

# IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY



**SPECIAL  
FOCUS  
BEEF**

**AGRI-ECONOMICS**  
IRISH DAIRY INDUSTRY  
CHALLENGES

**INTERVIEW**  
ORNUA CEO,  
CONOR GALVIN

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 **Tirlán**





Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

## ACTING THE OSTRICH IS NOT A VIABLE STRATEGY

**The temptation to reduce fertiliser application must be avoided. Fertiliser is far too expensive, but without adequate amounts, spread regularly, especially in the first half of the year, there will be a major shortfall in next winter's fodder supplies.** First cut is the most important. It delivers the bulk of fodder needs at a time when grass production is peaking. At almost any cost, we cannot risk a fodder shortage. The economic implications, the animal welfare ramifications, and the negative productivity outcomes are too great to contemplate. Our reputation as competent farmers is on the line. Fertiliser is a critical input, even as the price has doubled. Either we ensure that adequate fodder is available for next winter – perhaps sooner in the event of extreme summer weather ranging from drought to deluge – or we must consider destocking over the coming months in anticipation of matching reduced fodder supplies with lower livestock numbers. There are no other cost-effective equations that safeguard our reputation and economic viability. Meanwhile, reduced chemical fertiliser for immediate grazing is also a false economy. Replacing fertiliser with concentrate feed is, even at elevated fertiliser costs, still an expensive course of action. Brendan Horan's analysis of comparative feed costs clearly affirms the cost advantage of grass against all alternatives, and Matt Ryan's Management Hints include details of the Moorepark researcher's calculations. While the absolute costs are changing by the day, the comparative costs across grass, clover, silage and grain-based concentrates remain valid. With grazed grass used as the baseline cost, and given a score of 1.0, the only feed that outcompetes, in energy utilisation terms, is a grass/white clover sward mix carrying a comparative score of 0.6.

Pit silage scores 3.3, with its baled equivalent scoring 3.7 on the comparative cost scale. Red clover pit silage has a relative value of 2.7, with a three-cut red clover system giving a relative cost value of 3.1. Maize silage and fodder beet are viable fodder options at 3.2 and 2.8, respectively. The basic concentrate ingredient – rolled barley – incurs a relative cost of 5.2. Compounds carry a higher relative cost again.

The message is clear. Our much-promoted competitive advantage continues to be grazed grass, with the incorporation of white clover providing an additional refinement to further improve its cost competitiveness. For milk production so far this year, it has been more a case of keeping losses as close to break-even as possible, more than protecting profitability, which is beyond reach on most farms as costs increase and milk prices remain depressed. That only adds to the case for maximising the production and utilisation of grazed grass. The same emphasis holds for drystock production. The external challenges, be they war or weather, are outside of our control. That mantra of only being able to control the controllables holds true. Inside the farmgate we can influence outcomes. The Moorepark relative cost values of feed inputs point the way. Yes, the costs of all fodder production, from fertilisation to ensiling have exploded. We have two basic options. Plan our way through a truly horrific global trade disruption brought on by political and military over-reach or put our heads in the sand and hope it all goes away. Every day brings a sigh of relief with the latest cease-fire announcement, quickly followed by a gasp of dismay, with more bombs and bombast. Even as some semblance of peace may be on the horizon, it will take months if not years for some degree of global civil and economic normality to be re-established.

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## WHEN YOU'RE GONE, LEO, STAY GONE

Is there anything quite as annoying as someone who has shuffled off the stage insisting on still giving their tuppence worth of opinion ad infinitum? Leo Varadker's recent utterances on farmers freeloading on the urban taxpayer was just the latest in his attention-seeking diatribes. His comment, 'what is in the interest of farmers is, by and large, not in the interests of Ireland as a nation' was divisive, unfair, and inaccurate. We all have a shared interest in the wellbeing of the country. Why we never heard about the former taoiseach's real attitude to the agriculture sector when he was in government is easily explained. Leo Varadker was a great one for highlighting his farming roots when he wanted rural votes for Fine Gael. No comments on farmers being freeloaders back then. Leo now seems to have most of the answers to the problems facing the country and badly wants to share them, despite having abdicated on the opportunity of solving those problems. It would be too much to hope that he would follow the practices of other pensioned-off politicians who have had the good grace to keep their opinions to themselves when they are gone out to grass.

### NEGOTIATION VERSUS PROTEST

**We must acknowledge the economic damage caused by maverick blockaders masquerading as representatives of the people of Ireland, while acting without a mandate from any representative organisation, be that farmers, agricultural contractors, or road hauliers.**

Understanding the frustration and economic pressures that led to countrywide protests and blockages of vital fuel and other import facilities is not the same as condoning illegal actions. Quite how blocking fuel and fertiliser imports helps increase supply and reduce costs is puzzling. In a carefully choreographed strategy, the announcement of an additional €500 million package was made after the blockades were forcibly removed. Of course, the protests put the politicians under pressure but, ultimately, it was the democratically mandated organisations who negotiated substantial financial concessions to alleviate increased operating costs. Opposition politicians supporting illegal blockades, which were egged on by extremist fringe elements, may give us some inkling of what lies ahead should the electorate in due course decide on an alternative to the current government make-up.



### ROAD NETWORK GOING TO WRACK AND RUIN

**Anyone who has travelled the secondary roads of Ireland in the past few months will surely have noticed the deterioration of road surfaces.** After a very wet winter, the state of our roads is approaching what we endured up to 30 or 40 years ago, when our roads – primary and secondary – had more patches than a patchwork quilt. This is not a blame game. More traffic generally, more heavy goods vehicles especially, and bigger and heavier cars, are all contributing to our deteriorating road network. Increased numbers of heavier, battery-powered vehicles, in many cases up to 30 per cent heavier than conventional internal combustion engine vehicles, will only add to the pressures in maintaining road surfaces. What is to be done? Our county councils, allied to the National Roads Authority, are presumably doing their best to mend and make-do. Additional resources will be needed. Ireland has a more extensive network of roads than any other European country. That has facilitated a dispersed population, for better or worse. Every crisis has demanded more government expenditure. Road maintenance is another crisis in the making with the potholes getting bigger and more numerous by the day.

## WHEN YOU ENLIST YOU MUST SOLDIER – OR NOT

At the first sign of political trouble, the Healy-Raes pressed the emergency exit button. The US Marines operate on the basis that 'when the going gets tough, the tough get going' but despite being former 'soldiers of destiny', the Kerry TDs are no marines. The only 'going' Michael and Danny did was to walk out the door when they sniffed the way the wind was blowing in their constituency. It's all a far cry from their late father, Jackie's attitude. He stuck to his word through thick and thin when he supported the 2002 and 2007 governments in good and, ultimately, very bad times. From a purely national interest perspective, it was a pity Michael Healy-Rae decided to quit his role as Minister of State with responsibility for forestry. He was clearly committed to the further development of the sector, going as far as to call landowners who had applied for support to plant trees, and encourage them to proceed. The €55 million forestry reconstitution scheme for the 26,000 hectares of Storm Éowyn-damaged forestry, owes much to the efforts of the Kerry TD. Had he stayed put, he might have ensured timely payouts under that scheme, as well as addressing the long-term effects of ash-dieback. His ambitions to double or treble annual plantings will have to be advanced by someone else.

### BEWARE OF FREE FINANCIAL ADVICE

Minister for Finance, Simon Harris, is hellbent on advising savers to move their hard-earned nest eggs from low-return bank accounts to potentially higher-return, higher-risk, alternative investments. Yes, returns from savings accounts are miniscule, with the additional insult of paying DIRT on the miniscule interest earned. As every financial advisor tells us, the stock market outperforms savings accounts over time. Historical truths still don't guarantee future outcomes, even though inflation does guarantee that most savings accounts are losing value in real terms. If you want an historical example of the stock market coming unstuck, look back 97 years to the Great Crash of 1929. That was long-term financial catastrophe for millions of big and small investors, with the Depression only fully lifted by a World War, 10 years later. Of course, we hope that will never happen again. Allowing for all that, is it wise to advise higher-risk investment options? It is risk-free advice for the Exchequer. Minister Harris's, albeit vague, proposals represent a lost opportunity for the country. Far better to develop a means for savers to invest in a national infrastructure development fund, guaranteed by Government, providing a higher return than bank savings accounts and still below what the government currently pays on its borrowings. Abolishing DIRT on these State-run investments would be an added encouragement to small savers to transfer their hard-earned savings into low risk, higher return funds supporting vital national infrastructure developments, including transport, energy and water works. That could be a game-changing initiative for the country.

## Q Fever

### Do you recognise these signs?

Weak newborns      Abortion  
 Retained placenta      Stillbirths  
 Metritis  
 Premature calving



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



### DID YOU KNOW?

- Q Fever causes reproduction and fertility issues to cattle<sup>1</sup>
- 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 soil<sup>2</sup>
- *Coxiella b.* can be carried on the wind<sup>3,4,5</sup>

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

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

This information was provided by Ceva Animal Health (Ireland) Ltd, makers of Coxevac® COXEVAC® suspension for injection for cattle, sheep and goats contains inactivated *Coxiella burnetii*, strain Nine Mile 372 QF Unit/ml. \*Q-fever Unit: relative potency of phase I antigen measured by ELISA in comparison with a reference item. LEGAL CATEGORY: IE [P03] For further information, please refer to the product SPC, data sheet or pack insert. Use medicines responsibly.

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## InTouch

CATHAL BOHANE  
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

### BUFFER FEEDING: FUTURE-PROOFING MILK AND FERTILITY

**We have had a slow start to the year, but higher temperatures and a run of drier days have lifted grass growth above 30kg/day and improved ground conditions.** Recent cow performance has been supported by good-quality grass and silage, alongside a consistent level of concentrate. Nutrition does not need to be complicated; with accurate feed analysis and rations matched to demand, cows respond with milk, condition, and efficiency. As breeding begins on many farms, consistency is critical. Grass growth and weather can change quickly, so the priority is to keep feed inputs stable and protect daily energy intake through both diet quantity and quality. When energy intake is maintained, cows are more likely to hold body condition, cycle consistently, and go in calf. In practice, fed energy either supports milk solids and condition, or it is lost through poorer digestion and higher nutrient excretion. This can be alleviated through a correctly balanced diet, but energy shortfalls typically show up as falling milk solids or loss of condition, both costly to correct and likely to reduce conception rates. A planned move to grass often involves stepping down silage and concentrate, and this works best when grass supply and utilisation are reliable. The same planning is needed when conditions tighten, and cows must be brought back in, or when reduced growth or poorer grazing threatens intake. As a rule of thumb, concentrate can typically be reduced to 0.22kg once cows are out by day, and to 0.11kg once cows are out full-time. If you deviate significantly, it usually indicates additional forage or buffer feed is needed to maintain intakes and performance.

Buffer (supplementary) feeding is likely to become more important in grass-based systems as seasonal patterns shift and year-to-year variability increases. Commonly cited trends include:

- Longer growing seasons;
- Higher rainfall in autumn, winter and spring;
- Higher and milder average temperatures;
- Lower rainfall during summer months;
- More intense rainfall events rather than steady, gradual falls.

The practical outcome and what will become the 'norm' moving forward is longer periods when supplementation is needed, either because grass supply is insufficient or is restricted by ground or weather conditions. Planning buffer feeding in advance and securing feed early supports smoother management, protects milk output and fertility, and helps control the cost of extended supplementation. Silage quality will be central to making buffer feeding cost-effective. To achieve consistently higher-quality silage, focus on the basics: reseed where needed, pre-grazing, target earlier cutting dates, and improve clamp or bale management to reduce losses. An effective silage inoculant should be standard practice to support fermentation, preserve feed value, and improve feeding efficiency.

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## IRELAND MUST URGENTLY REVISE BIOMETHANE SUPPORTS – RGFI

**Renewable Gas Forum Ireland (RGFI) has called on the Government to move immediately to revise financial supports for biomethane, in light of the European Commission's recent opinion on Ireland's Renewable Heat Obligation (RHO).**

RGFI said that while the RHO can proceed without the so-called 'multiplier', urgent action is now required to ensure projects remain viable and investment is not delayed.

Nick Bennett, interim CEO of RGFI, said: "The RHO remains the Government's central delivery mechanism for Ireland's biomethane sector and can and should proceed. However, following the Commission's opinion, alternative support mechanisms will now be required to provide the long-term commercial certainty needed to underpin investment and support the development of an indigenous biomethane industry." The RGFI emphasised that the issue relates to the design of financial supports, not the overall policy direction, and that the strategic case for biomethane remains strong. With energy prices volatile and security of supply under continued pressure, the RGFI said the case for an indigenous renewable gas sector has never been stronger. Biomethane can play a central role in decarbonising industry, supporting agriculture and strengthening Ireland's energy resilience but only if a workable and investable framework is put in place.

The RGFI confirmed it will engage as a matter of urgency with Government departments, including the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to support the development of a revised approach.

## DETAILS OF THE €100M FUEL SUPPORT SCHEMES

**The €100 million fuel support scheme to assist farmers and agricultural contractors facing unprecedented increases in fuel costs will take the form of an income-support scheme covering the months of March up to the end of July. Details are as follows**

- ▶ It is aimed at those most impacted by the sudden increase in the cost of market gas oil (MGO). Eligibility for the scheme will be based on use of MGO for primary production of agricultural products on farm (including forestry).
- ▶ Both farmers and farm and forestry contractors will be eligible to apply. Farmers and agricultural contractors will benefit from a support rate equivalent to approximately 20c/L or €200 per 1,000 litres of MGO based on verified fuel usage in 2025.
- ▶ There will be one payment per applicant to cover a full five-month period rather than monthly payments. Applicants will be asked to supply their usage for the 12 months of 2025 based on receipted expenditure. The applicant will make a self-declaration of usage based on statements or receipts which may be subject to risk-based checks.
- ▶ For farm and forestry contractors, the scheme will require that they must be registered for VAT, tax compliant, and must supply services for primary production of agricultural products (including forestry) on farm.
- ▶ It is planned to open the scheme for three to four weeks (from middle of May) with payment to issue thereafter.
- ▶ There will be a minimum and maximum level of payment – the minimum level of payment will be €100 in line with regular DAFM schemes, and the maximum rate will be dependent on the level of applications, but will be in any event under the ceiling set by the forthcoming temporary State aid framework.



Damien O'Reilly  
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

## LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

Last year, as part of the **Vision for Agriculture and Food document published by the European Commission, a livestock strategy was announced.** It recognises livestock as an essential component of the EU agricultural sector and the wider food value chain. The good news for farmers is the recognition of the value of livestock farming against a backdrop of the necessity to meet climate mitigation targets which is hindered by the fact that cattle emit methane. An EU document pertaining to this states:

"The sector makes a major contribution to the EU economy, sustains rural communities, and supports landscape management and the preservation of environmental values."

In March, the Commission launched a public consultation aimed at collecting stakeholder opinions on the future direction of livestock farming in the context of sustainability, animal health, and economic viability. In the Commission's work programme for 2026 – this sets out the most important new policy and legislative initiatives it will take in the year ahead – under the priority 'Sustaining our quality of life: food security, water and nature', the Commission said that 'the livestock strategy will foster the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of the EU livestock sector and agri-food chain'.

It will be interesting to see what the Commission plans are in relation to the future direction it foresees for the livestock sector. They will have received thousands of responses from all society, from those who want to phase out farming animals to farmers who want assurances for a viable future. That's democracy in action. It will take into account the difficulties faced by the sector, economic uncertainty, declining herd numbers (head of cattle in the EU has dropped 10 per cent over the past two decades), farm closures (down from 14 million farms to nine million since the turn of the century), animal disease and welfare risks, the sector's environmental and climate footprint, the growing global population and with it, the increased consumer demand for high quality sustainable livestock derived produce.

But it will also consider the positive transformation that is happening in the sector including innovation in breeding, feed efficiency, animal health and welfare, and digital technologies which are all about improving productivity and reducing environmental impacts. In the context of territorial diversity, the Commission is aiming to publish a future-proof, long-term vision to ensure that the EU livestock sector is crisis resilient, globally competitive and sustainable in all dimensions. There is also a recognition of the role of livestock farming in sustaining rural and mountain areas and underpinning rural employment. It's a seismic initiative which we will see in the flesh in the coming weeks.



## If we can grow quality grass, we can make quality silage.

Dr. David Lawrence  
Head of Nutrition, Agritech.

**Autumn/Spring 2025/26 will become a memory as one of the most difficult periods for farming. Cows and cattle were housed in early autumn, and in many cases have only resumed grazing heavier ground in recent days.**

This is undoubtedly becoming a more frequent scenario, and the sentiment of early/late grazing is proving to be a difficult reality on many farms across the country. Spring 2026 has certainly given fuel to idea that we need to put a larger emphasis on the indoor period of our farms, with grass silage quality featuring in many discussions.

Managing grass quality in the summer months has the same urgency as conserving grass quality as silage for the winter months. The targets are the same in both scenarios, maximise feed quality to optimise both production efficiency and profitability from the forage component of the diet. Simply put, grazing grass that is too strong reduces the production efficiency of milk and beef; equally feeding silage that was cut too strong and/or poorly preserved will reduce the production efficiency of milk and beef. They are merely two sides on the same coin.

There are many factors which influence quality and they all need careful attention and planning for a successful outcome.

1. Maintain a high-quality ryegrass sward with adequate soil fertility by reseeding and soil testing.
2. Cut it on time (ideally before the 22nd of May).
3. Mow it higher than you are comfortable with (6-8cm).
4. Give it a fast wilt (24hrs or less, target dry matter (28-32%).
5. Avoid soil contamination by operator errors (avoid mowing or raking in soil).
6. Get it into the pit quickly and roll it really well and continuously.
7. Use a good cover and oxygen barrier and maintain a good seal, (tyres should be touching on all sides and sandbags on the edges are a help).
8. Use a silage inoculant such as "GrasZyme Sugar-Boost" to ensure that your fermentation goes to plan, maximising the retention of both the quality and volume of silage available to feed.

**For further advice, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit [www.agritech.ie](http://www.agritech.ie)**



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## SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER UV EXPOSURE FOR OUTDOOR WORKERS

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation rises between April and September and outdoor workers – in construction, agriculture, transport, fisheries, maintenance, local authorities, and water safety – face significantly increased exposure that can lead to sunburn, eye damage and longterm risks such as skin cancer. With over 11,000 cases of skin cancer diagnosed in Ireland each year, and numbers continuing to rise, increasing awareness about prevention is more important than ever.

The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) is calling on all organisations with outdoor workers to prioritise UV protection in the workplace as part of their employee safety and wellbeing policies. It is encouraging employers to integrate UV safety into their occupational health strategies and to support staff in adopting SunSmart behaviours.

