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MAY 2021

Beef Focus:

Sustainable strategies and competing
with meat 'alternatives'



JOHN JORDAN DISCUSSES THE IMPORTANCE
OF THE KERRYGOLD BRAND

MACRA NA FEIRME'S NEW PRESIDENT ON THE
PRIORITIES FOR HIS UPCOMING TERM

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Editorial**Contents****Farmer resilience to be tested**

Despite the myriad of challenges facing Irish agriculture there is a lot to be positive about in regard to the direction of the single largest indigenous sector in the Irish economy. It is a sector with quite remarkable resilience, the latest example being its ability to function through the Covid pandemic. Farms continue to be managed well. Meat, milk, grain, vegetables and other farm products are transferred, processed and sold locally and internationally. The fact that all of this has happened with minimal interruption to the food chain through a prolonged period when most of our economy was shut down owes

much to the organisational skills of so many people involved in agriculture at every level along the chain. The remarkable adaptability of our livestock marts in moving to remote selling, almost overnight, is testament to the positive attitude of all involved, including sellers, buyers and management. From a position where online selling of livestock was largely considered to be impractical and unlikely to find favour with farmers, the system is now so embedded that it will continue as a key aspect of livestock trading long after Covid.

That same ability to adopt novel technologies quickly and effectively can be seen across the entire agriculture sector. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine has been increasing its online interaction with farmers for over a decade. The acceleration in that process in recent months was driven by necessity as farmers found themselves increasingly isolated because of Covid restrictions. Teagasc is another organisation that acted quickly to ensure that its advisory service continued to interact with clients to the greatest extent possible when it was impossible to visit farms or engage physically with Discussion Groups.

There is a recognition that the professionalism of our food processor management has been central to ensuring that commerce continued in circumstances where major Covid outbreaks could have brought the entire system to its knees. This is especially the case where staff work in close proximity with a resultant high risk of infection. It is only May and the Covid challenge may have some time to run yet. Nevertheless, experience to date suggests that competency and care have been exemplary amongst everyone involved in the food sector. While Covid has been a natural preoccupation for everyone, farmers have also had additional pressing issues to occupy their thoughts. From being a background issue, the environment has now come centre stage and will continue to concentrate farmers' minds into the future. Farmers rightly consider themselves to be the ultimate custodians of the rural environment and that custody will increasingly bring more responsibility. Covid shows the necessity for farmers to adopt new practices and actions to ensure that their businesses continue to operate through the greatest health emergency seen in our lifetimes. They are traditionalists in many respects. That gives them the resilience to continue rearing cattle, milking cows, producing grain, fruit, vegetables and trees through weather, price, health and other challenges. The singular focus on production is long gone, however. Farmers understand that to survive and thrive they must accommodate other priorities. A willingness to do this is shown through the embracing of REPS, GLAS and a range of other voluntary programmes. The future must include even more willingness, driven by necessity, to participate in agri-environmental programmes. Mandatory participation in a variety of regulatory programmes will increasingly become a normal aspect of farming. Continuing farmer resilience over the next decade may be determined by the degree to which farmers, through their representative organisations, can influence the framing of these programmes to best suit individual circumstances.

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Kerry stand-off

There is a very strong possibility that the proposed joint venture between Kerry Coop and Kerry Plc will not now go ahead, at least in the foreseeable future. After building up a head of steam in the early months of the year, negotiations have now ceased, with indications of serious disagreement. While price is a critical factor for the Plc, there is also a philosophical stumbling block in the form of thousands of Coop shareholders who have no skin in the dairy game. The dispersal of millions of Kerry Plc shares to Coop members over the past few decades through regular spin-outs has delivered significant wealth to thousands of Kerry Coop shareholders with many bequeathing shares to their non-farming family members. Due to natural attrition, the numbers of dairy farmer Coop shareholders is a small percentage of the total 13,000 Coop shareholder register. The majority of Coop shareholders have little interest in seeing their shareholdings used to purchase relatively low-margin dairy and agri-business interests. If the Kerry Plc board is fully intent on disposing of these businesses, it may well open the sale process to outside interests. That would likely result in a complete sale of the non-core businesses, as distinct from any hybrid Coop/Plc ownership model on the lines of the Glanbia structure. A sale to a private and possibly foreign purchaser would not be in Kerry milk supplier interests. It has been difficult enough to extract a/the leading milk price from the Plc. None of the other Irish milk processors have, as yet, shown interest but such a development appear to be the least-worst result for milk producers in the Southwest.



IPHS seminars

The Irish Pig Health Society (IPHS) are looking forward to holding their 2021 Symposium virtually as a series of three webinars held across May 5th, 12th and 19th. The IPHS Symposium is the largest annual pig event in Ireland and traditionally attracts attendees to Ireland from all areas of the pig industry. The President of the IPHS, Dr Carla Gomes, says the Society will be providing Irish pig farmers with insights from world leading pig experts virtually. The sector faces huge challenges with new legislation focusing on the reduction of antimicrobial usage, the withdrawn of zinc oxide and improved animal welfare. The aim of this year's virtual symposium series, Dr Gomes emphasises, is to provide practical solutions for producers and industry stakeholders so that Irish producers can access tools to help them continue to thrive as the sector evolves.

Attendees at the first webinar on May 5th will hear from Dr Egan Brockhoff, Canadian veterinary expert and veterinary counsellor for the Canadian Pork Council. Dr Brockhoff will discuss the global perspectives on African Swine Fever (ASF). Following this, Ciaran Cunningham and Iain Mortimer from Agrihealth will discuss biosecurity practices in poultry and pigs respectively. The second webinar on May 12th will focus on the principles, details and daily practices for improving pig health and welfare. German pig consultant, Mirjam Lechner, will share best practices in managing inflammation, health and vices in pigs. Attendees will also hear from Miguel Higuera, Director of ANPROGAPOR, the Spanish pig farmers' association. Attendees of the final webinar on May 19th will listen to a panel of farmers sharing their experiences of weaning without zinc and other medications. This session will be moderated by Ciarán Carroll, Head of Knowledge Transfer, Pig Development Department, Teagasc. All three webinars will begin at 7pm each evening and run until 8:30pm. Those interested in part-taking in the IPHS Virtual Symposium, can register for each of the webinars by visiting the IPHS website.



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Walking on valuable wool

The sheep-shearing season is well underway and wool prices are still not even sufficient to pay the cost of shearing. There is one end use for Galway wool, however, that could certainly pay for the cost of shearing, handling, packing and transporting wool. Claire McGovern, the owner of Rhyme Studio, is turning the under-rated wool into valuable heirloom carpets, rugs and tapestries. Not only is the wool Irish, so are the intricate designs that are making her products so popular. Claire has taken inspiration from seventh century Irish monastic art and from ancient Ogham writing. The wool for the rugs and tapestries is sourced from Zwartbles flocks on Galway sheep farms and is processed by Kerry Woollen Mills in Killarney. It is then hand-dyed at Cushendale Mills in Graiguenamanagh with the final tufting process carried out at a farm-based studio in Wicklow before the products go on to adorn the homes of deep-pocketed buyers across the globe. The Rhyme Studio creations sell from €4,000 to €20,000, depending on design and size. It's a long way from 50 cents per kilo on offer for lowland wool last year. Claire McGovern is said to be zealous in her promotion of wool, highlighting its high environmental and biodegradable credentials as a renewable resource compared to the millions of tonnes of synthetic fibre produced every year.



Glanbia Vice Chairman,
Patrick Murphy

Don't say cheese yet

As covered in our last issue, where we talked to Glanbia Vice Chairman Patrick Murphy, Glanbia Ireland continues to have its planning application for a cheesemaking facility at Belview upheld in every forum including Kilkenny County Council, An Bord Pleanala and, latterly, the High Court. Whether and when GII can now go ahead and build is another matter. The delays have already pushed the project back considerably, resulting in financial and psychological strain on milk producers. The product diversification holy grail of increased access to high-end European consumers should be facilitated by the Glanbia/Royal A-Ware joint venture to produce a range of continental cheeses including Gouda and Emmental. Now that An Taisce's objections have been fully examined it is time to press on in the interests of Irish milk producers and the Irish economy. Government policy, outlined in the national food strategies Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025, encouraged milk producers that dairy expansion would be an economic benefit to the country and especially to rural Ireland. To add to the despair being felt by milk producers, they are now hearing that An Taisce and other environmental bodies intend to stymie every dairy related development with the presumed intention of at least delaying indefinitely, by making submissions or objections, on all investments by milk producers and processors across the entire country. Any farmer considering building a new milking parlour, increasing slurry storage or wintering facilities for their cows can expect to be met by delay, added cost and, ultimately, a wall of constraint on their ambitions to improve their livelihoods.

No Rushe to Climate Bill condemnation

Brian Rushe spoke for many farmers when he described some of the commentary and tone from some elected representatives regarding the Climate Bill and what it means for rural Ireland as unhelpful and a major setback to farmers ongoing efforts to communicate the good work they are doing and their willingness to engage constructively on climate change, water quality and biodiversity improvement.

Certainly, when you read some of the comments from member of the Rural Independent TD group, it would appear that the Climate Bill heralds doomsday for farmers and rural Ireland. Mattie McGrath said as much when he interjected in a Dail debate warning that there will be no family farms left in ten years time. He did say that farmers are as interested in mitigating the impacts of climate change as anybody but that they won't be able to live or work in rural Ireland post the impact of the Climate Bill. Laois-Offaly TD Carol Nolan took a slightly more nuanced approach, insisting that the Bill should be rural-proofed, while also claiming that it will lead to family farms being decimated. Michael Healy-Rae TD claimed that provisions in the Climate Bill will damage farming and tourism here. There are nuggets of wisdom in some of their utterances. Unfortunately, and this is probably the at the root of the IFA Deputy President's criticism, there is too much hyperbole and too little emphasis on the practical initiatives being taken by farmers to mitigate climate change and improve their environmental credentials.



Verona wants pilot pay convergence for civil service

Verona Murphy TD is turning into quite the champion of Irish farmers, or some of them, at least. Her remarks that pay convergence should be trialled on the Civil Service before being foisted on thousands of Irish farmers will find favour with farmers who have higher than average EU payments. Those farmers tend to be located in the East, Southeast and South of the country so the Wexford Dail representative was rightly looking after her own constituents. That doesn't take from the strength of her arguments made during a Dail debate on the CAP. The former Road Haulage Association President drove home her opposition to Convergence by pointing out that if higher pay-grade civil servants were told that part of their salaries were to be given to lower paid colleagues, without any redistribution of work or productivity, there would be total opposition to the concept. There is, she added, no other sector in the country that would be asked to move money from the top to the bottom and be expected to accept it. The real villain of the piece is the EU Commission, aided and abetted by the Council of Ministers, who have consistently refused to countenance any increase in the CAP Budget to facilitate farm payments being brought up to an average rather than down to an average payment per hectare.



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Kerrygold sales up 13% with over 10 million packets sold weekly



John Jordan

Ornuia, one of Ireland's leading dairy companies, has published its operating and financial results for the 12 months ending 26th December 2020, with Group turnover reaching €2.3 billion. Group EBITDA grew by 49.6 per cent to €107.4 million, driving a robust 69.2 per cent increase in Operating Profit to €83.1 million. This performance was achieved against the backdrop of a complex trading environment dominated by Covid-19, market volatility, and the macro-economic challenges of Brexit and punitive US tariffs.

Ornuia exports to over 110 countries and owns the iconic €1 billion Kerrygold brand, which experienced 13 per cent volume growth in 2020, selling over 10 million packets of butter and cheese a week.

Commenting on the performance, John Jordan, CEO Ornuia said: "Ornuia had a unique performance in a unique year, and we are pleased to report a record profit with Operating Profit of +69 per cent. The strong fundamentals of our business – great people and great products – came to the fore allowing us to maximise the opportunity presented with the change in consumer behaviour, doubling down on driving profitable value growth against the backdrop of the global pandemic. This performance delivers on our commitment to maximise returns to our member co-operatives and the 14,000 farmers who supply them.

Ornuia's 60 years of experience navigating global trade stood to us in 2020, as did our balanced product portfolio, geographical spread across 110 markets, and strong financial foundations. Our branded and own-label portfolio benefitted from the change in consumer behaviour which saw Kerrygold volumes grow by 13 per cent which, coupled with our Ingredient's business delivering positive year-on-year growth, enabled us to pay €68.7 million to our Member co-ops through the Ornuia Value Payment.

Looking ahead, we are cautiously optimistic about the gradual re-opening of economies as the global vaccine rollout gathers pace; we have clarity on Brexit, and we welcome strong signals from the US on improved US/EU trade relations. This, coupled with Ornuia's clear and ambitious new 5-year strategy focused on driving profitable growth in priority global markets, will ensure we continue to deliver value for the 14,000 Irish farming families we represent."

Dairy markets proved resilient throughout the pandemic, aided by retail sales and strong demand for milk powders from China, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Product balance within commodity markets supported milk price stability with Irish milk price averaging above 30 cents per litre. Looking to 2021, Ornuia noted that the outlook is largely positive with the market underpinned by foodservice recovery and strong export demand. Global milk output, John said, is likely to continue growing in 2021, with a projected growth of +1.3 per cent.

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Strong demand and tight supplies drive sheep trade



IFA Sheep Chairman Sean Dennehy has said market conditions for sheep meat are favourable, underpinned by strong supermarket performance, tight supplies and reduced volumes of imported lamb in our key markets. Hoggets are making €7.70 to €8.00/kg, spring lamb €8.30/kg, with higher deals available and concessions on weights. Cull ewes are ranging from €3.10/kg to €3.50/kg.

"Demand from factory agents and wholesalers is strong in the marts, with prices particularly for heavier lambs and cull ewes above what some factories are offering," Sean said.

Total lamb imports to the EU 27 and the UK from New Zealand are down 23 per cent year on year, with EU 27 down 27 per cent and the UK down 20 per cent. The sales of lamb in supermarkets continues to perform strongly, increasing in volume and value by 12 per cent and 6 per cent respectively for the latest 12-week period.

Supplies are tight. Last week's kill at just under 48,000 was 3,000 below the corresponding week in 2020, with the total numbers processed this year almost 60,000 below last year's levels.

Sean Dennehy noted prices in the UK and throughout the EU are strong. He added that there is no basis for negative market comment from factories. Numbers are tight, demand is strong, imports to the EU and the UK are low and consumer demand for lamb in the supermarkets continues to increase.

Concluding, he urged farmers to sell hard in this positive market environment, while moving lambs and hoggets as they become fit to maximise returns.

TRACE MINERAL INJECTION PRE-BREEDING

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One of the key performance indicators and a major determining factor for farm profitability is compact calving.

Adequate trace mineral levels are vital for reproductive performance in cattle. Copper deficiency can lead to decreased conception rates, infertility, silent heats and foetal resorption.¹ Zinc deficient cows display abnormal oestrus as well as a decrease in fertility.²

At critical phases in production like breeding, increased demand for minerals, variable oral intake, rumen antagonism and poor absorption can result in oral minerals taking weeks to restore a cow's trace mineral stores, which alone may not be enough to ensure cattle are in adequate trace mineral status to meet profitable targets of a compact calving.

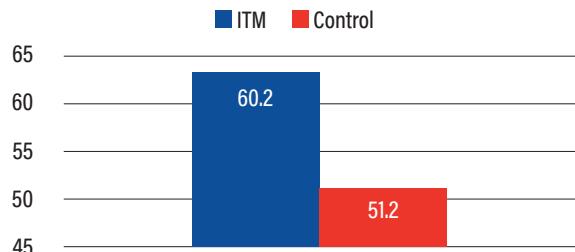
Trial work has shown that strategic injectable trace mineral "Top Up" can help to improve calving distribution.³

Injectable trace minerals bypass the harsh rumen environment and antagonists, raising circulating trace minerals within 8 to 10 hours and liver levels within 24 hours.⁴

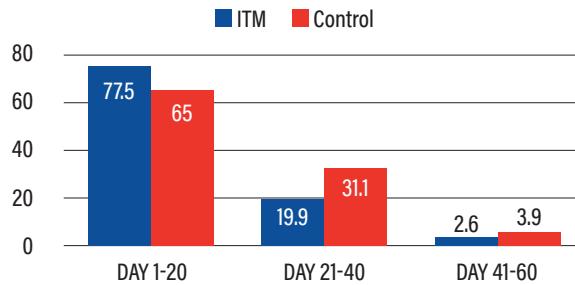
The study illustrated in the graph below indicates that supplementing cows with an injectable trace mineral (ITM) may improve reproductive performance indicators significantly.

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1. Hollister C.E. et al., Vet J. 2003 Sep;166(2):125-39.

2. Underwood, E.J. (1981) *The Mineral Nutrition of Livestock*. 2nd Edition, Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux, Slough.

3. Mundell J.R. et al. *The Professional Animal Scientist* 28, 82-88(2012)

4. Pogge D. et al. *J. Anim. Sci.* 90, 2692-2698 (2012)

Ask your vet how injectable pre-breeding trace mineral supplementation could help get your cows and heifers back in calf more quickly^{3,4}

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InTouch

Grazing: Trying to stay on the middle ground

Cathal Bohane, InTouch Nutrition

The month of May brings challenges on many farms, with breeding, grazing and silage all having to be juggled. Taking our eye off any of these events will have knock-on effects long after they have passed. Weather will also play a big role in all these areas, and sometimes the best-laid plans can be undone very quickly.

Our main focus should be to meet the feed demands of the cows, and we also need to make sure grazed grass makes up the majority of this intake. Slow growth in April has stagnated the early growing season, making measurement a key tool in matching supply and demand. Most of all, we need to avoid two extreme areas – too much or too little supply. In the absence of measurements, two figures to keep in mind are your stocking rate on the milking platform and the daily grass growth for your areas, which can be obtained from sources such as Pasture Base. For instance, if we have a stocking rate of 3 LU/ha and are giving cows a full allocation of grass (approximately 18 kg dry matter (DM)), then we need grass to grow at 54 kg per day in order to match supply. We will have a farm cover built up or a reserve of 10 or more days on most farms, but this is a simple calculation to see if we need to change allocations.

Too often, we let the last day be the hardest, and there are consequences to this. We often get calls in InTouch related to this, like:

"I have 3–4 days of grass left but don't want to use silage. What do I do?"

"Why has my milk protein dropped when I have plenty of grass?"

The first question is related to too little grass. The second usually implies the opposite, where growth far surpasses demand for a period, resulting in cows entering paddocks with large covers and being forced to 'graze down.' This will all have knock-on effects when it comes to production, body condition and fertility.

Measurement of grass and cover is the ideal scenario. In the absence of this, we first have to make sure cows have enough grass by understanding ideal covers, allocating adequate area per day (Total demand divided by current cover), and keeping track of growth rates. When weather and growth rates prevent adequate grass levels, act early. Bring in concentrates, first up to 0.15 kg per kilo/litre of milk, and after this, bring in some high-quality silage. Silage is of poorer quality than grass silage at this stage of the year, so extra concentrate will also be needed as more silage is added.

Being flexible, acting fast and bringing in supplement quickly but taking it out slowly when conditions allow, meeting the requirements of the cows will generate the most success..

New appointments at MSD Animal Health



MSD Animal Health has some new appointments to its growing team. Emma Gilsenan is joining the company as Ruminant Product manager. From a large dairy farm on the outskirts of Virginia, Co. Cavan, Emma will be responsible for the development of marketing,

advertising and awareness campaigns targeted toward both vet and farmers highlighting the extensive ruminant animal health portfolio.

