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Editorial

We need a viable tillage sector

Our Tillage Focus this month highlights the significant and critical role crop production plays within the Irish agricultural sector and also the contribution it makes towards the broader economy. Critical mass is essential to the wellbeing of our grain and other crop enterprises. The drastic fall in acreage over the past 40 years should make us aware of the vulnerability of tillage farming in this country. On average, tillage acreage reduced by ten percent in every decade since 1980. In the past 10 years alone, our tillage area shrank by fifteen percent. The loss of sugar beet as a high margin crop was a critical blow to the economic wellbeing of tillage farms and the wider Irish economy. The lack of a viable milling wheat segment in our grain production profile highlights an issue that Brexit brought into sharp focus. We must play to our strengths and growing quality wheat for milling, year on year in our damp climate, may not be one of them. Nevertheless, the absence of an indigenous and dependable supply of a basic human foodstuff should not be ignored.

The fact that grain output has not reduced, despite our tillage acreage falling by forty-two percent since 1980, is notable. These extraordinary productivity gains show how adept our growers have been at adopting advanced crop production technologies. The research and advisory role of Teagasc in servicing the tillage sector is also praiseworthy.

What is absent, to a greater or lesser extent, has been adequate recognition among purchasers of premium grain products such as malting and distilling barley, and oats for human consumption, of the unique value of native grains in the production and marketing of their high value-added food and drink brands. The percentage of the end price of a pint of stout, even net of taxes, returned to the supplier of the grain ingredient in that pint is abysmal. The same can be said of Irish whiskey, Irish liquors and other Irish alcohol products. There are premia paid by purchasers of oats for human consumption. Relative to animal-feed grade oats the price to the grower is adequate to secure commitment and contracts. Does the premium price fully reflect the premium placed on product provenance by discerning consumers? The EU's Farm to Fork commitment that 'No one will be left behind' will be a pious platitude unless the primary producer is elevated to primary position in securing an adequate share of the profits of their labour. There is no reason to believe that the European Union can or will deliver on the aspiration to retain what remains of Europe's family farm structure. The loss of so many of Ireland's tillage growers is indicative of a worldwide contraction in farm and farmer numbers as technology and mechanisation replace human labour, while productivity increases, ultimately driving down farmgate prices. Our interview with Sean Kelly, MEP, in these pages confirms the importance of trade to this country. It also illustrates the fact that the European Union needs to have a nuanced view of the benefits and importance of some trade agreements compared to others. CETA and Mercosur provide perfect examples. Meanwhile Ireland, as a member of the EU, still needs to protect itself against the worst excesses of unbridled free trade. It is in our long-term interests to protect our critical indigenous food production sectors. A thriving tillage sector is important to the security of our food supply and relevant to the branding and promotion of many food and drink products that trade on their Irish provenance.



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Lower revenues hit Kerry's bottom line



Edmond Scanlon, Kerry CEO

The headwinds of the Covid pandemic impacted heavily on international trade last year. Irish based multinational Kerry Group was no exception and saw its 2020 revenues reduced by 4 per cent, to €6.95 billion. This in turn hit the bottom line with trading profit down by €105.5 million to €797.2 million. The 11.7 per cent profit fall did not prevent Kerry from increasing its 2020 total dividend by 10 per cent compared to the previous year. The 2020 financial results still reflect a healthy performance by the company, given its significant reliance on the food service sector for a considerable proportion of sales. If the global pandemic is brought under control in the coming months then Kerry, in line with other

food-based companies should experience a resurgence in demand. Meanwhile, a purported short trader muddied the waters for the Tralee-headquartered Kerry Group in February with a report suggesting that the company is overpricing acquisitions and is basically a dairy and bulk ingredients supplier rather than the more upmarket Taste and Nutrition business, as Kerry describes itself. Looking at Kerry's EBITA margin of 14.4 per cent, the seemingly spurious criticism is flawed, to say the least. Any bog-standard bulk dairy processor would hope for margins in the lower single digits rather than Kerry's impressive double-digit EBITA margins. There is no insinuation whatsoever that the virtually unknown Ontake Research

was in any way attempting to subdue Kerry's share price in anticipation of a short selling opportunity. Kerry Group's retreat from purchasing DuPont's nutrition business in 2019, when the price was deemed too high, shows a healthy acquisition price discretion on its part. The multinational's latest proposed acquisition is Spanish food company, Biosearch Life, which includes a range of probiotics in its product portfolio and comes with an estimated price tag of €127 million. On home ground, the proposed sale of Kerry's Irish milk processing and branded dairy product businesses to Kerry Coop is still in play. The proposed model replicates Glanbia Coop's strategy of acquiring a majority stake in the milk processing capacity previously held by the Plc. One complication, on top of a hefty asking price, is the long running 'leading milk price' saga dating back to 2013, in which Kerry Group pledged to pay top price for milk. The smaller print, however, placed six significant caveats on this pledge. That contract is unlikely to be still in place in a few years, even if Kerry Group retains ownership or Kerry Coop buys a majority shareholding or an outside entity buys the business outright.

Easter lamb

In a few weeks it will be Easter. Lamb is a delicacy that we all associate with the religious feast and a lot of planning goes into its production. Since Easter is, literally, a moveable feast, the planning changes every year. This year, Easter Sunday is particularly early, almost as early as it can be. That posed increased challenges for producers both in terms of tuppung timing and increased production costs. While all Easter lamb requires some concentrate input, later Easter dates offer more opportunity to use grass as a cheaper feed. Last month's exceptionally wet and windy weather posed even greater challenges than a normal February to have lambs and their mothers outdoors thriving. The decent lamb price that held right through the production season just gone augers well for producers and with demand continuing to exceed supply the likelihood is that early Spring lamb producers will be reasonably well rewarded this year for their efforts.





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Milk pricing ploy



The latest milk pricing mechanism, introduced on foot of EU regulations, may make milk producers feel better off, but the reality is that changing to an EU common pricing standard will not put one extra cent in their pockets. In the short term a dual pricing standard will apply where milk sellers will see the base price calculated on both the existing 3.30 per cent protein and 3.60 per cent butterfat format as well as the EU standard of 3.40% protein and 4.20 per cent butterfat. Meanwhile, there is optimism that milk prices will be reasonably robust this season, barring unforeseen circumstances. The processors seem to be adopting a cautious approach, with most holding their end of 2020 base price for the moment. Kerry has held its December 2020 price as has Lakeland, while Glanbia has the same base milk price pencilled in for January 2021 as for the previous month, though the removal of a 0.4c/l sustainability bonus paid out in December has not been carried over, so effectively it would seem its suppliers have taken a 0.4c/litre reduction in price for January supplied milk. That's not the full story, however. A robust seasonality bonus of 4c/l on all January milk does put a considerably better complexion on Glanbia's milk price for the first month of 2021. There is another top-up in the form of a 0.42c/l share of Gil's profits. That effectively negates the absence of the December 0.4c bonus. To make the sums even more complicated, if Glanbia, in line with other processors, adopted the EU standard LTO pricing mechanism, its suppliers would receive an average milk price of 38.32c/l, based on higher actual constituent percentages. (LTO Nederland is the Netherlands Agricultural and Horticultural Association. It tracks milk prices across a dozen or so European countries and includes Glanbia, Kerry and Dairygold milk prices in its Irish calculations). None of this, as already stated, makes Irish milk producers any better off. They are receiving on average, give or take half a cent, the same price in January 2021 as they received in January 2011. As highlighted on page 34 of December 2020 *Irish Farmers Monthly*, 'Irish milk producers are running very fast to stand still. Without ongoing volume expansion, dairy farm incomes would be in freefall'.

Ulster exit



In what is likely to be slow exit from the Republic of Ireland banking sector, Ulster Bank's decision to close up shop here poses serious challenges on a range of fronts. First and foremost, customers, of whom farmers make up a substantial proportion, must begin discussions in due course with other financial agencies to take on their custom. While farmers are not the only people who tend to stay with the same bank for many years and even generations, they are notoriously slow to change custom and practice in terms of their financial arrangements. It is estimated that there are upwards of ten thousand farm-related loans being facilitated by Ulster Bank in the Republic and whatever the eventual reality of securing alternative banking facilities, there is little doubt that this will be a fraught and worrying experience for many people. The fact that Ulster Bank will continue to operate north of the border only makes the situation more complex, especially for southern customers living near the border. Will they be able to continue to avail of Ulster Bank's services by travelling north to do business? That has not been explained as yet. Then the reality of dealing in both Euros and Sterling with potential currency fluctuations might render that option, if it were there, impractical and hazardous, financially speaking.

On the broader national front, the loss of a bank in an already sparsely serviced sector, puts Republic of Ireland borrowers in an even more precarious position than heretofore. The likely duopoly of Bank of Ireland and AIB will increase the prospect of lending rates moving upwards. We already have amongst the highest rates in Europe and the loss of Ulster further reduces competition in the market.

On a positive note, the active campaign of the Credit Unions to attract farmer borrowers is welcome. With interest rates at zero or below, many Credit Unions have money on deposit with no gainful investment prospect. The decision to offer loans to the farming community at attractive rates will become even more important with the imminent departure of Ulster Bank after over a century of a banking presence in this country.

The price path from oats to porridge

Looking at end price versus producer price can be a depressing exercise. Oat price is a good example. Long recognised as an energy powerhouse feed for horse and man, there has been renewed interest in promoting the crop in recent years. Growers can look forward to a premium above base price if quality is up to specification. Last season livestock feed oats was fetching €135/tonne. Equine grade oats was worth €155 and standard grade food oats was returning €192/tonne. The top of the food chain, gluten-free oats delivered €206 to the primary producer. The basic price usually has various add-ons including loyalty bonuses, with purchasers adding up to €15/t to the price. Compare and contrast the oat price, even with loyalty bonuses added on, with the price the consumer pays when he/she buys a one kilo bag of own-brand porridge oats in the local supermarket. A €0.70 one kg bag of own-brand porridge oats translates into an impressive €700 per tonne. The top of the range branded porridge product costs much more on the supermarket shelf. A one kg pack of branded porridge oats was retailing at €2.50 last month. Multiply that price by one thousand to get the per tonne price and you begin to appreciate the value of branding, name recognition and product promotion.



Presumably, the own brand product still delivers a decent profit to the processor, supermarket and everyone else in-between so one assumes the extra costs of brand promotion for the crème-de-la-crème of porridges are well worthwhile. To the grain grower, added-value is a small premium on a low price. For everyone else along the chain it's a multiplier effect on that base purchase cost. In the case of the own brand product, a three hundred and fifty percent price inflation from field to spoon should pay for a lot of transporting, drying, rolling, packaging and presentation on the supermarket shelf.

Fair Deal lobbying pays off

Long and sustained political lobbying looks set to pay off in terms of securing an amendment to the Fair Deal Scheme. While it will come too late for some, the prospect of the amendment being in place before the Summer Dail recess must be welcomed. The current legislation on payment for nursing home care has the potential to pauperise farm families. The age-old reality that farmers are asset rich and cash poor still holds. In many instances, the open-ended system currently in place can result in farm sales. The much-awaited reform legislation cannot come too soon. It should not, however, be regarded as a complete panacea for farm families affected. The reform of the Fair Deal scheme in relation to farm families is expected to provide additional safeguards for future generations of family farmers. It will effectively cap contributions based on the value of farms to three years, provided the inheritor is actively farming. Where there are substantial farm assets and income, these will be assessed in the determination of the costs a farm family will have to bear.

Tesco source SuperValu brands for Iberian market

Brexit is continuing to cause supply difficulties for Tesco in several of its international supermarket outlets. The absence of own-brand Tesco items was noticeable on its Irish supermarket shelves at various times over the past two months and the latest supply problems have arisen in the British supermarket chain's Spanish and Portuguese outlets. A spokesperson for Tesco said that they have sourced Irish products to fill the gap due to the Brexit-induced supply problem. Irish expatriates living on the peninsula are noticing that Tesco stores have replaced many of their own-brands with SuperValu alternatives. With hundreds of Tesco own-brands not available, the most pragmatic option, obviously, was to refill the empty shelf spaces with grocery items that approximate most closely to the UK product. As Ireland is still a member of the EU, the logistics of supplying Tesco supermarkets in Spain and Portugal from this country are straightforward.

Roll on SuperValu with their own-brands which compare well with the British product. From soups to sausages and rashers, the Irish SuperValu brands are selling in big volumes in both countries. Tens of thousands of British residents are clearly happy with an Irish alternative. Naturally, the Irish expats, of whom there are large numbers living in both Spain and Portugal, are also flocking to Tesco for a taste of home and as soon as supplies arrive they are being bought up enthusiastically. There is anecdotal evidence that the natives are also responding favourably to the Irish alternatives. Irish cheese and ham cuts are particularly popular, it seems, as are tins of marrowfat peas.

Glanbia 2020 results



Glanbia plc, the global nutrition group, has announced its preliminary results for the 2020 financial year ended 2 January 2021. According to the Group it navigated Covid-19 well with the business portfolio delivering a resilient performance in 2020. Solid top line with revenue of €3,823.1 million (2019: €3,875.7 million) was up 0.6 per cent constant currency on prior year (down 1.4 per cent reported). Like-for-like revenue grew 1.8 per cent constant

currency on prior year. Glanbia Performance Nutrition was impacted by Covid-19 restrictions, in particular in Q2, with a like-for-like revenue decline of 13.3 per cent, constant currency; while Joint Ventures delivered a strong performance with reported share of profits up €13.0 million to €61.6 million.

Commenting Siobhán Talbot, Group Managing Director, said: "I am exceptionally proud of how our people responded to the many challenges of Covid-19. Throughout the pandemic, we lived our purpose and our values, delivering essential, nutritious food during the most challenging of circumstances and proving the resilience of our business. We delivered on our priorities of protecting our people, continuing the supply of food and maintaining our strong financial position. We kept our operations running safely with the aid of enhanced health and safety measures. Our business portfolio delivered a robust operating performance supported by our swift and decisive actions which resulted in improving trends across the Group in the second half of the year. Our focused approach to liquidity resulted in cash conversion of over 122 per cent and our financial position has improved materially with net debt reducing by over €120 million during the course of 2020.

We also maintained delivery of our strategic agenda by making significant progress on GPN's transformation programme; keeping all major projects on track, which included the completion of construction of two new large-scale JV plants; completing the Foodarom acquisition in GN; and launching a €50 million share buyback programme to enhance shareholder returns whilst maintaining our dividend level. This pandemic is by no means over and we remain vigilant in managing the risks associated with it but we are confident that earnings growth will be restored in 2021.

In 2020 like-for-like wholly-owned revenues grew by 1.8 per cent, on a constant currency basis. GN delivered a good performance versus prior year as the majority of its end-market demand was sustained throughout 2020 and it continued to execute its strategic growth agenda. GPN was impacted by Covid-19 related restrictions which caused significant disruption to International markets and the North American specialty and distributor channels. However we maintained our focus on the key transformation programme with revenue and margin trends both improving in the second half of the year. Our full year adjusted EPS was down 14.9 per cent on a constant currency basis versus prior year as a good start to 2020 was severely impacted by Covid-19 in the second quarter but improved market conditions and focused actions drove a sequential improvement in earnings in the second half of 2020."

Glanbia also outlined the evolution of its sustainability strategy, "Pure Food + Pure Planet". As part of this strategy, Glanbia is signing up to Science Based Targets and aiming to reduce manufacturing emissions by 30 per cent and supply chain emission intensity by 25 per cent by 2030, while achieving net zero carbon emissions no later than 2050.

ICOS sees a ray of sunshine for dairy farmers investing in solar

Irish dairy farms, says ICOS, provide a 'perfect-fit' for solar based micro-generation investments and this in turn would provide sustainability benefits for climate action and for the livelihoods and wellbeing of rural communities.

ICOS has stated this in its submission to a consultation on the Micro-Generation Support Scheme in Ireland by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications.

ICOS has also identified a positive commercial rationale for on-farm solar developments across a range of scenarios for a 90 cow farm (at 477,000 litres) a 120 cow farm (at 636,000 litres), and a 250 cow farm (at 1.3m litres) covering functions including milk cooling, water heating, milking, lighting, pumping and other activities.

The ICOS submission projects potential annual savings from the on-farm use of renewable energy ranging from €843 to €2,341 per annum. Potential annual income from the supply of electricity, from the farm to the grid, ranges from €208 to €2,773 per annum.

The projections identify a return on investment occurring between 2.9 to 13.3 years, depending on the scale of dairying platform and the scale of solar installation, usually affixed to outbuildings and/or underused areas around the immediate farm buildings.

These figures are predicated on investment costs ranging from €3,900 for a 3kW array to €52,000 for a 40kW array, using advanced photovoltaic solar panels. TAMS (Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme) grants may also be available for arrays ranging from 3kW to 11kW in size. ICOS also said that many beef and tillage farms would also have significant potential in this area if the 30 per cent export limit were raised. Under the currently proposed scheme, micro-generators can sell 30 per cent of the excess electricity they produce and export it back to the grid.

Irish dairy farms have an average herd size of 90 cows. For a typical herd of this size, the installation of an array under 11 kilowatts (kW) makes a lot of sense. The additional cost of battery storage is

not incurred and there may be opportunities to avail of TAMS grant aid under the CAP and also capital allowances, subject to the individual farm situation. A typical 11kW solar installation will produce up to 10,000kWh (kilowatt hours) of electricity per annum. This is enough to power the typical electricity consumption of two Irish homes, across multiple electrical appliances, for an entire year. Darragh Walshe, Legal and Development Executive of ICOS said the co-operative movement is broadly in favour of the scheme. "There is considerable potential whereby dairy farmers can implement savings and generate recurring new revenue, while contributing to the overall sustainability agenda for the dairy sector and national climate action objectives. It is also the case that co-operatives can support their own members and milk producers by co-ordinating cost effective financing schemes from relevant financial institutions and schemes."

However, the energy consumption on a considerable number of dairy farms would certainly warrant an array of up to 30kW, possibly even 50kW for larger dairy farms, in the presence of a grid feed-in tariff. "A network of power generators dispersed throughout rural Ireland would provide energy security and a boost to the rural economy. Therefore, the micro-generation scheme and the national grid should permit this. We believe that a specific renewable energy infrastructure grant should be set up for agricultural holdings to promote farm-based solar generation. Funding for this would ideally come from the Just Transition Fund or National Recovery Fund which prioritises investment in renewable energy," said Darragh.

AgriFood Matters podcast

The UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science have launched an exciting new podcast series 'AgriFood Matters' featuring leading academic staff at UCD in the area of Agriculture, Food Science and Human Nutrition.

This monthly podcast will examine topical issues such as Sustainability, Biodiversity, Inclusion, Food and Health, Innovation, Crop Sciences, Agricultural Economics, Humanitarian Action and much more and is available for download on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Breaker, Pocket Casts and RadioPublic.

The first episode – Sustainability – featuring Prof. Alex Evans, Dean of Agriculture and Tommy Boland, Professor of Ruminant Nutrition and Sheep Production at the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science is now available and discusses sustainability in agriculture; and the drive towards practicing agriculture and the production of food in a more environmentally friendly way. Visit www.ucd.ie for more.

CASE STUDY CORK 2020:

IMPROVING PREGNANCY RATES IN HEIFERS WITH INJECTABLE TRACE MINERAL SUPPLEMENTATION

Herd fertility in pasture-based dairy farms is a key driver of farm economics^[1]. According to Teagasc, "a cow calving in May will generate €400 less profit than a cow calving in February, due to higher feed costs and reduced yield".

Age is particularly important in farming systems with restricted calving periods, with heifers ideally conceiving early in the breeding season as Teagasc also advise the first step to improving calving distribution is to generate large numbers of early calving heifers^[1].

On a pasture-based farm in Cork in 2019 a farmer reported fertility issues in a group of 22 mixed British and Holstein Friesian heifers weighing 340-390 kg. Submission rate was low as only 17/22 received AI. Only 14/17 held to first service and 5 heifers did not come bulling for the first 3 weeks of the breeding season - all heifers eventually went in calf to the bull by the end of June. When some of the heifers calved it was at the end of April, too late in the farmers opinion.

These heifers were intended as replacements for the herd. The farmer used conventional semen and each heifer only got one straw before the bull was introduced after the first 3 weeks. Due to the poor submission rate and his late calving heifers in 2019, the farmer sought advice from his local vet, Hazel Mullins in Abbeyville and in 2020 the farmer treated this year's heifers with an injectable trace mineral supplement, 30 days prior to AI.

In the 2020 group there were 20 heifers- a submission rate of 90% in the first 3 weeks of breeding was achieved - 18/20 in calf to first service AI, the remaining 2 heifers did not receive AI. Those 2 heifers were later coming in heat- resulting in 90% submission rate in the first 3 weeks and 95% in calf to first service. One heifer held her first service to the bull and the other held to her second service. They were all scanned on the 7/08/20 and 20/20 were in calf > 85 days with 18 > 105 days in calf.

