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IRISH

FEBRUARY 2023

# FARMERS

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FEBRUARY 2023

# EDITORIAL

Matt O'Keeffe, Editor



## GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

**The demonisation of agriculture has intensified. The connection between farming and food production appears to be lost in much of the commentary around livestock emissions.** There are now many people in Irish society who believe that total responsibility for lowering carbon output and eliminating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions rests completely on the farming community.

It is as if there are no other sectors of the Irish economy, or society, that have any responsibility to curtail their contributions to climate change. It comes as little surprise to farmers that they are being subjected to almost constant criticism around the management of the environment in which they work and produce food. Food producers are a soft touch in the blame game being played out, especially by those who abhor livestock-based food production. Farmers and their representatives have not been proactive enough in arguing the case for agriculture. Despite huge investment in environmental care running to billions of euros, farmers are still on the back foot in terms of presenting a balanced alternative to sometimes rabid criticism.

The Irish Farmers Association's (IFA's) recent climate summit, which we highlight in this issue of *Irish Farmers Monthly*, was both positive and timely. Economist, Ciaran Fitzgerald, in particular, put forward the case for agriculture in an excellent manner. Climatologist, Professor Peter Thorne made the valid remark that the climate challenge is far broader than agriculture. Even if food production reached a net zero emissions contribution, the problem of climate change would not be solved. Farming has become a soft option for many commentators on which to blame all climate and environmental ills. Transport, electricity, and heat sectors, as well as citizens' personal decisions around their lifestyles, all deserve the same level of attention

as the food producers and the farming sector. And yet, they are the bogey people. A cattle cull will not make everything well in the world, but it is easier to place the entire responsibility on agriculture rather than take personal responsibility for actions and activities that are often far less important than food production. Agriculture needs to up its public-relations game, substantially. The IFA climate summit was exemplary in pointing out that while agriculture will do its part to mitigate climate change, it is important that actions taken do not damage our ability to produce food. We can all manage without many of the fripperies of modern life but there is no life at all without food. Where information dissemination events such as the summit fall down is in assuming that the message spreads to the whole of society. Too often, we are speaking to the converted about the merits of agriculture's case.

In other news, we carry a report from the Irish Grassland Association's excellent dairy conference held last month. It was refreshing to listen to speakers concentrating on the basics of efficient milk production, whether by adopting cost-effective technologies or by more efficient use of inputs. The potential for energy production on farms was particularly well received. Farmers have open minds when it comes to diversification. It has been a survival mechanism honed over generations of being willing to change to accommodate changed circumstances. It is another talent for which farmers receive far too little credit. Considered by those watching on as a conservative grouping, unwilling to change practices as required, we have shown time and again that nothing could be further from the truth. What we must resist is change that will damage our competitiveness, lower our production efficiencies or adversely impact our role as the driver of rural economic activity.



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## YEAR OF ELECTIONS

**Nothing stirs the blood quite like an election. As far as farmer-representative organisations go, there should be plenty of opportunities for canvassing and voting during 2023.**



### MACRA

In the coming months, Macra is due to replace its current president, John Keane, after his two-year spell at the top of the young-farmer grouping. John has been very successful in promoting the cause of young farmers, as well as highlighting issues of importance for his organisation's broader rural youth membership. Whether he follows in his father, Martin's, footsteps and forges a role in the co-op movement or climbs the even greasier pole of broader political involvement remains to be seen. Suffice to say, that his communication and representative talents should be put to good use. While Macra has plenty of presidential replacement talent with Munster vice-president, Elaine Houlihan, appearing to be the front runner, Liam Hanrahan, chair of Macra's influential Agricultural Affairs Committee might give her a run for her money should he also decide to declare an

interest in the role. As a former Young Farmer of the Year, Liam has proven he can walk the walk, though Elaine may appeal to Macra's broader membership as she is not involved in front-line farming as a career. Should she succeed, Elaine would be only the second woman to become president of Macra.



### IFA

Meanwhile, Tim Cullinan is into his final year as Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) president. He took on much of the responsibility for representing the organisation during his tenure, to date, and while there has been some criticism of his communication skills, no one can doubt his dedication. Could another pig farmer put up his hand for the IFA presidency? Frank Brady's name has been mentioned. However, the fact that he is little over a year in his current role as Ulster/North Leinster chair may dissuade him. Meanwhile the IFA's treasurer/returning officer, Martin Stapleton, may fancy being returned as the next president himself, though he would have to resign the returning officer role in order to enter the fray. Right now, the smart money is on Martin to put his name forward. Brian Rushe, the current

deputy president, would have been the odds-on favourite to step up but he has not yet given an indication of his ambition in that regard. Meanwhile, Tipperery's TJ Maher may look to move up the ladder after a term as Animal Health Committee chair. A run for the deputy presidency or Munster chair looks likely. Kilkenny's Paul O'Brien has been an outstanding environment spokesman and should seek further advancement, though his recent appointment to a leadership role on a prestigious EU environment committee could demand his full attention.



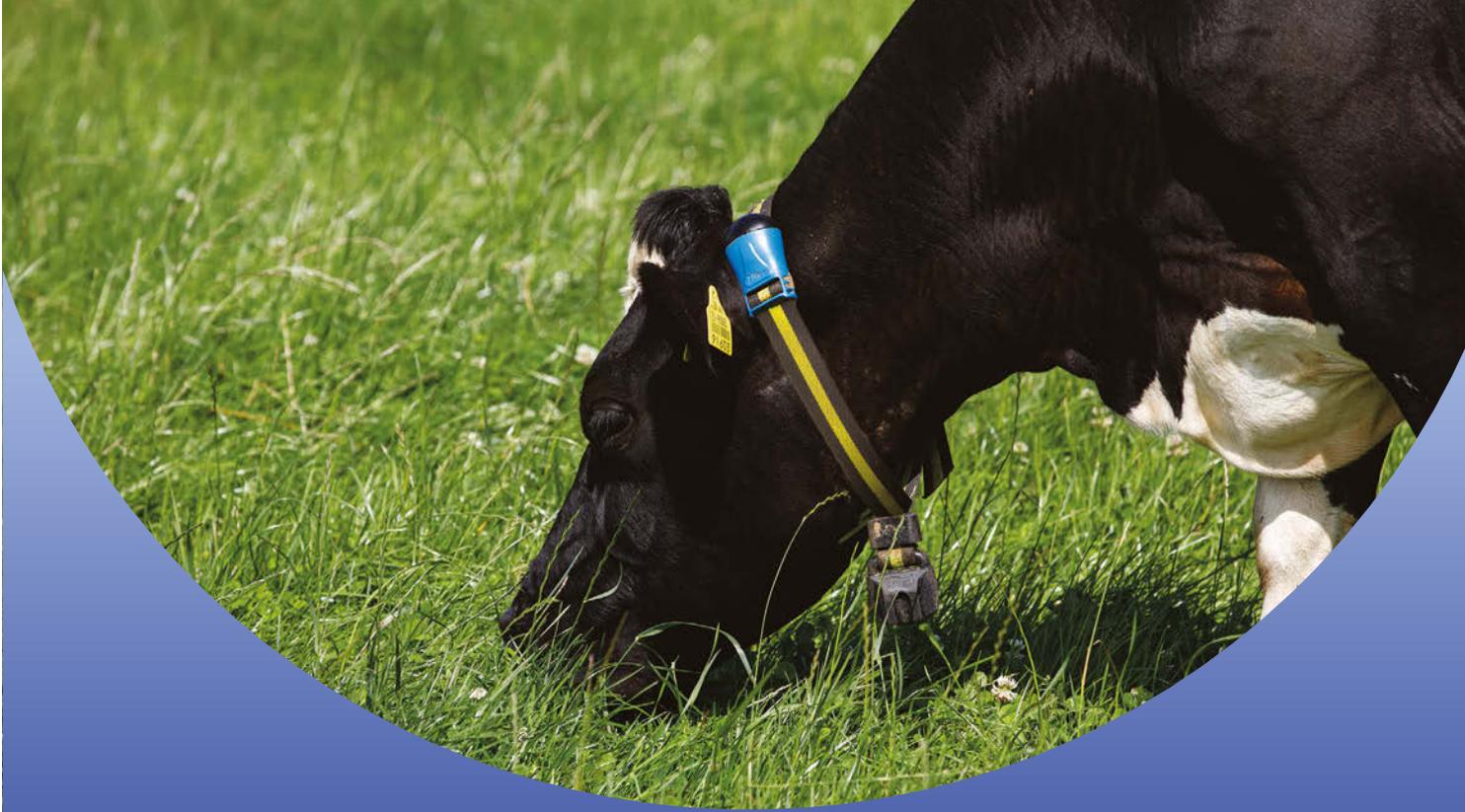
### ICMSA

The Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association is also looking ahead to a change of leadership. Pat McCormack concludes his presidential term at the end of 2023 and the obvious replacement is Denis Drennan, currently filling the second-in-command role at the Limerick-based farmer-representative body. Denis stepped up into the deputy presidency last year after Lorcan McCabe unexpectedly resigned in mid-term. Having previously held the role of Farm and Rural Affairs Committee chair, Denis certainly has the experience for the job.



## PUBLIC WIND BLOWING AGAINST TURBINES

The increasing hostility to land-based wind turbines is showing no signs of abating. Local communities across the country have become very vocal in their opposition to the renewable-energy structures being erected in their backyards. The mood has become extremely soured with one opponent questioning whether landowners who facilitate the installation of turbines should be allowed gain financially when they are the ones responsible for climate change by having methane-emitting livestock on their farms. This is where the debate, if it can be called that, has come to. Climate change and farming have become synonymous in many minds. If it weren't for farmers producing food, it appears, there would be no climate change and, consequently, no need for the development of alternative energy sources. The next battle against wind turbines is likely to be fought at sea. Off-shore turbines are seen as a panacea to their objectionable presence in rural Ireland. Wait until the realisation dawns that marine life, birds, fish and aquatic mammals may also be distressed by arrays of huge wind-energy structures disturbing their habitats.



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## DEFINITELY NOT THE REAL THING

**Adding oat juice to milk and actively promoting the hybrid drink as a flavoursome alternative to pure cow-sourced milk might not seem an obvious development for an Irish dairy co-op. Similarly, the development of hybrid butters with rapeseed oil added to improve spreadability may not seem like a natural fit for any organisation built on butter production and promoting grass-fed butter across the globe.** Now, we have the emergence of full-blown, non-dairy alternatives developed by organisations established to process, promote and market dairy produce on behalf of Irish milk producers. The new, plant-based spread is promoted as being just like the original butter, but plant-based. It is further described as being perfect for spreading, cooking and baking. Just like the real thing, then. Only, it is not. The new alternative to butter is dairy free, gluten free and lactose free. Definitely not butter. Quite rightly, it can be described as an alternative to dairy, but should it be

described as a dairy alternative? Perhaps it is just semantics, but there is a world of a difference between the two alternative descriptions. The product is also highlighted for its positive taste profile in that it is reputed to have a creamy and fatty dairy-inspired mouthfeel. The dairy-free alternative could further be described as freeloading on the taste and texture of the real thing. An alternative narrative is that dairy milk, as originally conceived and developed, is also a plant-based product, albeit with the plants having been eaten, digested and lactated as dairy milk by mammals. It is a case of turning a low-value carbohydrate into a high-value protein via the digestive system of a cow. Elsewhere, we have products being described as delivering characteristic creamy, buttery, cheesy and cultured dairy profiles. If that sounds to you like butter, you would be mistaken. Why we need to develop alternatives to this most natural process is puzzling. That's the ever-changing world in which we live, I guess.



## CARRIE'S VOICE STILLED

**Last month saw the sad passing of Carrie Acheson who was the voice of the National Ploughing Championships for three decades.** A woman of diverse talents, Carrie was a member of the Barlow family and worked in the family's agri-machinery business, Barlo Farm Machinery, in Clonmel, before her election to Dáil Eireann in 1981. Subsequently she put her talents to work as chair of the Irish Red Cross from 1981-1984. She was also a former mayor of Clonmel, and president of her beloved Clonmel Show. But she will be especially remembered as the voice of the ploughing. Our abiding memory of Carrie was that she was an elegant lady, with a distinctive voice that conveyed competition results; made everyone aware of visiting dignitaries to the show; and helped to reunite children with their parents. Carrie had a unique style and dressed accordingly, with a special love for classical millinery. She was a real lady and a breath of fresh air. May she rest in peace.

## AD HITS THE FAN

**Just as a viable methane-producing anaerobic digestion (AD) industry looks to be in prospect, we see the emergence of what may become a mass movement in opposition to the technology.** The excrement-throwing incident at a meeting of objectors to a proposed biomass plant in Galway, again, highlights how a transition from fossil-fuelled energy production to renewable alternatives will be far from simple. Despite AD technology being widely adopted across Europe as well as in neighbouring Northern Ireland, where there are up on 80 plants in operation, without obvious negative impacts on local communities, there is every prospect of significant opposition to the development of 130 anaerobic digestion AD biomethane plants in rural Ireland by 2030, as envisaged by Renewable Gas Forum Ireland.



A farm-based plant in Europe.

# ONE 2023



**We have heard that Dr Mark Lyons is bringing the Alltech One conference to Dublin this year.** This unique event, which, in the past, has attracted 2,500 agri-business executives to Lexington, Kentucky, is coming across the Atlantic and Ireland will be a European venue for this year's event. More than 500 participants are expected to attend the event, with 200 of those delegates coming from other European countries. In 2023, Alltech is transforming its annual conference into a series of international events. This Alltech world tour will bring the inspiration of the One conference to communities throughout the world. Among the countries Alltech is planning to visit are Brazil, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Middle East.

## MISLEADING PRODUCT CLAIMS

**UK advertising watchdog, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), has banned a marketing campaign by Swedish oat-juice brand, Oatly, due to 'misleading green claims.'** Seemingly, in one national newspaper advert, the company claimed that 'climate experts say cutting dairy and beef products from diets is the single biggest lifestyle change we can make to reduce our environmental impact.' However, it transpired that this was actually the view of just one climate expert. Oatly, in paid-for Twitter and Facebook ads, also claimed that production of dairy and meat is responsible for emitting more CO<sub>2</sub> than all the world's planes, trains and boats combined. However, the ASA found that this claim was overstated. The ASA launched its investigation after receiving 109 complaints from members of the public and the campaign group, A Green World. Oatly has also engaged in a significant advertising campaign on this side of the Irish Sea, including billboard advertising across the country, as well as buying front- and back-cover commercials in national-newspaper supplements – which cannot come cheap. A near-calamitous collapse in gross profits and margins resulted in a 60 per cent share price fall over the past 12 months. That has spooked investors and the Oatly company is obviously intent on spending big in an attempt to rejuvenate the brand.



## Transition cow management – the winning and losing of 2023

**Maeve Regan, Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech**

The efficiency of grass-based systems is hugely influenced by the calving pattern on farm, and subsequently requires excellent reproductive performance in a short-breeding season. Therefore, it is extremely important to navigate through the transition period of a spring-calving herd with nutrition being a top priority.

In the weeks post-calving, cows will produce more milk than their feed intake can provide for, resulting in Body Condition Score (BCS) loss due to Negative Energy Balance (NEB). A cow typically reaches peak milk output 6-8 weeks post-calving but will only reach peak dry matter intake 10-12 weeks post calving. The success of the breeding season is mainly dictated by the severity and duration of this period of NEB during the weeks post-calving.

