fill you in on my international findings on the state of farming in Europe.

Until next month, farm safely, farm wisely.



KRONE LAUNCHES REAR-MOUNTED MOWER WITH AUGER CONVEYOR

Krone has expanded its EasyCut series with the new EasyCut R 360 Collect; a rear-mounted mower with an auger conveyor. Depending on requirements, cut crops can either be placed directly on the swath or across the width. When operated on its own, the mower, without the conditioner, has a working width of 3.6m and when combined with a front-mounted mower it has a width of up to 6.5m. According to Krone, the EasyCut R 360 Collect is a solid option for farmers running their own machinery as well as contractors looking for output and flexibility.

The Collect system is based on the EasyCut R 360 but also adds a large 450mm auger conveyor. This feature gives you the option

to either lay the crop in a clean swath straight away or spread it wide to help speed up drying when the weather allows. The auger conveyor is operated under a closed, hydraulically adjustable hood that is controlled directly from the tractor cabin. This enables the driver to easily and conveniently switch between wide spreading and swathing, and ensure crops are optimally prepared for subsequent harvesting machines.

The partial widths can also be positioned particularly accurately using the auger conveyor. Using the '12-to-6' process, this ensures that mowing can be completed at 12m and crops can subsequently be consolidated efficiently to 6m using a double

rotor centre rotor rake. The Collect system thus enables optimum use of harvesting machines even if mowing is completed later and crop levels are low.

With a mower unit that has six cutting discs and two mower drums, the EasyCut R 360 Collect provides an accurate cutting profile and even crop flow even if volumes are high, according to Krone. Its DuoGrip centre-of-gravity suspension ensures weight is distributed evenly and adjusts to the ground perfectly. The impact damage protection system integrated in the headstock protects the machine reliably against damage caused by collisions.

There is a wide range of optional equipment to adapt the mower to different areas of application. The high-cut skids ensure that the cutting height can be raised to over 90 mm, which is particularly advantageous in dry and rocky regions. A hydraulically adjustable swath cloth always ensures that the swath is uniform even when mowing tapered areas or slopes.



NOTHING

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STEERING 25 YEARS OF AUTOMATED GUIDANCE

John Deere recently celebrated 25 years of automated guidance – a milestone that commenced in 2001 when it launched the first StarFire receiver and GreenStar display, introducing visual guidance to help operators steer more precisely and consistently.

The StarFire and GreenStar launch marked a turning point: for the first time, the in-cab display could show whether an operator should steer left or right, supporting parallel tracking and improving pass-to-pass precision.

In 2002, it launched AutoTrac, enabling GPS-assisted automatic steering that could keep machines on track independently, initially with 30cm accuracy. By 2004, John Deere introduced AutoTrac with RTK, pushing guidance accuracy to ± 2.5 cm. This made it possible for tractors and combines to follow the same tracks reliably over multiple seasons. This was an advantage for operations where repeatability matters, including row-crop production, hoeing, and soil-friendly field traffic strategies.

GUIDANCE INNOVATION CONTINUES

Automated guidance has continued to advance beyond steering and in 2020, John Deere launched AutoPath Rows, designed to record the actual driven tracks of each row unit and enable precise repetition. Most recently, since 2024, AutoPath Boundaries has enabled the automatic calculation and creation of optimised paths for the entire

field based on its boundaries, either from the in-cab display or via the John Deere Operation Center, including the headland.

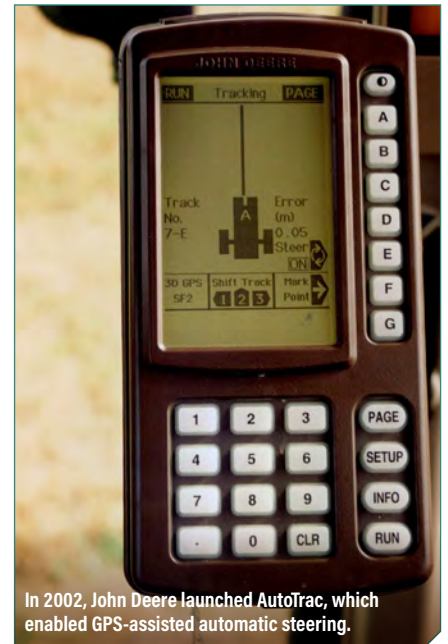
REAL-TIME DATA EXCHANGE

Guidance progress has been matched by equally dramatic changes in data recording and connectivity. In the early days, digital field documentation could be as literal as 'data in the pocket'. FieldDoc stored field work on a keycard that had to be read out manually in the office. Today, data transfer is designed to happen automatically. JDLink modems transmit information in real time to a smartphone, tablet or computer, enabling a more connected approach to decision-making and machine management.