	2019	2020
Submission rate	77%	90%
Pregnancy in first 3wks of Breeding Season	64%	95%

Heifers born in the first 21 days of the breeding season will come off grass heavier and hit puberty earlier meaning more efficient reproduction in the herd, a key driver of profitability. Heifers that were heavier at the start of breeding had increased incidence of oestrus and higher pregnancy rates at the end of the season than lighter animals^[1]. In a 2013 study, it was reported that younger calving heifers achieved more days in milk over 5 years, with >44% of their days alive spent in milk production compared with only 18% - 40% in cows calving later^[2].

Pre-breeding supplementation helps to raise not only the trace minerals but also the essential enzyme levels rapidly and effectively which could assist farmers to get cows and heifers back in calf in a tighter calving pattern.

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InTouch

Early Lactation: Beating the Drop

Cathal Bohane, InTouch Nutrition

With the “back broken” in the calving season, attention now turns to getting cows to grass, and early-season management of this will pay dividends in the long run. Feed prices have not been kind to us this year, so getting some higher-protein forage into the cows will be a welcome reprieve when supply and conditions allow us to do so.

Measure and manage

Management of supply and demand is important when it comes to grass and recovering the intake of cows and maintaining condition on them this time of year. Keeping cows “happy” or “content” is not enough of a measurement of success. Cows require approximately 0.6–0.7 kg of dry matter (DM) for every litre of milk they produce. Every kilogram fresh of silage is about 0.25 kg DM, and every kilogram fresh of concentrate is around 0.9 kg DM. Do the math and see how much grass they require, or likewise, calculate the amount of grass available and see what level of supplement you require. Cows milking well or producing phenomenal solid percentages at the moment may give you a false sense of what is truly happening. You might think that the diets are working well or that the silage is feeding great this year, but you will not see a true reflection of the diets and the cows’ performance until about 6 weeks post-calving. This is around the time when a cow has lost the majority of her condition and you are getting into a possible positive energy balance. The condition loss or fat mobilisation over the last 6 weeks has “propped up” the production and solids yield, and the cow will rely on her own diet from now on. This means that the percentage of fat and protein will come back to levels you are more accustomed to seeing. Of course, there is no reason why they cannot go lower, and for this reason, you must do your utmost to make sure they don’t cause further losses in production, which will have knock-on effects on fertility later in the season.

Farms always want better solids, and genetics play a key role in all of this. Whether you are coming from a Holstein, Friesian or cross-bred herd, you should examine your EBI reports in ICBF and see if you have a positive percentage for fat and protein in your breeding. This will tell you, year on year, whether you are naturally increasing or decreasing your solid percentages.

Beat the drop

This could be a long-term project, but focusing on the now is also important. Cow condition and intake, as outlined above, and energy — particularly sugar and starch — will drive protein and fibre, and controlling the oil content from the grass will affect butterfat. Some of these issues are unavoidable, but they can have an even worse effect if the rumen or stomach of the animal is unhealthy and unprepared to deal with these issues. Several ways to prevent this are to avoid overfeeding concentrate in the parlour; using digestible fibre within the concentrate; and using an effective fibre source, like straw, as part of a TMR containing forage where intake is required. The addition of products such as Yea-Sacc will also support rumen health.

A campaign that we focus on — and that you might see over the next few weeks — is called “Beat the Drop,” and it centers around acting earlier to avoid the drop in milk solids. Some of the key features of “beating the drop” include making the necessary changes to your concentrates and management techniques as outlined above to establish a more stable rumen, better production and less waste.

Gary Ryan leaves FTMTA



The FTMTA would like to confirm that Gary Ryan will be leaving the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Farm Tractor & Machinery Trade Association (FTMTA), the representative body for the Irish farm machinery industry in the coming weeks to pursue other opportunities.

Gary has held his

position with the Association since October 2008 and has assisted in the growth and development of the associations’ two main shows, FTMTA Grass&Muck and FTMTA Farm Machinery Show. Ryan states that he has enjoyed working with, and on behalf of, the members of the FTMTA and believes “that we have achieved very positive results for the Association and trade on a number of fronts over my time with FTMTA. It is imperative for what is a relatively small trade in the overall context to have a strong representative body and we have been fortunate to add a substantial number of new members to the Association in recent years”.

Current FTMTA President Mr Diarmuid Claridge expressed: “On behalf of the association and its members I would like to thank Gary for his contribution and dedication to the industry over these past years. The association wishes Gary all the best with his future endeavours.”

The outgoing FTMTA CEO added that “the farm machinery sector is a vital one within an economy such as Ireland where agriculture and agribusiness overall are such important activities. The trade has proven to be a resilient one over the years and has dealt with the challenges posed by the public health situation in recent times in a commendable manner. The final implementation of Brexit has brought challenges for the trade also but these can be dealt with and, based on the current farming outlook, the trade can look forward to a good year in 2021”. Ryan has expressed his thanks to the staff of the Association (current and former) and the FTMTA Executive Council members with whom he has worked with over the years for their efforts and wishes the Association and the membership every success in the future.

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MACRA PRESIDENT OUTLINES CAP CONCERNS

We are now in a transition period between the next CAP and the extended current CAP. A key concern, according to Thomas Duffy, president of Macra na Feirme, is that young farmers could be forgotten again in this interim period as the new CAP takes its final shape. Here, he talks to **Matt O’Keeffe**

“This is a major concern. Up until recently, we were operating on the basis of what the previous Agriculture Commissioner, Phil Hogan, had committed to in his construction of the next CAP. He placed generational renewal centre stage in his proposals. The changes in the make-up of the Commission and a new European Parliament have created a central focus on the environment. We have always believed that it is important for farmers to be at the forefront of environmental protection as people working everyday in the natural environment. However, there is now cause for concern around the possible dilution of commitment towards young farmers. There are ongoing discussions on updating the original Commission proposals, which hasn’t happened before, or continuing through and ensuring that those proposals into which a lot of work was put, will be seen through, perhaps accompanied by greater environmental conditions.”

Securing EU payments in a new environment

The practicality of implementing the goals set out for the farmer, on the ground, prompts various questions and, as Thomas notes, there is a lot to be considered here. “A big challenge is how the stated aim of having up to 30 per cent of payments directed towards eco-schemes, will be implemented. Will it be done by an average payment or will it be on each individual farmer’s payment percentage. If farmers don’t take up those schemes will that money be returned to the EU coffers? Then the question arises as to how we can have well-constructed environmental schemes, both under Pillar One and Pillar Two, which provide the environmental outcomes desired and make it as practical as possible for farmer participation.”

Sequestration is not the full answer

Carbon sequestration has become a major focus and Thomas warns that farmers need to be cautious here: “Having spoken to many of the researchers in the area, farmers need to be cautious. The potential for sequestration in soils, hedges and trees is greater than previously realised. However, there is concern around emissions from our drained peat soils, for example. There is huge potential, nevertheless, to improve sequestration.

The increase in CO₂ levels from fossil fuel burning is being mitigated by our soil and grassland management. It will not be a single element such as sequestration that will provide the full solution. We will have to improve farming efficiencies and reduce on-farm emissions and, alongside that, we can use the carbon sequestration and storage from our soils to offset emissions. Zero carbon is not a practical proposition either in agriculture or the wider



economy. The key to reducing carbon is the reduction in fossil fuel use. Ultimately, agriculture provides an essential food production service, necessitating energy use in some form. There are opportunities for replacing fossil-fuelled energy with renewables and farms will play their part in this with the correct strategies and support. The latest micro-generation proposals suggest this is the direction we are heading in. Solar and biomethane offer opportunities for farmer involvement.”

“We will have to improve farming efficiencies and reduce on-farm emissions and, alongside that, we can use the carbon sequestration and storage from our soils to offset emissions.”

Fear of another young farmer lock-out

In this current transition period, Thomas states that we need to be fully aware of precedent where young farmers were locked out by being caught between different policy timelines. “That means there is a real possibility that many young farmers will not enter the sector during the next two years as they wait for certainty about future supports and don’t want to be left in a limbo of not being eligible for the supports that may be included in the next CAP. We have already seen that the Young Farmers Top-Up scheme will be down by €6 million this year, though that money is being redistributed to the National Reserve. Nevertheless, it reflects a grave concern that there aren’t enough young farmers available to take up the existing measures. That would have a chilling effect on generational renewal.”

“We have been working on the assumption that the emphasis on generational renewal built into the original proposals for the next CAP would come through. The reality is that in the latest Commission proposals, including the Farm to Fork strategy, there is only one, brief, mention of young farmers in the entire document, despite the fact getting young farmers established is one of the few ways to get change embedded in agricultural practices. We don’t want to reject anything out of hand and what we need is increased ambition. We have been clear with our EU partners in CEJA (European Young Farmers Association) as to what those ambitions should be. The European Parliament passed a motion that four percent of all CAP funding must be directed towards generational renewal. That doesn’t necessarily mean any cuts to Pillar One payments. It does mean that Pillar Two payments would have tailored elements reflecting the need to support young farmers through greater investment support, for instance through the TAMS and

environmental payments directed specifically towards young farmers.”

Macra Skillnet

Macra’s Skillnet Programme reflects a demand for specialist training and also harks back to Macra’s original role as an educator in its early days. “It has come full circle in many ways. Originally, we were an informal educational service. That role was taken on by Teagasc and its forerunners to a great extent. In the past few years we recognised the need for short duration courses and upskilling of our members and a wider clientele. Agriculture is now one of the few industries that does not have continuous professional development standards and Macra is working to fill that gap. I have heard it described as ‘death valley’ in some ways. It’s that time between when a young farmer concludes their formal education and when they can put that training into action in full managerial roles. We have had a huge uptake in our training courses through the Skillnet Programme. The choice is enormous ranging from animal handling, animal welfare and health issues to grassland programmes and also a wide variety of training options for those outside the core farming area such as agri-food and professional development. Macra has always been informally involved in delivering many of these opportunities and now we are able to adopt a more formal and intensive approach to the delivery of new skillsets.”

“Some of the more broad-spectrum training options include interview training. Specialist training opportunities such as DIY AI, hoof-care and ultrasound scanning are fully subscribed to by trainees who either want to use the training on their own farms or are using the new skills to pursue off-farm work opportunities. We have found that the training offers both off-farm work and, where the herd size has increased, the option of doing tasks that would previously have been undertaken by specialists.”

Adapting to Covid

Concluding, Thomas notes that the Covid pandemic has had a huge effect on the social interaction that young farmers usually enjoy through Macra. In response, Macra has moved many of its activities online: “The Covid pandemic restrictions meant that Macra had to redraw many of its activities and adapt them to an online format. Social interaction is a huge aspect of Macra’s activities and during the various lockdowns we had to postpone many of our larger social events. Our members and clubs, as well as the national organisation have taken up the online option both for keeping in touch and to organise a range of activities, including our competitions. We have even managed to run our debating competitions online. There is nothing to beat live, physical interaction, but the online alternative has been very worthwhile. We have a responsibility to service our members in the best way possible and that has been our aim throughout this difficult period. The mental health and personal development of our members is uppermost in our priorities and doing nothing was not an option.”



Euro Parliament trade oversight

Sean Kelly, MEP for the Ireland South Constituency, is a member of the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade. In a recent interview with **Matt O'Keeffe**, Sean outlined his attitude to various EU trade negotiations and agreements, including the CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement) trade deal between the EU and Canada.

Sean is nonplussed by any negative view towards CETA, pointing to the fact that it has been operational for a number of years now, with increased exports to Canada in this time: "I don't see how why people are opposed to CETA, especially at this stage. It took 12 years to be negotiated and was agreed five years ago and has been provisionally applied in trade between the European Union and Canada. In other words, it has been operational for the past couple of years. Since then, there have been no problems with the agreement. It removed 99 per cent of trade barriers between the two entities and that helps small and medium enterprises as well as larger businesses and exporters across a range of goods being sold to Canada. That country has many strong ties with Ireland. Our close relationship with the United States is matched by our relationship with Canada. We have thousands of Irish people living in Canada, while millions more have Irish ancestry. It is a strongly democratic state and if we can't do a trade deal with Canada, who can we do one with? I was involved with the Parliament Trade Committee when CETA was being debated and negotiated. People went on and

on objecting about different issues. Eventually everything was sorted and the EU's Court of Justice confirmed that the agreement is in compliance with our rules and there have been no problems since it came into being. I just don't understand all the negativity towards it. Irish exports to Canada have increased by 35 per cent since CETA was provisionally agreed."

Trading gains

There is, as Sean Kelly confirmed, the potential for a €1.2 billion boost in Irish exports to Canada on foot of the CETA agreement: "A substantial proportion of that increase in trade is in food and agricultural products from Ireland. It's not only CETA, the vast majority of trade deals under negotiation or completed by the EU are positive in terms of boosting Irish agricultural exports. In the normal run of things, a trade deal is usually an extension of trade that is already taking place. Ireland is an open economy. We export most of what we produce and if you want to stop trade deals and trade that has very negative implications for jobs and incomes and our economy. That's the other side of the

“The export of South American beef into Europe encourages increased production there with a high carbon footprint at a time when we are seeking to reduce the carbon footprint of European beef.”

equation you rarely hear about when people are objecting to these trade deals.”

Mercosur implications

The Kerry-based MEP does not have the same unequivocally positive attitude to the ongoing negotiations on concluding a trade agreement with the group of South American countries known as Mercosur: “I have a slightly different perspective on Mercosur compared to CETA and have expressed my reservations in the European Parliament. A deal was reached in principle in June 2019 but has still not gone through. There are many people concerned about the environmental implications of agricultural production in some Mercosur countries, especially in relation to the degradation of the Amazonian rainforest in Brazil. Another point I emphasised in the Parliament is that from a logical viewpoint, we have a BEAM scheme in Ireland under which farmers who signed up have to reduce their nitrogen limit, or stocking rate effectively, by five per cent. At the same time, we are implementing that regulation we are giving an increase, even if it is a limited increase, to the Mercosur countries to export beef to the European Union. To me, that is contradictory, and I cannot see the logic of it. You could go further into it and look at the carbon footprint of Irish beef compared to that of South American Mercosur cattle production. Irish beef carries a carbon footprint of 17.5 kgs while Brazilian beef production is almost twice that figure. Paraguayan beef is 47 kgs, almost three times the Irish figure. So, the export of South American beef into Europe encourages increased production there with a high carbon footprint at a time when we are seeking to reduce the carbon footprint of European beef. These issues will have to be answered before the European Parliament will sanction the Mercosur trade agreement.”

Economic priorities

Asked whether environmental concerns may be put

to one side as the EU seeks to develop increased opportunities for high value-added exports to South America in the wake of Covid, Sean states: “That is a concern. Many European industries are enthusiastic for the Mercosur trade deal because they can’t wait for increased export opportunities in return for concessions on beef imports. But everything must be balanced. There are advantages because that’s what any good trade deal is about. However, if some sector suffers unduly, without adequate protection or compensation, then that has to be addressed. So, I believe we have to hold off on giving the green light to Mercosur until a resolution is found. I agree that after Covid we have to ramp up the Irish and European economies, develop job opportunities and trade, but it has to be in a responsible manner with adequate protection for those whose livelihoods could be damaged in the process.”

Negotiating the EU/US impasse

The Ireland South MEP does not anticipate the ongoing tariff war between the US and the EU getting worse: “In fact, the former Trade Commissioner, Phil Hogan, negotiated the first tariff reductions between the EU and the US in the past 20 years, with an agreement last August. That was an indication that even the Trump administration, while anxious to put tariffs on European goods, was willing to look more benignly on Irish exports. It was a clear signal that negotiation is possible. On the other hand, the tariff impositions have cost about €40 million to the Irish dairy sector in terms of knock-on effects. The Americans weren’t targeting Ireland specifically, but the knock-on effects impacted on us. I believe we can resolve the outstanding disagreements with President Biden and his colleagues. He has a broader view of world trade and a more positive attitude towards the EU. If the problem over aeronautics subsidies can be sorted I would expect that relations between us will improve dramatically in the time ahead resulting in increased export prospects for Irish agri-food produce.”

A resilient mart sector

Our livestock marts have shown remarkable resilience over the past 12 months. **Matt O’Keeffe** reports.



Despite three lock-downs during the past year, for the most part marts have managed to continue to trade. A great deal of the credit for this has to go to management and staff who quickly adapted both their premises and selling practices quickly and efficiently.

“If every business was getting through this pandemic as well as the livestock marts, we would be in a very positive place in this country.” Those were the remarks of Tullow Mart Manager Eric Driver when asked to comment on how the sector is coping. Eric went on to say: “To be fair to everyone concerned, the farmers, agents, factories and customers buying on-line, they have all adapted well. That runs across fat-stock sales to stores and there is a lot of potential in this online system. Many of our sales figures were on a par or better than 12 months previously both in terms of prices and throughput, so that proves the new system works, even in difficult circumstances. Our experience is that people make their decisions independently and efficiently. Of course, we all want the unique physical mart presence of being able to view the animals and compare and contrast different lots as well as gauge price expectations. But the main thing is that, despite Covid, we have managed to operate safely and efficiently, servicing the needs of the livestock sector.”

Challenges

For auctioneers, one of the most challenging aspects of online trading in livestock marts is gauging the enthusiasm of buyers for particular lots and thereby maximising price for the seller. George Candler, auctioneer at Cillin Hill Livestock Mart in Kilkenny for many years, misses the human interaction: “The online system has worked well

and allowed us to continue our role as vendors. However, the absence of buyers from ringside does pose a particular challenge. It is more difficult to raise the adrenalin of both the auctioneer and the buyer, both, to my mind, essential components in the livestock selling process. I have to say that livestock marts were very quick in changing over to online and we have had great cooperation from owners both in terms of how animals are presented for sale and in their discipline in keeping to the social distancing rules. Likewise, the buyers made the rational decision that if they wanted cattle they had to come on board quickly and use the new system. Less than a decade ago, none of this would have been possible. The internet got here just in time and with sufficient scale both in the marts and in farmhouses and offices around the country to allow mart sales to continue. There were short periods when trading was not possible. Without wifi those periods would have been much longer and with all the disruption that would have caused to the sector.”

Social

The fact that marts have been gearing up electronically for many years has helped, though nothing could have prepared them for the strict regulatory system they have had to introduce since the Covid pandemic struck a year ago this month. There is another significant and important aspect of livestock sales missing that has little or nothing to do with price. The absence of social interaction is a huge, and hopefully short-term loss. Many farmers in attendance at livestock marts have few other engagements with their peers. That has implications, both socially and psychologically, for all concerned.



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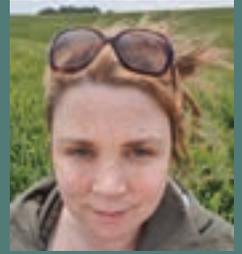
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Latest research – BioCrop

Angela Feechan, Assistant Professor at UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science talks to *Irish Farmers Monthly* about new research underway which will examine bio-based products in crop production as alternatives to fertiliser inputs and pesticides.



Angela is a plant pathologist who completed her degree in plant disease resistance in Scotland before moving to Ireland where she has been working at University College Dublin since 2013. "I have always been interested in how plants protect themselves against disease. My work predominantly focuses on those diseases that are prevalent in Ireland."

Angela is part of a team of researchers working on an exciting new project – BioCrop (@BioCropIRL) – which has received funding of just under €2 million and sets out to explore the possibility of utilising bio-based products and innovations as viable alternatives while addressing sustainability and the environmental impacts of these.