Outdoor workers and employers can reduce the risk of skin cancer by following the Healthy Ireland SunSmart 5 S's:

1. Slip on clothing that covers your skin, such as long sleeves and collared T-shirts.
2. Slop on sunscreen. Use SPF 30 or higher, apply 20 minutes before going outside, and reapply every two hours, or more often if sweating.
3. Slap on a wide-brimmed hat or a hard hat with a brim or neck flap.
4. Seek shade, especially between 11am and 3pm, when UV rays are strongest. Where possible, schedule outdoor work outside these hours.
5. Slide on wraparound sunglasses.

The HSE's NCCP outdoor worker subgroup and partner organisations, the Road Safety Authority and the Health and Safety Authority have developed a resource, Driving for Work: Sun Safety Guidance. The resource provides tailored advice to support health and safety officers, supervisors and managers in protecting employees who drive as part of their job.

## MILK QUALITY FARM WALK PLANNED FOR JUNE

**'A tradition of excellence in dairy' is the theme for a farm walk set take place on the Ryan family farm in Thurles, Co. Tipperary on June 24.** The Ryans won the 2025 NDC and Kerrygold Quality Milk Awards, and will host the farm walk, in association with Teagasc, Centenary Thurles Co-op, National Dairy Council (NDC) and Ornu. The Ryans carry a legacy that stretches back over five generations to 1860. Today, Tom, Mary, and their son Michael continue that tradition and they supply milk to Centenary Thurles Co-op. Joe Kerrigan, CEO, Centenary Thurles Co-op said: "We are really proud of Tom, Mary, and Michael's achievement in winning this award and we thank them for hosting this upcoming farm walk in June. They produce milk of the highest quality for Centenary Thurles and are a great example of a family farm producing high quality food."

The farm walk is open to all farmers, industry representatives, and anyone interested in the future of Irish dairy farming. To find out more and to register to attend, check out Teagasc's website.



Michael Horan, chief financial and secretariat officer; John Murphy, chair; Seán Molloy, CEO; and Lisa Koep, chief ESG officer.  
Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

## TIRLÁN REVENUE INCREASES TO €2.94 BILLION

Recent highlights of Tirlán's 2025 accounts showed that the co-op's total revenue reached €2.9 billion, 10 per cent ahead of the previous year, with growth reported across agribusiness, consumer, and ingredients. Other highlights included:

- ▶ Operating profit: €63.7 million (within target range);
- ▶ Core net debt: €126 million at year-end (down from €138 million in 2024), the lowest level in over a decade;
- ▶ Milk supply growth: milk collected increased by 7 per cent year-on-year, with milk solids; and
- ▶ Strategic investment: work underway on a €126 million new state-of-the-art whey processing facility at the Ballyragget site.

In addition, a €15 million generational renewal programme was launched. Tirlán chair, John Murphy said the co-op delivered a strong financial performance in 2025, with consistent profit delivery and a significantly improved debt position. "This performance was achieved on the back of excellent supply volumes, alongside disciplined cost and cash management. The co-op continued to invest for long-term value creation across its ingredients, consumer and agribusiness businesses, while maintaining a strong focus on supporting farm families through market volatility."

He said the coop board remains firmly focused on delivering the best possible milk and grain prices, while also taking a broader view of how the coop delivers for and supports its members through total member returns, which captures all payments, support schemes and value distributions to Tirlán farmers. John said that 2025 was an excellent year for total member returns with a spin-out of 15 million Glanbia plc shares to co-op members and the launch of a number of targeted support programmes in response to member needs.

The Tirlán chair continued: "As well as targeted feed and fertiliser supports at key times of the year, we introduced our €15 million generational renewal programme, a landmark initiative designed to strengthen the foundations of our co-op for decades to come. Under the programme, new entrants receive a 2c/L bonus on all milk supplied for their first three years in production. This initiative is proving to be very successful, with near record annual number of new entrants (52) anticipated in the current year. In addition, we committed €5 million to a new TB support programme, offering an optional advance on future milk payments of €750 per cow to suppliers that lose more than 5 per cent of their herd due to a TB outbreak"

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Trevor Hoff, livestock farmer



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Niall Moore, a third-generation Co. Waterford dairy farmer features in 'A World Without Cows - The Pasture Paradox'.

# 'WE HAVE THE ANSWERS'

**BERNIE COMMINS** ATTENDED THE WORLD PREMIERE OF 'A WORLD WITHOUT COWS - THE PASTURE PARADOX', A SHORT FEATURE FILM EXPLORING IRELAND'S PASTURE-BASED DAIRY SYSTEM, WHICH IS SUSTAINING A GROWING DEMAND FOR GRASS-FED DAIRY AGAINST A BACKDROP OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

'World Without Cows - The Pasture Paradox' is a companion mini-documentary produced by the filmmakers of *World Without Cows*, which was released in 2024, and commissioned by Alltec. For a country with 1.6 million cows supporting a €7.3 billion dairy export industry that supports 60,000 jobs, it made sense to turn the cameras on Ireland and explore how it is navigating significant environmental challenges, while continuing to produce food for export. The documentary features a number of interviews: Dr Lisa Koep, chief ESG officer, Tirlán; Dr Laura Burke, former director general, Environmental Protection Agency; Dr Patrick Ward, Alltech; and Niall Moore, Waterford farmer, and focus of this piece.

## DAIRYING IN THE DÉISE

Niall is a third-generation dairy farmer and he and his 120-cow herd are based in Co. Waterford. If ever there was an ambassador for the best in Irish dairy farming, Niall is surely it. He understands that growth opportunity and environmental responsibility are most definitely not exclusive. He was reared to respect the natural world, the

waters, and the environment around him, and these things always translated to the farm, he said.

"We were always taught about nature growing up on the farm, about the birds and animals. My grandfather was a fisherman, and father was also a keen angler." 'Blue knuckles', he joked, were a side effect of being taken up the river fishing for trout when he was young; those memorable cold excursions gave him firsthand opportunities to learn about the environment around him, and the importance of clean rivers and waters. As he says in the film: "It's always been a position here [at the farm] that we're caretakers of the environment. Because if the environment isn't good, it isn't going to be good for farming."

## 'I HATE THE WORD SUSTAINABLE'

The word 'sustainable' is embedded in everything that farmers do. It is an important word, and the practices that it promotes are essential now more than ever. But it is not a new phenomenon.

"I actually hate the word sustainable. I'll be honest," said Niall. "We have a low carbon footprint per kilogramme of milk solids that



**EAMON DE BUITLÉIR,  
FAMOUSLY DRANK A GLASS  
OF WATER OUT OF ONE OF  
THE PONDS**

we produce, way lower than a lot of other systems. The way we farm, it's just brilliant. I don't think we have to call it anything," Niall explained.

A farmer quoted in mainstream media saying they 'hate the word sustainability' might make headlines for all the wrong reasons, but in a farming context, it somehow makes sense. The Moore farm commenced adopting sustainable farming practices when that word was not even a 'thing'. Way back in 1991 they ventured into dealing with the farm's soiled water, Niall explained: "Environmentalism, Dr Rory Harrington, who worked with Waterford County Council at the time had returned from a trip to New Zealand, and he introduced a pilot constructed wetlands project. So, we had about four acres where we dug ponds,



## THE WAY WE FARM, IT'S JUST BRILLIANT. I DON'T THINK WE HAVE TO CALL IT ANYTHING

put back the topsoil, and planted weeds in it. It naturally filters the water. Eamon de Buitléir (well-known Irish environmentalist), famously drank a glass of water out of one of the ponds. So that is how much faith Ireland's most famous environmentalists had in it at the time."

### CONTEXT

Context is important and when we put forward arguments for our dairy sector, we are not basing those arguments on emotions or traditions, but on facts. The facts are: more than 60,000 jobs are dependent on the sector, as mentioned; we export dairy products to 140 markets around the world; and dairy now represents 38 per cent of our total food and drinks exports. But the big question remains, how do we continue with sustainable food production, while staying in tune with our environmental targets and commitments. A panel discussion that took place after the screening of the short film highlighted that water quality is the most important consideration now for farmers. Nitrate levels and their associated risks to aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity have long been publicised. While the Environmental Protection Agency acknowledged in a report published last year that there had been a 10 per cent national reduction in river nitrate concentrations during 2024 with 'reductions observed in all regions', it also stated that 'nitrate concentrations in the southeast and midlands and eastern regions remain too high'.

But to every challenge, there is a solution, Niall said: "Farming does face challenges but the science and desire to solve these challenges also keeps getting better. There is an answer to any and all of the questions or issues we have out there, so we will continue to improve. I really believe in the quality of the milk we produce. Farmers care about the environment. They cared about it then, and they care about it now. We're guardians of this land."

Some of the practices he has introduced to his farm include:

- ▶ **Low-emission slurry spreading:** He uses trailing shoe technology that returns more nutrients to the soil and reduces nitrogen loss to the air. Across Ireland, 85 per cent of dairy farms have now adopted low-emission slurry spreading techniques, driven by regulation.
- ▶ **Clover:** In the 1990s, Niall explained, the farm grew rye grass varieties that relied on chemical fertilisers. Over time, Niall introduced red and white clover into his fields. Clover fixes nitrogen from the atmosphere directly into the soil. White clover seed usage across Ireland increased by more than 40 per cent between 2022 and 2025 – Niall was well ahead of the curve on this.
- ▶ **Constructed wetlands:** Niall's constructed wetlands can remove between 50 per cent and 99 per cent of nitrogen from dairy farm water runoff.

# inject herd health

## GIVE YOUR FUTURE HERD THE ESSENTIAL EDGE

Youngstock face 'trace mineral gaps' during high-demand periods where oral intake is reduced or stress is high. Supplementation with injectable trace minerals such as copper, zinc, manganese and selenium is scientifically proven to:

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- Improve response to vaccination. Supplemented calves showed higher antibody levels than vaccination alone<sup>2</sup>, and produced antibodies at a faster rate<sup>3</sup>
- Improve average daily gain<sup>4</sup>, helping you meet growth targets
- Reduce clinical scores<sup>5</sup>, disease and death rates<sup>6</sup> in calves

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

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# NATIONAL TRACTOR SAFETY WEEK

THE FARM SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TRACTOR SAFETY WEEK STARTS ON MONDAY, 25 MAY. IT WILL HIGHLIGHT THE HIGH NUMBER OF SERIOUS AND FATAL TRACTOR ACCIDENTS THAT OCCUR IN IRELAND EVERY YEAR, AND WILL FOCUS ON PRACTICAL STEPS TO PREVENT THEM

During this safety week, FBD is encouraging all farmers and contractors to take 10 minutes each day during the week to walk around their vehicles, check the basics, review any risks in the yard, and talk through tasks with anyone helping on the farm. Small steps, done consistently, reduce the chances of a serious accident. If something looks unsafe, fix it or stop the job until it can be made safe. Your actions this week could prevent a tragedy later in the year.

Tractors remain the main cause of fatal injuries on Irish farms. The Health and Safety Authority's *Review of work-related deaths in agriculture in Ireland between 2016-2025* shows that 41 per cent of fatal farm accidents involved vehicles. Of these 73 deaths, 52 per cent involved tractors, 18 per cent involved quad bikes, 10 per cent were caused by loaders or telehandlers, 7 per cent involved trailers, and 5 per cent were attributed to excavators. The figures highlight the need to keep vehicles in good condition and ensure that only competent and experienced operators use them.

Ciaran Roche, risk manager at FBD, said: "Behind every fatal statistic is a family and a community coping with a grave loss. Most fatal tractor incidents come down to basic issues that can be prevented with a bit more time, care, and attention. Maintaining brakes, driving at a safe speed, making sure only competent people operate vehicles and keeping children away from tractors and machinery can save lives."

Farmers rely on tractors and machinery every day, which can make risks easy to overlook. Most accidents stem from four areas:

- 1. The operator** – errors, inexperience, rushing, speed, fatigue, or distraction.
- 2. Environmental conditions** – steep gradients, poor visibility, or weather.
- 3. The vehicle** – poor mechanical condition,

especially faulty brakes.

- 4. Systems of work** – not following safe operating procedures or ignoring warnings. Nearly all fatal tractor accidents can be prevented by following simple steps such as: only allowing competent operators drive a tractor; always driving at a safe speed; avoiding rushing; parking safely; taking adequate breaks to avoid fatigue; keeping tractors well maintained; and keeping children away from moving vehicles and trailed implements.

## TRACTOR SAFETY WEEK THEMES

Each day of the campaign focusses on a specific issue:

### 1. Maintenance and the tidy tractor

Emphasising the basics such as working brakes, good tyres, clean windows, effective lighting, and a tidy cab to prevent object from getting caught under foot controls.

### 2. Safe operation

Promoting competent drivers, safe speeds, full concentration free of distraction such as the mobile phone, and safe operating procedures when operating tractors such as reverse parking.

### 3. Blind spots

Raising awareness of visibility risks around tractors and attachments, especially during yard work and manoeuvring. Due to size of tractors and trailed implements, good vision can often be significantly reduced.

### 4. Older farmers and young people

Highlighting risks for both groups. Older farmers may face reduced mobility or slower reaction times; younger people may lack experience and a full understanding of the associated risk. With this in mind, it is essential that young children are supervised and kept away from areas where tractors are operating. Young persons must be trained in the safe operation of tractors and

must comply with the legal driving age requirements.

### 5. Fatigue

Focusing on tiredness as a major factor in farm accidents, particularly during harvest and peak seasons when long hours are common. Operators must take adequate breaks during operation, stay hydrated and practice good nutrition and sleeping habits to help avoid fatigue.

## CHILD SAFETY

Tractors and vehicles account for most fatal accidents involving children on farms. Children must be supervised at all times and kept away from areas where machinery is operating. The *Code of practice on preventing accidents to children and young persons in agriculture* states:

- ▶ Children under seven must not ride on tractors.
- ▶ Children over seven may only ride on a tractor with a properly fitted passenger seat and seatbelt inside a safety cab or frame.
- ▶ Children under 14 must not drive or operate tractors or self-propelled machines.
- ▶ Young people over 14 may only operate tractors after proper training and close supervision.
- ▶ Anyone driving on a public road must be at least 16 and hold the correct licence.

Think tractor safety first; don't put yourself or others at risk.

For more farm safety information, scan the code



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# IRISH DAIRY INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

**FOOD ECONOMIST, CIARAN FITZGERALD CONTINUES HIS ANALYSIS OF THE IRISH DAIRY SECTOR, IN THE SECOND OF A THREE-PART SERIES ON THE SUBJECT**

**Ciaran Fitzgerald**  
Agri-food economist

**As I indicated previously, it is important to recognise that the key driver of current constraints on Irish dairy output is domestic policy/environmental compliance-based, rather than deriving from EU policy.** This, I pointed out, deviates from a time when the European dairy industry was subjected to the production constraints imposed by the 1984 milk-quota system, which was eventually abolished in 2015. The Irish dairy sector is certainly not constrained by any decline in demand for grass-based Irish dairy products. Ornuá's recent 2025 financial report bears testimony to the popularity of Irish premium-priced dairy produce, marketed under the Kerrygold brand.

## **GOVERNMENT IMPRIMATUR FOR IRISH DAIRY**

Importantly, the support for the new Nitrates Directive seems to reflect a broad cross-Government acceptance of the vital importance of sustaining/maintaining Irish dairy output. This contrasts with certain opposition entities' views of what should happen to Irish dairy, much of which are pushed and vocalised without any consideration of their destructive impact across the economy and the wider agricultural sector.

## **ACCEPTING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALITIES**

Given the various political, regulatory, and environmental restraints on production, how does the Irish dairy sector best adapt and plan? If we accept an output ceiling of nine billion litres (well

beneath the sector's physical limitations in terms of land availability, environmental protection, and human resources) over the next five to 10 years, what is the optimum dairy-processing structure and the optimum product mix across the dairy product spectrum?

Static throughput and product mix combined with continuously increasing processing costs under the current processing profile, point to declining margins to processors, lower price returns to producers, or both. In addition, imposed decarbonisation investment costs and ever rising energy costs are further key business development constraints.

Equally importantly, Irish dairy processors, unlike branded drinks manufacturers, such as Guinness/Diageo, don't have selling power that can transmit higher costs into consumer price hikes. This is a very real factor that is often ignored by policymakers who, nevertheless, insist that supermarket buying power must be maintained.

## **STRATEGIC DECISIONS**

Given all these imposed realities, industrial development policy suggests that the first step in a dairy development strategy must be focused on a mergers/rationalisation process. When put together with an output cap of nine billion litres of milk, the realistic outcome of this inertia-based policy, with built-in ever-increasing costs, is declining margins and price reductions to producers. The proposed model, utilising existing production and product modelling, only works economically in an environment of processing capacity driven

by increases in milk production.

The alternative strategic response to output inertia and ever-increasing costs suggests either a change in product mix or new product development/innovation or both. As an example, a strategic study of the Irish dairy industry, known as the Prospectus Report, published in 2003 highlighted an overdependence on butter production and proposed a switch to increased cheese production. Such a movement would also benefit from the increased production of whey products through the cheese stream. The partial adoption of this strategy has worked successfully for some processors.

#### IRISH DAIRY PROCESSING CAPACITY BREAKDOWN

- ▶ Tirlán remains the largest processor in Ireland, with capacity to process 3.4 billion litres of milk annually.
- ▶ Dairygold processed approximately 1.44 billion litres of milk in 2025.
- ▶ Lakeland Dairies has a combined cross-border assembly and processing volume of about two billion litres.
- ▶ Kerry Dairy Ireland, previously part of the publicly listed Kerry Group, has a milk pool of 400 million litres.
- ▶ Aurivo processes approximately 444 million litres of milk annually.
- ▶ Carbery Group, supplied by the west cork co-ops, processes approximately 550 million litres.
- ▶ ArraTipp, the resulting amalgamation of Arrabawn Co-op and Tipperary Co-op has a combined milk pool of some 200 million litres.

#### INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

From an examination of those milk pools, even without impending and obvious output and business cost challenges, Irish dairy processing is relatively low scale compared to our global competitors. The largest milk processor in Ireland, Tirlán, is processing 3.4 billion litres annually. The figure, impressive in Irish terms, pales against the profiles of global dairy giants listed below. While scale is not everything, in a relatively low-margin, commodity-focussed industry, lower-scale processors, without very high margin, niche product lines, will always be at a distinct competitive disadvantage. Grass-based production, accounting for only 10 per cent of global milk output, does offer some marketing advantages, but these do not significantly extend to bulk powder production.