Upon graduating from University College Dublin in 2018 with a bachelor's degree in dairy business, Emma worked as a dairy technical journalist with AgriLand media. With a great passion for the agricultural industry, Emma is very involved in the management of her home dairy farm and until recently, she also worked as a grass technician with Cavan Grassland Consultancy.

Currently, Emma is completing a masters in agricultural extension and innovation in UCD. The research investigates the effectiveness and management of multi-species swards at farm level.

Meanwhile, Jack O'Connor has been promoted to Ruminant Marketing Manager with MSD Animal Health. Formally Ruminant Product Manager, Jack continues to move up the ranks within the industry. Hailing from Drinagh, Co Wexford, Jack graduated in 2017 from UCD with a bachelor's degree in food and agri-business management. When he's not playing hurling for his club or county, you'll find him farming with his uncle James and cousin Patrick on their dairy farm in Piercestown, Co. Wexford.

After an internship with MSD Animal Health in 2016, Jack landed the role as a Trade Sales and Marketing Associate in September 2017. In 2018, he was promoted to Ruminant Product Manager and at the same time John Heslin was appointed Ruminant Product Manager after he joined MSD Animal Health coming from Teagasc Grange. Together, they have played an integral part in raising the awareness around animal health and the use of vaccines in Irish dairy, beef and sheep farms. Jack will now be responsible for the full range of products in the ruminant animal health portfolio and he is very excited about his new venture. Commenting, Jack said:

"I'm very excited about the new role and the challenges that it will bring. There are many headwinds facing the industry at the minute such as antimicrobial resistance, climate change and the availability of skilled labour. We will endeavour to leverage the wide range of products and technology services that the company has to offer for both vet and farmer, to help navigate through these on-coming challenges."

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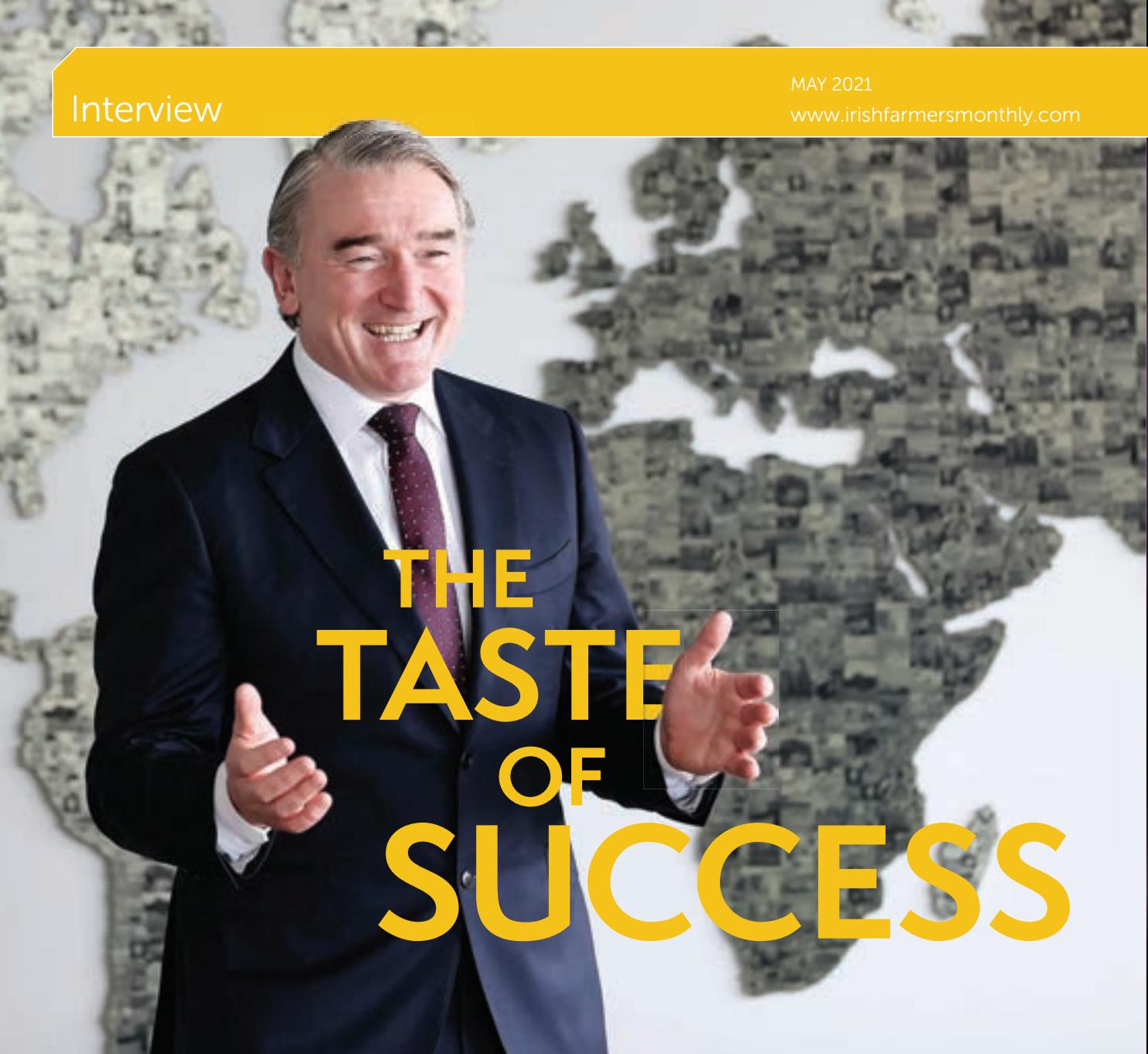
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THE TASTE OF SUCCESS

Ornua, one of Ireland's leading dairy companies, has recently published its financial results for 2020, with record figures showing a 68 per cent increase in operating profit. Here, Miriam Atkins talks to Ornua's CEO John Jordan about changing consumer habits and the success of Kerrygold on the international stage.

"It has been an incredible year... pre 2020 we were thinking about things like Brexit; we had the US tariff which introduced a 25 per cent tariff on cheese and butter from Europe; and there was volatility in commodity prices. These were the things we were grappling with and then, two months into 2020, we were hit with Covid and that changed the world. It was very hard to predict what would happen from there so agility and responsiveness were critical. Our buying behaviours as consumers completely shifted. How we bought food typically, there was a kind of balance between buying retail and in foodservice: in markets like the US it's probably split 50/50 between at home and out of home consumption. With the lockdown, this pretty much all moved to home consumption and in the developed markets we saw a huge surge in retail demand and the collapse of foodservice. There were a lot more occasions for eating at home – people began cooking and baking more – and consumers defaulted to brands that they know and trust and Kerrygold benefitted from that." Indeed, the Kerrygold brand enjoyed a volume growth for the year of 13 per cent, with over 10 million packets sold weekly. Group turnover for the company was reported at €2.3 billion.

Looking ahead

With such an unexpected shift in buying trends in 2020, how has the company planned for 2021 and where does John see the challenges and opportunities ahead? "When we were putting budgets together in October, looking at 2021 we were all saying to plan our business on a return to normality from early January... with restaurants opening and retail demand returning to normal. But the reality is that from January to March, in many of our big markets, the lockdowns were probably more severe than any time in 2020. So it's very hard to predict." Going forward, he states, the likelihood is that we will see spikes in commodity pricing throughout 2021 as lockdowns ease. "Roughly half of our business is in the B2B space and half is consumer so if things rebalance we are in a good position with our portfolio. What we need to do is figure out how we can capture as much value as we can to pay back to our co-ops and indeed hope that they pay that back to the farmers in the price."

Ornua paid member co-ops an additional €68.7 million this year: "The purpose of Ornua is to create value for Irish farming families and we fundamentally believe that the cornerstone of our industry is a grass-based production system on Irish family farms. Our co-ops produce superb quality dairy products. There was almost €69 million of additional value created through our brand and through some of our subsidiary so that's an additional premium. Five years ago that was €30 million. What we're trying to achieve over the next few years, with ambitious growth targets, is to continue to drive that value payment for members."

"Farmers want to make sure that they are handing over a viable, sustainable business to the next generation."

An industry under fire

Any effort for future success will need to be part of a wider conversation around sustainability and climate action – how does John think the industry is responding to consumer concerns here? "Certainly, as a sector, I genuinely believe that people are stepping up and taking ownership and responsibility. Agriculture accounts for 35 per cent of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. With the climate action bill we have legal targets as a country to meet and I believe that farmers, dairy processors and everybody in that supply chain will step up. It's important to recognise that Irish farmers are the most carbon efficient producers of dairy in the world, therefore we just need to be careful... if we don't produce it in Ireland are we pushing production to somewhere else that is in fact more damaging to the environment? If you take



a place like the US, where you have very large herds on feedlots off grain that probably produce double the carbon output. It is in Irish farmers' interests to have a long-term sustainable business. You know, in Ireland, farms don't change hands that often – they move from generation to generation – so farmers want to make sure that they are handing over a viable business to the next generation. So, I am very confident that, as an industry, we will step up to the challenges ahead and we will see positive movement in line with climate action."

The importance of a brand

A recent loss by Kerry Group to register the trademark 'Kerrygold' for use in Europe was a victory for Ornua and John stresses that protecting the Kerrygold brand is central to the organisation's success: "The Kerrygold brand is a really important asset for Ornua. This year, we celebrate 60 years as a business and, over that time, the brand has been invested in by generations of farmers and generations of our employees. It is something we consider sacrosanct. We had a recent win against Kerry Group and their request for a European-wide Kerrygold brand; so we were very happy with that judgement and we will continue to defend the Kerrygold brand against any and all competition that we think would cause consumer confusion. It's all about making sure we can capture and retain value for Irish dairy families. We are very positive about the potential for growth with the Kerrygold brand in our key markets in both cheese and butter and indeed in some new innovations that we have in the pipeline."

Positive vibes around tillage

'What is rare is wonderful' and certainly never has this been truer than for the Irish tillage industry at this time, writes **Tim O'Donovan**, Seedtech Technical Director.

Current forward and spot prices are higher than recent years and offer growers a chance to get a fair return for their investment. Of course, we all hope to sell at the top of the market, but experience tells us that only happens to a few and they only get it right by luck. So do your sums and decide if these prices can reduce risk on the farm.

Apart from the grain prices, there are longer term things happening which I believe will have a positive impact on the Irish tillage industry for years to come and I want to share some of the initiatives we are working on in Seedtech.

The EU's path to Greening

The EU has set very ambitious targets for the next 30 years. It wants to improve the health of its citizens, reduce our impact on the environment and maintain the rural economy. Read the Green Deal or Farm to Fork EU

policy documents and you will see equal references to the words: food, health, environment, and the incomes of primary producers. Yes, there are alarming targets to reduce pesticides and fertilisers, but I expect these changes to happen slowly over time and to be mitigated by other opportunities such as carbon payments (as part of your CAP payments or increased prices for your crops) and possibly gene-edited crop varieties. Also, another 'novel idea' in these EU documents is to apply EU regulations to imports like maize and soya - something every tillage farmer has been saying for years. So, in summary, the EU is telling tillage farmers it will reduce its chemical armoury but will reward us for carbon and will stop us being flooded with cheap imports. In my 25 years experience, the EU states its destination well in advance of getting there but this is where we are going - just compare the 1996 Nitrates Guidelines to the 2020 Nitrates Regulations.





Innovating together for a greener future

INNOVATION ARENA AWARDS 2021

Enterprise Ireland is launching this year's Innovation Arena Awards in association with the National Ploughing Association.

The competition will take place online and participants will have the opportunity to exhibit live in the Innovation Arena in September 2021 (Covid-19 restrictions permitting).

The Innovation Arena has a prize fund of €10,000 with the winner of the Best Start-Up category and the overall winner each being eligible for individual prizes of €5,000.

Previous overall winners include Malone Farm Machinery's Bale Express, an innovation that went on to attract global interest.

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www.innovationarena.ie

Closing date:
Wednesday 30th June

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Tillage friendly Irish Government

It's not so long ago that tillage farmers had limited opportunities to get government funding and looked enviously on the livestock sectors getting supports such as the Dairy Hygiene Scheme and the Suckler Cow Scheme. Fortunately, all that has changed, and our sector is rightly being supported by Department of Agriculture Food and Marine (DAFM) through machinery grants and the Protein Crop Scheme. Indeed, the very recently published Ag Climatise Bill targets a minimum tillage area for Ireland and puts tillage as one of the key sectors to meeting our climate action targets. Already, this 'tillage friendly' government policy is hitting the streets with the announcement of a straw chopping scheme for Harvest 2021 and I expect more tillage friendly initiatives from DAFM in the years ahead. The Ag Climatise Bill is a 'living document' so if you have good ideas, make them known.

Industry demand - carbon mitigation

After the economic bust in 2008, agriculture was correctly identified and supported as an industry with potential to contribute positively to Ireland's finances and national economy. This has apparently come at a cost to our water quality and GHG emissions, so agriculture is now asked to keep up the good work but reduce its impact on the environment. Easier said than done when the fixed costs associated with increasing output including cow numbers, buildings and milk processing facilities are still being paid for. Rather than forced de-stocking, the stated Irish Government policy is to use technological solutions such as feed and fertilizer additives and increasing the use of Irish produced protein feeds (rape cake, faba or 'fava' beans, peas) to reduce our GHG's. Again, there is scope under EU laws to set up a carbon market and/or reward farmers through the CAP for such crops. The EU have committed to publishing a Regulatory Framework for the certification of carbon removals by 2023 which would be the rulebook on what each crop or tillage practice contributes to reducing carbon. So again, all positive for tillage farming.

Industry demand – raw ingredients

It never ceases to amaze me when I am abroad as to how well-known Irish food brands are. From Kerrygold to Jameson, Irish food exports are something to be proud of. Luckily, we have innovative and forward-thinking agri-businesses situated that use the crops we produce and pay a premium. Despite Covid-19 greatly reducing demand for alcoholic drinks, our malting industry has largely maintained its demand for Irish-grown malting barley, paying a premium for quality produce. In Seedtech, we have some very promising spring and winter barley varieties coming to market in the next year or two. There are other opportunities being looked at – all it takes is a little imagination and support from people to try something new.

Initiatives from Seedtech

The starting point of all crops begins with seed that is fit for purpose. In Seedtech our business is built on innovating seed, be that a grower-focused trait like BYDV tolerance in winter barley, an end-user focused trait like low vicine and convicine (anti-nutritional compounds) in our faba beans for improved animal performance or meeting a sectoral need such as producing an organically certified oat seed or improving nitrogen use efficiency in winter crops with our hybrid barley varieties. We have invested heavily in a state-of-the-art seed processing plant in Belview Port, Waterford which allows efficient seed processing of all grades of seed and application of new dressings which will be more relied upon in the future.

Some tips

- Get ready for beans – Plan for more beans (maybe other protein crops) in 2022/23. Simple things like getting those fields to at least pH 6.5 and soil P levels to at least 6.5 ppm will greatly help bean yields. Get some organic manures onto those fields as beans need 'the kindness of dung' more than cereals.
- Start thinking carbon – which of your crops and fields are best suited to straw chopping? What crops yield the most straw to bale and sell? Hybrid barley and hybrid rye certainly make more sense if you want to produce and sell the most straw per acre.
- Try some new crops (or try old ones again) - oilseed rape should be included in the new straw scheme and this will change its economics. Do your sums on oilseed rape again. Do not forget the benefits of using slurry in August (no other crop can utilise it at that time), the break-crop benefit on following cereals and how handy it is to have 10 per cent crops drilled before 1st September. Seedtech offer spring and winter seed rape contracts and offer an added premium in land that has not grown rape before.
- Get good advice – How can you maintain and even increase profits with 'lower chemicals and fertilisers' as the EU has said is the future? Are there crops, varieties, or new ways of doing jobs that need to be trialled in 2021. One thing I have learnt from giving advice to farmers is: I can only improve a grower's profits 1-3 years before the crop is grown, especially if we want to reduce inputs. A few examples: Belfry hybrid barley out-yields conventional barley year on year and reduces sterile brome numbers by 70 per cent, rarely needing a spring herbicide; Bono hybrid rye produces more grain and straw than 2nd wheat and uses less chemicals (Latitude) and nitrogen; Joyau winter barley is BYDV-tolerant so should not need aphicides; direct drill Aquila oilseed rape in August to reduce the need to start drilling winter cereals too early (reduces all diseases); use the roots of Lumen spring oilseed rape to mix in dung or slurry and see the benefits in next year's crop. There are countless other examples but getting good advice is common to all.

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A Laois beef and dairy farmer, John Keane, has been elected as president of Macra na Feirme, taking over this month from Thomas Duffy who has concluded his two-year term. **Matt O'Keeffe** talks to John about his upcoming term.

YOUNG BLOOD

Since joining Devil's Bit Macra branch in neighbouring Tipperary John has come through the ranks from local member and club and county officer to his current role, taking in the chairmanships of Macra's National Agricultural Affairs Committee and the organisation's Board of Directors, along the way. John notes the benefits of such experience on his way towards



heading up Macra na Feirme: "It has been a valuable learning curve and will help me in representing our members over the next two years. The importance of Macra both nationally and in the impact we have at European level on policies that affect young farmers through our partnership with CEJA, the European Young Farmers Association, means that we have significant influence in getting policies put in place that help our young farmers and rural youth in general. This is particularly important now with the negotiations for the next CAP ongoing."

Generational renewal

The new Macra leader acknowledges the positive attitude towards young farmers and generational renewal by the previous EU Agricultural Commissioner Phil Hogan: "He was a huge champion of both generational renewal and on a personal basis as a former Macra member he was very supportive of the organisation. Currently it is a bit more difficult to get our point of view across but given our strength and the wider representation offered by CEJA we still offer a strong voice for young farmers. Encouraging the next generation of farmers is set out as a primary focus under the proposals for the next CAP and we intend to build on that to develop practical strategies and policies for implementation over the next five years."

New opportunities

John Keane reflects on the opportunities for rural young people in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic: "Macra is a broad church and for anyone interested in rural life and in agriculture and who is young and enthusiastic there is a place for those people in Macra. The rural youth aspect of our organisation is hugely important to us. The past 14 months has given us a real appreciation of the value of Macra to our members and to rural Ireland. There is a renewed focus on what it means to be living in rural communities and Macra is nurturing that lifestyle through the services we offer and through highlighting the importance of local jobs and opportunities for young people to live and work in their local communities. Macra has always been active in promoting those priorities and they are as important as ever. We are fully committed to continuing to push that agenda as an organisation."

Make the Moove

John Keane and his Macra colleague and friend Jonathan Dwyer have been proactive in highlighting issues around mental health through an initiative called 'Make the Moove - Farmers Matter', as John explains: "It was really a big team effort by our members in Devil's Bit as well as in the wider region and has really shown its worth in the past year during the Covid lockdowns. The main focus of the programme has been to provide a national rural mental health support service for people in rural communities. Our initial focus was within the farming community because there are undeniable stress factors affecting our communities and particularly our farmers and their families. We have developed mental health tool kits which we have delivered to 5,000 farmers across Tipperary to help them with their mental health and provide

them with coping mechanisms. We have also developed specifically farmer-focused mental health training. That was developed pre Covid and we have the ultimate ambition to roll that out at seminars whether that is in marts and Coops or through discussion groups in the course of the next year. We are continuously seeking funding to extend the boundaries of that programme beyond Tipperary into surrounding counties and beyond. We have funding in place currently to extend the service to Roscommon so that's a good start. It is a very positive development by Macra and the response from farming community has been very positive both with our own age group and with older farmers and their families. Other farmer organisations have also been very supportive of our efforts."

