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So far so good

Praise should be dispensed rarely and only when fully merited. In the case of the Government's handling of the Covid pandemic, it is a case of so far so good. It is not as if the Government's actions and reactions have been perfect. Far from it. How could it be otherwise given the fluidity of the pandemic and the ever-changing impact and trajectory of the virus in its various mutations. The central theme of the

government's response, however, has been to safeguard health and life while at the same time attempting to protect the economy and the jobs of hundreds of thousands of our citizens. It has been a costly exercise so far, adding many billions to an already overloaded national debt. There was little choice in this regard and if a viral crisis was to hit us at any time, then the past two years was as good a time as any. We were approaching full employment when the virus struck, with burgeoning taxes being collected and historically low interest rates to be paid on borrowings. This is not a permanent feature of international financing and a return to higher rates of interest can be expected in the coming years. The fact that the EU took responsibility through its financial institutions for underpinning national borrowings for the duration of the pandemic shows the benefits of an overarching monetary structure for the EU. For Ireland, that may not extend to a fully-fledged common taxation policy and recent agreement on a global approach to corporate taxation, while impacting on Ireland's corporate taxation policies, was the best possible outcome for us in the circumstances. The bottom line is that we remain a destination of choice for Foreign Direct Investment for a myriad of reasons, including our taxation policies. We will continue to need that advantage in the coming years as the government, hopefully, reduces our borrowing deficit.

There is talk of an economic boom and that is always a dangerous mindset for any country. Apart from raising over-optimistic income expectations across the economy and driving unrealistic enthusiasm for increased government spending, there is, unfortunately, the underlying risk that we have not seen the last of Covid in its many manifestations. That apart, much of the economy seems to have been reasonably well protected from the worst effects of the pandemic. It remains to be seen whether the hospitality sector will fully recover and how long that recovery will take. Ryanair is certainly betting on a return to international travel by Irish people and while it does little for our balance of payments there must be hope that renewed enthusiasm for travel globally will deliver increased visitors to Ireland over the coming months and years. With costs and inflation rising across the economy there is a real threat of, if not pricing ourselves out of the market, at least diminishing our reputation as a value-for-money destination.

In summary, as regards our government's handling of the Covid pandemic, mistakes were made, money was wasted and not all the decisions and restrictions had the hoped-for outcomes. What we cannot deny is that our government, led by Mich  l Martin, did show leadership and a willingness to take hard decisions as required. Occasional abdication to media headlines and the diktat of non-elected experts in health and science notwithstanding, we must acknowledge that most of the actions taken were in our best interests or seemed to be at the time. Lessons can and must be learned if we are to be prepared for future crises which will inevitably occur.



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No shortage of management talent

There is a shortage of farm labour in Ireland. Many farms are finding it increasingly difficult to source labour at critical work periods. Dairy farms at this time are extremely busy places with calving in full swing. The labour shortage is all the more acute given the expansion in herd size on so many farms. While the FRS is doing a fine job in matching up all available operatives with their farmer clients, there is still clearly a need to open up more opportunities for short and longer term migrant labour from across the EU and further afield to take up job opportunities in Ireland. Labour shortages have also been identified across other farm and agri sectors including the horticulture and mushroom enterprises. In the broader agri-related economy, the meat processing sector is regularly challenged in sourcing sufficient staff to keep the processing lines running smoothly. The absentee rate from Covid infection or close contact hasn't helped, though that problem is, hopefully, now diminishing.



One man who has had notable success in sourcing top class personnel is Liam De Paor of De Paor Consultancy. As a talent headhunter, Liam obviously has an eye for identifying the right people for the right jobs, most especially when it comes to filling senior management roles for Irish pedigree cattle breed societies. The past two years has seen the De Paor agency fill the positions of CEO and Field officer for the IHFA,

General Manager for the Limousin Cattle Society, Breed Secretary for the Irish Charolais Cattle Society, and most recently, De Paor Consultancy recruited Deirdre McGowan to the role of General Manager of the Irish Simmental Cattle Society. McGowan, who hails from Leitrim, previously worked as an inspector certifying Irish Angus. In addition, Liam and co. also filled a role for AXA last May, with the appointment of Tom McCarthy as Munster Area Manager.

ASA Podcasts

Last year we highlighted the superb series of podcasts commissioned by the ASA during the pandemic. Using the classic dictum of creating opportunity from Covid crisis, the Agricultural Science Association's monthly podcast series is excellently presented and really showcases Irish agriculture.

The 'Expert in their Field' series is sponsored by Ulster Bank, and featured Tom Tynan as the guest interviewee in December. Mary Delaney, a former President of the ASA interviewed him. Mary spoke to Kikenny-born Tom about his life story, including his early years growing up on a dairy farm. He has an impressive resumé, including a stint with IFA as head of its Dairy Division, as well as periods working in senior management positions in the private sector. Noted for his shrewd political antennae, Tynan was also a special advisor to Ivan Yates, when Yates was Minister for Agriculture.

Tom joined the European Commission in 2014 and served in the cabinet of European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil Hogan, for the full five-year mandate. In December 2019, when Phil Hogan was appointed Trade Commissioner, Tom Tynan again joined his fellow countyman's Cabinet. He must have been



ASA President, Dr. Anne Marie Butler interviews Richard Hayden, Sportsturf consultant and MD of Hayden Turfcare, who was a guest on the ASA podcasts

extremely disappointed at the treatment meted out to Hogan in the wake of the so-called 'Golfgate Affair'. It was always clear that neither Phil Hogan or Dara Calleary had any organisational responsibility for the function in Clifden and attended in good faith that all Covid protocols were being observed. Nevertheless, they had to walk the plank when our political leaders took the populist approach to appease a rabid media headhunt.

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On your bikes

New Holland, despite its historical association with the internal combustion engine, has signed up to sponsor pedal powered locomotion. Not just any old bike race, of course. This is the Giro d'Italia 2022, one of the most prestigious professional cycling races in the world. New Holland Agriculture will be official sponsor of the Giro d'Italia 2022 and the brand will accompany the world's best cyclists on the roads around and beyond Italy as they tackle the 21 stages of the first Grand Tour of the year. Irishman Sean Lennon, Vice President Europe New Holland Ag, clearly sees a prime opportunity to promote the NH brand as the cycle race moves through some of the most magnificent scenery in Italy over the course of three weeks in May. In fact, the race will start in Budapest, Hungary, move through Slovenia and then conclude on the 29th of May in the beautiful city of Verona in Northern Italy. The sponsorship looks like a winning opportunity for the New Holland brand, which has close ties with Italy, including its global headquarters in Turin. The fact that the Giro encompasses so much rural and farming landscape, provides great associative links for NH with agriculture and farming across a broad range of enterprises from grape cultivation to cereal growing and animal production.



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*From January to December 2020, on average we paid out on 99% of motor, home, van, farm and windscreen insurance claims. Zurich Insurance plc is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

Where should development permission begin and end?



Looking in on the Supreme Court proceedings last month in regard to An Taisce's appeal against An Bord Pleanála's permission to Glanbia Ireland to build a cheese making facility in Belview, the most compelling aspect of the case was the implication for any and all future development in the event that An Taisce is successful. This seemed to be a thread of argument running right through the hearing. Where does the effect of any development begin or end? Is it the actual development site involved and which is subjected to planning permission stipulations, in this case a cheese manufacturing plant to supply European-style cheeses to continental Europe, or should planning regulators take into account the wider implications of any development? In the An Taisce case, there was argument and counterargument around the possible environmental effects any additional milk production would have on four and a half thousand dairy farms supplying milk to the cheese making facility. A peat burning power station in Edenderry and its depletion of the associated peat bog supply base was cited as an example of upstream environmental impact by An Taisce. The opposing Senior Counsel questioned its relevancy. But how far can the upstream or downstream impact argument go in any permission for development? Does the use of plastic wrapping for a product constitute reasonable objection against a biscuit manufacturing facility? Should the diesel burned to transport goods across land and sea be a viable objection to any new pharmaceutical manufacturing development or should the increased drain on electricity preclude the development of further electronic manufacturing in this country? These are very big and very fundamental questions that are being adjudicated on by the five Supreme Court Justices involved. The Big Cheeses are not just deciding on the future of a little cheese factory in south Kilkenny, but on far more fundamental aspects of our planning system.



Colostrum, Colostrum, Colostrum

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

Calves that receive a sufficient level of high quality, clean, fresh colostrum have proven to be 24 times less likely to suffer from a scour related sickness in the first weeks of life. The importance of colostrum management protocol cannot be overlooked, with the majority of scour related issues experienced on farms being directly correlated to insufficient passive transfer.

Feeding colostrum on farm

3-2-1 Rule:

1. Offer milk from the dam's 1st milking
2. Within the first 2 hours of birth
3. Offer at least 3 litres (approx. 10% of birthweight)

Typically, there is large variation in colostrum quality within a herd, with Teagasc research showing that approximately 20% of a herd may have poor quality colostrum, i.e., insufficient antibodies for the calf. Many farmers have started to test colostrum quality using a refractometer to ensure calves are receiving a high-quality first feed, with the threshold of a Brix value $\geq 22\%$ being the quality standard.

Pooling colostrum is often practised on farm due to labour constraints, however combining colostrum from several cows will increase the risk of disease spread (e.g., Johnes), reduce passive transfer and dilute high-quality colostrum. Where possible, aim to offer calves a 'one-dam-to-one-calf system' to avoid such issues occurring.

High standards of hygiene are necessary when collecting, feeding and storing colostrum, with research indicating that clean (no dirt contamination) colostrum allows for increased antibody absorption. Bacterial contamination will compete with antibodies at gut level, resulting in reduced passive transfer. Recent results from a Teagasc Moorepark survey of 48 commercial farms highlighted that stomach tubes and bottles with teats had the greatest quantity of bacteria present.

Boosting Colostrum Quality

If an issue with colostrum quality on farm is identified, feeding soyabean meal to the in-calf cow in the final two weeks pre-calving can boost overall quality. Feeding rates will be silage quality dependant but typically range from 0.25-0.75 kg/head/day.

For more information and calf rearing advice, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor.



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Publication of forestry licensing statistics “make sobering reading” – SEEFA

Private forestry group SEEFA has welcomed publication of forestry licensing statistics for 2021 by the Forest Service but highlights that the data makes for sobering reading. It claims that little improvement has been made in the last 12 months and that the position is deteriorating. According to the Department, this month there are 4,742 forestry licenses still outstanding including 878 afforestation; 3,285 felling; and 579 road licenses. SEEFA Chairman, Teige Ryan of None So Hardy Forestry said: “Afforestation is now at its lowest level since 1949. The Department has failed to reach its’ own soft target of 4,500 licences for 2021. Only 12 per cent of the 4,035 licences issued were Afforestation Licences. This is in spite of the commitment given by senior Department official, Colm Hayes, to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine in January 2021 that “Afforestation needs to be the clear focus for 2021”, and Minister Pippa Hackett’s own assertion in December 2021 that “Forestry has progressed”.

Imelda Connolly of Green Belt added: “Afforestation is the future of forestry in Ireland and a viable solution to climate change. More needs to be done at Department level to alleviate issues and allow for progress.” The licensing backlog she noted is also evident on examination of the Felling Licence figures. Tomás Hanrahan from Forestlink Ltd. said: “Despite the money spent to date and the additional staff employed by the Department, output is still not matching input in that a greater number of Felling Licence applications are submitted than the number of Felling Licences issued. It is unclear how the backlog will ever be cleared.” In addition to the worrying licence figures, the number of grant-aided forest road metres constructed in 2021 was 29 per cent lower than the figure for 2020. John Roche, Arbor Forest Management Ltd said: “This further highlights the fact that the construction of forest roads and thinning of forests are operations that should be removed from the licensing system. These vital management interventions need to be carried out in a timely manner and unfortunately, under the current licensing system, they are very often delayed or not carried out at all, to the detriment of the forest crop and at



the expense of the forest owner. Separately, it is crucially important that timelines are introduced within which the Forest Service must process and finalise all licence and scheme applications.”

SEEFA thanked all politicians for their support in 2021 particularly the Joint Oireachtas Committee for their work and devoted attention to the weekly dashboard. SEEFA also outlined the areas that they believe still require addressing:

- Full implementation of the MacKinnon report in a defined timeframe, with immediate implementation of the environmental planning proposal
- Maximum timelines must be introduced for every application in a functioning licensing system
- Full integration of afforestation into the next CAP
- The creation of a Forestry Development Agency to promote and represent the sector (forestry is currently the only natural resource sector without a development agency)
- Political support allied to leadership in the Forest Service which is essential to achieve climate change targets and to support existing challenges for forest owners

Beef Prices Continue to Edge Upwards

IFA Livestock Chairman Brendan Golden has noted that beef prices continue to edge upwards on the back of tight supplies and strong factory demand. He said base prices are starting at €4.30/kg for steers and €4.35/kg for heifers with another 5c to 10c/kg available for larger and specialist lots. R/U grading young bulls are making €4.20/kg to €4.40/kg.

Demand for processing beef is particularly strong, with cow prices ranging from €3.65/kg to €4.10/kg. “Demand for beef in our key export markets - the UK and the EU - is strong, with the prime export benchmark price showing consistent growth since the beginning of the year. It’s now 3c/kg above our price,” he said. Brendan added that numbers of slaughter fit cattle are tight. With live exports to NI performing strongly for forward store and finished cattle, factories are having to compete for supplies. He said farmers should sell hard in these positive market conditions to match the price returns in our main markets.

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The Grassland Agro soil sustainability programme is a free programme designed to improve soil health across three pillars;

- Chemical (Soil fertility)
- Physical (Soil Structure)
- Biological (Soil bacteria)

The starting point on each individual farm is to first measure and benchmark soil performance on participating farms. This allows a farm specific programme to be developed to improve soil health.

THE STEPS TO THE PROGRAMME

1. Soil Sample - The Sustainability Programme begins with a soil sample. An agronomist will call to your farm to collect recent soil samples or take samples if required.
2. Fertiliser Plan - The fertiliser plan is developed to deliver a field specific programme to each individual farm. The first fertiliser considered in the plan is lime and developing a plan to optimise pH. This is done with the farmer in order to take into account the practicalities of each farm. Every farm is different. Farmers face different challenges in respect to either pH, P or K and the plan focusses on using the right nutrient, right place, right rate and right time approach.



3. Silage Measuring - Improving grass silage is critical to increasing profitability. Before the silage is harvested an agronomist calls to the farm to perform a pre harvest assessment. Sugars and nitrates will also be tested to ensure the crop is suitable for harvest. The yield is also recorded so that the offtake of lime, P and K can be calculated and included in the fertiliser programme.
4. Soil Biology Assessment - During July and August, an agronomist will call to the farm to take a soil biology sample. This sample is sent to a lab to test the microbial activity in the soil. This report will be returned to the farmer and explained to highlight actions that can be taken to unlock the pool of nitrogen in the soil to reduce chemical nitrogen inputs while maintaining grass production.
5. Soil Structure Assessment - While collecting the soil biological

assessment the agronomist will also perform a Grass VESS (Visual Estimation of Soil Structure) using the Grassland Agro Grass VESS app. This is a protocol which is used to benchmark the soil structure on farm and the quality of the roots. Improving soil structure helps to access nutrients in the soil, improves drainage and reduces nutrient losses to water.

The programme is entering its second year and is open to more farmers. Over the first year of the programme data has been collected from thousands of farms across Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.

SOME OF THE DATA HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- 19% soil samples below pH 6
- 36% soil samples index 1&2 for Phosphorus
- 43% soil samples index 1&2 for Potassium
- Average silage yield 72 T DM ha
- Average Labile Nitrogen 353kg N/Ha (range 178-443)

Joe O Reilly, in Westmeath, says: "The fertiliser programme was very specific and worked really well this year. I wanted to make more use of the information I had gathered from my farm through the years and the programme allowed me to do that. I have spread less chemical P and K this year, have had better grass recovery throughout the year and have plenty of silage ensiled. I have been using Physiolith for 3 years now and it's a super product. The deeper roots anchor the plant to the ground and have improved the structure of the soil. The solvita test showed a huge store of nitrogen in the soil so the plan going forward is to tap into that as much as I can"

The soil sustainability programme equips each participant with a detailed field specific fertiliser programme, which targets the right product, in the right place at the right rate and the right time. One of the key benefits of the programme is that each farmer is supported throughout the year with regular on-farm visits. This is done in conjunction with the farmer so that practical considerations like soil type, ground conditions and the distance from slurry tanks can be factored into the soil health programme.

The Soil Sustainability Programme is a free service available to dairy, beef, sheep and tillage farmers. Further research will be ongoing throughout the programme as a function of an exciting research project between Grassland Agro, Teagasc and UCC. Get in contact with your local Grassland Agro agronomist or email soil.health@grassland.ie to get involved in the programme.

InTouch

Focusing on the positives

Cathal Bohane, InTouch Nutrition

Calving is in full swing on many farms around the country. This is a very intense time for many farms, as advances in genetics, feeding and management have allowed them to focus on a compact calving season where up to 90% of the cows calve in a six-week period. Therefore, it is natural that systems come under pressure at this time. Firstly, it is important that you, your family and staff stay safe during this time. If we are constantly up at night, it is impossible to be there during the day. Hence, the need for a night calver if numbers are sufficient.