#### ECONOMICS VERSUS POLITICS

If rationalisation/mergers, in an Irish dairy processing context, seems obvious as the key first step in managing the high cost/output, production cap challenge, several considerations and questions arise:

- ▶ Is Government prepared to financially support a rationalisation programme given that any immediate gains from scaling would

#### GLOBAL DAIRY PROCESSING CAPACITY BREAKDOWN

According to 2024 stats from IFCN (IFCN is a global network for dairy economic research and consultancy), the top global dairy processors by milk volume intake includes:

- ▶ Dairy Farmers of America, the world's largest dairy company by volume, collects almost 29 billion litres of milk annually.
- ▶ In second place, Lactalis (France), collected ~21.7 billion litres in 2024.
- ▶ New Zealand's Fonterra, one of the largest global dairy export-focussed processors, processes 18-20 billion litres of milk annually, mostly supplied from the island of New Zealand.
- ▶ Arla Foods (Denmark/Sweden) is collecting ~13.7 billion litres of milk annually, with significant operations in northern Europe and the UK.
- ▶ Friesland-Campina (Netherlands) is processing around 10-12 billion litres of milk annually.
- ▶ The Yili Group in China is a rapidly expanding dairy giant with significant processing capacity in excess of 12 billion litres of milk per year. It has an ambitious and successful global acquisitions strategy.
- ▶ Mengniu Dairy, also China-based, is another top-tier player with over 40 production bases and a total annual production capacity exceeding 12 billion litres.
- ▶ Canadian owned Saputo is a dominant player in North America and Argentina, with a 38 per cent market share in Canadian cheese processing.
- ▶ Amul (GCMMF – India), is the largest farmer-owned cooperative in India, processing over 12 billion litres of milk annually.
- ▶ Nestlé, headquartered in Switzerland, has capacity to process 14 billion litres of milk.

be gobbled up in the huge cost of the decarbonisation of the scaled-up processing sector?

- ▶ Where do mergers fit into the functionality of the current farmer-owned dairy business model?
- ▶ The product mix and innovation/R&D challenge require a greater focus on commercialisation versus the ponderousness in terms of actual new product development of the current research system through innovation centres, which reflected the outdated EU Commission constraints on state aid supports for innovation which were criticised in the Draghi report.
- ▶ A greater emphasis is needed on support for accelerating commercialisation is imperative to deliver both reduced on-farm emissions and new product innovation.
- ▶ Post-quota growth in Irish dairy output delivered jobs, billions of euros in export growth and billions in increased Irish economy expenditure. Billions are not required to sustain this, but the overall Irish economic value is surely worth serious support.



Ornuu CEO, Conor Galvin.

# ORNUA TO BUILD ON 'SOLID PERFORMANCE' FOR 2026


**A VERY POSITIVE SET OF OPERATING AND FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR 2025 WERE ANNOUNCED BY ORNUA IN MID-APRIL. MATT O'KEEFFE SAT DOWN WITH CEO, CONOR GALVIN, TO DISCUSS THE RESULTS, AND MUCH MORE**

Despite a 'complex' year, the Irish dairy co-operative put in a 'solid performance', said Conor. "We managed to grow our turnover by nearly 2 per cent, and grow profits by nearly 5 per cent. Operating profit is up to €136m and our payments out to members, the Ornuu value payment for the 12 months, was €74m, which was up 14 per cent. There were really two different halves to the year but, nonetheless, Ornuu still delivered value for Irish dairy."

Especially impressive was the fact that revenues increased by 1.6 per cent while profit increased by 4.7 per cent, as Conor noted: "A lot of that was delivered by growing our margin and growing innovation in the business, and really driving value out of grass-fed dairy, making sure we are finding the markets that can pay a premium consistently. Those markets and consumers are also willing to take new products and buy into the brand. Because of that, we were able to increase the value payment back to producers."

## ORNUA'S GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD

Headquartered in Dublin, Ornuu has a strong global team of 2,800 employees, operating from 10 business units worldwide, and 13 production facilities. It is, truly, a global company. "We have a number of important markets for the Kerrygold brand, with Ornuu operating in the four corners of the globe," said Conor. "Our most important markets in terms of sales include the US, Germany and the UK. Naturally, the Irish market remains very important to us as well. In addition, we have a very strong ingredients business in the US, Europe, in the Middle East and Africa. Ornuu's global reach allows us to trade through tough times and to still get the value back into Irish dairy."



“

## THERE'S NO ISSUE WITH THE FUNDING OF THE BUSINESS; WE'RE WELL-FUNDED

### DEBT UP

Despite the significant increase in Ornu's debt levels, Conor was not perturbed, as he explained it is a working capital figure, driven by inventory and by the stock purchased from its members. "It does ebb and flow," he said. "I'm not concerned about the debt number rising because we're here to buy and hold inventories and sell them in a manner that brings stability to the market. Those numbers have come down significantly in the first three months of 2026. There's no issue with the funding of the business; we're well-funded. The debt being high at the end of the year was our way of supporting and fulfilling our remit and making sure that we are holding the right products to sell in future. We're also doing that on behalf of our members. We have very well-run member co-ops that sell us products that we, in turn, sell in the international markets. We have long-established working capital facilities which our members avail of. I'm not concerned. This is what Ornu does and what we'll continue to do."

When asked about the travails of North Cork Creameries, Conor replied: "North Cork has been on a well-publicised journey. They're a member of Ornu and we will continue to trade with them. We will also be respectful of what members might like to do in the future. Until otherwise advised, North Cork remains a very valued member."

### THE MISSING CO-OP

Commenting on the fact that Kerry Dairy Ireland is not a member co-op, he said: "We do have a relationship with Kerry Dairy Ireland, and I think that will continue. We'll make sure that the channels are always open. I think Kerry Dairy Ireland have developed a very clear strategy since becoming independent of Kerry Group. We'll continue to talk to them and if there's anything we can do together in the future that makes sense for the dairy farmer, I'd be very open to that."

### CATCHING THE CREAM

Ornu's Kerrygold brand has hit €1bn in revenues, so where does a brand go and

grow from here? "The €1 billion mark is a very strong foundation to grow from. It gives us the scale in the US, for instance, to launch new products and to sell to new consumers," Conor explained. "Consumer recognition is high, and there's a willingness to pay a premium, whether that's for butter, cheese or newer branded products including cream cheese and flavoured butters. Cream cheese is an important addition to Kerrygold in the last couple of years, not least because it's a clean label product. It doesn't have any stabilisers or other added ingredients except dairy and some culture. There is enormous potential for cream cheese. Consumers are looking for difference in what they purchase.



Cream cheese is an important addition to Kerrygold in the last couple of years.

They are looking for natural products. Kerrygold can fulfil those needs. We continue to expand our distribution of cream cheese, and we will launch it in more markets in the next 12 months."

### PRODUCER PRICE CHALLENGED

Conor acknowledged the price pressures that Irish milk producers are under: "There's been a big downturn in farm gate prices, reflective of international dairy markets since late last year. There's a lot of volatility even in the futures markets, and that is a challenge because, depending on what day or what week you look at, the outlook has changed. It's fair to say that prices probably couldn't drop any further. Markets have stopped sliding and have stabilised at a level which at least gives some certainty to what returns will be like up to June. We'd all like to see markets come up, putting some margin back in milk production. It's likely that it will happen in the second half of 2026. "But the challenge right now is the uncertainty around the forecasts. A lot happens in a week. Six weeks ago, I would have been talking about prices for the second half being a lot higher than are forecast now. We'd still be hopeful with the fundamentals that are out there, particularly on the demand side, where's there's still significant demand. If we can right size supply, there's still significant value in the markets for the future."

### ORNUA GROWTH PLAN

The Ornu co-op has embarked on a strategic growth plan to 2030, as described by the Ornu CEO: "It's all about transforming for growth, scale and efficiency. We're looking at growing our branded sales even further so that we can drive margins in the business and ultimately improve the

returns to farmers. We will do that by having commercial and operational excellence. We will increase our focus on the consumer, whose needs are changing. They want more experiences. They want to be spoken to on social media. They want to interact with the brand. The strategy is all around changing the way we operate, to support the new world that we have to operate in.

"One target is to have €3 billion of branded sales in the next five years, which would be a significant increase. We'll do that through innovation and through creating new products like the cream cheese that we've spoken about and by recruiting new consumers."

### MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Do the Mercosur and India trade deals offer opportunities for Ornu? "They're probably more medium to long term," he said. "We must recognise that in the markets that we sell Kerrygold, we need to be able to command a premium to justify the product going into new markets. We have some seed markets, which we're currently looking to develop in the next couple of years. We do need to have patience and recognise that the investment the dairy industry and dairy farmers have made in Kerrygold over the last 60 years is paying the return. These things don't happen overnight for those large regions that you've described, and there's certainly an ambition for us to expand beyond where we are today."

### GREATER COOPERATION

Conor said Ornu is positively disposed to further co-operation in the Irish dairy sector: "I think there is always room for encouraging co-operation and efficiency. We have an industry which is well invested in. We have dairy farmers who are ambitious and we

have great products. We always need to be careful that we're not either driving waste or removing value from the system with the current structures. I think with the existing structures, we can get the maximum value out of Irish dairy. But we always need to be cognisant that the consumer and the affordability of our products are at the front of our minds. Any inefficiencies in the system are likely to lead to a cost challenge for the consumer and that is not good. Where we can encourage cooperation and efficiency in the supply chain, we should do so."

### ROOM FOR VOLUME GROWTH

Milk production peaked on Irish farms last year. Is there scope to sell more dairy produce?

"We can handle increased output, particularly on the branded side with the ambition we have for the Kerrygold brand. If there is more output, our role is to find markets to support that in a sustainable and profitable way. Last year demonstrated that with the right weather and economic conditions, we have a herd and a cohort of farmers that are well capable of producing high quality product in greater volumes. Ornu is here to support milk producers in their needs and ambitions. If the ambition is for them to continue growing, we'll grow with them."

### 2026 OUTLOOK

The Ornu CEO is naturally cautious about the remainder of 2026: "We'd like to match last year's performance. Dairy markets are very volatile and a lot of the performance, particularly on the turnover line is driven by what the dairy markets can return. It appears that in the second half of the year, there will be a lift in the value of dairy markets. Ornu has had a reasonable start to 2026 so that's positive. But the challenges now appear weekly and monthly that used to appear annually. So, we need to be agile and responsive. We also need to be very close to our members to make sure that we're aware of their challenges and their needs so that we can respond to them as well."

### TARIFFS - STILL ON AGENDA

Tariffs are still on the agenda, according to Conor: "We've had five different tariff rates in the last 12 months, and there still isn't finality on exactly what the long-term plan is for tariffs. The European Union and the US are still in negotiations. We would encourage a positive conclusion that brings certainty and allows us to plan for the future."



## A NEW CHAPTER IN VETERINARY STUDIES

BERNIE COMMINS CAUGHT UP WITH DR MARY-KATE BURKE, HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERINARY MEDICINE AT SOUTH EAST TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY (SETU) ABOUT PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIRST INTAKE OF STUDENTS TO THE NEW UNDERGRADUATE VETERINARY DEGREE THERE IN SEPTEMBER



Dr Mary-Kate Burke, head of the department of veterinary medicine at South East Technological University (SETU).

**BC:** How is everything shaping up for the first intake of students in September?

**MKB:** Everything is coming together as planned for our first intake on our new MVB in veterinary medicine. There's been a huge amount of work behind the scenes to make sure everything is in place from expert lecturers to clinical training partnerships. We look forward to welcoming 40 students this September. The students can expect a really strong experience from day one.

Between South East Technological University (SETU) and Atlantic Technological University (ATU), we'll see a meaningful increase in the number of veterinary places in Ireland this year, which is very welcome. That said, demand is still quite high across the country, so while it's a big step forward, it probably won't fully meet the need just yet. As the programme beds in and grows, there's definitely scope to increase numbers over time in a way that's sustainable and maintains quality.

**BC:** Will there be an emphasis on recruiting more large animal vets?

**MKB:** There's a clear need for additional large-animal and mixed-practice vets, and the programme development team have been conscious of this during curriculum development and preparing for students arriving in September. The Department of Veterinary Medicine at SETU is focused on



**THERE'S A CLEAR NEED FOR ADDITIONAL LARGE-ANIMAL AND MIXED-PRACTICE VETS, AND THE PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT TEAM HAVE BEEN CONSCIOUS OF THIS DURING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

providing practical, hands-on learning across all species, while encouraging students to consider careers in rural and farm settings.

**BC:** Has there been much collaboration with the School of Veterinary Medicine in University College Dublin to get the new schools off the ground?

**MKB:** There's been good engagement across the sector, including veterinary academic institutions, veterinary practitioners and the veterinary industry more broadly. That kind of collaboration is important to make sure standards are aligned with best practice and that we're taking a joined-up approach nationally.

**BC:** The new veterinary school at SETU is partly aimed at addressing a national shortage of vets. How significant is this shortage for Irish farmers, particularly in relation to large animal care?

**MKB:** The shortage is significant, especially

in rural areas where access to and retention of large-animal vets can be limited. Some farmers are facing delays in routine care and emergencies, which may impact animal welfare and increase stress on both farmers and existing veterinary staff.

**BC:** There is a strong link between veterinary services and farm productivity. How will increasing the number of trained vets directly benefit farm efficiency and animal performance?

**MKB:** Better access to vets means more support around things like herd-health planning, disease prevention, and fertility management. All of that contributes to healthier animals and more efficient, productive farms.

**BC:** What role will this expansion play in maintaining Ireland's reputation for high-quality agricultural produce, especially for export markets?

**MKB:** The quality of Irish agricultural and food products is known internationally and the standard of veterinary care in Ireland is a big part of Ireland's reputation. By educating and strengthening the workforce, we're helping to maintain those high standards, which is crucial for export markets and consumer confidence. Food safety and public health are central components of SETU's veterinary medicine programme, developed in collaboration with Dawn Meats.

**BC:** Will these additional schools improve Ireland's export reputation, do you think?



## STUDENTS WHO TRAIN IN REGIONAL AREAS ARE OFTEN MORE LIKELY TO STAY AND WORK THERE, SO IT HELPS ADDRESS LOCAL SHORTAGES

**MKB:** Over time, yes. Having more highly trained vets supports the entire agri-food system, and that feeds into Ireland's credibility as a producer of high-quality, safe food.

**BC:** How important is it that new veterinary schools are located outside Dublin, and what difference will this make for farmers in regions like the south east?

**MKB:** It is important from a national and regional perspective. Students who train in regional areas are often more likely to stay and work there, so it helps address local shortages. It also strengthens the connection between the university and the farming community in that region.

**BC:** The partnership with Teagasc and facilities at Kildalton College will provide essential hands-on experience. How important is this and what exactly will be provided there?

**MKB:** The partnership with Teagasc Kildalton College builds on almost 50 years of collaboration between both organisations. Students will benefit from the existing facilities

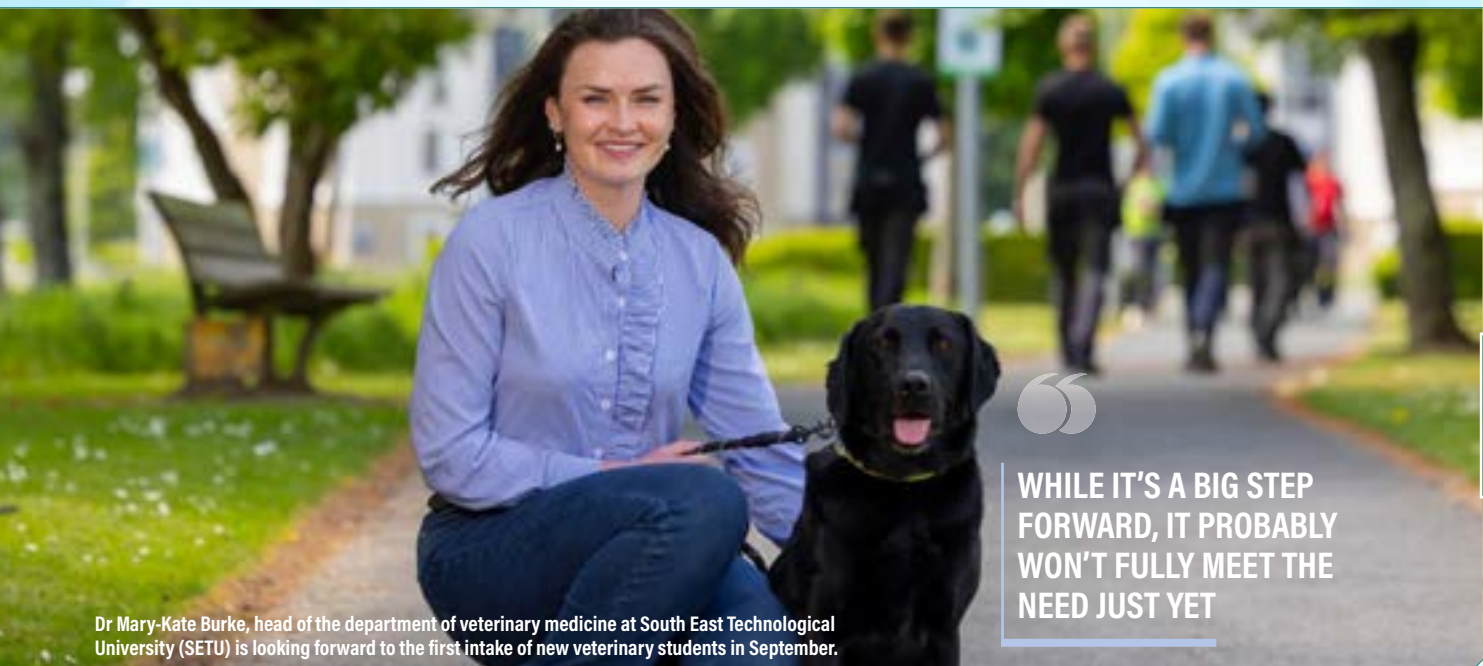
at Teagasc Kildalton and new specialist teaching facilities, including anatomy spaces, to support advanced training in veterinary medicine. This new facility is currently at the detailed design stage. This will allow our students to receive practical experience working with animals in a farm setting with everything from handling and husbandry to herd health. That kind of exposure is invaluable.

**BC:** The programme emphasises a 'One Health' approach. What will students learn about the real on-farm benefits of this?

**MKB:** Students will get a strong understanding of how animal health, human health, and the environment are all connected. Elements of One Health have been integrated into all modules across the five years of the programme. On a practical level, that means better disease control, more responsible use of medicines, and more sustainable farming practices.

**BC:** The initiative highlights stronger collaboration between education, industry, and agriculture. How can farmers and agri-businesses engage with institutions like SETU to maximise the benefits of this development?