Financial stress

While on the subject of mental health the new Macra leader acknowledged the impact of the Glanbia peak milk restrictions, especially on young farmers growing their dairy enterprises: "It is disappointing that the pressure is being put back on the farmer because of An Taisce's objections. From a young farmers point of view we have had many members telling us of the stress and impact of the production restrictions being forced on them. The worry about the investments made before any milk is produced is particularly stressful with financial planning and repayments now having to be restructured. This has a wide effect, involving a farmer's bank, his or her coop, contractor and other suppliers and service providers. This situation negates the guarantee contained in various milk supply contracts that what was planned to be produced would be bought and processed by Glanbia. The planning delays caused by An Taisce's objections, now rejected by the High Court, put that guarantee in jeopardy, at least over the next two years, and it falls back on the milk producers be they younger or older. That burden of stress and responsibility is weighing heavily on so many farmers that it is very important that all the people and organisations involved reflect on that fact. We all need to work collectively and cohesively to come up with solutions because of the great degree of uncertainty created around people's lives and livelihoods." John Keane highlighted his passion for Macra and confirmed that the organisation is "huge" in his life. He reflected on the past few months: "It has certainly been different for everyone and Macra members have had to adapt to the changed environment brought about by Covid. Our social interaction, such an important aspect of Macra, has been curtailed. I have great admiration for our local and national officers and staff who have kept the organisation relevant to members and have kept our members engaged. We have managed to continue our policy promotion with the government and the EU Commission and Parliament to drive the issues that are important to young farmers and young people in our organisation generally. All of that is a result of voluntary effort supported by our staff. As a result, we have ensured that Macra has survived and thrived leaving us in a very positive position, once Covid and the restrictions around Covid diminish, for our members to fully engage with each other again."

Ireland's Food System: Dialogues on future sustainability

A series of virtual National Dialogues on Ireland's Food System are taking place – Join the conversation

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is convening a series of National Dialogues on Ireland's Food System as part of Ireland's engagement with the United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021. Join the conversation to discover how enhancing the sustainability of our global food system, through improved production, processing, distribution and consumption practices and behaviours, can help address many of today's greatest challenges and accelerate progress towards achieving the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This September, the United Nations Secretary-General will host a Food Systems Summit to highlight the potential of food systems to deliver a sustainable future for all people and the planet, and set out a framework of commitments and actions for all stakeholders to achieve sustainable food systems over the coming decade.

The term 'food system' refers to the myriad of activities involved in producing, processing, transporting and consuming food. Food systems touch every aspect of human existence. The health of our food systems profoundly affects the health of our bodies, as well as the health of our environment, our economies and our cultures. When they function well, food systems have the power to bring us together as families, communities and nations.

As part of Ireland's engagement with the Summit, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is convening a series of four National Dialogues – to discuss the environmental, economic, and social sustainability of Ireland's food system; as well as the contribution we can make to strengthening global food systems.

Each dialogue features a keynote speaker and a panel of stakeholders and focuses on solutions – practical steps we can take to improve the sustainability, resilience and inclusivity of our food system over the coming decade and accelerate progress towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Ireland's 2030 Agri-Food Strategy

The first National Dialogue focused on Sustainable Food Systems and Ireland's 2030 Agri-food Strategy, which was recently published in draft form as part of a public consultation on its environmental aspects.

Ireland's 2030 Agri-Food Strategy has been developed using a 'food systems approach', which takes account of the links between policies for food, climate and



environment, and health, as well as the role of all players in the food value chain in realising a future vision.

This pioneering approach will be of interest at EU and international levels, particularly in the run-up to the UN Food Systems Summit.

The central vision for the 2030 Agri-Food Strategy is that Ireland will become a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems over the next decade. Sustainability in its three dimensions – economic, environmental, and social – is at the heart of this vision.

The second Dialogue investigated the relationship between food, health and nutrition, and the importance of social sustainability and wellbeing of people and society.

Join the conversation

These Dialogues provide an opportunity for all stakeholders, from producers to consumers, to learn about our food system, to build an understanding of the challenges we face and to work together to contribute to its future sustainability. Young people, in particular, will have a critical role in shaping sustainable production and consumption, and forging new connections between rural and urban society. The dialogue on Monday, May 4 looks at how we build a more inclusive food system for the future, and the role of research and innovation in food systems transformation.

The final Dialogue of the series, which takes place on May 17, will address the challenge of aligning domestic and foreign policy towards sustainable food systems including a discussion on the challenges and opportunities facing Irish stakeholders on the ground in developing countries.

This dialogue will be chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs, who are working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on preparations for the Food Systems Summit.

For more information and to join the upcoming Dialogues, visit gov.ie/foodsyste

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The non-negotiable: quality grass silage

Aislinn Campbell, InTouch Feeding Specialist, Alltech, outlines the importance of quality silage.

Grass silage remains the most common forage in animal diets across Ireland. However, it is the one element that varies massively. Whether your farm is high- or low-input, good quality grass silage is non-negotiable. The objective on every farm should be to produce high-quality silage and improve efficiency by reducing field and clamp losses where possible. Crops and clamps need to be prepared well in advance to ensure high-quality silage; a good fermentation takes place to increase palatability, and finally, there is enough silage yield.

Cows are designed to eat forage, so making and feeding high-quality digestible silage is a must. Maximising the intake of this high-nutrient feed is important. Poorer quality silage requires additional supplementation to achieve the same performance, bringing in additional costs.

For example, if a cow eats 10 kg (approximately 43 kg fresh weight) of dry matter (DM) of a 75 DMD silage with a UFL content of 0.85, the energy intake of a cow is 8.5 UFL. Whereas if the cow eats the same amount of a poorer silage (65 DMD) with a 0.72 UFL, she will only get 7.2 UFL of energy. While this difference of 1.3 UFL seems small, this is enough energy to produce 3 litres of milk. For this cow to achieve the same performance as the first, an extra 1.5 kg of concentrate will be required, resulting in additional costs.

Good-quality grass silage should have a UFL >0.8 or a metabolisable energy (ME) of 11.5–12 MJ/kg DM, a crude protein of at least 14 per cent and a dry matter content of 27–30 per cent.

While fertiliser and slurry will already be applied at this stage, this should have been completed based on your farm. Representative soil testing should be done regularly to ensure good optimum soil fertility levels. Optimum soil pH is also vital and should be between 6–6.5. Without this basic feature, you will struggle to manage the other parameters.

At harvest, we need to be careful if there is still nitrogen in the grass. Excess nitrogen impacts grass ensilability, which may result in poorer fermentation. Too much nitrogen can produce grass with low sugar levels, meaning the silage could have high ammonia and butyric acid, causing palatability issues. On the other side of that, too little nitrogen can cause low protein silages and reduced yields. The biggest factor that contributes to nutritional value is cutting date. For the highest quality silage, an early cutting date, before the plant has headed and a seed head is visible, is vital. Each day that passes beyond this point, the DMD value will decline by 0.5 units. So, aim to cut just before the seed head emerges. Do not sacrifice quality for quantity, as it is possible to achieve both. Aim for an early-May cutting date, as later will impact on second and

third cuts.

While not always possible, cutting on a dry, sunny day is ideal. Grass sugars are at their peak in the afternoon, but you also need to consider a fast wilt. Expecting an overnight wilt might not be adequate, so both need to be taken into account. Wet, ensiled grass will be too acidic and produce an unpalatable feed. Effluent will also be likely at a dry matter less than 25 per cent. A target dry matter of 27–30 per cent is ideal. Grass can also be too dry, resulting in consolidation issues, poor ensiling or secondary fermentation in the pit and aerobic spoilage or heating once opened.

The mower should not be dropped below 6–7 cm to help avoid soil contamination and encourage good regrowth. Once cut, the grass needs to be ensiled as quickly and cleanly as possible to prevent losses (<24 hours). A longer wilt time leads to bigger losses. Chop length should be 2.5–5.0 cm for 25–40 per cent dry matter crops.

Irish weather can be unpredictable, and we need to bear that in mind here. If weather conditions are difficult, mowing should be held off until it settles. However, do not delay too long, as soil contamination will become an issue. If possible, use different access points in fields and make sure the area in front of the clamp remains free from soil. Work downhill and make sure tyre pressures are correct for the conditions. Part-filling trailers should also

be considered. Be prepared and remember that wet grass will also produce a lot of effluent.

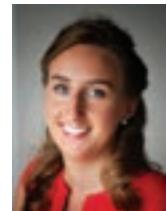
Silage additive can help make good silage great, but it will not compensate for poor silage management. One certain additive is not always ideal in all farm circumstances. It is possible to make good-quality silage without an additive. You will have to make an informed decision based on the conditions and allow adequate time to get the product and the correct equipment for application.

Put aside time to prepare the clamp before harvesting begins. This can help speed up the operation. Old, mouldy, rotten silage should already be removed from the clamp. To ensure quality, clamps needed to be filled as quickly as possible, paying good attention to detail. Good compaction from the very start is vital for clamp stability and to reduce losses. Even filling and regular rolling is a must; however, avoid rolling the next morning before filling if a pit has been left overnight (this will draw in air). Clamps should be filled in a wedge shape. Do not overfill the clamp; consolidation above the walls will drop significantly, creating losses. Finally, the pit needs to be sealed as soon as all compaction is complete.

Paying good attention and allowing the correct time and preparation of all stages of silage making should help improve silage quality and positively impact feed costs and animal performance.



Coccidiosis: A common infection in lambs and calves



Sarah Campbell, MSD Animal Health Ireland, discusses coccidiosis and ways to control it in the herd.

Coccidiosis is a disease caused by a parasite called Eimeria. Oocysts are capable of surviving for long periods of time and eventually all calves and lambs are likely to become infected. Calves and lambs can be infected from birth resulting in clinical disease from just three weeks old. Disease is usually seen in calves between three weeks and six months old and lambs aged four weeks to six months old.

Scour is one of the signs frequently associated with an outbreak of coccidiosis, although sub clinical disease results in far greater economic losses.

How it works

After ingestion, Eimeria oocysts enter the cells lining the guts. The oocysts multiply inside these cells before they emerge and destroy the cells resulting in massive damage to the gut lining. Millions of oocysts pass out in faeces which contaminates the environment and become the main source of infection to other animals. Coccidiosis is common on farms although not all animals show clinical signs of disease, some are sub-clinically affected.

Sub clinical disease occurs when the signs of illness are not as obvious. During the multiplication phase damage is occurring to the guts resulting in a reduced ability to absorb nutrients from food. Animals maintain a good appetite without achieving their expected daily live weight gain. This leads to a generalised ill thrift in the group. Sub clinical coccidiosis can cause a greater economic loss than the clinical condition as many more animals are likely to be sub clinically affected.

The role of exposure

Nearly all animals will become exposed to coccidian oocysts at some point in their lives. As Eimeria oocysts are present on most farms, the likelihood of infection at an early age is high. Many lambs and calves benefit from passive immunity acquired from their dam when they receive plenty of colostrum. Passive immunity wanes over time so they need to acquire their own immunity. Exposure to coccidian oocysts is necessary for animals to develop immunity. To develop immunity, animals need exposure to low levels of infective parasites and a healthy immune system. Natural immunity helps animals resist future challenges. Most animals are immune by one year old.

The impact of stress

Exposure to a high infectious pressure, or stress that diminishes the effectiveness of the animal's immune

system, can overwhelm natural defences and result in disease.

Stressors such as mixing groups, weaning, turn out or a sudden change of diet, castration and bad weather can reduce the immune response. Animals that have not received enough good quality colostrum are often at risk from an early age. Overcrowding indoors or high stock numbers in paddocks as well as unhygienic conditions can contribute to the risk of disease occurring.

Coccidiosis is a group disease rather than an individual animal issue. An entire group is usually exposed to a similar infectious burden of Eimeria infection in the same environment and are subjected to the same external stressors. Therefore, if one lamb or calf presents with clinical signs such as bloody diarrhoea, the whole group should be considered infected.

Ways to control

Developing immunity against Eimeria sp. is key to control. However, eliminating coccidia oocysts from farms is practically impossible. Therefore, ensuring immunity develops is crucial. A control strategy may include:

- Good hygiene
- Keep the build-up of faecal material in the shed to a minimum to minimise oocyst ingestion
- Assess the floor type – slats, deep litter bedding, concrete floors
- Ensure feeding troughs and buckets are kept free of faecal contamination
- Avoid over-stocking outdoors
- Move feeders frequently
- Drain wet areas in fields
- Administration of prophylactic drugs such as diclazuril to infected animals during asexual reproductive stages of parasite development.
- Disinfect sheds, feeding equipment and handling areas
- Amine, cresol and chlorocresol-based disinfectants are effective against Eimeria oocysts
- Open doors to allow sunlight to enter the shed
- Coccidiosis outbreaks are a herd level problem and precipitated by stress.
- Minimizing stressors such as mixing, re-grouping, dietary changes and over-crowding.

Preventative Treatment options

To prevent disease and reduce the impact of sub-clinical disease, treatment using Vecoxan® should be administered close to the time when exposure to coccidiosis is known

to occur. Exposure is required for protective immunity to develop. Therefore, treatments should be administered 8-15 days after moving to a high-risk environment or if historical data is available, approximately one week before the expected outbreak. A single administration to susceptible animals during risk periods is appropriate although a re-treatment may be necessary if the period of risk is prolonged. For animals that are already showing clinical signs, treatment is of limited value as the life cycle of the parasite has already been completed and damage to the guts has already occurred. Pain relief, rehydration and supportive therapy is required to promote the recovery of individual clinical cases. Diclazuril is the active drug in Vecoxan® that inhibits parasite reproduction, thus limiting parasite multiplication and gut damage. Vecoxan® is used for the prevention of coccidiosis in lambs caused by *Eimeria crandallis* and *Eimeria ovinoidalis*. In calves, Vecoxan® is used to aid in the control of coccidiosis caused by *Eimeria bovis* and *Eimeria zuernii*. Vecoxan® has a zero-withdrawal period for meat in calves and lambs and normal routines for manure spreading from treated animals apply. Current studies in lambs shows that treating lambs infected with coccidiosis with diclazuril (Vecoxan®) does not interfere with the development of natural immunity. Vecoxan® facilitates exposure to the parasite. It acts on all life stages of the parasite in the

host animal and rapidly lowers the challenge. It has been suggested that, by causing the rapid death of *Eimeria*, Vecoxan® may allow proteins belonging to the parasite to be recognised quickly by the immune system, leading to a rapid immune response. In calves, studies found that those previously treated

with Vecoxan® responded better to subsequent infections than those who had previously naturally recovered from the disease. The study also found that

previously treated calves excreted fewer infective oocysts. Reducing the level of environmental contamination is key to disease control.

The Principle of Coccidiosis Treatment:
Control the level of challenge to prevent disease but to still allow enough exposure so that young animals can develop immunity




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A photograph of two sheep grazing in a green field. The sheep are facing away from the camera, their backs and heads covered in thick, curly wool. The field is a mix of green grass and brown patches. In the background, there's a low stone wall and a vast, cloudy sky at sunset, with orange and yellow hues. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing the text.

BEEF FOCUS



Demonstrating profitable calf-to-beef pathways

The second phase of the Teagasc Green Acres Programme was launched in the spring of 2019 to demonstrate best practice in calf to beef systems in order to maximise profitability writes **Sean Cummins**, Green Acres Programme Advisor.

Now in its third year with 12 commercially-operated farms enrolled, the changes being implemented at farm level are beginning to bear fruit in terms of the net margins being achieved. Through the support of industry stakeholders – Volac, MSD, Munster Bovine, Drummonds, Liffey Mills, Corteva Agriscience and AgriLand - a number of key areas are being examined and improved at farm level and an

increased focus has been placed on calf rearing, animal health, soil fertility, grassland management, farm planning and financial management.

Excluding subsidies, an average net margin of €455/ha was recorded across participating farms in 2020. However, this ranged from €18/ha up to a maximum of €1,140/ha on account of the farms being at various stages of

development.

With growing stock numbers on some farms, it must be noted that this net margin figure is inclusive of a positive net inventory change figure €392/ha. In layman's terms, inventory change is the estimated value of the additional livestock on programme farms and it is hoped that this will filter down into sales in the future.

Taking the inventory as it stands, the farms achieved a gross output of €2,383/ha or €1,036/LU in 2020.

Costs

A key focus of the Teagasc Green Acres Programme is monitoring costs and the below section details the variable costs experienced at farm level in 2020, which totalled €1,284/ha or 53 per cent of gross output. Feed and milk replacer stood at €678/ha, fertiliser spending averaged €184/ha, an average of €125/ha was outlaid on veterinary, while contractor spending averaged €157/ha and other variable costs totalled €143/ha.

With variable costs amounting to €1,284/ha, a gross margin of €1,098/ha was achieved. Meanwhile, fixed costs of €644/ha were recorded across the Teagasc Green Acres farms, with the three largest being machinery running costs (€101/ha), depreciation (€135/ha) and land lease (€107/ha). When fixed costs were accounted for, this left an overall net margin of €455/ha (excluding subsidies).

Average Teagasc eProfit Monitor results of the Green Acres farms 2020

Stocking rate (LU/ha)	2.31
Output (kg/ha)	1,286
Gross output (€/ha)	2,383
Feed (€/ha)	678
Fertiliser/lime (€/ha)	181
Other variable costs (€/ha)	424
Total variable costs (€/ha)	1,284
Inventory change (€/ha)	+392
Gross margin (€/ha)	1,098
Fixed costs (€/ha)	644
Net margin (€/ha)	455

Calf price and slaughter value

Although profitability levels have improved, a focus must continue to be placed on calf value. Along with assessing the profitability levels, the relationship between calf cost and carcass value for animals slaughtered in 2020 and purchased during the 2018 calendar year was also assessed. An analysis of the slaughter performance of animals produced on the Teagasc Green Acres farms was compiled earlier this year, which examined the physical (carcass weight, grade and fat scores) and financial

performance (€/kg) of animals slaughtered over the course of 2020.

To delve further into this data and to understand the relationship between calf purchase price and carcass value, 2018 calf purchase values have been compiled and presented as a percentage of the total carcass value below. Annually, early-maturing (Angus and Hereford) males achieve a premium on the market when compared to Holstein Friesian males. The three-year price difference witnessed on the Teagasc Green Acres farms over the springs of 2018 through to 2020 is €81/head.

On account of this higher purchase price, a larger proportion of the animal's final value has been consumed on day one of the production cycle.

This is displayed when the average performance of animals slaughtered over 2020 is compared to the average price paid for these calves in 2018. Calf price accounted for 17 per cent, 20 per cent and 11 per cent respectively of Angus, Hereford and Holstein Friesian steers final value.

In €/kg terms, this equates to €0.66/kg of the animal's value being taken by purchase price for Angus steers, €0.72/kg for Hereford steers and €0.37/kg for Holstein Friesian steers on day one – the day of purchase. In terms of 2020-slaughtered heifers, Angus heifer calf value accounted for 20 per cent (€0.75/kg) and Hereford heifer calf price accounted for 22 per cent (€0.82/kg) of the animal's final value.