When prolonged, NEB will firstly appear in the form of low milk protein % in the short term and in the more long-term have detrimental consequences on fertility during the breeding season. The overall objective is to have calved down the cow at a BCS of 3.25 and maintain an average herd BCS of 3.0 (with a range of 2.75 – 3.25) at the start of breeding, to achieve optimal fertility. Keeping body condition loss to less than 0.5 BCS between calving and breeding has proven to significantly increase the likelihood of conception to first service, with cows that lost <0.5 body condition score between calving and breeding typically shown to ovulate 15 days sooner, than cows which lost ≥1 BCS.

Effect of BCS loss from calving to breeding on conception rates			
BCS loss between calving to first service			
BCS at calving	<0.25	0.25-0.50	>0.50
>3.0	72%	65%	53%
2.75-3.0	64%	55%	44%
<2.75	57%	49%	37%

(Ref: Moorepark) Note: 1 BCS ≈ 50 kg live weight

In very practical terms, navigating the transition period means bridging the energy gap between the cows output relative to her intake. Forage quality, and the proportion of high quality grass in the diet will be the main dictating factors here. After this, most of the energy deficit will have to be filled with concentrates in the parlour, with milk output and silage analysis dictating feeding rates this spring.

**For more information on the management of the transition cow, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit [www.agritech.ie](http://www.agritech.ie).**



# InTouch

## LET'S CHALLENGE THE NORM

**CATHAL BOHANE**  
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

With calving up and running on most spring-calving farms, there will soon be many things to juggle on a daily basis. A healthy cow and calf – as well as good production levels – can be damaged by metabolic issues, a negative energy balance and poor dry matter intake, as well as a wide variety of other health events. The focus should now change from formulating the ideal dry-cow diet to looking at the fresh- or transition-cow diet.

There are added pressures for producers this year due to forage stocks being depleted on numerous farms. Many producers are beginning to spare silage or ask about alternatives. As per our previous advice on feed shortages, it is important to act now rather than waiting to make changes when a more severe deficit has already set in. Grass is on the horizon, but we also need to assume that we will experience a major weather event; as a near given, we need to prepare for this eventuality and protect ourselves from higher prices or unavailability down the road.

High-quality forage should be partitioned towards production and/or high-demand stock. If there is a low supply of forage, the purchasing of more forage should not be producers' immediate solution. Are there alternatives to this grass silage? What is the cost per tonne and on a dry-matter basis? If these options are too expensive, is there a simpler approach to increasing concentrate levels? There are many questions to answer, but it is more important to ask them now than to avoid them and be confronted by them later.

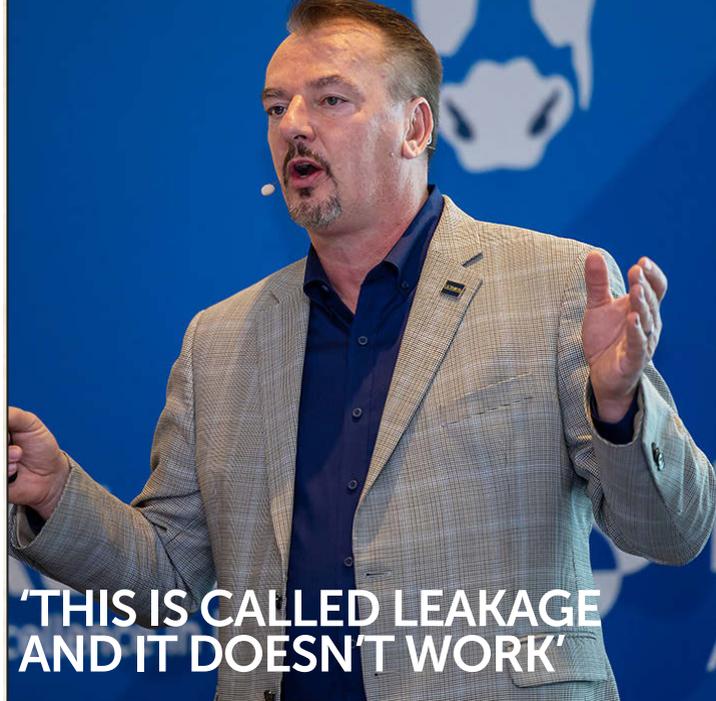
Protein prices are again on the rise, with soya being quoted in the high-€600 range. Most farms should take a two-pronged approach: reducing the overall protein fed and assessing the alternatives. Every litre a cow milks requires approximately 100 grams of protein; for instance, a 30L cow will require 3kg of protein. If this cow consumes 20kg of dry matter, then the overall diet only needs to include 15 per cent. Of course, feeding higher levels of protein will increase intakes and milk yields – but maybe not efficiently. Hitting the correct protein levels will allow producers to reduce their feed costs, hold body condition on the cows, optimise their yields, fat and protein levels, and better prepare the cows for breeding.

On a day-to-day basis, InTouch includes alternatives to soya in our diets to optimise production and costs. Optigen is one such product that supplies a better balance of protein, thereby allowing farms to feed less protein overall. Running at 60 per cent of the cost of soya also makes Optigen an attractive alternative. Furthermore, it offers many environmental benefits, which is becoming increasingly more important in today's farming systems.

With change comes the unknown, and it is important to speak to your feed supplier or nutritionist to develop a plan for dealing with what might lie ahead. Even in a typical year, it is important to challenge the norm. If there is any positive to rising feed costs and supply issues, it is that they challenge us to do things in different and, in many cases, ultimately better ways.

**KEENAN**  
an Alltech company

**Alltech**



**Irish vets were called on, at a recent conference, to help policymakers understand the correlation between reducing our livestock numbers here in Ireland, and that gap being filled elsewhere in the world.**

Keynote speaker, Dr Frank Mitloehner told attendees of a recent large-animal vet event – CAVI Sustainable Livestock Production – that reducing our livestock numbers won't impact consumer demand. "The consumer demand for animal products remains, so this food will simply be produced by other countries, which then produce the emissions – this is called leakage and it doesn't work," he said. "I hope that the veterinary community in Ireland helps your policy makers understand this point."

The CAVI conference set out to explore the environmental impact of our agriculture and food industries and to examine how vets, working with their clients, can positively impact and contribute towards a more sustainable agricultural sector into the future. Dr Mitloehner highlighted the importance of utilising our natural resources to feed the world's growing population: "Without ruminants we could not make use of two thirds of all agricultural land in the world. We have a limited amount of natural resources to feed the growing global human population, so it is imperative for us to make the best use of all the resources we have." He said, for a country like Ireland, this was a no-brainer: "To me, there is no doubt that you have to use those resources, all that green grass that you are famous for all over the world, in order to produce highly nutritious food products."

He also highlighted the importance of re-thinking how we manage methane: "Tackling the issue around livestock and its impact on our climate demands for us to re-think methane. The gas is only a problem if we don't manage it but if we do manage it, it can be a solution." He said the opportunities around converting methane to electrical power as a fossil-fuel replacement should be explored.

A wide range of expert speakers, both Irish and International, offered a local and global perspective on the challenges, and the potential solutions, facing the agriculture and food industries. Commenting on the goals of the conference, vet, Donal Lynch said: "The veterinary industry, hand-in-hand with farmers across the country, is already doing an awful lot to promote ongoing health on farms, which contributes to addressing our environmental impact and is helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But we need to continue to upskill in the area of sustainability and explore the issues and the solutions that will help us to achieve our targets."



## MASTER BUTCHER'S HEALTHY TREATS HAVE PETS LICKING THEIR CHOPS

**A Co. Westmeath master butcher has developed a range of pet-food treats that are made from natural ingredients and underpinned by scientific research carried out in collaboration with Teagasc.** Leonard Greene, a farmer's son and master butcher from Multyfarnham, near Mullingar, also designed the machines to manufacture these treats into their novel cylindrical shape. Handmade from grass-fed Irish beef, seaweed, and a range of natural botanicals, these treats deliver key nutrients, like protein, and offer added benefits such as assisting in the prevention of health issues associated with the heart and joints, as well as helping to control blood sugars to prevent diseases like diabetes. Tests performed at Teagasc indicate that Leonard's pet-food supplements contain ACE-1 inhibitors and have potential to maintain normal blood pressure in pets. This is a new approach to proactively managing blood pressure in pets. Research has also shown the joint health benefits of the inclusion of the naturally occurring cyclooxygenase (COX) enzyme, which is said to offer a new approach to proactively manage joint health in dogs and cats, through natural nutrition. The further benefits of including naturally occurring enzymes in the diet to promote pet health extend to controlling blood sugar levels, a major factor in type 2 diabetes prevention.



**Damien O'Reilly**  
EU Affairs and  
Communications Manager, ICOS

## LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

**The war in Ukraine has had a devastating impact, first and foremost, on the country's innocent people. That goes without saying. It has also had a tsunami-like effect on the world, from displacement of people to food inflation to rocketing energy costs. And, everywhere you look around the corridors of power in Brussels, the war is impacting decision-making too.**

Any policy being drafted or designed here in Brussels is against the backdrop of what is happening in Ukraine. And, at its heart is sustainability. Long before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU was focussed on wrapping sustainability around all-new legislation and policy. That included food production under the Farm to Fork element of the EU Green Deal project. Now, the war has refocussed minds on the issue of sustainability. There has been some debate about how the roadmap to the Farm to Fork targets might not be workable while global grain supply and food security are under threat. Nevertheless, the focus on a more sustainable EU remains as sharp as ever.

When it comes to farming and food production, sustainability will have a much broader remit than merely the headline physical adjustments such as less fertiliser use, less pesticide use? and better animal husbandry. The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive has been given the important seal of approval by the EU Council. Very soon, large companies which include agri-food businesses will be required to publish detailed information on sustainability matters.

This will increase a company's accountability, streamline sustainability standards, and ease the transition to a sustainable economy. The EU says: "In practical terms, companies will have to report on how their business model affects their sustainability, and on how external sustainability factors (such as climate change or human right issues) influence their activities. This will equip investors and other stakeholders better when making informed decisions on sustainability issues." The day of 'good to have' from a sustainability perspective - which covers environmental and animal welfare - is over. It is a case of 'must have' for agri-businesses because consumers are demanding it. Meanwhile DG Sante (responsible for the EU Commission's policies on health and food safety) is working away on developing its sustainable food-labelling framework. The aims are familiar:

- ▶ To promote sustainable food consumption;
- ▶ Empower consumers to make informed, healthy, and sustainable food choices; and
- ▶ Incentivise food-business operators to improve the sustainability of their products.

Information focussed on nutrition, environmental impact and animal welfare will become more mainstream on food packaging in a way we only see on specialist food labels in the vegan or organic aisles of the supermarket. The experts here in Brussels say it's all being consumer driven. And, farmers and food producers must and will respond in kind. The question is, are we - the EU consumers and taxpayers - willing to pay for the higher standards we demand?

## MINISTER TO ADDRESS UCD AGRI-CAREERS DAY

This year's University College Dublin (UCD) Agriculture, Food Science & Human Nutrition Careers Day will take place on February 22, providing a unique opportunity for companies to meet with upcoming talented graduates.

Organised annually by the UCD Agricultural Science Society – AgSoc – this event has been a staple of final-year students' calendar for many years. In recent years, up to 50 exhibitors have attended the event. On the day, the publication of the annual graduate handbook, sponsored by FRS Recruitment, will be launched and available to any prospective employers; the winners of the 2023 ASA mock interviews will also be announced; and Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, will deliver a keynote address. AgSoc Careers Committee chair is Eilish Gill, a final-year animal-and-crop-production student, from Co. Mayo. Commenting on the event, she said: "This year marks 100 years of UCD's Agricultural Science Society. In recognition of this, our aim is to make this careers day one of the biggest and best yet!" Any companies or organisations interested in attending are encouraged to contact Eilish for more information: [agcareers@gmail.com](mailto:agcareers@gmail.com)



Michelle McNally, from Carlow; Eoin McCormack, from Tipperary; and Isabel O'Neill, from Dublin pictured at an Agriculture, Food Science & Human Nutrition Careers Day. Photo: Patrick Browne.



## 'DAY-OF-BIRTH' VACCINE NOW AVAILABLE FOR CALVES

An intranasal vaccine from MSD Animal Health, aimed at reducing clinical signs of respiratory disease, can now be administered to newborn calves from the day of birth. The vaccine, which reduces clinical signs of bovine respiratory disease (BRD) and viral shedding, is the only one on the market that can be administered from the day of birth, according to the company. BRD, caused by bovine respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and parainfluenza-3 (PI3) viruses, is a significant threat to calf health and welfare that can cause pneumonia and permanent lung damage. Global technical director, ruminant biologicals, MSD Animal Health, Geert Vertenten explained: "As a major cause of morbidity in cattle populations around the world, it results in significant economic loss in the dairy and beef industries. "Unlike other vaccination methods, intranasal vaccination is still effective in the presence of maternal antibodies found in colostrum, allowing it to be effective when administered to a newborn calf. This vaccine, Bovilis INtranasal RSP Live, is the only vaccine that can be administered from the day of birth, offering young calves the earliest protection against BRD."

## €2.25m PLEDGED IN BID TO ACHIEVE BVD-FREE STATUS BY END OF 2023

Additional financial support of €2.25 million has been pledged to farmers to help support bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) tag testing for 2023. Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, recently praised the 'significant efforts' made by farmers in the past decade, which has resulted in the incidence of BVD-positive animals decreasing from 0.66 per cent in 2013, the first year of the compulsory phase of the eradication programme, to 0.03 per cent this year. Ireland has not recorded a confirmed BVD positive case since May 2021. In 2022, the Irish BVD programme was aligned with the European Animal Health Law (AHL) and official recognition of the programme was granted. Ireland has now achieved two of the three conditions for BVD-free status: animal level prevalence; and the absence of a confirmed BVD case for 18 months. However, it is key that the final target of a national herd level prevalence of 99.8 per cent of all herds free of BVD is achieved. By maintaining the current focus on BVD eradication, Ireland should be positioned to apply for BVD-free status by the end of 2023, according to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

"The BVD eradication programme has brought Ireland close to achieving the goal of BVD freedom," the minister said.

"This reduction in BVD prevalence has delivered benefits to all cattle herds, including better animal health and improved fertility, which, in turn, has helped to reduce antimicrobial usage and contributes to a more sustainable livestock sector." At the outset, BVD was costing Irish livestock farmers in the region €102 million each year and these costs would have lasted into perpetuity if the programme was not undertaken, the minister said. The tag-testing funding for 2023 will target breeding herds, in particular, smaller breeding herds where the relative costs are the greatest. A payment of €2 per calf, will be made directly to farmers based on calves registered, up to a maximum of 25 calves per herd.

The Minister also confirmed that the Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH), a mandatory herd epidemiological investigation, after disclosure of a BVD-positive or inconclusive animal will continue.