FLEET-WIDE SYNCHRONISATION

With Data Sync, any recently added guidance line or boundary, product or equipment is automatically synchronised across the entire fleet and John Deere Operations Center, so critical information for field work execution is being always up to date and accessible to all Operators. As accurate documentation data is getting more foundational, John Deere introduced in 2022 the Work Planner tool where farm managers can easily store setup information online for upcoming field work and send it to the fleet wirelessly. Once the driver crosses the field boundary, the displays will automatically load all necessary information without operator interaction, and the machine is ready to go. JDLink technology

◀ **John Deere launched the Star Fire receiver in 2001 marking the start of its automated journey.**



In 2002, John Deere launched AutoTrac, which enabled GPS-assisted automatic steering.

connected machines as early as 2002, supporting telemetry, remote diagnostics, professional fleet management and efficient field work execution helping lay foundations for connected farming. Today, John Deere reports more than 1,000,000 machines digitally connected, describing it as one of the largest connected fleets in the world and a key element of data-driven agriculture.

HARDWARE EVOLUTION

The 25-year journey is also reflected in the evolution of key precision-ag hardware. From the original GreenStar display (2001), display generations progressed through Generation 2 (2005), Generation 3 (2011), Generation 4 (2014) and Generation 5 (2023). Receiver development has followed a similar path, from the original StarFire (2001) to StarFire iTC (2004), StarFire 300 (2008), StarFire 3000 (2010), StarFire 6000 (2016) and the latest StarFire 7500 (2024).

Peter Koch, production system marketing manager for precision technologies at John Deere commented: "Over the past 25 years, precision agriculture has moved from early visual guidance and manual data handling to integrated, automated workflows. From keycards to cloud connectivity, and from steering support to highly accurate guidance and automated path creation, the aim has remained the same: to make fieldwork simpler, more precise and more efficient."



FENDT - DREAM MACHINE FOR SPRAYING, SPREADING AND CUTTING

THIS MONTH, NOEL DUNNE VISITED PAUL CUSHEN WHO FARMS 120 ACRES OF MIXED TILLAGE, AND RUNS A CONTRACTING BUSINESS IN STRADBALLY, CO. LAOIS. PAUL INVESTED IN A FENDT 516 VARIO BACK IN 2022. COMING IN AT 160HP WITH A DEUTZ ENGINE, COMPLETE WITH ISOBUS AND VARIO TRANSMISSION, THE FENDT 516 VARIO OFFERED PAUL COMFORT, RELIABILITY, AND THE OPPORTUNITY - THROUGH SMART FARMING - FOR GREATER PRECISION AND DETAIL WHEN CARRYING OUT HIS CONTRACTING WORK. THE FENDT RUNS ALONGSIDE A 2022 JOHN DEERE 6R 125 C/W WITH LOADER, WHICH PAUL IMPORTED FROM THE UK. WHILE THE FENDT WORKS MAINLY ON SPRAYING, SPREADING AND HEDGE CUTTING, THE JOHN DEERE IS USED MOSTLY FOR PLOUGHING, LOADER WORK, AND TRAILER WORK



- ▲ Paul's decision to buy a Fendt 516 Vario was made very easy when his local dealers, Atkins in Birr, Co. Offaly, suggested he take it out on a full test and put it through its paces while doing the daily jobs. "It was the best tractor I ever drove," beams Paul. Paul says, with excellent service from Atkins and the fact that Fendt retains its value when it comes to trade, he was happy to do the deal.