Grassland performance and silage quality

Since enrolling in the programme, the participating farmers have been required to measure grass growth rates at farm level through the PastureBase system. Grass forms the backbone of many of the systems being exhibited in the programme and maximising livestock performance from this feed is one of the key targets of the programme. In 2020, the farmers grew 10.2t DM/ha and an average of 33 measurements were taken across the individual farms. Calf to beef systems require high-quality silage of 72–74 DMD (dry matter digestibility), which is a key factor in achieving the desired levels of animal performance and reducing feed costs over the winter months. When silage quality falls to a sub-optimal level, increased levels of concentrate supplementation are required in order to achieve the targeted average daily gains for weanlings, steers, heifers and finishing cattle. The expense of this increased meal feeding is a significant cost to the system and it has the potential to erode a significant proportion of the margin achievable per animal. In 2020, the dry matter digestibility (DMD) of first cut silage was 74 per cent, while second cut was recorded at 71.9 per cent.

Slaughter performance and calf cost of 2020-slaughtered animals

Breed	Category	Carcass (kg)	€/head	Calf cost (€/kg of final carcass weight)	Calf cost (% of final animal value)
Angus	Heifer	265	991	0.75	20
Hereford	Heifer	261	984	0.82	22
Angus	Steer	320	1,226	0.66	17
Hereford	Steer	315	1,162	0.72	20
Holstein Friesian	Steer	325	1,132	0.37	11

Organic opportunities in drystock production

Matt O'Keeffe talks to Galway farmer James Donnellan about his Aubrac breed and the conversion to organic

James has found the Aubrac breed to be a perfect fit for his farming system: "As an organic farmer the pedigree Aubracs are easy to manage and with increased interest in the breed in recent years they provide a good return for our time and investment."

The Aubrac breed are popular with both dairy and beef farmers, as James explains: "The establishment of the Dairy/Beef Index by ICBF has helped a lot. The Aubrac has featured well in the Index. They have a short gestation, they are muscular and perform well in terms of growth rate. That makes the Aubrac a good choice for dairy farmers who want ease of calving and who are selling calves to farmers who are running dairy calf-to-beef enterprises."

A convert to organic

James and Rose Donnellan converted to organic production six years ago. They have no regrets: "We were traditionally a suckler and sheep farm and would have sold cattle on for finishing before the move to organic. The suckler herd was wound down when we began breeding pedigree Aubrac and we keep a flock of sheep for mid-season lamb production as well. The Aubrac progeny are sold for breeding and we would have a number of bulls and heifers entered in the Annual Aubrac sale at Tullamore. We also sell privately at the farm."

Added complexities

The breeding of pedigree stock on an organic farm is a little more complicated than operating on a non-organic farm, as James confirms: "Most people would be aware that organic meal prices are considerably more expensive than your normal concentrate price. It's usually double the price of conventional feed, so that adds considerably to the expense of feeding the pedigree stock. The reality is that if you want to present a bull for sale they will require a certain amount of buffer feeding."

An organic premium

The usual question arises in relation to premia for organic produce. James is blunt in his response: "There is a premium for organic lamb, but not as much as there could be, or perhaps should be. We have supplied lamb to different outlets including Dawn Meats in Ballyhaunis and more recently to ICM in Camolin. The premium can be as little as fifty cents per kilo. If the ewes have to be fed some organic concentrate before or after lambing then the

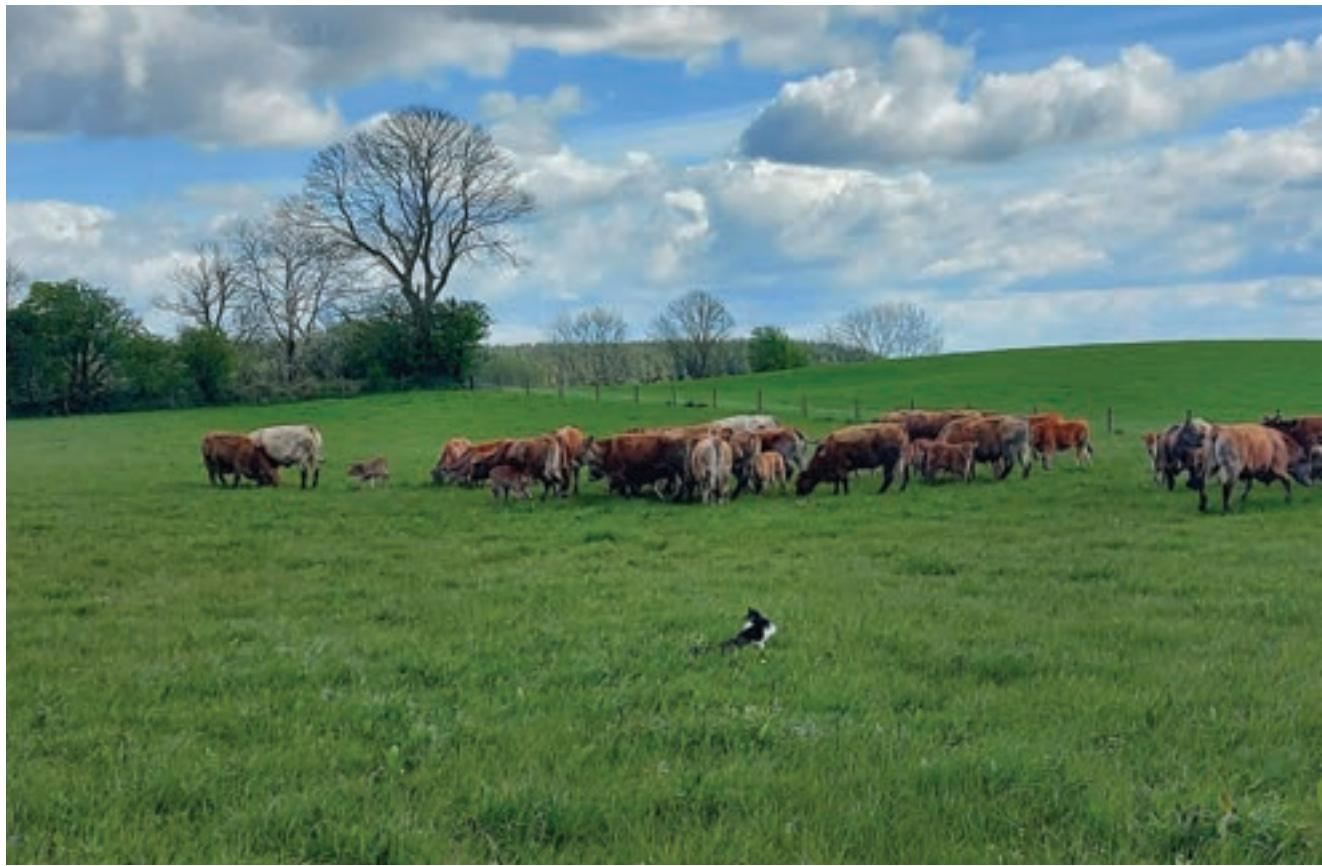


premium doesn't do much more than cover the additional costs of the feed. Some organic lamb producers have a later lambing season and are able to minimise the meal feeding. That lowers costs but can also result in a lower end price as lamb numbers increase later in the year and the lamb price generally goes down a bit."

Nevertheless, James has no regrets on converting to organic: "A lot depends on your stocking rate and livestock profile before you convert. Some farmers might need to reduce stocking rates if they are converting. In our case we had a medium stocking rate so there wasn't a big change in regard to stocking rate when we went organic. For those farming intensively a lower stocking rate might be needed, given the lower inputs used under organic systems. I would say that to farm any more than 1.5 livestock units per hectare does require very good management under the organic system."

Organic in all but name

Given his Galway base, James is familiar with suckler farming carried on right along the west coast: "Many of those drystock farmers are close to organic standard. From speaking to them one of the difficulties those cattle, sheep and suckler farmers would have in going the extra step is that they are involved in commonage arrangements with other farmers. It would mean that every farmer with a share of the commonage would have to convert to organic and it's very difficult to get every farmer to do the same thing in any circumstance. On top



of that there would be high standards of fencing required which is both expensive and difficult to put in place across commonage land. A requirement under the organic system is that animals cannot be allowed to wander onto non-organic land. I do think the situation with many suckler farmers should be examined to find ways to allow them to convert to organic given their farm systems

"The consumer is looking for more sustainable food and they equate organic, especially, with sustainable."

are quite close to organic standard in many instances. On hill farms the grass and herbage is as organically grown as on any officially organic farm. It would mean a lot economically because the produce would attract a premium."

The future for organic beef and lamb

The EU has big ambitions to increase the agricultural area of Europe under organic to twenty five percent in the

coming years. Given our low starting base, the Irish target is to triple our organic area to six percent of the Irish agricultural land-base. Is James Donnellan at all worried that such a massive increase in organic production could erode the premium available for organic produce? "The consumer is looking for more sustainable food and they equate organic, especially, with sustainable. There has never been such concern around the environment and that will continue. I wouldn't be fearful about organic produce not commanding a premium in the future even if there is more produced. I accept that we could see short-term hiccups along the way if it is not managed properly. The reality is that, even in Ireland, they have taken in new organic entrants in the cattle and sheep sectors and there were times when there were not enough processors to buy and market the produce. In regard to price, there will always be people who are looking for cheap food, even when it is produced to a very high standard either through conventional or organic farming. On the other hand there are considerable numbers of consumers that are looking for quality, premium priced food and organic production is aimed at that market. If you are looking at 25 per cent of land converted to organic production, the output will be lower than 25 percent of all European food production, so we should assume that there is a willingness by a sufficient minority of consumers to pay an organic premium for food produced organically. There will need to be more promotion of organic as volumes and number of farmers involved increases."

Worming strategies for spring grazing

Maura Langan, Norbrook Veterinary Advisor, looks at sustainable worm control during the spring grazing period.



As concerns grow surrounding anthelmintic resistance there has been a change in recent years towards sustainable worm control. There are two groups of roundworms which affect cattle: gastrointestinal (GI) worms, of which *Ostertagia ostertagi* and *Cooperia oncophora* are considered the most economically important, and lungworm, *Dictyocaulus viviparous*. Farmers are encouraged to work with their vets to devise a robust parasite control programme that allows for the development of the animals' natural immunity whilst maintaining adequate growth rates and reducing the risk of clinical disease. Here we look at key management groups and the risk factors involved during the first half of the grazing season.

First season grazers – autumn calves, dairy to beef weanlings

Calves in their first grazing season are completely naive and therefore are at high risk of parasitic infection until they develop natural immunity. When cattle are first turned out, they should be free from parasites and do not need treatment immediately.

Young stock at grass are exposed to overwintered infective L3 *Ostertagia* larvae and other worms as they graze, and acquire low level burdens that in turn contaminate the pasture with eggs. Pasture contamination builds up and as warmer temperatures support the faster development of worm larvae on pasture, the risk of disease increases throughout the summer.

Farms with limited clean pasture (i.e. grazed by cattle

in the previous season) are considered high risk, so calves should be monitored carefully and a season-long worming programme established. After 3-4 weeks on pasture they will have picked up some worms, but crucially will also have been able to build up some immunity. At this point a first worm treatment should be considered.

Pasture not used by cattle in the previous year or silage aftermath is lower risk, so consider moving calves there to avoid peak L3 larvae infection at the end of June / July. If you are in doubt as to the level of pasture contamination, ask your vet to perform a faecal egg count (FEC) 6-8 weeks post turnout to assess the worm burden.

Lungworm causes coughing and laboured breathing and if left untreated can result in death or long-term debility. Lungworm in growing cattle can incur losses of between €60 and €120/head. Monitor regularly for lungworm: be vigilant for the first signs of coughing and monitor growth rates. Treat the whole management group at the first sign of infection.

Second season grazers

By the second grazing season, cattle will have acquired some immunity and as older, heavier animals will be better able to tolerate a low worm burden. While small quantities of GI worms may not cause distress, if left untreated they continue to infect the pasture and as the worm burden increases growth and development are affected. Losses in a severe outbreak of osterstagiosis in growing cattle can reach €120/head.

For second season cattle, the aim is to balance the number of treatments with performance. FECs can be a useful tool when making informed decisions about the level of infection and timing of treatments.

Some worming products have 'persistency', meaning that they continue to protect cattle from infection after treatment. Taurador® Pour-on contains Doramectin and has persistent action against Osterstagia (35 days), Cooperia (28 days) and lungworm (42 days). This means further worming may not be necessary for another 6-8 weeks following treatment.

By extending the time before and after worming, it is possible to reduce the number of doses during the grazing season. Again, the risk from lungworm will depend on previous exposure, immunity and whether cattle have been vaccinated. Lungworm is unpredictable so vigilance is required; watch out for evidence of coughing and treat early at the first indication of infection.

Bought-in cattle

Bought-in stock risk bringing in parasites, possibly ones that are resistant to treatment. Where possible, try to get as much information about the farm of origin and treatment history prior to purchase. Animal Health Ireland recommends treating with two different classes of wormers (either 1 BZ, 2-LV or 3-ML) and quarantining for at least 48 hours following treatment. A liver fluke treatment may also be appropriate.

Cattle should be grazed on 'dirty' pasture following treatment in order to dilute the proportion of potentially resistant worms.

Suckler cows with calves at foot, breeding stock, adult cattle

Adult cattle should have

developed immunity to roundworms in previous grazing seasons, so regular treatment is generally not necessary. Always treat promptly if you suspect lungworm infection. During the early part of the grazing season spring born calves are still suckling and not

ingesting large quantities of grass so at low risk from parasites. They may need to be treated later on in the season, but where possible establish the need by monitoring growth and performance or using faecal egg counts.

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Move over meat

Matt O'Keeffe looks at the growing 'meat alternatives' industry and asks how meat producers can compete.



The ongoing march of non-meat substitutes continues. It is now a multi-billion industry with consumer exposure increasing every year. These plant-based alternatives to meat are described in various ways, usually depending on your perspective or bias or dietary preferences. Referred to as plant-based meat, vegan meat, meat substitute, mock meat, meat alternative, imitation meat or vegetarian meat, fake meat or faux meat, the one thing they have in common is that there is no meat in them, which, from some of the descriptions seems contradictory. The creators of these non-meat alternatives strive to develop products that look like real meat, taste like real meat and have a similar texture to real meat. One might be forgiven for thinking that the consumers of these products want to eat meat, but not if it originates from an animal. The argument as to whether developers of non-meat alternatives should be able to piggy-back (pardon the pun) on the descriptive features of meat products, indeed the use of the 'meat' noun itself in promoting their products, is important but incidental to the fact that, as non-meat product developers perfect the meat-like taste, colour and texture of their products, more consumers

are opting for the alternative. There are multiple reasons for this, including environmental concerns around meat production, lifestyle and dietary decisions based on vegetarian choice or vegan ideology. Curiosity also leads to occasional or permanent non-meat alternative purchase and consumption. Price is not yet a major factor as, in the main, the non-meat alternative production systems have not reached the scale to drive down product price and/or the technology behind their development has not yet provided the price reductions necessary to influence consumer choice. That is set to change in the coming years.

Growing meat

Another alternative to plant-based, non-meat products is laboratory-grown meat. Mark Post, a researcher at the University of Maastricht and co-founder and CSO of Mosa Meat, is reputedly the original developer of a meat alternative developed in a laboratory.

After producing the first cultured burger in 2013, which reputedly cost €250,000 to grow, the price has since dropped to around €10 per burger. While still expensive

by comparison with the standard beef burger, the collapse in cost is indicative of where this technology is going. Within the next decade there is increasing likelihood that cultured meat burgers will cost a fraction of those produced from a bovine. If the taste, texture and presentation of these industrially cultured meat products are acceptable to the consumer then the meat industry as we know it will be in real trouble. In future, the beef sector may have to compete for market share using niche, high quality and higher cost naturally produced beef, rather than competing directly on price with a factory-cultured meat that may be the basic choice of cost-conscious meat eaters.

Plant-based burgers moving fast

The influence on diet of fast-food outlets should not be underestimated. Across the globe eleven million consumers visit Burger King every day. That figure is dwarfed by McDonalds with its global reach in one hundred countries attracting almost seventy million customers daily. Those figures add up to millions of beef burger consumers being exposed to plant-based alternatives and, in due course, cultured meat alternatives to the traditional beef burger. It would be naïve to assume that traditional dietary habits will prevail in all cases. That naivety has already been disproved with growing numbers of fast-food customers regularly choosing non-meat alternatives in their burger buns.

Burger King has been especially bullish (sorry) about its ambitions around the promotion of non-meat alternative offerings. Its UK Chief Executive, Alasdair Murdoch, confirmed recently that Burger King's ten-year outlook is to have at least fifty percent plant-based options by 2031 without necessarily expanding the overall menu choice. That immediately suggests that some of the current meat-based options will be discontinued. Plant-based fast foods are still more expensive on average than regular meat offerings in restaurants, though that fact will not be a permanent consolation for cattle farmers as larger scale production and higher environmental consciousness amongst discretionary consumers drive increasing demand for plant-based meat alternatives.

KEY INGREDIENTS IN BEYOND MEAT PRODUCTS:

Water, pea protein, expeller-pressed canola oil, refined coconut oil, rice protein, natural flavours, cocoa butter, mung bean protein, methylcellulose, potato starch, apple extract, pomegranate extract, salt, potassium chloride, vinegar, lemon juice concentrate, sunflower lecithin, beet juice extract for colour.

Big business

Impossible Foods, a leading pioneer of plant-based non-meat products, is understood to be planning a public share flotation. While the \$10 billion suggested

value may be an exaggerated worth, it is clear that many big investors with deep pockets will want a piece of the action. Bill Gates has invested in the two major alternative meat companies, Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods. The Microsoft co-founder is worth \$130 billion and is committed to financially supporting meat alternative production on the basis that it is less environmentally damaging than animal-based meat production. Los Angeles based Beyond Meat, after only nine years in production, had \$400 million in sales revenues of its plant-based meat substitutes last year. The company is currently developing production facilities in China to produce imitation beef, pork and chicken products. Despite containing such chemical additives as dipotassium phosphate, potassium chloride, titanium dioxide and maltodextrin, consumers are increasingly voting with their feet, or rather their mouths in favour of plant-based meat alternatives. Most consumers do not read the small print list of ingredients and even if they did, it wouldn't differ greatly from many other highly processed foods in our everyday diets.

IMPOSSIBLE FOODS BURGER INGREDIENTS:

Water, soy protein concentrate, coconut oil, sunflower oil, natural flavours, potato protein, methylcellulose, yeast extract, cultured dextrose, food starch modified, salt, mixed tocopherols, soy protein isolate, vitamins and minerals. For colour, Impossible Foods burgers include on an iron-containing compound called leghemoglobin, an oxygen transport molecule found in the roots of legumes.

Caught in the middle

Caught in a vice-grip between non-meat alternatives and cultured meat products, it will be difficult for traditional meat producers to compete. Raised environmental awareness and an increasing disconnect between the food products consumers purchase and where that food originates will make it difficult for traditional meat producers to continue at existing scales of production. Cultured meat is no longer fictional. The technology is well developed and will, in time, create meat products further up the product ladder to include sirloin and fillet offerings. One report estimates that 35 per cent of all meat will be cultured by 2040. It would not be in the cattle industry's best interests to assume that its traditional place in the beef market will continue indefinitely. Whether the meat industry likes it or not, plant-based protein alternatives tick a few popular investment directives including their perceived higher environmental credentials. That can be countered with valid argument around the use of additives, excessive water demand, chemical protectants and potential air-miles in their production, processing and transport. These arguments are unlikely to negate the upward momentum in both choice and demand for these non-meat products.

A future strategy for the beef industry

Maurice Colbert, former executive with ICOS, believes the Irish beef industry compares badly to its French counterpart. Here he outlines his thoughts on the subject.