Giving these cows the best possible start is key, and previous articles have spoken about the importance of an ideal dry period and calving event. Even the best post-calving diet and ingredients can only do so much without these. All cows will experience negative energy balance (NEB) post-calving, as it is impossible for a cow to meet her energy demands from her dry matter intake alone.

While a cow will not ultimately peak for up to six weeks, within 7–10 days of milking, these cows are producing 85–90% of this target and, as a result, mobilising their body condition. Our focus should be on how much body condition they lose and how long they are in NEB.

Cows that lose >0.5 body condition score units are less likely to conceive, which is the cornerstone of an efficient and profitable spring calving system. There are several requirements we need to set from Day 1, such as: Setting a fresh cow diet at their peak milk yield once they calve and not what they are currently doing.

Paying attention to the top 20% of cows when pitching your target and not just the average of the herd. If we feed for the average, we will always have average.

Assessing forage quality to determine concentrate requirement. For average-quality (65 DMD) grass silage, work off 0.33 kg of concentrate per kg of milk (i.e., 27 kg equals 9 kg of concentrate).

Balancing protein levels not just on crude protein but also on the right type of protein and based on their requirements. This will avoid 'pushing' cows and reducing the cost of the concentrate.

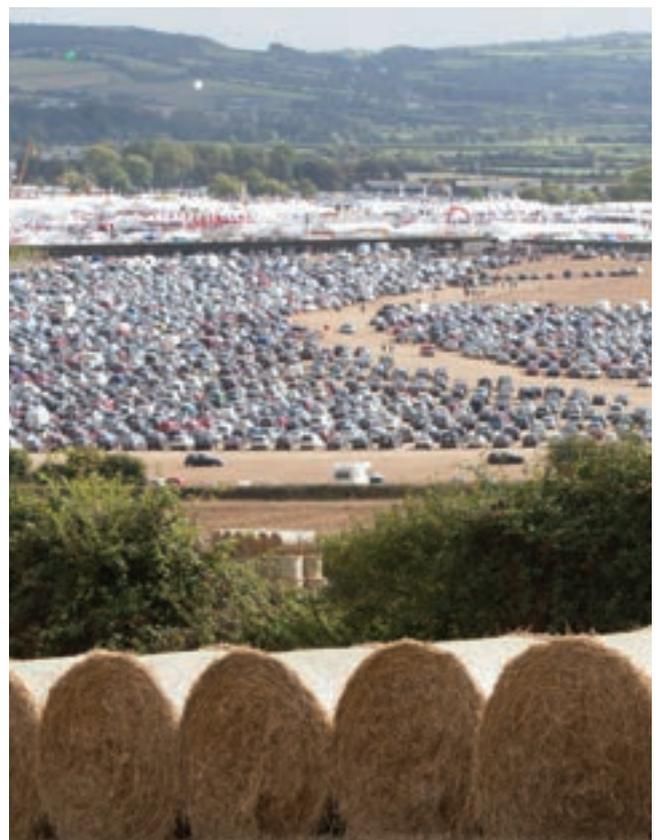
Looking after the dry matter intake of the animal, as this will help most other things look after themselves.

Focusing on getting cows to grass as soon as possible, making sure there is grass available and looking after the overall dry matter intake of the cow. Once the grass is finished, they need dry matter intake from supplementary feeds.

In summary, the dry matter intake of the cow is crucial. If we focus on this, we are, in a general sense, looking after the cow. Cows need to be at grass for the right reasons, as they cannot afford downtime when there is feed to be eaten.

Plans for #PLOUGHING2022 kick off

The largest outdoor event on the Irish calendar is set for a huge comeback this year after a two-year absence returning to the familiar venue of Ratheniska, County Laois on September 20th 21st & 22nd. 2019 saw the biggest event to date with an attendance of almost 300,000 and according to the NPA there is already immense interest and positive reaction from exhibitors, patrons and visitors alike hoping that this year's National Ploughing Championships will get the green light to go ahead.



Companies are anxious to get back to trading, patrons are anxious to do business according to NPA who say that public health and safety guidelines will be a priority this year emphasising the fact that the event is largely outdoor spread across hundreds of acres is a huge advantage. Anna May McHugh NPA Managing Director said: "It has been wonderful to see the warmth and depth of support from all over the country and even internationally over the past couple of years for the National Ploughing Championships and in particularly this year's event. I'm delighted to announce that the Trade Exhibition Portal will open in March and we will work very closely with exhibitors making sure they are up to speed on regulations as they unfold over the coming months." For information regarding this year's National Ploughing Championships please see www.npa.ie.

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Threat to live exports averted

In the aftermath of a rearguard action to protect live exports and animal transportation protocols, **Billy Kelleher** MEP took time out last month to talk to **Matt O'Keeffe**.

As a Corkman and a farmer, Billy Kelleher is only too well aware of the implications of recent efforts by a European Parliament Committee to restrict, if not ban, the extended transportation of livestock: "The live export trade has been under significant challenge from Europe, specifically within the European Parliament. A Special Committee of Enquiry of which I am a member, was established in the current Parliament and it published a report which I voted against. The report and its proposals were a major threat to animal exports and animal transportation in general. What the report suggested was that no animal or unweaned calf under 35 days of age would be transported at all and unweaned animals over 35 days old would only be transported for a maximum of a two-hour journey. Also in the report was a proposal to stop the transportation of pregnant bovines and equines in the last semester. There was a range of other obstacles also proposed."

Rearguard action

Billy Kelleher outlined his plan of action to offset the worst effects of the proposals: "From my perspective, the debate in a plenary session of the Parliament in January gave me and my colleagues an opportunity to table a series of amendments and we garnered enough support for a debate and a vote in favour of our amendments. If the report's proposals had not been amended the effect would have been to totally prevent live animal exports from Ireland. To put that in context, we export around 140,000 calves annually, mainly from dairy farms to European veal farms, mostly in the Netherlands and parts of France. Preventing that trade would have significant implications for animal welfare and would increase our bovine herd dramatically over a two-year period. Additional animals over their life cycle in a two-year period would add up to 400,000 extra animals. That in turn would create pressures on fodder provision and on our emissions targets. In Europe, as reflected in the European Parliament, there is a very strong green agenda and while that is welcome from an environmental perspective, the debates can become very ideological and not based on the practicalities of agriculture and the realities of farming in Ireland. That is what happened in this instance with a very strong emphasis on one side around animal transport and not enough acceptance that excellent animal welfare standards are in place for animal transport. This is all fully

regulated with veterinary and Department inspections. We are being tarred with the same brush as other countries with far lower standards and regulatory inspections."

Total movement ban in prospect

The initial proposals were quite stark, as the MEP confirmed: "While provision was made for an individual farmer moving his or her livestock to adjacent lands or to an outfarm, any commercial transport of animals for purchase or sale would not have been allowed. I made the point in relation to a practical situation of a farmer moving calves for sale from Mizen Head to a mart in Dunmanway or Fermoy, that would entail a two hour journey. Such movement would have fallen foul of the proposed legislation in regard to the internal transport of animals around a county or the country. There was a lot of work done to prevent the worst excesses of those proposals being adopted by the Parliament. We want and accept high standards, strong welfare provisions and sanctions where they are not complied with. At the same time, we want allowance for the transport of animals in a humane and compassionate manner so that farming can continue."



"We are being tarred with the same brush as other countries with far lower standards and regulatory inspections."

A welcome compromise

Inevitably, in any negotiation, compromise was necessary to avoid the worst aspects of the Committee of Enquiry's proposals being put forward unamended to a plenary session of the EU Parliament. To that end, Billy Kelleher, with the support of the majority of his fellow Irish MEPs, put forward a series of amendments: "It was a victory for common sense and practicality. We secured acceptance of a series of amendments to the original proposals, so



that the worst aspects were eliminated. In some ways it was about separating ideology from practicality. It was a ringing endorsement by the Parliament which ratified our amended proposals by a very large majority and it allows us to continue to trade with improved standards across the European Union, while ensuring that the integrity and welfare of our animals is maintained during transport either within our borders or within the Union or to third countries. Assuming that these proposals are adopted by the Commission in the coming years, there will be additional challenges and costs for everyone involved from farmers to transporters to regulators. The proposals include an increase in the age at which an animal can be transported from fourteen days to twenty-eight days. If we had not been willing to offer some extension in the age limit for calf transportation, as well as increased veterinary supervision, increased monitoring of the transport vehicles and ships involved, including GPS surveillance, videos, temperature and ammonia monitoring, then we would not have succeeded in keeping the trade viable and operable in the longer term.”

A pregnant clause

Another challenging proposal that was diluted was around banning the transportation of pregnant animals in the later stages of pregnancy: “That proposal extended down

to the pregnant family cat or dog not being carried in the family car for any reason. Beyond that it would have had a calamitous effect on dairy or suckler herd dispersals in the Autumn, for instance. A four-hour movement restriction proposal remains in place. Moving pregnant mares to specialist foaling units would also have been problematic. None of these are de facto regulations and will not be until or unless the Commission together with the Parliament and Council of Ministers agree to such changes in the coming years.”

A scientific approach to animal welfare

Animal welfare and transportation research at Moorepark and other centres was cited by the South MEP in support of his stance: “We want to be able to build on that and have sufficient research and science in place to support farming practices and high welfare obligations. Most people involved should welcome the highest standards in relation to the management of our animals right through their lives. As part of my submission to the Parliament debate I called for the full implementation of existing standards and regulations around animal care. Ireland already does well in this regard with high animal welfare standards. However, there are member states which are poor in this area and that has to change because any shortcomings drag us all down.”

A man with a beard, wearing a grey and green jumpsuit and black boots, stands in a field. He is looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a red tractor and a green field under a blue sky. The text 'GOING VIRAL' is overlaid on the image in large, bold, yellow and grey letters.

GOING VIRAL

We chat to young Longford farmer, Philip Stewart, who has become somewhat of a YouTube sensation on social media as 'Farmer Phil'.

Philip Stewart, better known as 'Farmer Phil', is a beef and tillage farmer based in Ballinamore, Co. Longford. The family farm is near the Royal Canal in the picturesque village of Killashee or Cill na Sidhe meaning 'The Church of the Fairy Mound' or 'The Wood of the Fairies'. Philip is a member of Macra na Feirme and the IFA. Farming approximately 240ac of tillage and 300ac of grassland, (50/50 owned/rented) the family farm is a partnership between Philip, his father Derek and his Uncle Ian. The family also has a large farm contracting business and operates a wide range of machinery. As Philip says, "we do everything except hedge cutting." His brother Eric, his sister Jessica and his fiancé Olivia Hartshorn also help out. His mother Diane does "all the book work, accounts and all the behind-the-scenes work." During the busy season the family also employs some extra workers to help with silage and harvest.

YouTube success

Philip studied in Gurteen Ag College and qualified with a Green Cert in 2016. He is very active on social media, mainly YouTube, where he uploads videos every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday that feature everything from contracting and cattle, to machinery demos and vintage tractors. Philip can also be found on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. One of his videos uploaded onto YouTube on 3rd June 2021 had 418k views. According to Philip his "videos are seen in 120 countries, 50 per cent of views are from Ireland, 33 per cent from Britain and the rest from around the world."

Dairy-beef finishing

Up until 2004, the Stewart family were milking a pedigree Jersey herd but were wiped out by TB. They also had a pedigree Limousin herd until 2016, when they switched from the suckler enterprise to a dairy beef finishing system. Around 400 dairy x beef calves (aged from 10 days upwards) are purchased every spring from local dairy farms. Calves are fed milk replacer using automatic calf feeders and weaned onto a calf ration supplied by Liffey Mills. Philip is a big advocate for Jersey X calves and finds that Jan/feb born calves are generally healthier and give the best performance.

Cattle are bedded through the winter either on home grown straw, milled peat or on slats in the former dairy sheds. Finished cattle are sold mainly to Dawn Meats in Slane at a target liveweight of 500kgs minimum. Bulls are finished before 24 months, bullocks at around 25 months and heifers at 26 months. The cattle are all fed on a grass-based system with a 100 per cent home-grown finisher ration except for biscuit meal, a food waste product supplemented by a mineral vitamin mixture.

The Stewart Family used to buy bagged feed which is more expensive than bulk feed and aside from biosecurity risks they also had significant feed losses from vermin. So, they purchased a 16t green split V-Mac feed silo from McAree Engineering which could store two different calf rations and which also protected the calf feed from vermin. According to Teagasc, rodents, if not controlled, can cause serious economic losses on farms through consumption, contamination and spoilage of food and feed, the spread of pathogens, which are damaging to human and animal health, damage to buildings and equipment and loss of quality assurance accreditation e.g. Bord Bia. The new feed silo has two bagging shutles and the Stewarts can move feed using a McAree barrow to the calves. One side can also be retro fitted with an auger if required, to load their Keenan diet feeder.

Tillage enterprise

The family grows 240 acres of cereals plus field beans (which replace imported soya beans for protein) and forage maize (under cover) to feed their own stock. They also sell surplus oats and winter barley to an Agri merchant, local equine and livestock farmers. Philip says “we also sell some baled silage, square bales of hay and straw to local farmers. Square bales are popular because of their higher density and shape they take up less storage space than round bales.”

Contracting machinery

As detailed, the family operate a wide range of machinery for their farm contracting business. This includes a fleet of Massey Ferguson (MF) tractors, a MF big square baler and a MF combine harvester. They also have a Claas Jaguar silage harvester, a Fusion baler wrapper, JCB loader among a range of other machines.

Bertie, an Irish x Lakeland terrier, one of their dogs, particularly likes to travel around the farm in a tractor cab and can often be seen in Philip's YouTube videos.



Philip and his fiancé Olivia Hartshorn

The Stewart family also have a large collection of vintage tractors and machinery from Fergusons to Nuffields, including the first ever tractor the family owned, bought by his great grandfather, a petrol Ferguson 20. Also included in their collection are 4 vintage MF combine harvesters.

Diversification

Philip and his fiancé Olivia have also opened a Farm Shop this year, Stewart Family Farm, selling their own home-produced beef, which is slaughtered and processed by a local butcher in an approved abattoir. Alongside this they also sell a range of produce from Co. Longford, including honey and elderflower cordial, as well as ‘Farmer Phil’ merchandise. According to Philip “Our Friesian and Jersey x beef is selling well. We have great feedback from customers and people are coming back for more.” Their beef, merchandise and other produce can be ordered online, by phone or by visiting their store. Philip says, “The shop is going great, we have a great range of customers from locals to sending boxes of beef to the four corners of Ireland”.

Last Autumn, a farm enterprise in conjunction with the Farm Shop was a crop of homegrown pumpkins. Open for the week before Halloween, visitors were able to ‘pick your own pumpkin’. Another example of farm diversification and an enterprising young farmer.



Philip and his family on the farm

A critical approach to co-operatives

There are farmers today who feel that their modern business needs are not met by co-operatives established out of the idealism of past generations, writes Maurice Colbert.



The reasons vary, some stemming from perceptions that co-ops are not efficient, competitive organisations that are truly capable of surviving and thriving in the highly challenging modern marketplace. The case for such a critical view of co-ops is not devoid of merit. For example, with adherence to bureaucratic processes, co-ops can lose agility and fail to maintain talented, dynamic leadership in touch with the demands of the membership and market alike.

However, despite its historical roots, the relevance of the co-op business model to agribusiness endures to this day. There is a place for the co-op as a commercial partner to modern farmers, a champion who actively represents their interests in the increasingly difficult marketplace. Through well run co-ops, the many can come together and achieve strength in numbers and real commercial success.

Many of today's co-ops were established by an earlier generation of farmers, born out of necessity or idealism or both. Despite their past service, some argue that these co-ops do not always meet the needs of the farmer of today. There are those among the new generation of farmers who feel they should owe no particular allegiance to the co-ops set-up by their forefathers and foremothers. Their reasons are many, often stemming from the unique features of the co-op business model,

such as its conventions on ownership, management and governance.

There are critics who feel that co-ops, despite their idealistic intention, in fact are 'feather-bedded, cosy clubs' that don't have to fight for their business in a competitive and commercial environment, instead depending on the captive or forced loyalty of the membership. Some consider co-ops to be inefficient, slow and cumbersome business organisations, that, ironically, foster a form of inequity, where the smaller and less committed members are treated on an equal footing with their more progressive neighbours. There is even some criticism that co-ops are dominated by the interests of management and employees with farmers, again ironically, getting the leftovers when everybody else has been paid. Sadly, a mentality of 'them and us' ensues. At the same time, co-ops are expected to be all things to all people, with no allowance made for any shortcomings, whether real or imagined.

For decades, agri co-ops have delivered both service and income to Irish farmers. Over the 20th and early 21st centuries, Ireland has been economically transformed. Standards of living and

education have risen dramatically. Today, our hi-tech, export-driven economy and systems for education, transport and communications would be unrecognisable to Plunkett and many of the founders of Irish co-ops. Agri co-ops have played their part in Ireland's economic progress. This is particularly true for the economy in rural areas and in smaller towns around the country. Here they provide sources of income to members and employees alike.