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## DAFM 'ASSESSING' IF ALL ACRES APPLICANTS CAN BE FACILITATED

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue has reiterated that his department is assessing the possibility of including all 46,000 applicants in the first tranche of ACRES. This €1.5 billion agri-environment climate scheme – considered to be the new REPS – will facilitate 50,000 farmers in total, taking in 30,000 farmers in 2023, with the remaining 20,000 to be enrolled in 2024. However, the first tranche was massively over-subscribed and a so-called 'gap payment' has been discussed as a potential way of ensuring that farmers do not miss out on payments in 2023 if they were not successful in accessing the scheme. Speaking at the recent Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) AGM, the minister was questioned again on the status of the scheme and whether it would be expanded. "If we can, and we are working very hard in the department to assess the capacity to run the ACRES scheme fully for all 46,000 applicants, or not. That would be a massive challenge, and there are many moving parts in that, but we are assessing whether that would be possible. If it is possible, then there would be no gap year involved," he said. But he said that bottom line is that he wants the scheme to work well for everyone. "We want to ensure that no one is left behind. Critically, we can't allow a situation where all other farmer payments are affected by stretching too far. We are moving quickly on this and I will be announcing next steps very soon."

## NITRATES DEROGATION APPLICATIONS OPEN

Applications for the 2023 Nitrates Derogation are now open and more intensively stocked farmers are being encouraged to engage, as soon as possible, with this application process and to discuss the need for a derogation with their agricultural advisor. Dairy farmers who previously did not avail of the derogation are also strongly encouraged to consult with their agricultural advisor, due to the new excretion rate bands applicable for dairy cows from January 1. The three bands applicable for dairy cows are: 80kg N/cow, 92kg N/cow and 106 kg N/cow per year. Previously all dairy cows were considered equal in terms of nutrient excretion rate at 89kg N/cow per year. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine says it will shortly write to farmers individually regarding the banding options applicable to their herd and the requirements around banding. This will help farmers inform themselves to make important decisions in the year ahead. Nitrates Derogation applications can be made online at: [www.agfood.ie](http://www.agfood.ie)



IFA president, Tim Cullinan and Minister Charlie McConalogue. Photo: Finbarr O'Rourke.

## MINISTER'S AMBITIONS FOR IRELAND TO BE WORLD FIRST IN GENOTYPING HERD

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue said that, in the context of the agricultural sector meeting its climate targets, all-herd genotyping would be a huge help, and that he 'would very much like Ireland to become the first country in the world to genotype all livestock in the country'.

Addressing the Irish Farmers' Association's (IFA's) 68th AGM, he told the crowded auditorium that he believes this will happen, and that by delivering it, Ireland will continue to show the world that it is more than an

outpost on the edge of Europe'.

"We have a beef sector that is the envy of the world and the starting point in all of this is the farmer who calves the cow, rears the calf, produces the weanling or store and, ultimately, finishes the animal. Genotyping can be a huge help here.

"I am considering how that might be achieved, having regard to the funding that might be made available, the climate impact and a variety of organisational and logistical challenges," he said, adding this can only be done if it will lead to a 'real and measurable reduction in emissions'.

## 2022 REFERENCE YEAR WOULD BE USED IN 'VOLUNTARY REDUCTION SCHEME'

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue sought to quell the idea that a dairy-reduction scheme would be imposed when questioned at the recent Irish Farmers' Association's AGM, but clarified that a voluntary reduction scheme may still be on the cards. "For the avoidance of any doubt, were we to contemplate any such scheme on the dairy side, I would intend to use 2022 as a reference year against which any reduction would be measured," he said. When questioned further on this, he said that while there was a clear message that there would be no welcome for a suckler-reduction scheme, he reminded the AGM that there was a recommendation supported by a

number of stakeholders from the Food Vision Dairy Group, in relation to a potential voluntary dairy-reduction scheme. "That is something I will be engaging further in with yourself and other stakeholders," he told IFA president, Tim Cullinan. "This would be a voluntary dairy reduction scheme," he insisted.

"But that creates speculation in relation to what would we reduce it from, what reference year would there be? And, whether you might have unintended consequences where people start to keep more [animals] with the intention of reducing. "So, what I am saying is if we do step forward a voluntary reduction scheme, we would base that on 2022 being a reference year."



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# TIRLÁN ONE YEAR ON

IT HAS BEEN ONE YEAR SINCE GLANBIA CO-OP TOOK FULL CONTROL OF THE DAIRY AND GRAIN PROCESSING ASSETS, HITHERTO IN JOINT OWNERSHIP WITH GLANBIA PLC. **MATT O'KEEFE** REPORTS ON THAT YEAR'S DEVELOPMENTS

That acquisition later resulted in the birth of a newly named and rebranded entity, Tirlán Co-operative Society Limited – known as Tirlán – which is looking forward to growth and development in 2023, its CEO, Jim Bergin explained at a recent shareholder information meeting.

“As a €3 billion-revenue organisation, Tirlán has now put management and governance structures in place that aspire to be best in class,” he said.

“We have a €150-million investment fund in place, as agreed by shareholders, as well as the residual 28 per cent continuing investment in Glanbia Plc. We have personnel in place to manage our investment strategy so that if, or when, worthwhile acquisitions are identified we will be well positioned to act. The whole area of ESG (environmental, social, and governance) is now of such importance that we have recently appointed an ESG executive. ESG will have implications across a range of operations and actions that we undertake, and every organisation of scale will require strong ESG credentials in future.”

## RESTRUCTURING REPRESENTATIVE ROLE

While the Tirlán CEO was scarce on specifics as regards a restructuring of the role and make-up of the co-op's representative structure, he did confirm that a review is well advanced, under the leadership of Tirlán

vice-chair, Brendan Hayes. It may well result in the amalgamation of the area committees into larger units, akin to the existing regional committees, with the latter potentially becoming redundant. That would leave a slimmed-down representative structure comprising newly revamped regional structures electing members to a council, which ultimately elects the co-op board. A clearer vision will, it is hoped, will be made public in the coming months.

## STRONG FINANCIAL DISCIPLINES

Jim reiterated his belief that the new entity will maintain 'strong financial disciplines.' “That includes taking tough financial decisions on a regular basis and a big achievement for the past year has been the management of our cashflow,” he explained. “The cost of everything has increased so more funds are required to run the business from day to day. Because of intense effort by our finance and agri teams, our working-capital requirements have been managed to the extent that we are in a similar position to one year ago.

The introduction of a split by-monthly milk payment has delivered for the organisation, as well as milk suppliers, in terms of lowering capital requirements at any one period. Our balance sheet is strong and that is where we want to be.”

## MILK-VOLUME PLANNING

The Tirlán boss outlined future milk-volume-expansion plans: “There are still regulatory areas that are unclear regarding milk production and consequent processing. The carbon-reduction requirement is in place, though the nitrates usage on farms is not clear [at time of print]. We are conscious that this has implications for farmers in making plans for milk production.

“In our previous response to farm plans, we invested €200 million in 2012 in expanding processing capacity.

That was based, accurately, on our farm census. We need that joint understanding again for the next phase of development at farm and processing level. As well as catering for further milk-volume expansion, as indicated by producers, we will need to build new income streams and add value to existing products and commodities. That's an ongoing effort and presents opportunities as well as challenges.”

## FIXING THE FIXED PRICE

One contentious issue that has caused considerable debate at Tirlán information meetings is fixed-price contracts for milk supply. After 17 relatively successful iterations of this milk-price hedging strategy, the wheels came off the bus for many 'hedgers' in the past 12 months as the agreed price failed to



Pictured at the unveiling of Tirlán in 2022: CEO of Tirlán, Jim Bergin; head of commercial, Tirlán, Nicola O'Connell; brand ambassador, Irish rugby international, Tadhg Furlong; and chair of Tirlán, John Murphy. Photo: Julien Behal Photography.

meet either the rampant production inflation endured by milk producers or the unforeseen increases in international dairy-market prices. While outlining the steps taken by the co-op to alleviate the cost/price squeeze for those producers involved – this included trying to ensure that producers were at least at breakeven and/or in some degree of profit, according to the co-op – there were many producers who still voiced their belief that more needed to be done.

Jim summed up the situation: “Our job is to manage the balance between those who don't have fixed contracts and those who do. We have supported the contracts through a €25-million fund and there has been a huge degree of engagement with individual producers.”

At this stage, it would seem that the bones of contention revolve around 'lost opportunity'

more so than profit or loss. That should come as no surprise given the unprecedented price of milk in recent months.

### SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

Acknowledging both the improved sustainability of production on farms, as well as the lack of recognition of that fact among the general public and commentators he said: “Farmers are not only the solution to many of the challenges ahead, but they also have more power to enact change than many of those commentating and observing from the sidelines. Specifically, the carbon-reduction target is a big challenge. The nitrates element is more tangible because water quality is immediately relatable to environmental welfare. We have to act on the basis that our river-water quality needs to improve significantly. Any change to the nitrates derogation would be very challenging, with both a possible 220kg limit alongside cow banding posing big dilemmas for milk producers.”

“We need a coherent strategy around bovine welfare. The Calf Welfare Charter will set the debate. In Tirlán, through the Twenty20 Beef Club, we have developed a dairy-beef calf-rearing blueprint that can deliver profitability for the farmers involved. Calves are live animals and must be treated under the appropriate animal-welfare standards. For 2023, we are effectively providing the opportunity to manage calves, without a slaughter option, below eight weeks. We fully understand the need for a national policy around calf breeding, rearing and general management,” he said. “Land-use policy is another high priority. Alternatives to bovine enterprises are being promoted. Improved forestry supports, targeted

supports to encourage tillage development, organics – including milk production – as well as rewetting and anaerobic digesters, all constitute significant potential changes in land use. We are conscious of the need to protect our members and producers through this time of change.”

### OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

By any standards, an 83 per cent increase in milk production since quotas were abolished in 2015 was an outstanding achievement. That growth by Tirlán milk producers was highlighted by Jim Bergin:

“Producers and processors invested heavily to make that happen. We have now entered a 10-year period where sustainability will be a priority. Our job will be to support Tirlán milk producers to remain the most sustainable milk producers internationally. It is a strategic challenge to be met collectively and individually on farms.”

### MARKET OUTLOOK

On the market outlook, Jim said constrained supply and high production costs brought renewed focus on food security in 2022, Jim said. “From last September, some level of market normality returned with higher production in reaction to high prices. These prices have impacted on demand and that has shown up in reduced marketing volumes. In order to maintain profitability levels, high input costs will need to be matched by a relatively high milk price.

Prices have been supported by Tirlán since last October with markets not returning the full processing cost. Ultimately, gravity cannot be defied indefinitely so a downward milk price adjustment is inevitable unless markets change dramatically.”



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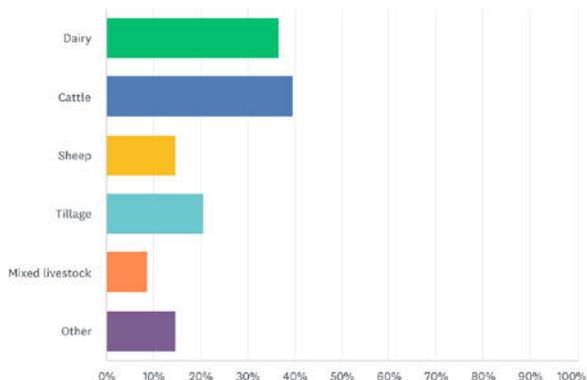
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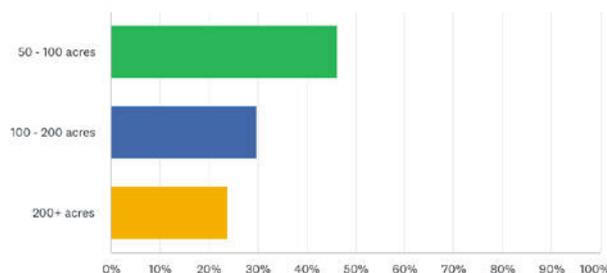
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Answered: 68 Skipped: 0



### What size is your farm?



# FARMER SURVEY

**IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY UNDERTOOK A SURVEY AMONG FARMERS TO GET A READ ON THE MOOD OF IRELAND'S FARMING COMMUNITY AROUND KEY ISSUES SUCH AS CLIMATE ACTION MEASURES, SUCCESSION PLANS AND POSSIBLE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. BELOW IS A SNAPSHOT OF THE RESULTS**

#### ON CLIMATE AND EMISSIONS:

Over 60 per cent of respondents did not believe the targets proposed for reducing agricultural emissions are reasonable, however over 85 per cent believe that farmers are currently stepping up to their environmental responsibilities. In addition, over 80 per cent have made changes to their farm/farming practices in recent years to improve biodiversity and reduce emissions.

#### ON PLANNING, COSTS AND SPENDING:

Over 65 per cent confirmed that they would be buying machinery over the coming 12 months. Meanwhile, 73 per cent of those responding noted that, in their experience, farmgate prices for beef/milk/grain/lamb do not fully cover the increased input costs. Answering how important off-farm income is to the overall income of the farm, 32 per cent noted it was important and 46 per cent ticked 'very important'. Almost 60 per cent of those questioned confirmed that they do have a succession plan in place to secure the future of their farm.

#### ON GOVERNMENT:

Over 77 per cent do not believe that farmers are being well supported by the Government/State when it comes to making farms more carbon efficient. Answering the question 'who would you vote for in the interest of farming communities if an election was called tomorrow?': 38.8 per cent answered Fine Gael; 28.3 Independent; 17.9 per cent Fianna Fáil; and 13.4 per cent Sinn Féin.

*The survey was undertaken in September 2022 with 68 farmers participating.*



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Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue with CEO of Bord Bia, Jim O'Toole.

# IRISH FOOD AND DRINK EXPORTS REACH RECORD HIGH OF €16.7BN

GROWTH IN VALUE AND VOLUME BOOSTED EXPORTS OF IRISH FOOD, DRINK AND HORTICULTURE BY 22 PER CENT TO A RECORD-BREAKING €16.7 BILLION IN 2022, ACCORDING TO BORD BIA, WHICH RECENTLY PUBLISHED ITS *EXPORT PERFORMANCE AND PROSPECTS REPORT 2022-2023*. **BERNIE COMMINS** REPORTS ON THE COMPOSITION OF THOSE EXPORTS AND WHERE, IN THE WORLD, THEY WENT

The above figures represent a significant increase in food and drink exports in 2022 – up €3 billion since 2021, and moving towards 30 per cent on pre-pandemic levels – back in 2019, the value was €13 billion. The jump can be attributed to both increasing unit prices – due to inflation and rising input and operational costs – and an increase in the volume of goods exported, according to Bord Bia.

Generally, the volume of exports for sectors such as Irish beef and dairy increased in 2022, while prepared consumer foods (PCF) and drinks achieved new milestones in the value of their respective exports. Value-added meat and seafood exports, captured under PCF, reached over €1 billion in 2022. This represented an increase of 30 per cent compared with the previous year, with exports surpassing pre Covid-19 levels by 23 per cent. Within meat, this subcategory represents a vitally important outlet for traditionally lower-value cuts, Bord Bia said. This is the first *Export Performance and Prospects Report* delivered by CEO of Bord Bia, Jim O'Toole, who stepped into the role in November 2022. "Following two years of profound disruption, 2022 brought a new

*The Export Performance and Prospects Report* was launched by Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue. He stated that his department estimates that the actual total Irish agri-food exports, including non-edible products that are not included in Bord Bia's report, to be worth €18.7 billion in 2022!

range of cost and sourcing challenges, making this year's export performance even more impressive," he said. "For large and small businesses across the country the impacts of inflation, input costs and the invasion of Ukraine have been inescapable and make last year's export performance all the more impressive and important. To frame this significant exports figure another way Ireland exported the equivalent of over €45 million worth of food and drink every day last year to customers in more than 180 countries around the world."