- ▲ Paul operates a 4,000L Horsch Leeb sprayer, which he bought from Kelly's of Borris, complete with a 24m boom as part of his operation. "I looked at different sprayers but settled on the Horsch; its a mid-range sprayer and is ideal for the tight roads I travel on. It is also easy to connect to the Fendt's computer system with no need for extra screen or connections."



- ▲ Paul spreads fertiliser on more than 2,500 acres per year for local farmers. He operates a Viccon spreader on a bogie suspension system, which was originally built by Meredith Engineering just outside Stradbally, Co. Laois. He made some changes to the bogie system to strengthen it and it can now carry two tonnes on the road, and it operates smoothly in the field. Paul is pictured here with Johnny McNamara who farms around 190 acres in Co. Laois, and who is one of the farmers he spreads for.



- ▲ The panoramic view from the Fendt 516 Vario is a really appealing feature, Paul says, and he feels that the view from this cab is far superior to other cabs.



When Paul purchased the Fendt 516 Vario in 2022, he also purchased an extended warranty package, which, he said, gives him great peace of mind – even if he has yet to avail of it. "Apart from the routine checks, I haven't put a spanner to it," says Paul. As owner-driver of the Fendt, taking care of it is hugely important.



Paul wanted to keep the rear of the tractor, and machinery attached, as clean as possible. He reviewed some ready-made mud guards, but decided to tailor-make his own. "I wanted to keep the rear end and machinery behind it clean while also having easy access to the back end; making my own achieved that and saved money."

All functions on the control panel and display screen are easy accessible with clear vision to the right-hand side window. All equipment can be linked through one terminal so there is no need for additional screens (and associated clutter).



Tom Murphy
Professional Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland

ARE WE MISSING SOMETHING?

If time and money were the solution to safety on Irish farms, the sad statistics of fatalities and serious injuries would be zero. For over 35 years, through the Farm Action Committee and then the Farm Safety Partnership, I have worked closely with the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and other farming stakeholders.

Together, we have spearheaded many safety campaigns, introduced the *Farm Safety Code of Practice* and the *Code of Practice on Preventing Accidents to Children and Young Persons in Agriculture*. We have initiated many training courses (attended by over 50,000 farmers), distributed countless safety leaflets and videos, and staged safety demonstrations. We have had a presence at the National Ploughing Championships, the farm machinery shows, and other farming events, all at considerable cost.

SERIOUS

Code of Practice on Preventing Accidents to Children and Young Persons in Agriculture is considered to be a great success, and I was privileged to have spent many days together with HSA officers going through it line by line before it was signed off to ensure there was no ambiguity on the requirement to keep children safe. Since its introduction, the numbers of children killed and injured on our farms has reduced significantly. That said, the loss or injury of even one child is unacceptable. Not only has the

above involved a huge financial cost, but also incalculable hours of HSA staff and stakeholders' time, while minister after minister has made farm safety their top priority.

I could add much more to the above, but I think I have given an indication of how seriously safety on Irish farms is taken. While all this hard work has resulted in reducing child fatalities and serious injuries, sadly, we still have farm-safety problems in the farming community, and particularly among our older farmers. After all this time, I am now forced to ask, have we been missing something in our campaigns or our approach?

HARD TO GET INFORMATION

It has always been difficult to obtain information on which to base safety policies.

I particularly refer to information from hospital emergency departments on those attending with serious injuries caused on the farm. This information has been refused, I am told, because of data protection. In gathering this information, it would not be necessary to identify individuals, just their sex, age, the injuries sustained, and cause. There is a precedent where information was sought from hospitals in relation to accidents involving motorbikes. This eventually led to the mandatory wearing of crash helmets by both drivers and pillion passengers. Understandably, there is also a reluctance to carry out a deeper analysis with the families who have suffered loss or with those who have life-changing injuries. I believe we need specially trained personnel who, after a period of time, would approach families to discuss with them all the issues that may have contributed to the fatality or life-changing injury. It is my belief that such information would play a major part in developing highly targeted risk-based safety policies by identifying unique workplace hazards and other more personal factors. Understanding actual frontline conditions, would assist greatly in tailoring guidelines to prevent specific accidents.