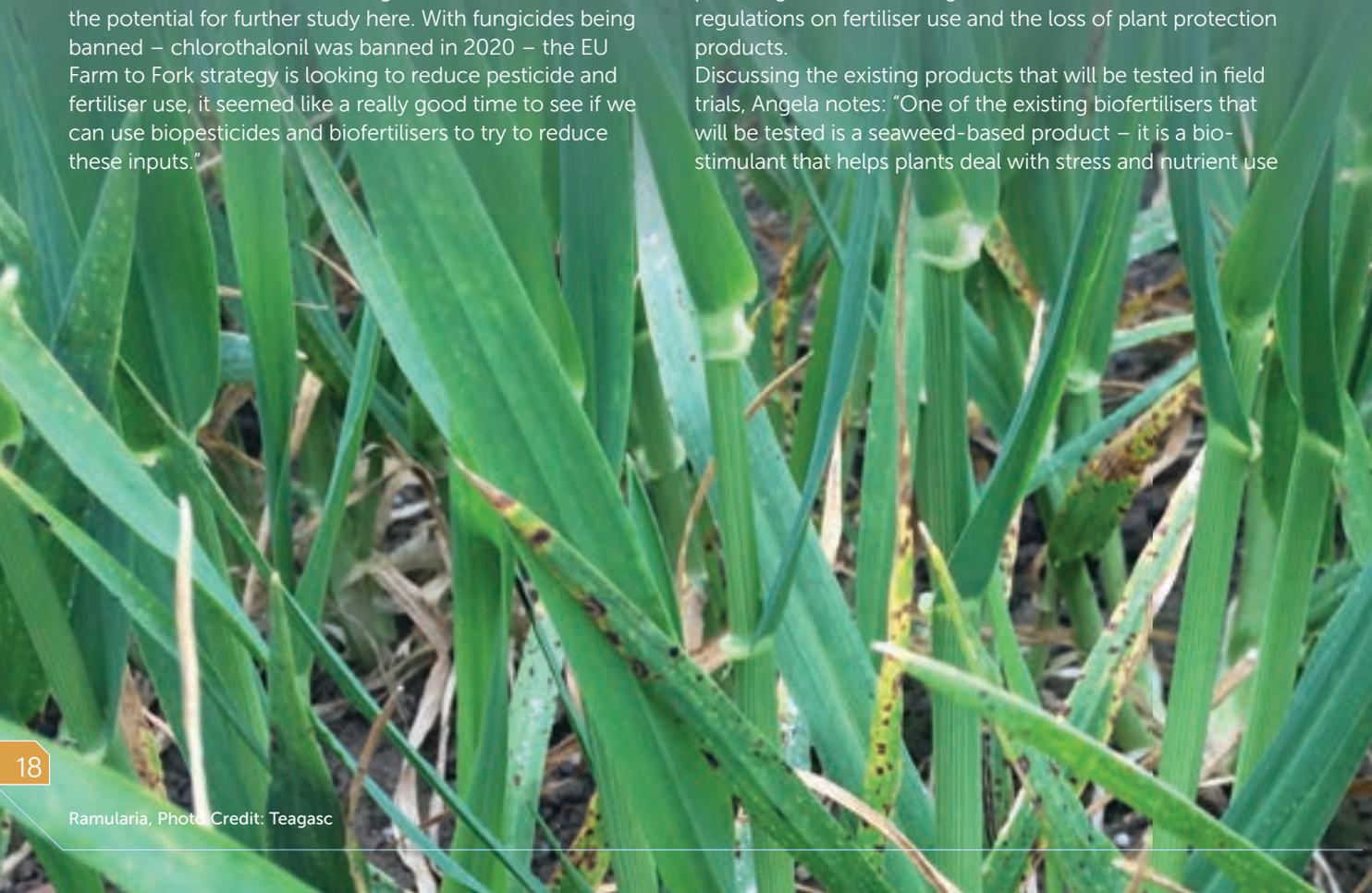
Angela explains how this study came to be: "In my group we had been working on antifungal peptides; looking at antimicrobials that come from the fungi itself. Meanwhile Fiona Doohan (UCD) and Trevor Hodkinson (TCD) were studying endophytes, friendly fungi or friendly bacteria that allow the plant to protect itself from disease. And other research was underway in Ireland within areas that linked to this. We were all liaising with each other and saw the potential for further study here. With fungicides being banned – chlorothalonil was banned in 2020 – the EU Farm to Fork strategy is looking to reduce pesticide and fertiliser use, it seemed like a really good time to see if we can use biopesticides and biofertilisers to try to reduce these inputs."

BioCrop

BioCrop aims to produce new algal and fungal derived biopesticides and biostimulants while engaging with industry and collaborators to test existing biofertilisers (algal and bacterial based) and biostimulants (endophytes) for efficacy. The existing products will be compared to fossil fertiliser applications and ability to control disease (focused on aphid-borne disease and Ramularia Leaf Spot, RLS) in barley in field trials. Life-cycle analysis will deliver a system-level life cycle analysis of bio-based fertilisers and pesticides considering impacts across the full life cycle to avoid 'burden shifting' from one environmental impact to another. This analysis will assess the use of bio-based products in an integrated management approach. Furthermore, BioCrop will undertake economic modelling to assess the impact of these biobased fertilisers and pesticides on production costs and the profitability for Irish growers.

Therefore, BioCrop will develop new and test existing biofertilisers and biopesticides for Barley production providing alternatives for growers in the face of EU regulations on fertiliser use and the loss of plant protection products.

Discussing the existing products that will be tested in field trials, Angela notes: "One of the existing biofertilisers that will be tested is a seaweed-based product – it is a bio-stimulant that helps plants deal with stress and nutrient use



efficiency, making the plant more resilient and assisting growth. NUIG are taking that same seaweed species and trying to find what the compound is that has the active ingredients. There is also a yeast-based product which is in development from the University of Seville.

In addition, Trinity College Dublin and UCD have already been working on a selection of endophytes forming a spin out company and also aim to identify new endophytes from wild barley relatives... often wild relatives of cereals are really good sources of finding those friendly microbes and a good source of these endophytes as they have to grow under hard conditions."

Reducing inputs

Angela explains that the need to reduce fertiliser inputs and bio-pesticides is the prompt for such research however investigating the performance and economic reality of the alternatives is key.

"The EU have said we need to reduce fertiliser by 20 per cent and bio-pesticides by 50 per cent and; we have to reduce those inputs fast. At moment there are these different products available but the problem is: how confident are we that they work? And also, how expensive is this compared to a conventional fertiliser or pesticide regime? So we have to ask: do they work, how do they perform against a conventional programme and how much this will ultimately cost?"

Economic modelling will be part of the research, to investigate how much these bio-products will cost the growers. "At the moment there is a model for the dairy industry, a bio-economic model that exists, and Fiona Thorne, a research officer at Teagasc, along with Michael Wallace at UCD want to try to produce the same bio-economic model for crop production."

And a life-cycle assessment will look at the idea of 'burden

TASK 1. Discovering and selecting endophytes for insect, disease resistance & improved nutrient use efficiency in barley

TASK 2. Discovering and developing fungal and algal based biopesticides for barley disease control

TASK 3. Targeting endophytes for control of Ramularia Leaf Spot and Barley Yellow Dwarf Virus of Irish Cereals

TASK 4. Determine potential of biobased fertilisers in comparison to fossil based fertilizers

TASK 5. Life cycle assessment of biobased fertilisers and pesticides

TASK 6. Economic Modelling of biofertilisers, biostimulants and biopesticides

TASK 7. Dissemination

KEY PARTICIPANTS:

Stephen Kildea, Research officer, Teagasc Oakpark; Louise McNamara, Research officer Teagasc Oakpark; Fiona Thorne, Research officer, Teagasc; Fiona Doohan, Professor of Plant Pathology; Rainer Melzer, Assistant Professor Plant Science; Saoirse Tracy, Assistant Professor Soil Science UCD; Julio Isidro-Sánchez, CBGP; Carl Ng, Associate Professor and Head of Botany, UCD; Paul McCabe, Associate Professor, UCD; Fionnuala Murphy, Assistant Professor, UCD; Grace Cott, Assistant Professor, UCD; Michael Wallace, Professor, UCD; Zoe Popper Assistant Professor, NUIG; Trevor Hodgkinson, Professor of Botany, Trinity College Dublin

shifting' – so, we need to question that, if we are removing an environmental impact (which at the moment is fertiliser run-off or pesticides), is there another environmental impact that comes with the manufacturing of these new bio-fertilisers? Are we simply moving the problem elsewhere? We need to see if this is a sustainable option at the end of the day. So, the life-cycle assessment led by Fionnuala Murphy (UCD) will take information from the field trials – the level of disease, yield etc – and also examine how products are made and if there is any waste stream from this, so that we can understand the environmental impact from when you make the product all the way to the field, at each stage."

Stakeholders

The project runs until 2024, at which time, Angela says, the hope is that four years of research and three years of field trials will have offered up some answers to these questions.

Keeping the industry in the loop throughout this time on the findings learned is key: "We are really keen that we involve industry as much as possible along the way. We want to host workshops where we can invite different stakeholders alongside farmer associations also and get their input."



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Optigen: Answering your economic and environmental challenges

With the recent supply chain challenges on raw materials, particularly soybean meal, and the resulting increased prices, farmers not only in Ireland but around the world, are crunching the numbers and reconsidering the feasibility of including certain materials in their feeds.

While these price hikes in raw materials may be temporary, in a situation where feed already contributes to up to 70 per cent of on-farm beef and dairy production costs, can Irish farmers afford not to consider alternatives? Another element of the protein debate that is here to stay is the growing environmental concerns around the use of soybean meal in ruminant diets. Optigen® from Alltech provides a solution to both the economic and environmental challenges, with decades of research to support its benefits.

The most extensive research into Optigen took place over 17 years (2002–2018). A recent meta-analysis of 17 published beef studies revealed significant production benefits of Optigen inclusion.

Optigen was proven to:

- Increase daily liveweight gain by 8 per cent
- Improve feed conversion efficiency (FCE) by 8 per cent
- Reduce days to slaughter
- Reduce the carbon emission intensity of beef production

Studies have also shown the positive impacts of Optigen on dairy production. A similar increase in feed conversion efficiency has been demonstrated, translating into an increased milk yield of 1.3–1.4 litres per cow.

While these results show production benefits at farm level, how does using Optigen impact the wider environmental picture? In 2019, the Carbon Trust validated that the replacement of high-carbon ingredients with Optigen significantly reduces the risk of a high carbon footprint, without affecting (and in some cases positively affecting) animal performance. For example, soybean meal carries a high carbon burden. For every 1 per cent reduction in soya content in feed due to Optigen supplementation, there is an associated 1.5 per cent reduction in the carbon footprint.

Optigen is Alltech's non-protein nitrogen source for ruminants. Unlike some other nitrogen sources, Optigen increases the efficiency of rumen nitrogen capture, resulting in lower nitrogen excretion. Figure 1 shows the Optigen degradation profile versus that of soybean meal. Optigen has a slow, steady release of nitrogen and can, therefore, partially replace soybean meal in diets.

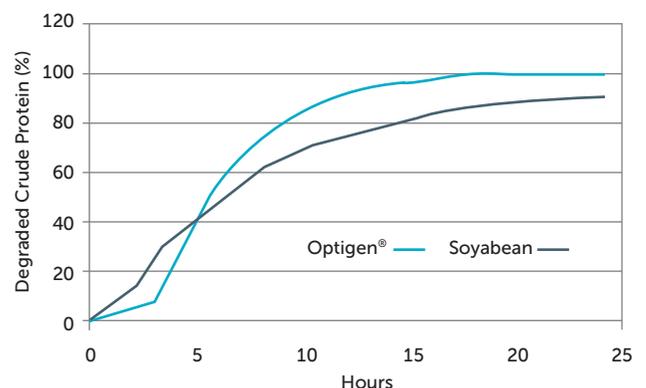


Figure 1: Protein degradation versus time of soybean meal and Optigen (Palmer et al., 2008)

Maximising the use of homegrown feed

Optigen complements the use of high-energy feedstuffs very effectively. It concentrates the nitrogen fraction of the diet, creating dry matter space for more fibre and energy. This increase in microbial protein enhances the fibre digestion in the animal. Studies have shown this to be as high as +27 per cent (Sinclair, 2008).

Dermot O' Dowd is the manager of the beef enterprise at Broadleas farm in Stamullen, Co. Meath. Optigen has allowed Broadleas farm to maximise their use of homegrown feed and reduce their feed costs.

"We run a calf-to-beef and store-to-beef system, with some under-16-month bulls, but recently we have introduced more heifers to beef," Dermot explains. "A lot of what we grow is used in the cattle's diets; we grow our own barley, potatoes, grass and maize silage, which are all used in the diet. We allow time for a slow build-up onto their full diet — about three weeks in total. Then, once they are on their full diet, it is about 120 days to finish. A challenge for our farm is trying to reduce feed costs, and we try to reduce that by using as much of our own homegrown forage as we can. We put a huge emphasis on the quality of our grass and maize silage.

"We've been using Optigen from Alltech for three years now. We introduced it into the cattle's diets so we could replace some of the protein in the diet and create more space to use as much of our own feeds as we could to cut down on costs. I think everyone has to be a little



Dermot O' Dowd is the manager of the beef enterprise at Broadleas farm in Stamullen, Co. Meath

concerned about their farm's sustainability nowadays; we use our own straw as bedding and using Optigen means we are using more of our own produce and not bringing in imported proteins.

"Optigen is a great protein alternative, which allows us to grow more and use more of our own feeds."

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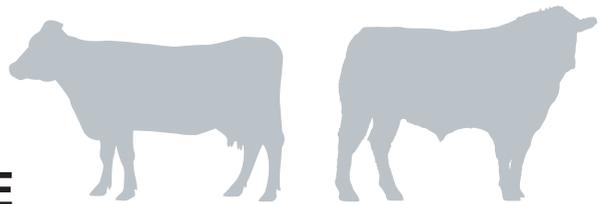
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Control and prevention of respiratory disease in calves

Martin Kavangh, Cow Solutions Veterinary Consultancy, examines the measures that should be taken to control and prevent respiratory disease in calves



Sarah Campbell, Vet Advisor with MSD Animal Health ultra-scanning the lungs of calves to detect early incidence of BRD on a farm workshop with vets in February 2020.

Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD), calf pneumonia, 'virus pneumonia', calves coughing, all describe the calf that is panting, possibly coughing, has mucous or pus discharges from the eyes, is slow and off feed, may have a temperature and has the vet reaching for an injection of 'strong' antibiotic.

A recent study by UCD carried out on Irish farms, found that the average prevalence of pneumonia diagnosed by using ultrasound on the lungs and detecting clinical signs was 14 per cent. Some farms had up to 50 per cent of calves affected.

The Irish Regional Veterinary Laboratories report that respiratory disease was diagnosed as the cause of death in 11% of calves under one month old, as well as in 30 per cent of calves over one month old submitted for post-mortem examination. Interestingly, if 30 per cent of the calves are seen with pneumonia, up to 40 per cent of the 'healthy' calves may be infected but don't show signs. The deaths which occur on a farm may be the tip of the iceberg. The 'healthy' calves on farm are affected, lose thrive and potential but we just can't see it happening. By the time a calf shows us signs of respiratory illness, the lungs are damaged and if the calf avoids dying, her ability to reach her potential is impaired. She will produce less milk in the first lactation, estimated at 120 kg of milk lost for every sick day. If the calf is a beef calf, it may show a decline in weight gain of 0.2 kg per day and take longer, on average 14 days, to finish.

Antibiotics – prudent use

Antibiotic prescribing rules are changing and access to 'strong' antibiotics, the fluoroquinolones and macrolides, which are used routinely to treat calves, will be restricted due to their importance for human medicine. The options for treatment in the future will be limited. It is likely that more calves may suffer long term impacts from pneumonia if the root causes are not discovered and eliminated.

Covid-19 has been a devastating virus on humanity. Epidemiology, the virtually untreatable nature of severe viral infections, the aggressively contagious nature of viruses and the importance of the protectant effect of whole population vaccination. These are some familiar terms and now everyday concepts. In comparison, as the population of calves grows within a farm, the risk of rampant spread of respiratory viruses such as IBR, RSV and Pi3 is extremely high. 'Distancing' by controlling stocking density, having enough fresh air to reduce the number of virus particles and bacteria as well as employing a vaccination regime, are necessary strategies to limit the spread and impact of respiratory disease.

Farm control

The goal is always to limit the amount of viral and bacterial challenge to the calf and, on the other side of the scale, build up the resistance of the calf to prevent it from succumbing to disease. Think of handwashing, being in a ventilated room and wearing masks, on the one side. Then, correct diet, appropriate temperature, adequate ventilation and vaccination as key elements of a calf management system on the other side.

The key areas that we can influence to support our calves' health are:

- colostrum feeding & correct calf nutrition
- correct stocking rate in sheds
- fresh air
- a clean, dry, draught-free environment
- specific vaccination protocols

Colostrum Feeding and Nutrition

Feed a minimum of three litres of clean colostrum from the first milking, within two hours of birth. Colostrum quality is affected by the time from calving to first milking; the quality deteriorates by the hour. Over half of the samples of colostrum taken from Irish farms have too many bacteria in them and are a challenge for the newborn. Keeping colostrum bottles and tubes clean and

sterilised, cleaning dump lines and buckets, cleaning the cow's teats before the first milking are all important considerations to make sure the quality of colostrum is best for the calf.

Calves need enough energy to grow and fight infection. The calf is dependent on milk for the first three to four weeks of life for its energy and protein source as it cannot ruminate and use starter ration effectively. Calves need to drink a minimum of 15 per cent of their body weight. As temperature drops during cold weather periods, the calf's energy demand increases. As the temperature drops below 10 °C, the calf will need 10-20 per cent more feed per day to grow at the same rate.

Cold and moisture

Young calves under three weeks of age perform best if the environmental temperature is between 15°C and 25 °C. This is equivalent to nesting in a deep bed of dry straw. Wet beds, too much moisture in the shed, draughts and wind chill all put the young calf at risk of scours and pneumonia.

In the same UCD study, calf sheds that were assessed were on average only 0.7 °C warmer inside than outside, showing that the stack effect does not exist in most calf sheds and sheds can be colder inside than outside. Large volume of sheds built from steel and concrete can be like freezers for young calves. Using jackets, lamps and heated areas for young calves can help. However, deep straw beds and enough feed will be even more important.

Draughts and fresh air

The dilemma in calf housing is providing enough fresh air while avoiding draughts. If the airspeed increases to over 0.5 m/s at calf level, you will see the straw 'trembling', the calf is exposed to a draught and at risk of wind chill. There must be enough inlet for air to enter, and this inlet must be limited or restricted enough to slow down the wind coming through it. The position and orientation of the calf house will determine how much wind hits the inlets. Down draughts, which often occur in calf housing due to solid partitions or sheeting also need to be addressed.

Reducing stocking rate

High six-week calving rates which are important to drive the economics of a grazing system, create a demand for calf housing space for a short-term period. The need for adequate space must be balanced with the economic limits within the system. Calves under 150 kg have a minimum floor space requirement of 1.5 m². The more space that is given to calves, the better they perform, while in large group pens, allowing more than 2 m² is beneficial in controlling disease outbreaks. Limiting group size to less than 16 calves is beneficial. When using automatic feeders more floor space is recommended, and groups should be restricted to 25 or less.

Conclusion

Controlling and preventing respiratory disease in calves requires an understanding of many different elements. Designing the perfectly ventilated shed is not always the answer. Many sheds can be too cold, draughty and poorly drained. Some calf feeding systems continue to promote limited feeding that can put calves at risk of disease. Following first principles when building new sheds or adapting old calf accommodation of having a dry bed, an environment which is draught-free with adequate space and making sure the calf is sufficiently fed. These facilities along with a tailored vaccination programme should guide pneumonia prevention and reduce the need for antibiotic treatments.

VETERINARY TECHNICAL BOX

SUZANNE NAUGHTON VETERINARY TECHNICAL ADVISOR MSD ANIMAL HEALTH

Vaccination is considered an essential component in any control plan against respiratory disease. When using a vaccine, we are trying to boost the calf's immune system before it encounters a virus/bacterium and so reduce the development of disease. Once a vaccine is administered, it takes a certain length of time before it becomes effective. As a result, it is essential that they are administered well ahead of the known risk period. Bovipast RSP provides protection against two important viruses in the bovine respiratory disease (BRD) complex, PI3 and RSV but also provides the broadest protection available on the market against *Pasteurella* (Mannheimia) bacteria. The primary course consists of two injections administered under the skin, four weeks apart from two weeks old onwards.

Cover against IBR should be included in any vaccination programme against BRD, particularly on farms where calves are bought in for rearing. IBR is from the herpes family of viruses and approximately 75 per cent of herds in Ireland have been exposed to this agent. Bovipast RSP and Bovilis IBR Marker Live can be conveniently co-administered on the same day from three weeks old onwards.

Another option to consider is intranasal vaccination against the pneumonia viruses RSV and PI3. Bovilis INtranasal RSP Live provides the earliest & fastest protection available against these two important viruses with full immunity developing within a week after administration from one week old onwards. When deciding on a vaccination protocol, it is important to always consult with your attending veterinary practitioner on the protocol that's most suitable for your farm.



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TILLAGE FOCUS



The value of Teagasc tillage research

While tillage farmers were unable to physically attend this year's Teagasc Tillage Conference, they did have an opportunity to virtually view the broad spectrum of research being carried out by the organisation through a series of two well presented webinars. **Matt O'Keeffe** reports.

With a decent EU-financed protein payment in place, Teagasc rightly have engaged in extended research into the bean crop and have looked particularly at how the crop stands up in yield and profitability terms over a period of years. Sheila Alves gave a summary of how field beans fit into an Irish crop rotation, noting that they have performed well and have a decent yield potential. Farmer experience of the crop was captured, as Sheila outlined, in a three-year survey involving 20 farms each year. In addition, an online survey was conducted to ascertain farmers' individual experiences of growing field beans in the past season. The information gathered was used to determine best practice for best outcomes across several parameters including sowing dates, soil nutrition, variety and seeding rate. This data is particularly useful for its 'compare and contrast' potential where crop management under each of the relevant headings can be tweaked to ensure that the optimum seed rate or sowing date or fertilisation can be adopted. In addition, the Oakpark researcher highlighted the main external influences that are critical to delivering a premium crop and particularly those influences that resulted in lower yields over the past three years. These included weather effects and diseases and pests that affected yield on individual farms. One notable feature of winter field beans, as experienced in this country over the past few years, is their ability to withstand extended drought conditions without yield impact. Clearly, the longer growing period of winter beans compared to spring-sown varieties, allows deeper root formation to source moisture in the event of drought. It was also noted in the online presentation by Sheila Alves that late-sown spring field beans will lower yield potential.