**MKB:** There are lots of ways to get involved, through student placements, working with researchers, or taking part in knowledge transfer initiatives. The more farmers and businesses engage, the more relevant and impactful the programme will be.



Dr Mary-Kate Burke, head of the department of veterinary medicine at South East Technological University (SETU) is looking forward to the first intake of new veterinary students in September.



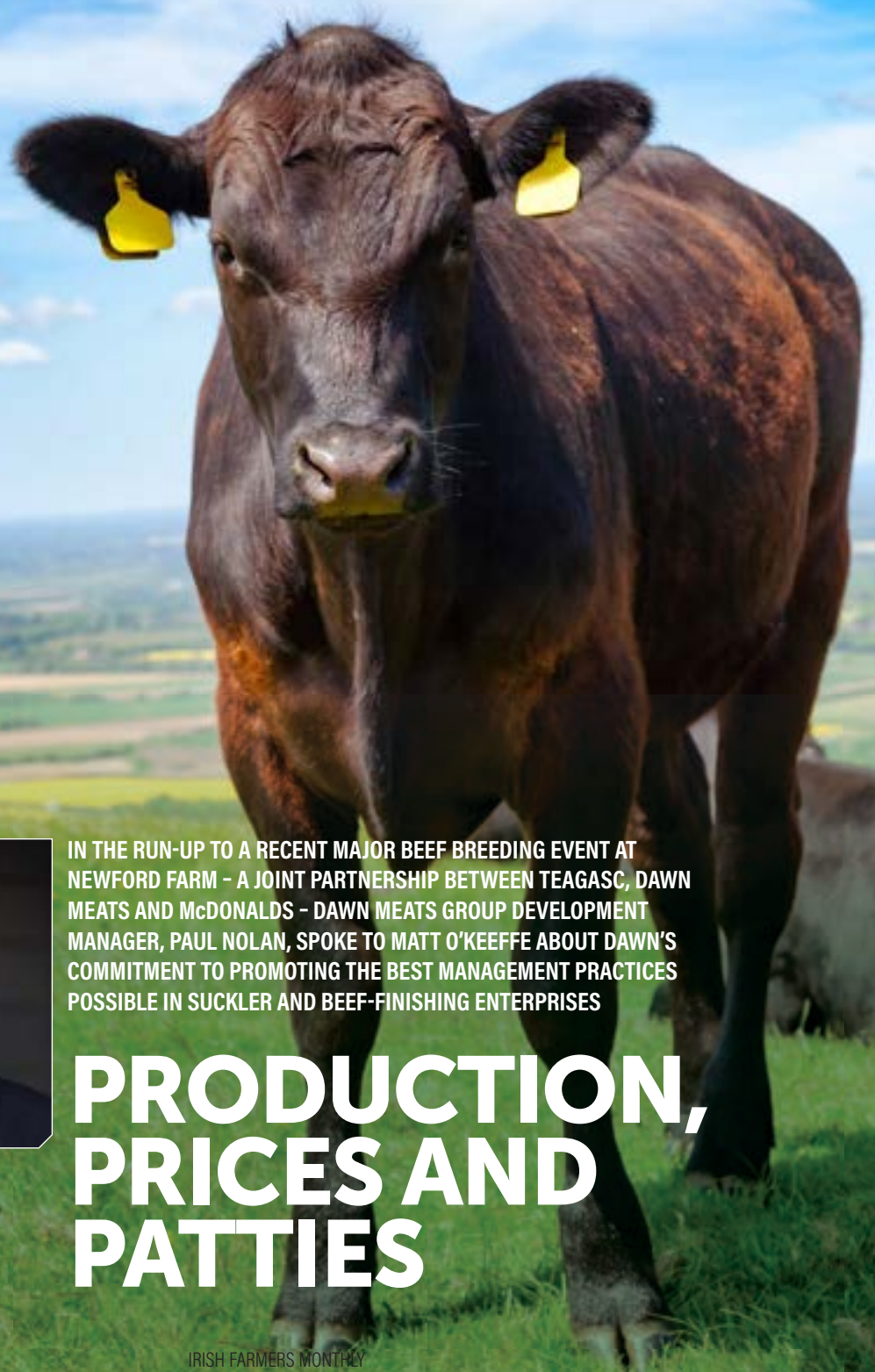
WHILE IT'S A BIG STEP FORWARD, IT PROBABLY WON'T FULLY MEET THE NEED JUST YET

# FOCUS

# FOCUS



**BEEF**



Paul Nolan, Dawn Meats.

IN THE RUN-UP TO A RECENT MAJOR BEEF BREEDING EVENT AT NEWFORD FARM - A JOINT PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN TEAGASC, DAWN MEATS AND McDONALDS - DAWN MEATS GROUP DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, PAUL NOLAN, SPOKE TO MATT O'KEEFFE ABOUT DAWN'S COMMITMENT TO PROMOTING THE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES POSSIBLE IN SUCKLER AND BEEF-FINISHING ENTERPRISES

# PRODUCTION, PRICES AND PATTIES



## SUCCESS IS BASED ON GOOD BREEDING AND GENETICS, GOOD GRASSLAND, AND ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

### In 2015 Teagasc and Dawn Meats, supported by McDonald's, established a commercial suckler herd, known as the Newford Herd, in Athenry, Co. Galway.

The aim was, according to Teagasc, to demonstrate the potential of a moderately large suckler beef farm to generate a viable family farm income when operated to the highest level of technical efficiency and best practice.

The conclusion of the Athenry lease a few years back presented an opportunity to move to the herd to pastures new, and in 2023 Newford Farm, comprising a 90-cow suckler-calf-to-beef herd, was established on 118 acres in Co. Roscommon. It was a positive move, said Paul: "Certainly the results and the achievements have been exemplary. The farm is getting there. Maintaining the efficiencies that we've always had with the herd itself is the most important thing. We brought the herd over from Athenry so we had a head start on the new farm. Obviously, farm infrastructure and refining the management of the new unit is ongoing."

### DAN BROWNE LEGACY

Reflecting on Dawn Meats' co-founder, the late Dan Browne's ambitions for the beef-finishing showcase enterprise, Paul said the initial targets are being achieved. "Our typical bullock is being slaughtered at 22 months of age at 350kg, grade R3, and the heifers are finishing at 18 months of age, typically R3, at 305kg. So, in terms of the efficiencies, slaughtering at a young age, the genetics are absolutely honed at this stage to give us what we're looking for.

"Our suckler first-calver heifers are calving down at 24 months. They would be the offspring of AngusXFriesian cows, crossed initially with an Angus bull and, thereafter, they go on to produce animals of a slightly sturdier nature through crossing with the

likes of Limousin and Charolais and so on up along the line."

### MINIMISING THE SECOND WINTER

Early finishing brings significant cost savings; the vast amount of thrive is being achieved, and beef is being produced just from grazed grass, explained Paul. "Looking back at the last couple of years, the cattle slaughtered have had no more than 550kg of feed in their lives and almost all of that was at the weaning stage of their development. Otherwise, it's grass and grass silage right the way through. It's not what I would call the traditional suckler herd of continental type cows. This is a cow breed that's able to deliver a finished carcass, ultimately, from a lower dam weight."

He continued: "The questions Dan Browne asked were, what does the market want and what's the most efficient way to produce it? We know in Ireland there was a tradition of heavier continental Charolais crosses doing the job. We weren't sure it could be done with a lighter breeding stock. We've proved that it can and is being done on a regular basis in Newford. There is, of course, still a market for heavier cattle. There is a market for every type, particularly in relation to the export market for those continental weanlings that west of Ireland farms are renowned for producing. There'll always be a demand for those bigger muscled animals from the feedlots in Spain and Italy. But for us, it works on a combination. Success is based on good breeding and genetics, good grassland, and animal management."

### PRODUCTION EFFICIENCIES

Paul outlined the efficiencies being promoted at Newford Farm: "There is one person operating the unit. That includes ensuring all the cows are artificially inseminated each year, that grass growth and utilisation are

optimised, and that targets are met for grass, weight gain, and finishing dates. This year, for example, all but six cows calved down in the first six weeks. These are the kind of things that we're trying to show that can make life a bit more workable and sustainable in all its meanings on a suckler farm. Attention to animal welfare and health and safety in general are also high priorities for the farm." Recently, Newford Farm hosted an open day to highlight learnings from the enterprise for visitors. "All the financials, including production costs and returns for the farm, were on view and, especially, how they were achieved, how we got there," said Paul. "We don't pretend to be know-alls; we're trying to show what we think we've successfully achieved, as well as things that didn't go as well as we expected. If farmers saw 12 key points on four boards around the farm that afternoon, and if two or three of them could be applied to their own farm to make their lot a bit better, then I think it's a win-win."

### FINISHER LOSSES

Paul wasn't hiding from the fact that many beef finishers were badly burned, financially when they sold finished cattle during the spring: "Absolutely. That's a given, unfortunately. We knew last year that we were living in exceptional times. The market was on fire because a whole lot of things came together at the same time. There was a global beef scarcity, and an improvement in demand, along with a growing world population that was enjoying a reasonable spend on food, including red meat. Almost overnight, that has changed. Even before the Middle East war started, sales had been under a bit of pressure since Christmas and now, with everybody watching what's going on at the fuel pump and the oil tank, their concern is driving a tightening of consumption and spending."

Paul acknowledged the expectation that prices would have stabilised and increased in line with the normal beef price push early each year, but the opposite happened: "I was just looking at the figures recently, and it was only in late March to early April that prices were less than they were in the same week last year. Price managed to hold generally at the beginning of the year, but that's probably more to do with the fact that the kill was somewhat smaller this year compared to other years. The reflection is just the same as when cattle prices went up last year. The old adage of supply and demand normally kicks in. This year, it just isn't quite there and it's something we all have to watch. And no doubt we'll be watching events unfolding in the Middle East because of the impact that's having on everybody's lives in every way." Paul continued: "The bottom line, all I can tell you really, is that the kills are lower than last year and that is helping hold prices reasonably steady now. I would be concerned if there were a lot more cattle available for kill, then we would see a bit of a surplus and we know what happens in supply and demand when you end up in a surplus. In terms of markets and consumer demand, across the board, in our main markets of Ireland, the UK and Europe you can feel the drag and when you get that drag the first thing people do is consume locally produced beef as far as possible and cut down their spend on the premium quality offering that Ireland is renowned for. So, we feel it slightly quicker than the local processors in our

#### A NEW DAWN DOWN UNDER

Dawn took a controlling interest in a leading New Zealand meat processor last autumn, which has presented a whole new market perspective, said Paul: "The attitude of Dawn will be, obviously, to take management control, but at the same time, to be somewhat flexible, in the sense that we must learn how the thinking, the market and the structure work from a New Zealand point of view. Thankfully, we're fast learners because we need to be."

export markets, but it's felt across the board this year. It's not pleasant out there at the moment."

#### WHERE NOW FOR BEEF PRICES?

Beef markets are especially difficult to predict for the remainder of the year, Paul says: "Overall, livestock numbers are back, not only in Ireland and the UK but across Europe. Is there hope for at least stability and incremental improvements? There are two ways of looking at it. On the one hand, we saw what has happened to beef prices in the first four months of 2026, which, as far as I'm concerned, reflects where the market is. At the same time, mart prices haven't, pro-rata, come down in terms of what people are paying again for store cattle to go out on grass. The positives, as confirmed by Bord Bia statistics, are that we will be down further on last year's kill again this year. That, obviously, should help keep the supply side tight and keep prices to consumers up. On the other side, unfortunately, the big unknown is what is going to be the outcome in the Middle East. If some kind of peace is achieved, then confidence can resurge at a time when beef is still reasonably tight. But remember, in 2027, if everything goes to plan, we will have another 100,000 tonnes of Mercosur product come in. The British will probably up their purchase of Australian beef. Australia has also negotiated an EU contract. So, we need the market to be buoyant to give us the prices that we all want. These are all reasons why people need to be careful when they're making cattle purchasing decisions."

#### THE BIG MAC BUSINESS

Dawn Meats supplies millions of burgers to McDonalds annually; Paul describes the two companies as having a 'wonderful relationship for the guts of 40 years'. He said: "In terms of getting the closest you can to the interface with the consumer in making the burger patties for them since 2012, it has been, I have to say, a very good relationship. There has been huge input by both parties. You have to stay sharp and keep up with the trends and consumer movements and so on. I think it's a credit to both companies that we have made it work so well for so



### IF THEY [McDONALDS] WERE A COUNTRY, THEY'D BE IRELAND'S FOURTH BIGGEST MARKET IN VOLUME TERMS

long as a major processor and supplier of burger patties to McDonalds. In addition, the company buys a heck of a lot of Irish raw material. In fact, if they were a country, they'd be Ireland's fourth biggest market in volume terms.

"Dawn's relationship is unique, in a sense, in Ireland. We make the burger pattie for them. But the rest of the product raw material is going into their own pattie-processing operations across Europe. They are very proud to say, and we're very glad to hear them say it, that one in five burgers eaten in Ireland, Britain or the EU [in McDonalds] today is 100 per cent Irish beef."



Dawn Meats supplies millions of burgers to McDonalds annually.

# Join the Bord Bia Farmer Forum

Bord Bia is inviting applications from farmers and growers interested in joining the new Farmer Forum. This is your opportunity to share constructive feedback, take part in open dialogue, and help shape the work that supports Irish farmers.

## What is the Farmer Forum?

The Farmer Forum will be an assembly of approximately 100 Irish farmers and growers. Discussions will focus on issues and topics impacting farmers, which are relevant to Bord Bia's role and remit.

## Who can apply?

The Farmer Forum is open to all farmers and growers who are actively farming on a Bord Bia Quality Assured farm.

For more information and to apply, visit [www.bordbia.ie/farmerforum](http://www.bordbia.ie/farmerforum)

**Applications open on 5th May and close 20th May.**



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CONOR CRAIG, ALLTECH BEEF SPECIALIST, LOOKS AT WHY SELECTING ANIMALS SUITED TO YOUR INTENDED FEEDING SYSTEM IS CRITICAL TO MAXIMISE PROFITABILITY

### The memorable year of 2025 for beef farmers has not carried through into 2026, with Irish beef producers facing a far more challenging trading environment.

Beef prices have declined by approximately 80c/kg, while factories have been slower to take cattle due to an apparent backlog of stock nationwide. As a result, winter finishers are under significant pressure, with farmers who purchased cattle at high prices in late 2025 now struggling to break even, and in many cases making a loss at current market prices.

#### PRESSURES

Reflecting on 2025, beef prices reached record levels, restoring profitability to suckler systems for the first time in many years and lifting confidence across the sector. However, volatility remains a key feature of the market. Ongoing global economic pressures, combined with fluctuating input costs such as fuel and fertiliser, are expected to contribute to a higher cost of production in 2026.

#### OPTIMISM

As of April 2026, factory prices were beginning to stabilise, with some optimism for price improvement heading into the summer months. The national beef kill has exceeded 72,000 head, while young bull numbers have remained consistent with 2025 levels. This trend may indicate a gradual shift towards higher-output systems, with farmers increasingly targeting animals capable of delivering improved performance.

Profitability in any beef system is largely determined by daily liveweight gain (DLWG) relative to feed cost. Therefore, selecting animals

suiited to the intended feeding system is critical. For high-forage systems, non-continental breeds or crosses are generally more efficient, whereas continental-type animals typically require higher-starch diets to achieve superior carcass weights and kill-out percentages.

#### UNDERSTANDING NUTRITION

A strong understanding of animal nutrition is fundamental to system success. Animals should be gradually transitioned onto their finishing diets over a period of several weeks to minimise the risk of rumen upset. Ruminants depend on a stable microbial population within the rumen to convert feed into usable energy and protein. Maintaining a consistent rumen pH is essential for optimal microbial activity and overall animal performance.

The inclusion of live yeast products, such as Yea-Sacc, has been shown to support rumen stability by helping to regulate pH and enhance microbial efficiency. Improved rumen function can lead to increased nutrient utilisation from both forage and concentrates, ultimately supporting higher DLWG. Research conducted at Teagasc Grange has demonstrated that the inclusion of Yea-Sacc in beef diets can improve performance by over 10 per cent (figure 1).

However, even the most well-formulated diet can only deliver results when supported by strong on-farm management. Feed systems must be consistently implemented, with attention to detail in areas such as feed delivery, animal health, housing conditions, and stock management. Ultimately, it is the combination of sound nutrition and effective management that determines the level of performance achieved on farm.

**EVEN THE MOST WELL-FORMULATED DIET CAN ONLY DELIVER RESULTS WHEN SUPPORTED BY STRONG ON-FARM MANAGEMENT**



Figure 1. Percentage improvements in performance parameters in beef animals fed a Yea-Sacc diet compared to a control diet (Fallon et al., Teagasc Grange Research Centre, 2003).



# MEATY BUSINESS

BERNIE COMMINS HAS A ROUND-UP OF BEEF-FOCUSED NEWS, DEVELOPMENTS, AND EVENTS TAKING PLACE

## BEEF2026 OPEN DAY

### JULY 1

'Driving Sustainable Performance' is the theme of BEEF2026, which is Teagasc's main open day for 2026, sponsored by FBD Insurance. The event will showcase systems and technological advances that can be utilised by cattle farmers from across the country, to increase production and drive income in a sustainable way. Information boards and talks on the main topics of interest to cattle farmers will be presented. These will be combined with live demonstrations and interactive sessions focusing on the latest animal and grassland research and technologies of benefit to Irish beef farmers. Director of Teagasc, Professor Frank O'Mara said: "The beef sector is extremely important to the national economy and plays a crucial role in generating activity in the rural economy. Cattle farming is critical to rural Ireland, and the grass based, family farm systems used in Ireland provides sustainably produced beef for Irish and international markets. This is a valuable opportunity to connect with farmers and share practical ideas that support the future of Irish beef production."

Dr Paul Crosson, Teagasc beef enterprise leader, said: "We have seen a seismic shift in beef markets in the past year, and this event will focus on the opportunities that this presents to Irish beef cattle farmers. We must of course remain conscious of the consumer

demand for sustainable farm systems so, backed by practical, applied research, the best advice for farmers to drive their businesses forward will be highlighted."