## Numbers



€16.7 billion – the value of exports in 2022



€3 billion – increase in value since 2021



€6.8 billion – dairy exports



€4 billion – meat and livestock



€2.3 billion – dairy exports to EU



€475 million – sheepmeat exports



## Ireland exported the equivalent of over €45 million worth of food and drink every day last year to customers in more than 180 countries

Looking ahead, he said that the industry needs to be responsive to a range of oncoming challenges in 2023, as the challenging trading conditions will endure and evolve. "As 2023 is predicted to be another disruptive year of economic difficulty and challenging supply chains, Bord Bia will continue to be agile and responsive to client and sector needs in what is likely to be a period of ongoing volatility. For Irish food and drink exporters, it will be increasingly important to be aware of how consumers respond to the current cost of living crisis and to position their products accordingly."

### 2022 – A CLOSER LOOK

#### DAIRY

Irish dairy exports were valued at €6.8 billion in 2022, a year-on-year value increase of 33 per cent or €1.7 billion, driven mainly by Irish butter, up 26 per cent in value, and cheese, up 25 per cent in value. The percentage increase for butter represents €270 million to a record value of approximately €1.32 billion. The EU, UK and North America remain the key markets for butter, accounting for 95 per cent of exports. Cheese exports increased by an estimated €260 million in 2022 to a record value of approximately €1.3 billion. EU markets accounted for over half of this growth with strong trade to France, Netherlands and Germany, fulfilling demand based on lower local supply. Spain and Belgium also performed very strongly from an Irish cheddar exports perspective; rising by approximately 40 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively. Trade to North America and the UK was largely in line with 2021 volumes but with a higher value being achieved. In terms of Asia, Japan remains a key market for Irish cheddar with further value growth evident.

Exports of fat filled milk powder (FFMP) increased by an estimated €230 million in 2022 to a value of approximately €920 million, up 34 per cent up on a relatively slow performance in 2021. Strong energy prices, coupled with a

**Dairy remains the largest element within Irish food and drink exports with over 1.7 million tonnes of product shipped to over 130 markets worldwide.**

strong dollar versus euro exchange rate offered favourable trading conditions into the key west Africa markets of Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana. Exports of specialised nutritional powders increased by an estimated €70 million in 2022 to a value of approximately €730 million, 11 per cent up on 2021's figures and arresting a five-year trend of declining export value. Production challenges in the US served to drive import demand there and across the globe. Exports of finished product to China continue to decline, albeit at a slower pace than seen in recent years. This is driven by lower birth rates and increased government support for local manufacturers, who are now estimated to account for approximately 60 per cent market share. In contrast, other destinations across Asia including Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand performed strongly and contributed to overall exports to the region increasing by approximately 5 per cent. Skimmed milk powder (SMP) export values reached an estimated at €560 million for the year. This is the first time that SMP exports have broken the €500 million mark and represents value growth of €170 million or 44 per cent in 2022. Exports of casein powders increased by €320 million in 2022 to a value of approximately €790 million, 68 per cent up on 2021's figures and affirming the strategic decisions the Irish dairy industry has made in investing in the manufacture of this product.

#### MEAT AND LIVESTOCK

Meat and livestock exports were valued at over €4 billion in 2022 representing a 15 per cent value increase, up €520 million, compared to 2021. Although product prices increased across all meat species, this robust performance also reflects increases in output levels and average

#### Dairy destination – breakdown



prices within the beef and sheepmeat sectors, according to the report.

Irish beef exports were the largest contributor to the meat sector, valued at €2.5 billion, an increase of €384 million or 18 per cent on 2021 levels. During the first half of the year, the Irish beef sector benefited from continued strong demand from the UK and EU markets. Exports of Irish beef to the UK increased 15 per cent to reach an estimated €1.1 billion. The UK market accounted for 43 per cent of Irish exports in value terms, down slightly from 44 per cent in 2021.

Irish beef exports to Continental European markets grew by 26 per cent to €1.3 billion in 2022, accounting for 50 per cent of the overall value of this trade. Beef supplies across many markets tightened, most notably in France, Sweden and Spain by between 3 per cent and 4 per cent. Demand was particularly strong for forequarter and manufacturing beef while higher value cuts

such as steaks were in lesser demand as food inflation concerns focused attention on value offers. Beef consumption reportedly declined in Germany, France, Sweden and Spain, while Italy saw a marginal increase.

Irish beef exports to international markets are estimated to have declined by 10 per cent to €162 million. This equates to a 6.5 per cent share of Irish beef exports in value terms. This reflected the strength of prices available in the EU, particularly during the first half of the year. Demand from Japan and the Philippines started the year strongly resulting in other countries' exports increasing slightly to these markets. Meanwhile exports to the US were impacted by the filling of the import quota early in the year and as a result Irish exports declined considerably with this partly offset by higher trade to Canada in 2022.

The European Commission estimates that beef consumption across the EU decreased by 1 per cent while beef imports to the EU rose by an estimated 17 per cent.

#### SHEEPMEAT

The value of sheepmeat exports increased by 17 per cent to €475 million while the volume of exports increased by 10 per cent to 75,000 tonnes. This is the third consecutive year in which Irish sheepmeat exports recorded

volume and value growth.

Relatively tight global supplies of sheepmeat combined with stable consumer demand contributed to strong prices for Irish sheepmeat producers in the first half of 2022, despite an increase in domestic sheepmeat production. During the second half of the year, higher costs of production and more difficult grass growing conditions had a negative impact on lamb performance and ultimately the availability of lambs for processing. Irish sheepmeat faced increased competition due to a recovery in the availability of UK sheepmeat, as well as an increase in product from the southern hemisphere.

#### PIGMEAT

Despite the ongoing pressures faced by the sector, Irish pigmeat export values were 2 per cent higher in 2022 at €540 million as higher prices helped to offset some reduction in export volumes as the year progressed. However, pig producers were faced with unprecedented production costs, which severely impacted on viability for much of the year.

#### POULTRY

Overall, Irish poultry export values are estimated to have increased by 14 per cent in value terms to €143 million during 2022, with volumes up 3 per cent at 78,000 tonnes.

#### PREPARED CONSUMER FOODS

In 2022, prepared consumer food (PCF) export values exceeded €3 billion, in a performance that was largely driven by the reopening of foodservice as Covid-19 restrictions lifted in early 2022 across key markets. Inflation played a significant role in this value increase, which was up 17 per cent compared to 2021 levels, as volatility in input costs and rising energy prices curtailed new growth opportunities in the UK and European markets.

#### DRINKS

Meanwhile, Irish drink exports reached almost €2 billion (up 22 per cent year on year) for the first time, a 25 per cent value increase on pre-pandemic (2019) levels, which reflects the good recovery and now growth of the sector following difficult years in 2020 and 2021. North America continues to be the key export market, representing 52 per cent of overall exports at just under €1 billion. Irish whiskey

exports accounted for 60 per cent of the overall value growth last year, with exports valued at almost at €1 billion (up 25 per cent on 2021) for the first time.

#### SEAFOOD

Improved prices helped drive the performance in Irish seafood with export values increasing by 3 per cent (or €17 million) year-on-year to reach €530 million. This was despite a 19 per cent decrease in volumes exported, reflecting the challenging situation faced by Irish seafood exporters in securing supply.

#### HORTICULTURE

Finally, exports of Irish horticulture and cereals exceeded €300 million, with mushrooms, largely destined for the UK, accounting for 50 per cent or €152 million (down 6 per cent on 2021), while cereals exports were valued at €73 million (up 10 per cent on 2021).

#### EXPORT DESTINATIONS

Maintaining a diverse range of markets and channels around the world has been key to the success and continued growth of Ireland's food and drink exports, according to Bord Bia. In 2022, more than one-third (34 per cent) of Ireland's total food and drink exports in value terms were destined for international markets, while the EU and UK accounted for 34 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively.

The UK remains the largest single country market for Irish food and drink exports, with exports valued at an estimated €5.4 billion in 2022, an increase of 20 per cent on 2021 levels. Irish exporters have navigated their way through considerable uncertainty in terms of the new trading environment with the UK, and more recently a rapidly slowing British economy.

In value terms, Irish food and drink exports to the EU increased by 29 per cent to reach €5.7 billion last year, and for international markets, the value increased by 23 per cent to reach €5.6 billion.

Exports to the US increased by almost 40 per cent to more than €2 billion and while China's Covid restrictions contributed to a decline in exports to China, growth in the value of exports to the Philippines, India, Malaysia and Japan more than offset this decline. Overall Ireland's food and drink exports to Asia increased by 9 per cent to €1.5 billion.



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AT THE RECENT IRISH FARMERS' ASSOCIATION'S (IFA) FARMING & CLIMATE SUMMIT, FOOD ECONOMIST, CIARAN FITZGERALD SPOKE ABOUT 'THE PREJUDICE OF ECONOMIC IGNORANCE' AROUND THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR. HERE, WE REVIEW SOME OF HIS KEY POINTS

# ECONOMIC IGNORANCE FOR AGRI-SECTOR

**While climate action remains a key topic for Ireland's agri-food sector, shining a spotlight on the economic relevance of the sector is something Ciaran Fitzgerald believes is a priority:** "This is what we

have to strive for because, frankly, when you are relevant you don't get given away. Economic relevance isn't just a number. It drives conversations about what goes on in the economy, what's regulated and what's supported".

He argues that, over the last three to four years, agriculture was broadly characterised as a polluter, however, 'agriculture's performance, and the food industry's performance, throughout Covid [restrictions], for instance, were rarely commented on'. "Not only did we have the domestic challenges at home of keeping agriculture and food production going, we had the global challenges of selling into export markets where one third of the demand was closed, because restaurants and fast-food channels were closed. And yet agriculture and food

performed remarkably. Was there recognition of it? Unfortunately, the answer is no." According to Ciaran, when we look at the challenges of reducing carbon emissions, there's a dismissal of agriculture's economic importance.

## HORTICULTURE AS HERO

Often, according to Ciaran, the horticulture sector is promoted as the great panacea here, but, considering that fruit and vegetables are chronically sold at low cost, this is

problematic: "The notion of a quick and easy panacea in the plant-based and horticultural sector is not well grounded. And I think, in contrast to reality, it speaks to a disconnect. One of the issues of food production is that, by law, the food producer cannot set the price of food. So, people at policy level really need to join up the dots."

Ciaran adds that global demand for Irish grass-based food offerings continues to increase and is robust: "While people here [at the summit] know there are going to be huge challenges in maintaining value, there is a growing global demand for what we produce." In addition, the spend within the Irish economy driven by the agri-food sector is relatively high in comparison to other sectors. "The Irish economy spend from purchasing meat and dairy products alone is about €10 billion. What's important here is that our own Central Statistics Office (CSO), our own Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment as well as Eurostat, look at expenditure in the Irish economy and what



**The economic misrepresentation here of agriculture has been used to promote the notion that the contribution currently of the sector is low and that it's easily replaced**



IFA director of European Affairs, IFA Brussels office, Liam MacHale; director, sustainability and quality assurance, Bord Bia, Deirdre Ryan; IFA senior policy executive, Geraldine O'Sullivan; and food economist, Ciaran Fitzgerald.

comes from that is that the spend by the agri-food sector is three times bigger in the Irish economy than any other business. And that is hugely important."

"When we look at some of the driving forces about the politics of emissions reduction, there hasn't been any real statement on the economic impact. And what I would suggest is that it needs to be factored into any discussion. Every one per cent reduction in our output represents a reduction of €120 million in output, and a reduction of €240 million in Irish economy spend. That's not small money, when you get to a possible five per cent, that's over a billion euros."

"So, what's the challenge here? It might seem obvious but it's worth stating: the economic misrepresentation here of agriculture has been used to promote the notion that the contribution currently of the sector is low and that it's easily replaced. My assessment is that we need to challenge this prejudice of economic ignorance around the sector."

#### POSITIVE MESSAGING

"I think it's also a challenge to change how agriculture speaks about itself. If I look at other sectors such as pharmaceuticals and IT, they all speak positively about what they do, why they want to do it, and why they want to stay at it.



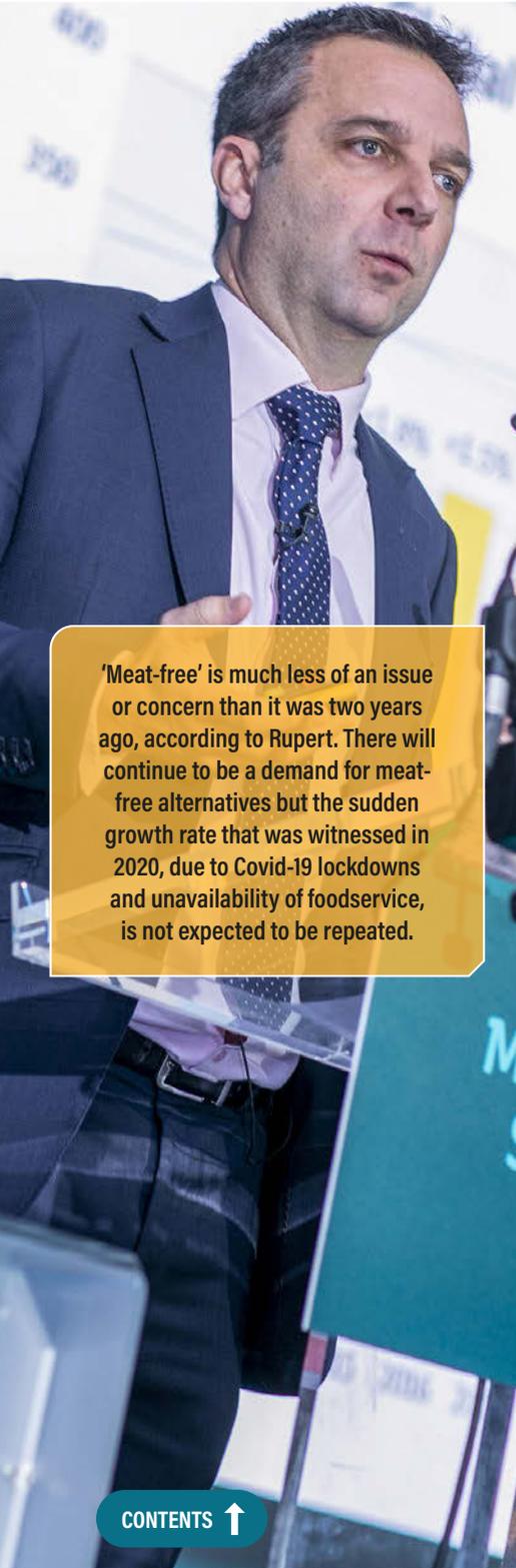
**Every 1 per cent reduction in our output represents a reduction of €120 million in output, and a reduction of €240 million in Irish economy spend**

"I understand the issues around things like price and income – there is a low margin. But there also needs to be another message, I would suggest, that says: 'We are big and important; we have an economic impact; we have a future economic impact. What we need is your help to maximise that economic impact! What that, hopefully, will lead to is a better acceptance that the intent with emissions reduction is based on the notion that we understand the economics; that we're not in the business of trying to get rid of cows, we're in the business of trying to decarbonise our economy."