French farmers have succeeded admirably where Irish beef producers failed. The French marched on De Gaulle's Paris with military precision in the early 1960s, bringing their farm produce with them in protest. More importantly, they had the clear objective of modernising French agriculture to supply world markets. On the other hand, the Irish farmers who marched on Dublin in 1966 had the much narrower focus of improving farming incomes through government subsidies and price supports. The Irish approach did not succeed. The French approach did and they modernised their beef industry to compete in world markets.

A disorganised and chaotic industry

The beef industry is comparable to the dairy industry in terms of size, gross output, exports and jobs. But this is where the similarity ends. The cattle and beef sectors are disorganised, crisis-ridden and unstable. Ultimately, this industry is loss-making for most cattle producers. In the words of agri-economist Dr Seamus Sheehy, "all cattle die in debt".

The Irish dairy industry, in sharp contrast, is well organised through Cooperative structures, it is market-led and ultimately profitable for dairy farmers. In addition, the current climate in dairying is one of producer confidence, investment and expansion.

In the beef sector, the work of our Department of Agriculture over the past decades centred on animal breeding and health, veterinary regulations, intervention supports, FEOGA grant aid, CAP, live exports and marts. During the same period our farming organisations have been preoccupied with CAP payments, price reviews, intervention in various guises, live exports and meat plant protests. The overall thrust has been towards short-term, stop-gap solutions for long-term problems.

The French Approach

The approach of successive French governments since the 1960s is in sharp contrast to the Irish situation. Through national policy they have invested heavily in the beef sector, which is substantially export driven. This entire approach has been built around legally binding



partnerships, strong industry linkages, Joint Enterprises, SICA's (Agricultural Cooperatives) and cast-iron contracts, with the full support of UNIBEV And Credit Agricole.

What is urgently needed in Ireland is robust, effective antitrust legislation along the lines of Capper Volstead in the USA, together with a national beef strategy comparable with the Irish dairy industry. Here, Beef tribunals and Food Ombudsman have not been sufficient. The French approach to the organisation of the beef sector deserves urgent consideration in the Irish context. Michael Collins was one of the few Irish statesman to have a vision of the emerging beef industry. Published in April 1922, his book 'The Path to Freedom' envisaged a national beef industry based on Cooperative lines and excluding monopolistic profits.

The French beef model

France is the top beef producing nation in the EU. Only the Irish dairying industry compares in terms of industry efficiency, overall profitability and future prospects. France's unique beef industry model was created through implementation of a series of strategic policies at all points along the food chain. The modernisation of the industry at farm and industry levels was paramount to developing a successful outcome. Specialist cattle breeds with excellent beef producing qualities were encouraged. Specialised suckler herds were also encouraged to use the best beef genetics available. Transparency was introduced right along the system. The introduction of enhanced payments for quality beef was a hugely positive development. Stable prices for farmers delivered more certainty to producers. There was reorganisation of the beef sector at industry level with strong government supports from production to processing. The brand image of French beef in world markets was heavily promoted.

Many of the changes at farm production level were quite revolutionary. The aforementioned encouragement of speciality suckler herds allied to increases in herd size had a fundamental effect on the economics of beef farming in France. The demand for bull beef in Italian markets was recognised and pursued, providing a ready and reliable market for French bull beef on the country's doorstep. Traditional seasonal production was virtually eliminated providing year-round supplies. The trading of young cattle is no longer a common feature of French

in the Irish cattle sector. Generic promotion of Irish beef on international markets by An Bord Bia has been impressive, as have promotions by individual beef processing companies. The development of a dedicated Irish beef brand is, however, not a viable prospect in the medium or even long term. The introduction over the past decades of high-performance beef breeds has raised the quality of product, though the process has been ad hoc with little overall coordination. The absence of scale on most Irish suckler farms makes most suckler enterprises unviable even with significant EU and Governmental financial supports. The work of ICBF in the promotion of high-quality terminal sires is another positive development and the star ratings system, if widely adopted by producers, is a pathway for delivering rapid improvements on both the terminal and maternal breeding lines on suckler farms. Unfortunately, farmer adoption of many of these improvements has been too slow and possibly too late to stem the continuing decline of the Irish suckler herd.

No trust in Irish beef industry

It is acknowledged that the Irish beef processing sector has scaled up to a level that can compete internationally. The most damaging aspect of Irish beef production has been the total lack of trust by producers in those who buy their finished cattle. The absence of transparency is understandable, given the fact that the beef processing sector is controlled by a few large private operators. The Grant Thornton reports, commissioned by the Beef

Michael Collins was one of the few Irish statesman to have a vision of the emerging beef industry. His book 'The Path to Freedom' envisaged a national beef industry based on Cooperative lines and excluding monopolistic profits.

cattle farming. In terms of basic cattle husbandry, the promotion of maize silage production and zero grazing delivered impressive productivity advantages and improvements in the economics of beef production. Overall, French beef producers have the confidence that they are well served at industry level and are paid a premium price for quality beef. Regardless of the EU price quotations, beef is highly profitable for French farmers. More important still, the future prospects for beef producers in France are consistently better than for their Irish counterparts.

The Irish model

In fairness, there have been positive developments

Forum, are unlikely to dispel this lack of transparency. Is it even reasonable to expect full transparency outside the farm gate where the industry is controlled by private entities in the processing sector and large conglomerates in the retail sector which do not publish segmented profit analyses of their sales lines? While EU law, backed by financial supports, is now supportive of farmers establishing producer organisations, there is little evidence that this opportunity is being, or will be, availed of on a widespread scale by Irish beef producers. The cooperative ethos, so strong in the dairy sector, is sadly lacking in the beef sector where individual producer autonomy is almost sacrosanct.



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Beef demand remains focused on retail channel

Latest figures from Bord Bia show some improvement in market conditions and a rise in price



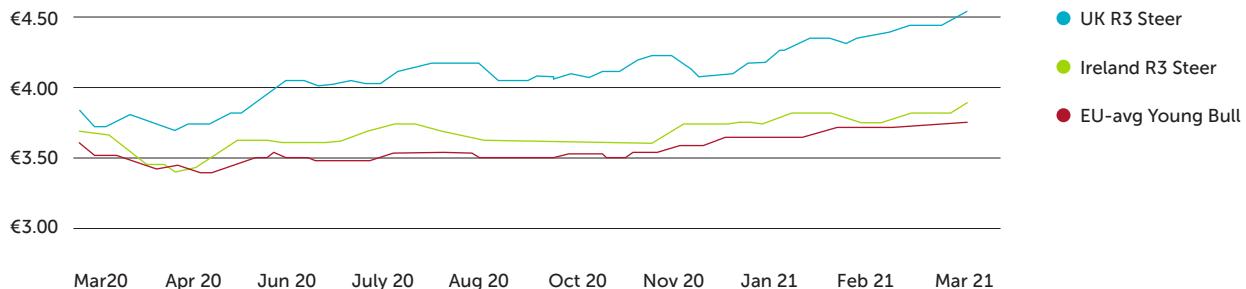
Cattle supplies at export meat plants totalled 30,390 head during the week ended April 17th, increasing by 898 head on the week previous, as processing plants returned to a normal week of production. Prime cattle throughput also increased by 226 head on the previous week, with overall supplies of prime cattle currently running 11.7 per cent lower than they were 12 months ago. Throughput levels for the third week in April were 3,267 head above the throughput level of the same week in 2020.

A total of 478,462 head of cattle have been processed in the 15 weeks of 2021. This figure represents a decline of 58,627 head on the corresponding period in 2020 (-10.92 per cent). Heifer throughput has decreased by 12.28 per cent, whilst steer throughput is back 6.63 per cent on the same period 12 months ago.

Quotes for finished cattle during April have seen further improvements across most export meat plants, as they continue to secure lots of quality cattle for the export market. Nearly all factories have now moved to a base price of €4.00/kg for steers, with heifers trading at €4.05/kg in most cases, with some plants quoting 5c/kg above that. Producers with larger numbers and regular supply are securing deals above that and even more in some cases.

The appetite for good quality cows remains strong, and this is reflected in current quotes being received in export meat plants. Quotes for P grade cows are ranging between €3.20-€3.25/kg, with good quality O grade cows achieving prices of €3.30-€3.35/kg. R grading cows are receiving quotes of €3.50-€3.55/kg and maybe slightly

Beef producer prices (€/kg deadweight excl. VAT)





more in some cases depending on carcass quality and demand.

The average prices paid for prime cattle for week ending April 17th as recorded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, were €3.97/kg for R3 steers, and €4.00/kg for R3 heifers. Note that these prices exclude VAT but would include all bonuses such as for breed-based producer groups.

For week ending April 17th, average prices paid in Northern Ireland have seen further change in the past 7 days, with R3 grade steer and heifer quotes increasing to €3.92/kg each. These prices were equivalent to €4.52/kg, excluding VAT.

Prices paid for R3 prime cattle in Britain saw further changes during this period, with steer prices increasing to £4.08/kg and heifers increasing to £4.09/kg. In euro terms, these prices were equivalent to €4.70/kg and €4.72/kg respectively, excluding VAT. (€1=£0.8674)

Across Europe, average R3 young bull prices are equivalent to €3.80/kg excluding VAT, which is 17c/kg lower than the Irish R3 steer price.

The Irish composite cattle price for week ending April 17th was €3.75/kg deadweight excluding VAT, compared with the Export benchmark price of €3.76/kg.

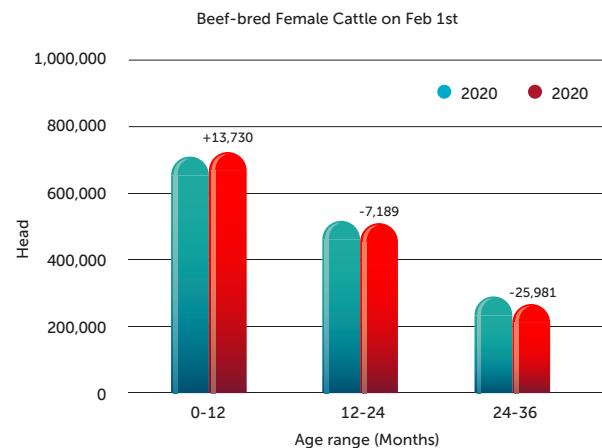
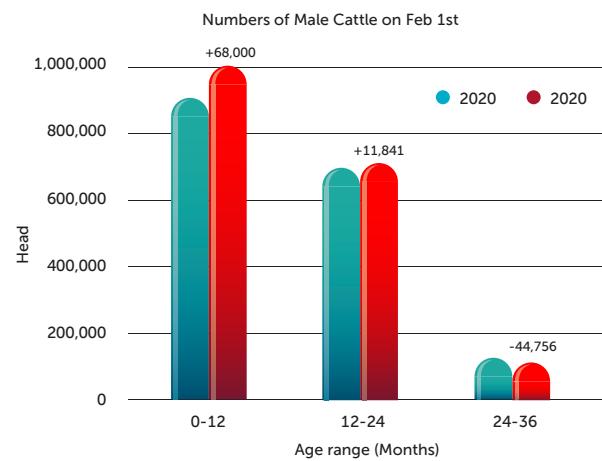
Live Exports

For the week ending April 10th, live cattle exports reached 9,331 head according to the Department of

Agriculture, Food & the Marine. For the first 14 weeks of 2021, the number of animals exported is running 5 per cent behind the same period 12 months ago, with 106,661 head of cattle being exported out of Ireland.

The intra-community trade of Irish dairy calves remained steady in April, with 6,881 calves exported to Continental Europe for the week ending April 17th. However, the calf export season has gotten off to a very difficult start in 2021 with 77,440 calves leaving Ireland in the first 14 weeks of this year. This is an 11 per cent decline from the 86,941 calves exported in the same period in 2020 and 25 per cent behind the same period in 2019.

The movement of cattle to Northern Ireland has continued to perform strongly with 2,064 head traveling



north during the week ending April 10th. This included a combination of calves and store cattle for further feeding, along with 390 animals for direct slaughter. 23 per cent of cattle exports so far this year have been to Northern Ireland. The live exports of animals to Northern Ireland for direct slaughter is expected to remain strong as prices remain more favourable in NI compared to the south.

Live cattle exports to Northern Ireland are running 117 per cent higher compared to the same time 12 months ago, with over 24,500 head exported so far this year

Pledge for change

The largest beef processor in the UK and Ireland has joined the Low Carbon Pledge initiative

Earlier this year, ABP announced that it had signed up to the Business In the Community Ireland (BITCI) Low Carbon Pledge, the first dedicated pledge generated by Irish businesses to set industry standards on sustainability and reduce carbon emissions. ABP has been committed to the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) since 2019 and the company, which is the largest beef processor in the UK and Ireland, is also a nominated sector leader of a similar carbon reduction scheme with Business in the Community in Northern Ireland.

As part of its commitment to reduce its carbon emissions, ABP has been conducting a multi-year study with Teagasc and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) at its demonstration farm in Carlow. The research has focused on using a data- driven approach to improving the genetics available to the dairy-beef herd, so that beef animals are ready for slaughter at a younger age, thereby significantly reducing their emissions footprint. The study has demonstrated that a methane emission reduction of up to 40 per cent is achievable and this could have significant positive benefits across Irish beef production. Over 4,000 animals have been involved in the study so far with results fed into the ICBF database.

Dean Holroyd, ABP's food group technical and sustainability director, said: "ABP is pleased to be among 50 Irish businesses that have signed up to the Low Carbon Pledge movement. For over six years we have been working with Teagasc and the ICBF and looking at ways to make beef production more sustainable. The results to date demonstrate what can be achieved on a typical farm as well as highlighting the possibilities for the beef production sector." ABP's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions targets have been validated by the SBTi, demonstrating the company's commitment to aligning its sustainability strategy to the global climate change goals as set out in the 2015 Paris Agreement. The targets address GHG emissions across ABP's business (scope 1 and 2 emissions) and its supply chain (scope 3 emissions). Originally launched in 2018, the Low Carbon Pledge has now evolved and calls on all Irish businesses to work towards setting science-based emission reduction targets by 2024. The pledge demonstrates meaningful business commitment to reducing carbon emissions and acts as a catalyst for wider initiatives and actions. The pledge is led by the Low Carbon Sub-group of the BITCI Leaders' Group on Sustainability and endorsed by the Irish Government.



ABOVE AND BEYOND

ABP has achieved Platinum Level in Business in the Community's 2020 NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey. The survey was conducted with 100 organisations to identify areas where they can improve their environmental impacts. It recognises and rewards organisations that are going above and beyond their legal environmental requirements. "As a business depending on natural resources to produce its products, ABP fully understands its responsibility to ensure that those resources are in place for the next generation," said George Mullan, managing director of ABP in Northern Ireland. "For this reason, operating with sustainability as a core principle goes to the very heart of our business. ABP is a fully integrated agri-business. This means that its main business function – the processing of beef – is supported by three supporting businesses: a pet foods division, a renewables division and a proteins division. This unique structure ensures that ABP's products are processed in the most sustainable manner possible."

Chair of Business in the Community NI, Chris Conway, said: "Stakeholders, suppliers and the general public increasingly consider sustainability to be of utmost importance and the survey is a way for organisations to publicly demonstrate their commitment to a greener future. I want to congratulate and thank all companies that have stepped forward to take part in the survey, and report on their environmental practices."



International trade and the beef sector



Niall Durkan, a student of the UCD Food Business Strategy MSc – which is a collaborative programme between the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science and the UCD Smurfit School of Business – examined the effect international trade deals have on the Irish beef sector.

Many beef farmers in the past have inherited lands with the capabilities of feeding and rearing an entire family. Nowadays, they are often managed part time, and can be seen by some as almost a financial burden. Nonetheless, they are farmed with passion passed down from generation to generation. But how can we build a sustainable future for farmers in the beef industry?

International trade effect on the economy
International trade can pioneer the growth of new export markets while also providing goods and services to domestic markets that are unavailable. Countries will export goods that they have a comparative, absolute or competitive advantage in producing. A balance of trade surplus can have a hugely positive impact in strengthening the currency due to the flow of money into the economy (Penson et al. 2015). Trade agreements are made with the ambition of boosting exports and economic growth, but on the flip side they can often bring competition that can be damaging to domestic industries. Although Ireland can differentiate their product with the unique selling point of pasture grazing and 'sustainable' farming, the full economic cost of production is higher relative to the EU and international market. So that begs the question, does Ireland actually have a competitive advantage or are we surviving due to the protection of previous lack of international trade deals and financial supplements?

EU – Mercosur trade deal

The EU – Mercosur trade deal finally reached an

agreement in 2019 after 20 years of deliberations. It is the largest deal the EU has negotiated covering 773 million people and is set to reduce tariffs on EU imports of beef to 7.5 per cent for the first 99,000 T imported (European Commission, 2019A). This reduces the protection that the EU beef market was previously subject to and puts considerable pressure on Irish exports to continental Europe. What does this deal mean for the Irish beef sector? This deal has been labelled a sell-out of the Irish beef sector and Copa Cogeca, which represent EU farmers has commented that "agriculture has been the trade-off chapter to facilitate gains in other sectors" (Copa Cogeca, 2019). The prospect of a Brazilian steak selling in a French supermarket at 50 per cent less than the Irish equivalent is becoming a reality. Additionally, the carbon footprint of South American beef is higher often leading to deforestation, while Irish farmers are subject to Glas schemes hampering productivity.

How could the EU sell out the Irish beef sector like this? Given the sensitivity of the beef sector, the deal does include important safeguards to protect the interests of Irish farmers. All imported food products must comply with the EU's stringent food safety standards. Therefore beef imported must comply with demanding traceability, food safety, animal welfare, and environmental standards which will greatly add to production costs in Mercosur. The beef quotas will also be implemented over several years to prevent sudden market disturbances. In the event that the market comes under pressure, there will also be a support package to the value of 1 billion euro to assist farmers (European Commission, 2019A).

It would be unlikely with the cost of Irish beef production, that our sector could compete in any case if a free trade agreement was struck. The survival of the Irish beef industry would then depend upon the ability of the industry to differentiate themselves and instill a unique selling point that appealed to consumers over and above what their competitors can offer.

Within the EU market, the comparative advantage of Irish beef production is based on the lower cash costs of production that are a function of Ireland's largely grass-based production systems. Marketing of Irish beef may increasingly depend on this grass-based production system and its associated health and environmental benefits.

Beef aside, this deal will provide tangible opportunities to approximately 300 Irish companies and others who may now seek to export to Mercosur countries. The deal is due to cut EU duties on exports by € 4 billion a year for products such as skim milk powder, infant formula and cheese.

EU - US Trade Deal

The previous trade deal agreement permitted 45,000 tonnes quota of non-hormone treated beef into the EU from qualified suppliers which included the U.S. The new agreement established that 35,000 tonnes of this quota will now be allocated to the US phased over a 7-year period (European Commission, 2019B). The deal increases the value of EU imports from the U.S from 150 million to 420 million dollars. So why would this affect the Irish beef sector? US beef production is carried out in large scale feed lots. Corn, a low-cost commodity which is in abundance of supply in the US is mainly used for feeding livestock which incurs a low-cost production. In summary, the US produce a high-quality product at a low price which has the capability to undermine Irish beef prices. Donald Trump has commented about it being a good deal for "American farmers and EU consumers" (Lynch S, 2019). Even this comment suggests that the consumer surplus will increase, pulling prices down which will have a profound effect on the performance of Irish exports.