We have seen evidence of where co-ops have been market-driven. They have evolved in parallel with the macroeconomic and technological development of Ireland as a whole. Farming has mechanised and so have co-ops. Clear examples can be seen in food processing giants, many of whom produce not only for local markets but also for export.

Many businesses have thrived in the Irish economic transformation. Co-ops are not alone in this. But many co-ops have done so while also adhering to their mandate of service to their members and preserving the principle of 'one person one vote'. They have often done so in circumstances where private enterprise has otherwise failed to provide an effective and competitive service. Furthermore, they have acted as countervailing agents to break monopolies and create more competitive conditions in the marketplace for both farm produce and farm inputs. They provide security of service to Irish farmers. In periods of agri-business recession, co-operatives usually come to the fore and help to ease the price squeeze facing farmers.



"I regard a farmer-owned, farmer-controlled cooperative as a legal, practical means by which a group of self-educated, selfish capitalists seek to improve their individual economic positions in a competitive society"

Howard E. Babcock (Economist), USA 1935

Leadership – the Key to Future Co-op Success

"An institution that cannot produce its own leadership cannot succeed" - Peter F. Drucker

Agri co-ops have shown that they can succeed as viable and profitable businesses. However, if not careful, they can also struggle with the frequently competing objectives of market success and preservation of co-op ideals. Going forward, strong, dynamic, well-informed leadership will be key to ensuring co-op success in a fast changing, competitive marketplace. Such leadership must always remember their mission, keeping uppermost in their mind the specific mission of co-ops, to achieve commercial success while also preserving co-op ideals on the interest and welfare of members. Effective

management of co-ops requires remembering these goals and achieving optimal balance between them.

They must embrace the market and reflect market trends, developments and changes. In addition, co-ops must flexibly respond to the changes observed in the market to ensure their business remains competitive. That requires co-ops to serve

the members and lead them. At the same time, the the specifically social dimension to the agri co-op model and its democratic procedures must be maintained and followed, alongside the duty to inform and educate members on market developments and strategies, actions and changes needed to respond to them. We have seen an example recently of Livestock co-ops helping members through change with the necessary introduction of online livestock sales.

Moving Forward

Co-operatives are not just a good idea or noble, utopian concept. Nor are they an idea that was formerly good for the past, but without relevance today. Co-ops have shown, and continue to show, that they can work in practice for farmers, delivering income to them, workers and the communities in which they operate. They have stayed relevant through an ability to move with the times and adapt to changes in the market, technology and society around them. However, these changes will surely continue and agri co-ops will need to always be ready to adapt with them. In so doing, they must never lose sight of their egalitarian, democratic ethos. Horace Plunkett, and those pioneers who have gone before, would expect no less of those to whom stewardship of this precious business model has passed today.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most responsive to change"- Leon C. Megginson



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Challenge of a lifetime for pig producers

“This is one of the worst challenges in my forty years as a pig producer”. That was the stark summation of the predicament in which Irish pig producers find themselves, as described by **Roy Gallie**, chairman of the IFA Pigs Committee.

The reasons for the severe financial hit being taken by the sector are both complex and varied, as the IFA representative confirmed: “There are so many factors, all contributing at the same time to a differential between the price producers get, which is going down, and the cost of producing the pig, which is going up. The cost of growing a pig is divided into two parts. One is the feed and then there are the ancillary costs including labour, electricity, insurance and all the other costs associated with running a business. Right now, the pig is costing in the region of €1.40 per kilo to produce, based on feed cost alone. The value of that kilo in the marketplace is €1.42. That’s the price we are getting. So, we are left with two cents per kilo to cover all other costs. This places pig producers in a frightening predicament.”



No parallel with beef or lamb prices

One might be forgiven for assuming that pigmeat prices would have risen with the increase in price for beef and lamb. Not so, says Roy Gallie: “We produce pigmeat at world market prices. Two pandemics have fed into the situation in which we find ourselves. Quite a lot of what goes on in the pig world is dictated by the Chinese market, the biggest market globally for pigmeat. The Chinese domestic pig herd was decimated by African Swine Fever (ASF) and that should have delivered a medium-term price improvement. In reasonable anticipation of that market outcome, European pig producers ramped up production to fill the deficit created by ASF in China. Alongside that, improved genetics have been increasing production per sow spectacularly over the past decade. Along with African Swine Fever in pigs, China, like the rest of the world, was hit by Covid infections in the human population. Chinese ports were severely restricted because so many dock workers were either sick or isolating because of Covid that refrigerated containers were piling up in Chinese ports and not available to ship meat and other goods from across the world. As a consequence, the market slowed down and the available container capacity doubled in price. Meanwhile, African Swine Fever appeared in Europe. It first appeared in forests on the German/Polish borders and then in Germany, precluding German pig producers from selling any pigmeat into China. That surplus production then had to be sold in Europe, flooding the market and bringing prices down. For a short period, the absence of German product created some opportunity to sell into China for other European pig producers.”

Chinese create opportunity out of crisis

At the same time however, China was increasing its own production and restructuring the sector at the same time, going from small, inefficient two-sow farms to vast, modern pig production facilities, as the IFA Pig committee chairman explained: “As we saw when they built new hospitals to cope with Covid, they were equally fast and efficient in building ‘pig hotels’, nine or ten stories high with complete integration from farrowing to finish. These ‘hotels’ have up to ten thousand pigs on each layer, so the scale is almost unimaginable. The Chinese have been using genetics sourced in Europe to drive production efficiency. The end result of this surge in production and productivity has been a fall in pig meat prices in China, making it far less profitable to ship pigmeat from Europe to that market. Add in Brexit, big energy price increases as well as higher grain and protein prices and the perfect crisis has been created. When energy prices, specifically gas prices, increase there is a redirection of grain from animal feed to energy production as a feed source for biorefineries. That inevitably puts huge pressure on pig feed prices. Barley, wheat and maize prices have risen by at least fifty percent in the last six months. Soya prices have risen in tandem. As a result, the cost of producing a pig has escalated well beyond what the market is returning.”

What is to be done?

Could this crisis permanently damage or even destroy the Irish pig production sector: “That is our fear. Because this is such an unprecedented crisis, we are asking for government intervention to support the sector. To sustain the pig industry through this period we do need an injection of capital. It is as blunt as that. We appreciate that there are rules and regulations around that, including the basis for market supports so there may be financial supports available through EU Covid or Brexit support mechanisms. The other option is to seek support through a price increase from the retail sector. That is another direction we are pursuing. We are at the bottom of the food chain so it is not easy to secure a price increase given the nature of pig production where pigs have to be moved through constantly. We cannot simply suspend supply at our discretion. That essentially means taking whatever price is available on the day. Likewise, when it comes to buying feed, we have very little bargaining power. Some forward buying is possible over the longer term but that will not solve the current difficulties. We are weak players in the market even if we are highly efficient producers.”

Unsustainable losses

The average Irish pig farm has five to six hundred sows. Currently every pig sold is losing up to €38. That amounts to a farm loss of about €10,000 per week. Those losses are unsustainable. That is why there is such urgency for action to at least reduce losses to manageable proportions. Even if producers could borrow to offset these losses, the repayment capacity for many would be challenging. While there may be fewer than four hundred commercial pig producers in the country, there are upwards of seven thousand people employed in the production, processing and marketing of Irish pigmeat. The sector is a critical asset if we are to maintain an indigenous resource for pigmeat production, as well as a valuable contributor to exports. International sales last year were estimated at €586 million, our third largest livestock-based export earner after dairy and beef.





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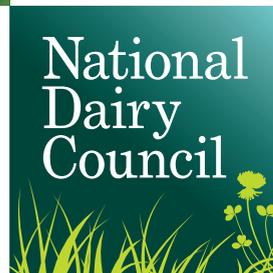




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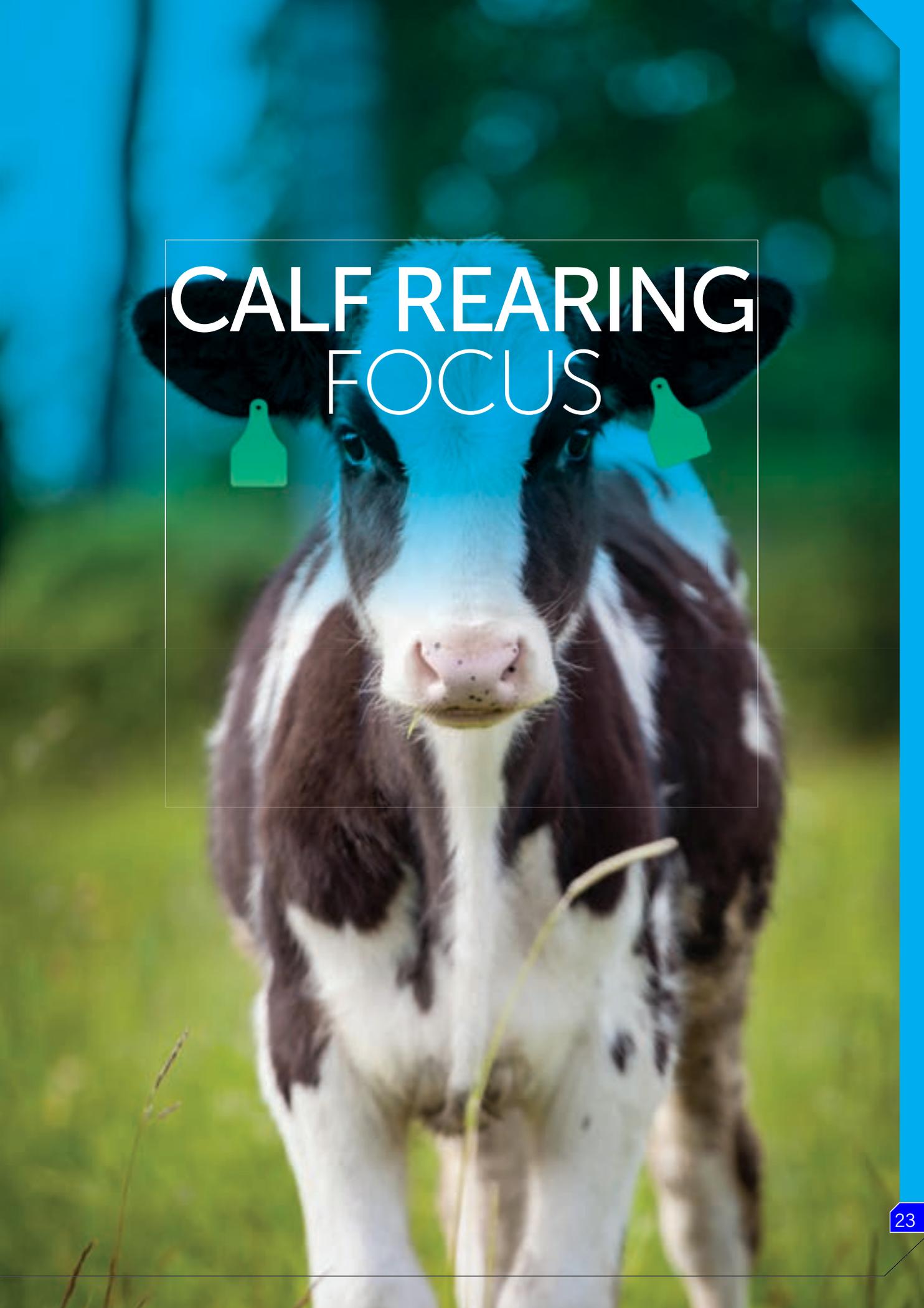


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Preparing for your dairy herd of the future

Emma Swan, InTouch Feeding Specialist, examines the factors for a productive and successful rearing strategy.

The key to ensuring a productive future dairy herd is raising healthy heifers. A successful heifer rearing strategy starts with a healthy calf. Following this, it is essential that this calf achieves ideal growth rates and is weaned successfully while also hitting performance targets. By ensuring these steps are taken, the heifer should be able to calve down into the herd between 22–24 months, where she would be able to reach her future lifetime milk production targets.

There are four important areas that need to be considered when rearing calves and keeping mortality levels low:

1. Colostrum
2. Early nutrition
3. Environment
4. Rumen development and immunity

Colostrum

Ensuring that high-quality colostrum is given at the correct time is essential for the success of any calf rearing enterprise. Colostrum is vital to the newborn calf because it contains antibodies (also known as immunoglobulins, or IgG), which provide immunity. It is also rich in energy and nutrients essential for growth. Newborn calves must

receive at least three litres of high-quality colostrum within the first two hours of birth from the first milking. The only exception to this is Holstein calves, which require four litres. A second feed should then be given eight hours later, before transitioning to milk or calf milk replacer.

A calf is born with no active immune system to protect against disease and depends solely on passive immunity from colostrum feeding. After the first few hours of birth, the calf's ability to absorb essential antibodies from colostrum reduces significantly as the gut barrier loses permeability. Quality of colostrum also needs to be considered; high-quality colostrum contains at least 50 grams/litre IgG. The IgG concentration of colostrum can be measured with a refractometer or colostrometer — these are freely available and inexpensive.

Early nutrition

No one calf rearing system is suitable for all dairy farms, and many varying systems can be successful. However, there are basic nutritional requirements that should be met, regardless of the feeding regime.

During the first few months, a calf is most efficient at



turning feed into weight gain. Current recommendations for feeding dairy calves are to offer 15 per cent of the body weight in whole milk or milk replacer mixed at 125 grams/litre water. The abomasum of a newborn is not large enough to deal with six litres of milk in one feed, so the feed should be split until they are at least three weeks of age. Remember: As calves grow, they will require more energy, so volume and energy must be increased. Calves need 325 grams of milk solids for maintenance alone. Milk is 12.5 per cent dry matter, which equates to 2.6 litres. If a 40-kilogram calf is fed four litres, they can only gain 200 grams per day, taking longer to achieve the target weaning weight or weaning at a low weight. Water is a vital part of calf nutrition and is often disregarded if they are on milk. Clean, fresh water should be readily available from week one. The development of calf starter intake depends on water intake. It is important to remember that milk goes into the abomasum, bypassing the rumen. Hence, there is no water/moisture to aid the digestion of the calf concentrate in the rumen.

Environment

Another crucial factor in rearing healthy calves is ensuring suitable accommodation. Calves spend up to 80 per cent of their time lying down and need:

- A dry, draught-free bed
- Adequate access to water

- Light and sufficient fresh air to breathe
- Calves in groups will need at least 1.1 square metres of lying space up to eight weeks old and 1.5 square metres thereafter. It is vital to avoid changes within groups and group calves according to size and age. The shed should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected with a broad-spectrum disinfectant before calves arrive. While in use, pens should also be frequently disinfected to prevent the build-up of disease organisms. Hygiene around milk feeding is also vital: cleaning all feeding equipment is necessary for maintaining healthy animals, and prioritising younger animals first, along with rinsing before feeding the other batches, will help mitigate the spread of disease.

Rumen development and immunity

Calf rearing will take up a large proportion of the morning and evening routine on most farms. It can be time-consuming at the best of times and particularly frustrating if calves' immunity is compromised.

Developing a healthy rumen is one of the first steps to a healthy animal, establishing a robust immunity that will lighten the workload for everyone involved. Giving the calf the best opportunity to develop and gain weight means ensuring a healthy rumen and working gut function.

At 10 weeks of age, a calf should be double its birth weight at weaning. An average daily gain of 0.6 kilograms liveweight/day should be the target all calves are looking to achieve this spring. A developed rumen supports greater efficiency in breaking down feed, leading to an improved weight gain over the calf's life.

At InTouch, we do not advise feeding hay or silages to pre-weaned calves. This can slow growth and negatively affect starter intakes. Calves cannot digest large quantities of forages, and consumption of this material can lead to 'pot belly' calves, which increases rumen fill, leading to reduced starter intake and overall poor performance. The use of 8–10 per cent of chopped straw as part of the calf concentrate can encourage rumen strength, as well as allow the concentrate to be fed safely between weaning and grass or any other changes in diet. The starch in the concentrate will help to drive papillae development. It is also important to make sure any concentrate is highly palatable and dust-free to avoid respiratory issues.

Scour is responsible for nearly 30 per cent of calf deaths while also resulting in poor growth and performance and a lot of work for the farmer. Prevention is better than cure, and much can be done to help prevent diarrhoea problems on a dairy farm. Including Actigen® in the diet will benefit all calves by modifying and improving the intestinal microflora composition. It has been proven to help manage the risk of diarrhoea in calves, improve feed conversion efficiency and increase starter intake and weight gain.

Actigen can provide calves with the best possible start to building up a strong immune system. It can be used to reduce scour in calves and, as it is a yeast-based product, lead to improved feed efficiency. Actigen can be included in the milk replacer or calf ration at an average inclusion rate of 1.5 grams/day.