Whiskey and rye

In looking at another minority crop choice, Richie Hackett outlined the uses to which rye can be put and its potential as a viable crop option in the Irish tillage context. Rye is well recognised as a useful ingredient in animal feed and is also a key ingredient in some distilling processes, as anyone familiar with rye whiskey will know. In this time of lockdown when many people are becoming increasingly interested and adventurous in the art of bread baking, it is noteworthy that rye flour is becoming an increasingly popular ingredient in home and bakery-baked breads. Rye is quite an ancient grain and has, as Richie asserts, several positive attributes, including the fact that the

modern hybrid varieties grown at Oakpark have high yield potential. Take-All resistance is high as is resistance to foliar diseases, though it is prone to mildew and brown rust. Another noteworthy ailment, presumably as a result of its close association with the wider ryegrass family, was the susceptibility of rye to ergot infection. That problem has been pretty much eliminated since the introduction of the hybrid varieties. Probably the biggest potential problem with growing a rye crop is its height. That can result in the plant toppling over, from the root up. Rye is also favoured by slugs, which can do substantial damage at critical establishment stages. The advice from Richie Hackett is to grow for contract only, until such time as Rye gains popularity as a mainstream crop with wider market opportunities.

Holistic approach to crop protection

Integrated pest management (IPM) strategies for crop protection are becoming increasingly important in minimising the traditional interventionist approach to safeguarding grain crops. While preventative and curative strategies are all involved, the emphasis is very much on managing crops to minimise challenges and consequently reduce the need to intervene with chemical protectants. Maximilian Schughart, Teagasc Walsh Scholar, at UCD, confirmed the application of this IPM approach in relation to aphids in his presentation to the Teagasc conference. It is well known that the barley yellow dwarf virus can be carried by the grain aphid and can have significant yield implications where infestation is widespread. From limited research knowledge as to the ultimate sources of BYDV, the best estimate is that most infection is carried over from crops grown nearby in the previous season. To back up this belief, Teagasc have established a series of 12m high suction traps in two field research sites in Carlow and Cork, with another to be added this year in Dublin. There are two main research targets involved and those are to monitor movements of the virus-carrying aphids as well as study those aphids which are resistant to aphicides, an increasingly worrying development. Already the flow of information has started with evidence emerging last year of a partially pyrethroid-resistant aphid clone continuing to have a strong presence in the general aphid population. The Teagasc Walsh Scholar outlined the overall aim of the research: "By combining in-field and landscape scale monitoring, we aim to be able to predict

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BYDV occurrence and the occurrence of insecticide resistant aphid populations in the future. This will provide stakeholders with an accurate decision support system as part of a broader IPM strategy to mitigate the impact of BYDV”.

From porridge to overnight oats

In recent years, oats has become an ever more popular part of the human diet, especially as a core breakfast staple. The quality and consistency of our oats crops has risen in tandem with this increasing popularisation of the

energy-rich grain. There are a range of factors that impact on oaten quality, as Walsh Scholar Sara Tudor confirmed to the Teagasc Tillage Conference audience. These include variety, environmental variabilities, physical and chemical composition, and individual quality

characteristics in different varieties. Sara’s research is examining ‘the effect of different nitrogen application rates on crop growth and development, yield components and quality characteristics of both winter and spring oat cultivars’. Already, some conclusions have been reached. For instance, for both winter and spring oats, there are treatment and varietal effects that impact on yield and quality. Nitrogen applications have been closely studied, with significant effects being noted on both yield and quality across winter and spring oat varieties. There are application ceilings, however, where increased application does not deliver added yield benefit. Variable impacts on quality, specific weight, screenings and even kernel content have also been identified. Again, this is practical research with clearly definable field and crop applications, as summarised by Sara Tudor: “Conclusions from this study will deliver best management practices to increase the competitiveness of oats with other cereals, minimising environmental impact and maximising the benefits for growers and the milling industry by achieving optimum grain yield and milling quality of oats”.

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Combined research on crop establishment and rotation

The second stage of this year's virtual Teagasc Tillage conference included Dermot Forristal's paper on crop establishment and the benefits of crop rotation.

The research highlighted the benefits, if any, between specific cultivation techniques used in tandem with crop rotation. While it has been generally acknowledged that crop rotation has benefits, Dermot put facts and figures on the screen to show not only the general yield benefits of crop rotation, as he also outlined the increased benefits for some crops more than others.

Cultivation choices

The cultivation systems used were conventional ploughing at a depth of 225 mm; shallow ploughing to

a maximum depth of 150 mm; min-till at 75 mm and strip-till using 330 mm spacing to a maximum depth of 150 mm. A five-crop rotation was used in the study with a continuous winter wheat crop as a baseline comparison. The five crops were oilseed rape, winter wheat, oats, winter wheat and winter barley. Yield trends were graphed over the research period beginning in 2014 and running up to last year's harvest. While Dermot and his research colleagues saw significant variation from season to season in terms of the benefits to the next cereal crop of the five-crop rotation – ranging from a low of 3 per





cent to a high of 41 per cent – the average yield benefit over the six years was a very impressive 19 per cent, with yield benefits coming through early in the rotation process. The research showed little difference between oats and OSR as break crops, indicating that breaking the take-all sequence was the most important aspect of a crop rotation. What was equally interesting and important was that there was little difference in the response of different establishment systems to the rotation process. Basically, there was no noticeable interaction. The differences in wheat yield between the continuous wheat and the wheat crops grown in the five-crop rotation were impressive. The average benefit in cash terms came to €208/ha or a 45 per cent increase in the value of the crop. It should be noted that of all the crops involved, winter oats was the best performer when subjected to the strip-till establishment system, with little differential being experienced for any of the crops under the ploughing, shallow ploughing or min-till methods. All three of the latter, then, were proven to be capable of supporting high yields. While the yield penalty was relatively small across the crops established with the strip-till method, apart from oats, it was nevertheless present. Grass weed challenges were also particularly noticeable in the strip-till crops.

Lifting the plough can be profitable

Dermot rightly questioned the merits of deep ploughing when shallower ploughing delivers equally good results. This fact has positive cost reduction implications as deeper ploughing carries heavier costs both in wear and tear and higher fuel burn.

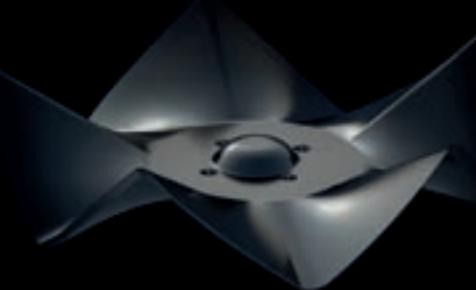
On-farm study

Last October Teagasc Oakpark established a new on-farm study to be coordinated by Jack Jameson, a post-graduate researcher at the Oakpark research facility. The study involves three separate facets, all interlinked. The first is a 'Focus Study' of 21 farms, looking across ploughing, min-till and direct drilling systems with a view to surveying crop performance, soil assessment and environmental indicators. The second aspect comes under the heading of a 'Perception Study' and uses one hundred farms to assess grower expectations, knowledge sources, knowledge acquisition and adoption practice. The third leg of the research study involves 'Field Trials' looking at how the particular tillage system used impacts on crops and soils in a controlled experiment. All of this should provide a comprehensive set of data on the practical experiences of farmers across a range of crops and establishment systems.

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The future of fertiliser

The Fertiliser Association's Spring Seminar provided indications of policy direction in relation to nitrogen usage in future years. Jack Nolan, Senior Inspector with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, confirmed likely restrictions on chemical nitrogen use under the EU's Green Deal.

One of the primary aims of Green Deal, as discussed by Jack, is the decoupling of economic growth from resource use. That is a huge challenge, even if the Department representative described it as an opportunity. There is also an affirmation in the Green Deal that no place or people will be left behind. These lofty aspirations are easier said than achieved and farmers should be under no illusions in that regard.

NPH	Farms in 2018		Area (hs)		Bovines	
0	30,081	23	799,336	17%	30,208	0%
≤130	79,666	60%	2,634,476	58%	3,135,542	46%
131-170	11,780	9%	515,234	11%	1,396,177	20%
>170	11,668	9%	632,614	14%	2,277,799	33%
Total	133,195		4,581,660		6,839,727	

Increased scrutiny

Jack Nolan noted that a Nitrates Derogation Review is in progress and water quality will have a big influence on the outcome. He linked greater dairy intensification with a deterioration in water quality, adding that fifty percent

of dairy expansion has taken place in the three counties of Cork, Kilkenny and Tipperary and that nine percent of all Irish farms account for 33 per cent of bovine livestock. On that basis, Jack asserted, future actions to secure improvements in water quality will be targeted. In other words, the individual farms and areas identified as having increased stock numbers and operating under the Nitrates Derogation, will be placed under even more intensive scrutiny and, presumably, subjected to more restrictive practices. What this will involve is not yet clear. Phosphorous loss was also identified as an actionable issue by Jack. With lime application at a low percentage of where it was forty years ago, the Department Inspector emphasised the value of lime both in value terms and its positive impact on increasing fertiliser efficiency on farms. This is clearly one area where farmers can improve productivity while lowering fertiliser inputs.

Fertiliser register

The introduction of a chemical fertiliser register was





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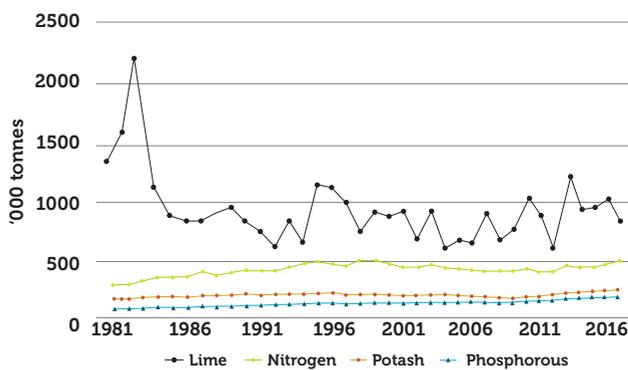


signalled in Jack's presentation to the FAI webinar audience. It is anticipated that all fertiliser purchases will be linked to a farmer's herd number. There is, said Jack, a huge potential to reduce the levels of nitrogen being applied on some farms. He spoke about the greater control over fertiliser application available to farmers who measure grass regularly. Jack also advocated intensive analysis of soil sample results to determine actions rather than merely soil sampling for compliance. He advocated tissue analysis for tillage farmers, in line with the aspiration under Green Deal to reduce fertiliser applications without impacting on soil fertility. Clearly, the proposed way forward for both grassland and tillage farmers will be the appliance of more science and less fertiliser. Meanwhile, only 20 per cent of Irish soils are considered to have adequate pH and P&K levels.

Enforcing the rules

Jack Nolan had strong words on slurry application, pointing to breaches of spreading date regulations as being particularly problematic. This, he suggested, is because increases in stock numbers are not being matched with additional slurry storage capacity. He advocated increased enforcement of slurry regulations both in relation to storage capacity and spreading dates and soil and climatic conditions at spreading. Ideally, he said, all slurry should be spread with low emission

equipment and spread at the most effective growth periods. A cutback of twenty units N per hectare where slurry has been applied should deliver significant savings without impacting on productivity, he advised. Nitrogen use efficiency, The DAFM representative insisted, needs to move from 24 per cent to at least 35 per cent. All this is in the context, as Jack Nolan acknowledges, of Ireland being in the top third of European countries in terms of water quality. If we can improve on our current position, he insisted, it would provide a competitive advantage in securing a premium for our food produce.



Source: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine



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Glanbia Ireland 2020 Grain Supplier of the Year Award

Laos grain grower John C Fletcher has claimed the Glanbia Ireland Grain supplier of the Year Award for 2020 and the Seed Barley category champion, beating off stiff competition from fellow growers nationwide.



Overall winner, John C Fletcher, Ballykillane, Portarlinton, Co. Laos.

The fourth generation farmer from Ballykillane outside of Portarlinton is among 12 suppliers honoured for producing top-class native Irish grain.

John, who farms with his father, also John, grows winter crops of wheat, barley, oats and oilseed rape along with spring crops of malting barley, feed beans and oilseed rape. He uses beans and oilseed rape as an entry crop to seed crops whenever possible. Most are sown using a plough-based, establishment system.

Rotation is key

According to John, rotation is key on the all-tillage farm. "We're always trying to build fertility in the soil as we're in continuous tillage. 2020 wasn't a great year as drought got us very early on. Yields were poor and were down

about a half tonne an acre on 2019 levels. But thankfully the quality was good and price was better than previous years."

Commenting on the challenges and opportunities ahead for 2021 John states: "There is the talk of the new straw chopping scheme, which will obviously put a floor under the price of straw. Meanwhile, at the moment we are having more bad weather so hopefully that will turn around soon and we can get back into the fields."

As well as tending to several hundred acres, John and his family also run a hardware and electrical contracting business which employs over 130 people. Currently, under construction is a 25,000 sq ft hardware retail store.

"Production was down an estimated 18 per cent nationally in 2020 but the outlook for 2021 looks promising. Forecasts look good, prices have increased and there's a confidence that markets have strengthened and hopefully that the trend will continue."

Attention to detail

Glanbia Ireland Chairman John Murphy congratulated the growers whose excellence and attention to detail are recognised as central to the exceptionally high standards in the industry, as evidenced at the latest awards. He looks forward to a promising year ahead.

"Grain farmers across Ireland continue to produce extremely high quality grains, albeit in very challenging weather conditions over the past number of years. 2020 was no different with 60 per cent more than average rainfall and high winds wreaking havoc in the south and south east, particularly in August. Despite all of this, our award winners and their fellow growers excelled and have raised the bar even further this year."

RGT Planet - A New World for Spring Barley

From Australia to Alaska, and from Ireland to India, it is a fair claim to state that the sun never sets on fields of RGT Planet spring barley, such is the extent of the cultivation worldwide of this truly unique and outstanding variety. Amazingly, RGT

Planet is now grown by farmers in 57 countries across the globe, making it the number one single variety of any crop in the world. "Given that varieties are named well in advance of their full commercial potential being realised, it was certainly a stroke

of genius that the name "Planet" was chosen by the breeders RAGT Seeds" says Donal Fitzgerald of Goldcrop, the seed agents who represent the variety in Ireland. "Normally a spring barley variety will have adaptations to a limited

climatic region. For example, in Ireland we usually select maritime types which perform best in our mild, wet climate. For a variety to be so universally adapted in a huge variance of climatic conditions is truly a rare phenomenon. Between our own private trials, and those conducted by DAFM, new barley varieties are screened for years before they are commercially propagated and released on the market for farmers to grow. From early on, it was very obvious that RGT Planet was a high performing variety, and it has maintained that consistent performance year after year" says Donal. RGT Planet holds the top yield rating on the DAFM Recommended List for 2021 and it will be the largest sown variety this year, projected at 35% of total barley area sown. RGT Planet is also currently Ireland's leading malting barley variety and will command about 50% of the area being produced this year by Irish malting barley growers. "In our view, RGT Planet has been a game-changer for Irish spring barley growers. It has raised yield expectations for the crop, but it has also delivered a new level of consistency in performance which gives great confidence to growers and industry alike, especially given the huge variances in weather patterns we have seen in recent years."

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RGT Planet, Fully Recommended on DAFM Spring Barley List 2021

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Green Feed Wheat winner, Patrick McEvoy, Kilberry, Athy, Co. Kildare



Dried Feed Wheat winner, Philip Doyle, Lullymore Farm, Rathangan, Co. Kildare

“Production was down an estimated 18 per cent nationally in 2020 but the outlook for 2021 looks promising. Forecasts look good, prices have increased and there’s a confidence that markets have strengthened and hopefully that the trend will continue,” he said.

The expert nutritional, R&D and sustainability team at Glanbia Ireland’s Plant Hub are continuously innovating and examining more efficient, environmentally-friendly and healthier ways of feeding the human and animal population.

Head of Strategic Alliances at Glanbia Ireland Tom Finlay said: “Glanbia Ireland is the largest buyer and user of

native Irish grains. Our gluten-free oatmeal base doubled in volumes in 2020, based on 2019 intake.

“We are expanding our value chain to include a range of oat flour which is used in a number of nutritious applications. We will bring a range of quinoa offerings to market and these will include flakes and flour. We’ve also introduced a range of organic oatmeal this year,” he revealed.

Glanbia Ireland’s total green grain intake for 2020 stood at 171,260 tonnes, down from 206,040 in 2019. Glanbia will also buy around 80,000 tonnes of dried grain from the 2020 harvest.

GLANBIA GRAIN AWARDS

CATEGORY WINNERS 2020

- **WINTER (CASSIA) FEED BARLEY:** Richard Thomson-Moore, Barne Estate, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.
- **MALTING BARLEY:** Diarmuid MacAmhlaoibh, Ballyarra, Castletyons, Co. Cork.
- **GREEN FEED BARLEY:** Martin Hayden, Coolroe, Graiguenamanagh, Co. Kilkenny.
- **DRIED FEED BARLEY:** Michael Cloney, Curracloe, Co. Wexford.
- **SEED BARLEY:** John C. Fletcher, Ballykillane, Portarlinton, Co. Laois.
- **GREEN FEED WHEAT:** Patrick McEvoy, Kilberry, Athy, Co. Kildare.
- **DRIED FEED WHEAT:** Philip Doyle, Lullymore Farm, Rathangan, Co. Kildare
- **SEED WHEAT:** The Brennan Family, Chapel Avenue Farm, Barrowhouse, Athy, Co. Kildare.
- **FOOD GRADE OATS:** John Leahy, The Heath Farm, Athy, Co. Kildare.
- **GREEN FEED OATS:** Tom McKeown, Knock, Castletown, Navan, Co. Meath.
- **GREEN FEED BEANS:** Philip Murphy, Ballykerogue, Campile, Co. Wexford.
- **GREEN OILSEED RAPE:** Ivan Curran, Broadleas Farm, Broadleas, Stamullen, Co. Meath.



Adopting digital tools for a greener future

Philip Cosgrave, Yara Country Agronomist, looks at how technology can assist farmers in the race to a greener future

Nitrogen management at farm level on cereal crops hasn't changed much over the decades. Both the EU's 'Farm to Fork' strategy and the Ag Climatise roadmap published in December by the DAFM, seek to reduce nutrient losses and nitrogen (N) fertiliser usage at farm level. So one thing is certain, there will be an increasing level of focus on farms to improve overall nitrogen use efficiency (NUE) this decade. Adopting new N management strategies allows improvements to be made resulting in better efficiency, profitability and sustainability.

Yara is focusing its efforts at lowering the GHGE intensity of growing crops, by developing digital tools that will improve NUE on cereal farms. The company continues work to reduce the carbon footprint associated with the production of fertiliser by adopting the best available technology in its plant. The next step (this has begun already!) is to produce fossil fuel free N fertiliser from renewable energy sources, namely wind, solar and hydro.

Using technology to guide application rates

At present NUE is not a measure of efficiency that we use regularly but it could in the years ahead be an important environmental metric on which our use of N is judged. The simplest NUE calculation uses only applied N as an input, whereas others may also include soil mineral nitrogen. As a target we should aim for an NUE of 80% on cereal crops that are managed optimally and where

the latest N management technology such as the Yara N-Tester BT is in use to fine tune N rates. Normal practise is to apply a non-targeted, uniform application based on a field's N index and yield history. This may not accurately estimate the soil N supply or the variation that often exists within a field. The supply of N is highly variable, it is influenced by factors such as soil type, crop residues, cultivations and soil organic matter. This leads to over and under application of N fertiliser leading to potential environmental losses. Yara are developing new digital farming tools to increase NUE. Trials in recent years have demonstrated that utilising tools such as Yara's N-Tester BT and variable rate application app Atfarm farmers are able to achieve nitrogen use efficiencies of 70 – 80% per cent.





N-Tester BT

Yara's N-Tester BT is a hand held leaf nitrogen measurement tool which links to your smartphone via Bluetooth. It enables quick and easy readings to be taken in a growing crop to establish its exact nitrogen status. This enables fast and accurate field specific recommendations to help fine-tune application during the growing season. This can result in more accurate field-scale recommendations, improving profitability and minimising environmental impact.



How does it work?

The N-Tester measures the absorption of the leaf in the red and near-infrared regions. Using these two values, the N-Tester calculates a numeric value which is proportional to the amount of chlorophyll present in the leaf. There is a strong correlation between chlorophyll content and nitrogen concentration in the leaf, and this allows an indirect in-field measurement of the N content in a cereal crop.