EU - Brexit negotiations

The UK is by far Ireland's single most important beef market accounting for 47 per cent of Irish beef exports valued at € 990 million in 2019 (Bord Bia, 2020). In a way, it is understandable, with the UK offering a large market with similar consumer preferences and behaviors. However, this reliance on the UK market left the Irish beef industry vulnerable while Brexit was on the horizon. Fortunately, the EU and UK avoided the worst-case scenario outcome of a 'No Deal' which would have incurred high tariff levels on Irish beef exports. Instead, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) was signed which avoided the imposition of any tariff barriers.

However, the TCA has led to many non-tariff barriers in the form of paperwork requirements. Furthermore,

the UK has also been utilized by Irish beef exporters in the past as a land bridge to continental Europe, which is now also subject to the paperwork requirements. Consequentially, this will reduce resources for businesses in value adding sections such as innovation and sustainability. On a more concerning note, the UK are now free to negotiate trade deals with third markets, which could lead to an increase in competition for Irish beef. Brexit has undoubtedly highlighted the over dependency Ireland has on the UK market. However, the population of the world will reach over 9 billion by 2050. This will open up opportunities for Irish beef exporters to diversify and seek potential new growth markets with the ultimate aim of reducing dependency on the UK market.

Conclusion

The future of the Irish beef industry has never been as uncertain, with an over reliance on single markets, new international trade deals have worried Irish farmers beyond their breakpoints. As a nation, we talk about international trade in a positive sense when we are talking about the volume of exports and the billions and billions of euro it brings into our economy. On the other hand, we reject the idea of international trade when it results in increased competition to our domestic industries such as beef. Truth be told, we cannot have it one way and not the other. Many have stated that the newly signed trade agreements will have a detrimental impact on the Irish beef industry. But then that's another question in itself. Why do we produce so much of something that we are not economically competitive at? International trade agreements made by the EU going forward must be balanced to protect domestic industries from unfair competition while also securing additional access in growth markets. And it is in fact these growth markets that might reintroduce profits into the industry, that have been sucked out. With the global population expected to reach 9 billion by the year 2050, an increase of 70 per cent food production will be required to feed the population. Most of this population increase will occur in developing countries which might provide Ireland with the opportunity to grow their international beef market which currently represents only 8 per cent (45,000t) of total production after a few years of successive growth (Bord Bia, 2020). Ireland has already been progressive in taking the first step. Having only been granted access to the Chinese market in 2018, the value of exports for 2019 reached 38.8 million euro (Bord Bia, 2020). On another optimistic note, there is a strong consumer trend towards sustainable production which might place the Irish beef sector in a strong position to take advantage of consumer needs. All in all, with the EU safeguards to fall back on, and potential new growth markets open for business, beef farmer can look forward to a steadier marketplace than exists at the moment.

*The above is an edited version of Niall's original essay.
References available on request*

MESSAGES:

- ▶ Aim for the May breeding targets, understand the ‘why’ and act quickly.
- ▶ “It is a no brainer: do the “Why Wait” and 32-day scan on whole herd.
- ▶ Use 1.5 to 2 AI straws per cow in your herd.
- ▶ Most farmers don’t manage the “grass wedge”. Do you?
- ▶ Two-thirds of your annual N must be applied before 21 May.

By Matt Ryan

BREEDING TARGETS & THE ‘WHY’

- ▶ This month is the driver of dairy farmers’ most important KPI, that is a 6-week calving rate of 90 per cent in 2022.
 - ▶ I heard a farmer at a recent virtual farm walk say... “the calving season went well.... We had 80 per cent calved in 6-week”. Is this good? At a loss of €8.22 for every 1 per cent below target, that represents a loss of €8,220 per 100 cow herd.
 - ▶ There are several markers/critical targets you must hit over the next 2 months to achieve that KPI.
- ▶ The following targets must be the goal and if not achieved you must address “Why”, otherwise, you are going to have a scattered calving pattern next year with late calvers and more cull cows:

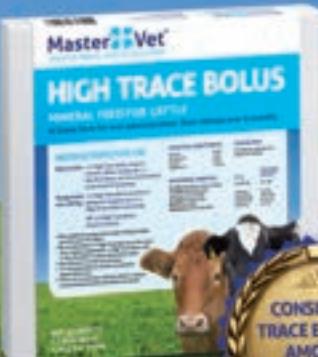
▶ Submission rate (3 weeks)	90%
▶ Non return rate (NRR) to 1st service (Cows)	70%
▶ Non return rate (NRR) to 1st service (Heifers)	75%
▶ Non-Detected-Oestrus (NDO)	10%
▶ Normal (18-24 day) return interval	65%
▶ Repeat AI (1-10 day) return interval	<10%
▶ Repeat AI (24+ days) return interval	<25%
▶ Scanned Pregnant at 32 days:(a) Cows	55%
(b) Heifers	65%
▶ Services per conception	1.7
▶ AI/Bull/Scanning/Drugs Costs	0.9 cents/litre
- ▶ You can’t measure these unless you keep good records:
 - ▶ Use the ICBF breeding chart and pocket notebook to record all breeding details on the ICBF site,
 - ▶ Use ICBF Herd Plus data from last year to establish where you are weak and use it this year to stay on top of problems arising.
 - ▶ Look at your recent ICBF reports to see if you can learn anything that will make this year’s breeding season more successful.
- ▶ Before I start ‘preaching’ I must bring a few research genetic facts to your attention:
 - ▶ The Fertility targets for B & W Cows = €110+
 - ▶ The Fertility targets for Jx Cows = €65+
 - ▶ If your herd is under these targets then:
 - » BCS will be 3.0 V 2.75.
 - » More endometritis (75% V 25%) at 6 weeks
 - » Lower cyclicity (85% V 20%) at 6 weeks,
 - » Weaker heats – 40% lower peak activity,
 - » Poorer conception rates to 1st service (33% V

- 56%)
- » The 6-week in-calf rate will be 41% V 72 % for fertile cows.
- » Therefore, don’t expect to make “a silver purse out of a sow’s ear”. If your herd is infertile you will have your breeding seasons’ ‘work cut out for you’.
- » Never-the-less you must work harder during the season.
- ▶ Poor submission rates can be due to many factors but many farmers miss 20-40% of cows that are in-heat and 30 per cent of the herd should come in heat every week (or 4.3 per cent of the herd per day) for first 3 weeks:
 - ▶ Heat lasts on average 8 hrs (range 2-18 hrs and 55 per cent of cows have heats that last less than 8 hours) and the cow in heat only stands for 2-3 seconds for a “standing mount”- therefore, the cows’ will only be seen in “standing heat” for 1-2 minutes for all of the 2-18-hour period.
 - » Difficult! Also, if the heat period is disturbed (collecting for milking, strangers, dogs, people, machinery nearby, etc.), she may not stand for heat any more. Such breaks occur in 30-40 per cent of cows.
 - » Late calving cows have shorter heats.
 - ▶ Lame cows, often refuse to be mounted, so it best not to put on AI list. The same goes for mastitis.
 - ▶ 10-15 per cent of cow show heat at night and may not show signs in the morning.
 - ▶ Heat may occur in 4-8 per cent of pregnant cows – insemination at that heat may cause abortion and delayed calving; hence, the need for good records.
 - ▶ Tail paint or whichever heat detection aid is a must routine on every farm and with 3 observations per day (before morning and evening milkings and 9pm) will pick up 90 per cent of in-heat cows.
 - ▶ For tail-paint to work well/easy-to-interpret it must only be 2 inches wide by 9 inches long from the tail head forward to highest point on back bone – all loose hair must be removed first.
 - ▶ Ensure cows are on an adequate plain of nutrition prior and during the breeding season.
- ▶ The non-return rate (NRR) should be 70 per cent or better; that means that in a 100-cow herd that 30 cows should have been submitted each week and only 9 cows repeating in week four. What is wrong if more repeating?
 - ▶ BCS was either too fat at calving or lost too much weight up to mating start date (MSD)- so energy intake could have been reduced,
 - ▶ Service day management:
 - » Poor storage of AI straws,
 - » Poor AI technician technique,
 - » Cows under stress on day due to feed or water shortage,
 - » Poor facilities for service; the ordinary cattle crush is not suitable for AI service.
 - » The best time to serve a cow is 12-24 hours after the onset of heat.
 - » The repeat window is 18-24 days.

- » If there is blood on the vulva, she is gone off heat and there is only a 7 per cent chance she will go in-calf if you serve her. Use that information to "pick" her up in 21 days time or PG her in 7 days' time to bring her on sooner.
- Minerals could be a problem (usually 4-5th in line of causes), particularly, Se, I, Cu, Co, and maybe P, Mn, or Mg.
- Non detected oestrous (NDO) should not be greater than 10%. That means that all cows bar 10 per cent should be mated in the first 3-weeks. Lower suggests you are not actively 'picking up cows' that are on-heat.
- 18-24 Day return interval; This must be over 70%, otherwise something wrong with your heat detection.
- Target less than 10 per cent (1 to 18 days) short repeat intervals. A high % repeat interval of less than 18 days suggests poor heat detection and that cows are being submitted who are not in heat.
- Target less than 25 per cent long repeat intervals (24+ days): A lot of intervals greater than 24 days suggests 'over cautious' heat detection and failure to AI cows that are on heat; but there could be embryo loss.
- Remember a missed heat will cost you €150 on your next year's profit. Many farmers are having 10+ missed heats per 100 cows. Good heat detection is the way to avoid that loss.
- Because nearly half the cows in the country are by stock bulls I suggest

that farmers with a low EBI herd should use all Beef AI and buy in good calves next spring or better still do a contract NOW with someone for them next spring.

- Could I strongly recommend to you that you PLAN to get by this year without a stock bull because?
 - They are dangerous around the place,
 - They can move from being fertile to being infertile quite frequently; thereby giving you too many April calvers.
 - They cost on average €800 – 1000 per year to get approximately 30-40 cows in calf very expensive!
- If you have a vasectomised bull, one per 20-30 cows, let him into the herd 5-6 weeks after start of mating date. Do it before that and he will be wrecked.



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DO "WHY WAIT" & SCAN AT 32 DAYS

- This programme involves bringing cows that are due to be mated on week 2 of the breeding season to week 1 and bringing cows due to be mated in week 3 of the breeding season to week 2. How?
- If you have been recording, and you should have been, pre mating start day (MSD) heats, then you will know: (1) the cows that came in heat from day minus 7 to day minus 14 and, (2) those that came during the period minus 1 to minus 7 days pre-MSD.
 - Group (1) cows should be PG'd on MSD
 - Group (2) cows should be PG'd seven days after MSD.
- Farmers are reluctant to use beef bulls because of longer gestation lengths,
 - A big loss of MS/cow and the possibility of the cow being culled next year because of late calving,
 - The "why wait", if used will be bringing cows into heat 11 days early and so will mitigate against longer gestation.
 - As well as this approach use beefy, low performing Friesians with very short gestations and easy calving stats.
- On the week cows are served put a

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2021 Basic Payment Scheme and Straw Incorporation Measure

Applications for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the submission for the Transfer of Entitlements and the Straw Incorporation Measure (SIM) must be made online via agfood.ie.

The Straw Incorporation Measure is a payment for chopping straw and incorporating it into the soil.

The closing date for submission of BPS, Transfer of Entitlements and SIM applications is Monday, May 17.

The Department's offices are closed to the public for the present.

Farmers, advisors and consultants can call our helpline at:
Direct Payments Helpdesk – Lo-call 0761 064420.

For more information, visit gov.ie/agriculture.

gov.ie/agriculture



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

different colour paint on all cows served that week.

- This allows you scan cows 39, 46 and 51 days after MSD for the cows served in each of the first 3 weeks of breeding.

- The benefits of this early scan are enormous;
 - » More accurate prediction of data of calving,
 - » Cows that are not in calf can be managed under Vet advice.
 - » False pregnancies are identified,
 - » Weak pregnancies are identified.
 - » With this information planning and remedial action can be undertaken.
- A very good scanner is worth his weight in gold to you for

this task.

- At a recent virtual farm walk, a farmer who did both the "why wait" and the early scan last year said... "It is a no brainer decision!

MANAGE THE GRASS WEDGE!

- The grass wedge drives summer grazing management and I think many farmers who are measuring are not making decisions to save on meal feeding while at same time maximising milk solids (MS) and grass utilised per hectare. This statement is meant challenge you – "If the cap fits, wear it".
- Quality grass is grass that is consistently over 80 per cent DMD and is necessary to maximise MS.
- The quality of grazed grass is totally dependent on grazing grass that is the correct pre grazing

cover (PGC) for each individual farmer's grazing stocking rate.

- Post grazing height, 3.5 – 4.0cms, is another key driver of:

- Grass quality for next grazing and subsequent summer grazing,
- The amount of grass utilised per hectare,
 - » Because every 1 cm of grass remaining on a field when cows leave the paddock is 200 kgs/ha of grass DM.
 - » If you leave that after you for each of the six (6) summer grazing's you have LOST 1.2 tons of dry matter per hectare,
 - » Why? Because there none of this left-over grass is available for the next grazing
- Tiller density; hence, ground cover to prevent poaching,

- In my opinion, most farmers 'give' cows too many grazing hectares to their cows during late-April to mid-June:

- The target MUST be 4.5 – 4.7 cows per hectare,
- I shouldn't need to spell out the consequence for you, but I will:
 - » Low stocking rates means lower quality grass, means more meals to produce expected MS yields.
 - » Less grass grown,
 - » More topping or bailing.

- The following calculation drives your PGC:

- For a stocking rate (SR) of 4.5 cows/Ha, with an allowance of 18kgs DM/cow/day and a 21-day rotation and a residual of 50kg DM this is how you calculate PGC.

$$\text{SR} \times \text{Allowance} \times \text{Rotation} + \text{Residual} = 4.5 \times 18 \times 21 + 50 = 1,750 \text{ kg DM/Ha.}$$

- Insert your own planned SR, intake per cow (18kgs required by a reasonably sized cow to produce 2kgsMS/day), rotation length and residuals.

- Before making decisions to bale, put in more meal etc you must also watch your average farm covers (AFC). The target figure is 150 – 200 kg DM/cow. For example, at a stocking rate of 4.5 cows/Ha, the

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target AFC, with good grazing management, would be:

$$\text{Stocking Rate} \times 170 = 4.5 \times 170 = 765 \text{ kg DM/Ha.}$$

- If your PGC is greater than 1750 and your AFC is greater than 800 then is very likely you will need to cut out 1-2 paddocks immediately for silage.
- If both figures are under these targets, then you will either have to feed some meal for a short period or graze some silage ground.

64% OF NITROGEN USED BY 31 MAY

- Know how much Nitrogen you are allowed use and then spread accordingly throughout the year.
 - You won't grow enough grass if you don't have 64 per cent on your year's nitrogen allowance used by the end of May and 76 per cent used by mid June,
- For most highly stocked farms where they are allowed to use 226 units/acre they should have 144 units applied by mid May and 172 before mid June.
- This is the month to use Nitrogen.
 - Growth rates and responses are best - 1kgN will grow 30 kg DM grass,
 - Will enable you get most of your winter feed in the 1st cut - cheapest by far.
 - You must use Nitrogen appropriate for your stocking rate,
 - If you use too much you will have none left for the remainder of the year and be in trouble with the Nitrate Directive.
 - Spread Nitrogen 3-4 times per week, never at weekends, by spreading N on ungrazed paddocks 3 days before cows are due to graze them.
 - Be careful that large quantities on N are not spilled on the ground on headlands as cows will be poisoned.
 - On light soils deficient in Sulphur, you will grow more grass (10-50 per cent based on Research).
 - With no restriction in Sulphur use, you must use 20-25 units of
 - Sulphur from now to the end of season.
 - If using Sulphur on copper deficient or molybdenum antagonised deficiency, make sure to give animals a copper bolus.
 - Don't use sulphur if your farm doesn't respond to it.

GRAZING TIPS

- Practice 24, 36 or 48-hour grazing areas for cows (forget about strip grazing or 12-hour blocks). This results in cows having too small an area from which to get their feed.
 - This results in the 'bully' cows chastising the timid cows with the result the latter have to stop grazing and move away, thus reducing their grazing time. Heifers and shy feeders suffer/stressed due to this bullying.
 - High performing cows also suffer because they have to eat more grass to produce the extra milk.
 - These cows will be grazing late in the afternoon while other lower yielding cows will be lying down (observe this yourself).



Unlocking Silage Potential

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

Silage harvesting is a major cost on Irish farms, therefore it is most important that the desired level of quality is achieved.

Dry matter digestibility (DMD) is the key factor influencing silage feed value and animal performance. The higher the DMD of a grass silage, the more efficiently animals will use it, leading to greater milk or meat production. To make high DMD silage, the grass sward must contain a high leaf: stem ratio. DMD is also linked to harvest date, with research showing that a crop harvested on June 2nd versus a harvest date of May 20th resulted in a DMD drop of as much as 5%.

Growth stage at harvest and DMD relationship

Source: Teagasc



>75%	70-75%	60-70%	<65%
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Weather will be the main dictating factor with harvesting, however, ensure grass is cut before the seed heading stage and sugar levels are above 3% to achieve best results. Avoid over wilting your crop; if silage is too dry going into the pit, it increases the risk of aerobic spoilage and encourages secondary fermentation once the face is exposed over the winter (heating pit-face). Target 25% dry matter for pit silage and 30/35% dry matter for baled silage.

Silage is best made when enough time has passed since fertiliser was applied and the nitrate levels in the grass are low (<800ppm). Nitrogen (N) levels in grass should be tested if nitrates are a concern pre-mowing. Wilting to a dry matter >28% will help overcome the effects of high N.

Using a silage additive

The inclusion of a proven silage additive will significantly help improve the process of fermentation and secure as much quality as possible. Using a high-quality additive, like Agritech's GrasZyme Sugarboost, has proven to reduce silage waste, increase silage feed-out quality, and subsequently increase animal performance in the form of increased intakes and production (e.g. increased milk protein, milk volume or average daily gain).

For further information, contact your local Agritech sales advisor or visit www.agritech.ie.



www.agritech.ie

- » Unfortunately, for the high yielding cows who are grazing late in the afternoon, grass cover will be low. Consequently, bite size is small and, intake is reduced by 1-2 Kgs DM, as well as the DMD will be 1-2% lower due to more stem – the result; lower milk yields and loss of weight.
- Post grazing heights must be measured, using a plate meter, so as to be sure you are grazing down to 3-5 to 4 cms.
 - If, after any grazing, there is grass remaining in paddock (1cm =200kgsDM/ha), cows should be “asked” to go back out and “clean it out”.
 - This is best done by letting cows straight out of the parlour; bullies and dominant cows will be first and will have it cleaned by the time the shy feeders arrive. After 1-2 hours they should be moved to the “new paddock”
- Cows should enter a fresh paddock in the evening (not after mornings milking) because the grass will have a lot higher sugars – could result in 1-2 litres more milk.
- Topping must be carried out when the ‘tall grass’ areas greater than 25 per cent of the paddock area; but if this is happening frequently it means you are under-grazing paddocks. If the tall grass area is 25 per cent in May, it will be 35 per cent to 40 per cent of the paddock in June/July because of the fresh dung deposited during this grazing. Tall grass is grass around dung pads and other under grazed areas. It will be getting nitrogen and the grass not eaten – imagine the financial loss from this.
- New Zealand experimental work has shown that topping is preferable to pre-mowing.

BITS AND PIECES

- If you need to know the potential of your cows' milk yield for this year, multiply your May peak per cow per day by 220.
 - Example, if a cow peaks at 25litres/day in May, then her expected yield per cow per year will be 5500litres/year
 - Or if you sell 2.0 kgs MS/cow/day, multiply by 250 and you will know you will sell 500 kg MS/cow this year.
 - Unfortunately most farmers are not achieving these multiplication factors so use your own based on last year.