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Auctus Delivers Quality & Value

As well publicised over the past few months, the dairy commodity market has been very bullish with the cost of dairy ingredients increasing substantially. It is namely Whey powders that are the core ingredients which make up the composition of the majority, of calf milk replacers. These increases have seen the cost of calf milk replacer rising for the 2022 calving season. It is more important this year that farmers in both the dairy and beef sectors look at what they are buying in terms of calf milk replacer. Crude Protein and Crude Oil & Fat only tell half of the story. You must also look at the Crude Fibre and the Crude Ash content as well to make sure the Protein is being delivered from a dairy source. Crude Fibre should not be above 0.1% and Crude Ash should not be above 8%. Auctus has also given a very strong commitment to the market to deliver value on their calf milk replacer range and it will pay you to investigate their pricing, especially this year. The strong price for dairy ingredients is good news for the dairy sector as it is the price of these commodities, which in turn delivers a better price for milk at farm level. December base milk price for 3.3% protein and 3.6% fat is paying for example 42 cent per litre in Glanbia, 40 cent per litre in Lakeland Dairies and 40.5 cent per litre in Dairygold with their average December milk price of 50.9 cent per litre being paid to name but a few. The short term outlook for the dairy commodity market is also looking favourable to deliver good prices for milk to the farmer and rightly so. Auctus delivers the highest quality through their calf milk replacer range and by using the highest grade whey milk ingredients, results in the efficient absorption of the high protein levels and in turn delivers on daily live weight gain.

HEALTH & VITALITY

All Auctus calf milk replacers have the inclusion of Triple Shield Protection. Triple Shield Protection is a combination of a comprehensive health package to protect calves:

- A high grade mix of enzymes are included to promote good microbial growth essential for the calf's health and immunity.
- Auctus powders are formulated purposely with a very strong Vitamin & Mineral inclusion. The Vitamin & Mineral content is the strongest on the market and this gives added protection from a vitality and health

point of view.

- All Auctus calf milk replacers have both Sodium Butyrate and Sodium Bicarbonate now included. The advantages of these are 2 fold. The Sodium Butyrate helps to buffer the stomach from harmful pathogens such as cryptosporidium and coccidiosis or bacteria such as e-coli and salmonella. Sodium Bicarbonate is added to help in the incidence of a clostridial challenge.

Auctus now have 5 calf milk replacers in the range.

CHAMPION – is the biggest selling calf milk replacer in Ireland presently. Champion is formulated to deliver high levels of quality protein with large amounts of energy, in order to grow the calf's bone structure, while fleshing the calf at the same time. The high energy levels encourages the calf to consume more ration and fibre from an early age and increase the rate of rumen development. By doing this, the calf is better developed and stronger for the weaning period and beyond. Champion is ideal for rearing replacement heifers and beef calves.

CHAMPION WITH ADDED LUNG GUARD – has all the benefits of Champion but with the added protection of Lung Guard. Lung Guard, is as it says on the tin, protects the lungs of the calf. It is a mixture of silicic acid to promote mucus growth to protect the lung's alveoli and



eucalyptus oil to keep the airways open to expel any unwanted viral or pathogenic load.

OPTI-MUM – is specifically designed to develop frame growth in replacement heifers.

The very high protein levels push skeletal and structural growth from the start of life.

OPTI-MUM WITH ADDED LUNG GUARD – again provides an ideal product for replacement heifers but with the added protection of Lung Guard.

TURBO THRIVE – is formulated using the same high grade whey and skim milk powders as the other Auctus calf milk replacers. Turbo Thrive is designed for the beef calf market and delivers a more economical option of calf rearing whilst still pushing calf performance from the calf's first week of life onwards.

When pricing calf milk replacer this year, there are a few pointers to watch for. Calf milk replacer should be bought at a nett bag price. If you are getting a price with an offer with so many bags free of charge, calculate what the price per bag is inclusive of the free stock. Check out the Crude Protein, Crude Oil & Fat but in conjunction with Crude Fibre and Crude Ash contents.



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Lessons from Covid support calf rearing targets

Covid has taught us the lessons of bolstering, as best we can, our immune system to fight off disease and infection. And this applies to keeping our calves fit and well through the colder and damper winter months. So says Cargill's UK and Ireland youngstock specialist **Bianca Theeruth**.

"There are plenty of challenges facing our young calves, and particularly in winter," Bianca explains. "Experience on farm in the past few calving seasons seems to show that rotavirus and cryptosporidiosis continue to be a challenge."

Good management and strict hygiene protocols are crucial on calf units. But farmers can vaccinate dams prior to calving to provide necessary protection against rotavirus, coronavirus and E.coli.

"It's a veterinary decision, but it's very cost-effective when you consider the potential costs in treating sick calves and the potential losses."

She adds that those farmers who have been affected by rotavirus and now vaccinate, consider this as part of the animal health programme and would never go back to skipping it. "Even if they didn't lose calves, or only a few, treating and caring for these sick calves is very costly and labour-intensive in a busy time of the year."

"Rotavirus is shed by cows around calving and infected calves shed it in huge quantities. Any calf-rearing facility,



and especially the larger ones, provide ample opportunity for the rotavirus to spread quickly. Infection with rotavirus can also make calves more susceptible to infection from other organisms such as cryptosporidiosis, coronavirus and E. coli."

Unfortunately, there's no vaccine treatment for cryptosporidiosis yet. This parasite causes scours in young calves, generally in the first few weeks of life. "It's not usually fatal, but their growth rate and immune system development can take a hit, and, as sick calves, they need more care. "When it comes to cryptosporidiosis 'cleanliness' is next to Godliness' in calf-rearing systems." While these two diseases are the main causes of mortality on calf units, they're not the only causes of setbacks that can affect growth rates and jeopardise the target breeding dates and age at first calving, thereby adding to rearing costs.

Poor colostrum management, housing, hygiene and feeding routines can also hold back calves. Calves facing nutritional or energy stresses, and with depressed immune systems, are most likely to be vulnerable to infection and face more severe symptoms.

Three key areas support calf care. "And it's where most could make some simple improvements that would benefit calf performance."

The first is the environment, particularly bedding and ventilation.

"Young calves need clean, dry bedding and in cold weather deeper bedding to provide more insulation. Cold, wet bedding is a big 'no-no' They're no more safe and happy resting on a cold, wet mattress than you would be! And it's a breeding ground for infection."

Infra-red lights for very young calves and calf jackets are all part of the winter and early spring armoury for calves, to minimise environmental challenges.

Plenty of fresh air – but not a draught – is needed too.

"We're back to Covid lessons," she adds. "Keep the building well-ventilated and not over-stocked, however tempting this latter point may be in a busy calving season." The second area where we see a lot of infections creeping





in, is in colostrum collection and feeding equipment. "Hygiene here must be 100 per cent. It's such a good breeding ground for bugs, yet you're giving this highly valuable feed to newborn calves with no protection. "Colostrum must be harvested and stored in clean containers and feeders and equipment must be clean enough that you would eat or drink from it – if you wouldn't, then give it a good wash first. A third key area is nutrition. "The calf's diet should provide the ingredients for bolstering its immune system," adds Ms Theeruth, emphasising that high quality colostrum is vital, and the need to follow it with a high quality follow on milk.

"I'd encourage farmers to be discerning about their choice of milk and look for one with the correct balance of ingredients along with a proven gut conditioning package to support the calf's immune system.

"And as temperatures drop during a cold spell, consider increasing feeding rates to provide additional energy needed for maintenance.

"Too many calf growth rates slowdown in cold weather because the available energy for growth is diverted to maintenance," she adds, reminding farmers that milk should be well mixed and fed warm.

When it comes to calf milks, Ms Theeruth encourages producers take advantage of the latest generation of products. "These embrace new knowledge in calf nutrition," she adds.

"We have recently launched a range of calf milks in the UK and Ireland with a more precise combination of ingredients than has been available in the past. These diets, now available in Ireland, give the calf what it needs. "By providing the right ingredients in the right amounts there's less waste, which has a positive environmental impact. And the calf doesn't need to spend energy getting rid of them – so this energy can be used for growth."

Amino acid technology and improved gut health packages are at the core of the improvements in Cargill's new NeoMilk® range of follow on milks, that update its ProviMilk® calf milk formulations. These gut health packages include an improved fatty acid content to promote gut health and immunity, bone growth, metabolism and organ development. We want a fatty

acid profile in each milk that is as close to mother's milk as possible," says Ms Theeruth. "They can also include postbiotics that contribute to the calf's immune response and help it cope with disease challenges during the first few weeks of life."

"Healthy calves will grow better and are less likely to succumb to disease or need antibiotic treatments. Minimising the challenges and increasing the anti through vaccination, improved diets and a safer environment will help to keep calves healthy, trouble-free and on their growth track."

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Managing Milk Fever this Spring

Maura Langan, Norbrook Vet Adviser, examines the risk of milk fever within the herd and advises on methods of prevention.

"All freshly calved cows are challenged to maintain normal calcium levels within the first 72 hours of calving, so the modern dairy farmer needs to understand the risk of milk fever within the herd and aim to prevent it wherever possible," advises Maura Langan, Norbrook Vet Adviser. Milk fever or hypocalcaemia occurs when the cow is unable to mobilise her own calcium reserves quickly enough to match the increased demand created by the production of colostrum and the onset of lactation.

Risk factor

Some cows will struggle to adapt to the increased need for calcium more than others. Cows particularly at risk of milk fever include those that are over-conditioned (BCS 3.5 or more), under-conditioned (BCS 2.5 or less), older cows (third lactation plus), those with a history of milk fever, high-producing dairy cows and breeds such as Jersey.

Milk fever has been found to increase the risk of other clinical diseases from retained placenta and left displaced abomasum to mastitis and lameness. The impact of clinical cases, reduced milk yield and sub-optimal fertility also have significant financial implications, leading many experts to recommend a whole-herd approach to the management of milk fever.

Maura explains: "Calcium is stored in the bones so it takes time for the cow to mobilise what is needed. By providing a calcium supplement around calving, we can give her a little extra time to access her own supply and meet her needs naturally. In many Irish dairy herds, I would recommend an oral calcium supplement like Calcitrace D3 bolus or Calcitrace P liquid is given to every cow shortly after calving. For really 'at risk' cows this should

be followed up with a second dose after around 12 hours. This will give high levels of easily absorbed calcium that will not interfere with the cows' natural metabolic processes."

Prompt treatment

For many farmers a case of milk fever involves a 'downer cow', when clinical hypocalcaemia results in a loss of appetite, low body temperature, muscle weakness causing her to go down and a slowing of her heart rate. Prompt veterinary treatment with intravenous Calciject 40+3 delivers high levels of calcium very quickly, getting the cow back on her feet.

"IV Calcium infusion is a lifesaving treatment," adds Maura. "I always recommend a follow-up oral calcium supplement is given to every downer cow as this is the most effective way to ensure she has a continued calcium supply post-treatment until she is able to match her requirements naturally."

Being vigilant

Farmers are also being urged to be vigilant for other metabolic diseases and mineral deficiencies in Transition Cows. "Milk fever is often complicated by deficiency in phosphorus and can bring an increased risk of ketosis when the animal goes off her feed. Your vet or animal health adviser or nutritionist will be able to advise about appropriate supplements or treatments," advises Maura. "The calving season can be very busy and stressful for farmers, vets and cattle," concludes Maura. "But with careful milk fever management it's possible to reduce the need for clinical intervention and promote a healthier more productive lactation."

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Calf policies and practices

Matt O’Keeffe reports from the latest calf-related seminars.

January was a time of preparation for the calving season which has now begun in earnest. There was a range of webinars for farmers to tune into, including an IFA-organised virtual event which included an update on calf and livestock exports generally and the increased regulations which could be introduced in the coming years. The IFA presentation also focused on the use of sexed semen and one of the key take-away messages was that sexed semen is a fragile product, having gone through an intensive process to segregate the male sperm from the female ones. There are different protocols to be adopted in terms of both timing of insemination and the handling of the straws before use. The benefits of using sexed semen both on individual farms and for the livestock sector generally, were well laid out in the webinar and are well worth viewing if not seen on the night.

Breeding with purpose

Another online paper looked at the economic and performance differences between different dairy calf breeds and it is clear that ongoing research and the development of the Breeding Indexes have much to offer

in providing breeders and beef producers with valuable direction and guidance. Some of the big eye-openers in the IFA webinar were the significant differences in profit outcomes from different management practices, the selection of different dairy calf breeds and the potential for finishing cattle in a shortened second winter period to drive up net margin.

Best practices post birth

Animal Health Ireland again used virtual presentations this year to provide refresher courses for farmers coming into the calving season. Hopefully next year the organisation will be able to return to its popular and practical farm-based Calf-Care meetings.

In the meantime, the importance of early and adequate colostrum was well highlighted by Emer Kennedy. She also emphasised the importance of ensuring that hygiene standards must be excellent or the best efforts in getting colostrum into calves will be totally negated. Storing good quality colostrum for later use is always a good calf management practice, especially if a cow calves down with inadequate or inferior colostrum, as Emer noted. Colostrum will store safely for up to one year if frozen,

or for a 48-hour period if in a fridge. One regular mistake when thawing or warming stored colostrum is the use of boiling water or a microwave. Both practices are a definite NO-NOs as Emer Kennedy emphasised in her presentation.

On the farm

Dairy farmer Philip Donohue gave an outline on his practical application of best practices in the run-up to calving, post calving and calf management generally. Philip's pre-calving cow management is noteworthy as he acclimatises the cows to their calving headquarters in the period before calving. Group pens are used in the early life stage of the calf and they are then moved onto a larger calf feeding system. There are clearly defined stages as the calves move towards the outdoors. As a practical example of on-farm practice the AHI webinar is well worth a look for farmers even during the calving season to reassess their own practices. Compact calving means that everything needs to run as smoothly as possible, as Philip told his virtual audience.

Rules around calf housing

Ciara Hayes from DAFM gave viewers an update on best welfare practices and covered such areas as floorspace space per calf, airflow, ventilation, clean bedding, fresh, clean water and adequate nutrition. There are many

farmers who probably do not know exactly how much space they should have per calf or even how much space per calf they do have in their calf houses. Stuart Childs led a discussion which hit on a lot of topics. One of particular interest was around the benefits of calf jackets. While they have a role, they do not compensate for shortcomings such as wet bedding, draughts or overcrowding.

De-budding protocols

Joris Somers of Glanbia was on hand to illustrate best practice in de-budding calves. Timing, numbing, the benefits of anti-inflammatories and good holding facilities for the calf undergoing de-budding were well outlined. Volac was a partner in the AHI-organised event with Teagasc and the Coops and Liam Gannon of Volac outlined how to minimise bloat in calves. He described the condition, the influencing factors and the best methodologies to prevent the condition. Vet Joris Somers gave some viable tips on how to deal with a bloated calf to alleviate the condition. Vaccines, a topic on which the general public, as well as livestock managers, are now almost experts, were discussed and the merits well outlined.

The best advice is that a first or even second look at the AHI webinar would be well worth while for anyone wanting a refresher course on calf management this spring.

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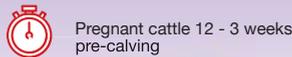
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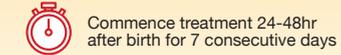
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*Caused by RSV and P



PRODUCT	1 WEEK	2 WEEKS	3 WEEKS	4 WEEKS
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Bovilis[®] INtranasal RSP[™] Live	Intranasal			
Bovipast[®] RSP		1st shot subcutaneous		
Bovilis[®] IBR Marker Live		Intranasal		
Bovilis[®] IBR Marker Live				
Bovipast[®] RSP			Same day administration ²	
Vecoxan[®]				Administered more than 3 weeks

1. Due to diagnosed *Cryptosporidium parvum*, in farms with history of cryptosporidiosis.
 2. Bovilis Bovipast[®] RSP and Bovilis[®] IBR Marker Live can be administered the same day but not mixed. Can be given from three weeks of age.
 3. *Mannheimia haemolytica* A1 & A6.
 4. Commence oral treatment in the first 24-48hr after birth for 7 consecutive days.
 5. Nuijten P, Rooij MV, Vertenten G. A new intranasal BRD vaccine induces protection in the presence of maternally derived antibodies. European Bovine Congress; 2019 11 - 13 September 2019; 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands. Note: The efficacy against MDA may be reduced by the presence of MDA.