At the IFA Farming & Climate Summit, IFA president, Tim Cullinan, said the farming sector faces unprecedented policy challenges, not just on emissions, but from other policies coming down the line from Europe on re-wetting through nature restoration laws, the Sustainable Use Directive, the Industrial Emissions Directive, and more. "The purpose of the summit is to bring farmers together with policy makers to fully understand what is facing us in the context of the value our sector to the economy and in terms of food production. While we now have a Climate Action Plan set out by the Government, there are huge details to be worked out including what funding the Government intends to provide to help farmers adopt new measures," he said.

"I want to make it very clear that IFA recognises the climate challenge and that our members are keen to play their part. However, it cannot be at the expense of their livelihoods. Much greater engagement is needed with farmers to ensure we can farm sustainably while still developing our sector and enhancing the social infrastructure in rural Ireland."

# A MEAT MARKET



'Meat-free' is much less of an issue or concern than it was two years ago, according to Rupert. There will continue to be a demand for meat-free alternatives but the sudden growth rate that was witnessed in 2020, due to Covid-19 lockdowns and unavailability of foodservice, is not expected to be repeated.

**AT A RECENT MEAT-MARKETING SEMINAR ORGANISED BY BORD BIA, RUPERT CLAXTON FROM GIRA - A GLOBAL STRATEGIC CONSULTANCY AND MARKET RESEARCH FIRM IN THE FOOD AND DRINK SECTORS - GAVE AN OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL MEAT CONSUMPTION FOR 2023. BERNIE COMMINS REPORTS ON SOME OF THE MAIN HEADLINES**

"Do we need more meat? Yes, the world still is looking for more meat," said Rupert, asking and answering his own question. Despite a general supply constraint, meat consumption, according to research carried out by Gira, and released in December 2022, is expected to grow over the next five years, with poultrymeat coming out on top as the most sought-after meat, globally, due to its affordability and accessibility. Sheepmeat is next, followed by beef.

Generally, global meat consumption has risen every year since 2011 - apart from in 2019 and 2020 when pork consumption fell due to outbreaks of African swine fever (ASF). In that timeframe, overall meat consumption - poultry, pork, sheep and beef - has risen and, looking ahead to 2027, is forecast to grow by just under 3 per cent per annum from 2023.

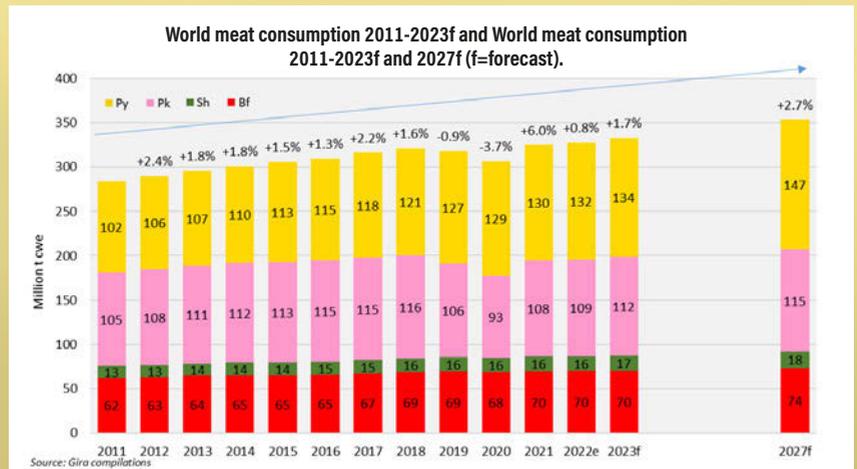
Gira also forecasts that, in the 10-year period from 2018-2027, consumption of poultrymeat will have risen by 21.2 per cent; followed by sheep (and goat) meat, up 14.8 per cent;

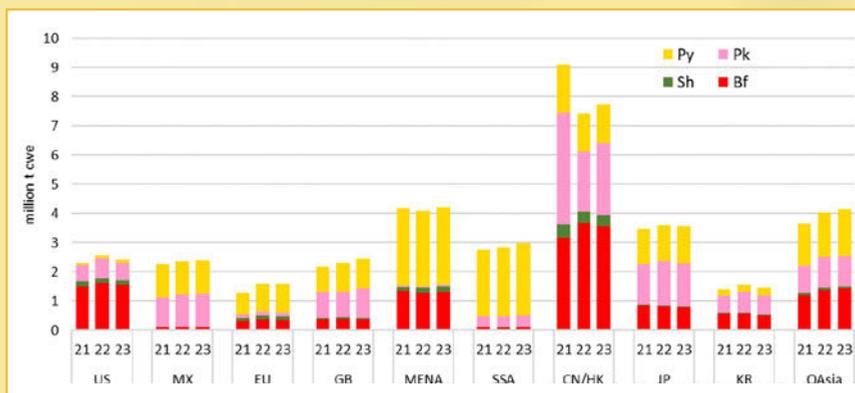
with beef and veal consumption expected to increase by 6.9 per cent.

"Pork is down a little bit from 2018 - a result of ASF across Asia - but growth in production is expected over the next five years," Rupert said. "And that is seen in all meats around the world, we are looking for more - poultry, pork, sheep and goat, and beef and veal - production growth is strong."

## POTENTIAL FOR BEEF

In that timeframe, 2011-2023 and forecasting to 2027, Rupert said the 'trade flow - that is where the meat is produced and where in the world it goes to - has seen continued growth. There is a really strong potential for beef to grow further, according to Rupert, because the areas where beef is currently produced are not necessarily where the consumption growth is. "The Asian markets are looking for more beef because the domestic Asian supply isn't there. China is one of those markets that cannot supply the domestic market, so they are looking to the world market," explained Rupert.





Key export destinations 2011-2023f (f=forecast).

## China opens beef market to Ireland

The beef-growth potential is good news for Ireland, particularly considering the recent announcement that the route for beef exports to China has reopened. Beef shipments were suspended in May 2020 following confirmation of an isolated case of atypical BSE by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Atypical BSE occurs naturally and sporadically in all cattle populations at a very low rate and is not considered a public-health risk. According to Bord Bia, Irish beef exports to China were on a sharp upward trajectory, rising from just over €2 million in 2018 to almost €40 million in 2019, the last full year of trade. In 2020, beef exports were on track to far exceed 2019 levels, with January to May figures having more than doubled compared to the same period in the previous year.

### EXPORT DESTINATIONS

China and Hong Kong are the biggest meat-export destination by far, followed by the Middle East North Africa (MENA) countries, then 'other Asia' countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam.

### BEEF

Despite the beef positives outlined above, globally, 'we are expecting less beef in the world today' said Rupert. According to Gira, beef and veal production, are forecast to rise by just 1 per cent in 2023. The reasons for this include a reduction of about 3 per cent in US production due to the significant drought there last year. "This means that the US is

really tight for beef supply in 2023 and they will be less competitive on the export markets around the world," he said.

This significant reduction offsets the increases forecast for Brazil (up 2 per cent), China (up 4 per cent), and Australia (up 12 per cent). Although Chinese beef production is up, this will serve a domestic market only.

### BEEF IMPORTERS

There was a steady growth in quantities of beef being imported around the world from 2020 to 2022, with growth – albeit marginal at 0.9 per cent – forecast for 2023. "There is a steady growth from 2020 to 2023, and what is most interesting about this is China's 'pull' on those imports," said Rupert, highlighting that, overall, China accounts for the most beef imports. In 2022, there was a significant increase to 3.6 million tonnes from 3.1 million tonnes in 2021. This was attributed to past importers' profitability attracting new importers, over-purchases, speculation and rising imported stocks, and higher production. Quantities are expected to be down slightly in 2023, however, to a forecasted 3.5 million tonnes. After China, the US imports the most, followed by the MENA countries.

While the US is a big importer, the reality is that most of that product comes from Canada and Mexico, with lean beef coming in from Australia and New Zealand, because of the domestic supply shortage due to the 2022 drought, when cows had to be culled.

### SHEEP

In 2022, there was very little growth in supply of sheepmeat around the world. While it is more positive in 2023, realistically, we are talking about 1 per cent increase in the total global supply chain, according to Rupert. Australia's production growth is forecast to be 6 per cent, with most of that going to Asian markets.

### PORK

Pork production is expected to grow, globally, by about 2 per cent, according to Gira research, but there will be 'noticeably less pork in Europe' in 2023, according to Rupert. It is forecast to be down by 3 per cent, on top of a 4 per cent drop in 2022.

In the aftermath of the devastating ASF outbreak in 2018 in China, pig production there is on the rise, and forecast to grow in 2023 by 6 per cent. The 'other Asia' countries are also forecast to up production by 4 per cent, down from 6 per cent in 2022, despite the presence of ASF. In Europe, production is expected to be down slightly by 1.7 per cent, while production is not expected to grow in the US. While China is currently importing around 1.5 million tonnes of pork, it is simultaneously building for the future in the form of some huge infrastructure, according to Rupert, who highlighted the 26-storey pig farm, which, when fully operational, will have an annual slaughter capacity of 1.2 million pigs.

### Rupert's observations for 2023

- ▶ A challenging first quarter that will drag into the second quarter.
- ▶ Inflationary impact on production is being passed on to the consumer.
- ▶ High energy costs mean reduced disposable income.
- ▶ Across the EU 27, there will be reduced production of meat: beef will be down 1 per cent, sheepmeat will be down 2 per cent; and pork will be down 4% - good for prices!
- ▶ Chinese imports set to increase as Covid restrictions lift.
- ▶ Sustainability back on the agenda in 2023 for governments.



# CALF REARING AND FORAGE PRESERVATION IN NEW ZEALAND

**AFTER A LONG AND SUCCESSFUL CAREER WORKING WITH VOLAC INTERNATIONAL, PAT CAHILL IS NEARING RETIREMENT. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, HE SPENT SOME TIME IN NEW ZEALAND WORKING WITH THE COMPANY'S NUTRINZA DISTRIBUTOR. IN THIS FINAL INSTALMENT OF DOCUMENTING HIS EXPERIENCE, PAT LOOKS AT CALF REARING AND FORAGE PRESERVATION COMPARISONS BETWEEN IRELAND AND NEW ZEALAND**

For my final article, I would like to share some information around the two areas in which I was working – calf rearing and forage preservation – and the comparisons and contrasts that exist in the predominantly grass-based systems of Ireland and New Zealand.

The driving principles in both New Zealand and southern Ireland are very similar: maximising profitability from grass growth. I think this is being done well in both areas and, land permitting, it is down to individual farmers to optimise this. What always strikes me, when visiting farmers in New Zealand, is that the size of the herds and the weather often drive what is capable of being done on farms.

## TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER

We talk a lot about the weather in Ireland, and I think this is equally the case in

New Zealand. There is no doubt that New Zealand winters always have that few degrees higher temperatures with earlier growth, fewer requirements for volumes of fodder, and with most over-wintering taking place on outdoor pads, run-offs and catch crops.

But over the last few years, farmers are saying that the weather situation is becoming much more extreme. During the first few weeks of September when I visited, we had a week of 4-5-degree temperatures with cold, wet showers – not ideal for very young calves outdoors. Over October and November – springtime in New Zealand – silage was being taken in very difficult harvesting conditions, the kind of which I have never seen in Ireland, especially on the peaty grounds of the Waikato.

On the other hand, three of the last five growth seasons have seen severe

droughts in areas, which has greatly increased the requirement for home-grown fodder and bought-in feedstuffs. 'Sunday ground' was a common refrain from farmers I visited – too dry on Saturday and too wet on Monday – and I definitely saw these extremes, with huge variations in soil types and water-holding capacity. Deeply rutted silage fields and tractors having to be pulled out of them were common. Quite a bit of the very expensive maize crop planted in October had to be reseeded, or is very poorly, having received as much as three to four inches of rain over a few days in different regions. Labour or, more so, the lack of it also drives capability on these bigger farms.

## FORAGE CONSERVATION

Because of the size of the dairy operations in New Zealand, nearly all farmers use

contractors for work including harvesting, fertiliser spreading, and spraying. Slurry spreading is generally not done with run-off water pumped out on the land. The problem is that, although contractors are very big and, generally, have top-class equipment, they cannot get to their customers at the ideal time so, like us, it has quite an effect on the quality of grass silage that can be harvested.

In the South Island, especially the main dairying area with Ashburton as the centre, where irrigation is very prevalent, with little rain, excess grass is generally taken off as silage, often in bales. This, along with catch crops of fodder beet, kale, and stubble turnips are used for winter feed. Very little maize is grown here. In the North Island, maize is grown as feed for milking cows in the after-calving/spring period on the majority of farms (August to December, as a supplement to grass and, more importantly, when grass is scarce). Again, there is about a 50:50 mix of bales and clamps for overwintering. Often, the bales are taken off as excess and the quality can be variable (especially if having to wait for contractors) when these are often required as top-quality feed back to milking cows. These more frequent weather variations are driving farmers a few ways. There seems to be a definite move by smaller farmers towards split calving with reasonable pay-outs from the processors. There are more concrete maize and silage slabs, rather than outdoor clamps and dairy housing, appearing on farms, adding to expense. Quality of forage is becoming more important – this is the area in which I was working – and the addition of silage additives and the use of our products such as Ecocool and Ecosyl are growing steadily.

### CALF REARING

Calf-rearing is a difficult task on many farms. With excellent compact calving and approximately 75 per cent of calves coming in a six-week period, many farms have 20-30 calves dropped, per day, in this period. Calving takes place in

outdoor paddocks and is, generally, not assisted. The intricacies of getting these calves identified and housed, getting sufficient colostrum to them, getting navels treated, getting them tagged and started on milk, etc. requires experience and time. At the same time, cow groups are being continuously shifted from dry herds to calving paddock, back to dairy herd, colostrum-milking for four days, and all of this needs to run like clockwork when 1,000-2,000 cows might be involved. The immediate requirement for extra-experienced labour could lead to chaotic conditions if that is not available. Many farms have two to three part-time calf rearers, generally, with levels of experience to help in this period, and this is invaluable. On occasion, when this is not available the stress levels can be high. The bull calves are moved on most farms in week two. Quite a number of farmers, especially in the South Island have moved to easy calving Herefords, Charolais and Belgian blues to try and increase value in their calves for the beef enterprises. New Zealand used to have many dedicated calf rearers doing batches of 200 upwards but the margins here have been very tight, and more are giving up year on year. I visited a number of these, including Jonathan Leigh of Top Notch Calves, who puts 9,000 calves through his farm. Generally, they rear on contract to 100/110kg for growers, beef farmers, and Wagyu beef groups at an agreed price. Calf housing on the dairy farms is,

generally, less than what is necessary; usually in polytunnels and Dutch housing. Calves will often be outside from two to four weeks of age – perfect if the weather is kind. Most farms have very good set-ups to hold the excess biestings and the heifer calves are often on this for the first four to five weeks, and then move to whole milk or milk replacers. Traditionally the feeding rates were four to five litres of milk, moving to once-a-day feeding at three weeks or often earlier. Most farmers are now following the research and realise that to maximise longevity and production in their replacement stocks, they need to treat them more favourably. Feeding rates are increasing to seven to eight litres per day. Twice-a-day feeding is getting more regular to five to six weeks of age, then moving to once-a-day feeding for three weeks. The colostrum is often bolstered with milk replacer to up the concentrations.