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Denis Drennan
President, ICMSA

GOVERNMENT MUST PRIORITISE SPECIFIC POLICY ISSUES

The ICMSA met Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon, last month and had very useful discussions on the most pressing issues facing Irish farmers at this mid-point in the year.

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer scale and complexity of the challenges facing us and, while everyone will have their own opinion about which issues constitute the most critical, ICMSA has the 'luxury of consistency'. What I mean by that is, from the very instant the association was founded, it identified ensuring viable and comparable farmer income as the single most important issue on which to focus its efforts. The logic of the ICMSA founders was simple and indisputable: if families cannot make a living or support themselves from full-time farming, then all other questions around farming become irrelevant.

MAIN CONSIDERATION

From my earliest involvement with the ICMSA – more years ago now than I care to remember – it was impressed upon me that the paramount consideration always had to be the income of farm families. The first question that ICMSA representatives considered was this: was any given proposal likely to increase that income or decrease it? If we ask that question of the present scenario, we'd get a very sobering answer. We see a situation where milk and beef prices are still below the cost of production, input costs are still at an excessively high level, and a frankly mystifying reluctance on the part

of officialdom to cut through the fog and noise and just concentrate on getting to grips with the two most obvious requirements: get farmer prices up and get farmer costs down.

What rubs salt in the inactivity wound is the fact that – certainly as regards milk price – there's a perfectly good policy 'tool' that we know would work almost instantly in terms of giving dairy markets an upward shock. The European Milk Board (EMB) has been calling for an EU-wide voluntary milk reduction scheme for several months now. It was tried once before in 2016 and worked perfectly in that it signalled a measured reduction in milk supplies that brought the buyers immediately back into the market and 'buying forward'. The effects were positive and almost instantaneous. The ICMSA and our sister organisations organisations from across the EU in the EMB see absolutely no reason why it would not work with equal effect and speed 10 years later.

CAP CALLS AND TB

On the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2027, the ICMSA repeated its calls for an increased budget and for direct supports to be targeted at food producers. While we welcomed Minister Heydon's commitment to simplification of the process, we told him that had to mean simplification for the farmers – not the civil servants and administrators.

In relation to TB, we told the minister that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's communications around the new requirements to farmers had been



WE URGED THE MINISTER TO ROLL OUT A PLAN OF ACTION ON NITRATES THAT WOULD GIVE SOME DEGREE OF PREDICTABILITY TO THE FARMERS CONCERNED

slipshod and hit-and-miss, and that this had contributed greatly to the total chaos that had marked the introduction of the new rules. Certain matters remained unaddressed: compensation ceilings needed to be raised, and the losses suffered by farmers only allowed to sell animals to controlled finishing units had to be looked at.

NITRATES ACTION

We urged the minister to roll out a plan of action on nitrates that would give some degree of predictability to the farmers concerned. Much attention, we told him, would focus on the proposed simplification of the nitrates directive in the context of the Irish system of production. On the subject of reconciling Irish and EU policy, we noted that we now have an EU fertiliser plan promoting EU self-sufficiency in fertiliser based on CAN, a product whose use our own Government is actively discouraging. To be fair to farmers, and simple consistency, this is a contradiction that must be resolved.

A dish from L'Étage featuring Irish beef: fillet of beef, wild asparagus, fresh morels, and garlic flowers. Image supplied by Guillaume Mallet.

CHEF'S KISS FOR GRASS-FED IRISH BEEF

LYON-BASED CHEF, **GUILLAUME MALLET**, RECENTLY TRAVELLED FROM FRANCE TO IRELAND AS A MEMBER OF BORD BIA'S CHEFS' IRISH BEEF CLUB. HE SPEAKS TO **BERNIE COMMINS** ABOUT THE TRIP, THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEING FIRSTHAND IRELAND'S GRASS-BASED SYSTEM, AND HE SHARES SOME DELECTABLE DETAILS ABOUT HOW HE SERVES IRISH BEEF AT HIS RESTAURANT, L'ÉTAGE

Guillaume is the owner of L'Étage, a beautiful second-floor restaurant – the only second-floor establishment of this kind remaining in Lyon, he explains – overlooking the historic and very picturesque Place des Terreaux. In addition to being owner, he is head chef and waiter at this intimate and much-sought-after restaurant. Guillaume is at the heart of everything that L'Étage does; not only does he prepare and cook the finest produce, but he must also share its story with his discerning clientele. With Irish beef featuring on his menu for five-to six-months of the year, and having the opportunity to visit the source of that beef, it is a story that tells and sells very well.