N-Tester measurements are strongly influenced by both variety and growth stage. Yara conduct field trials to generate the necessary data to calibrate the N-Tester readings for different varieties (due to the colour differences between them). Therefore, for both winter wheat and winter barley Yara is able to provide the actual nitrogen recommendation for most of the current varieties. There needs to be 3 years' worth of data for a calibration to be added therefore the newest varieties may not always be present on the device.

Yara Atfarm

Atfarm measures the crop growth of your fields using satellite technology. Powered by Yara's N-Sensor algorithm, Atfarm looks for growth differences and based on these creates variable rate application maps for your N-fertilisation and allows farmers to monitor biomass maps of fields during the season.

The advertisement features the Yara logo at the top left, with the tagline "Knowledge grows" below it. The background is a vibrant green field with rows of crops stretching into the distance under a clear sky. The main headline reads "Quality NPKS Fertilizer from Factory to Field". Below this, there are five circular icons, each containing the letters N, P, K, and S in different colors. The bottom section of the ad contains two paragraphs of text and the YaraMila logo, which is a circular seal with the text "Always on the ball" and "As in the ball". At the very bottom, there are social media and contact details for Yara Ireland.

YARA

Knowledge grows

Quality NPKS
Fertilizer
from Factory
to Field

You want to know that you are applying your fertilizer accurately to ensure every plant receives the correct nutrition. YaraMila fertilizers are complex compounds. This means that they contain every nutrient in every granule.

These granules are all the same size and density meaning segregation does not occur. Trust YaraMila for a consistent and even spread to maximise your yield.

YaraMila™

Always on the ball
As in the ball

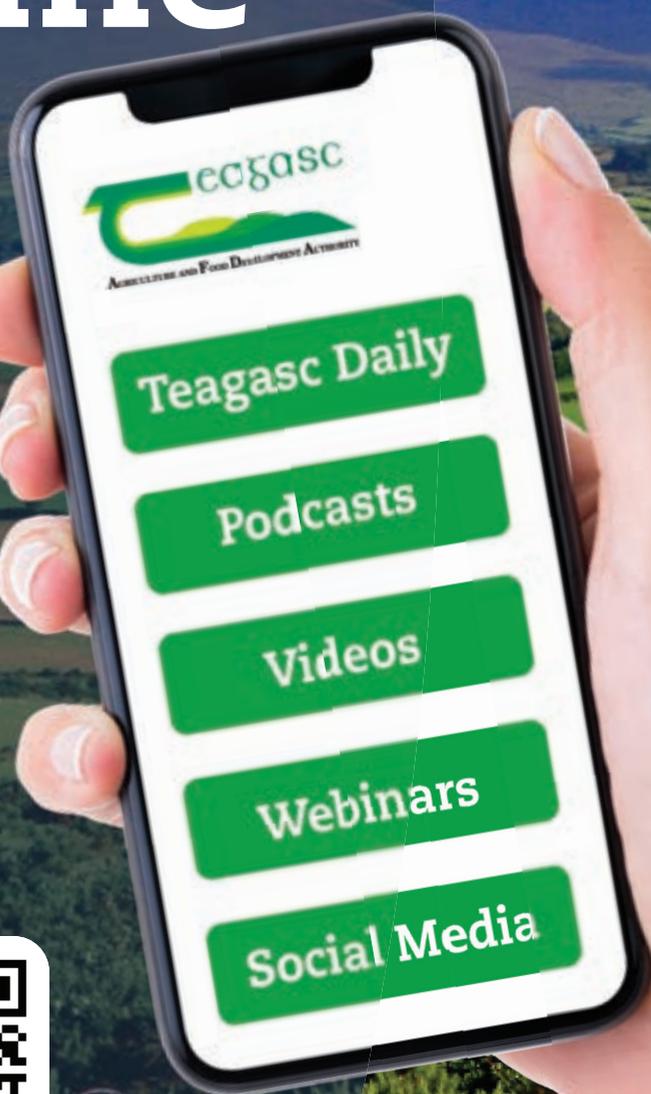
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Wexford grower drives IFA tillage agenda

Mark Browne – tillage farmer from Enniscorthy and chairman of the IFA’s Grain committee – talks to **Matt O’Keeffe** about efficiency, the environment, convergence and the straw scheme.

Mark Browne is a tillage farmer from Enniscorthy, growing cereals, oilseeds and protein crops. They dry and store much of their own grain and also produce significant quantities of premium crops such as malting barley, milling wheat and oats. Prior to the closure of Irish Sugar, the Brownes were significant sugar beet growers.

Mark is currently chairman of the IFA’s Grain committee and previously chaired the Boortmalt Malting Barley Steering Group which was key to the development of the fledgling distilling malting barley supply. Mark and his brother have pioneered the use of min and strip-till techniques on their farm over the last number of years.

Range of crops

Speaking to Matt O’Keeffe, the Wexford grain grower listed his crops: “We have oilseed rape, winter wheat, sometimes winter barley, and then predominately spring barley for the malting industry. This year we might even



have a bit of spring wheat, and spring beans as well. The Brownes mainly use min-till and it has worked well for them: “We’ve been doing it now for eleven or twelve years. It’s a good way of getting crops into the ground



efficiently. Min-till is said to be more environmentally friendly with less carbon release than ploughing. It is definitely better for soil structure and there is less disturbance of earthworms which are essential in the soil. It has worked out for us and there are large numbers of farmers in the Wexford area using min-till to establish crops. It would be hard to go back ploughing when you have gone down the min-till route."

Lost crops

"We grew a good bit of sugar beet down in this area, it was a big loss to the tillage sector. We were growing grain as a rotation for sugar beet, so we still really miss the crop and we've never replaced it. Milling wheat was also a big loss to the country, we don't grow any amount of it anymore. Farmers gave up growing milling wheat because the premium was too low. Again, we were competing with imported wheat. The premium over feed wheat just wasn't worth the effort to get the protein right. Now, having said that, there are some farmers who grow it every year and they're crying out for a market. The Grain Committee is following that up this year to see if we can increase supply of Irish wheat into the milling industry. With a lot of flour coming from the UK, a no-deal Brexit would have been a major problem. We will still need a large mill in Ireland very soon, working at full capacity."

Promising prices for this season

Mark is optimistic on grain price: "The spot price of grain has risen a good bit since the harvest. Wheat is very scarce so there is a big premium on prices, up on €230/€240 a tonne. Forward prices have risen as well, though there's not a big amount of forward selling taking place yet. Some farmers have got into bother with forward selling, while others forward sell every year and they continue to that. Other farmers who haven't done it, won't do it."

Irish grain for Irish beer and whiskey

Mark Browne is critical of distillers increasingly using foreign grains: "Some of it is not even wheat or barley. Irish growers should be able to supply the needs of the distilling industry. Some years we have top quality, the best distilling barley that you could have. If you get a good growing year, you will have low protein, and that's what the distilling companies want. Usually, 30-40 per cent of Irish grain would qualify and we are aiming to get up to 50 per cent because the distilling market is growing, so we need to grow more distilling barley. We are stepping up to that challenge."

Irish malting barley is used extensively in the brewing industry as the IFA chairman confirms: "In South Carlow, Enniscorthy, South Wexford there is a lot of malting barley produced for the brewing and distilling industries. It is also grown extensively across the entire Leinster region with East Munster making up the remaining acreage."

Reversing the decline in growers

Mark believes there is potential to grow acreage and farmer involvement: "We have lost 20 per cent of our acreage over the last six years. While acreage has plateaued, there is growth potential. Unfortunately, you can't compete with low priced maize imports and that drove farmers out of the business in recent years. EU standards are higher with restrictions on chemicals and GM, so it's difficult to compete. Irish prices are higher this year there is more demand for Irish grain. If that continues you will see more Irish grain grown. Farmers give up growing when they see no sustainability with price going down continuously."

Growing protein crops

Mark grows field beans and considers the crop as a logical substitute for soya: "I grow the crop. We are still learning and it can be a little bit hit and miss. Some years we have excellent yields with up to three-tonne per acre. But the year of the drought we were down to half a tonne and lost a lot of money. So that's the variation. It's a good rotation crop and it will fulfil some of our protein needs. Bean prices for next season are looking promising with a minimum of €240 a tonne on offer. That's up about €40 a tonne on last year and will encourage growers to put it in as a rotation. Beans have a low fertiliser requirement and are good for biodiversity. The Department encourages us to grow beans to promote home-sourced protein so it ticks all the boxes."

The straw scheme

Tillage farmers are to benefit from a €10 million straw incorporation support scheme and Mark is positively disposed to the initiative: "I'm delighted with the scheme. This is a very strong message to tillage farmers that the Department doesn't want to see our area diminish any further. We need a tillage industry in Ireland for feeding animals, for the drinks industry, for the environment, for the biodiversity it brings to the countryside. It is a pilot project and I'm working with the Department to make sure the scheme will work well for everyone involved."

Convergence

Convergence is expected to have a big impact on tillage farmers and the IFA Grain Committee Chairman is animated on the subject: "It's a word I dread as a tillage farmer. Convergence is another reason why there was a shift away from tillage. It had a devastating effect on farmers in the last round of CAP negotiations with €100 million lost from farm incomes. Now there is a threat of further payments convergence. I want that down to the minimum because it disproportionately effects tillage farmers. Direct payments were introduced to compensate for the fall in grain value. Now all of a sudden, the level of support is dropping with money being taken from farmers who must still operate with low prices. We are lobbying strongly against further convergence."



More control, more efficiency

Paudie Ahern, a tillage farmer from Co. Tipperary talks about the efficiencies his Cirrus drill offers on farm

Farmhand has been the exclusive Irish importer for Amazone machinery since 1968. "Amazone have always been a leading manufacturer of farming implements for tillage. The brand is synonymous with quality and precision," says Stephen Scrivener, Sales Director for Farmhand.

Paudie Ahern, a tillage farmer from Grange, Clonmel in Co. Tipperary farms with his brother Liam and Father Liam senior. "It's 35 years since we set our own corn," explains Paudie "We always had contractors in before." "Two years ago we purchased a ZA-V fertiliser spreader so when myself and my brother decided we would drill our own corn we found no reason why not to go with Amazone again, between all their technology and marrying both our major components we found it worked very well with our system" explains Paudie. The Cirrus trailed seed drill combination is a pneumatic seed drill which is distinguished by the superb quality of its work in single-pass ploughing and sowing and mulch sowing. With working widths in 3m to 6m and hopper sizes of 3,000l to 4,000l, the Cirrus range is highly efficient. Due to their flexibility and different conveying system concepts, the Cirrus models offer the right solution for any farm, from small, compact sowing combinations to large-scale seed drills.

"We went for the trailed because it suited our horsepower and also the speed of the drilling we felt was faster and it would get through the land an awful lot quicker," explains Paudie "For our soil type here it also suits and it is lovely on the discs rather than the tines. So we went for the disc version and it brings up a lovely puffy seed bed in front of the coulters."

The trailed seed drill combination with 2-row disc element shows its advantages. The disc element loosens, crumbles and levels the seedbed depending on the type of discs chosen immediately ahead of the seed placement. The working depth of the disc element can be adjusted on the move. Via a series of holes, the end discs can be adjusted individually to ensure a level finish between bouts. The Cirrus is also available without a disc element to provide a high output solo drill. With all the technical benefits of the basic seed drill, the Cirrus without disc segment is a cost-effective alternative for solo sowing but still maintains the pre-drilling reconsolidation. In this specification as well, the optional Crushboard can be added.

"It also has great paddles in front and the track eradicators," explains Paudie. When operating on compaction sensitive soils, and at a reduced working depth, the optional tractor wheel mark eradicators make sense. These loosen the compacted tracks behind the tractor tyres. The position of the wheel mark eradicators



can be set horizontally and vertically. The special kinematics of the eradicator provides a constant spring force across the entire area of deflection. The wedge shares safely loosen yet, however, do not bring stones to the surface.

The metering system on the Amazone Cirrus is suitable for all seeds and sowing rates from 1.5 to 400 kg/ha. Over-sized metering cassettes produce a low peripheral speed protecting the seed from damage. Conversion from fine seeds to normal seeds is done in seconds by exchanging the metering cassettes. They can even be changed when the seed hopper is full. The three metering cassettes supplied as standard cover up to 95 per cent of all seeds. Other metering cassettes, for instance for maize or specialist crops, are also available. The segmented distributor head provides huge flexibility for the pneumatic seed drill. With immediate effect, asymmetrical tramlines can be carried out without an undesirable seed rate reduction on the other half of the machine.

"We also included the sensors, so we have the sensors for each of the coulters to tell us when they are blocked. This is a big benefit, from the cab I can see the 18 numbered green lights to say that all my coulters are working perfectly and the seed is being put out at the correct rate that I have asked for it to be put out," explains Paudie. An additional useful assistance system is the optional seed tube monitoring which immediately detects blockages at the coulters and in the seed pipe. Directly behind the distributor head, sensors check the seed flow inside the seed tubes. The system automatically detects when the drill is tramlining.



New launches from Väderstad



Väderstad has launched the Spirit 400C/S pneumatic seed drill with key features such as innovative E-Control control system with ISOBUS Task Control, SeedEye blockage monitoring and new hydraulics. The drill also has a new open machine design and two platforms, which has led to improved accessibility. New hydraulics delivers active seed coulter pressure, adjustable following harrow pressure, and automatic headland sequence control. The operator has full control of the seeding operation via the iPad-based control system Väderstad E-Control. The SeedEye blockage feature helps the operator to monitor the seed and fertiliser output in real time. Any deviation triggers a warning so that any impact on drilling can be quickly solved.

The new Spirit 400C/S is available as the seed-only version Spirit 400S, as well as the combi versions Spirit 400C FIX – which places the fertiliser in 5cm wide strips at 125mm row spacing, in front of every seed row – and Spirit 400C InLine, which is designed to apply a low starter fertiliser rate in a separate outlet together with the seeds in the seed coulter.

Meanwhile, Väderstad has also launched a new 6m NZ Mounted harrow cultivator with reinforced frame and a unique versatile linkage for accurate contour following, similar to the trailed version. NZ's versatile linkage is easy to unlock into a floating position, which can then move independently from the tractor, offering exceptional contour following in three dimensions. The linkage can also easily be locked, without the need for tools. On the new 6m model, tines are fitted on four axles with a tine spacing of 9cm, enabling NZ Mounted 500-600 to deliver an intensive seedbed preparation at constant depth.

Lemken Saphir and Solitair seed drills update



The Saphir mechanical seed drill and Solitair 9 pneumatic seed drill have been updated with a new look. Both handling and operating comfort have been improved, while the seed metering and placement system with the proven parallel double disc coulters and depth control wheels remain unchanged.

The new Saphir 9 features the electronic EcoDrill control, which is operated via the LET-40 terminal with touch display. The hopper has been redesigned and now seals better with a plastic lid. Also, the new hopper lid opens particularly wide to facilitate filling from big bags. The design of the access grille, loading bridge and handrail has been improved, and the controls on the side of the implement, such as the lever for the bottom flap, are now protected by cover panels.

The redesigned Solitair 8+ and 9+ also feature an updated hopper design and lid. The new blower fan, which has been fitted to the Solitair 25, is not only extra silent, but also consumes impressively little oil. A new calibration sensor on the drill saves farmers having to move between the implement and tractor when calibrating. The access step has also been improved, and the access grille can now be folded up to make the metering unit and calibration tray more easily accessible. The pre-emergence markers and harrows of the Solitair 25 can also be fitted to the Saphir 9 and Solitair 8+ and 9+. The single harrows are mounted to the rear seeding coulters to reliably cover two seed rows and the optional compact harrow is easy to lift and can adjust to a wide range of different conditions.

The Grassland Agro Soil Sustainability Programme

The Grassland Agro Soil Sustainability Programme is designed to help Irish farmers address the sustainability challenges facing the industry by improving soil health. The three pillars to achieving a healthy soil are at the forefront of the Grassland Soil Sustainability Programme: Chemical, Physical and Biological.

4 Steps to Grassland Agro Soil Sustainability Programme

- Soil fertility
- Soil structure
- Soil biology
- Grass quality

National soil fertility statistics of Irish dairy farms show that, 41 per cent are suboptimal in pH, 48 per cent are suboptimal in phosphorus (P) and 41 per cent are suboptimal in potassium (K). Each pillar has considerable influence on soil health, farm performance and farm profitability. Irish agriculture has come under immense pressure in recent times in our commitment to reduce greenhouse gas and ammonia emission as part of the EU Green Deal and the national climate action plan. The soil sustainability programme developed by Grassland Agro aims at improving soil health, and the efficiency of applied nutrients and farm production and profitability.



Soil Fertility (Chemical)

The first step of the programme is to develop a comprehensive fertiliser plan that is easy to implement. Our technical agronomy team will soil sample your farm, interpret soil sample test results and develop a bespoke fertiliser and liming programme to improve soil fertility status on your farm. Soil type, field use, stocking rate and offtakes are among the factors considered when developing farm specific fertiliser plans. Improvements in nutrient use efficiency can be made by addressing soil fertility deficits and correcting soil pH. It is important for farmers to note that recent soil sample results can be used to develop custom made fertiliser plans, or alternatively soil sampling can be arranged for farmers. In order to facilitate the adoption of clover into our grass swards we need to improve soil fertility.

Soil Structure (Physical)

The second step of the programme is to assess soil physical structure on farm. This is carried out using the Grass VESS (Visual

Estimation Soil Structure) methodology. In the past 5 years there has been an increase of approximately 400,000 dairy cows in Ireland. As a result, agricultural land has experienced increased stocking rates and traffic from livestock and machinery due to intensification. Surveys of Irish grassland soils have identified that soil structure is a challenge, and it is very important to diagnose any potential problem before deciding on remedial action.

Optimum soil structure provides numerous benefits from an agronomic perspective but also an environmental perspective:

- Supports root development and acts as an anchor and nutrient supply for plants
- Dictates the quantities of nutrients made available to plants
- Purifies water as it filters through the soil
- Influences the storage and cycling of carbon
- Influences the population of the largest biological habitat on earth

Soil Biology (Biological)

The third step is to conduct the Grassland Agro soil biological activity test. This is a key component of the programme, indicating soil biological activity and the stock of nitrogen in a soil. In conjunction to the nutrients applied in chemical fertiliser, slurry and recycled from livestock excretion, there are a large amount of nutrients supplied from the soil organic carbon. Microorganisms in the soil release enzymes that convert unavailable nutrients in the soil organic carbon into plant available nutrients. This process is known as mineralisation. Microorganisms provide plants with nutrients and plants provide microorganisms with an energy source in the form of carbon, both working simultaneously. This test provides an indication of a particular soil to supply nitrogen based on its biological activity.

Grass Quality

The fourth component of the programme is monitoring and measuring grass quality for grazing and silage production. The reliance on imported protein is a challenge to the Irish livestock sector and it is important grassland management is improved to ensure better grass utilisation, feeding quality and farm production. For silage production, grass measurement and preharvest sampling of sugars and nitrates will be carried out to improve silage quality in term of protein, DMD and energy. It is important that we exploit our resilient grass-based, low input system as global food supply comes under increased pressure. Irish dairy production is striding ahead of its EU partners in terms of efficient production of human edible protein. Research carried out by Teagasc suggests that for every 1 kg of imported human edible protein consumed, the average dairy cow produces 4.92 kg of human edible protein in return, highlighting the importance of improving grass and silage quality. The first step in the process is to get recent up-to-date soil samples. Sign up to the programme by contacting your local Grassland Agro agronomist or e-mail [Hello@grassland.ie](mailto>Hello@grassland.ie)

MESSAGES:

- ▶ **'Never mind the B#ll#cks, here's the Science'**
- ▶ **Use meal, judiciously, to get you through March.**
- ▶ **Plan the end of your 1st rotation to grow 1.3 tons (DM/ha) more grass.**
- ▶ **P + S with Nitrogen in March 48 per cent more grass.**
- ▶ **Dos and don'ts of March grazing.**
- ▶ **You MUST use Gene Ireland Bulls.**
- ▶ **You must DNA test all heifer calves.**
- ▶ **Bulling Heifer management = compact calving.**
- ▶ **Let out calves and bulling heifers now.**

By Matt Ryan

'Never Mind the B#ll#cks, here's the Science'

- ▶ This is the title of a book by Professor Luke O'Neill, who is one of the leading voices of authority during the Covid-19 pandemic; in this book he grapples with life's biggest questions and tell us what science has to say about them: "This book is about celebrating science and hard facts on medicine in a time of fake news and sometimes unhelpful group think." Its relevance cannot

be lost to farming. This is a very important statement. In case you think 'fake news' is confined to Trump and Brexit campaigns, it is rife in medicine and agriculture plus aspects associated with farming. You are all aware of the off-farm 'fake news' campaigns being waged on some of the below topics:

- ▶ Animal food for human consumption
 - ▶ The treatment of animals' both on and off farm
 - ▶ Farmers as chief polluters of the environment
 - ▶ Methane from animal's causing serious global warming,
 - ▶ Getting bigger is selfish
 - ▶ Dairy farmers are the bane of rural Ireland,
 - ▶ All dairy farmers are millionaires
 - ▶ This breed or that is better
 - ▶ Stock bulls are better than AI
 - ▶ Protected urea doesn't work
- ▶ I depend totally on Teagasc and international research, verified and adopted by innovative farmers. Remember private companies and sales people have Indices to enhance selling a product; farmers need independent and reliable Indices to buy a producer. The very nature of the business dairy farmers are in predisposes that they must adopt new practices. But why has the adoption of certain recommended practices, such as improved soil fertility,



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Efficient Form Systems

grass measurement, moderate stocking rates, moderate use of meal feeding, EBI, cow fertility, been so slow? I believe many farmers are being influenced by false information either from farmers, sales people or other family members.