Computerised feeders have started to appear, with many set up on outside facilities for big numbers. Better and more calf-rearing facilities are common. Young calves that were outside during the first three weeks I was in New Zealand, on four to five litres of milk were really struggling. However, on account of being outside they tend to get fewer problems with disease. Rotavirus is common, especially on farms not vaccinating. Cryptosporidia is relatively new and does not seem to be as widespread as in Ireland. Coccidiosis is an ongoing and a common problem necessitating coccidiostats in the milk replacers and rations.

Overall, considering the limitations in numbers, farmers, as always, want to do the best possible job with their young stock and, in general, New Zealand farmers are following this.

The biggest change I would see over my five years visiting there is that, rather than prolonged milk-feeding periods for 12 to 15 weeks at low levels (four to five litres) they are pushing much higher feeding levels and, thus, growth rates in the early period and weaning at the nine-to-10-week mark with good advantages for the calf.



An outdoor automated calf feeder.

Pat Weeks, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick takes notes at the Irish Grassland Association's recently held dairy conference, Dairy Farming in a New Era.

Photos: Donal O'Leary.

# GRASSLAND ESSENTIALS

THE IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION (IGA) LIVED UP TO ITS REPUTATION AS AN ORGANISATION DEDICATED TO THE DISSEMINATION OF ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE ON GRASSLAND PRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT WHEN IT HELD ITS RECENT ANNUAL DAIRY CONFERENCE, WRITES MATT O'KEEFFE

Among the speakers were Francis Nolan, from Kilkenny, who featured previously in *Irish Farmers Monthly's* Signpost Farmer series. Francis's story is one of ongoing progress since becoming a new entrant to milk production in 2013, just before the abolition of quotas.

Last year, the Nolan herd had grown to 156 cows with continuous improvement in milk solids production and economic breed index (EBI). The amount of grass grown last year was also impressive. At 13.5 tonnes of dry matter per hectare (DM/ha), the Nolan farm is in the top tier in terms of forage production. The breeding season is well managed. Francis carries out do-it-yourself AI for 12 weeks, with no bulls on the farm. This strategy has delivered a six-week calving rate of 82 per cent and a 365-day calving interval.

## THE BENEFITS OF TECHNOLOGY

None of this has happened by accident and Francis gives credit to the introduction of a range of technologies on his farm for



Kilkenny farmer, Francis Nolan.



The key reason I have invested in new technologies is that I put a high value on both my own time and that of part-time labour

simplifying management as well as reducing labour requirements: "One of my main motivations is to enjoy farming on a day-to-day basis and have a good work-life balance. The key reason I have invested in new technologies is that I put a high value on both my own time and that of part-time labour." While he acknowledges that direct payback, in terms of increased profitability, can be difficult to calculate, Francis has no doubt about the financial, labour and general efficiency benefits: "I will only adopt technology on the farm if it's going to save me time and labour, which, ultimately, saves me money and allows me to put a focus on

the areas that are really important in terms of efficiency and profitability.”

Installed in 2020, heat-detection technology, allied to an automated cow-drafting system, is given credit for streamlining the breeding season and reducing workload at a very stressful period of the milking season.

“You’re only after finishing calving, so having cows automatically heat detected and drafted out for AI is a huge benefit,” he says.

“I have now got great confidence in the system and the breeding performance speaks for itself. At the same time, the collars won’t put the cows in calf and it’s important to keep on top of the information the app provides.”

### RECOUPING THE COST

Francis also invested in a robotic scraper two years ago, eliminating any hand scraping as well as keeping cows and cubicles cleaner. He suggests it contributes to lower mastitis rates and lameness. Calf management has been improved through the introduction of an automatic calf-feeding system and higher energy prices have been somewhat negated by the installation of a 5.8Kw array of solar panels on the milking-parlour roof, mainly used to heat water. Add on a variety of apps, including SenseHub and the PastureBase Ireland app, used by Francis to access and record information, and it is clear that technology has a critical role to play on his farm. He put it in perspective to the IGA audience: “While technology can be an excellent asset to a farm business, having all the basics in place and working should be the first priority.”

### ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS

If anyone was in doubt as to the high financial costs of complying with the ever-more rigorous range of environmental impositions on farming, Noreen Lacey laid that doubt to rest. The head of banking with IFAC prefaced her presentation to the IGA dairy conference attendees by outlining the need for farmers, worldwide, to produce 60 per cent more food by 2060 for an increasing global population. Given the land demand for housing, afforestation, energy crops, rewetting as well as increasing desertification in parts of the world, that challenge becomes even harder when one considers the process now being pursued in Ireland and Europe of lowering inputs, specifically nitrogen, as well as cow banding, which essentially lowers stocking-rate potential on many farms.

### INVOLUNTARY COW CULL ON THE CARDS

Noreen confirmed that Ireland must reduce agricultural emissions by between five and seven million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. The new Nitrates Action Programme (NAP), recently introduced, will change the organic nitrogen levels deemed to be produced per cow, with a new banding limit brought into effect for all herds. Combined with the upcoming review of Ireland’s current Nitrates Derogation regulations, these are set to act as a significant restraint to dairy expansion and per-cow and per-hectare milk production for a large section of Irish milk producers. Noreen gave a range of practical examples of how these seismic changes will impact farmers depending on their individual herd and farm profiles. Generally, she concluded, the new NAP will increase the deemed organic nitrogen excretion rates produced, per cow, based on milk yield and will move about 17 per cent of herds from 89kg of organic nitrogen excreted per cow to the high band of 106kg per cow, forcing some dairy farmers to involuntarily reduce their stocking rate.



Noreen Lacey from IFAC.

### POTENTIAL INCOME COLLAPSE

Referencing the pending Nitrates Derogation review, Noreen sees the possibility of the maximum 250kg/ha organic nitrogen limit being reduced to 220kg. In that scenario, she calculated that a 40-hectare farm with 112 cows could face a herd reduction of 29 cows if the herd is in the highest-yield 106kg nitrogen cow band. She then crunched some numbers to confirm the financial impacts of either and both cow banding and a lowering of the derogation.

Cow banding for the high-yielding herd example will reduce income by a potential 33 per cent. Add on a Nitrates Derogation reduction to 220kg and farm income collapses by 53 per cent, based on the farm only being able to carry 83 cows when hit with a double whammy. Mitigation strategies include renting additional land to offset lower stocking rates, but cost and availability, as any farmer knows, are problematic, to say the least. Reducing milk supply/yield, to fit into a lower cow band, was also discussed in Noreen’s presentation. This could be hazardous from an animal-health-and-welfare stance but would offer some lessening of the doomsday income collapse, as estimated by Noreen.



It is likely that this new NAP will act as a virtual quota for dairy farmers in the future

### A NEW QUOTA SYSTEM

The biggest impacts will be felt by the higher-yielding herds, according to Noreen who hinted that there is potential for the regulatory system to impact far more milk producers severely in the time ahead. Even another potential banding above 6,500kg per cow would have catastrophic effects on those herds above that figure. Meanwhile her advice to milk producers was timely: “Everyone’s circumstances are unique and there is an onus on producers to review their individual circumstances and put an appropriate plan in place that achieves the financial and environmental objectives of the business. It is likely that this new NAP will act as a virtual quota for dairy farmers in the future, with a forced reduction in cow numbers inevitable on many farms.”

# SIGNPOST

## *Feirmeoirí ar mhaithe le Gníomhú ar son na hAeráide*

Is comhchlár an Clár Signpost chun gníomhú ar son na haeráide ag feirmeoirí in Éirinn a threorú agus tacú leis an aistriú chuig córais fheirmeoireachta níos inbhuanaithe.

### *Is iad príomhchuspóirí an chláir ná:*

- Astaíochtaí gás ceaptha teasa a laghdú
- Astaíochtaí amóinia a laghdú
- Cailteanas cothaitheach chuig an timpeallacht a laghdú agus cur le caighdeán uisce agus bithéagsúlacht níos fearr
- Airgead feirmeoirí a shábháil agus éifeachtúlacht na gcóras táirgeachta a fheabhsú

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# FOCUS



CALF HEALTH



# KEEP YOUR CALVES SCOUR-FREE THIS SPRING



**LAUREN HENRY, INTOUCH FEEDING SPECIALIST AT ALLTECH IRELAND, EXAMINES THE ISSUE OF SCOUR AND HOW TO ADDRESS IT**

**It is vital that farmers have a robust colostrum-management protocol in place during the spring-calving season.**

This is paramount to improve hygiene, reduce stress, and reduce the incidence of disease, all to get calves off to the best start possible. When it comes to colostrum, there's only one opportunity to get it right.

The first few hours of a calf's life are probably the most critical, because what happens during this time has a lasting impact on the lifetime production and profitability of the animal. High-quality, clean colostrum, given at the right time and in the right amount, provides a foundation for success for any calf-rearing programme.

A calf's immune system is not fully functional for the first few months, so the calf needs the antibodies from the colostrum to protect it against pathogens and disease. The calf's ability to absorb these antibodies is at its highest in the first hour of life; the absorption rate declines rapidly thereafter and will completely cease at 24 hours, so time is of the essence. Colostrum doesn't only provide the newborn with antibodies; it is an immediate, easily metabolised energy source, vital for the calf immediately after birth. Thermoregulation, standing and feeding deplete a calf's energy. Without a quickly available supply of colostrum, the calf's natural activity will be hindered and development of organs and physiological systems delayed.

The quality of colostrum can vary widely

between animals; it is affected by age, length of dry period, vaccinations, breed, and time collected post-calving. High-quality colostrum should contain at least 50g/L of immunoglobulin G (IgG), but a study in Ireland revealed that 44 per cent of samples had an IgG concentration below target 50mg/ml. To ensure colostrum quality, always test it with a colostrometer or Brix refractometer. The golden rule — or 3-2-1 rule — is to get at least three litres of colostrum into the calf within two hours of birth for the first feed (Holsteins require four litres, or 10 per cent of bodyweight).

By following the 3-2-1 rule, you will:

- ▶ Improve rate of daily gain and feed efficiency;
- ▶ Reduce morbidity and mortality pre- and post-weaning;
- ▶ Reduce age at first calving;
- ▶ Increase first and second lactation milk production;
- ▶ Improve fertility; and
- ▶ Reduce culling rate.

The risk of disease development is lessened by good management of colostrum,

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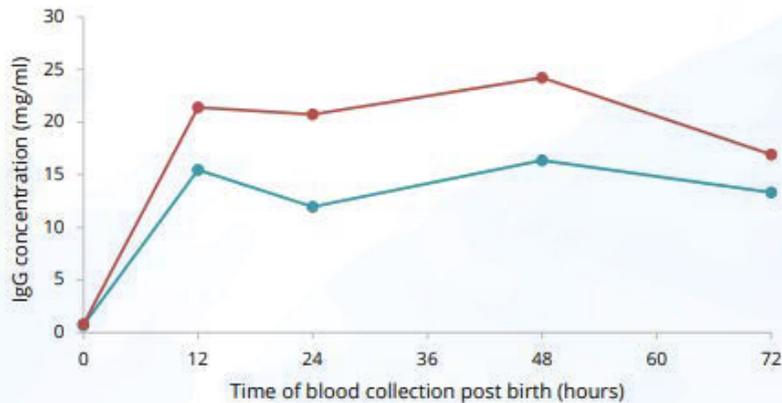
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vaccination of dams, and disinfection of calving pens. The figure overleaf shows a comparison of calves fed two litres in volume of colostrum at birth (blue line) to those fed four litres of colostrum at birth (red line). The latter group achieved a higher IgG status for up to 72 hours after birth and experienced less scour.

An InTouch survey identified scour as the most common disease within spring calving herds, found on 60 per cent of farms. However, 30 per cent of the farmers whose herds were affected were unable to identify the type of scour they had on-farm. This highlights the need to consider and implement a well-informed management protocol, designed to prevent disease exposure, prior to the beginning of calving. As you do this, keep in mind that calf mortality is caused by metabolic acidosis and dehydration rather than by scour itself. The survey showed that 52.6 per cent of mortality tends to occur within the first month after calving. Therefore, the proactive application of successful strategies that effectively target these consequences is essential to a full recovery from scour.

## KEY FOCUS AREAS

### COLOSTRUM

The foundation of a successful calf-rearing system begins with successful, passive transfer of colostrum. Calves require a minimum of 150g of IgG from three to four litres of colostrum fed as soon after birth as possible (and definitely within six hours) to protect against early-life health issues and to support optimal growth and performance.

#### ► CLEANLINESS

A clear, defined hygiene policy will ensure consistency throughout the calving season.

Cleanliness begins in the calving pen, so check stocking rates and clean-out procedures regularly. Clean and disinfect calf pens after every use, making sure the disinfectant used is effective against common scour pathogens and that it's applied at the appropriate concentration. Keep feeding equipment clean and change teats frequently.

#### ► REHYDRATION

From the first sign that something is not right with a calf, offer electrolytes. Dehydration is the primary cause of death when a calf has scour. Oral rehydration solutions provide:

- Sodium and glucose, essential to replenish lost fluids and facilitate water absorption;
- Sodium, potassium and chloride, required to correct the mineral imbalances caused; and
- Alkalisating agents, to increase blood pH.

#### ► WATER

You can never have enough clean water. Water is a vital and often overlooked component of calf nutrition. It should be available, offered separately from milk, at all times. Any milk that is consumed goes straight to the abomasum, bypassing the rumen, meaning that there is no water to aid the digestion of the calf concentrate in the rumen. Only 30 per cent of respondents from the calf-rearing survey reported that they provided water from birth, but this simple step can increase growth rates by 38 per cent and starter/concentrate intakes by 31 per cent.

#### ► ENERGY

Contrary to popular belief, milk should not be withheld in cases of scour. Not

only do scouring calves require energy and nutrients to grow, but they lose a lot of water from the scour. Because milk is necessary to provide energy and nutrients, regular milk feeds should be continued during treatment.

#### ► ISOLATE, THEN IDENTIFY THE CAUSE

- Many scour-causing agents are highly contagious, so isolate sick calves quickly to prevent widespread contamination.
- Ask your vet to then help identify the cause of the scour; quick, pen-side scour kits are also readily available and can be helpful. After the initial assessment, additional testing can help identify underlying causes. An effective treatment plan can only be successful if you know the cause of the scour and have a customised treatment plan.
- Many farms now use supplements and additives in their calf-rearing protocols for disease prevention or treatment; however, with the high incidence of scour and the mortality that can result, farmers should re-evaluate their colostrum protocols to assess whether the supplements and additives they are using are actually effective.
- A key highlight from the survey was that the majority of respondents believed housing/infrastructure/space to be the biggest contributor to scour. Sometimes this may be true, as on a block calving farm with a high throughput of calves in a small timeframe. However, simple tips such as testing colostrum quality, ensuring that calves have access to fresh, clean water, roughage and starter from birth, and employing effective supplements can greatly improve calf health and cost less than building new infrastructure.