## €4 MILLION DAIRY BEEF WEIGHING MEASURE ANNOUNCED

The 2026 National Dairy Beef Weighing Scheme (NDBWS) is open for applications. Designed to support farmers rearing progeny from the dairy herd, is unchanged from its 2025 iteration, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has said. Participants in the scheme will be required to weigh eligible calves and submit the weight data to the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation. Eligible calves can be male calves of a dairy breed or male and female calves of a beef breed sire born to a dairy breed dam in a participant's herd. To qualify for payment, liveweight data must be submitted for a minimum of five eligible calves in a herd and for up to a maximum of 50. Farmers can weigh and upload data on an unlimited number of eligible calves in a herd but 50 is the maximum number on which they will be paid under the scheme. All calves must be at least 12 weeks old and registered on the holding for at least 10 days at the time of weighing. Weight data should be submitted within seven days of weighing but no later than 17.30 on November 1, 2026. Farmers should note that they will only be paid on the number of eligible calves in respect of which they submit liveweight data

by the closing date.

Applications for the 2026 NDBWS must be lodged online before midnight on Friday, May 15 2026 using the MyAgFood portal. Late applications will be accepted, subject to payment deductions, until midnight on Tuesday, June 9, 2026. The full terms and conditions of the NDBWS and other relevant scheme information are available on the Department's website.

## TB (BTB) PROGRAMME CHANGES NOW IN EFFECT

Important changes to animal testing and animal movement requirements to the bovine tuberculosis (bTB) programme came into effect on April 13. The changes being introduced as part of the further implementation of the Bovine TB Action Plan published last year include:

- ▶ The removal of the post-movement test option for all cows and for males over 36 months of age.
- ▶ All dairy cows moved into a breeding herd will require a 30-day pre-movement test.
- ▶ 30-day pre-movement testing for contract-reared heifers.
- ▶ The introduction of mandatory gamma interferon test (GIF) testing in large breakdowns of breeding herds (this will apply to herds in a bTB restriction on or after April 2026).
- ▶ Restriction on sale of exposed cohorts where GIF test is carried out in larger



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Pictured at the launch of the BEEF2026 open day: Pearse Kelly, Catherine Egan, Dr Paul Crosson, Teagasc; Professor Frank O'Mara, director of Teagasc; John Calahan, chief commercial officer, FBD Insurance; Leah Kehoe, branch manager, FBD Drogheda; Margaret O'Donovan, Teagasc; and Pat Gilligan, head of sales west & farmer business, FBD Insurance.

breeding herds for a period of time (this will apply to herds in a bTB restriction on or after April 2026).

### €6M FOR NEW ON-FARM BADGER BIOSECURITY SCHEME

Under the Bovine TB Action Plan, 6m has been pledged for a new on-farm badger biosecurity scheme. The scheme has opened for applications from interested co-operatives and agri-retail merchants from whom farmers will be able to purchase eligible items; applications will subsequently open for farmers. Commenting, Minister for

Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon said: "Good biosecurity is important to reduce the risk of transmission of bTB from badgers to cattle and cattle to badgers. This scheme will allow farmers to reduce the risk posed by badgers to the spread of bTB by contributing to the cost of good on-farm badger biosecurity measures."

In addition to the on-farm badger biosecurity, the minister also announced that the DAFM had recently completed a tender process for a service provider as part of its wildlife programme. "That tender evaluation is now complete, and the contract is currently being



finalised. This will result in an increase in resources on the ground further improving the effectiveness of my department's wildlife programme measures in the bTB Action Plan," he said.

### TB TESTING AND MOVEMENTS - BEEF CONTEXT

For the purpose of this article and in the context of our beef focus, the following outlines the changes in TB testing and movement requirements for beef cattle.

#### 1. Types of testing and movement requirements

- ▶ **A 30-day pre-movement test:** Beef breed cows' movements to dairy and suckler herds where the animal has not been tested in the last six months and the herd that is moving them out has not been tested within the last six months.
- ▶ **Animals which must have been tested in the last six months and the herd that is moving them out has been tested within the last six months:** All beef breed cows moving to all herds other than CFUs (controlled finishing units – a specialised beef finisher).
- ▶ **Animals which can move for up to 12 months after the herd test, with no**

**need for additional testing:** Beef and dairy cows and male cattle greater than 36 months may be sold to CFUs for 12 months after the herd test.

- ▶ **Relapse high-risk (H) herds:** Herds with three or more standard reactors in a breakdown (where there are reactors present in the same exposed cohort that were previously in a H breakdown in that herd); and at least one of the reactors at the relapse breakdown was present as part of the exposed cohort at the previous H breakdown will require testing at six-month intervals for a period of three years, post derestriction.

#### 2. Testing requirements for cattle entering various cattle enterprises

- ▶ **Store/fattening farms:**
  - ▶ All male cattle between 42 days and 36 months of age must be within 12 months of a herd test.
- ▶ **All non-calved female cattle greater than 42 days of age must be within 12 months of a herd test.**
- ▶ **Beef breed cows must be tested in the last six months, and the seller herd must be tested in the last six months, or alternatively within a 30-day test.**
- ▶ **Dairy breed cows must be tested in the last six months, and the seller herd must be tested in the last six months, or alternatively within a 30-day test. However, there must be no breeding cows in these herds.**
- ▶ **All male cattle greater than 36 months of age must be tested in the last six months and the seller herd must be tested in the last six months, or alternatively within a 30-day test.**
- ▶ **Controlled finishing units:** All cattle classes must be within 12 months of a herd test.



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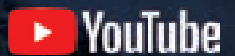
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PRICE PRESSURES ON IRISH BEEF PRODUCERS, EVEN IF EASED SOMEWHAT IN THE COMING WEEKS, ARE LIKELY TO COME UNDER INCREASED PRESSURE AGAIN BEFORE THE END OF 2026, WRITES MATT O'KEEFFE

# BEEF PRICES BUCK HISTORIC MARKET TRENDS

**It's as dependable as night following day. When a commodity is in short supply, prices rise, assuming that demand is maintained.** However, Irish beef prices have defied normal market expectations in the first four months of 2026. Even though slaughterings were down by 64,000 head in the first three months of 2026, compared to the same period in 2025 – according to Bord Bia's meat and livestock manager, Joe Burke, at a recent event – producer prices have failed to reflect this volume reduction.

## NOT UNIQUELY IRISH

If this were a uniquely Irish-based volume reduction it would be easier to explain the lower prices being offered to beef finishers, given that we export 90 per cent of our beef production. Internationally, in several of the leading cattle producing countries across the globe, numbers are down significantly. In the US, for instance, the national beef cattle herd is at its lowest level in three-quarters of a century.

European cattle numbers have also reduced substantially. The French herd is

on a continuing downward trajectory, with year-on-year declines. From a cattle herd of 19 million head in 2015, including beef and dairy – numbers last year stood at 15.7 million head, according to la Confédération Nationale de l'Élevage (CNE). The German figures are a further illustration of contracted output, with production down 6 per cent in 2025 and confirmed to drop again this year.

## CATTLE POPULATION PRESSURE POINTS

Environmental pressures, historical low margins for producers, and increased production costs are all contributing to a seemingly long-term decline in European beef output. It's little wonder that the European Commission is blasé about driving on the implementation of the Mercosur trade deal. This will lead to the importation of a further 99,000 tonnes of South American beef annually, phased in over the next decade, on top of an existing high-tariffed 200,000-tonne import allocation to the South American beef producers. There is likely to be a receptive consumer demand for this well-priced beef, given that many EU countries, including

the aforementioned Germany, are now not producing enough beef to meet domestic demand.

Meanwhile, both Australia and Brazil are already filling many of the gaps in these deficit markets. The US relies on Australian-sourced beef for much of its import requirements. China too, is a major buyer of Australian beef. While Brazil also exports considerable tonnages of beef to the US, its main market is China, accounting for 50 per cent of Brazil's total beef exports.

## FINITE CONSUMER PURCHASING POWER

Both Australia and Brazil increased their beef exports across the world last year, with exports accelerating again in the first months of 2026. This does not fully account for the pricing challenges being experienced by Irish beef finishers. There is still a global beef deficit. In those circumstances it would be natural to assume that prices would be trending upwards. The reverse has happened in the first three months of 2026, with only a mild pricing stability being established by mid-April. One key explanation to understanding

this disconnection between supply and demand is that there has been significant consumer resistance. At current retail prices, consumer purchasing power appears to be finite. They are buying less beef, even as the monetary cost of their purchases remains the same in many instances. Ultimately, this drags on volume sales with producers being the first to feel the pain. Even as beef production volumes reduce in Ireland and across much of the EU, so too do the consumer volumes purchased. Add in the very competitively priced white meats and pork alternative consumer options, and it is easier to see how beef price is under pressure, even as a global beef deficit might be expected to deliver buoyant producer prices.

Counterintuitively, reduced Irish cattle kill since January has coincided with a declining beef price. Bord Bia's Joe Burke confirmed (at the earlier mentioned event) that cattle slaughterings were down by 64,000 head to the end of March. Even allowing for cattle being held back in expectation of higher prices or because the processors had reduced demand and purchasing. Joe said the figures would suggest an annualised 2026 reduction in cattle kill from the high point of 2025 when 1.6 million cattle entered the beef market.

#### TWO-FACED CATTLE DEFICIT IMPACT

The increased prices over the past 18 months for younger cattle, including calves, weanlings and stores, on foot of a lower Irish cattle population, while delivering necessary returns for historically low margin producers, have not been reflected in sufficiently increased end prices for the farmer cohort that brings these cattle to slaughter stage. As ever, it is the margin – the bit in the middle – that is important. In essence, there is a disconnect that is only now being fully felt. Time will tell as to whether the beef market will rebalance to deliver higher prices to beef finishers, or – on the other side of the equation – the suppliers of cattle to those finishers will be expected to accept lower prices for their produce.

#### PRICE PROSPECTS

With higher volumes of imports of South American beef into the EU in prospect later this year and into the future, Irish beef producer prices could come under renewed pressure. Even if third country beef does not come onto the Irish domestic market in any meaningful volumes, because we have such a small consumer base compared to the amount of beef we produce, we are particularly vulnerable to the price softening effects of EU-wide beef imports, given that we export large beef volumes to our EU neighbours. Australian exports to China are now tariff-capped for the foreseeable future, and that country may turn increased attention to the UK, on foot of their 2023 trade agreement with that country facilitating increased beef access. Additional Australian beef imports into our single biggest market, the UK, on top of their current modest tonnages, would signal potential added pressure on Irish beef producer prices. The same tariff ceiling applies to Brazilian beef exports to China, adding another impetus to the South American Mercosur member to maximise both its historical export allowance to the EU as well as the increased volumes allocated through the EU Commission-imposed Mercosur trade deal.

In summary, price pressures on Irish beef producers, even if eased somewhat in the coming weeks, are likely to come under increased pressure again before the end of 2026.



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Teagasc's Dr Peter Doyle, Catherine Egan, and Michael Fagan at the Newford suckler demonstration farm in Scrine, Co. Roscommon. Photo: Clare-Frances Photography.



# MAXIMISING GRASS UTILISATION AT NEWFORD

THE ROSCOMMON-BASED NEWFORD SUCKLER FARM - A JOINT PROJECT BETWEEN PARTNERS, TEAGASC, DAWN MEATS AND McDONALDS - IS PRODUCING CLOSE TO DOUBLE THE GRASS GROWN ON MANY COMMERCIAL FARMS. HERE, WE SHARE THE PRACTICES IN PLACE TO ENSURE ITS UTILISATION IS MAXIMISED, AND WE LEARN HOW THAT ALSO MAXIMISES ANIMAL PERFORMANCE

'Breeding efficient and profitable sucklers' was the theme of the open day at the Newford suckler demonstration farm in Scrine, Co. Roscommon. The day marked the first event since the Newford suckler herd relocated from Athenry at the end of 2023 and farmers from neighbouring counties were keen to see the livestock, as well as the management practices on this top-tier commercial farm.

According to Teagasc, the 90-cow suckler calf-to-beef demonstration herd has continued to pursue its core aims: compact, AI-based breeding; efficient profitable finishing of heifers and steers at a young age; and practical on-farm measures to reduce emissions and enhance biodiversity through the Future Beef and Signpost programmes. Teagasc published a series of papers to coincide with the Newford farm open day. Here, we focus on a paper written by Peter

Doyle, Catherine Egan, and Michael Fagan from Teagasc on how grass utilisation and animal performance are maximised at the commercial farm.

## GRASS TO THE MAX

Newford farm's grazing platform is divided into two blocks: 53.1 hectares (ha) on the home block, and an out farm comprising 21.8ha. In 2025, it produced an impressive 12t DM/ha of pasture using 170kg N/ha (138 units N/acre). Grazed grass continues to offer the cheapest source of feed, despite rising fertiliser costs, and maximum grass utilisation is achieved at Newford in a number of ways, the authors explain: "This is achieved by turning stock out as early as conditions allow, maintaining sward quality throughout the season, and building grass covers in autumn to extend grazing while still ensuring an adequate supply for early spring."



**THE HIGHER QUALITY SILAGE WAS PRIORITISED FOR WEANLINGS AND REPLACEMENT HEIFERS, WHILE LOWER DMD SILAGE WAS FED TO SUCKLER COWS PRE-CALVING**

They point out that grass production on many commercial farms still falls behind that achieved at Newford - the data from Teagasc states that 6.5t DM/ha is being achieved on the former, while 12t DM/ha is being grown on the latter.

The authors continue: "Increasing herbage production and utilisation can be achieved



There was great interest in the recent open day at the recent Newford suckler demonstration farm in Co. Roscommon.

through improved soil fertility, better grazing infrastructure, vigorous perennial ryegrass swards, and the incorporation of clover.”

### FERTILITY IS THE FOUNDATION

As we know, soil fertility is the foundation for grass production and the Teagasc authors note that soil testing regularly is an essential task that must be carried out. They write: “Correcting soil pH is particularly important, as lime application on acidic soils can increase grass production by 1-1.5t DM/ha annually – that is the equivalent of five to 10 additional bales of silage per hectare – from a relatively low-cost investment (approximately €70/ha).” The slurry at Newford, they write, is targeted towards fields with low phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) levels, particularly silage ground where nutrient offtake is highest. Good grazing infrastructure is essential for efficient grass utilisation and with this in mind, the water troughs are centrally located to allow paddocks to be easily subdivided, improving grazing control and enabling practices such as back-fencing. Additionally, all paddocks have multiple access points and farm roadway access to move cattle easily between paddocks and back to the farmyard.

### CLOVER USE

Clover, the Teagasc authors write, plays a central role in reducing reliance on chemical nitrogen at Newford, while maintaining high levels of grass production. Clover has been established across 94 per cent of the grazing area there. Not only does this impact grass growth, but animal performance is also influenced by clover. The Teagasc authors write: “Research from Teagasc Grange shows that incorporating white clover into swards can improve animal performance, increasing weaning weights by approximately 14kg and

carcass weights by 10-14kg compared to grass-only systems.”

### SILAGE

Another important animal performance factor is silage quality and in 2025, silage quality at Newford ranged from 67 per cent to 80 per cent DMD. The authors write: “The higher quality silage was prioritised for weanlings and replacement heifers, while lower DMD silage (67 per cent DMD) was fed to suckler cows pre-calving. Producing high-quality silage reduces the quantity of concentrate supplementation required during the first winter, while supporting target daily gains of 0.6 kg/head/day for weanlings.” At Newford, a fodder budget is completed annually to ensure there are sufficient winter feed supplies.

### DRIVING PERFORMANCE FROM GRASS

The final section of the Teagasc paper highlighted the contribution of grass to liveweight gain. The authors write that in 2025, animal performance at grass averaged 0.97kg/head/day for steers, and 0.77kg/head/day for heifers. Weanlings reached a 200-day weight of 310kg for males and 292kg for females. In 2025, the grazing season at Newford began on February 1 with the turnout of 39 yearling heifers. This year was delayed due to weather and on March 3, 36 yearlings were turned out.

### Sources

The information contained in this article is sourced from a paper by: Peter Doyle, Catherine Egan and Michael Fagan from Teagasc, Animal & Grassland Research Innovation Centres from Grange, Co. Meath and Mellows Campus, Athenry, Co. Galway.

### Report: *Breeding Efficient & Profitable Sucklers*

The report *Breeding Efficient & Profitable Sucklers* was produced by Teagasc, in partnership with Dawn Meats and with the support of McDonald's, and was published to coincide with the open day and to share some of Newford farm's targets and achievements. Some of the highlights of the report include:

- ▶ Both steers and heifers at Newford farm have consistently achieved R= conformation and 3= fat score over the last eight years, while being fit for slaughter and meeting market specification at between 18 and 22 months of age.
- ▶ The average carcass weights being achieved have increased steadily over time, rising from 341kg in 2017 to 372kg in 2025 for steers and 291kg in 2017 to 331kg for 2025 in heifers.
- ▶ 81 cows and heifers calved at Newford in 71 days in 2025 from January 31 to April 11, with an average calving score of 1.5 out of 4 - the vast majority unassisted or needing only minor help.
- ▶ 85 per cent of these cows and heifers calved within the first six weeks, compared to a national average of just 56 per cent.
- ▶ On farm improvements such as a number of water protection works have been carried out at Newford under the Farming for Water European Innovation Programme (EIP). In total, Newford received just over €18,000 in EIP funding and this was invested in two farmyard settlement tanks, three constructed wetland ponds and farm roadway rain bars, with each playing a specific role in improving the farm's overall watermanagement system.

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## MESSAGES

- Identify the challenges within your control and act!
- Know the relative value of feeds.
- Grass management in May is key for quality and yield.
- Use fertiliser – not meals!
- Make 40% - 50% of your silage requirements with a DMD of 73% - 74%.
- Check your breeding management.



By Matt Ryan

### VERY CHALLENGING PERIOD!

- ▶ Milk price is down a lot from last year – nearly 20c/L in March for some farmers!
- ▶ Expensive diesel is an issue, but it is also driving many costs up.
- ▶ Fertiliser is more expensive, but its availability will also be a concern.
- ▶ Spring weather has taken its toll on farmer morale, and on spending:
  - ▶ Meal use to date, by far the highest of all input cost and giving one of the lowest returns (3% - 4%), is far higher than usual.
  - ▶ Many silage pits are totally empty; therefore, we can predict a winter fodder shortage on many dairy farms next winter!
- ▶ However, dairy farmers are resilient and they must always be!
- ▶ Therefore, I need only remind you to stick to your good practices plan:
  - ▶ Stay up to date on your financial management controls.
  - ▶ Try to get the most out of your grass this year to feed less meal and get higher milk yields. Do this by:
    - ▶ Growing as much grass as possible for the remainder of the season; and
    - ▶ Feed the highest quality grass you can to grazing animals.
  - ▶ Manage the breeding season so that you have compact calving next year and fewer cull cows to sell this autumn.
  - ▶ Manage animal health by not cutting back on preventative healthcare.
- ▶ Keep yourself in good health – you are the key!