Meals to Cows in March?

- ▶ The quantity of meal to feed per day depends on grass availability for the imposed stocking rate. Meal is expensive this spring, so let us see if we can reduce the quantity fed. The message is 2 kgs, if you have enough grass and in fact there is too much grass on most farms.
- ▶ Let's make the case for grass, again?
 - ▶ Meal is very expensive as it costs over 28 - 32 cents per Kg dry matter (DM) compared with grass at 6 -7 cents.
 - ▶ And silage costs 15-19 cents per Kg DM, as well as depressing milk yield, % protein and cow body condition.
 - ▶ Grass has over 20 per cent Protein (silage has 8-10 per cent); grass now is over 78 per cent DMD with an intake of 2.5 per cent, approx, of body weight (silage at best is 70 per cent DMP with an intake of 1.8 per cent of body weight). Therefore, grass is a great feed.
 - ▶ With significant quantities of grass in the diet the cows' total intake increases by 3 per cent, she produces more milk, more protein (+0.3 per cent) and gains more weight (0.17 Kg extra per day).
- ▶ Compare the cost/day of feeding a cow on various options:
 - ▶ 9kgs Silage + 4 kgs Meal = €2.82 (1)
 - ▶ 9 kgs grass + 4 kgs Meal = €1.86 (2)
 - ▶ 11 kgs grass + 2 kg Meal = €1.37 (3)

Multiply these costs by say 100 cows and the daily savings by going from 1 to 2, 1 to 3 and 2 to 3 are €96, €145 and €49 respectively. Therefore, it is worth making a plan, however late, to make these savings and the increased benefits of providing more grass in the cows' diet.

- ▶ A grass budget plan, easily done on PastureBase, will guide you through the next 2 months so that you minimise meal feeding and get to the 1st week of April before starting the 2nd round while at the same time being in a position to go on a stocking rate of 4.0 to 4.5 from mid-April onwards.
- ▶ Of course, if you have not enough of grass each day to

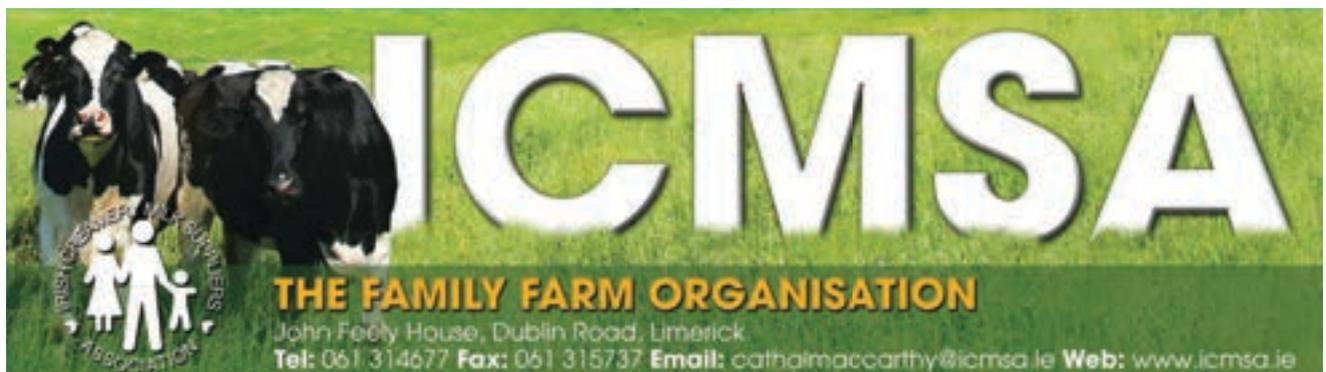
get you to the first week of April before starting the second rotation, that you should feed extra meals.

- ▶ Which type of meal? Obviously as cheap as possible, but good in energy with 12-14 per cent protein. I am a big fan of molassed beet pulp and with grass you can feed up to 3kgs/cow/day. Straight barley at similar levels could be fed but pulp would increase % F and P by 5% and 2% but decrease yield by 1% over barley. With these straights you will need to make provision for feeding magnesium to prevent grass tetany. Co-ops should be more responsible in making a value for money meal (12-14%P) with magnesium included available to farmer so that they do not have to feed more than 2-3 kgs meal per day to get the full complement of magnesium into cows. There is no need for high % protein rations when grass has 20-25% P in it.

End 1st Rotation 1st April

This is crucial to maximising grass in the cow's diet and setting up the farm for the remainder of the grass year.

- ▶ Finish on the 1st April in the South and dryer soils and 7-14 days later in the remainder of the country and wetter soils.
- ▶ You might be tight in grass in early April but you can and should increase meal level to slow down rotation length. Easy justified because you have saved on meals in late Feb and March by eating up all the grass that was available.
- ▶ Late let out this year due to weather will make things more challenging, but you must endeavour to achieve the following targets. The Spring Rotation Planner will drive this.
 - ▶ It is essential to hit the following targets (7-14 days later on wet/cold farms):
 - ▶ 1st March: 35% of grazing area grazed
 - ▶ 15th March: 65% of grazing area grazed
 - ▶ 29th March: 95% to 100% of grazing area grazed
 - ▶ Allow 7-9 days later for these targets in Northern or wetter farms.
- ▶ Why? To have enough grass on the second rotation you need a long period of days from first grazing to second grazing because the growth rate is low.
 - ▶ Grazing off old grass stimulates growth, so you grow more per day.
 - ▶ By ending the 1st rotation a few days early it allows



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you go some way towards achieving “an extras grazing rotation” in the year which, according to Moorepark results in 1.3 tons of grass/ha more being grown in the year.

- ▶ If you have not achieved the above target percentages grazed ask yourself how can you rectify things? Some or a mix of the following options must be considered:
 - ▶ Graze off light covers so that you can graze some areas faster, because it takes longer to graze high covers.
 - ▶ The preferable thing to do is to graze twice a day with milkers as follows; milk at 7 am, let cows out to grass at 8.30 until 11am, house with no feed, milk at 3pm; let cows out at 4.30pm until 6.00pm, house overnight with no silage, having fed 1kg or no meals at each milking.
 - ▶ Let out dry cows or dry stock to bring you to the 33% target in early March – only necessary if you are away under targets on 25th February.
 - ▶ Feed no meals or silage for a few weeks so as to graze more area.
 - ▶ Keep the meal for feeding in April because there is a strong possibility that grass will be tight in April.
- ▶ This spring grazing rotation planner is available on PastureBase and is very easy to set-up. This planner is effectively a GPS type of line plan from which you must not deviate below. This may happen because you were unable to graze enough area in Feb due to weather or high covers. But you must “get back on line” immediately by doing as suggested above.
- ▶ The driver of this principle is post grazing height:
 - ▶ If cows are leaving too much grass behind on the day’s allocated area, it indicates they are getting too much meals or silage. Therefore, feed no silage and/ or you reduce the meals being fed.
 - ▶ If they are grazing too tight and have all the grass eaten after an hour or so, then you must increase the meals being fed.
- ▶ I can’t stress enough the importance of “on-off” grazing when ground conditions are marginal – the soil structure is terribly important to grow grass and store Carbon. Now, with reduced N this is key to growing grass.

You Must Do a Grass Budget

- ▶ More and more farmers are doing grass budgets on PastureBase. Why? It will tell you how much grass you can feed to each cow per day. This is based on:
 - ▶ The numbers of cows being fed grass, the areas available (=stocking rate), the growth rates, the average farm cover (AFC) now and when you want to increase the stocking rate in April to close for silage.
 - ▶ In nearly all the plans that I have done I find that with a 6-week calving pattern of 78-85 per cent and having grazed 30 per cent of milking platform by 1st March that you will have to feed 4-5 kgs meal during most of the month because you will only be able to allocate 6 – 11 kgs DM of grass.
 - ▶ Stocking rates, a function of the compactness of calving, are varying from 2 cows/ha at the beginning



Developing calves from the inside out

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

As new-born calves are born with undeveloped rumens, the main objective over the next few weeks and months is to implement an early feeding strategy geared towards rumen development.

Rumen development begins within the first few days/weeks after birth and is advanced by exposure to healthy bacteria from the environment and the consumption of solid feeds.

Therefore, it is vital to introduce a high energy/protein calf starter ration from approximately 3 days of age, with free access to fresh clean water and high-quality clean straw, offered above ground level to avoid contamination (no silage/haylage).

Importance of diet for early rumen development:



Rumen development at six weeks. When fed milk only (A) the rumen has no papillae and is white in colour, meaning there is little feed absorption possible. When fed milk and grain (C) the rumen at six weeks shows developed papillae and is dark in colour, allowing for significant feed absorption. Source: Penn State University

What is happening to dairy calves at grass?

Year on year, in the proceeding weeks after turnout to grass, cases of calves suffering from setbacks such as summer-scour syndrome or calf wasting symptoms have been reported.

Spring grass is very high in oils like CLA (conjugated linoleic acid), sugars and potentially nitrogen, and to a young undeveloped rumen, this can be hard to adjust to. In addition, low covers of grass also have very little fibre, which is a key substrate for good rumen health.

Ensuring greater rumen development in early life will help combat these issues, alongside practises such as, offering concentrates post-turnout, grazing slightly heavier covers and/or offering a fibre source at first to ease the transition.

For further calf rearing advice, contact your local Agritech sales advisor or visit www.agritech.ie



of March to 3.2 cows/ha at the end of month.

- ▶ At higher SR's you will have to feed 5-6kgs meal unless you want to run very low covers in April – this will result in silage cutting being delayed.
- ▶ You will need to have AFC's of 600 to 700 during the 1st and 2nd week of April.
- ▶ Recent podcasts from Teagasc are advising building silage reserves, "old hay is old gold" attitude, to counteract the increased frequencies of very wet weather and/or drought conditions.

March Levels of Nitrogen + P, K, S & Ca

Very little nitrogen was applied up to mid-February and later because of the terrible weather.

To comply with the Nitrogen requirement of 250kgs/ha, Teagasc advise that by 15th March it is recommended that you have used 56kgs/ha (45 units/acre) of Nitrogen, protected Urea, be applied to all the grazing area.

- ▶ This is lower than you may be used to doing,
- ▶ But if you have not that amount used, you should get out there immediately, otherwise, you will be short of grass in April.
- ▶ Follow Teagasc advice because you will not have grass if you don't follow the recommendations for your stocking rate.
- ▶ Slurry, using the LESS systems, will have to be used correctly to compensate for lower levels of Nitrogen:
- ▶ Every 1,000 gallons gives 8-9 units of Nitrogen.
- ▶ Apply 2,000-3,000 gallons per acre on 30-50 per cent of the farm, particularly, areas to be cut for silage.
- ▶ As soil compaction by wheels gives a big reduction in grass growth in subsequent rotations, you must carefully choose the method of spreading, the fields to spread and the type of weather.
- ▶ From what I have seen everyone should use the umbilical system to prevent poaching and using up valuable labour at a time when very busy. A big word

of warning; massive amounts of slurry/acre (5000 to 7000 gallons), which farmers are applying, will kill the worm population, thereby, depriving the soil of air and so the surface will get soggy and poach very easily.

- ▶ One-third of the farm should have got slurry (3000gallons/acre) in February, now another third should get it while the last third should get it from mid-March on. This will satisfy instead of 24 units of N.
- ▶ Lime or calcium are essential for:
- ▶ Freeing up other nutrients, particularly, nitrogen and phosphate
- ▶ Perennial ryegrass and clover growth.
- ▶ Grass palatability (lower DMD's).
- ▶ Therefore, we can save on Nitrogen and phosphate if we apply lime now and it is much cheaper.

If you have no P or K put on yet, apply 2 bags 10:10:20 for Index 1 soils and 3-4 bags for lower index soils. Also include Sulphur (S). The addition of P and S with the N will increase the grass growth response by 48 per cent and the recovery of N by 20 per cent.

Dos and Don'ts of Grazing

After all the advice farmers, in general, are very lax on using this information. It must be a fundamental requirement of every farmer that he does not damage soil structure on his farm. This year is one of the most challenging ever with a lot of grass on farms but ground conditions are working against grazing.

- ▶ Some Don'ts:
 - ▶ Don't let out or leave cows out if raining, wait till afternoon and bring them in when raining starts (they do too much walking and consequently poaching).
 - ▶ Don't give them access to large areas of ground (they do too much damage as they walk more).

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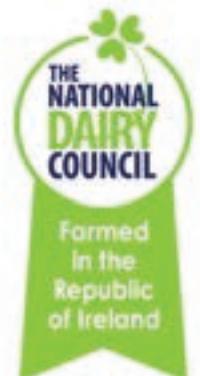
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- ▶ Don't let them out with "bellies" full (no silage if possible).
- ▶ Don't have dirty roadways or paddock entrances (they soil the grass).
- ▶ Don't let cows out at night if rain is forecast unless you are prepared to get up and bring them in.
- ▶ Don't leave calves 'suck' the cow for 3-4 days (because they do too much walking/bawling when let out).
- ▶ Don't ever go back to graze damaged, incompletely grazed paddocks until their next rotation slot (regrowths eaten off).
- ▶ Don't let out bulling cows (they do huge damage).
- ▶ Some Dos:
 - ▶ Do block graze to minimise walking/poaching damage.
 - ▶ Do have several paddock entrances.
 - ▶ Do walk cows over "good" grass to graze grass from the back of the paddock.
 - ▶ Do use "cow walks" to access long or awkward paddocks.
 - ▶ Do keep a close eye on your grass budget.

You Must Use Gene Ireland (GI) Bulls – Why?

- ▶ The 'team pack is higher in EBI (€310 compared to €255) than the average on the Active Bull List
- ▶ Ensures that you use them as teams (i.e., all bulls provided in equal amounts). Because, some farmers are using over 20-25 per cent of one bull on their farms.
- ▶ To encourage you there are attractive incentives, such as reduced rate semen charges and genotyping. Prices on these are currently being finalised.
- ▶ Access to the very best young bulls in the breeding program. These sires will provide the sons of interest for next year's program. So, herds using GI bulls will be the herds that semen companies target next year to purchase high EBI calves.
- ▶ You owe it to Ireland Inc. so that farmers' herd genetics can stay up with international competition.

Use Genomic Bulls (G1)

- ▶ The vast majority of the high EBI herds now are genotyping. That's no fluke as they are using the resultant data to pick better replacement females etc. This allows you mate your best cows, for sure, with the best AI bulls.
- ▶ There is evidence that farmers who have used G1's in the past have made faster genetic gain (EBI) than those not doing so.
- ▶ The cost of rearing a dairy herd replacement is approx. €1400. We need to be certain that we are rearing our highest EBI animals, especially with increased focus on stocking rates and decreasing carbon footprint, etc.
- ▶ It ensures 100 per cent parentage knowledge. Remember, parentage errors are 15 per cent on dairy farms and 25 per cent on large scale farms, that is calf and mother are not related.

- ▶ It is accelerating genetic gain through selecting the highest EBI animals from your cohort of young female calves. To maximise genetic gain, you must 'mate the best to the best'
- ▶ Using Sire Advice, the lowest EBI cows can get dairy beef or beef bulls, ensuring a calf of more value. Knowledge of the genetics of the cow is key.
- ▶ Donagh Berry, Moorepark, has calculated that the return on the investment is 4:1. That is, if it costs €22/animal, the pay-back will be €88/cow more profit.
- ▶ There is always the chance that you might with a mini-lotto and have a male that ends up in an AI station.

Graze Silage Ground in Early April

- ▶ There is a lot of silage left over on many farms this year. If you want to reduce meal costs then you should graze silage ground twice before closing. This practice saves on April meal bills. It will only delay silage cutting by a few days because growth rates will be over 90 in late May compared with 30 Kgs DM per day in early April.
- ▶ There will also be a strong possibility of split cuttings of 1st cut: facilitates the availability of aftergrass over a longer period.
- ▶ To push this concept to its limit the silage ground may be grazed from 15th-30th April. So, work backwards on your silage area to set this up. Silage will be cut on 10th-16th June.
- ▶ You must aim to get 90-95 per cent of all your silage requirements from the 1st cut. This will save money.
- ▶ Can only happen if cows are stocked at 4 to 4.5 cows per hectare on the grazing area during April-May. Stock cattle at 2,000-2,500 kgs weight per hectare.

Bulling Heifer Management = Compact Calving

- ▶ Bulling heifers (R2's) should now be 53 per cent of the breeds mature weight. Therefore, the range will be 275 kgs to 320 kgs for 520 kgs Jx and for 600 kg big Holsteins, respectively. Weigh them to confirm; be extra kind to animals below target and 'hard' on one far in excess of target.
- ▶ The median calving date for the national herd 12th March, which is far too late. It is resulting in huge loss of production – 60 to 100 Kg per cow of milk solids. The target is 18th and 26th February in the south and Northern areas, respectively. So, how can you bring it back near target?
- ▶ Bulling heifers are the solution because you can arrange their calving date. Therefore, they must calve before the cows every year. Remember, calving date slips 4-6 days per year, so an animal that calves on 1st March in her first year will calve on 6th March, 12th March etc. in subsequent years.
- ▶ Two things are now important to maximise the number of heifers that calve down in the first 3 weeks of calving next spring:
 - ▶ Adequate size, and
 - ▶ Synchronisation (discussed next month).
- ▶ Conception rates will be best if:

- ▶ They weigh 300-350 Kgs at AI date,
- ▶ They are on their 3rd heat at AI date,
- ▶ They are well used to the grass diet for 2 weeks before service.
- ▶ Manage animals accordingly to achieve these three objectives.
- ▶ Light yearlings for bulling may need meals now.
 - ▶ It will pay to get that extra 20-30 Kgs weight on.
 - ▶ But let them out and feed meals at grass (if small).
- ▶ Inject them for Leptospirosis again now, final injection before 5th April. This is a “must do” job for most herds.
- ▶ Stock them on grass at 1,000 Kgs weight per acre. Three to four per acre until June/ July. Equally, a copper bolus may be required if copper deficiency is a problem on your farm. Also address iodine where necessary.
- ▶ Let out worm dose is not necessary for these animals (or any yearlings). Why waste money?

Let Calves Out to Grass

- ▶ Calves at grass will thrive as well as those indoors and will have a lot less health problems while being easier to manage. I cannot understand why farmers are so slow in adopting this practice.
 - ▶ Try to have fresh grass for them every 3-5 days by rotating them round small blocks of grass.
 - ▶ Feed straw while at grass, as they need fibre (essential).

- ▶ If the weather is wet and cold, farmer’s favour letting calves run back into a house but this can be dangerous unless it is well ventilated like a hay barn.
- ▶ All they need outdoors is a dry lie and ground shelter because they spend

- a lot of time lying down.
- ▶ Fertiliser pallets and other homemade huts can be used to provide shelter and they work well.
- ▶ Continue feeding generous levels of meal (1 kg/day) and milk until weaning.

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The New 8280 TTV

The new 8280 TTV completes the high power range from German manufacturer Deutz-Fahr, which the company explains concentrates on the new technologies at the farmer's service: dynamic power, connectivity, comfort and reliability - the guidelines to engineer this project.

This innovative new tractor boasts a whole spectrum of unique new content and capabilities. The 8280 TTV is equipped with the 6.1 litre twin-turbo Deutz 6-cylinder engine stage V with a maximum power up to 287 HP and delivers impressive 1226 Nm of torque. It is designed to offer great performance and a high level of efficiency: twin-turbo and CommonRail system at 2,000 bar ensures more immediate and responsive power and torque delivery. The innovative powertrain is the result of many years of research by the SDF Group and includes the new SDF T7780 continuously variable transmission. A multi-stage epicyclic gearbox has been intelligently mated with a clutch unit and two hydrostatic units to create new composite transmission (Compound Concept), which the company says offers industry-beating performance in terms of power flow management, efficiency and traction force.