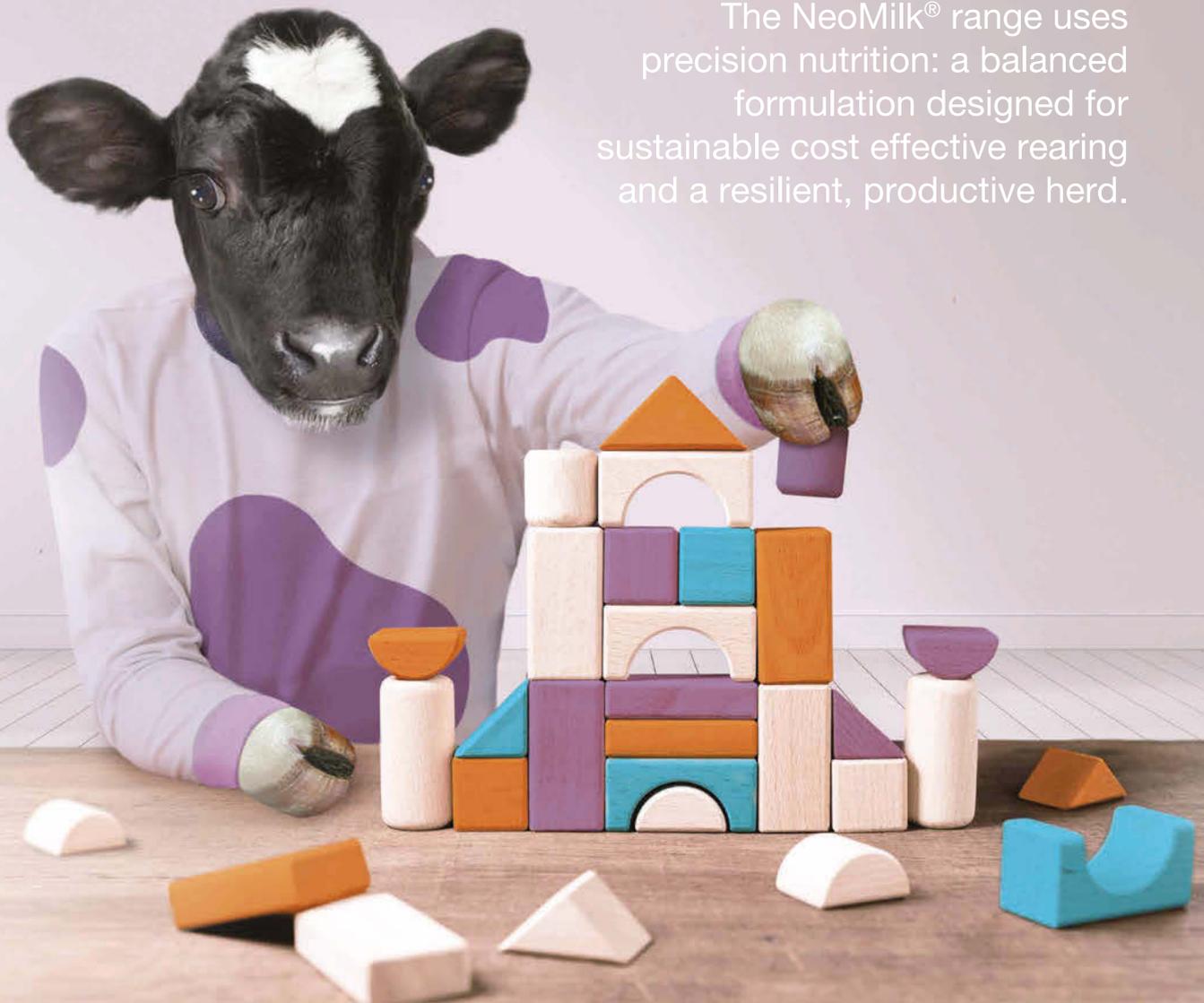
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# NURSING SICK CALVES AND THE ROLE OF SUPPORTIVE THERAPIES

**MAURA LANGAN, NORBROOK VETERINARY ADVISOR, OUTLINES WHY EARLY INTERVENTION AND ATTENTIVE NURSING CARE CAN OFTEN MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH IN VERY YOUNG CALVES**

**There are many reasons that young calves get sick. Calves are born without any immunity and rely solely on the passive transfer of antibodies from their mother's colostrum in the first hours of life.** Ideally, every calf should receive three litres of colostrum within two hours of birth. The calf's ability to absorb disease-preventing antibodies starts to diminish after that until, at 24 hours old, it disappears completely. Neonatal calf scour (diarrhoea) can be caused by a range of viruses, bacteria or parasites and is the most frequently diagnosed cause of death in calves up to one month of age in the regional veterinary labs. Up to 26 per cent of deaths from diagnosed

conditions in this age group are caused by diarrhoea and the resulting dehydration and weight loss. Early intervention and attentive nursing care can often mean the difference between life and death in very young calves. The scouring calf begins to lose more fluids than it can take in and this quickly leads to a dull, depressed and dehydrated animal, often with a 'sunken eye'. Because very young calves have poorly developed fat stores, they are especially vulnerable, so prompt action is essential.

## **ORAL REHYDRATION**

Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) is the single most important therapeutic measure to be

carried out to help correct the dehydration, acidosis and electrolyte imbalance that occurs in scouring calves. Good quality, commercially available ORT powders contain optimal levels of electrolytes, bicarbonates and glucose, but it is essential they are used correctly to ensure the best possible outcome. Always follow the instructions and prepare fresh for every feed. Ensure all buckets and whisks are clean to prevent the spread of disease.

Current recommendations are that scouring calves should be fed milk alongside an oral rehydration solution. In dairy calves, feed milk as normal with supplemental feeds of electrolyte solution; beef calves should

remain with their mothers. Continued milk feeding not only provides the energy required for weight gain and growth throughout the period of diarrhoea, but also provides the nutrients that are necessary for the recovery of the intestinal mucosa. Continued feeding of milk to diarrhoeic calves in conjunction with oral rehydration therapy has beneficial effects on weight gain, physical appearance and recovery rate. Studies show that scouring calves that remain on milk gain weight at the same rate as healthy calves.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF NSAIDS

Similar to human non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) like paracetamol or ibuprofen, your vet is able to prescribe an NSAID called meloxicam that is licensed for cattle. Suitable for use in calves over one week of age, it is known to

reduce pain and inflammation and has anti-pyrexial qualities to reduce high temperatures. A single injection when administered in combination with ORT helps to reduce the clinical signs of diarrhoea. It is deemed best practice to use both ORT and NSAIDs together to improve outcomes and may reduce the need for subsequent intervention with antibiotics.

#### NURSING CARE

Sick animals should always be isolated from the rest of the herd or management group to reduce the risk of transmitting infection. Ensure they have plenty of clean bedding and ready access to food and water. Keep the calves warm, using calf jackets if necessary and change bedding frequently. Hygiene is essential to reduce the spread of disease. Check on calves' progress regularly while administering supportive therapies and call your vet if you have any concerns.

## MAURA'S FIVE-POINT TREATMENT PLAN

- ▶ Isolate the calf (or calves) at the first sign of scour as it may be shedding large quantities of infectious agents which could be transmitted to the rest of the herd.
- ▶ Administer oral rehydration therapy (ORT). Mix one sachet in two litres of water and give it at midday and repeat with another two-litre dose at night, in addition to normal milk feed. Continue for 48 hours. Always follow the instructions and prepare the solution fresh for every feed, using clean buckets and whisks to reduce the spread of infection.
- ▶ It's essential to continue to feed milk as it has two major benefits: firstly, it provides the energy the calf needs to grow and gain weight; and, secondly, it contains the nutrients needed to aid the healing and recovery of the gut lining.
- ▶ Consider the use of NSAIDs. When given to scouring calves over one week of age in combination with ORT it reduces the clinical signs.
- ▶ Seek veterinary intervention if any of the calves get worse or fail to respond to treatment within 48 hours. A proper diagnosis and treatment of the underlying cause is essential.

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The neonatal calf is vulnerable to infections and remains at high risk of respiratory disease throughout the first year of life.



Sioned Timothy MRCVS, ruminant veterinary adviser at Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health.



# VACCINATION OF YOUNG CALVES AGAINST RESPIRATORY PATHOGENS: IMMUNOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

SIONED TIMOTHY MRCVS, RUMINANT VETERINARY ADVISER AT BOEHRINGER INGELHEIM ANIMAL HEALTH, DISCUSSES THE IMMUNOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF VACCINATING YOUNG CALVES AGAINST RESPIRATORY PATHOGENS

**The neonatal calf is vulnerable to infections and remains at high risk of respiratory disease throughout the first year of life.** Bovine respiratory disease is complex, and control relies on a multi-pronged approach to reduce the pathogen challenge, address management-associated risk factors and maximise the resilience of the calf to infection. This article will discuss the immune system of the young calf and how vaccination to optimise immunity in young cattle can maximise their resilience to infection and help to provide the foundations of a healthy, productive life.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

The calf's immune system develops during the gestation period but continues to mature during the early months of life. By the time a calf is born the innate immune system is largely formed. Macrophages and neutrophils can be detected from around 130 days of gestation; however, a rise in foetal cortisol ahead of parturition suppresses innate immune function for a period following birth. Gamma delta T cells, in particular, play an important role in the innate immune response at this stage of life. Young calves have high

levels of these cells, up to 60 per cent of the total lymphocyte pool, and although their role is not fully clear, it is probable that they have a function in recognising specific pathogen-associated molecular patterns (PAMPs), present on many disease-causing organisms to provide a first-line response to infection. The cellular components of the adaptive immune system – the B and T lymphocytes – are also present in the foetal calf, but at lower levels than in adult animals. During gestation the foetal environment offers a high level of protection against microbial challenge. This means that calves are typically born 'agammaglobulinaemic', with no circulating antibody unless infection has occurred *in utero*. Once born, however, the calf's innate and adaptive immune system must rapidly adapt to deal with exposure to both pathogenic and commensal microbes. Humoral immune responses are initiated – functional levels of endogenous immunoglobulin M (IgM) are detectable in colostrum-deprived calves from eight days after birth, and IgA, IgG1 and IgG2 are present from 16-32 days. Adult levels of circulating antibody are reached at around four months of age.

## PASSIVE IMMUNITY IN THE YOUNG CALF

Antibodies transferred from the dam to the calf in colostrum confer passive protection against infection in early life. IgG predominates in cow colostrum, accounting for over 75 per cent of total immunoglobulin, but IgM and IgA are also present. During the first hours of life, macromolecules present in the gut, including immunoglobulins, undergo endocytosis by the enterocytes and pass into the circulation. Uptake of other colostrum constituents, including cytokines, lymphocytes and growth factors, also influences the development of the immune system. Bioactive compounds in colostrum also play a role in the development and maturation of the gut itself. Calves fed colostrum at birth have been shown to have improved intestinal morphology compared to those fed milk alone.

The transfer of molecules across the gut was previously considered to be a passive process, however there is increasing evidence to show that it is influenced by both calf and management factors. Colostrum-feeding protocols can ensure that an appropriate volume of good quality colostrum is fed to every calf in a hygienic

and timely manner. Care should also be taken to recognise animals that may be at specific risk of failure of passive transfer due to factors that impact on their ability to absorb IgG even when an appropriate amount of colostrum is fed. Management factors such as cold stress, premature birth, dystocia, and delivery by caesarean section can all directly reduce the ability of the enterocytes to take up antibodies.

Monitoring passive transfer can help to guide colostrum management practices on farm. Guidelines on interpretation of IgG assessment have recently been updated. This change was initiated following a recognition that application of the previous target of serum IgG >10g/L was effective in reducing mortality but did not have the same impact on calf morbidity. In place of this single threshold, the following herd-level targets are now recommended:

- ▶ 40 per cent of calves achieve >25g of IgG/L of serum at 24-48 hours;
- ▶ 30 per cent of calves achieve 18.0-24.9g/L;
- ▶ 20 per cent of calves achieve 10.0-17.9g/L; and
- ▶ <10 per cent of calves achieve <10.0g/L.

Assessment of total IgG does not provide insight into the levels of pathogen-specific antibody titres – each calf begins life with a different maternal antibody profile which is influenced by a wide range of farm-level and calf-level factors.

### MATERNALLY DERIVED ANTIBODY AND THE VACCINE RESPONSE

The calf is largely dependent on maternally derived antibodies (MDA) for protection against disease for at least the first two to four weeks of life. Early vaccination is used on many farms with the objective of achieving a smooth transition from passive to active immunity, avoiding the immunity gap that can occur at this time.

However, the presence of high levels of MDA can have a negative impact on the vaccine response of young calves. Although the mechanism has not been fully characterised, binding of maternal antibodies to vaccine antigens can interfere with the response to systemic (injectable) vaccines. This inhibits B cell activation and attenuates the initial antibody response to vaccination, meaning that calves vaccinated in the face of vaccine antigen specific-MDA are unlikely to undergo sero-conversion when defined as a four-fold increase in antibody level, however



The calf is largely dependent on maternally derived antibodies (MDA) for protection against disease for at least the first two to four weeks of life.

vaccination may still induce a humoral response in addition to a B cell memory response. T cell priming is also recognised to occur following vaccination against respiratory viruses in the face of MDA. As severe respiratory infections pose a significant threat to young calves, it is desirable that vaccines work in the face of MDA and provide rapid immunity. Studies have shown that live attenuated viral vaccines delivered via the mucosal route induce immunity more consistently in the face of MDA than inactivated or live vaccines delivered by injection.

A study demonstrated that MDA-positive calves vaccinated with a live attenuated intranasal vaccine containing PI-3 and bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV) were protected against challenge with either PI-3 or BRSV at 12 weeks after initial vaccination. Both MDA-positive and MDA-negative vaccinated calves showed a comparable, significant level of reduction of both viral shedding and clinical signs when compared to unvaccinated controls. Seroconversion was also observed in the vaccinated MDA-

negative animals and circulating antibody titres were maintained at similar levels following vaccination of the MDA-positive calves.

The efficacy of mucosal vaccines in the face of MDA is due to the presence of lower levels of pathogen-specific maternal antibodies at the mucosal surface where the immune response is initiated compared to SC or IM injection sites. As respiratory viruses initiate infection within the respiratory tract, inducing immunity at the mucosal surfaces can optimise protection against infection: mucosal antibodies block virus entry into cells, whilst cytotoxic T cells kill infected cells. Mucosal immunity develops rapidly, but typically provides a shorter duration of immunity than that conferred by systemic administration of injectable vaccines. Follow-up vaccination can extend the duration of immunity against bovine respiratory disease (BRD) pathogens and provide appropriate protection ahead of high-risk periods. In addition to this, immunological priming can be induced by intranasal vaccination of both MDA-negative and MDA-positive calves, which can enhance the serological response to subsequent administration of the same antigens by the injectable route.

### RESPIRATORY VACCINATION STRATEGIES

An optimised respiratory vaccination strategy should provide calves with enhanced resilience to key pathogens at periods of high risk. On many farms the risk begins early in life, and continues throughout the first year, peaking at times of increased stress such as weaning and housing. Vaccine selection should consider farm level risk. In many instances, administration of a single course of a respiratory vaccine will not provide the duration of protection and pathogen cover required to effectively reduce the risk of disease throughout periods of high challenge. An integrated approach, which capitalises on the rapid onset protection against respiratory viruses provided by mucosal vaccines, even in young MDA-positive calves, and the longer-term protection offered by subsequent administration of a full primary course of an injectable vaccine can enhance the resilience of calves to infection and minimise the impact of respiratory disease on health and productivity.