### KNOW THE RELATIVE COSTS OF FEEDS

- ▶ In a period where we must tighten the belt, it is vital to know the relative values of feedstuffs.
- ▶ They may have changed slightly due to recent cost rises but the relative values are fairly accurate. We compared the various grass/forage options in relative costs to grazed grass per energy utilised, giving grazed grass a score of 1.0:
  - ▶ Grazed grass = 1.0
  - ▶ Grazed grass + white clover = 0.6
  - ▶ Pit silage = 3.3
  - ▶ Baled silage = 3.7
  - ▶ Red clover pit silage = 2.7
  - ▶ Red clover x 3 cuts = 3.1
  - ▶ Maize silage = 3.2
  - ▶ Fodder beet = 2.8
  - ▶ Purchased rolled barley (fresh at €390/t) = 5.2
- ▶ From this, it is obvious that we must increase the clover content of

our farms as it is 40% better value than a straight grass field.

- ▶ As I said before, red clover must be used on outside land to generate some of our silage needs.
- ▶ If you are likely to be tight in winter feed, based on this you can and should make plans now.

### GRASS MANAGEMENT IN MAY IS KEY!

- ▶ Grazed grass is five times cheaper than meal per kilogramme DM; we must focus and rely heavily on it to get us through this period of 'price-cost squeeze'!
- ▶ Firstly, if overstocked, you are going to be in a tail-spin of being short of grazed grass and short of silage next winter. That means buying more meals and silage for next winter. This is the wrong approach for this year.
  - ▶ Sell off surplus cows, particularly cows with problems or poor yielders.
- ▶ May management of grass is key for high quality and high yields for the remainder of the year.
- ▶ Weekly grass measurement and recording the data through PastureBase are key. Let us remind ourselves of the key targets:
  - ▶ Pre-grazing covers (PGC) of 1,400kg-1,600kg DM/ha.
  - ▶ Average farm covers (AFC) of 160kg-180kg DM/ha.
  - ▶ Post-grazing heights (PGH) of 4cm.
  - ▶ Match animal demand per hectare with predicted growth rates in PastureBase's weekly newsletter for your area.
  - ▶ A rotation length of 18-21 days.
- ▶ Based on past data on PastureBase, more than 50 per cent of dairy farmers have been grazing covers that are too high during May. This indicates that they are afraid to aim for the targets or they 'get caught on-the-hop' when grass growth takes off.
  - ▶ For sure, this results in loss of milk and reduced percentage protein in milk. The target loss of milk from one week to the next is 2% - 2.5% (preferably 2%).
- ▶ By watching both your PGC and AFC, you will be able to identify impending surpluses (and deficits) before they arise. You must react to a surplus by removing the surplus for baled silage – and remember the quicker you react, the lower the cost of the reaction!
- ▶ If PGC is higher than target and AFC is also higher than target, then you must:
  - a. Remove one or two paddocks, immediately, for round baled silage or,
  - b. Bring extra stock into the cow area to graze out paddocks or,

- c. Reduce meal levels.
- ▶ If PGC is lower than target and AFC is also lower than target you should:
    - a. Introduce meals/quality bales.
    - b. Graze some of silage ground if not too strong. This may have to be pre-cut to get good utilisation or strip graze small allowances per day.
  - ▶ If PGC is higher than target and AFC is also lower than target, then you should:
    - a. Continue grazing the high covers or,
    - b. Pre-cut to maximise utilisation.
  - ▶ If PGCs are lower than your targets and the AFC are higher than your targets and if growth rates are good, then unless a lot lower, you should be safe enough.
  - ▶ The key is to measure at least once/week but twice /week if you are making adjustments.
  - ▶ Leaving the correct PGH is key to providing quality grass for the remainder of the year. Use a plate meter/discussion group to train your eye to the PGHs advised. Managing PGH is a key grassland management skill, because:
    - ▶ Leaving high PGHs results in wasted grass because every 1cm above 4cm is equal to 250kg DM/ha. This would feed 14 cows for one day! If that's your system and you under-graze to 5cm on seven rotations, then you are wasting 1.75t DM grass/ha, which is worth €780 in meal saving.
    - ▶ High PGHs lead to more stem in subsequent grazing rotations – hence, quality decreases.
    - ▶ That grass left behind will not be available for grazing next time as the plant starts three new leaves – it rots, leaving a sour butt.
    - ▶ Poor tillering results because sunlight doesn't reach the base of the plant.
    - ▶ Good graze outs result in no topping – now a badge of honour as you save on labour and diesel.
  - ▶ A key principle to remember: a grass plant has three leaves and during the key grass growing season a new leaf develops every six to seven days.
    - ▶ When there is 'great growth' a new leaf comes up every six days; hence, rotation lengths should decrease to 17-18 days.
    - ▶ With restricted availability of N to grow grass, we will have to use photosynthesis working on larger leaves to make up the deficit.
  - ▶ Stocking rate on milking platform decides what the pre-grazing cover should be:
    - ▶ 3 cows per hectare: 1,130kg DM/ha.

- ▶ 3.5 cows per hectare: 1,310kg DM/ha.
- ▶ 3.75 cows per hectare: 1,400kg DM/ha.
- ▶ 4.0 cows per hectare: 1,490kg DM/ha.
- ▶ 4.25 cows per hectare: 1,580 kg DM/ha.
- ▶ 4.5 cows per hectare: 1,670 kg DM/ha.
- ▶ Above this stocking rate, high levels of meal need to be fed.

#### USE FERTILISER NOT MEAL

- ▶ The response is 0.8kg milk (value 30c) for every 1kg meal (cost = 33c) fed in the range 1kg to 3kg/day. Above that meal feeding level the response is 0.5kg to 0.6kg (value 23c) per kg meal.
  - ▶ If you have to feed more than 2kg meal/cow/day you need to review your system.
  - ▶ The percentage protein in the meal should be 12%.
- ▶ Research has shown that the return on investment in meal is 3% while the return to applied fertiliser is 48%.
- ▶ Get your fertiliser use correct in May. Use protected urea as your N source in May – at all costs, we must encourage clover by reducing N levels from now to year end as follows:

	Urea + S (kg N/ha)	Units/acre	Urea	(kg N/ha/year)
No clover	32	26	212*	212*
5% clover	20	16	16	175
10% clover	15	12	150	150
15% clover	15	12	12	150
20% clover	15	12	150	150

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

- ▶ You won't grow enough grass if you don't have 53% of your year's nitrogen allowance used by the end of May because there are only four applications left for the remainder of the year and growth rates will be slowing down.
  - ▶ Not adhering to this principle will guarantee you won't have maximised grass grown on the farm.
  - ▶ Most farmers, because they have a very high proportion of land away from the milking platform, will be able to use 230kg N/ha on the milking platform (MP) if they stay under the annual target of 212kg N/ha. And that extra 18kg N should be used in May when the response is greatest.
- ▶ On light soils deficient in S, you will grow more grass (10% - 50% based on research).
  - ▶ With no restriction in S use, you must use one unit of S for every 12 units of N used.



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- ▶ If using S on copper-deficient or high-molybdenum farms, antagonised deficiency may result, so make sure to give animals a copper bolus.
- ▶ Cows should be given areas that last for 24, 36, or 48 hours' grazing.
  - ▶ As well as being beneficial for the cows, it will be less laborious for the farmer.
- ▶ Grass contains sugar, and its level is higher in the afternoon than in morning.
  - ▶ To take advantage of this, let the cows into fresh grass after the evening's milking to achieve more milk and percentage protein.
  - ▶ The longer the leaf, the greater the surface area available to trap sunshine.

### CUT SOME SILAGE EARLY

- ▶ You should make 40% - 50% of your silage at 73% - 74% DMD by cutting it in mid-May. Late heading grass varieties allow you to achieve this quality when cutting later but before heading out.
  - ▶ Because of the year we have had this may not have been planned but taking a light first cut will be more than compensated with a heavier second cut.
  - ▶ Make sure to wilt your silage to ensure good preservation.
- ▶ Fertiliser for second cut: Now is a great time to apply slurry: 2,000 gallons/acre (8-10 units N), to return P and K where most needed.
  - ▶ Follow this seven to 10 days later with protected urea + S (1.5 bags 38:0:0 + 7S).
  - ▶ If no slurry is available, apply 70 units N and two to three bags 0:7:30 depending on soil fertility.
  - ▶ For aftergrass, apply 2.5 to three bags of 18:6:12.
- ▶ It is also an opportunity to apply lime, where necessary on cut silage fields. But apply the slurry first and the lime one week later (definitely not in the reverse order), the same time as bag N, P and K.

### CHECK YOUR BREEDING MANAGEMENT

- ▶ This month, we need to check that everything is going to plan. Basically, that is, that you are submitting the expected numbers of cows for AI each week to meet the 90% three-week target and, that repeats are along expected lines also. See tables 1 and 2. At the very least, make these checks at the end of each week but it is better to do it daily.

Table 1: Herd check on submission rates.

	Target	Target	Your Herd	
	% herd served	100-cow herd	Target numbers	Target numbers
End 1 <sup>st</sup> week	30%	30		
End 2 <sup>nd</sup> week	60%	60		
End 3 <sup>rd</sup> week	90%	90		

- ▶ If you haven't or are not meeting those targets, you need to act fast or you will pay the consequences in delayed calving next year.
  - ▶ If fewer than four to five cows/day per 100 cows are being artificially inseminated (AI'd), then something is wrong.
  - ▶ Talk to your vet or adviser for solutions.
- ▶ Are conception rates or non-return rates (NRR) along expected lines?
  - ▶ You should be hitting NRR of in excess of 60%; that means not

### MAY: SCHEME DEADLINE DATES

- ▶ May 15: Establishment deadline for winter bird food plots in ACRES.
- ▶ May 15: Deadline for BISS and related area-based schemes 2026 application.
- ▶ May 15: Deadline for BISS 2026 entitlement related applications including the online 2026 transfer of entitlements application and the online application for national reserve.
- ▶ May 15: Likely deadline for applications under the CSP Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme, National Dairy Beef Weighing Scheme.
- ▶ May 31: Final date to amend BISS applications with the addition of lands without penalty.
- ▶ June 5: Final date for TAMS tranche 12..

more than 12 cows per 100-cow herd should be repeating per week.

- ▶ The daily check is better, less than two per day, as you are more on top of trends.
- ▶ Again, talk to your vet or adviser if a problem exists. They will try to identify possible causes and suggest actions.

Table 2: Herd check on conception rates/non-return rates (NRR).

	Target	Target	Your Herd	
	% herd served not repeating	100-cow herd - number cows repeating	Target numbers expected to repeat	Actual numbers
End 4th week	60%	12		
End 5th week	60%	12		
End 6th week	60%	12		

- ▶ Body condition score (BCS) all cows now (mid-May and again mid-June). Any cow that is 2.75 or under should be put on once-a-day (OAD) milking for a short time. If cows are still losing weight, even if in good condition, they must be put on OAD milking.
- ▶ I recommend scanning cows that have been served 30+ days and appear 'to have held'.
  - ▶ This will confirm pregnancies.
  - ▶ It will help to identify cows you thought were pregnant and are not.
  - ▶ And it will also identify poor pregnancies - these are unlikely to be identified at the next due heat day.
  - ▶ With this information, you will be able, with the help of your vet and scanner, to put these cows in calf in three to five days.
  - ▶ Sounds like a big job - it is not!
    - ▶ Batch cows by week of AI-ing into week one, two and three.
    - ▶ Easily done with collars but if you use tail paint, raddle mark AI'd cows across the shoulder, each week with a different colour.
    - ▶ Then week one will be scanned on day 35 after mating start date (MSD); week two scanned day 42 after MSD and week three will be scanned on day 49 after MSD.
    - ▶ Many farmers are now doing these scans to very good effect.
- ▶ Vasectomised bulls: They are invaluable if you do not have collars, as they work 24/7.
  - ▶ Use a correct fitting chin ball with the correct paint, which must

be topped up after every 10-15 heats.

- ▶ Remember, it is only the paint marks on top of the back that count – young bulls, during courtship, will mark cows on the side; this is not a heat.
- ▶ Don't use him until two or fewer cows are repeating per day.
- ▶ Beef bulls:
  - ▶ Choose the best DBI bulls for your herd; easy calving is essential.
  - ▶ Stock bulls now have little or no part to play on dairy farms with collars widely available. Beef AI is much, much cheaper, gives more valuable calves and carries less risk. But if you have to use, introduce and monitor them with diligence.
  - ▶ Lamé bulls will malfunction.
  - ▶ Young bulls need more feed and time off as they use up more energy.
  - ▶ Of course, he should have been vaccinated and fertility tested.
  - ▶ For the first seven to 10 days post AI, after introducing the bull, continue to AI all repeats so as to avoid a 'lull' in calving during that transition period next year – the bull has to 'settle in'.
  - ▶ For a 120-cow herd and three weeks' AI you require two mature bulls. For the same number of cows and six weeks' AI you need one mature bull or two young bulls.
  - ▶ In order to monitor him, use a chin ball or continue tail painting the cows.

#### BITS AND PIECES

- ▶ Light calves should be kept on milk replacer until they are 110kg for weaning and fed 1-2kg meal (18% P) until they catch up.
  - ▶ Calves that are 110+ kg now should be off meals.
- ▶ Monitor calves and heifers that are with contract rearer; R1s should be 110kg - 120kg now while R2s should be 330kg - 360kg now depending on breed.
  - ▶ In the agreement with contract rearer you should get animal weights every two to three months so as not to have problems on collection if too light.
  - ▶ Because contract rearing and rearing replacements are very expensive, you should only rear 20% - 22% replacement units.
- ▶ Stocking rate band 3 – greater than 6,313L per cow in 2025. You may have taken this option.
  - ▶ If your average milk yield/cow

in May is greater than 28.7L, then you will fall into band 3 for stocking rate. Take steps to manage.

#### MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH

"Think about the quality of your expenditure! Some expenses are just costs, some expenses are dead-weight costs, and some expenses are almost investments. Examples of 'just costs' could be fuel, personal drawings, and repairs and maintenance. Examples of dead-weight costs could be interest on last year's cash deficit carried forward to this year, rates, and penalties of all kinds. Costs that are almost investments could be fertiliser, good seed, good farm management advice, three-day weekend costs, and wedding anniversary presents. Make sure you think laterally about costs – sometimes with plant policies, interest payments on replacement purchases are a better value for money than repairs on existing items."

**PS Alexander, New Zealand consultant.**



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# HIGH PERFORMANCE AND HIGH COMFORT

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The standout feature of the new 8 Series, according to Deutz-Fahr, is the **SigmaVision: a completely redesigned four-pillar cab, offering panoramic visibility, superior ergonomics, and a spacious interior.** The new cab is completely insulated and supported by an innovative pneumatic suspension system, ensuring unmatched quietness and zero vibrations. To create the most comfortable working environment, the new-generation ComfortPro three-zone automatic air conditioning system puts the operator in complete control of the climate.

The new iControl armrest integrates intuitive, colour-coded controls, MMI and two multi-functional ergonomic joysticks: the iMotion joystick, featuring several freely assignable buttons for expanded control and the CrossLever joystick with new layer management for precise, intuitive and customisable operations. Two high-resolution digital displays – a market-leading 15-inch iCluster on the A-pillar and a 12.8-inch iMonitor 5 next to the iControl armrest – create a fully digital operator experience,



The new cab is completely insulated and supported by an innovative pneumatic suspension system.

merging machine data, guidance functions, and comfort settings in one intuitive interface. The new electronic architecture enables seamless integration of SDF Smart Farming Solutions, including Auto Guidance, Isobus, Xtend, and Telematics. The system supports digital camera integration and is preconfigured for Deutz-Fahr TAGS (Tractor

Assisted Guidance System), which has been awarded a silver medal at the Agritechnica 2025 Innovation Awards.

The 8 Series' new MyDeutz-Fahr App makes tractor management simpler, safer, and more efficient. Farmers, tractors, and data now work together to achieve maximum output with minimum effort, according to the company.

## FEATURES

Premium features include seat massage function with DualMotion headrest, Low-E coated windows, laminated safety glass, and footrests for enhanced comfort during long working hours, all highlighted by an advanced and powerful all-LED lighting system that sets a new standard in visibility and style. To further enhance comfort, the newly developed front axle suspension with an extra-long swing arm and dry disc brakes provide outstanding stability, comfort, and safety – even at speeds of up to 60 km/h.

## ENGINE

The new 8 Series is equipped with the latest N67 engine with eVGT and high



**IT'S A TRACTOR DESIGNED WITH A CLEAR GOAL: MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY WITH UNCOMPROMISED COMFORT IN A FULLY DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

efficiency Hi-eSCR system, delivering up to 1,398 Nm of torque. Tailored in collaboration with FPT, it integrates seamlessly with Deutz-Fahr systems, and is combined with a sculpted hood that provides best-in-class visibility and manoeuvrability. A powerful engine, designed specifically for the agricultural sector, delivering high torque and ensuring quick responsiveness and fuel efficiency. The engine is HVO-compatible and features a 1,000-hour oil change interval, ensuring reduced maintenance costs and maximum uptime. A robust aluminum cooling system guarantees optimal thermal efficiency even under the most demanding conditions. The TTV transmission delivers smooth, continuous power from 0-60km/h, providing outstanding traction, acceleration, and control across all terrains at low engine speed, all while keeping fuel consumption remarkably low.

Hydraulic performance has been further optimised with up to 220L/min load-sensing pump capacity featuring a separate CleanOil tank, 10-way electronic distributors, a dedicated low flow valve for the hydraulic top link and pressure relief levers for easy coupling and uncoupling. Together, these features provide maximum hydraulic power with exceptional fuel efficiency and impressively low noise levels.

The rear lift offers 12,000kg capacity, while the front lift provides 5,450kg with Load Relief Control, ensuring efficient handling of implements in any condition.

Commenting on the 8 Series, Alessandro Maritano, SDF chief commercial officer said: "For us, it represents a crucial step forward: we have strongly believed and invested in a project that puts farmers and their needs at the centre. The result is a powerful, innovative tractor and, thanks to the new SigmaVision cab, always connected with the highest comfort. The operator is at the centre of the machine, connected to a world of digital farming. A tractor that doesn't just meet expectations: it goes beyond them."

Alberto Bellini, SDF global product group director added: "The 8 Series marks a revolution starting from the top, with 340hp. Not just power on the ground, but effectiveness and versatility across all applications: from road transport to the most demanding fieldwork offering a perfect power-to-weight ratio and the ability to adapt to any need. It's a tractor designed with a clear goal: maximum efficiency with uncompromised comfort in a fully digital environment."