Bovilis[®] Scour vaccine for injection for cattle contains (per 2ml dose): Bovine rotavirus, strain UK-Compton, serotype G6 P5 (inactivated) - a 1/4 dose of vaccine stimulates a virus neutralising antibody titre: $\geq 7.7 \log_2/\text{ml}$ (guinea pigs). *E. coli* F5 (K99) adhesion - 1/20 dose of vaccine stimulates an ELISA antibody (OD492): >0.64 (guinea pigs). Light Mineral Oil/emulsifier and Aluminium hydroxide are added as adjuvants and Thiomersal and Formalin are added as preservatives.
 Cryptosporidium control contains 0.5mg/ml halofuginone lactate in an aqueous excipient. Withdrawal period: Meat and offal: 13 days. Legal categories: ROI [POM] NI [POM-V]
 Bovilis[®] INtranasal RSP[™] Live: contains live, bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV), strain Jencine-2013, live bovine parainfluenza virus type 3 (PI3), strain INT2-2013. Withdrawal periods: Zero days. Legal Categories: ROI [POM] NI [POM-V]
 Bovilis Bovipast[®] RSP contains inact. BRS Virus strain EV908, Pi-3 Virus strain SF-4 Reisinger and *Mannheimia haemolytica* A1 strain M4/1. Withdrawal periods: zero days. Legal Categories: ROI [POM(E)] NI [POM-V]
 Bovilis[®] IBR Marker Live contains live BHV-1 strain GK/D (gE₊). For the active immunisation of cattle against infectious bovine rhinotracheitis virus. Withdrawal periods: zero days. Legal Categories: ROI [POM(E)] NI [POM-V]
 Vecoxan[®] 2.5mg/ml Oral Suspension for lambs and calves. It is indicated for the prevention of coccidiosis caused by *Eimeria crandallis* and *Eimeria ovinoidalis* in lambs and *Eimeria bovis* and *Eimeria zuernii* in calves. Legal Categories: ROI [POM] NI [POM-V]

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Oral administration



WEEKS	5 WEEKS	6 WEEKS	7 WEEKS	8 WEEKS	9 WEEKS	10 WEEKS	11 WEEKS	12 WEEKS
8 WEEKS APART		 Booster shot subcutaneous						
								 1st shot Intramuscular
4 WEEKS APART			 Booster shot Bovipast RSP					 1st shot Intramuscular Bovilis IBR Marker Live
For calves greater than 3 months of age ⁷								

6. Vaccination protocol for farmers who intend to vaccinate calves with Bovipast[®] RSP and with Bovilis[®] IBR Marker Live.
 7. Vecoxan can be used in calves at any age, but usually disease occurs from 3 weeks of age.
 8. Agnessens J, Goossens L, Louineau J, Dauschies A and Veys P (2006). Build up of immunity after a diclazuril (Vecoxan) treatment in calves. Poster at World Buiatrics Congress, Nice.
 9. Philippe, P., Alzieu, J.P., Taylor, M.A. and Dorchies, P., 2014. Comparative efficacy of diclazuril (Vecoxan[®]) and toltrazuril (Baycox bovis[®]) against natural infections of *Eimeria bovis* and *Eimeria zuernii* in French calves. *Veterinary parasitology*, 206(3-4), pp.129-137.

10. (in swine). Bovine coronavirus, strain Mebus (inactivated) - a 1/20 dose of vaccine stimulates an ELISA antibody titre: $\geq 3.41 \log_{10}/\text{ml}$. Formaldehyde are included as excipients. Withdrawal period: zero days. Legal Category: ROI [POM] POM NI [POM-VPS]

11. [POM(E)] NI [POM-V]

12. [V]
 13. Legal categories: ROI [LM] NI [POM-VPS]

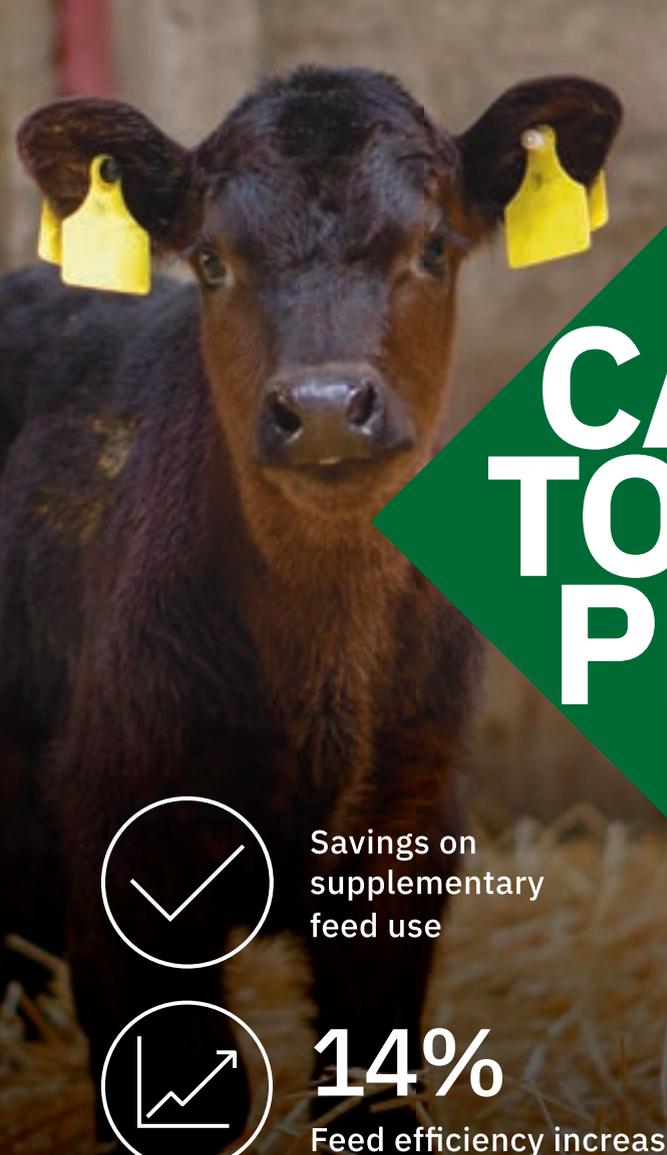
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Vaccination of the pre-calving cow

Cara Sheridan, MSD Animal Health, discusses vaccination strategy for this time of year.

And just like that it's January again. On many farms throughout the country the 2022 calving season is imminent. Whether your calving pattern is solely spring based or spread out in the calendar year, January is often a busy month for cow vaccination. With regards to cows (and in-calf heifers), two questions worth asking:

- At what stage pre-calving do they need to receive the scour vaccine?
- Have they received a booster of IBR vaccine this winter?
- Vaccination of the cow pre-calving for passive protection
- Vaccination of the cow and subsequent colostrum feeding helps to bridge the gap between birth and development of the calves' own immune systems.
- The most common vaccine used in the pre-calving period is that against E. coli, rotavirus and coronavirus. Salmonella vaccine and clostridial vaccine if warranted can also be given in the pre-calving period to provide passive protection to the calves.
- Vaccination of the cow against E.coli, rotavirus and coronavirus:
 - ▶ A single 2ml dose of vaccine; three weeks to 12 weeks before calving
 - ▶ If a spread in calving pattern, it is advisable to vaccinate the herd in batches
 - ▶ By the intramuscular route using a 16 gauge 1.5 inch needle recommended
 - ▶ When calves are fed colostrum and transition milk from vaccinated cows and heifers for the first two weeks of life, the antibodies provided reduce the incidence and severity of scour. These calves also shed less rotavirus and coronavirus.
- Vaccination of the cow against salmonella species with Bovivac S:
 - ▶ A booster vaccine three to four weeks before

calving in cows previously vaccinated

- ▶ Replacement heifers should be vaccinated with a primary course at six and three weeks pre-calving (if receiving the vaccine for the first time)
- ▶ A 2ml dose of vaccine given by the subcutaneous route
- ▶ This vaccine must not be given within 14 days of any other vaccine
- Vaccination of the cow against clostridial species with Tribovax 10:
 - ▶ A booster vaccine eight to two weeks before calving in cows and heifers which have been previously vaccinated with a primary course
 - ▶ A 2ml dose of vaccine given by the subcutaneous route
 - ▶ IBR vaccination of the cow herd

Many herds are on a six monthly IBR live vaccination programme with boosters in January and July. January is a good time to administer to a spring calving herd as a booster two weeks or more prior to calving will ensure cows and heifers have boosted immunity at the critical stress time of calving.

Best practice

When dealing with the pre-calving cow herd and in-calf heifers it is worth being considerate of their condition; they are heavy in calf. Gentle handling and correct administration of products are both necessities. As stated above, salmonella vaccine should not be given within 14 days of any other vaccine. I would also recommend that the scour vaccine against E. coli, rotavirus and coronavirus be the only vaccine administered on the day. If the cows require a dose for fluke or a lice treatment at the same time as vaccination that would be appropriate to administer on the same day. It is in everyone's interest to look about the cows and in-calf heifers and ensure that the products given work to the best of their potential.

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MESSAGES:

- ▶ Look back at 2021 to plan 2022
- ▶ A spring 2022 grazing plan was never more important
- ▶ Know where and how to save on nitrogen use this year
- ▶ Apply N, P, K and particularly LIME now to meet requirements
- ▶ Milk record in 2022 – a must do resolution!
- ▶ Cow and calf care must be prioritised in February.
- ▶ Bulling heifer targets: start now to achieve.
- ▶ Plan to use contractors more in 2022.

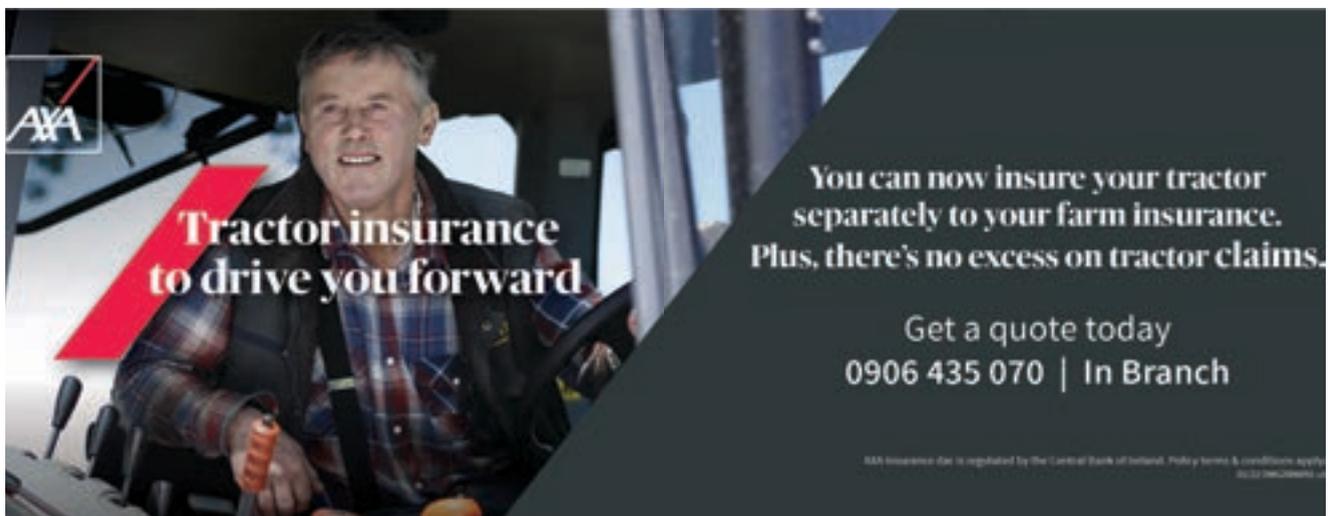
A BRIEF LOOK BACK AT 2021

- ▶ It makes us feel good to look back, particularly in a good year. But even though they say we learn more about ourselves when we don't do well, we can still learn from a good year because it was mainly driven by milk price.
 - ▶ Milk price increased by 6.3 c/l, due in greater part to better markets but % F increased by 0.1 while % P remained the same – the highest milk price achieved was 45.1 c/l.
 - ▶ The kgs Milk Solids (MS) produce increased by 20 kgs (4.3%) driven by a not-so-large increase in meal feeding (4%), while the kgs MS per kg cow body weight increased by 3.5%.
 - ▶ The total and comparative costs of producing a kg MS increased from €2.71 and €2.08 to €3.46 and €2.39 respective. This represents an increase of 27.7% and 14.9% respectively.
 - ▶ Comparative Profit per kg MS increased from €2.15 to €3.16, an increase of 47%.
 - ▶ SCC, cow cull rate remained nearly the same, but...
 - ▶ Grass utilised decreased by 2.4% from 11.12 to 10.86 tons DM/ha.
 - ▶ Interesting that this group of farmers increased EBI and cow fertility by over €9 each. This is one of the few ways of insulating yourself against input cost and milk price volatility – let no one tell you anything else.

- ▶ A lot of good messages can be derived from these stats, all be it from a very small number of farmers. But with projections for fertiliser and meal prices to dramatically increase this year, dairy farmers would need to control inputs a lot better. Milk price is likely to help but don't spend on that basis.

SPRING GRAZING PLAN – NEVER SO IMPORTANT

- ▶ This is a most unusual and challenging spring with Nitrogen prices at a level we never could envisage. So, the question being asked is 'can I afford to use any N?' And if you don't, what will you do? Spring grass will cost 17-20 c/kg DM, meal will cost 34-36c/kg DM and silage in pit will cost 17c/kg DM, while it will cost 26-30 c/kg DM to make in 2022.
 - ▶ The advice is to strategically use some N, make more use of slurry and be careful not to over rely on meal and silage.
 - ▶ But good and well proven grazing practices are much more important than ever. Let us recap.
- ▶ The spring rotation plan is vital to use as per the letter of the law.
 - ▶ Any farmer not using this is not serious about grazing cows in spring to make €2.80/cow/day profit – an old figure, probably reduced by half.
 - ▶ Feeding more meal and/or silage will mean reverting to where we were 20 years ago.
 - ▶ That €2.80 profit figure resulted from only a 10-15% savings in cost with the remainder coming from increased milk yield, higher % fat and protein. Other benefits accruing from grass in the diet, even for only 3 hrs per day, were that there was less body weight loss, better health (mastitis, lameness, viral infections etc.) and, of course, lower labour demands.
- ▶ Can I guarantee you that if you let out your cows to grass on the 10th Feb that you will have enough grass until early April and not run short? Yes, I can! How?
 - ▶ The spring rotation planner does all that for you.
 - ▶ Get it from your adviser (PastureBase).



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- ▶ This planner will show you the area of ground you allocate to your cows each day from let out until the 2nd rotation starts. You must never give more than the specified area of ground; otherwise, you will finish the first rotation too soon. If you have not enough grass on that area, you must feed meal and/or silage. This will be indicated by the allocated area being ‘skinned’ and the cows looking empty and hungry.
 - ▶ You must have 30% of the available grazing area grazed by 1st March and 60% by the 17th March. Why?
 - ▶ Because, otherwise, you won’t have enough grass on the 2nd rotation in April; for every 1% you are below these target you will have 14kgs DM/ha less grass in April.
 - ▶ You need 50 to 60 days from grazing the first paddocks in February to the next time they are grazed in April.
 - ▶ The summary is:
 - ♦ Graze 30% in February; these paddocks will be dry, closer to the yard, with multiple access points, sheltered, with covers 800-1200 kgs DM/ha, recently reseeded and the quickest growing. If silage is being cut off milking platform due to low stocking rate, then these paddocks/fields should be grazed during this period so that they can be grazed again in early April.
 - ♦ Graze 30% from 1-17th March; with heavier covers, greater than 1200, further from the yard with many access entrances and pretty dry.
 - ♦ Graze the last 40% by 5th April; these paddocks will have been grazed last in autumn, have poorer grazing infra-structures, old grass types and slower growing.
 - ▶ If you have some paddocks with very heavy covers, postpone grazing these until you have a lot of cows milking, by grazing lighter paddocks; say 800-1000 kgs, first. Otherwise, you will waste too much grass, do too much ground damage and you will not get 30+% of the area grazed out before 1th March.
 - ▶ On-off - that is 3 hrs out grazing - is an essential practice. This prevents poaching damage and is most neglected in Ireland.
 - ▶ Because of the amount of grass on farms this year it is certain that farmers must have cow out “full-time” from very early Feb – my definition of full-time is 2-3 hours after both morning and evening’s milking.
 - ▶ Do the am milking at 7am and the evenings at 3 – 4pm, bringing the cows back in to very, very little silage at 6-7pm.
 - ▶ So as to graze the 30-35% target, start grazing light covers and then the heavy covers around 20-25th Feb when a lot of cows are calved and they have a much-improved appetite.
 - ▶ As gut fill is a major cause of poor grazing activity, minimum silage should be fed.
 - ▶ The 1st rotation should end as near as possible to the 1st April because:
 - ▶ Moorepark has said that farmers whose 1st rotation end around that time grow most grass.
 - ▶ It is partly explained by the fact that they also say that each extra grazing rotation results in 1300 kgs DM/ha being grown. Therefore, picking up a few days in early April will go some way towards an extra grazing in 2022 (set this target).
 - ▶ If, because of a wet spell, you fall behind on the area being grazed, you must “catch-up” by grazing larger areas per day when the weather dries up. Otherwise, you will miss the 30% and 60% targets.
 - ▶ You know, for certain, the area being allocated each day set up the stakes for 7-10 days in advance to save labour.
 - ▶ Associated with this practice is to graze the silage ground twice. It will save on meals in early April and give higher yield, higher % F & P plus improved BCS.
- ### STEPS TO REDUCE NITROGEN
- ▶ With Nitrogen so expensive and environmental pressure we need to adopt practices that help us reduce the amount of bag N we use. The following suggestions should be practiced:
 1. Apply a max of 29 kg/ha (23 units/acre) in spring of protected urea to the area planned for bag N. Where slurry is not being used use bag N.
 2. Use slurry strategically instead of bag N, as it contains 6-8 units N, 5 unit P and 30 units K per 1000 gallons if the slurry dry matter is 7-9%.
 - ▶ 2500 gallons/acre on the 40% to be grazed from 17th March to end of 1st rotation.
 - ▶ 2500 gallons on the first 30% of area grazed from let out to 1st March.
 - ▶ 2500 gallons on the 30% area grazed from 1st to 17th March.
 3. Apply bag Nitrogen 4 to 6 weeks after the 1st application – the higher the stocking rate (SR) the shorter the period,
 4. Replace some of the bag N with slurry for 1st cut silage.
 5. Make as much 1st cut silage as possible as this saves on N – farmers very remiss on this advice,
 6. Diluting slurry with soiled water will increase the efficiency of utilisation of N in the slurry,
 7. Avoid making a 2nd cut silage if possible – hence the need to do winter feed budgets early.
 8. Plan to build grass cover by extending the rotation from mid-July to late-July.
 9. Keep records of quantities and dates of application N on PastureBase – then study the outcomes,
 10. White clover has the potential to halve the amount of bag N used – so plan to sow in April – May.
 - ▶ Remember the following facts (Research) on nitrogen use efficiency on grassland. It is:
 - ▶ 63% - when the pH, the Phosphate (P) and Potash (K) are optimum.
 - ▶ 54% - when P is deficient,
 - ▶ 57% - when K deficient

- ▶ 53% - when P & K are deficient,
- ▶ 35% - when P, K and lime are deficient,
- ▶ I hope you can deduct from this; the element having the greatest effect! LIME – a 28% reduction in the efficiency of nitrogen.
- ▶ All soils have background N (averaging 140 kg/ha) and it won't be released to its max without lime.
- ▶ The message is clear for 2022 – bring ALL fields up to pH 6.5 this year. No excuses about weather, grass cover, silage – plan to make it happen.