CHEFS' TRIP

Guillaume has been a member of Bord Bia's Chefs' Irish Beef Club for four years. He visited

Ireland for the first time two years ago and, more recently, he joined a group of 18 French and Belgian chefs – with nine Michelin stars between them – on a five-day tour of farms and food producers. The tour included a visit to Hereford Prime beef farmer, John Applebe's farm, where the chefs heard about his grassland management, rotational grazing, reseedling, and use of clover; while Kay O'Sullivan's organic beef and sheep farm was also on the itinerary.

The latter really piqued Guillaume's interest. Kay's farm has been certified by the Organic Trust since 2012 and she spoke to the chefs about her use of multi-species swards in her all-grass-based system, as well as finishing her Angus cattle at 19 months' without any meal-feeding. "I didn't know that there was also organic beef [in Ireland]," says Guillaume. "We met the farmer, Kay, who told us all about how the cattle were reared, what the

cattle were eating, the herbs and bok choy. Bok choy is well-known in France, but not for feeding cattle," he laughs. "It was very nice to see her on this farm because she is so passionate; passionate about what she is doing, passionate about all the animals and all the details, such as the hedgerows growing there."

'GREEN STUFF EVERYWHERE'

As an industry, Irish agriculture prides itself on its grass-based system; it is the foundation of our beef's unique selling point to the rest of the world. Guillaume's take on this, as a chef from France where they know a thing or two about beef production, is very interesting. "When you visit a farm in Ireland you see all that green stuff [grass] everywhere. It's like being in a movie," Guillaume says, laughing. "For me, in France, we have nice beef, but it's just not the same. Even if it is raining in Lyon,



Members of the Chefs' Irish Beef Club pictured on Kay O'Sullivan's (second from left) farm, with Bord Bia's Germain Milet, market specialist France, Belgium and Luxembourg (back row, far right).

the grass is green, but not as green as it is in Ireland. We don't have big grass, you know? And the cattle are not outside as much, so, it's very different. In Ireland, the first thing farmers talk about is grass, grass, grass," he laughs. "It's fantastic, when you are a chef, to see the produce at the very beginning. All the products I use, Mother Nature gives to us: we are just here to cook it, very simply, because it is great produce that makes the difference," he says. Having visited Ireland, met the farmers, walked their farms, and picked – and sniffed – their grasses, Guillaume says he is more than happy to support Irish beef production and to feature it on his incredible menus. It might not be from France, but Ireland is a European country, and the beef is consistently excellent, he says: "In France, we have nice beef, for sure, but Ireland is not too far from France and is part of Europe, so I am more than pleased to work with Irish people. And with all the Irish beef I have had, I never have been disappointed with it," he says.

ON THE MENU

At L'Étage, Guillaume offers a tasting menu, which he changes every week. The beef fillet is his go-to cut: "A lot of chefs don't like it, but I like to work with the fillet," he says. He occasionally likes to use ribeye, but the fillet suits his system of work much better: "I'm alone in the kitchen, and while ribeye is very good and maybe a bit more flavourful, portioning it can be a headache." He chooses Angus fillets for the restaurant because they have the

correct amount of fat and flavour that he requires. On Guillaume's tasting menu, the beef is served at the end – the best course saved for last: "For me, red meat is an ending dish," he says.

THE FRENCH VERDICT

What reception do Guillaume's customers give the Irish beef on his menu? "The French are a bit like the Irish, we are very proud of what we produce," he says. "But they are happy once the quality is unquestionable. But the quality has to be perfect for people to accept it." And it goes back to the story of Irish beef – telling it and selling it: "When people ask why I use Irish beef, I tell them it is because it is grass fed, and I have been lucky enough to visit Ireland and see it, so I have a bit more to explain to the customer, and this is important. Sometimes, just because something is produced or grown near you, it doesn't mean that it is good. Once the value for money is there, people are happy."