**NOEL DUNNE**  
Machinery editor

## FIRED UP

**For the most part, my monthly column is machinery or machinery-sector focussed and that is how I like it but sometimes you have to get off the fence and stray from the norm.**

This is one of those times, so please bear with me as I row in on the happenings of the last few weeks in our modern Ireland. Now, unless you have been on the shuttle to Mars with the Americans you will know our country has been 'in a terrible state o' chassis'. The fuel crisis protests, a culmination of several things, really highlighted this point for me.

People are feeling pressure at the pumps and in the shops, they are trying to rent homes at extortionate prices but can't afford to buy their own. Mostly, people are trying to make life better for themselves and their families, but obstacles keep popping up.

Many are among the 'working poor' who, at the end of the month, have very little left once the bills are paid, and loans are repaid. And that 'very little' is disappearing as the price of everything is going one way. And farmers and contractors are at the end of their tether as costs go up, up and up on one side but earnings on the other no way near match them!

The recent fuel protests really showed how much unrest and unhappiness there is right now among farmers and contractors, and indeed hauliers – all the people who put food on our plates. They had a message for the rest of the country: we need them and if they can't operate, we are in dire straits! It is a shame that there was another less accountable layer to the protests, which muddied this message. I was chatting to a good friend of mine the other day, and he summed up very well the Government's response to the recent protests and the fuel crisis. He said: "The tánaiste spoke very well for himself, he spoke very well on behalf of the Government, but he spoke terribly for the people." My personal opinion is that the Government's refusal to engage with some of the 'leaders' of the protestors – those who were doing it for all the right reasons – was wrong. Those who legitimately protested were just trying to protect their livelihoods: truckers, traders, builders and plumbers all standing shoulder to shoulder with farmers, contractors – all facing higher costs.

Greater supports are needed to help rural Ireland and its treasured businesses to weather this storm. The €505 million fuel package from Government is not enough and as IFA president, Francie Gorman put it, far more must be done to address the frustration and anger in rural Ireland, particularly around the cost of doing business and over-regulation.

It is the Government's job to protect its people, and its people are angry! But anger turns to hurt – both financially and emotionally – and hurt, my friends, runs deep and is scarring. And people are slow to forget this.

But those scars have to be pushed to the side – for now – as silage season is upon us and, as usual, the show goes on thanks to the hard-working men and women of rural Ireland. Many of these are the same men and women who mobilised to Dublin some weeks ago, and now they are expected to get on with it, despite all the challenges.

Appropriately, I end this month's column on a machinery note because, remember, it's machinery that is one of the first steps in the chain when it comes to food production; you have to till, sow, roll, harvest, transport. And it takes fuel to run these machines and if they don't run, well, that doesn't bear thinking about.

Until next month, farm safely, farm wisely.



**Tom Murphy**  
Professional Agricultural  
Contractors of Ireland

## FIVE HOURS AT THE TABLE

**Tom Murphy was at the table when the Government met stakeholders last month during the ongoing and controversial fuel protest. He shares his experience, and tells us what changes he would make to ensure a repeat situation is averted.**

As the fuel protests gathered momentum, there is no doubt they had public support, including many of my friends and relatives. It was simple, they wanted the price of fuel to be reduced to the price they paid before the conflict in Iran. In their minds, the Government was to blame. Simple. And that is the predicament the Government found itself in. It was quick to throw quarter of a billion euro at keeping pump prices down for the general public but didn't have a plan or even a notion on measures needed to help farmers, agricultural contractors, hauliers and many other sectors badly affected by the fuel crisis. There was no contingency plan to deal with such an emergency – and that must be addressed.

### NO PLAN?

In our democracy, the Civil Service runs the country. Yes, politicians set policies, but ministers and TDs come and go. Government departments must have plans in place to deal with any worst-case scenario that comes under their remit, but neither the civil service nor the politicians seemed to have anticipated such a scenario. Since February 28, the world and its mother have been following events in the Middle East and the disruption of the oil supply to world markets by President Trump's actions against Iran. So, the question is why did it take the Irish Government six weeks to come up with a plan, particularly when within three weeks of the conflict, stakeholders were beating a path to meet with ministers? That delay lost them every ounce of credibility with the public and led to the streets being taken over by protesters, who not only caused havoc for the general public but upped the campaign to block Whitegate and other fuel distribution depots in Galway, Limerick and Cork. The irony of the blockades was that the protesters would have run out of fuel themselves if the Gardaí had not removed them.

The added problem is that unlike other EU countries Ireland does not have a large national fuel reserve. We rely, as do retail stations, on 'just-in-time



**The National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG) met on April 10 at Government buildings. Photo: Tom Murphy.**

delivery'. Not holding large amounts of fuel can be a big money saver, but it is also an Achilles heel as we saw. With no fuel being allowed out of Whitegate, ships delivering oil were anchored offshore and threatening to go elsewhere with their cargo, as were ships bringing in fertiliser. That alone forced the Government to act and have the blockade removed.

### PAC AT THE TABLE

I received an invitation from the Government, along with other stakeholders, to attend a meeting of the National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG) on April 10. We gathered at 2pm and I hoped we were going to hear a comprehensive Government plan to help various sectors – farming, transport, agricultural contractors, and business. I hoped we would have an update to bring back to our members.

Chairing the meeting was Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon alongside Minister for Transport, Darragh O'Brien. There were also five ministers of State present or on Zoom. The meeting started with senior civil servants outlining the overall situation with regards to the critical reserves the country held and how long they would last, and what effect the continuing conflict would have on exports. Each stakeholder was invited to have their say, with most reiterating what their sector needed, and all asking what the Government was going to offer. The reply was that they would have something shortly, but nothing until the blockades were lifted. My clear understanding was that the ministers were saying that because they wanted the farming organisations to condemn the blockades.

When my turn came, I protested that by having nothing to give us today to bring to our membership, the Government was undermining all the stakeholders around the table. To say there would be no help until the blockades were removed, was unacceptable. I said the Government needed to enforce the law and remove the blockades to allow movement from Whitegate and distribution centres to enable ships to dock and fuel to be distributed.

### NOTHING ON THE TABLE

A five-hour meeting ended with nothing on the table. I was annoyed and frustrated. The meeting resumed the next day but still, nothing. Before the meeting finished, we had a pep talk from all the

ministers of State – including Michael Healy-Rae, who resigned his post in a blaze of publicity just a few days later – imploring everyone to support the Government. There is no doubt the country was facing a crisis of unbelievable magnitude, and I don't use these words lightly. Everyone seemed to have a solution – remove carbon tax and other levies. But it's not as simple as that! What about the 55,000 farmers who benefit from the money raised from the carbon tax for environmental projects?

### TAKEAWAYS

What do I take from this crisis, from which there will be long term repercussions? We were badly let down by the absence of leadership from the Civil Service who had no plan. Our politicians took far too long to get a grip on the situation. Some politicians seemed more interested in their political careers than to tell the the blockaders to protest away from critical centres that are the lifeline for the nation. Some of the stakeholders wouldn't call out their members who were on the protest. We were let down by the vocal 'leaders' of the protest who had no coherent plan but used all the tactics of the soapbox orator for their moment in the spotlight. I wonder would my friends and relatives and the public have supported the blockade when they had no fuel for their car, no milk in the fridge, and empty supermarket shelves?

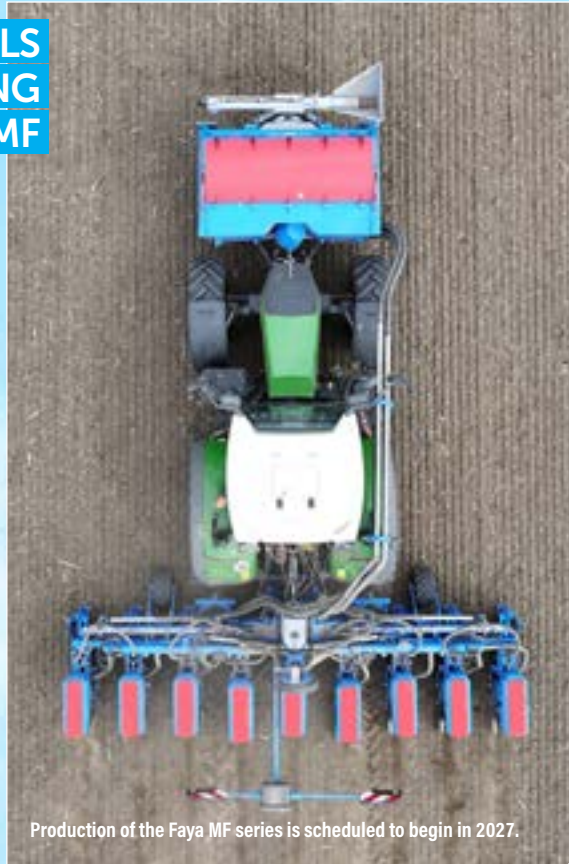
### ARE WE POWERLESS?

As I sat in that meeting room, looking around the table at the stakeholders who keep food on our table, who were outnumbered by ministers, who themselves were outnumbered by civil servants, I realised how utterly powerless we were. Thirty-five days into the war in Iran and there was no coherent plan. If I was sitting at the cabinet table, albeit after the event, I would demand an inquiry, not by the Civil Service but by someone from the judiciary. They would have the power to compel individuals to comply with the inquiry, and to reach into every Government department to ask why there were no emergency plans in place. My second action would be to appoint a minister for emergency planning at cabinet rank, who would have the power to assess all Government departments for potential national risk and ensure that plans for the security of national resources are in place, and regularly updated.

## LEMKEN NAILS PRECISION DRILLING WITH FAYA MF

**Lemken's Faya MF precision seed drill is, according to the company, a classic precision seed drill that offers a single-row seeding solution to complement the tried-and-tested Azurit with Delta Row seeding.**

It gives farmers and contractors who require both maximum placement precision and a high area output, a tailor-made solution for sowing row crops, says Lemken. The Faya MF is available now as a pre-series machine, with series production scheduled to begin in 2027. At the heart of this precision seed drill, which will be available in eight-, nine-, or 12-row versions, is a modular frame design with a working width of six metres and a two-section folding mechanism. Depending on the specific crop and the farm's production methods, this allows a variety of row and spacing combinations to be implemented, ranging from a narrow 45cm to a maximum of 80cm. The system

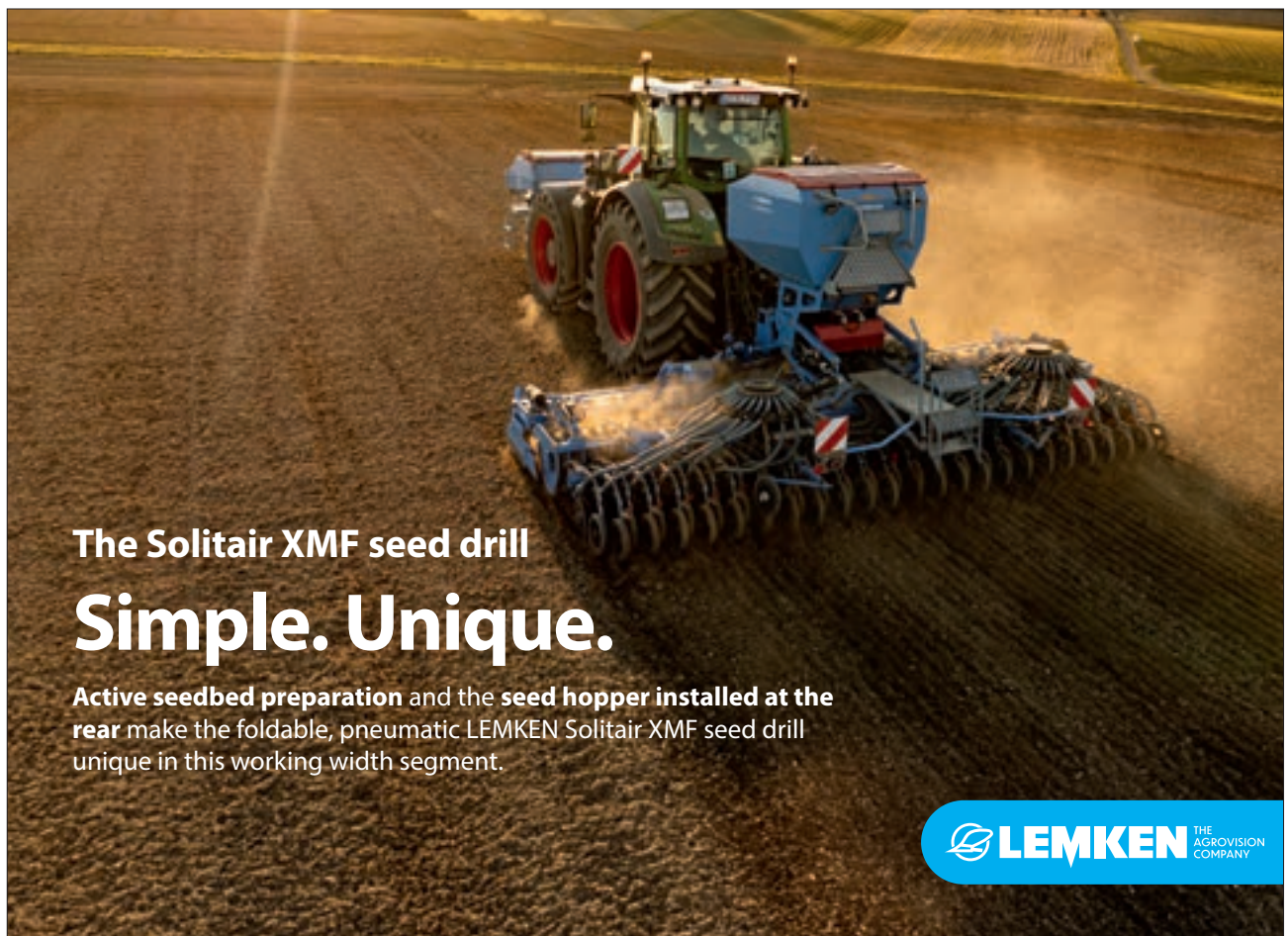


Production of the Faya MF series is scheduled to begin in 2027.

also enables swift conversion between 12x50cm and 8x75cm. This increases the machine's capacity utilisation and makes it economically attractive for a wide range of crops, from beet to maize.

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

The Faya MF also features practical 70L row hoppers for seeds, the option of under-root fertilisation via a combination unit, and the Lemken iQblue seed Isobus control system, including automatic width section control and an automatic tramline mechanism.



## The Solitair XMF seed drill Simple. Unique.

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



## KRONE EXTENDS HIGH-END RANGE OF ITS VENDRO SERIES

**Krone's new Vendro C 1340 is a 12-rotor tedder with a working width of almost 13.4m. It is capable of enormous efficiency with maximum output attributable to the OptiTurn rotor concept tried and tested in the Vendro series, according to Krone.** The Vendro C 1340 is offered in two equipment variants. The current top model of the Vendro series is equipped with the OptiTurn rotor concept. With 24cm added working width, the Vendro C 1340 surpasses its predecessor, the KWT 1300. As a standard, the Vendro C 1340 comes with a reversible drawbar and 40 mm drawbar lug for top and bottom hitching, or optionally with a K80 ball-head hitch or swinging drawbar. The standard equipment of the Vendro C 1340 Plus is a two-point hitch including tension spring. The benefit of this spring is the load compensation it provides in headland position, ensuring safe driving in all situations even with small or light-weight tractors. Thanks to these flexible hitching

options, a suitable solution can be found for any tractor.

Twelve rotors with 1.5m diameter, each with six tine arms, provide a generous overlap and thus allow for highly efficient tedding and turning on a working width of almost 13.40 m. Above all in highly contoured terrains, the OptiTurn rotor concept ensures optimum ground adaptation: The rotor guide wheels run very close to the three-dimensionally curved OptiTurn tines that pick up the crops accurately without raking losses before spreading them evenly and loosely. Depending on the type of use of the machine, the spreading angle can be variably set in four levels in a range of 13° to 19°. A steep spreading angle is used for intensive conditioning or tedding of the crops, a shallow angle for gentle turning. The tractor driver can easily adjust the desired working height centrally via a crank handle directly at the machine. The optional hydraulic

adjustment offers even more operator comfort with the adjustment made from the tractor cabin. This ensures that the operator can react quickly and easily to changing conditions at any time.

On request, the machine can be equipped with a border swath cloth mounted on the right side in direction of travel that is folded in and out hydraulically via operation panel. This prevents the crops being spread beyond the field borders and thus avoids border spreading losses.

An absolute highlight of the Vendro C 1340, according to Krone, is the hydraulic relief of the transport axle available on request – in the Plus variant, it is even comprised as a standard. Tried and tested in the smaller version, the Vendro C 1120 and its predecessor KWT 1300, it functions as follows: during work, the transport axle runs along on the ground very close to the operating range of the tines, guiding them optimally over each ground contour. To avoid damage to the sward when navigating narrow curves, the transport axle can be relieved. This reduces the weight on the axle by means of a special hydraulic system. The benefit: The sward remains intact, and neither the contact to the ground nor the function as a front guide wheel for the tines is lost. This guarantees a high forage quality also for the next cuts.

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**farmhand**



## UPDATES TO NEW HOLLAND DEALER NETWORK

New Holland has announced updates to its dealer network in the Republic of Ireland. These changes ensure all New Holland customers across the region will continue to receive comprehensive sales and service support from well-established main dealers, the company said. The changes, effective immediately, are as follows:

- ▶ Murphy Motors will expand their territory to cover the entirety of Waterford county, supported from their Glenmore depot;

- ▶ MC&S Agri Sales will expand south to cover the southern area of Cork county, supported by both their Bandon and Ballincollig depots; and
- ▶ Colemans Millstreet will expand their territory to cover the northern area of Cork county. Support for this area will be provided by their Millstreet and Mallow depots.

David Rapkins, commercial business unit director for UK and RoI said: "This expansion signals an important step forward for these

three dealers, highlighting their shared commitment to delivering continued support to New Holland customers." In February this year, Cavanaghs of Fermoy ceased trading after 100 years in business. It was a well-known New Holland dealer in the region. Commenting on the closure, David said: "We would like to extend a sincere thank you to the entire team who worked at Cavanagh's of Fermoy, for their longstanding service and commitment to the brand over the years."






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Pictured in 1989 at Adare Manor, this is one of the most iconic shots in Irish farm machinery history - and was published internationally. It depicts 16 New Holland forage harvesters with their new owners, along with staff of WW Doherty & Sons Ltd, and New Holland.  
Photo: Courtesy of WW Doherty & Sons Ltd.