APPLY NITROGEN, P & K, NOW

- ▶ To the above background I make the following points.
- ▶ Nitrogen is still the cheapest feed input you will buy – referenced above.
 - ▶ I updated an old piece of research, costing in spring grass at 20c/kg DM and 70% utilisation, silage at 17c/kg DM (2021 silage) and 26c/kg DM (2022 silage) while feeding 4 kgs meal to both cows kept in full time and cows eating 3.1kg grass DM per day (2.5hrs out),
 - ▶ The margin, due to increased kgs milk solids produced but increased cost was €0.67 per cow per day by having cows at grass (expensively grown) this spring. The advantage of feeding this year's silage is €1.07 if feeding all silage and €0.82 per cow per day if grazing for 2.5 hrs/day instead of sparing this year's silage for next years.
 - ▶ The message is clear: put on your nitrogen as recommended so as to have grass for grazing, feed 4kgs meal and the balance with pit silage.
- ▶ Use at least half bag protected urea on every acre in need of it.
 - ▶ You must put it on immediately, complying with the dates for your region, if you have not done so – as early as you can on wet farms, while obeying the regulations.
 - ▶ Even on fields with heavy covers.
 - ▶ Saves labour and confusion.
 - ▶ Maximise yield of grass per unit spread.
- ▶ Contrary to popular belief all paddocks, even ones with

1,500 Kgs DM grass cover, should get N, except paddocks that got the slurry.

- ▶ Approximately one-third of the farm, any field with a cover of less than 700kg/ha, should get slurry, using the umbilical or trail and shoe system to avoid soil compaction and or soiling the grass, as the Nitrogen source; and the remaining area get 23 units per acre of protected Urea.
- ▶ On farms that applied Urea in mid-January, the next application of at least 40 units Urea/acre falls due in mid to late February (4 weeks after the first application).
- ▶ Use the weather forecast so that no heavy rain comes within 24-48 hours.
- ▶ There should be no argument on which Nitrogen to use, protected Urea, and it is equally as good with lower risk of loss from soil.
 - ▶ It costs the same as CAN per unit.
- ▶ If you do not have time to spread Nitrogen and/or slurry, get someone in to do it because any delay will cost you a fortune.
- ▶ The advice above is for farms who have no P or K to apply, having done so in Sept. However, the following advice should be followed where P and K are required:
 - ▶ Apply 2- 2.5 bags 10:10:20 (cheapest combination) per acre as an annual maintenance dressing to farms with a Soil Index 3 and a lot of grass is grown. An extra 1-2 bags is required for lower Index farms. This is critical advice.
- ▶ It is worth getting slurry analysed but it must be very well agitated, being careful when doing so.
- ▶ The general analysis of 1000 gallons of slurry is: 6:5:30 units.
- ▶ Sulphur is a mineral that must be used, and there is a benefit even in some Februaries.

MILK RECORD IN 2022

- ▶ Many farmers, as a result of major expansion over the last few years, are overstocked on the milking parlour with 20% “bad cows” in the herd. Money can be made by clearer thinking on this dilemma.
- ▶ Take the case of 100 cow farmer producing 400kgs MS



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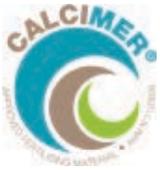


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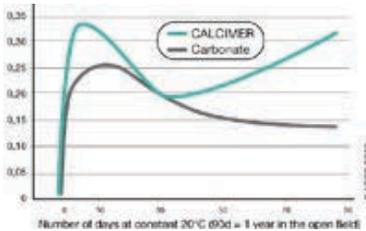
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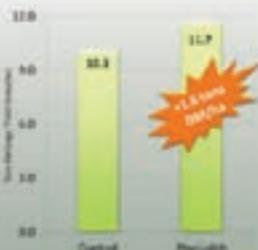


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per cow, with the lowest 10 cows doing 300 kgs each; the profit per kg MS was €2.50. We did a Partial Budget on the scenario of selling off the “bad 10 cows”:

- ▶ On the negative side he will lose the profit on 10 cows (10x300x€2.50), which is €7,500.
- ▶ On the positive side he will “save” 55 tons DM (10 x 5,500) or 63.21 tons meal equivalent which is worth €17,699. He would be milking one row of cows less a saving of 20 minutes/day for 280 day or 93 hours at €10 per hour, equals €930.
- ▶ Therefore, for a decision of doing less work he will be €11,199 ‘better off’, leaving aside the labour cost. He will also have 10 extra cows, probably late calvers, to sell at probably €1200 each, which can be put to productive use.
- ▶ Ironically, the 90 cows remaining will only have to milk 11 kgs MS more each to make up the “loss” of 3000kgs MS produced by the 10 ‘sold’ cows.
- ▶ A “no-brainer” decision!
- ▶ Do you appreciate the value of using the word AVERAGE to make decisions?
 - ▶ This farmer’s average figures per cow for his 100-cow herd were: 400kgs MS; 4% fat and 3.5% protein; and profit per cow was €800.
 - ▶ Once you know the average you should do something with the figure as I have demonstrated with the kgs MS.
- ▶ My punch line is to do Milk Recording in 2022 so that you have the knowledge to identify the “bad cow”. Arising from this you will have the Cows’ Own Worth (COW) which will identify the most profitable cows for you in the herd for the next 5-7 years. You will also know your best cows so that you can breed “your best to the best”. This is a terribly important concept to increase EBI, fertility and particularly % F & P.

COW CARE

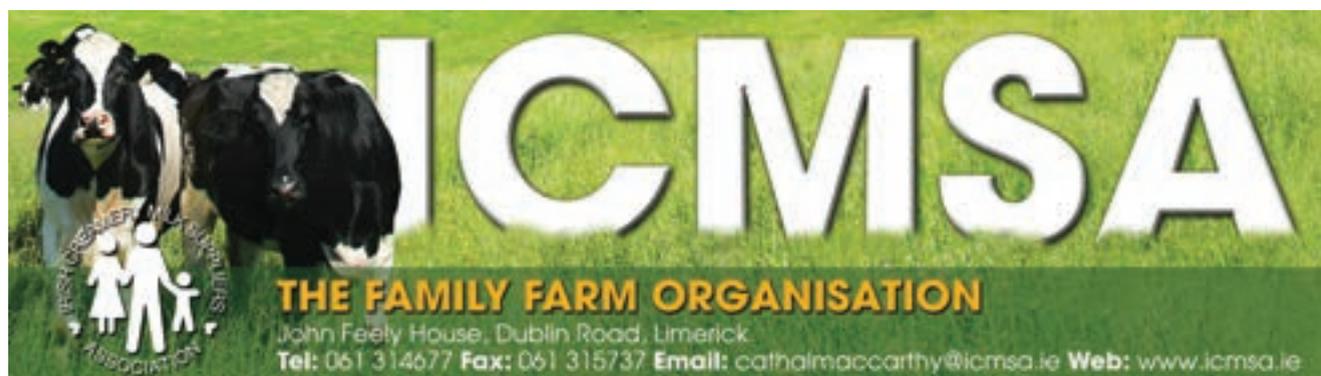
- ▶ Make sure all dry cows are getting 2-3 oz per head of a good dry cow mineral. Easy to slip up on this as you are now heavily focused on milch cows.
- ▶ Make sure cows and heifers, within 2-3 weeks of calving, are kept on very clean cubicles – their immune system is very low as there are increased amounts of infectious

bugs around.

- ▶ Lameness or cows tender on the feet should be looked after now. Get the FRS to do this job because you are too busy and don’t know the job well enough.
- ▶ Encourage daytime calving by feeding silage during the night (removing left overs in the morning) only. It is some help! For this to work well, cows should be exposed to this feeding routine for 7-10 days before calving. Keep those cows and cows with ‘tender’ feet in a straw ‘maternity’ shed.
- ▶ Do not rush in with the jack at calving. Why? ‘Damaged’ cows will not go back in-calf. ‘Infected’ cows (easily done with hands and equipment) will be slower to go back in-calf. The worst outcome could be a ‘downer’ cow.
- ▶ From the time the calf’s crubes appears:
 - ▶ Leave heifers 2 hours and cows 3 hours before moving in to give help.
 - ▶ Leave enough time for the muscles to relax and the pelvis open.
- ▶ Feed a little meal (0.5 to 1 Kg) for 2 weeks before calving:
 - ▶ Heifers, in particular, benefit from this.
 - ▶ Allows you move on to full meal feed within days of calving.
 - ▶ Slowly increase meal feeding after calving (7-10 days) because the cows’ intake is low and a lot of meal relative to roughage will result in acidosis and other problems.
 - ▶ Fat cows (condition score 3.5+) and not calving for 4-6 weeks should be put on restricted diet otherwise, they will have calving and health problems, as well as milking poorly after calving.
 - ▶ Post calving this year, farmers should feed 2-4 kgs meal with grass and minimum silage. The lower quantity as very heavy covers exist now on many farms.

BULLING HEIFER CARE

- ▶ A very high proportion of our heifers going to the bull are underweight and calving down under target weights.
- ▶ As the bulling weight targets of most heifers on the 1st May must be 320+kgs and they are likely to put on 0.8kgs/hd/day between 1st Feb and then, they now should weigh at least 250 kgs.



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- ▶ For every kg they are less than that, they must be fed 4-5 kgs meal. If they are 30 kgs below target, they must get 120 -150 kgs meal (16-18% P) between now and 1st May or 1.5 kg/hd/day over whole period or twice that over half the time.
- ▶ With excellent care, aggressive meal feeding, delayed bulling until 20th May and then synchronising them, you will be able to serve heifers that now would be considered very small at 200-210 kgs.
- ▶ This is a very good option if you are planning to sell these animals or expand,
- ▶ Let all out to grass in early Feb, feeding meals to those who require it.

SHORT NOTES

- ▶ Colostrum early is the most important way to prevent calf rearing problems associated with scours and pneumonia. Follow the 1, 2, 3 rule:
 - ▶ Use colostrum from the first milking for the first calf feed
 - ▶ Give colostrum within 2 hours from the calf's birth,
 - ▶ Give at least 3 litres.
 - ▶ Give another 2 litres within the next 6 hours.
 - ▶ A stomach tube (done correctly) alleviates some of the feeding problems. Most farmers now use it as a time saver and guarantees consumption of 2-3 litres in that first feed.

- ▶ To check the quality of the colostrum, use a refractometer – many farmers now do!
- ▶ Because February is a crucial month to set things up for the year, Discussion Groups should meet on farm for a quick technical meeting to check what is happening on each other's farms so as not to make mistakes that are preventable.
 - ▶ If your farm cannot run for 2 hours while you are away something is wrong with the way you organise things.
 - ▶ However, by using technology, we can stay in touch by using WhatsApp or a Zoom chat to stay in touch.
- ▶ Consider using Contractors more in 2022 for:
 - ▶ Dehorning calves,
 - ▶ Feeding out silage and cleaning yards twice per week.
 - ▶ Spreading fertilisers in bulk and slurry with the umbilical system (the only way to do it!)
 - ▶ Contract rearing of calves and heifers.
 - ▶ Contract labour for all or some farm chores (large units).
 - ▶ All reseeded work,
 - ▶ All lameness preventative care,
 - ▶ All capital investment work- farmers must refrain from this as it is putting huge strain on the labour to run the farm and efficiencies suffer.

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New Landini 7 SWB unveiled

The new Landini 7 SWB has been unveiled. It was first launched at EIMA in Italy in last October and is aimed at the arable and livestock farmer. Landini Series 7 Short Wheelbase is the latest in the high power Stage V emission segment thanks to the HI-eSCR2 exhaust gas treatment system (DOC SCRoF). The tractors are equipped with new FTP NEF 45, 16-valve, 4.5-litre 4-cylinder engines and FTP NEF 67, 24-valve, 6.7-litre 6-cylinder engines with Turbo Intercooler and Common Rail electronic injection. These are two models (7-165 and 7-175) with 4-cylinder, 165 and 175 Hp engines thanks to the Dual Power system and two other models (7-170 and 7-180) with 6-cylinder, 175 Hp engines.

The wheelbase is 2,651mm for the 4-cylinder, offering increased stability during field and front loader operations. The wheelbase of the 6-cylinder version is 2,760 mm. Common to both models is a maximum allowed weight of 11,500 Kg and a maximum rear wheel of 710/60R38, which offers greater stability and comfort during transport, less soil compaction in field operations.

The standard fitted Cooling Matrix system facilitating access to the underbonnet radiators for ease of cleaning, is also worthy of mention. There are two transmissions available: V-Shift (for the higher powers) and Robo-Six (for all four powers in the range). V-Shift, with 4-stage continuously variable transmission, guarantees top-of-the-range response. The speed ranges from a minimum of 0.04 km/h to a maximum of 50 km/h.

The Robo-Six transmission, on the other hand, features 6 Powershift gears under load, 5 robotised ranges and electro-hydraulic reverse shuttle on the steering wheel. The total gears are 30 Forward + 15 Reverse, which become, with the Creeper, 54 Forward + 27 Reverse. The Stop & Action system integrates the De-Clutch into the brake pedal, allowing the tractor to be stopped without depressing the clutch for easier driving on the road. Combination use of the Stop & Action and APS (Auto Powershift) systems allows the Robo-Six transmission to be driven in a similar way as the continuously variable transmission version. The 4-speed PTO allows full power transmission, with adjustable shifting and automatic PTO engagement and disengagement. The optional front hitch has a lift capacity of up to 3500 Kg.

The closed-centre hydraulic system with 123 l/min pump (a larger 160 l/min pump is available as an option) can handle up to 8 spool valves. The electronic rear hitch provides a maximum lifting capacity of 9,300 kg.

Attention to operator comfort is confirmed as best in class for both field and road driving, thanks to the optional independent front axle suspension system. There are also two cab suspension options: mechanical or semi-active electronically controlled.

The Data Screen Management (12" touch screen) benefits from a new menu and allows faster and more efficient operation thanks to the storage of activities with programmable buttons (MyFunctions) for customising



tractor controls. Satellite guidance and the ISOBUS system are fully integrated which, through the simple use of the DSM, allow the operator to manage implements without having to use other monitors in the cab.

The Landini Fleet Management system is complemented by an innovative remote diagnostic instrument made available to all authorised dealerships. It is possible to connect the software to the tractor's control unit and perform adjustments, program updates, engine parameter diagnostics and system code displays remotely, providing immediate and accurate support to service technicians as well as increasing management efficiency and profitability.



Brighter days ahead

As I pen this month's column, restrictions are lifted a week now. Across all media platforms over the last week Covid seemed to take a back seat to other pressing stories and a sense of hope at long last is in the air. Hopefully, it will be 'third time lucky' to launch into the spring season - quoting our Taoiseach "a spring to look forward to" - and it will bring brighter days ahead. But the fact remains that we still have Omicron and any future situations

that may arise with cases, so we will have to treat everything with cautious optimism. Now, down to business: over the past few weeks the competition for rental land has soared to new highs with the demand in certain parts of the country driving prices from €220 per acre up to €400 per acre. Land rental prices are now running at over 15 per cent compared to the same period last year.

We have also had some high jinks on the Irish seas: two ships are heading to Ireland to help our live export markets in a nice timely boost for the livestock industry; elsewhere, we have the Russian navy heading to the international waters off our zones - I salute the Irish fishing industry for their stand on this. The next phase of CAP will see more eco schemes being implemented and changes being made. Farmers are willing to adapt and change to new structures, but clarity is important for anything to work.