- Cut 1st cut silage in two lots:
 - Fields closed 6 – 8 weeks should be cut late May.
 - Late closed (light covers) fields should be cut 10-15 June.
 - This procedure should ensure an even arrival of aftergrass and less chance of shortages in June -July.
 - To maximise the area cut for 1st cut silage and minimise the amount of surplus round bales off milking platform you must stock the cows at 4.5 cows/ha on the grazing area during this period.
- The following ‘labour saving’ suggestions may help to make your life easier:
 - Milk every 16:8 or near it instead of 12:12 milking intervals as there is no loss of milk, and this enables you finish at 6.00 to 6.30pm.
 - If really working long hours and always ‘coming from behind’, then you should use contractors for fertiliser spreading, spreading slurry, cutting silage, fencing, and milking (FRS) cows occasionally,
- Postpone weaning late calves off milk substitute until the calf is at least 110 kgs. weight
- Strong calves can now be weaned off meal.
- Animal health preventative care:
 - Treat calves for black leg, hoose (be on lookout for 1st calf coughing) and stomach worms at little later.
 - Young cows with low immunity may need a hoose/worm dose,
 - If Iodine or copper are an issue on your farm consider a suitable bolus now,
 - It is still vital to take care to prevent grass tetany,
 - Lameness is a debilitating problem, affecting milk yield, fertility and body condition – if widespread in your herd examine the possible causes, get veterinary help and treat accordingly, possibly keeping in a paddock near the yard,
 - BCS cows now again in mid-month so that fertility or milk yield are not adversely affected.
 - Stay on top of mastitis issues by constantly monitoring SCC and occasionally doing a CMT test if not milk recording. It is not to late to start milk recording – essential information you will need when restricted antibiotic use comes into play.

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Claas Axion 960 Cemos – Sustainable Tractor of the Year 2021

An international jury of 26 specialist journalists selected the Claas Axion 960 Cemos as their Sustainable Tractor of the Year 2021. For Claas, the award underlines the relevance and uniqueness of the Cemos for Tractors dialog system.

Every year a jury of 26 agricultural journalists from 25 countries presents the Tractor of the Year Awards. Normally, the winners are awarded alternately every year at EIMA or Agritechnica. This year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the award ceremony took place virtually for the first time and was streamed as a live broadcast. As the winner in the 'Sustainable Tractor of the Year 2021' category, the Claas Axion 960 Cemos was able to prevail against 17 other finalists. This is the second time the "Sustainable TotY" has been awarded and is intended to honor tractors that stand out due to their particularly sustainable technology.

The jury commented: "With the Claas AXION 960, thanks to CEMOS system, a big step towards a more sustainable farming has been done. All the technology available on this tractor is easy to use as never before. The optimization of all the technology and all the electronics, last but not least the optimization of tyre pressure, allows to this

tractor a remarkable fuel saving and a much more efficient performance on field and in any working condition."

Claas introduced the latest Stage V Axion 900 large tractor series in September 2020. A new option on these models is the ability to optionally equip or retrofit them with a Claas CTIC tyre inflation system and the self-learning Cemos for tractors dialog system. This recently received the "DLG approved" label for achieving fuel savings of up to 16.8 per cent fuel savings and a 16.3 per cent increase in productivity when cultivating (DLG test report 7096). "We are pleased that the AXION 960 with CEMOS on board was able to convince the critical jury with a package of arguments," summarizes Christian Radons, member of the CLAAS Executive Board and responsible for sales and service. "On our most powerful standard tractor, we not only combine comfort with first-class power transmission, but also with excellent overall performance. The unique CEMOS for tractors system has proven to significantly increase efficiency on top of the pure effects of ballasting and tyre pressure. This not only benefits farmers and contractors in terms of time and cost pressure, but also the environment in many ways. Fuel consumption, CO₂ emissions and soil compaction are only three aspects that



are positively influenced by CEMOS for tractors from a sustainability perspective. In addition, the integrated plough assistant also helps with achieving the ideal settings for ploughs from eight leading manufacturers."

The Claas Axion 900 large tractors series cover a range from 325 to 445 hp maximum engine power and comply with emission level Stage V. Cemos for tractors can be supplied ex works on the Axion 900 CMATIC, Axion 800 CMATIC and Arion 500/600 CMATIC with CEBIS Touch, and can also be retrofitted to these tractor ranges manufactured since product year 2018. Using the online calculator at <https://www.claas.co.uk/products/technologies/cemos-2020/calculator>, interested farmers and contractors can individually calculate the potential savings and CO₂ savings for their business. According to the company, as part of the "DLG approved" field test (DLG test report 7096), Cemos for tractors was able to reduce fuel consumption for all test drivers compared to their own individual settings and at the same time increase the area output for 80 per cent of the drivers - thus proving that it helps make the best drivers even better. The latest generation of Claas CTIC tyre inflation systems is available for all Axion tractors.



Bring on the summer

For our first issue of summer 2021, we are greeted with a air of positive winds and warm sunshine; shoots of growth bursting and blowing through the sheds, parlours and tillage fields of our farms and of the wider agri-industry across the country. It is a positive time for

the Irish agricultural industry. There have been no shows or events in the farming circle for over 15 months now, but machinery dealers are busy, merchants are busy, manufacturers are reporting good order books and prices are moving upwards across all main sectors of agriculture. Now, down to business. The new targets outlined for the Agri Food Strategy 2030 will require a herd reduction of 400,000 cattle; a reduction in fertiliser by 55,000 tons; a target of 10 per cent of land being set aside for biodiversity, which would equate to an average of 8 acres being converted on an average size farm. Organic farming models are set double, if not treble, under the new proposals. There are ongoing discussions between relevant government departments and farming organisations as we speak but there is a lot of discontent amongst farmers. The issues will have to be teased out soon as the clock is ticking on this thorny subject.

On the beef front, factories and marts are hungry for cattle trade in the south and north is remaining strong. With the summer season kicking in, retailers are expecting an increase in demand. Both here and in the UK beef prices are on the up for the moment. Prices quoted as we go to press are 4.10 to 4.15 per /kg base price and there is a shortage of finished cattle at the moment this is seeing prices paid up a further 10 cent /kg this week.

As we go to press there has also been a lift on the base price of milk across most producers – good news for the dairy farmer as base price is now running at approx 33.6 cent /l.

Sheep farmers are starting to reinvest in the industry as prices remain strong on the back of demand. A lot of work goes in to sheep production and sheep farmers are starting to get rewarded for their efforts. Factories are trying to tighten prices but marts are reporting strong trade. In Northern Ireland the trade has eased somewhat, but in the Republic the industry is remaining strong.

On the tillage front, that dirty word 'Blackgrass' is showing its ugly head again: farmers are asked to check crops regularly and look at their rotation plans to curb this before it becomes a nationwide problem.

Early reports from the tillage industry are showing that many growers are not buying in to the proposed government backed plan to chop and plough in straw. Some tillage farmers have good markets for straw from both mushroom producers and farmers. I can't see them giving this revenue stream up easily. The conversation rolls on. Grain prices for forward selling at the moment is €215/t for wheat, €205/t for barley and €480/t for rape.

Tractor sales are up 16 per cent year-on-year here, with the UK market up 12.7 per cent year-on-year. General machinery trade remains strong in both countries, with the global price of steel and inputs rising. It could be very wise for farmers and contractors to consider making that purchase this year before prices rise next year.

Until next month, farm wisely and farm safely and remember to support your local machinery dealer.

Valtra design once again earns international recognition

The Valtra G135 has received the Red Dot Design Award 2021 in the Red Dot: Product Design award series. This marks already the sixth Red Dot award in Valtra's history and demonstrates how Valtra's success story continues with the latest, fifth, product generation of tractors. "The Red Dot Design Award presented to the new G Series is certainly encouraging, especially since this is Valtra's first product in a completely new generation of tractors and even in what could be considered a new product segment. The G Series is a popular tractor that has already been named Tractor of The Year, which suggests that we are indeed doing things right. Thanks for the award also go to the entire Valtra team, as it takes the seamless collaboration of hundreds of people to make such a successful product," says Valtra's chief designer Kimmo Wihinen.

It takes a particularly high-quality product to win the Red Dot Design Award, which takes into consideration the quality of both design and planning, as well as innovations. The Valtra G Series was praised for its exceptional quality in all these areas. "Winning the Red Dot Design Award is also the best possible way to kick off Valtra's 70th anniversary. It says a lot that, even with such an impressive history behind us, our eyes are still set firmly on the future. In fact, we will



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see several other interesting new products already this year!" Wihinen reveals.

The Valtra G Series was unveiled in August 2020 and elected Tractor of the Year 2021. The Valtra G Series is a small giant, a compact multipurpose tractor that can be operated comfortably while performing tasks effortlessly. The G Series combines a compact size with agility and a modern design. The G Series is also the perfect tractor for front-loader tasks. Work is facilitated by easy and unobstructed access to the cab via self-cleaning steps, as well as a comfortable and spacious cab for two people with excellent visibility in all directions, including upwards, thanks to a combined glass area of 5.7 square metres. The Valtra G Series cab also features other award-winning design in the form of the Valtra SmartTouch armrest, which has won the Red Dot Design Award in 2017.

The history of the Red Dot Design Award stretches back 60 years. It is one of the most prestigious design competitions in the world. This year, a record number of companies and design studios from around 60 countries worldwide took part in the competition.

Prestigious Red Dot: Product Design 2021 Award for Massey Ferguson MF 8S Series tractors

Massey Ferguson, a worldwide brand of AGCO, has announced that it is honoured to receive a Red Dot Award: Product Design 2021 for Product design, in the commercial vehicle category, for the innovative MF 8 S Series of tractors. This latest accolade follows the MF 8S.265 Dyna E-Power Exclusive winning the prestigious Tractor of the Year 2021 as well as Best Global Digital launch 2020.

An international jury selected the MF 8S from thousands of entries from more than 60 countries for the Red Dot Award: Product Design 2021 Award, which is only presented to products that feature outstanding design. "We are honoured the MF 8S has been chosen to receive this special award," says Thierry Lhotte, Vice President & Managing Director Massey Ferguson, Europe & Middle East. "With the MF 8S Series, we are defining a new era in tractor design, which the jury has distinguished with the Red Dot: Product Design 2021 Award.

"Developed for farmers by farmers, following seven years of thorough testing and extensive customer consultation, the MF 8S Series combines radical designs with a practical purpose. While equipped to a superb specification, it also introduces a completely new and enhanced user experience," adds Mr Lhotte.

"The MF 8S launch was just the first milestone of our fully rejuvenated tractor range offensive. We are thrilled to have received such industry leading awards for the MF 8S together with farmers' recognition through their choice for their new tractor. This is just the beginning. After the MF 8S and the MF 5S launches in 2020 we are now looking forward for new launches to come by the end of the year 2021, meeting farmers' demand for straightforward and dependable smart and connected machines," adds Francesco Murro, Director Marketing, Massey Ferguson Europe & Middle East. The distinctive Protect-U design



with its 24cm gap between the cab and the engine installation, sets the MF 8S Series apart from all other tractors. As well as reducing heat, noise and vibrations being transmitted to the cab, the unique encapsulated engine position improves cooling and performance. Completely new, the MF 8S Series introduces novel, innovative designs in every area – engine, cab, transmissions and driveline as well as new controls and connectivity. Equipped to a high standard, it comes with different specification packages. There is a choice of four models from 205hp to 265hp, all offering 20hp of extra power with Engine Power Management.

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Tractor testing

There is a saying that you get wiser as you grow older but some reading this article may question that. However, in talking to agricultural contractors and farmers I was surprised that what I am about to say was not shot down in flames. Almost all were resigned to the fact that it will happen in the not too distant future, so we might as well get used to it. What am I talking about? Testing of tractors.

I have been involved in farm safety for over 35 years and I've come to the conclusion that tractors and certain farm machinery should be subjected to a basic form of testing to ensure they are safe to use. Before dismissing the idea and listing all the downsides, I hope my many friends in agriculture will take a deep breath and acknowledge the benefits testing would bring, particularly in reducing serious injuries and fatalities and the devastation such accidents bring to farming families whose loved ones are killed or suffer life-changing injuries.

As part of the terms of insurance, the insurance industry monitors closely and requires sight of certification for machinery used on building sites. Certain farm machinery is also required to have a test certificate, but to my knowledge this is not monitored quite so closely as construction machinery.

Some arguments I've heard against testing:

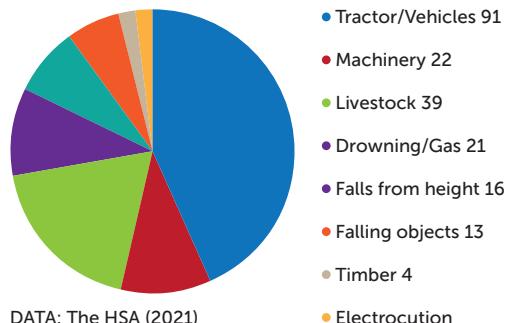
- It would be impossible to test all tractors and machinery: Not so, testing can be phased in the same way as NCTs for cars. We have enough machinery dealers in every town that can be authorized to carry out tests.
- A test is only as good as the day it is done: True but a test also highlights areas of the machine that should be checked regularly and those that require immediate action. If this were a valid argument then car NCTs and

testing of construction and haulage machinery would not work but of course it does.

- It will cost too much: There are two answers to this; Firstly, I believe there should be a grant to cover the cost of testing. Secondly, if that's not practical, testing is a fully tax allowable expense. Either way there is no cost to the owner.

I know some will reject the idea of any form of testing on agricultural machinery, but I ask them to consider the devastation and high financial cost facing families when they lose a loved one, which far outweighs the cost of testing. We must also remember that the majority of farm machinery travels, at some time, on the public highway, putting the public at risk. This would not be allowed in any other industry. Most people would be hard pressed to find a solid, logical or rational reason to oppose testing and if my contribution this month does nothing other than start a debate on testing, it will be worth all the flack I will get for discussing what is in effect a 'no go' area.

Main causes of death in agriculture and forestry (2011-2020) Total=210



McGinty Tractors takes on Strautmann

IAM Agricultural Machinery has announced the appointment of McGinty Tractors as Strautmann agents. McGinty Tractors was established in the 1970s and has been built up to become one of the leading Tractor and Farm machinery suppliers in the Northwest of Ireland. Based just outside Donegal Town, the dealership has gained a wealth of experience over the past few years and enjoys an excellent reputation.

Commenting on the announcement, Pat Kenny, IAM Agricultural Machinery, said: "We are delighted that McGinty Tractors have decided to take on the Strautmann Franchise. They have an excellent reputation for supporting customers and they are ideally positioned to grow the Strautmann Brand. IAM Agricultural Machinery Ltd is one of the longest established and most recognised importers & distributors of leading brands of agricultural machinery. With over 60 years' experience in agriculture, we are in the prime position to offer farmers and contractors the most extensive range of farm machinery and equipment to match their ever-changing needs."



Rory and Derek McGinty

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Josh Collins, AXION 920, 2x AXION 830, ARION 640, 3x ARION 630

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New Merlo Turbofarmer arrives

As Italian-made Merlo telehandlers continue to gain in market appeal, yet another new model has arrived on the market here, this time a top-of-the-line TF65.9T-170-HF Turbofarmer variant. Said by Denis McGrath, general manager of Merlo distributors, McHale Plant Sales to be 'the best choice in every field', the new, more powerful, more highly-equipped TF 65.9 is a unit equally at home on the farm, in the grain store or as part of a farm contractor's fleet as it will be in a construction or industrial setting. Attired in its familiar Merlo-green livery, the new, high capacity TF65.9T-170-HF range comprises three model variants. Beginning with the TF65.9 unit, it includes a TF65.9TCS-170-HF and range-topping TF65.9TCS-170 CVTRONIC-HF choice. All powered by a Stage V compliant 4.5-litre, 4-cylinder, 125 kW- 170 hp turbo diesel engine with DPF and SCR system, attributes include a maximum lifting capacity of 6,500 kg, a maximum lifting height of 8.8m, and a top speed of 40 km/h. Other features include hydrostatic transmission, EPD electronic control, load sensing hydraulics, transversal levelling, and a spacious 1,010mm wide FOPS and ROPS-certified modular cab with best-in-class visibility. Underlining its multi-use versatility, the TF65.9 can be equipped with fork lifts, work cage, materials grab and bale clamps, loader bucket, crane hook and cables and other boom attachments alongside down-to-earth cleaning brushes, snow blade, and suchlike. Compact dimensions increase the new unit's manoeuvrability while two front and two rear cab-mounted halogen-type work lights add to its versatility. Other features setting it apart are its electronic joystick control with capacity sensor and its ASCS safety system. On a 10-inch colour screen, operators can access a range of key data: items such as load and stability, the geometric limits of machine use, speed and



adjustment of hydraulic settings, and information on the amount of loads handled is recorded and stored – updated in real time, according to operating conditions. Safety-wise, an integrated safety system controls operating parameters while a 'load control' system automatically detects the attachment being used and configures the machine's boom extension and angle and other control variants accordingly.

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Kubota introduces EU Stage V compliant M4 and M5 tractors

Kubota (UK) Ltd has launched the M5002 and M4003 series tractor ranges, with several upgrades over their predecessors, the M5001 and M4002. Introduced to meet EU Stage V emissions compliance, these updated models include the 66hp M4063, the 74hp M4073, the 96hp M5092 and the 115hp M5112. Where the M4063 can be specified in open-station format with ROPS frame or equipped with a fully-glazed safety cab, the remaining models are only available with a fully glazed safety cab. "The M4003 is the smallest model in the M-series tractor range, though it packs a considerable punch," says Henry Myatt, Kubota product manager for M-series tractors. "Both the M4 and M5 are great solutions for those seeking lightweight, yet powerful tractors for use in many applications, including fruit and vegetable production, or for mixed farms for example. And when equipped with turf tyres, both are suited to amenity and sports field use, helped by a high power to weight ratio," he says. "Without a cab, the M4 weighs just 2,670kg, while the

M5 weighs 3,500kg." Power for the M4 comes from a 3.3-litre, four-cylinder engine. It meets EU Stage V emissions using a diesel particulate filter (DPF) combined with a diesel oxidation catalyst (DOC) in a single cannister. The after-treatment package has been integrated beneath the bonnet, delivering low emissions without compromising on visibility to the front and sides of the tractor. While the engine benefits from 500-hour oil change intervals, the DPF comes with a 6,000-hour cleaning interval – twice that of its predecessor, contributing to lower cost of ownership. DPF regeneration now occurs using lower engine rpm, typically 1,100rpm instead of 2,000rpm. The M4's gearbox uses six synchronised speeds in three ranges, creating an 18x18 transmission. With the addition of a Hi-Lo powersplit, this transmission is also available as a 36x36 on the larger M4073 model. All models benefit from an overdrive gear, which delivers a 40kph road speed at 1,945 engine rpm. Cabbed models benefit from the Hi-Lo and declutch



button located on the gear lever. The more powerful M5 version uses a diesel particulate filter (DPF), diesel oxidation catalyst (DOC) and selective catalytic reduction (SCR) for exhaust after-treatment for its 3.8-litre, four-cylinder engine, to comfortably achieve Stage V emissions regulations. It too boasts an extended interval of 6,000 hours for DPF servicing, up from 3,000 hours, with regeneration achieved at lower operating revs, thanks to improved filter performance. Maximum power is 96hp for the M5092 and 115hp for the M5112.