## 100 YEARS ON AND GOING STRONG

LAST MONTH, NOEL DUNNE SPENT A WONDERFUL EVENING WITH THE DOHERTY FAMILY - WW DOHERTY & SONS LTD - AND THEIR FRIENDS AND RELATIVES, MACHINERY SUPPLIERS, AND MANY CUSTOMERS FROM ACROSS LIMERICK, CLARE, KERRY, AND BEYOND AS THEY MARKED 100 YEARS IN BUSINESS WITH A VERY SPECIAL MACHINERY SHOW AND CELEBRATION DINNER. HERE, WE SHARE SOME IMAGES FROM OF THE SPECIAL OCCASION



Enjoying the 100-year anniversary celebration of WW Doherty & Sons Ltd: DJ O'Connor, contractor from Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry; Peter Hennessy, Same Deutz-Fahr (SDF), Ireland; Sean O'Connor, Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry; Graham Barnwell, country manager, SDF, UK/Ireland; Billy Cunningham, after-sales SDF, Ireland.



Attending the 100-year anniversary celebration of WW Doherty & Sons Ltd in Adare: Shane Ruttle, a contractor from Rathkeale, Co. Limerick, with Roland Doherty, MD, WW Doherty & Sons Ltd.



Pictured with a Deutz-Fahr backdrop at the 100-year anniversary celebration of WW Doherty & Sons Ltd: Paddy, Brian and Colm McSweeney, contractors from Lissycasey, Co. Clare.

#### FOURTH-GENERATION FAMILY BUSINESS

William Walter Doherty started the family business in 1926 as a taxi service and bicycle shop. Car sales were added in 1927 and they sold their first tractor in 1935 – a Fordson. Throughout the war years, WW Doherty & Sons Ltd sold Allis-Chambers tractors, but the big earner for them during this time was the repair and re-sale of farm machinery.

William Walter's son, the late Walter T, later took over the business, then his son James joined in 1963. He and his wife, Miriam, took over its management in 1976 and two years later, James's brother, Ivor joined them.

In 1979, the Doherty's brought the first round baler to Limerick and in the 1980s they acquired the New Holland and Kuhn franchises, before becoming the biggest New Holland forage dealer in Europe, covering 26 counties from their base in Adare, Co. Limerick.

In 1995 they set up a very successful Kerry branch and a year later, in 1996, James's son, Roland joined the family business. In 2010, they joined forces with Deutz Fahr UK and in 2013, Roland took over running the business. WW Doherty & Sons Ltd holds the franchise for Deutz-Fahr, Conor, Prodig, Samasz, Newmac, and Kab Seating, and more.



▲ John Blennerhassett with Todd Magner, both farmers and contractors from Co. Limerick.



▲ Ivor Doherty with Roland Doherty holding the next generation in his arms, baby Tiernan, and James Doherty.



▲ Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Niall Collins, pictured with Roland, Aoife, Miriam, James and Ivor Doherty, at the 100-year anniversary celebration of WW Doherty & Sons Ltd in Adare.



▲ Roland and Aoife Doherty, with babies Tiernan and Olivia, and Layla, Charlotte, Isobelle (front) enjoying a wonderful family celebration as WW Doherty & Sons Ltd celebrate 100 years.



Pictured at the presentation of the All Ireland Dealer of the Year award for 2025 from Case IH: Frank Ward, territory manager Ireland; Simon Pratt, Case IH business manager UK & ROI; Kieran Tobin, Tobin & Cantwell sales manager; David Rapkins, CNH commercial business unit director UK & ROI and James Tobin, Tobin & Cantwell managing director.

## TIPP DEALERSHIP WINS PREMIER CASE IH AWARD

**Congratulations to Tobin & Cantwell Ltd, based in Co. Tipperary, on its recent All Ireland Dealer of the Year award for 2025 from Case IH.** Additional category winners were recognised across sales, service, parts and precision farming – all in the UK – highlighting the dedication of Case

IH dealers delivering outstanding value to farmers and contactors across the region. “These awards reflect the exceptional work carried out across our dealer network throughout the year,” said David Rapkins, CNH commercial business unit director UK & ROI. “Our dealers play a vital role in

supporting customers, providing expertise, and representing the Case IH brand with professionalism and passion. We are proud to recognise their achievements and ongoing commitment to delivering outstanding service across the UK and Ireland.”



# A LONG WAY TOGETHER

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Denis Drennan  
President ICMSA

## WHERE'S ALL THE BEEF GOING?

**In light of recent controversy, the ICMSA paid particular attention to the detailed figures released recently by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine that showed that over 40,000 tonnes of beef was imported to Ireland last year, the equivalent of 118,000 steers based on average carcass weight.** The chair of our Livestock Committee, Michael O'Connell, noted that, based on 2024 CSO figures, Ireland produced seven times more beef than it consumed and legitimate questions had to be asked about why anyone would need to import beef in any notable quantities? He added that those questions would only multiply as people realised that the largest single source of this beef being imported into Ireland was Great Britain, which was also the single biggest export market for Irish beef.

However, at the time of writing (end of April), the questions asked by the ICMSA have not been answered. Something about this data did not add up and farmers – and anyone else with an interest in the sector – is entitled to ask where these 40,000 tonnes were going, how it was being sold and consumed, and who was bringing it in?

### QUESTIONS

Based on the average carcass weight for steers in 2025 of 346kg, we arrive at an extra 118,000 steers. That would equate to an additional 2,300 cattle per week that processors would have needed to purchase and slaughter. The very first question that arises is why you'd need to import so much beef into a country that exports over 90 per cent of what it produces – multiples of what it consumes?

The second question is who is responsible for the importation of this product, and we better not be fobbed off with this latest nonsense that this is 'commercially

sensitive information' or that this part of a 'contingency plan'. There have always been rumblings of imported beef, but the figures are startling and disturbing in equal measure. Last year was the best year on record for a long time for beef farmers but – by the looks of it – it could have been better still, were it not for this mysteriously large volume of imported beef brought into Ireland.

The third question we are asking is even more urgent: how can the largest exporter of beef to Ireland be our closest neighbour, Great Britain, which is also, bizarrely, our biggest single export market for beef? This is mind-boggling and we need to find out what's going on here.

### SELF-SUFFICIENT BY MILES

As a nation, based on 2024 CSO figures, Ireland was 700 per cent self-sufficient in terms of beef production. So, why would we need to import beef at all? The answer is simple: it is a means of controlling cattle prices; it's a means of controlling price paid to farmers. All of this has to be explored against the background of the Commission forcing through the Mercosur trade agreement. In the face of determined opposition by the ICMSA and others, 300 tonnes of beef was imported to Ireland from Brazil and Argentina. It may be miniscule in the grand scheme of the agreement, but how long has it been coming into Ireland? What customs checks are carried out? What food safety checks are carried out? Can it be guaranteed it is hormone-free and can it be traced to both who sold it and who consumed this beef?

Even after the controversy at the start of this year, 33 tonnes of Brazilian beef were imported in January 2026. Do the people importing this beef not care about the health of the Irish people or the livelihoods

of Irish farmers or – as usual – is their profit-line the only consideration? Spring 2026 has been one to forget for finishers between the colossal drop in price from last autumn to the hassle and annoyance of long waiting lists to get cattle slaughtered.

### EXPLAINS A LOT

Whatever about the waiting time, we are certainly beginning to understand the mysterious drop in price. There were 3,705 tonnes of beef imported in the month of January 2026, which is the equivalent of 10,708 steers based on 2025 average carcass weight. Put very simply, in the four full weeks in January, this would have been the equivalent to an extra 2,700 (approximately) cattle that needed to be killed per week to match the quantity of, most likely, sub-standard beef. That explains why farmers were not being given 'slots' in the factories and found it hard to get cattle slaughtered. It also begins to explain the complete hammering that factories have given beef farmers on price this year.

### QUESTIONS NEED ANSWERING

We are asking Minister Martin Heydon directly to come forward with an explanation for these beef imports. Because as it stands, very serious questions are raised. It is frankly unbelievable that beef imports of these volumes have gone this far unexplained and unquestioned. Well, we are asking the questions now and we'll go on asking them till we get a full answer. Who's bringing these volumes in? Where is that beef going and what checks have been done on it and why is Britain the biggest source of the imported beef while it's also the biggest market for exports of Irish beef? If there's a rational explanation for this, then the ICMSA and Irish beef farmers are waiting impatiently to hear it.

Construction work underway at the new Flying Tumbler whiskey production facility and brand home at the Walsh family farm in Larch Grove, Co. Carlow.

IRISH WHISKEY BRAND, FLYING TUMBLER, HAS BEEN MAKING A SPLASH IN IRELAND AND ABROAD FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, AND IS NOW TRANSFORMING THE FAMILY FARM INTO ITS WHISKEY MATURATION, BLENDING, AND BOTTLING FACILITY

# FARM DIVERSIFICATION IN HIGH SPIRITS

Over the past couple of decades, there has been a renaissance in the popularity of Irish whiskey. This has been led by Irish Distillers, with its brand leader Jameson, which is now one of the top selling whiskeys globally. If international sales continue to surge forward, Irish whiskey will outsell Scotch whisky in the decade ahead, taking the Irish spirit back to where it was over a century ago, as the best-selling whiskey in the world. As well as the big distillers, including the aforementioned Irish Distillers, Tullamore Dew and Bushmills, there are now several new distilleries competing successfully on the Irish and global spirits market.

One notable example is the Flying Tumbler Irish whiskey brand developed by Carlow brothers, Thomas and Patrick Walsh. Based at the Walsh farm in Larch Grove, Ballytarsna, Carlow, plans are being implemented to develop whiskey maturation, blending, and

bottling facilities for Flying Tumbler on site. Patrick explains: "For us, Flying Tumbler Irish whiskey was always about returning home. The farm at Larch Grove has been in our family for generations, and we wanted to create a new farming future for generations to come. There was a lot of negativity around the industry in 2025 but we are already seeing the positive headwinds of 2026."

## PROMOTING FARM DIVERSIFICATION

Carlow Leader is providing funding of €200,000 to assist in the farm-based development of whiskey maturation facilities. The aim is to create 15 new jobs when the farm diversification project is completed. Alongside the diversification project, the Walshes have been busy bottling two new expressions to complete their core trilogy. Launching in the coming months, The Roller, a non-age-stated single grain, and The Tippler, a blend of single pot still and single grain,

will be available for export to key markets alongside The Bird, a triple-distilled blend of single malt and single grain that is already well-established and currently retailing in the US for \$38.

## ORIGIN OF THE ENTERPRISE

Patrick explained the origins of the venture: "We come from a tillage farm in central Carlow where, previously, we mainly grew potatoes. We saw what farmers in the UK were doing using their crops for vodka production. That didn't really fit with Irish consumer preferences, and we felt it would be very hard to market an Irish vodka. At that point we'd committed to the venture back in 2017 and an opportunity arose to work with third-party distilleries, so we pivoted from a potential vodka enterprise into the whiskey side and that was the origin story for us. "Carlow Leader has been very supportive, and we work very closely with them. We have



## THE FARM AT LARCH GROVE HAS BEEN IN OUR FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS, AND WE WANTED TO CREATE A NEW FARMING FUTURE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME

Larch Grove farm, Carlow, Ireland, home to the Flying Tumbler Irish whiskey.

existing warehousing on the farm which was previously used for the potato business and is being retrofitted and extended to provide whiskey maturation facilities, as well as blending and micro-bottling.”

### MARKET APPEAL

Ireland is an essential home market base for Irish whiskey distillers, including Flying Tumbler, and America is the biggest market by volume for Irish whiskey with well over 50 per cent of Irish whiskey exported to the US. With Patrick's brother, Thomas, resident in Massachusetts, it was natural to concentrate on exporting the Carlow-distilled Flying Tumbler whiskey to the States: “Thomas had a network of connections that we were able to work with in securing distribution into Massachusetts back in 2022 and we're also in six other states on the east coast of America. The US has been a big market for us and we're mainly export focused at the moment. It's not without its challenges. It's a very complicated system to penetrate, with a legacy system there from prohibition. There's huge competition. We're also looking at Europe now and recently attended ProWein, a big spirits and wine trade fair in Dusseldorf.”

### THE INDIA OPPORTUNITY

The recent EU trade agreement with India offers opportunities for Irish whiskey producers to focus on a country with the biggest consumption of whiskey in the world,

perhaps not surprising given the 1.5 billion population. Patrick is cautiously optimistic: “Seven of the top 10 whiskey brands, globally, are Indian produced. It's a huge market but the import tariff is still high, so it remains challenging with a very diverse market of different States with different regulations. At our level it's on the far horizon. We're still focused on the US and Europe.”

### A WHISKEY TRILOGY

The Flying Tumbler brand refers to a 'daredevil acrobatic pigeon with an innate ability to always return home.' Patrick takes up the story: “We found a way to return home to the farm for the next part of our whiskey journey, by bringing whiskey maturation onto the family farm at Larch Grove in Carlow. Flying Tumbler is in full flight, and we have launched new expressions of our whiskey. The well-established Bird is a blend of a single malt and single grain that's really popular in America. The Roller is a single grain whiskey at 43 per cent, aged for nine years in a mix of Bourbon casks and Jamaican rum casks. We like to call it our party-starter whiskey. It's very smooth with lots of vanilla and ripe banana flavours. The final product that we launched at ProWein is called the Tippler, targeted at the cocktail maker. It's got a bit more spice and is a blend of pot-stills and grain whiskeys. The pot-still is a very traditional Irish style of whiskey that includes the likes of Redbreast and the Spot whiskey labels.”



Annette Fox, CEO Carlow County Development Partnership; Patrick Walsh, Flying Tumbler Irish whiskey; Erica Fox, Leader coordinator within Carlow County Development Partnership; and Seamus Doran, Carlow LEO celebrating breaking ground on the new Flying Tumbler whiskey production facility and brand home at Larch Grove farm, Carlow.

### IRISH WHISKEY RENAISSANCE

Irish whiskey is now a drink of choice for younger as well as more mature imbibers and it bodes well for the industry. “It's a marvellous prospect,” says Patrick. “Younger drinkers are looking for something different. They're looking for brands with stories to tell around their foundation, while at the same time not compromising on taste, smell and quality. There can't be any compromise in delivering those traits. Marry those together with authenticity and that's what the younger Gen Z and millennial consumers look for and are willing to pay for.”



MATT O'KEEFFE  
EDITOR

# WHO'S COMPLAINING ABOUT THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS?

**Discretionary spending habits are showing little evidence of changing despite the cost-of-living crisis we are constantly reminded of.** People could manage quite well without these indulgences, in many instances, to the benefit of their health as well as wealth. Vaping for example. Who can argue that it is a necessary spend? The jury is still out on whether or how vaping affects long-term health outcomes. The case for chemical inhalation, as well as wasting finite rare earth minerals in vape manufacturing, is questionable. Swapping one addictive habit for another is equally questionable. Vape away by all means; just don't complain about the cost-of-living crisis.

## CUT THE NAIL SPEND

Another questionable development has been the proliferation of nail bars. No one denies anyone the right to spend their wages on their nails. It is reasonable, however, to ask how so many people have spare money to spend on their nails, if we are in a cost-of-living crisis. While a nail clipper is, presumably, a poor substitute for regular visits to nail bars, it is a lot cheaper and, possibly, less deleterious to fingernails.

## GIVE IT THE CHOP

Evidence of another first-world indulgence is the extraordinary growth in barber shops. Haircuts at €25 to €35 a clip add up over a



## A WORD IN YOUR EAR

year. While not suggesting that we become shabby sheepdogs, is it necessary to get your hair or facial adornments tended to every week or every other week? Each to their own, but don't claim that you are crushed by a cost-of-living crisis while over-maintaining your mane.

## BREW YOUR OWN

For many people, daily spending on takeaway coffee is a necessity. Really? One obvious alternative is to invest in a flask and bring your own to work or wherever it is you are going with that indispensable, disposable cup in your hand. For those who don't care to boil a kettle, there are economical coffeemakers in supermarkets and electrical stores that will save you hundreds if not thousands of euros



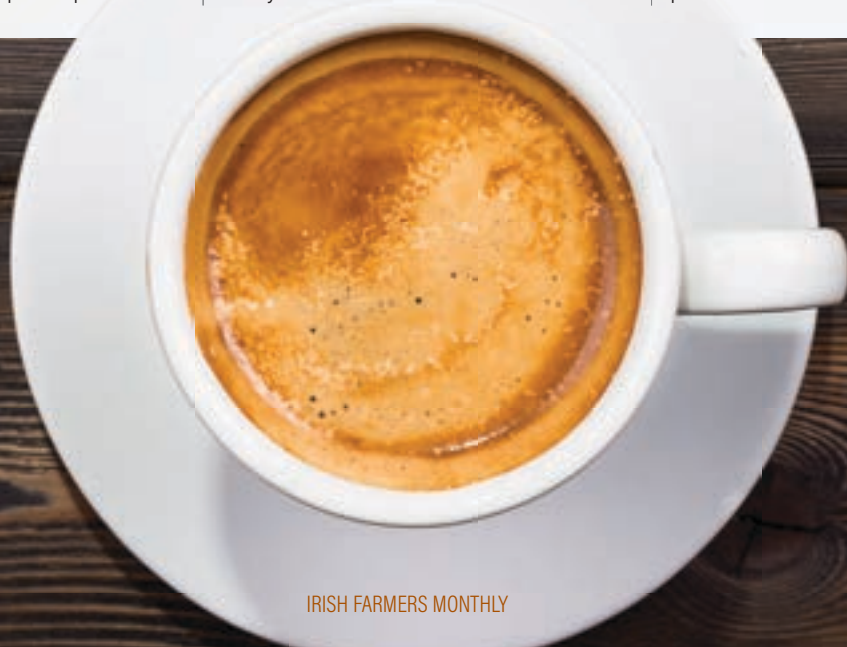
## VAPE AWAY BY ALL MEANS; JUST DON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

over a year. A couple buying take-away coffee five or even seven days a week will spend at least €2,500 per annum, assuming each cup of coffee costs an average of €3.50. Alternatively, a bog-standard coffeemaker can be bought for less than €100. Add on coffee grinds, electricity, a reusable mug and a flask, and you have a mug of coffee every day of the year for no more than €550. That's almost €2,000 saved – much more if you drink two cups of coffee daily. If you prefer the €3.50 offering, that's fine, just don't complain about the cost-of-living crisis.

## PRIORITISATION-OF-LIVING CRISIS

The list is almost endless. Tattoo parlours are thriving. People taking two, three or four flights per year is not unusual. Smoking is still widespread despite it being a very unhealthy and very expensive habit. Fast fashion is a false economy. Yes, we are in a cost-of-living crisis but for some, it is more of a prioritisation-of-living crisis!

A couple buying take-away coffee five or even seven days a week will spend at least €2,500 per annum.



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