The 8280 TTV offers dynamic performances and boasts acceleration of up to 60 k/h, progressive deceleration and lightning-fast responsiveness to changes in load. Front dry disc brakes, two-speed front PTO, three rear PTO speed modes, CleanOil hydraulic system of 210 l/min - with impressive 90 l removable hydraulic oil, rear lift up to 11,100 Kg and high admissible load (16 ton), ensure additional versatility and great performance.

Connectivity

Connectivity is becoming a point of reference for optimizing and managing agricultural activities, even remotely. With CFS (Connected Farming System), the new 8280 TTV provides productivity and efficiency:

- ISOBUS - with up to 200 Sections Control, Variable Rate Control and Universal Terminal
- "TIM" Certified - Tractor Implement Management; equipment can communicate with the tractor and manage operations
- SDF Guidance - increased precision thanks to the new SR20 receiver, CTM module and Auto-Turn function
- SDF Fleet Management included for 1 year - all the main data received in real time
- Agrirouter - standardized data upload and download via cloud or USB port
- XTend - iMonitor3 screen extension on tablet or smartphones

Comfort

Deutz-Fahr has created a range-topping tractor that makes no compromises in terms of comfort in all applications. The intelligent front axle suspension can be also be adjusted in three settings (Auto, Normal and Soft). Together with air sprung cab suspension, automatic air conditioning, premium materials and generous interior space a comfortable and productive place to work has been developed.

Powerful 50,000 lumen LED working lights, the

ergonomics of the cab and a logical control layout along with the Infotainment system of the latest generation, allows for long working hours in maximum comfort. Man-machine interface is even more functional thanks to the unique iMonitor3 that enables the driver to simply interact with the main functions. To make the machine even more relaxing to use, the MaxiVision2 cab is separate from the all-new engine cowl to prevent the transfer of heat, vibration and noise, taking driver comfort to unprecedented new heights.

Reliability

The new 8280 TTV from Deutz-Fahr stands out by offering long service intervals (1,000 hours for engine oil and 1,500 hours for CleanOil in the hydraulic system) and ease of action in ordinary operations. This is immediately clear from the cooling pack, which can be opened by the user with a single lever to make cleaning and maintenance extraordinarily quick and simple. The same is true for inspecting oil levels, which can be checked at a glance. Appropriate service platforms, an external connection for compressed air and the fuse tests on the electric circuit boards are just examples of the attention paid to ease of maintenance.



A new era

As I sat down to write this month's column, I decided to take a look at what I wrote in the March column last year. In that issue I commented on how we had a caretaker government in place, that Covid-19 was on our doorsteps and that was land saturated across the country with more rain expected. One year on and what has changed? The current government are at sixes and sevens with Covid decisions, land is still saturated with more rain expected as we go to press and, unfortunately, Covid has a firm grip on the country. At the end of this month the first quarter of 2021 will be over and we will still be living and trading within the grasps of lockdowns and limited travel. Mentally and physically it is a challenging time for all, but we have no choice but to keep moving forward as best as we can: how we live and how we do business, in my opinion, has changed forever. We are entering new and interesting times. To quote a famous Irish poet: "if we can winter this out, we can summer anywhere". Now down to business. The farm and contractors association (FCI) have published their contractors charges for 2021. These charges show a 4 per cent increase on works carried out on farms. This is on top of a 5 per cent increase last year. The FCI stated that these increases are down to increases in machinery prices, insurance and labour costs experienced by their members, and that naturally this cost will be passed on to the farmer. Contractors are calling on the relevant government departments to allow an extension of the hedge-cutting season to the 15th/17th March, owing to the ongoing wet conditions.

Elsewhere, I have learned that quads have been returned to their owners after being stolen from farms. They were fitted with tracking devices making it easier for the Garda to recover them and charges are being brought against the perpetrators. The lesson learned is to fit tracker devices and keep quads and trailers out of sight as much as you can. These thieves are opportunists and operate on drive-by sightings of machinery in yards and open sheds.

Moving on to latest research out on soil fertility levels, only 20 per cent of Irish soils is of sufficient fertility levels. We need to get crop rotation right, watch compaction and increase the use of farmyard manure and slurry, cutting down the dependency on artificial fertiliser. In order to increase soil fertility and make land more sustainable going forward we will have to go back to basics in order to look after the quality of our soil. We are now entering a new era of soil and grassland management with a very close eye being cast on nitrates and emissions. This is the future.

On the beef front prices have begun to harden a bit after a few weeks of low prices been quoted. Sheep supply is tight but prices are holding for now; with competition between marts and factories farmers should hold firm on prices. European dairy prices are increasing for the top commodities of milk powder, cheddar, butter and mozzarella. Grain trends and prices were flat both at home and abroad over the last few weeks but over the last few days there have been slight increases again, so going in the right direction for the tillage sector.

On the machinery front, new tractor sales for January 2021 were at 478 units: you would have to go back to January 2009 to record a January figure as high as that. In January 2009, 551 were registered in that month. There is an excellent outlook for the tractor market for this year. General machinery enquiries are also up nationwide with dealers and manufacturers reporting strong enquiries and deals been done.

Nunan farm machinery, the well-known Limerick farm machinery dealer have been appointed a full-line Pottinger dealer for Kerry. Kverneland Ireland will now offer Kverneland branded disc fertiliser spreaders; they were traditionally branded Viccon in this country. Anner Agri, County Tipperary, are now selling a big bag fertiliser cutter and handler machine, which makes handling and cutting bulk bags easier and safer. And finally, Gary Ryan is to step down as CEO of the FTMTA after 12 years at the helm of the association. Gary contributed a monthly trade column to *Irish Farmers Monthly* and it was well read and regarded. I wish him and his family the very best for the future. So, until next month, farm wisely and farm safely.

Increase milk yield up to 700 litres per Hectare

Managing grass silage is extremely important on all Irish farms. Grass silage quality is often the difference between profit and loss in any given year, Contamination in silage is a constant variant due to many factors, Bad weather not only at harvest time, damage is often done while applying fertilizer and Slurry if ground conditions are not favourable. Reseed fields bring a host of problems with soft ground, clay and stones entering the swarth leading to high contamination. To further add to this problem is the traditional rake sweeping the ground and due to the design of these machines its impossible not to contaminate grass silage. Soil is a good source of enterobacteria, clostridia and listeria which increases the risk of a poor fermentation, especially with wetter forages, and can lead to animal health issues. This will result in a negative metabolic state of cows immediately after calving with reduced cow survivability. Recent reports have shown contamination in grass silage significantly reduces forage intake, can reduce milk yield up to 700 litres per hectare, reduced reproduction and increase veterinary costs. This year Reiter Ireland introduced a new product to eliminate contamination in silage by lifting and transferring the crop instead of sweeping the ground and all the contaminants into the swarth. During the 2020 season a number of these units were sold in Ireland with intensive trials carried out all over Ireland north and south to meet the challenges of the



different crop and weather conditions. According to Reiter Ireland, feedback from the trials conducted concluded that even in good conditions the conventional rakes add up to 25 per cent more contamination than the Reiter Merger. Farmers and contractors are witnessing an increase in contamination year-on-year, especially slurry contamination with the increase use injectors and dribble bars. With the unique pickup design on the Reiter Mergers, which is flexible to follow the ground contours, and with the trailing tine design the company states that no contamination of Fungi, Clay, Slurry, Manure, Stones or Rotten under grass enters the swarth which is normally associated with the traditional rakes.

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New Holland partners with Maschio Gaspardo



New Holland Agriculture has signed a supply agreement with Maschio Gaspardo, a leading manufacturer of agricultural equipment for tillage, seeding and planting, fertilisation, crop protection, green maintenance and haymaking. Under the agreement, selected Disc Harrow and Subsoiler models will be manufactured by Maschio Gaspardo for New Holland. The blue products will be sold under the New Holland name and will be available exclusively at the brand's dealerships.

Carlo Lambro, Brand President of New Holland Agriculture, stated: "We are very pleased with our new partnership with Maschio Gaspardo. At New Holland, we are constantly looking at improving and extending our offering to provide our customers around the world with innovative and complete solutions to their farming needs. In Maschio Gaspardo we have a partner with a long-standing experience and a leader in its field, so that with this agreement, we are bringing their first-rate products to our customers, further widening the choice of implements to meet their tillage requirements with high-quality equipment."

Mirco Maschio, President of Maschio Gaspardo Group, added: "Maschio Gaspardo already has a consolidated OEM supply partnership with New Holland. We are proud of this new prestigious project as it also confirms the high-quality standards achieved by Maschio Gaspardo for its products and the offered customer service. It is another important building block for our growth."

New Holland will introduce in season 2021 the first products to be supplied under the agreement: the SDM and SDH Compact Speed Disc Cultivators, and the SUM and SUH Subsoilers. The new product lines will offer models ideally suited to New Holland's tractor ranges from the T5 Series tractors up to the 300-hp T7 Heavy Duty. The new products will first be launched in key European markets in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Spain and the UK.

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Kverneland Enduro Pro – the new versatile cultivator

Leonard Hovenden, Kverneland Group Ireland, Product Manager Arable, explains that the new Kverneland Enduro Pro is a good choice for both shallow stubble and deeper working depths. "Stubble cultivation, especially within a minimum tillage cultivation program, conserves soil structure and moisture and limits erosion," says Leonard Hovenden. "It's an operation which requires great consideration. Efficient stubble cultivation is the basis of success for the following crops!"

The Enduro carries out cultivation, levelling and consolidation in one pass, reducing costs and the risk of lost moisture to promote the weed regrowth. With the Enduro and Enduro Pro, Kverneland offers a 3-row configuration on a mounted version available from 3.0m to 5.0m working width. In combination with the 270/285mm tine distance and a high under beam clearance of 870mm, this leads to a nice mixing and finishing without any risk of blockages. A maximum working depth of 35cm is possible with the models of the Enduro Pro and 30cm with the Enduro.

The Enduro/Enduro Pro is equipped with the auto-reset Triflex tines at a release point of 700kg. The Triflex tine with narrow design and special shape reduces the pulling forces



whilst ensuring a perfect penetration in most compacted soil. It is the perfect choice for deep loosening and working on heavier soil types strewn with stones. A wide choice of bolted shares (heat-treated or carbide) and Knock-on shares are available to adapt to different working depths and tasks. According to the company, one of the main advantages of the Kverneland Triflex tine is its strength and durable material. This is due to the hollow tine technology that allows the Triflex tine to flex sideways by up to 7cm. Then there is the special shape of the tine with two working zones. The first lower zone of the tine with a reduced angle of 33° lifts and cracks the soil like a subsoiler. Due to angle and pressure of the soil above, the tine has a high penetration. In the second part of the tine, the angle is raised to 73° in order to ensure an excellent mixing of the soil with residues.

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Optimising tractor-implement combinations

In a comprehensive test conducted by the German Agricultural Society (DLG), the Claas dialogue system CEMOS for Tractors impressively demonstrated its superior ability to increase overall efficiency. An optimisation potential of up to 21 per cent was recorded for cultivation work – on a sustained basis.

In mid-September, ten experienced drivers from Germany, France, Poland and Denmark gathered on a large farm in Saxony-Anhalt to pit themselves against the optimisation potential of the dialogue-based operator assistance system CEMOS for Tractors. Test engineers from the DLG Test Centre Machinery and Farm Inputs were on hand to measure the ground speed and fuel consumption of all the test variants. The way in which both the operators and CEMOS for Tractors adjusted the machine settings during the test drives was also documented.

Using mounted cultivators, the operators shallow- and deep-cultivated the strips of slightly and very loamy sand on the test plots over a three-day period. In the first part of the test, the operators – both farmers and agricultural contractors – had the chance to adjust relevant settings such as front ballast, wheel weights, tyre pressure and engine droop on the two Claas AXION 870 CMATIC tractors as they saw fit during the initial set-up and to continue adjusting them during the test drive – without using CEMOS for Tractors. Claas provided not only the tractors but also a selection of different ballast



weights. They could also rapidly adjust the internal tyre pressure using the integrated Claas CTIC 2800 tyre pressure control system. All the drivers continued to adjust the settings until they achieved what they considered to be the optimum performance. Many participants had done their homework and researched the options for optimising the parameter settings in advance – for example in terms of consumption and torque, optimal rpm ranges and speed fields with the optimum efficiency. These drivers were true professionals, without a doubt.

Then all the test drives were repeated, but with CEMOS for Tractors activated. This time the drivers confirmed the suggestions for optimisation that they judged to be appropriate or requested alternative suggestions from CEMOS for Tractors. Here too, ballast weights were replaced, tyre pressure was adjusted and engine droop was changed as necessary. This process also continued until the optimum performance for the test plots and the prevailing conditions was reached.

On successful completion of the test drives, the recorded values were analysed and evaluated at the DLG Test Centre. Values recorded for all drivers from the variants with and without CEMOS for Tractors were compared and averaged to give an overall rating. According to Claas, the results showed that CEMOS went way beyond the mere effect of a tyre pressure control system: it was able to reduce diesel consumption by up to 16.8 per cent and at the same time increase the area output by up to 16.3 per cent for 80 per cent of the operators. If you extrapolate the fuel consumption figures over 3000 operating hours of tillage, a large tractor with a diesel consumption rate of 50 l/h without CEMOS for Tractors and 41.6 l/h with it could save up to 25,200 l of diesel and 67,000 kg CO₂. In addition, by increasing area output, the hours worked by the farmer or contractor are reduced by up to 490, which is equivalent to almost 50 working days.



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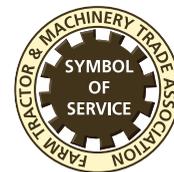
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Tractor Registrations start the year strongly



Although the previously unimaginable challenges of Covid and Brexit have certainly overshadowed all else in the first months of 2020, the farm machinery sector has seen the year get off to a bright start. The latest figures issued by the Farm Tractor & Machinery Trade Association in relation to registrations of tractors and

other types of self-propelled machinery cover the month of January and indicate a very strong start to the year for registrations of both new and used import tractors. There were 478 new tractors registered during the month of January which was the highest level of registrations in the first month of the year since 2009 when 551 units were registered in January of that year which was the last month of high registration activity before new tractor registrations effectively went on a cliff later in that year as the impact of the global economic downturn made itself felt. New tractor registrations ultimately fell by over 70 per cent in 2009 versus 2008. The January 2021 registrations are up 11 per cent on the 429 units registered in 2020.

All counties saw some new tractors registered during January, which is not always the case. The 101 to 120hp range continued to be the horse power band with the highest level of registrations with 163 units or over 34 per cent of all registrations in January. During the month 94 per cent of

all tractors registered had over 100hp, 60 per cent over 120hp and 28 per cent over 150hp.

Registrations of used imported tractors continued the strong performance seen throughout 2020 with 508 units registered during January, which was higher than any single month of last year and is very possibly one of the highest monthly levels of used import registrations seen in many years. The equivalent figure in January of last year was 300 units. It seems likely that many of the used import tractors registered last month were units that were brought into the country in late 2020 in advance of the post Brexit imposition of customs and import regulations.

Early indications are that it will be a good year for combine harvester sales with the tillage outlook now considerably more positive than at the close of last year's difficult harvest. Activity around grassland machinery also seems buoyant with TAMS still very much a factor around Low Emissions Slurry Spreading systems. The recent inclusion of GPS guided fertiliser spreaders for non tillage farmers within the scope of TAMS also seems set to drive investment in this technology within the dairy and beef sectors. The move is a further indication of the extent to which climate change and environmental factors are likely to influence farming practices and the related mechanisation technology in the coming years.



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Aerosem FDD: New front hopper seed drill

Pöttinger, the specialist for tillage and seed drill technology, has further expanded its range of Aerosem pneumatic seed drills. These field-proven seed drills with working widths of 4.0 and 5.0 m will be available as folding versions with a front hopper.

This latest development is particularly impressive in three areas:

1. Convenient operation was a major point of focus, making settings such as working depth, coulter pressure and seed rate calibration easy to perform, and mounting and removing the machine as easy as possible.
2. Thanks to the short and compact design of the power harrow and coulter rail, the centre of gravity of the machine is very close to the tractor's rear axle.
3. The front hopper has been designed to ensure that these machines meet the market's specifications and expectations.

The newly developed front hopper opens up two completely new applications. The front hopper is fitted with an airtight cover to ensure the seed is transported back to the coulter rail at the required metering flow rate. The hopper is available with a volume of 1,700 litres, and as a high capacity version with 2,300 litres. During development, special emphasis was placed on handling and accessibility while filling and calibrating. A service platform provides better visibility into the hopper during filling.

When selecting the front hopper, you can choose between a standard single metering unit or the newly developed dual metering unit.

This new metering system is called Single Shoot and lets you apply not only seed but also fertiliser into the seed slot in one



pass. Maximum flexibility is the result. Future requirements to meet new regulations regarding fertilisers, seed dressing and biodiversity can be met in full with the new Aerosem front hopper seed drill.

The coulter rail on the AEROSEM FDD is mounted on the power harrow using a locking system and only takes a few minutes to fit or remove. This system also allows for an optional hydraulic lifting system for the coulter rail to increase ground clearance.

The compact, folding coulter rail with a short headstock puts the centre of gravity impressively close to the tractor. The distributor head is mounted on the coulter rail and features a patented system that ensures it is always kept in vertical position. The patented linkage system ensures the distributor head is vertical to deliver perfect lateral distribution. The proven DUALDISC double disc coulters are offset at 30 cm and ensure precision seed placement. Convenient operation, especially regarding the coulter rail, makes the whole system very user-friendly. Coulter pressure can be adjusted mechanically (hydraulic adjustment is available as an option) from a central point and seed placement depth is set conveniently from the side of the machine.

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 <p style="color: red; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">Finance Available</p>	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">PROCUT 3000 MP</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hydraulic floatation ➤ Direct drive ➤ 25mm gears ➤ Friction clutch and over-run protection ➤ Drive Shield Module 	 <p style="color: red; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">Finance Available</p>	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">PROCUT 700/800/900</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Heavy duty cutter bar ➤ Multiband Belt ➤ Super floatation ➤ Galvanised frame ➤ Drive shield module
 <p style="color: red; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">Finance Available</p>	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">PROCUT 3000 TC</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 25mm gears ➤ Drive shield module ➤ Waltersheid driveline ➤ Heavy duty conditioner bearings 	 <p style="color: red; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">Finance Available</p>	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border-radius: 5px;">TEDD-AIR 570 840</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hook lines ➤ 7 arms per rotor ➤ Headland management ➤ Spare wheel and lights included ➤ 4 rotor 5.7 m ➤ 6 rotor 8.4m

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Tom Murphy
Professional
Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland



As life's circle turns another full wheel and we head into a new season, my thoughts turn to how agricultural contractors fared last year how many are carrying forward a clean balance sheet with all their invoices from last year paid in full. Every single invoice that remains unpaid reduces not only their profit but effectively the hourly rate they earn.

I know I've said it before but I am going to stress it again before we start out in earnest this spring: it is at this time of year that every agricultural contractor must look at what they charge on every single job they undertake, no matter how many times they may have done that same job. When did you last increase any of your charges? It will be different for every business, but that said there is no doubt that every contracting business will, year-on-year, incur increased costs; ie. parts, fuel, labour, insurance, new machinery and repairs and maintenance. It is vital that prices charged include a profit, otherwise there will be no increase in your own wage or monies available to reinvest in the business. Contractors who do not increase their charges every year will slowly work themselves out of business. No one knows better than farmers how costs increase each

year, because they are facing the same problem. A reasonable price increase each year is better than a substantial whack when things get desperate. A professional contractor doesn't need a price on the wall to tell him what he needs to do to stay in business.

Agricultural contractors need to be aware that labour costs are likely to increase with new legislation under consideration that will increase the national minimum wage from €10.20 per hour to a living wage of €12.50 per hour. 'The Tolpuddle Martyrs' were a small group of agricultural workers in a small village in Dorset, England who, in 1834 joined together to fight for better wages. For their efforts they were deported to Australia and they, like agricultural contractors today, only wanted a fair price for their services. Now I am not suggesting that any contractor seeking more for their services should be deported to Australia, even though at the moment it might seem like an attractive proposition! Contractors are well rewarded down there and then, of course, there is the sunshine!

Please, take care and stay safe.

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All-electrical Merlo E-Worker Telehandler

The highly-visible green liveried Merlo telehandler range is set to take on a second 'green' dimension with the recent launch in Ireland of an all-new, all-electric battery powered Merlo e-Worker model.

Manufactured in two model variants – a 2-wheel drive 25.5-60 version and a 4-wheel drive 25.5-90 version – the new e-Worker has a 2500kg capacity, 4.8 metres height and 44/60 kW/HP power output which, at an average 6 kW/h consumption, translates into a working span of eight hours. Suitable for on-road and off-road applications, the e-Worker has a distinct edge when working in enclosed environments such as warehouses, grain stores, stables, industrial and underground environment where low noise and zero emissions are a requirement.