There has been a lively start to the marts in the first few weeks of 2022 with pre-Christmas prices being quoted. Sheep marts are only starting now but early indicators are looking positive as the month progresses. The beef market once again remains strong and the December milk prices are seeing farmers in some areas receiving 60c per litre. Industry experts are expecting milk prices to rise within the first quarter of 2022.

The tillage sector is starting this year in a strong position coming off the back of a good harvest and prices in 2021. But the devil is in the detail now as input prices have just soared to record levels: fertiliser and diesel being the main areas for concern to start with. It is now down to cashflow management and financial planning: the tillage sector is strong and has a bright future so it is now down to tackling short-term issues.

On the machinery front the Irish tractor market was up 24 per cent in 2021. There were 2,366 new tractors registered in Ireland; 49.5 per cent of that was tractors in the 140hp sector - our horsepower requirements on Irish farms is slowly rising every few years. Import figures show that there was 3,726 imported in 2021 making it the biggest year on record for imports. Over the past 12 month plus, new tractor prices have seen increases of between 10-14 per cent and long lead in times for delivery. Second-hand tractors have also gone up in value.

In other news, Samco the well-known machinery manufacturers in Limerick who took on full line Kverneland mid last year have been appointed CASE dealers for the area in late 2021. Slurrykat, the northern-based slurry equipment manufacturers are looking for dealers in certain areas; and Breen Farm Machinery in Cashel have just been awarded Claas Dealer of the Year for Ireland/UK.

JCB has introduced their new 538-70 mid-range telehandler; TFM have been recently appointed dealers for the Italian built MAZZOTTI self-propelled sprayer; and John Deere have just launched their new autonomous tractor... watch this space. And finally, TAMS paid out 16.6 million to Irish farmers for low emission slurry kit in 2021. TAMS still remains a big incentive when choosing ag equipment specs and sizes.

As the year kicks off, it is confirmed that the spring farm machinery shows are ready to roll starting on the 23rd/24th in the EIKON CENTRE in Balmoral park on the 1st/2nd/3rd March it is in the Cavan equestrian centre as normal and then in to the Green Glens arena in Millstreet Co Cork on the 22nd/23rd March. We are just awaiting confirmation of dates for the flagship show in Punchestown from the FTMTA this summer. The Tullamore show is set to come back on Sunday the 14th of August this year and finally Garth Brooks has to share the stage in September with the biggest outdoor show in Europe the National Ploughing Championships, set to take place on September 20th, 21st and 22nd in Ratheniska, Co Laois.

So, until next month farm wisely and farm safely.

New LEMKEN front-mounted furrow press with true tracking



More and more farmers are using front-mounted furrow presses for reconsolidation and for ballasting their tractors when working with a raised seed drill combination. One popular model of this implement is the VarioPack front-mounted furrow press, which LEMKEN is now launching in an updated version complete with new steering characteristics. This

furrow press comes with hydraulically adjustable steering sensitivity for working in hilly terrain or with GPS-controlled tractors. This enables precise, reliable pass alignment. The true-tracking performance of this furrow press reduces driver strain, as there is no need to counter-steer in difficult conditions. The VarioPack steering is preloaded

mechanically or optionally via a hydraulic cylinder with a nitrogen accumulator. This allows the pressure to be adjusted so that the furrow press, which is adapted to the current working conditions, is safely and reliably returned to its central position and ensures precise pass alignment. This is particularly important when working on slopes or if you want to prevent movement caused by a delayed response to the steering movements of a GPS-controlled tractor.

LEMKEN has retained the time-tested hubless furrow press design. The first models to be released from mid-2022 onwards will be a rigid version with working widths of 2.50 to 4 metres and a ring diameter of 90 centimetres, and a folding version with a ring diameter of 70 or 90 centimetres and working widths between 4 and 6 metres.

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Amazone ZA-V – a testimonial



Michael Farrell is a dairy farmer near Kilfeacle, Co. Tipperary milking over 220 cows. "We're a grass-based system. We measure grass and we just keep replacement stock; there is no beef on the farm, it's just dairy stock. "My dad back 40, 50 years ago had Amazone spreaders, and he wore out a good few of them in his time, so they're a brand that's there to stay and reliable!" he explains.



"I collected this Amazone ZA-V off Hayes Agri the first week in June," Michael explained. "I chose the ZA-V model and also a hydro, because I looked into the various different spreaders again and I liked this idea of the hydraulic disc and variable speed on the headland management, compared to a PTO machine." It is all about accuracy – fertiliser is a significant cost and when you can reduce the quantity being used by improving accuracy and reducing double spreads, then you save money. As well as saving money and time, accurate fertiliser application is an important part of protecting the environment. Amazone pays special attention to how they spread on the headland. Whether you opt for a limiter or a hydraulic spreader, you can precisely set how far the fertiliser spreads to the boundary as well as shutting it off, so it doesn't spread into the ditch. The hydraulically-driven ZA-V Hydro spreader is electronically controlled from the cab, allowing you to control the speed of 'left' or 'right' disc individually, and easily adjust the amount of fertiliser spread – even on the move. "The border spreading is quite simple, it's just a case of press a button and we can go left and right. The border spreader works on either side," Michael continued. "The tractor we operate the spreader with is a Massey Ferguson 6615. She's a four-cylinder tractor; a heavy tractor and is quite capable of handling 5,500kg bags in the back of the spreader." "The Amazone ZA-V in the field is quite user friendly. I have the AmaTron Twin second screen for the GPS, and I have my main screen with all the spreader controls and it's quite simple after that." The ZA-V can be operated via the tractor terminal, or with the addition of a second terminal. The tractor terminal can

continue to control the tractor or it can also display the GPS application while the additional terminal monitors and controls the spreader. Unique to Amazone, Michael opted for the Amatron Twin. This allows you to duplicate the Amazone control box with an iPad tablet instead of buying two control boxes. You can have the spreader working on one and the GPS on the other. "When we go out to spread fertiliser now and we decide we want to spread X amount of kilos on a hectare, that's what happens." Michael continued. "It's not as before when we went out and we tried to get it as near as we possibly could, this thing will spread it accurately." The ZA-V takes all the guesswork out of spreading. The speed reading from the tractor, combined with the weigh cells constantly calibrating, means you can put out exactly the volume of fertiliser required, saving money and time as you won't be running out with acres left to spread. The weigh cells weigh the fertiliser 200 times per second and automatically adjust the spread rate to ensure you are spot on.



The Amazone MySpreader app is available to all Amazone spreader operators. The app is loaded with most of the fertilisers available in Ireland and gives the user setup information. "I go onto that app and it'll tell me for the type of fertiliser I'm going spreading, where the veins should be on the disc. On the main screen then, it's just a case of punch in kilos per hectare and away you go." The ZA-V spreader is available in hopper capacities from 1,400L to 4,200L, PTO and Hydro, GPS and without. ISOBUS communication, weighing system, the hydraulic or electric Limiter V or V+ border spreading systems, plus the many other optional extras make the ZA-V one of the most modern fertiliser spreaders in its class and there is a model to suit all farmers. "If somebody came into the yard to look at the spreader and they asked me what I thought of the spreader or other spreaders, I would say to them... well I did look at other spreaders, but the Amazone is the best," Michael concluded.

SAMCO is new Case IH Dealer

Case IH has announced that SAMCO Agricultural Manufacturing Ltd has been appointed as a new Case IH dealer. Based in Adare, County Limerick, SAMCO is best known for manufacturing mulch film and associated application machinery for the arable and horticulture sectors, alongside selling a range of other agricultural machinery. From 1st January 2022, the business will also sell the full range of Case IH tractors, harvesting equipment and telehandlers as well as supplying parts and providing a comprehensive after-sales service. The business also plans to open a second depot in Tralee, County Kerry in early 2022. The family business was started in 1997 and is now run by father and sons, Sam, Robert and Matthew Shine, employing over 50 staff and exporting to 25 countries.

"We're very excited to be adding the Case IH brand to our business," says Sam Shine. "Our family has used Case IH machinery for many years and it's a well-respected brand in this area that will complement our existing product range. We started business as dairy farmers, and then agricultural contractors before moving into machinery and work hard to use this experience to provide the best solutions for our customers in an ever-changing industry. The opening of an additional depot



Sam Shine [2nd from right] with members of the SAMCO team

in County Kerry will enable us to service an even greater area of customers and we look are very much looking forward to taking delivery of our first Case IH machines in the New Year."

Commenting on the development, Jon May, Case IH Dealer Relationship Manager for the UK and Ireland said: "SAMCO is very well-known in the Irish agricultural industry and is an excellent addition to the Case IH dealer network, covering an area that was previously open for the brand. They are a strong business that I am confident will deliver a professional service to existing and new customers in the area. Case IH continues to be the brand of choice for a large number of Irish farmers and we look forward to working with SAMCO to strengthen our sales of our products in this part of the country in the future."



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Lyons & Burtons Open Day

In late November I headed up to Kilcock, north Kildare, to Lyons & Burtons Open Day. On display was a full line of grass and tillage equipment along with a full line-up of New Holland tractors from the 25hp compact tractors to the T7 up to 240hp and much more besides. There was a large selection of AMAZONE tillage equipment and sprayers along with HE-VA and ALPEGO tillage equipment. McHales had a full line-up of balers and grass equipment along with the new McHale Proglide R310 standard mower just introduced for this season. Malone also had their mowers on display and, along with the Polish-built SaMASZ from importers Egmont Agri, the grass sector was well covered. Speaking with the Lyons & Burton team at the event they felt that it was an opportunity to show local farmers and contractors their extensive range and it was "great to get back meeting customers face to face again". Below is a sample of what was on display on the day.



Team Farmhand, Donny Clooney, Area Manager Midlands; Jackie Mills Fast parts Manager; and Val McCauley, Amazone specialist.

Pictured with the Bridgestone range of ag tyres on the day is Andrew Dowdall, off road and agricultural tyre specialist for Bridgestone Ireland.



Fergail Connelly, Malone Farm Machinery, in front of the new Malone product 285 Mower. Malone is set to launch for the 2022 grass season a new trailed tedder a new mounted conditioner mower as well as two new centre-pivot mowers.





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Billy Shaw, Lyons & Burton Ltd, James Heanue, McHale Engineering; and James Carroll, Lyons & Burton. On display was a full line of McHale grass equipment. McHales and Lyons & Burton have had a long standing relationship and the McHale brand is well established in this area.



Ray Kent, Fintain Murphy and Pat Kearney from Murphy Machinery Ltd Kilkenny, the well-known and respected importer distributor of HE-VA and ALPEGO tillage equipment into Ireland, and main importers of the Berthoud sprayers and much more besides.



Pictured in front of the polish-built SaMASZ KDF 301S perfect cut front mounted mower was Timmy O'Brien from EGMONT Agri Ltd who are sole importers and distributors for Ireland of SaMASZ farm machinery, which manufactures mowers, rakes and tedders. They also import Metal-Fach Agri Machinery. Timmy, who is also a well-known agri contractor and farmer from Mallow, has been importing SaMASZ equipment since 2014 and Lyons & Burton are now part of the growing dealer network nationwide.

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Planning Ahead



Tom Murphy
Professional
Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland



At this time of year a lot of advice is handed out to Agricultural Contractors, so I am going to add my bit of wisdom! Firstly, all machinery

maintenance should be completed leaving everything in tip top condition ready to kick off the season. Secondly, talk with your customers, discuss their requirements in advance, don't wait for their call later in the year. Planning out your working days/weeks/months will lead to a less stressful life.

Thirdly, study the price you have charged for each of the services you have provided over the last five years. Have you raised your prices in line with increased overheads? Have you priced for profit so that you are in a position to replace/upgrade machinery as and when required.

Every farmer is well aware how much their own fixed costs (machinery, parts, repairs, insurance, fuel, labour etc.) go up every year. Agricultural Contractors incur the same increase in overheads as farmers, just on a much greater scale. Yet surveys show that they seem unwilling to increase their charges, in the belief that they will lose customers. However prices need to be examined every year and if necessary raised to ensure overheads are covered. Most farmers are sound and understand if contractors are to stay

in business and be there to provide a reliable service into the future then they need to charge a viable rate. If you do lose a couple of customers at least you won't be working for nothing. I believe it is better to have small price increases every year rather than a large increase when you suddenly realize you are losing money.

Also look at how and when you are paid. Do you still carry out work for people who hold off payment to the start of the next season or try to negotiate substantial discounts? Although the vast majority of customers pay on time, just one or two "bad payers" on your books costs you money and can affect your bottom line. It's worth remembering that those Agricultural Contractors who don't issue an invoice promptly after work is completed are more likely to encounter payment problems.

There follows a simple little exercise that is used to demonstrate the effects of price rise v lost customers. It uses round figures for ease of calculation.

Turnover last year	100,000
5% loss from non returning customers	5,000
	95,000
Price increase of 5%	4,750
Turnover this year	99,750

This shows a potential loss of €250 but for less work, less hassle and this doesn't even take into account any new clients that might be picked up. Contractors that have used this method tell me it works. Why don't you try it on your own figures and potential price increase? Stay safe and well and profitable in 2022.



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JCB extends loadall range with new 538-70 Telehandler

The JCB Loadall range has been recently expanded with the introduction of the mid-range 538-70 to give farmers and growers yet more choice in an already comprehensive offering of performance, features and specifications. The 538-70 is a genuine seven-metre machine that slots into the Loadall Series III line-up with 3,800kg maximum lift capacity and 7.01m of lift height, placing it between the current 532-70 and 542-70 models. At 3,000 to 3,800kg, lift performance is particularly strong in the 4-6m loading-at-height zone critical for bulk loading of grain into trucks and silage into diet feeders; and there is 2,500 to 2,750kg of capacity available at full height, depending upon the version. Like all mid-range machines in the Loadall range, the new 538-70 is available with a choice of four different transmissions, three power outputs and three standard feature and specification levels. Together with a comprehensive options list, buyers have an opportunity to choose the machine package that best suits their applications and budget. The Loadall 538-70 AGRI variant comes with JCB's Torque Lock 4 transmission, featuring torque converter lock-up in fourth gear for

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 <p>PRO-CUT 3000 TC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick 11 blades 23mm gears Drive shaft mobile Waterproof drivebelts Heavy duty condition bearings 	 <p>PRO-CUT 3000 MP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick 11 blades Hydraulic floatation Direct drive 23mm gears Friction clutch and over-run protection Drive shaft mobile Waterproof drivebelts
 <p>PRO-CUT 210/240/260</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick 11 blades Heavy duty roller bar Multiball Ball Super floatation Galvanneal frame Drive shaft mobile Waterproof drivebelts 	

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power-efficient direct drive on the road, coupled to a 109hp (81kW) version

of the Stage V emissions-compliant JCB DieselMAX 448 engine. The AGRI Super

has 130hp (97kW) from this engine and a regular four-speed Powershift

as the base transmission installation; but along with the 150hp AGRI Xtra, it is also available with a six-speed Autoshift with automatic and manual shifting modes in addition to torque converter lock-up in the top two gears. The AGRI Super and AGRI Xtra can also be had with DualTech VT, the unique JCB transmission that combines the best characteristics of hydrostatic and powershift drives in one unit. DualTech VT provides precision slow speed control for loading and other handling tasks, and direct-drive auto powershift without a torque converter for high-performance, fuel-efficient field and road travel beyond 19kph. Switching between the two elements is performed seamlessly without any operator involvement; but operator-selected 'power' and fuel-saving 'eco' modes are available to suit different applications, and powershift selection can be restricted for field work. The transmission's Flexi mode permits a fixed engine speed to be set for optimum hydraulics performance with only the transmission then responding to the accelerator pedal – ideal for consistent loading performance and for operating hydraulically-driven attachments such as sweepers, feeding buckets and straw blowers.

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The all-new John Deere 6R Series



Since their launch in 2011, John Deere's 6R Series tractors have set standards in both field and transport performance as well as precision ag technology. With 14 new generation models from 110 to 250hp announced recently, these tractors have become even smarter to help operators achieve even more. In addition, four brand new models include the four-cylinder 6R 150, aimed particularly at mixed farms, and the six-cylinder 6R 185, a specialist transport tractor for farmers and contractors who spend more time on the road. A key new 6R Series feature is the integrated 1-Click-Go AutoSetup system, which makes tractor and implement settings much quicker and easier. The operator can save up to 90 per cent of display clicks in the field and the tractor is always perfectly adjusted. All the required settings can be pre-planned and managed in the cloud, including agronomic data such as field boundaries, guidance lines and prescriptions. Once the tractor crosses the field boundary, the stored profile is automatically available and even temporary drivers can be consistently accurate and avoid mistakes.

While AutoSetup makes the driver's life easier, John Deere has also increased operator comfort. Among other features, the dashboard behind the steering wheel has disappeared – this not only improves forward visibility, but also operator control using the armrest and right-hand console. All settings and indicators are provided on the corner post display.