Guillaume pays great tribute to the Irish farmers who work so diligently to produce such high-quality beef, and he admits that there is some pressure to perform in the kitchen to honour their work, and to honour the animal itself. "In the end, you can produce the best beef in the world but if we [as chefs] don't do a good plate, people will not be able to appreciate the quality of Irish beef. So, we have a bit of pressure on us to create a nice ending in the restaurant."



GROWING ORGANIC

Guillaume believes that in the coming years, while more people may choose to eat less meat, that smaller amount of meat must be 'fantastic' and this is where organic beef will shine. "I think that organic beef will become really important in a few years as people will be eating less but will be eating better. So we will try this organic beef on our menus. But, even when I see the Irish farmers who are not involved in organic beef production, for me, it's already like an organic product because you see how the cattle are living in those big country farms, eating grass all day long, in the rain. So, even the 'not organic' is organic for me."



MATT O'KEEFE
EDITOR

FACING UP TO INEVITABLE CHANGE

So, our farming population is ageing. That's hardly a revelation. Should we really be worried about this demographic cliff-edge? Apart from the fact that worry never solved anything, is there really a problem to be solved? Ever since the Industrial Revolution, the number of people working on farms, including landowners, next-of-kin, and farm labourers has been declining year-on-year. If it were not for an emotional attachment to land, the number of people operating Irish farms would be far lower and the remaining farms would be larger with higher output and greater productivity.

FARMER FACTS

These are inescapable facts if we look at farm demographic developments across the world. Farmers, globally, produce one-fifth more food than they did a generation ago, with 70 per cent of the labour units involved then.

A generation ahead, that statistic will still hold, with ever fewer farmers producing more food. That they will do this with less fertile land available is another inescapable fact. Ireland is by no means an outlier in terms of increased productivity, but neither are we leading the field in terms of production per hectare or per labour unit. Our milk yields are married to a grass-based production system which does not lend itself to the very high yields available from confinement-based milk production.

It is still a relatively efficient production model. Unfortunately, a premium-pricing dynamic for this niche system has only been partially realised. Likewise, Irish grass-produced beef, even with PGI status, will struggle to achieve



premium pricing, generally.

Our grain crops are recognised as having among the lowest carbon footprint production figures globally. There's plenty of hype, with lots of Irish grain purchasers boasting of this fact, but little evidence of a significant financial gain for Irish grain producers. A few euros' premium per tonne of grain is poor reward for agronomic and environmental excellence.

SO WHAT?

All this matters because, even as we face a future of fewer food producers with greater scale, there is little evidence they will be better off financially. It's a circular, never-ending challenge. Fewer food producers, greater scale, higher productivity per acre and per labour unit, and little or no improvement in per-unit-of-production financial return. Farmers strive to achieve a 'more from less' production model. Consumers have a 'more food at lower prices' variant. Advocating policies with the inherent

intention of retaining as many farmers as possible may be misplaced. Not only that, but it may also be unachievable. Is there a case to be made for advocating a restructuring of our farm model? One that offers an improved level on financial remuneration, higher productivity, greater sustainability, with more relevance in a world where we must produce more food with fewer inputs, less land and a continuing reduction in labour unit requirements.

TIPPING THE CAP

Should the coming CAP reform negotiations, rather than squabbling about divvying up a smaller cake, be about fundamentally restructuring our food production model? This would inevitably necessitate a redundancy package for thousands of farm owners across Europe. That may sound unacceptable, but it is only a more visible and honest reflection of what is and has been happening over many years. Would a once-off double, treble, or quadruple BISS payment in return for exiting the payment system permanently be politically palatable or popular with farmers? Would that land then be available BISS-less, at presumably lower rental or purchase prices for the remaining farming cohort to manage? These would be complex details to be teased out in policy formulation with the aim of securing fundamental change in Irish and European farm structures as well as accommodating the fact that European taxpayers and politicians are unwilling to provide the financial aid necessary for increasing or even preserving a status quo CAP budget.



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