Distributed here by McHale Plant Sales, it boasts a number of features, safety and comfort being high amongst them – for example, it meets all active regulations for frontal tipping prevention and offers maximum driver comfort and visibility thanks to its easy-entry 785 mm wide cab. Its compact dimensions add to its manoeuvrability and handling in tight spaces while its versatility is seen in the wide selection of attachments it is designed to handle. Another key attribute is its efficiency – its battery powers the hydraulic pump for arm movements while motors power its traction and movement. Commenting, McHale Plant Sales general manager Denis McGrath says: "On smooth roads and surfaces or out in



rough terrain, the e-Worker range in two or four-wheel drive format is wholly configured to meet the needs of owners in an increasingly climate-aware Irish marketplace".

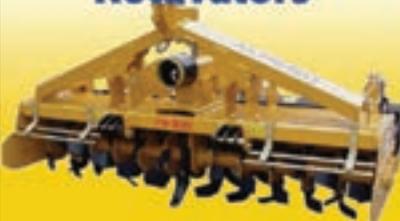
The e-Worker range success is reflected in its growing tally of international awards the latest being an EIMA International 20/21 Mentions award secured on top of recent gold medals for Innovation presented in Verona and a Grand Prix Materiel award presented to them in Paris.



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Skat Pan Breaker



- Skat 2.5M-4M

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New Ag appointment at John Deere

Following John Deere's recent business reorganisation in Europe, Brian D'Arcy has been appointed agricultural division sales manager for John Deere Limited with overall responsibility for Ireland, Scotland, Wales and northern England. He replaces Chris Meacock, who takes over as turf division sales manager for the UK & Ireland, the Benelux countries and Scandinavia.

Based at Langar, Brian will work alongside Joedy Ibbotson, who continues in his current role as agricultural division sales manager for central and southern England. Both report directly to the sales director for Western Europe Richard Johnson and are responsible for all agricultural product sales and marketing throughout the UK and Irish dealer network. Brian D'Arcy is a graduate of Tralee Institute of Technology in Ireland, where he gained a degree in Agricultural Engineering Management. He joined John Deere Limited at Langar, Nottingham in July 2007 as a tractor sales demonstration instructor, before being promoted to the role of crop systems specialist in 2009 and then later that same year to agricultural territory manager for Wales and the West Midlands, a position he held until July 2014.

Brian then became UK and Ireland strategic account manager for turf and other non-agricultural products, before moving to Deere's European HQ in Mannheim, Germany in October



2018 as Region 2 product manager for compact and utility tractors. He was subsequently appointed to the European turf division sales manager role in November 2019, before returning to Langar to take up this new position.

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The Precision Company

Zetor to hit the ground running with new design and structure in Ireland



New style Zetor Proxima HS 120 now available on the Irish market.

Zetor tractors the well known Czech built tractor will now come directly into Ireland from the factory. This decision was made owing to the Brexit outcome. Going directly to Irish dealers nationwide with tractors and spare parts will cut out VAT and customs issues speeding up delivery times and making tractors more competitively priced.

Customers will now be assured of quick parts supply and technical and warranty issues.

Zetor who are celebrating their 75th anniversary this year have been over the past few years stepping up their tractor design and innovation.



L to R Gerry Rabitte sales manager Southern and North Ireland for Zetor tractor and Jan Sik technical specialist Zetor Tractors Czech Republic.

The Zetor tractor range now comes with a line up of units from 20hp compact tractor to 170hp 4wd tractor complete with new interior and exterior design. The new range now sees the tractor up the stakes with the latest technologies taking it to the next level in tractor design and reliability.

A firm favourite with both farmers and contractors for decades. Finance Ireland is supplying Zetor Customers with a Finance Package. Gerry Rabitte who is well known in the farm machinery industry in Ireland will still remain in charge of operations; as before his role will cover sales and dealer development both north and south. All technical aspects of Zetor will be handled by Michael Brennan (087 6012953).

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"Zetor tractors were always a reliable work horse and we're both economical and well priced and had a great following here in Ireland. Now with the back up of Ms Zuzana Liskova from Zetor A. S and her management team and a strong dealer network.... and a direct line to the factory it will make access to both tractors technical information and spare parts more efficient going forward," said Gerry Rabitte.

A full line of new look zetor proximas, forterra and crystal models and much more besides will be available in Irish dealers both north and south in 2021.

LIST OF ZETOR TRACTOR DEALERS IN IRELAND

- Reas of Finvoy [Northern Ireland]
- Michael Jacob [Sligo]
- Kevin Brogan [Roscommon]
- Chris Brogan [Tuam Co Galway]
- Paul Brogan [Western Tractors Ballinasloe Co Galway]
- E F Sheeran and son [Tyresspass Co West meath]
- Ashbourne Agri Machinery [Brian Duffy] Co Meath
- Michael Brennan Agri Repairs [Castlecomer Co Kilkenny]
- West Waterford Agri [Co Waterford]
- Collins Machinery Sales [Macroom Co Cork]
- O Mahony Machinery Sales [Castle island Co Kerry]
- Tim Gleeson Machinery Sales [Nenagh Co Tipperary]

Protect Yourself at Calving Time

Cows at calving time can be particularly dangerous. Ciaran Roche, FBD Risk Manager, discusses ways to ensure you protect yourself during this time.



Sadly during the last 10 years (2011-2020) 39 people have been killed in livestock accidents on Irish farms and many more have been seriously injured¹. Cattle, cows and heifers were responsible for 69 per cent of these fatal accidents and bulls & bullocks were responsible for an additional 23 per cent of these fatalities. Accidents involving livestock account for 42 per cent of all on-farm accidents². While most serious and fatal accidents are associated with handling cows at calving and handling of bulls; a significant amount of accidents occur during routine tasks such as herding, loading, drenching, vaccinating and testing.

Protecting yourself

Cows at calving time can be nervous, agitated, excited and aggressive; even animals that are normally very docile. Where dangerous behaviour or warning signs are identified pre or post calving particular caution is required, but remember that any cow at calving time can have a sudden change of behaviour. The calving facility should be well designed- have a calving gate, provide adequate space, be tidy, well-bedded with clean dry straw, free of obstructions and have good lighting. A well-designed calving pen should minimise the direct physical contact between the cow/heifer and the farmer. The pen should be designed so as to allow the calving gate pivot from a pillar at the front of the pen beside the head-gate, as this provides protection to the farmer as it rotates inwards rather than having to enter the pen with a cow to manoeuvre her into the calving gate.

When calving cows or heifers ensure that they are safely secured in a fully operational calving gate. It is essential for the farmer to establish an adequate physical barrier between themselves and the cow and never turn their back on a cow following calving. Always make sure that there is adequate help at hand and keep children away. If appropriate a calving jack should be used as this can reduce the risk of back injury. Remember all cows with calf will be protective of their young

and are potentially very dangerous. For example when a calf is being tagged they often bawl and in turn this may cause the mother to attack in an aggressive and protective manner. With this in mind ensure the cow is securely isolated when tagging their calf. Cows generally become very agitated directly after calving. After a cow calves, leave the cow and calf alone for 20 to 30 minutes to bond. This will allow the cow to calm down. If calving aggression lasts for more than a few days, cull the cow after calf is weaned as aggression is a genetic trait. If it is necessary to assist a weak new born calf with suckling, safely put the cow back in the calving gate and assist the calf to feed or alternatively feed it colostrum using a bucket with a teat.

Cattle handlers

It is important that cattle handlers are experienced, competent, and sufficiently agile for the class of livestock being handled. Good stockmanship skills will ensure that stress to cattle is minimised, that they are handled safely and this in-turn will reduce the risk of injury to the handler. The demeanour of cattle usually gives a hint as to their state of agitation, because of this it is essential that you recognise and watch out for danger signs such as aggressive/agitated head or tail positions, bellowing and pawing the ground. Additionally it should be ensured that there is enough people at hand to carry out the task safely.

Facilities

Well-designed handling facilities are essential for safe handling of all cattle. Facilities should include securely fenced fields, good holding pens, suitable cattle crush, sculling gate, calving facilities and bull handling facilities. Not only will good facilities make the job safer but it will also make it easier to carry out the work in a more efficient manner. If cattle are located on an out-farm, strongly consider investing in cattle handling facilities for that location.

¹ Health & Safety Authority report on Main causes of deaths in Agriculture and Forestry over the last 10 years 2011-2020. ² 2017 Teagasc National Farm Survey

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EU must deny 'labelling camouflage' to non-dairy products

It's worth noting that that lobbying has begun by the manufacturers of plant-based 'replacement' products to prevent an EU ban on their employment of dairy terms like 'yoghurt style' or 'creamy'. The lobbying is carefully couched in terms and language designed to tap into current, and generally legitimate, concerns around emissions and the environment, but is essentially a cynical exercise designed to camouflage non-dairy products with the language and terms we have used for millennia to describe real dairy products. The idea put forward by the European Alliance for Plant-based Food (EAPF) that their motive in attempting to overturn the current ban on their using dairy terminology is out of a concern on the part of the member corporations for health and environmental benefits I believe is demonstrably bogus and self-serving. What the corporations concerned are really seeking is the right to use the positive terminology and vocabulary associated with real dairy products in a way that would actually undermine the meaning of the words completely. That would certainly be the outcome in the event of their very well-funded lobbying being successful – and whatever virtuous reasons they advance for their efforts, we have to think that they must realise that and want it. EAPF oppose Amendment 171 (that proposes to forbid the use of terms like 'yoghurt style' for non-dairy foods) on the grounds that the restrictions the amendment contains will preclude 'a level playing field for plant-based foods' they claim to want. But we have to be very blunt here: we don't think this is not about creating a 'level playing field'; what this move represents is jaw-dropping cynicism that will see the manufacturers of non-dairy foods use the very language of the real dairy products to unfairly undermine those real foods and build the sales of their own non-dairy brands.

This has nothing to do with the environment and everything to do with a conscious decision on the part of these manufacturers to camouflage their own products



Pat McCormack
President, ICMSA

with the names of something completely different, but one that is already trusted and understood. 'Dairy' is a real word that names real foods that come from real animals and are produced according to real practices by real people on real farms – the idea that a company can develop something that's consumable and then label it in terms deliberately designed to engender confusion between

those realities and their so-called 'alternative product' is completely wrong and it must be rejected by the EU. Alternatives will have to gain the trust of consumers on their own merits and cannot 'piggy-back' on the trust and reputation gained over millennia by the real dairy products that the alternatives are competing against. The discussion on the Amendment scheduled for March is an opportunity for MEPs and EU Agriculture Ministers to build on and reaffirm the decision taken just last November when MEPs voted in the restrictions on the use of dairy references by the alternatives and their corporate manufacturers. Irish farmers – and the Irish State – have a very specific interest in maintaining the integrity of the language that differentiates genuine dairy from the alternatives. Our dairy sector is the jewel in Ireland's €12 billion-odd farming and agri-food sector crown; it is the food in which we are measurably the most sustainable and environmentally-efficient producer in certainly the EU and possibly the world. The idea that we would allow these corporations to hijack commonly agreed and understood age-old words to describe their latest alternatives is absolutely unacceptable.

We know what yoghurt is. We know what cheese is. And we shouldn't allow anybody to start undermining that knowledge.



Running

and the rest is history

In his new book, John Connell takes us on a 42.2km journey, a marathon, around the byways of rural Longford – his home turf – and beyond. It is a journey punctuated by local stories, nuggets of history and the musings of a man out on his long run. **Bernie Commins** chats to John about *The Running Book*, which takes reader and runner on an intriguing and unique journey

‘It occurs to me that there are two types of runners: those who run for something and those who run from something, writes John Connell in *The Running Book*. I ask which one he is.

‘Well, I started as someone who ran from something. I was running from depression, a failed relationship and, a kind of failed life in Canada. Things were pretty bad for a while, so I think I was running from that. But I think the power of exercise is such that it changed after a few months to running ‘for’ something and finding the benefit. Now I run because I love it.’

And in *The Running Book* – the second part in a trilogy – John’s love affair with running is evident. It is a central theme in the book, the background to which he regales us with stories from the past and present, the local and global.

‘My first book, *The Cow Book* was, ultimately, about a man falling in love with life again, and *The Running Book* is about the joy of being alive. It is a celebration of movement and history, about living in the moment.’

Running smoothly

There has been some change to John’s life in recent years. Free from the fetters of the daily grind, he is now a professional writer, which means he can write and, importantly, run whenever he wants; he has gotten married; and he has reached a very positive place, both

mentally and physically. Life is good.

Written in 2017, *The Running Book* knows nothing of the pandemic that would strike in 2020, it is footloose and fancy-free, and beautifully showcases the freedom that running can provide – pandemic or not.

‘I have seen more people out running in Longford than I have ever seen before [the pandemic]. It is great, they are of all levels and nobody is judging anyone. I think running has kept me sane through it all; I have gotten fitter because I have had more time to run. When the travel restrictions were in place, there was a five-kilometre loop around here and that was my link to the outside world when we had full lockdown.’

Ultimately, he agrees, the pandemic-inspired interest and uptake in running must be heralded as a positive side effect of a societal health hazard.

‘I think people are fitter and happier than they were pre-Covid-19 because they have discovered time with themselves and most people didn’t have that before because they were stuck commuting, or they were stuck in traffic, stuck in a meeting. Life has gotten simplified. We all realised that there wasn’t much that we needed really: food, rest, entertainment and exercise. I think that people found the joy in movement again.’

Two roads converged

It is this joy of movement – of blissful running – that

spurred John to write *The Running Book*. And it came easy to him, as he embellishes his running experience with highlights of a lifelong history lesson.

“I always wanted to write a book about running and I always wanted to write a book about history,” he says. Combining the two made sense.

“I wrote *The Cow Book* in 2016 and after I got the book deal, I had saved enough money to quit my job and go visit my friends in Spain to do a bit of running, and to write the second book, which I did in 2017. So, it is three years ago now. I had always had it in my head to write the next book about running and once I got settled into it, I wrote it in a couple of weeks, and it was really pleasurable. I was in Spain initially and then I went to Los Angeles and I would write during the day and then run in the evening, or go for a run in the morning and write in the evening.”

Once in a lifetime

John’s trip to the US gave him the opportunity to feature what is, he agrees, one of his favourite stories in the book, and, perhaps, one of his most life-affirming experiences so far: visiting the Navajo Native Americans.

‘In the Navajo tradition, running creates a living cord between earth and heaven, it is a means of communication between the living, the dead, and the holy’ he writes in the book. Running, John explains, is a sacred act for the Navajo, deep-rooted in their culture and heritage. His visit there was meant to be, he says.

“It was so coincidental how it all happened. I said to my friend, our parish priest, that I was going to go and meet the Navajo Americans. He asked me why and I said, ‘I don’t know really, I am just very interested in them’. He then presented me with a letter that he had from a distant relation of mine, who was a priest, who had lived with the

Navajo and the letter details the links between the Irish and the Navajo. After that, I said, ‘wow, I really need to go there’.

“I went to Monument Valley, the famous mountain range that features in all the westerns in the US. This is located in the Navajo Nation. It was just really, really special. And I remember it so fondly because I had never been on a trip like it, where you travel around the world and you end up meeting people like yourself.

“That was the thing that struck me when I was writing the book – runners are the same everywhere, everyone gets that great feeling of running out in the open, particularly in a special place. I was writing a book about local history and how it reflects to the greater world, running is a special thing that connects everybody and that was something that I really took out of it and loved.”

Keep on keeping on

Some people run to clear the mind, to filter out the day’s rubbish, while for others, their paths are fuelled simply by the thoughts of putting one foot in front of the other. *The Running Book* reflects the ability of the imagination to run a little wild while out and about. “You have to find different ways of keeping on,” says John.

“Something that Sonia O’Sullivan once said to me was that ‘you will think of anything to keep moving, particularly when you get into distance’ and I suppose, I kind of got into that space.

“In a sense, I wanted the book to be a history of Longford, where I am from, but really it is an ‘anywhere’ book and it is just to show you that everywhere has a story and its own interesting experience for you. When you are in the slow lane [I am a slow runner] you can kind of capture and think about all these things, reflect and learn so much about yourself.”

Food for the soles

John is a huge music fan and, like many of us, loves a good sing song on the road. Here are his top-five running tunes:

1. **Mac De Marco – The stars keep on calling my name**
2. **Redbone – Come and get your love**
3. **Kendrick Lamar – Money trees**
4. **Paul Kelly – Before too long**
5. **Tom Misch – It runs through me**



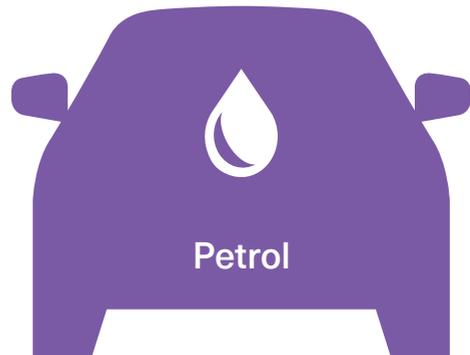
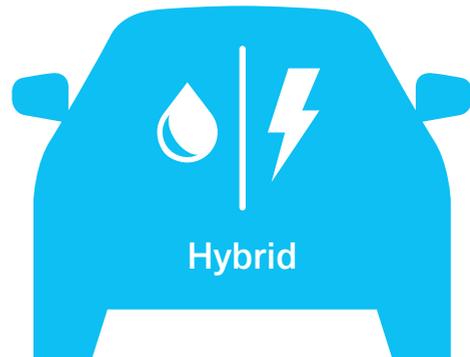
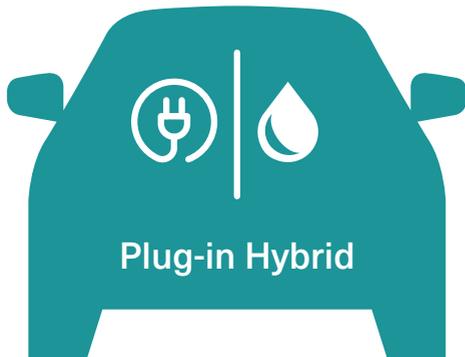
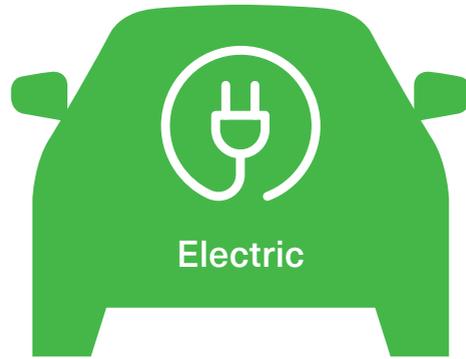
The Running Book – A Journey through Memory, Landscape and History
is available online and in all good bookstores.

The future must be different

This is the busiest time of the year for many farmers. Longer term planning is often impractical as weather, unexpected events and long days full of performing the bare necessities to keep the farm operational will inevitably mean that this is not the time to engage in big picture planning. In fairness, most farmers have a long-term plan in place, whether it is written down in detail or sketched out in their heads, there is a perceived way forward. With regulations and policies changing ever more frequently, one plan does not even suffice. Scenario building based on two or three possible developments is now what is required especially if there are significant financial implications accruing from one policy change or another. Some believe that 'what if' scenarios are not a useful use of your thought processes. Trying to second guess the outcome of the current Nitrates Review is a case in point. For those farmers embarking on a long-term development, however, it is cautious not to expect current policy to be written in stone. Any change can fundamentally impact on the viability of a project and financial projections should be subjected to a variety of potential future policy developments. It is not as if we do not have indications, however broad, of possible changes to our farming practices forced on us by politicians and regulators. The general parameters of future European agricultural policy are easy enough to ascertain through even a casual browse of the latest policy documents. Green Deal and Farm to Fork are too seismic in their implications for farming to be ignored. They clearly herald a step back from high input/high output farming practices. Whether farmers are happy with this approach is immaterial. What we must do is plan for an

accommodation of these policies or at least some version of them. That should bring us to the possibility of engaging in this change in a manner which will benefit us in the so-called sustainability space, especially in terms of financial sustainability. Environmental and social sustainability will only work for us if our economic sustainability is assured. This will require many of us to think in terms that are alien to our concept of farming exclusively to produce food. Forestry is already a mainstream enterprise as a fuel and building material production enterprise with the added benefits of carbon storage. We can envisage a new energy production model in the next decade, which will place many farm assets – including land and buildings – into an emerging category of productivity, alongside their existing roles in food production. Solar energy will become a mainstream energy production model and farmers must be engaged in the process if we are to derive some portion of our financial sustainability from its development. To put it bluntly, we must educate ourselves and seek the necessary advice to maximise our share of the financial benefits of this and other technologies such as biomethane production. The advocates of these technologies pencil in, in many cases, relatively token remuneration to the land and asset owners who provide the necessary facilities. Farmers have always been in this space – accepting whatever is left over when everyone else has taken their share of the profits. We must ensure that this time it will be different. The real returns from energy production, with built-in profit-sharing agreements for potential increased profitability in the future, must be calculated by farmers and their advisors so that we are at the top of the pile when the profits are being dispersed.





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