Another new feature is the E-joystick, which is particularly useful for front loader work. The operator can freely configure the layout of the buttons and can easily change the direction of travel using the reverser button, while a special hand detection system replaces the former safety flap. IPM (Intelligent Power Management) has been made smarter on the new 6R Series. This means that in addition to IPM functioning in transport and PTO applications, it also delivers additional horsepower in hydraulic applications as required. The four-cylinder models can now deliver up to 20hp and the six-cylinder models up to 40hp when using hydraulic fans, pumps and the most power-hungry hydraulic

implements, eg wrapping balers, slurry tankers and drills. In late 2022 a new StarFire satellite receiver will offer even more precision ag performance. No matter which level of correction signal accuracy farmers choose, this new receiver will provide superior signal stability when operating in shaded areas. Another highlight of the latest 6R Series tractors is their new design. The hood and mirrors are well known from John Deere's larger tractor series, while the name and numbering system has also been adopted from the 7R, 8R and 9R Series models. The 6R range name is now followed by a separate indication of the rated engine horsepower.

The new 6R 185 is aimed at farmers and contractors looking for a compact, versatile and powerful 6-cylinder tractor to be used mainly for transport, but also capable of handling demanding hydraulic power requirements. It delivers up to 234hp maximum power with Intelligent Power Management in transport, PTO and hydraulic applications. The 6R 185 is also an agile tractor, due to its short wheelbase of just 2.76m, which makes it more compact than the larger 6R Series models with a 2.8 or 2.9m wheelbase.



Mixed farms prefer four-cylinder tractors, but do not want to sacrifice power. With a maximum power rating of 165hp or 177hp with IPM, the 6R 150 is now the largest four-cylinder model in the series and covers this tractor segment perfectly. Tyre size has also been increased, with rear wheel options available up to 650/65 R38. Its short wheelbase of only 2.58m makes this machine particularly manoeuvrable. With a low empty weight of 6.5 tonnes and a total permissible weight of 10.45 tonnes, the 6R 150 tractor provides a very high payload of 4 tonnes. It therefore offers the performance of a six-cylinder tractor with the advantages of a four-cylinder machine, ie compact dimensions and light weight combined with agile and versatile performance. For lifting heavier equipment, rear hydraulic lift capacity has been increased by 12 per cent. The 6R 150 also offers a larger 155-litre hydraulic pump which, combined with the dynamic weighing system, provides considerable front loader performance advantages.



Mind your head

UCD School of Agriculture & Food Science is currently undertaking research into the factors impacting the mental health of Ireland's farming community. Here, we talk to Alison Stapleton, who is working alongside Dr Tomás Russell on this study.

“The overarching goal of this work is to identify risk factors for suicide among farmers, looking at the barriers and facilitators of wellbeing that are specific to those farming in Ireland,” Alison explains. Dr Tomás Russell a lecturer in Agricultural Extension in the School of Agriculture & Food Science is collaborating with Alison Stapleton, from the School of Psychology in UCD – alongside some other researchers – to conduct this important work, which is funded by the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention.

The research started in August 2021 and is solely focused on those employed and working in farming. “There are a number of studies happening around the topic: the first one that we already have some data back from is a series of one-to-one interviews we conducted recently, talking to farmers across a range of enterprises. We are also currently doing a national survey, which will launch in February, and we are planning to do some focus groups with the aim of tapping into what types of interventions might work for the farming community when dealing with these challenges.”

Latest data

Data from the one-to-one interviews with farmers is currently being collated, with some initial results already highlighting key areas of stress and challenge for farmers in Ireland today. Those surveyed hailed from a range of farming enterprises, including drystock, tillage and dairy. They also represented a wide age range of age groups, with the youngest interviewee being 31 and the oldest in their mid-60s.

The questions posed were within the context of what aspects of farming impact on their mental health – in both a positive and a negative way. So far, Alison explains, the data is showing that much of their anxiety is rooted in a sense of identity – how they view themselves versus how they believe they should behave.

“Many farmers mentioned wanting to seem ‘strong’ to others and some farmers were concerned that engaging with mental health supports would be viewed as ‘weak’. A lot of worry is tied up in identity and there is quite a rigid view of how ‘farmers’, ‘men’, and the ‘self’ should behave.”

Alison continues that when experiencing mental health

challenges, many stated that they believed they should 'just get on with it'. Not wanting to be a burden to others was a huge factor in keeping any mental health issues private and not accessing services.

Land issues

Having a real grá for the land and thriving with it, versus having 'land on the mind' and possession of land is another area of stress, explains Alison. "Thinking about land, land, land can be a huge source of pressure. Whether you are facing issues of ownership, succession, or even being pushed to expand when it may not be the best decision for the farm or the farming family; all of these factors create huge anxiety for farmers. There is a lot of stress linked with succession and legacy in particular – many of those interviewed said they felt the pressure of not wanting to be the one person who loses a farm that has been in a family for generations". In addition, the challenges around climate action are a further source of pressure for farmers around land. With regards to proposed new climate change policy, Alison notes that many interviewed said they feel like a 'scapegoat' within the context of the debate.

Farming and family

Generational differences in attitudes toward mental health are also evident from the study. Some farmers believed that older farmers were likely to be more 'traditional' in their approach to mental health and accessing help; while younger farmers were typically viewed as more progressive and less intimidated by the idea of seeking assistance from mental health services. Loneliness and isolation – experienced by both bachelor and married farmers – was another key factor identified. "This has definitely

been exasperated by Covid-19 restrictions. Friends, family and also casual labourers not visiting the farm has made this issue of isolation even worse for many. It is especially true for bachelor farmers who don't have a partner or family in the house. What was surprising was that married farmers with children also felt lonely during Covid lockdowns as they were so busy having to make up for the missing labour on the farm that they had very little time for family and often came back from their day's work when everyone else was already in bed."

The great outdoors

On a positive note, a key beneficial factor related to farming and mental health identified was the fact of being outdoors in the fresh air and surrounded by nature, as well as working with animals. "These experiences on a daily basis are very beneficial to farmers and their mental health. Also, there is the notion among many farmers that 'if the farm is doing well, then I am doing well.'"

Support

Concluding, Alison explains that her hope for the ongoing research is that it will lead to the roll-out of larger projects and tailored supports for the farming community across the country. "We asked farmers if they were aware of any farmer-specific supports and, beyond their own Discussion Groups, many said that there was nothing out there tailored to them. They want to be able to talk to someone who is familiar with the agri world, can talk their lingo about farming and the weather and then move onto the issue of mental health. If the work we are doing now contributes to getting these supports in place that would be great. Even if it can go some way to help normalise the discussion around mental health – through workshops and presentations – that would be a fantastic achievement."



One lung of slurry gas can kill



Ciaran Roche, FBD Risk Manager, outlines the risks of working with slurry



Working with slurry is an extremely hazardous activity. Sadly, too many people have lost their lives by asphyxiation, drowning and accidents with the PTO when handling slurry. One lung of slurry gas can kill and with this in mind, it amazes me that many farmers still continue to agitate slurry with cattle in sheds. Every year cattle are lost in sheds and many

farmers have had very lucky escapes when trying to remove falling cattle from a shed filled with lethal slurry gases. Don't leave safety to chance, manage slurry facilities and slurry activities safely on your farm.

There are three main hazards you should assess and manage when handling slurry. They are:

- slurry gases
- slurry tank openings
- the slurry tanker and the PTO

Slurry Gas

Hydrogen Sulfide, a highly toxic gas, is produced during the bacterial decomposition of slurry. You can't smell this gas and it's too late once you realise it has hit you, because it will immobilize your body which will prevent you from reaching a safe place. The release of this gas is greatest:

- when the crust is broken
- in the first 30 minutes of agitation
- when slurry is agitated in deep tanks
- after silage effluent has been added
- after storage for several months

To prevent the risk of being overcome by hydrogen sulfide gas you should always follow the golden rules around ventilation, evacuation and agitation.

Ventilate: always choose a windy day, as this will allow the gas to disperse quickly. Open all shed doors and outlets

Evacuate: all persons and all animals

Agitate:

- do not stand on or near slats or the agitation point
- agitate from outside the shed if at all possible (for

sheds with internal agitation points you should strongly consider moving the agitation points to an external area)

- do not attempt to enter the shed until at least 30 minutes after agitation has finished; remember toxic gases are being released even if you cannot smell them
- 2 people should be present if possible
- do not smoke within the vicinity of the shed being agitated

Slurry Tank Protection

Many children, farmers and contractors have drowned in unprotected slurry tanks. All open slurry tanks must be fenced off with an unclimbable safety wall or fence at least 1.8 meters in height and locked gates of the same standard should be fitted at the access point. For all other tanks, the first step is to provide safety manhole access covers at the agitation points. If the tank does not have a safety manhole access cover additional precautions need to be taken. Temporary covers or guardrails must be used to protect the opening and warning signs should be put in place. However, this is not an ideal situation and these slats should be replaced with safety access covers. Remember that slats can degenerate over time and fail. With this in mind it is imperative that slats are regularly inspected and replaced if damaged.

Beware of the PTO

Extreme caution must be taken when operating the PTO, as entanglement in the PTO can lead to loss of life and limb. Exposed bolts, universal joints or other projections on rotating components can grab clothing, resulting in instant entanglement. Always ensure that the PTO is fully guarded with a PTO shaft guard, U guard and O guard. By following these simple precautions you will minimise the risks associated with slurry.

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Ireland is about to make a historically wrong decision on dairying

Following a meeting with Minister McConalogue on Friday 28 January, we are now faced with the setting up of a group that will report back to the Minister with proposals that will work towards the introduction of restrictions on our dairy sector. As the Statwe's specialist family dairy farm organisation for in excess of 70 years, ICMSA takes its responsibility in this area very seriously and we have stated that we cannot accept any proposal that will place an arbitrary cap on the sustainable productive capacity of Irish family dairy farms. Ireland's dairy sector – built on and developed by the Co-ops founded and funded by generations of farmers – is the jewel in our farming crown: it is indigenous, it is wholly Irish owned and the Minister and the whole Government have to realise that the policy they are headed towards runs the risk of irreparable damage to the main driver of Ireland's rural economy. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the decision Minister McConalogue and his colleagues are about to take and ICMSA will put on the record now our grave concerns about the direction in which we seem to be travelling.

The Minister will have to answer why he and his Department have decided to specifically target dairy farming, the one sector of Irish farming that is economically viable? Our dairy sector is widely accepted as amongst the most climate efficient and technically competent in the world, as well as being the economic, social and communal bedrock of rural Ireland. Anything that damages that sector damages the rural economy and a restriction on its sustainable growth is effectively a restriction on the sustainable growth of rural Ireland. While the Minister and his colleagues ponder that, can we also know why other sectors, such as aviation, appear to have a licence to continue to expand without consequence? Ireland is going to restrict Irish milk production on the grounds of emissions but Ireland has no problem with the emissions involved in Irish airlines flying Irish stag parties to Portugal. Why is food not as important as fun?

The caricature of dairy farmers frantically adding cows to already large herds is just that: a caricature. The majority of family dairy farms milk less than 80 cows.

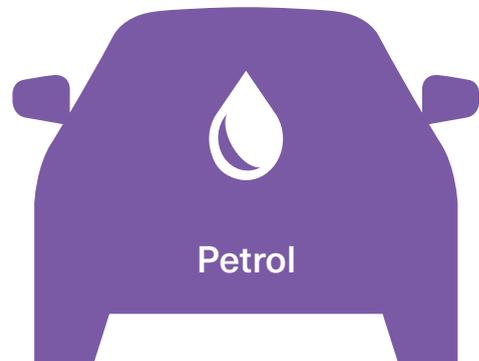
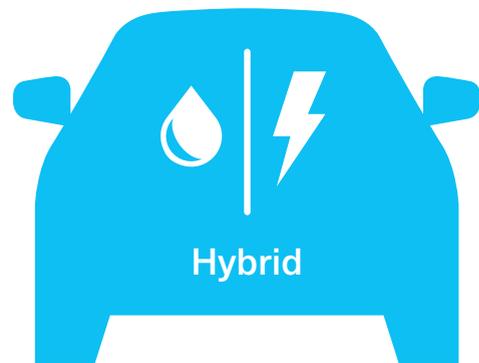
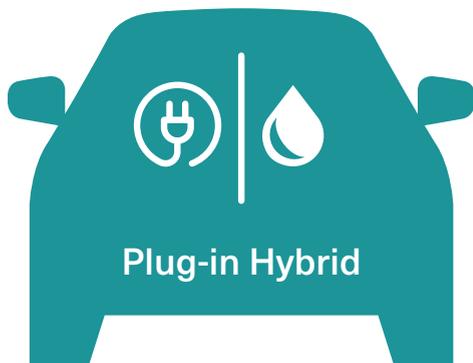
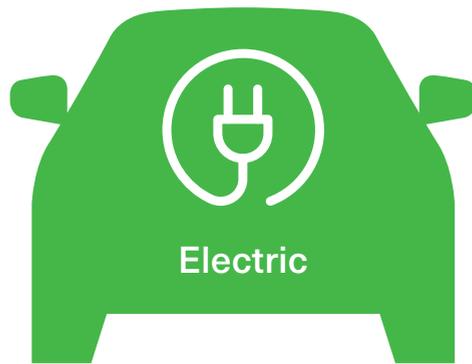
Nor are the Minister's assurances that there will be opportunities for new entrants and existing farmer-suppliers to improve their viability very unconvincing. If we know one thing from history, it is that that the overall trend always trumps individual cases. If the Minister announces restrictions on our dairy sector as State policy, then every decision after that starts from the negative. All these temporary arrangements become 'bedded down' and become permanent practice. Effectively, the most dynamic farming and agri-food sector we have will be driven up a cul de sac from which we will never be able to reverse.

Perhaps the most irritating part of this affair is the underlying message that, somehow, farmers are dragging their feet on the question of climate change. That farmers are having to be dragged – 'kicking and screaming' – to the realisation that the threat from climate change is real and will have to be addressed and quickly. That's just not true and adds insult to injury. We're the only sector that already has an emissions lowering plan that's 'up and going'. The Teagasc MACC curve and new technologies are already showing how agriculture can meet its climate commitments – and new technologies will accelerate that progress. But the Government effectively ignored the further potential in that area in the CAP Strategic Plan they submitted, and they now look set to compound that mistake by effectively proposing caps on our most valuable production.

The Minister has set out a timeframe that will have group reporting back to him by the end of March. This is almost literally a question around the grassroots economic viability of vast areas of rural Ireland and the idea that every angle can be covered and every consequence weighed up within eight odd weeks is just wrong. Given the enormity of the impact and consequences of any decision, it is only right that proportionate time and consideration is given to the deliberations. And that can't happen in eight weeks.



Pat McCormack
President, ICMSA



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An insane dairy herd mentality



“If milk is not produced in an environmentally benign manner in Ireland, it will be produced in increasing quantities in regions where the sizes of the bulldozers are the only restrictive factors in the determination of how many forests can be cleared for milk and beef production.”

We have been softened up for at least a curtailment on the dairy cow growth we have seen in recent years. After waiting for over 30 years to release the pent-up capacity of Irish grassland to produce more milk, we are now faced with a new limitation on milk production, based, this time, on environmental concerns. The absolute lack of rationale for this renewed restriction on our natural advantages to produce milk has been completely ignored by those who place their ideology on a pedestal where it must be neither criticised nor opposed.

We are reminded regularly that there is only one global environment. There are no segmented environments where what one country does gives it a more benign outcome from the surfeit of greenhouse gases that are changing our global climate. When anyone points out reasonably that it is better for the global environment and for animal welfare to produce milk from grazing cows, we are told that it would be better if we did not produce milk here or anywhere else, certainly not in the quantities currently being produced. It's not the most logical argument, but it suffices to put proponents of grass-based milk production on the back foot. Unless there is a decision to ban dairy consumption or tax dairy products so heavily that only the elite can afford them, the purchasing discretion of consumers should be facilitated. If consumers recognise the health-enhancing benefits of dairy consumption and want to continue sourcing nourishment from milk-based products they should be allowed to do so. The alternative is an attack on basic human rights. Do not dispel the prospect, given the mindset of many environmental zealots. Now

that we have seen an example of the societal restrictions that can be implemented through gentle coercion because of the fear of a virus, it will not be long before the guardians of environmental righteousness decide that similar tactics should be implemented to foist a dietary regulation on the global population, including restrictions on meat and dairy consumption. An exaggeration? Perhaps not. Who would have thought two years ago that the majority of the world's population would willingly acquiesce in social, travel and work restrictions of the kind we have endured for almost 24 months? Ireland still has enormous potential to produce more milk in the most environmentally benign process on the planet. Even at reduced stocking rates our capacity to grow more grass and turn it into milk is only in its infancy. Yet, we are being conditioned for the unthinkable – curtailing dairy cow numbers – only a few years after the shackles of milk quotas were thrown off. If there is shame and blame in this negative mindset, then we should be willing to point the finger at those who think they can solve the climate woes of the world by curtailing milk production in Ireland and, inevitably, facilitating its production in parts of the planet where immense and irreversible damage is being done to the eco-system. Carbon displacement is a reality, however much the proponents of new milk quotas say otherwise. We must continue to tell the truth even if it is scorned by the righteous – if milk is not produced in an environmentally benign manner in Ireland, it will be produced in increasing quantities in regions where the sizes of the bulldozers are the only restrictive factors in the determination of how many forests can be cleared for milk and beef production. The next generation of aspiring Irish milk producers will surely curse the stupidity of this erroneous dairy herd mentality.





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