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Enterprise Ireland's Innovation Arena Awards competition in partnership with the NPA – entries open



Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Leo Varadkar TD has officially opened the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Arena Awards 2021, in partnership with the National Ploughing Association (NPA).

Innovators and entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector are invited to enter their pioneering agri-related products and services for consideration to the annual awards competition which will continue online for a second year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Last year's competition attracted more than 60 entries with the overall award going to Malone Farm Machinery in Co. Mayo. The company's winning entry was a 16-bale trailer called 'The Malone Express'. The best overall start-up award went to lamus Technologies, an AI and robotics company based in NovaUCD Dublin. Its winning entry was 'Gallus', an autonomous robot for gathering data from chickens designed for the poultry industry. The 12 award categories include best agri-technology start-up, best agri-engineering established company, young innovator of the year, farm safety and sustainable agriculture. The best start-up and overall winner of the Innovation Arena Awards will be eligible to win up to €5,000 each.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar said: "This is a great opportunity for any Irish company with a bright idea in the agriculture or food production space. New technology and innovation is shaping modern farming for the next generation making it more productive, safer and more sustainable."

Mark Christal, Manager, Regions and Entrepreneurship, Enterprise Ireland added, "Despite the many challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the quality of the entries to last year's virtual Innovation Arena Awards showed that innovative and entrepreneurial activity is unabated in towns and villages all

over Ireland.

"Every year, the awards showcase Ireland's valuable contribution to farming and technology on a global level. Our world leading education and research through an established network of Universities and Research Centres allows us to prioritise the development of new agri-innovations to address climate change and sustainability in farming practices. Irish companies are playing their part in enhancing agricultural efficiency while helping to protect the environment for years to come – we look forward to seeing some of that work highlighted in this year's online Innovation Arena Awards."

NPA Managing Director, Anna May McHugh said: "Innovation has been at the heart of the National Ploughing Championships since its inception 90 years ago in 1931, predominately as it has evolved and grown over the years. Throughout the past year due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, innovation in business has never been more important and thoroughly vital, as companies have had to adapt quickly to an ever-changing and unknown economic climate and marketplace. As a result this year's Innovation Arena awards are particularly significant, with such a great prize fund on offer I would strongly encourage Irish agriculture companies to enter, as previous winners have gone on to have major success in business both in Ireland and internationally."

Innovators from the following industry sectors are encouraged to enter: dairy and dry-stock farming, horticulture, information and communication technology, cloud and mobile based software, animal health and genetics, water and waste management, environment and cleantech, animal and farm management, farm safety and leading research. To enter, visit www.enterprise-ireland.com. Closing date for entries is Wednesday, 30 June 2021.



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Safety while working with chemical sprays

Due to their very nature, chemical spray exposure can result in serious health effects including as cancer, birth defects, burns, skin rashes, and lung, liver or kidney disease. **Ciaran Roche**, FBD's Risk Manager FBD Insurance, outlines the risks.

Chemicals pose a risk by different routes including inhalation, ingestion and absorption. The risk posed by the chemical depends on its chemical properties, particularly its toxicity. Chemicals are at their most dangerous when in concentrated form. It is imperative that you have the necessary safety controls in place to keep you, your family and the environment safe.

We explore the correct procedures to follow to ensure that no one is put at risk through misuse or incorrect handling procedures.

Training and Spraying

Chemical sprays should only be handled or sprayed by competent and trained individuals. Only a registered professional user can apply pesticides authorised for professional use. For further information see www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie. Mandatory Certificate of Competency Training courses in pesticide operation, to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) standard, are available from several approved training providers.

Before handling, using or spraying any chemical always read the instructions, safety label and ensure that all controls recommended by the manufacturer in the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) are followed. Ensure that the sprayer is tested in accordance with regulations.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Absorption of sprays occurs mainly through the skin, lungs and mouth. With this in mind it is imperative that the PPE prescribed in the chemical safety data sheet is worn. PPE must be fit for use, fit the worker properly, and be CE marked.

Examples of PPE include: Disposable rubber gloves; Disposable chemical suit/overalls; Eye protection; Facemask/shield; Wellington boots

Storage

All chemical should be kept out of the reach of children and should be stored in a locked chemical store. The



chemical store should be clearly identified and have appropriate warning signage erected. The store should also be well ventilated and bunded. All chemical bottles and containers should be clearly marked and labelled. The store must be located away from areas where people or animals are housed and away from water sources, wells, and canals.

Transportation

Sprays should be transported in well-sealed and labelled containers. They should not be transported in the same vehicle with items such as agricultural produce. Vehicles transporting sprays should carry prominently displayed warning notices.

Disposal of materials

Never pour the remaining sprays into rivers, pools or drinking-water sources. The rinsing water should be collected and carefully contained or disposed of properly at disposal sites. Decontaminate containers where possible. For glass, plastic or metal containers this can be achieved by triple rinsing, i.e. part-filling the empty container with water three times and emptying into a bucket or sprayer for the next application.

Key Safety Tips

1. Always read the safety label and safety data sheet (SDS);
2. Always keep chemicals in original marked containers;
3. Always follow the recommended safety controls;
4. Always use the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
5. Always store chemicals in a designated and locked store
6. Wash your hands regularly and always before eating, drinking or smoking. Should you come in any direct contact with a spray, wash off immediately with soap and water.

In the event of coming into contact with sprays and you are experiencing symptoms of poisoning, medical advice must be sought immediately.



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Interactive Milk Price Tracker launched

By the time you read this article, ICMSA will have launched the first 'interactive' monthly milk price comparison tool that will allow dairy farmers to input their individual milk volumes, constituents and quality results and see – at the touch of a button – what they would have been paid for the same supply by every other milk processor in Ireland. The facility, available to all on the www.icmsa.ie website, will allow a degree of transparency and comparison on an individual basis and it is completely unique having undergone extensive preparation and testing. The system will be live from 27 April and, for the first time, farmers around the country will be able to see exactly what other processors would have paid them for their milk on a monthly or yearly basis. The term 'game-changer' is often over-used, but there was no other way of representing the power that the ICMSA Interactive Milk Price Tracker now gave individual dairy farmers. For decades, if not generations, farmers have questioned the relative performance of their milk processor and while various comparisons were made using different methodologies, an individual



Pat McCormack
President, ICMSA

and penalties that can play such a significant role in the final milk price a farmer can receive, I am happy to confirm that ICMSA Interactive Milk Price Tracker takes account of all bonuses and penalties. As and from 27 April, every Irish milk supplier can go on to www.icmsa.ie and for free use the Interactive Tracker to establish exactly what they would

have received in payment for their exact milk supply from any of the processors operating in the country. As of now, the ICMSA Tracker allows a farmer to input his or her data for 2020 and get direct comparison for all of last year, while a similar capacity for the first months of 2021 will be available shortly and every month thereafter. Milk price is central to dairy farmers' incomes and the performance of your processor is decisive in this regard. Information is power and that nowhere as true as it is in respects of what farmers get for their milk and from whom. We've been analysing this for quite a long time and came to the realisation that just compiling a sort of league table or aggregate/average of what the processors were paying per litre was no longer sufficient. That's why we have moved way past that and can now offer anyone a bespoke calculator that will

"Farmers can now track and map their milk processor's performance over any given period and compare it to other processors."

farmer was never in a position to compare their actual milk volumes, constituents and quality results on an individual basis and see what they would have received from another Co-op.

That precise individual comparison is now available at the touch of a button. Farmers can now track and map their milk processor's performance over any given period and compare it to other processors. The capacity for individual farmer comparison on a like-for-like basis is now there for every milk supplier in Ireland. It's a very significant tool for the farmers and a very significant achievement for ICMSA, one in which we invested time and effort. The work and software engineering involved was protracted and complex, particularly around the incorporation into the Interactive Tracker of the bonuses

allow them to put their own data in and get their own prices out.

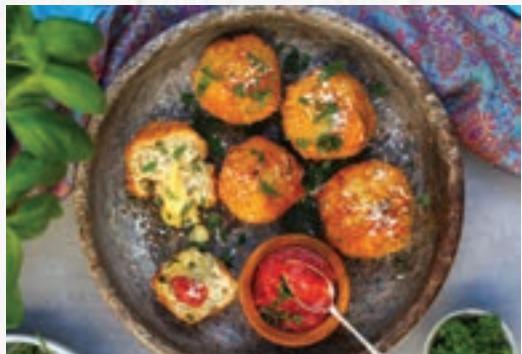
A farmer in Inishowen in Donegal will now be able to see what he would be getting for his exact milk supply – specific butterfat, specific protein, specific lactose, specific volume, specific day – if he was farming in Inniscarra in Cork and supplying a processor down there. And vice versa. What processors are paying for their milk has been made public and in a way that allows direct instant comparison in the most technically advanced way currently possible. We expect that farmers will be using this Interactive Milk Price Tracker and bringing 'real time' information to their interactions with their processors. And we're very proud of the work we did in giving farmers this tool.

HOME COMFORTS

FOOD WRITERS PATRICK HANLON AND RUSSELL ALFORD – AKA GASTROGAYS – RECENTLY WENT ON THE LOOKOUT FOR IRELAND'S MOST COMFORTING CHEESE RECIPES, TO FIND OUT WHAT'S COOKING, MELTING, AND BUBBLING IN HOMES ACROSS IRELAND. THE COMPETITION WAS INSPIRED BY THE IRELAND'S LOVE OF CHEESE AND OUR CURIOSITY TO TRY OUT MORE VARIETIES. IN A RECENT EU-FUNDED SURVEY 53 PER CENT PEOPLE STATED THEY ARE CURIOUS TO DISCOVER MORE CHEESES BUT IRELAND'S FIRM FAVOURITE AT 64 PER CENT IS CHEDDAR*.

HERE, WE FEATURE THE WINNING AND RUNNER UP RECIPES.

COURGETTE & COOLEENEY ARANCINI BALLS WITH ARRABBIATA SAUCE WINNER – SINÉAD HENRY BEZY



I previously lived in Naples where I was first introduced to the joys of Arancini Balls, a common indulgent street food stuffed with bechamel and ragù. I decided to create a lighter version by using courgettes. Ever since living in Italy I have become slightly obsessed with creating different versions of this dish. The rich arrabbiata sauce and melting cheese is a match made in heaven and I would happily eat a plate of these for dinner. They can be stuffed with a variety of fillings but in my opinion, cheese is a must. I have experimented with many different cheeses but the creaminess/nuttiness of Cooleeney is a winner for me as it oozes out unapologetically. Any type of Brie or Camembert also works a treat. In the absence of travel, why not try this recipe and pretend you are eating them on the bustling streets of Naples?

SERVES: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

FOR RISOTTO

- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 shallots, finely diced
- 1 courgette, finely chopped
- 80ml white wine
- 500g risotto rice
- 1500ml vegetable stock (add a bay leave and some fresh thyme)
- 70g Parmesan Cheese, finely grated (keep the rind)
- Salt and pepper

FOR ARANCINI BALLS

- 200g Cooleeney Cheese, cut into small chunks (including rind)
- 2 eggs, lightly whisked
- 150g plain flour
- 300g panko breadcrumbs (if you cannot find panko you can use ordinary breadcrumbs)
- Sunflower oil (for frying)

FOR TOMATO ARRABBIATA SAUCE

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 fresh red chilli, finely chopped
- ½ a bunch of fresh basil, roughly chopped
- 400g tin of chopped tomatoes
- Salt & pepper

TO SERVE

- Parmesan cheese
- Fresh parsley, finely chopped

METHOD

1. To make the risotto, heat up the olive oil in a large pan and sauté the onions and garlic until soft. Add the courgette and continue to cook for a few more minutes. Add the risotto rice and cook for one minute.
2. Pour in the white wine and continue to cook for two more minutes. In a separate pot, heat the stock over a low heat and
3. Add the thyme and bay leaf. It is important that the stock is hot as you add it into the rice. Continue to stir the risotto and gradually add the vegetable stock as the rice absorbs it. At this stage, if you have a parmesan rind, add it to the risotto as it adds an additional cheese flavour. Continue gradually adding stock, stirring until the rice is cooked. The time can vary but takes approximately 20 minutes to cook the rice. The amount of stock you need will depend on your rice. If the rice is too dry, add more stock until it is fully cooked but still has a bite.
4. Add the parmesan cheese and season with salt and pepper. Remove the parmesan rind at this stage (if added).
- Once the risotto is cooked, you can either eat it! or allow it to cool to make your Arancini Balls. To form the Arancini Balls, scoop

add the thyme and bay leaf. It is important that the stock is hot as you add it into the rice. Continue to stir the risotto and gradually add the vegetable stock as the rice absorbs it. At this stage, if you have a parmesan rind, add it to the risotto as it adds an additional cheese flavour. Continue gradually adding stock, stirring until the rice is cooked. The time can vary but takes approximately 20 minutes to cook the rice. The amount of stock you need will depend on your rice. If the rice is too dry, add more stock until it is fully cooked but still has a bite.

Add the parmesan cheese and season with salt and pepper. Remove the parmesan rind at this stage (if added).

Once the risotto is cooked, you can either eat it! or allow it to cool to make your Arancini Balls. To form the Arancini Balls, scoop

- a portion of the cooled risotto into your hand. Place a chunk of Cooleeney Cheese in the centre and shape it into a ball. Repeat with the remaining risotto and cheese. Place in the fridge for about 10 minutes to help them keep their shape.
6. In three separate bowls, place the flour, whisked egg and panko breadcrumbs. Firstly, lightly coat the Arancini Balls in flour, then coat in the whisked egg

- and finally coat in the panko breadcrumbs until they are fully covered. Repeat until you have used up all the risotto.
7. Heat the sunflower oil in a deep pan until it reaches about 180 degrees. Deep fry the balls for about 4 minutes on either side (or until fully golden). You may have to fry the balls in batches. Drain any excess oil on kitchen paper.
 8. To make the arrabbiata sauce,

place garlic, chilli and basil stalks in a pan over a medium heat with the olive oil and fry for two minutes. Add in the tomatoes, season with salt and pepper and cook for 10 minutes over a medium-low heat. Blend until smooth.

9. Serve the Arancini Balls immediately with the tomato sauce, grated parmesan cheese and lots of fresh chopped parsley.

LOCKDOWN RICOTTA CHEESE PIE RUNNER UP, 2ND PLACE - HEATHER HEATH



SERVES: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

- 500g Ricotta Cheese
- 300g Feta cheese (cubed)
- 300g Spinach
- 4 Tbsp Pesto (or more to taste)
- 2 Eggs
- Salt & Black Pepper to taste
- 500g Puff Pastry (2 pkts of Ready Rolled)

METHOD

1. Grease a cake tin with butter (9.5 inch by 2.5 inches deep). Set oven to 180 degrees Use one packet

2. of puff pastry to line bottom and sides of cake tin Bake blind for 15 minutes (or until slightly golden) As base is cooking prepare filling.
3. Mix together in a large bowl Ricotta cheese, Feta Cheese, Pesto, Spinach (wilt spinach first in a pan with a little butter and then remove excess moisture - I pat it with some kitchen roll) and 1 egg. Mix all these ingredients well.
4. When base is ready, allow to cool a little before adding Ricotta mixture. Meanwhile, roll up about ¾ of other packet of ready rolled

5. puff pastry then whilst still rolled slice into half inch rounds.
6. Put the mixture into the cake tin-spreading evenly Slightly loosen the pastry rounds - some may even unroll but that's okay.
7. Place the pastry rounds on top of pie making sure not to leave any gaps (it doesn't have to be perfect). This will give the pie an interesting top instead of a plain flat one!
8. Beat up the other egg and brush over the top of the pastry. Bake in oven for 15/20 mins or until golden brown.

GastroGays joined forces with the National Dairy Council and the EU-funded 'Cheese Your Way' campaign for this initiative. The winner received Ireland's Blue Book Hotel vouchers worth €2,000, while the runners up also received prizes.

2021 marks the final year of the European-funded 'Cheese Your Way' campaign, which was developed to encourage consumers to cook with, eat, and learn more about the wide range of diverse European cheeses. The campaign implemented locally in Ireland, France and Denmark is a combined effort developed through the European Milk Forum which is aimed at reinforcing the popularity cheese and building awareness of its versatility and variety as well as raising awareness of the quality and authenticity of this intrinsic product from European agriculture and developing new usages and occasions to eat it. For more information visit www.cheeseyourway.ie

*Survey results: Research carried out by Venise group by Toluna Analytics on the behalf of the European Milk Forum.

Ireland is flying

It is not only cows that create carbon footprints. In 2019 Irish people took 5.5 million holiday trips abroad, (CSO Household Travel Survey), the major proportion by air travel. That could include some taking one holiday and others taking several foreign holidays in the year. The actual breakdown is incidental. Most opt for short flights to the continent or the UK while a sizeable minority choose long haul flights to Florida, Thailand or other far-flung destinations. In the decade from 2009 the number of holiday flights is estimated to have increased by some 30 per cent. That shows both the growing popularity of foreign holidays, the increasing financial ability of Irish people to pay for them and, possibly, a lack of understanding about the impact of these flights on the environment. This is at a time when environmental issues are considered to be matters of huge concern to so many people. When the Covid crisis is finally behind us, foreign holiday destinations will regain their appeal for millions of Irish holidaymakers. Even the Tanaiste, in what might be regarded a rather careless remark, last month confirmed his liking for sun holidays. That, at a time when the country was still in Level 5 lockdown, in the early stages of a vaccination programme and with the Irish tourist sector hoping that Irish people would support the Staycation concept this year. The fact that the Climate Bill, demanding huge cuts in carbon from us by 2030, was being debated in the Dail at the time, was also ignored. Let's look, not at the immediate financial cost of flying on holiday – that's up to the individual or family to decide for themselves, but instead we should examine the environmental cost. One round trip from Dublin to

Lanzarote, a particularly popular destination, generates a carbon footprint of almost one tonne of CO₂ equivalent (0.978 tonnes). Two million sun holidays, using Spain as an average European destination, generates a total of just under two million tonnes of CO₂ carbon footprint equivalent. A trip for a family of four to Florida runs up a carbon footprint of 8.8 tonnes. Further afield, a Californian visit for that same family would equate to 10.8 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent carbon use. For those families of four flying to Thailand, the carbon cost is almost 13 tonnes. Everyone deserves a holiday and no one is begrudging anyone a break in the sun or elsewhere. The carbon cost/benefit analysis of a foreign holiday is most likely positive in wellbeing terms but more difficult to justify in its environmental impact. Michael O'Leary might argue that higher capacity, more fuel-efficient planes, coupled with limited baggage per passenger and high passenger loads can deliver real carbon footprint savings per passenger. He is correct. There are no rights or wrongs in this analysis. Equally correct is the fact that food producers are also capable of making carbon-economising changes to their production systems. They have already done so with the introduction of a range of improvements across all sectors. More improvements are being made every year to reduce farmers carbon footprints associated with food production. The analysis of the cost of holiday flights is an awareness-raising exercise to highlight the fact that few, if any, of us has an unimpeachable right to the environmental moral high ground. The bottom line is that, as we wrote in the Very End last month, 'Let he or she who is without environmental sin cast the first stone'.



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1. Herds with high prevalence of IBR may need to vaccinate calves from 2 weeks of age intranasally.

Next vaccine should be given at 3-4 months of age either intranasally or intramuscularly.

2. Intramuscular Vaccination.

3. Cowley DJB et al, Aspects of bovine herpesvirus infection in dairy and beef herds in the Republic of Ireland. Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica 2011, 53:40.

4. Kynete data April 2020.

For more information visit
bovilis.ie



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