*References available on request.*

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# MILK REPLACER SEES CALVES DOUBLE BIRTHWEIGHT BY WEANING

**A 2022 FEEDING TRIAL CARRIED OUT AT BITCON COLLEGE IN DEVON, ENGLAND, FOUND THAT CALVES FED GOLDEN MAVERICK TRIPLE A MILK REPLACER DOUBLED THEIR BIRTH WEIGHT BY WEANING AT 66 DAYS. THE STUDY'S FINDINGS ARE OUTLINED HERE**

Farm manager, Robin Boaden from the Wastenage Farm Group said he is delighted with the results of the trial, pointing out that the growth rates for Bicton College's small breed of calves exceeded the rearing unit target of 600g-plus, per day, and were in line with industry expectation for this size of calf.

"We run an extensive dairy farming system here with a high stocking rate, block calving 180 Friesian x Jersey x Norwegian Red cows in the spring. We supply our milk output on a constituent-based contract and one of our key performance indicators (KPIs) is kilogramme of milk solids sold per hectare, and crossbreed dairy cows are perfect in this respect," he said.

In the trial, 49 crossbreed calves were fed Golden Maverick Triple A milk replacer from an average birth weight of 31.2kg until weaning at a target weight of 70kg. Newborn calves were left on the dam to suckle colostrum for up to 24 hours before being removed and fed colostrum via a bottle and teat at a rate of three litres twice daily.

## MONITORED

Calves were then moved to dedicated calf housing within 48 hours of birth and monitored during the spring of 2022,



explained Volac's sales manager for Ireland, Una Hickey.

"From day three, they were fed reconstituted milk replacer through Milkbar feeders (12 teats per pen of 10 calves)," she said.

"Golden Maverick Triple A was mixed at the rate of 125g powder with 875ml of water to make one litre of mixed milk and then fed at the rate of up to 750g per day in two three-litre feeds. Fresh water, calf starter pellets (18 per cent crude protein) and barley straw were made available ad lib from day three.

"These small calves gained 0.62kg per day on average throughout the study period and at weaning (mean age 65.5 days), 88 per cent had at least doubled their birthweight. This recorded growth rate is in line with what is to be expected from small

crossbreed dairy heifer calves. A growth rate of 500-600g per day will help ensure these heifer replacements achieve set targets throughout the rearing period." Robin Boaden agreed: "The mature body weight of cows in the Bicton College dairy herd is only 525kg. Indeed, our calves are quite small when born and our target body weight at three months of age is 89kg. But in this trial our calves achieved 92kg on average at a mean age of 3.5 months, which is bang on target," he said. "What we can conclude from the trial is that feeding these calves Golden Maverick Triple A milk replacer at a rate of up to 750g powder per day (six litres at 12.5 per cent) resulted in sound, healthy 600g plus growth rates up to weaning – and perfect for small crossbreeds," said Una.



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# NUTRITION MANAGEMENT



**ALAN KELLY, SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN, EXAMINES OPTIMAL NUTRITIONAL MANAGEMENT OF DAIRY-BRED BEEF CALVES**

There is now significant evidence to suggest that the nutritional management of the artificially reared calf has a lasting impact on the animal's productive potential. Given the relatively high cost of the pre-weaning period, achieving acceptable calf performance coupled with a smooth transition from a liquid to a solid feed-

based diet are key objectives. In general, the ability of young calves (i.e. less than six months of age) to 'compensate' or 'catch up' following a period of under-nutrition is limited and, therefore, moderate-to-high growth performance must be achieved in order to consistently meet acceptable lifetime performance targets.

## **MILK REPLACER: COMPOSITION AND FEEDING**

The amount of milk replacer (MR) offered will depend on its nutritional composition and the body weight and desired growth rate of the calf. For successful calf rearing, the target

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is to achieve a pre-weaning growth rate of 700g per day, resulting in the calf reaching a body weight of 100kg at 12 weeks. Feeding rates typically range between 100-125g/litre. To meet the calf growth targets a standard MR at a feeding rate of six litres (125g/l; split between two feeds), equating to 750g of powder per day has been traditionally recommended. Research from Teagasc Grange shows no advantage in raising the protein content of MR from 23 per cent to 28 per cent. For this reason, the requirement for protein in dairy beef is lower and MR should contain a minimum of 22-23 per cent protein and 15-20 per cent fat. Target MR ash content should be 6.5-7 per cent. Higher ash levels are associated with higher incidence

of digestive disorders and scour. In general, MR containing milk products (skim and whey based) are digested better than those containing vegetable proteins and particularly beneficial in younger calves which may be more susceptible to stress.

Additionally, most MR can also be fed as a once-a-day product with no difference in calf performance, if feeding guidelines are followed correctly.

#### CONVENTIONAL VERSUS INTENSIFIED FEEDING SYSTEMS

Intensified feeding of calves for accelerated growth is a hot topic in calf management. Such rearing systems allow calves much greater intakes of MR in early life, with feeding

rates approximately twice those offered under conventional systems. Feeding a MR containing a higher crude protein content (25-28 per cent) to support the potential for rapid lean growth is typically advocated under such systems. Target growth rate at three months is 115-20kg following a MR input of >50kg. Research shows that calf growth rate responds to increasing MR allowance up to 1,200g/day pre weaning.

However, from a dairy beef perspective the economic payback for this additional investment will be highly dependent on the prevailing value of beef and the relative importance of meeting carcass specifications in a timely fashion (i.e. young bull beef systems).

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## RUMEN DEVELOPMENT

An orchestrated and timely transition from the pre-ruminant to the ruminant state is a key objective of any calf rearing system. The consumption of starch-based concentrates stimulates rumen development through microbial fermentation in the rumen. The volatile fatty acids (VFA) produced, particularly butyrate, stimulate growth and development of rumen papillae.

These 'finger-like' projections of the rumen lining, greatly increase the surface area of the rumen for increased nutrient absorption. It takes about three to four weeks to develop the rumen papillae from the initial time that concentrate is offered.

Optimal nutritional management plays a crucial role in determining rumen development and ultimately will determine weaning age.

- I. Concentrates the key to success: High quality calf starter should be offered to calves within by four days of age with daily consumption approximately 300g at two weeks of age. Calf starter should be high-quality, offered fresh on a daily basis and clean water should be freely available. Finely ground, dusty feeds should be avoided. Calf

concentrate should contain 17-18 per cent crude protein and have an energy value of at least 12MJ/kg (>0.95 UFV/kg).

- II. Feeding roughage: Roughage such as hay or chopped straw is not necessarily required until calves are consuming at least 1.5kg of concentrate, which typically doesn't occur until after weaning. Long forage is beneficial to promote the growth of the rumen muscular layer and maintain the health of rumen epithelium.

A general recommendation would be to offer roughage starting at week eight and monitor meal intake to avoid excessive consumption of forage which dilutes overall dietary energy content and can lead to 'pot belly' condition. In order to limit this, research recommends a concentrate to roughage (hay) ratio by weight of 8:1; or 200g per head daily, pre-weaning.

## SUCCESSFUL WEANING OF CALVES

Calf weaning age can vary from six to 10 weeks depending on the feeding strategy. Weaning decisions should be based on the calf's solid feed intake, not age per se. Once a calf is consuming 1.3-1.5 per cent of its body weight as dry feed, this will provide sufficient nutrients body maintenance and growth. Calves should be consuming 1kg of calf starter per day for three consecutive days prior to ceasing liquid feed. To stimulate concentrate intake, the general advice is to reduce liquid feed consumption by 50 per cent per day one week prior to desired weaning date.

Monitoring starter intake allows adjustment/delay of weaning dates for any calves not meeting growth targets/eating consistently well. Stressors, such as dehorning/vaccination, should be avoided during the weaning period.

## SUMMARY

- Meeting the calves' nutritional needs in early life will have lasting effects on subsequent productive potential .
- Feed conversion efficiency is highest during early calf-hood and reduces substantially as the animal matures.
- A key aim of any artificial calf rearing programme is achieving a smooth transition from a liquid-based diet pre-weaning to adequate consumption of solid feed.

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# Auctus expands calf-milk-replacer range with Opti-Skim

Auctus has launched the newest addition to its calf-milk-replacer product range. There are now six calf-milk replacers in the current range. Opti-Skim has just been introduced and gives the farmer the option to rear their calves on a skim-based product, delivering high-quality proteins to push daily live-weight gains from the first week of life.



Opti-Skim has an extremely high level of skim-milk powder included to give the desired clotting effect in the abomasum. All Auctus calf-milk replacers include high-quality dairy ingredients and keep the health of the calf at the core of the formulations. All six products include the well renowned triple shield protection.



All six products also contain the same extremely strong vitamin and trace-element package. This has the effect of ensuring the calf will have no mineral deficiencies and, in turn, will strengthen the calf's immunity to deal with any challenges. Only the highest quality dairy ingredients are used in Auctus powders and are balanced with the most digestible proteins and fats available. Auctus prides itself in using no greater than 7% ash and 0.1% fibre in any product. Each product has been formulated with a particular ambition of calf rearing in mind.

## OPTI-SKIM

Auctus has formulated Opti-Skim, using the highest grade of skim-milk powder to give calves a slow release of energy and protein throughout the day as the skim-milk powder absorbs slowly through the abomasum. This is ideal for starting calves on calf-milk replacer over the first two weeks of life as the rumen development is just starting to commence. Opti-Skim is 24% protein, 19% oil and fat, 6.5% ash and 0.1% fibre.

## CHAMPION

Champion is 23.5% protein, 20% oil and fat, 7% ash and 0.1% fibre.



## CHAMPION WITH ADDED LUNG GUARD

Champion with added Lung Guard is 23.5% protein, 20% oil and fat, 7% ash and 0.1% fibre.

## OPTI-MUM

Opti-mum is 26% protein, 17% oil and fat, 7% ash and 0.01% fibre.

## OPTI-MUM WITH ADDED LUNG GUARD

Opti-mum with added Lung Guard is 26% protein, 17% oil and fat, 7% ash and 0.01% fibre.

## TURBO THRIVE

Turbo Thrive is 21.5% protein, 18% oil and fat, 6% ash and 0.1% fibre.

Irrespective of the rearing system on any farm, Auctus has a calf-milk replacer that is tailored to the system. All powders are

suitable for twice-a-day feeding systems, which is still the system employed on the majority of Irish farms. Once-a-day systems, computerised feeding, and ad-lib systems are all catered for within the Auctus range.

**All Auctus products are competitively priced in the Irish market and are very much worth considering when deciding which calf-milk replacer to use this spring.**

For more information, please contact Auctus: on 043 668 3200; and info@auctus.ie.

Alternatively, you can contact your local business manager:

**Brian Geraghty** 087 1175971  
brian@auctus.ie  
Northern Ireland, Donegal, Monaghan and the west of Ireland

**Daragh O'Rourke** 087 1170803  
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Cavan, southeast Ireland

**John Linnane** 087 7996247  
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Midlands and southwest Ireland

For more product technical information, specifications and price enquiries, please contact Auctus on: P: 043 6683200 E: info@auctus.ie W: www.auctus.ie.

contact your local Sales Representatives on:

John Linnane	0877996247	Midlands and South West of Ireland
Daragh O'Rourke	087 1170803	Cavan, South East of Ireland
Brian Geraghty	087 1175971	Northern Ireland, Donegal, Monaghan, West of Ireland

- Look back at 2022 financial costs - ways to improve..
- Have a meal feeding plan per day, per month, to control the annual amount per cow.
- Use slurry and protected urea to save on fertiliser bills this year.
- Apply N, P, K and particularly lime now to meet requirements.
- Milk record in 2023 – a 'must do' resolution!
- Cow and calf care must be prioritised in February.
- Bulling heifer targets: start now to achieve your targets.
- Plan to use contractors more this year.



By Matt Ryan

### LOOK BACK AT 2022 AND SET ABOUT REDUCING COSTS

It makes us feel good to look back, particularly in a good year, driven mainly by milk price, even though costs were high. But lessons must be learned. The following is a summary of my groups:

- » Milk price increased by 21.51c/L to 64.94c/L due in greater part to better markets but fat increased by 0.04 per cent (% F) while protein increased by 0.03 per cent (% P).
- » - the highest milk price achieved was 70.1c/l. Fixed milk price reduced some farmers' price down to 52.2c/l – an awful cost to those farmers.
- » The kg milk solids (MS) produce increased by only 7kg with a small increase in meal quantity (a large increase in cost), while the kg MS per kg cow body weight increased from 89 per cent to 92 per cent of cow body weight. This is pretty good but a lot of meal is being fed - 2.05kg meal per 1kg MS - whereas the target is 1kg or less.
- » The total and comparative costs of producing a kg MS increased from €2.71 and €2.08 to €3.46 and €2.39, respectively. This represents an increase of 27.7 per cent and 14.9 per cent respectively. This is a very big concern going forward and all farmers must now plan to reduce them in 2023.
- » Comparative profit per kg MS increased from €2.15 to €3.16 an increase of 47 per cent.
- » Somatic cell count (SCC) decreased by 28,000, cow cull rates were over 22 per cent (up 2 per cent).
- » Grass utilised remained the same at 9.9 tonnes DM/ha, even though stocking rates decreased a little, both overall and on milking platform (MP).
- » Feed efficiency (kg MS produced off farm per tonne dry matter available) remained more or less the same at 77.3 (compared with a target of 90). This is an interesting figure which is driven by: feeding the correct meal levels at the correct time of year; having cows that can respond to meal feeding; age of herd; and

quality of grass and meal.

- » It is 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.

Based on George Ramsbottom's summary of the early profit monitors analyses, the following are the figures achieved by the very best farmers in Ireland, and should be the barometers all dairy farmers should aspire to:

- » Gross output: stocking rate (SR) = 2.59; ratio of cows: replacements = 79%; % F = 4.51; % P = 3.73; milk price = 64.32; and gross output = 64.32c/l.
- » Variable costs (c/L): total = 18.35; contributed by: meal = 8.03; fertiliser = 3.65; vet/medicine = 1.15; breeding = 0.75; contractor = 1.93; other variable costs = 2.83.
- » Fixed cost: total = 10.42; contributed by: labour = 1.90; machinery = 1.29; car/phone/ESB = 1.34; depreciation = 2.79; leases = 0.95; interest = 0.40; other fixed cost = 1.76.
- » Total costs: 28.8c/l
- » Net margin: per litre = 35.55; per cow = €2240; per ha = €5801.

Looking at my farmers who measure grass growth with PastureBase, (as all farmers should do), the following summary will be of interest:

- » The yield of grass in 2022 is down 0.72 tonnes dry matter (DM) per hectare to 12.48 tonnes. What contributed to this?
- » In 2022, we came into the spring with 30kg more cover, 973kg DM, but carried higher pre-grazing covers all through 2021 at 1,439 (spring), 1,421 (summer), and 1,736 (autumn).
- » The grazing season in 2022 was 280 days, three days longer than 2021.

Grass utilised per hectare: using a Moorepark programme, anyone can get it and it is easy to input the data, I have come up with the following information:

- » Farmers utilised more grass in 2022 v 2021, 9.89 compared with 9.78 tonnes DM. This indicate they managed grass a little better, being slightly higher stocked on milking platform with a lower overall stocking rate.
- » The percentage grass (home grown grazing and silage) in the diet was 82 per cent in 2022 compared with 84 per cent in 2021 – that means when you don't grow the grass, you substitute with meals. The target for max profit is 90 per cent.
- » As mentioned above, the feed conversion efficiency, kg MS/tonne DM, was 77.33 while my target is 90. You can conclude from this that there is big scope for improvement here.
- » The grazing season was 255 days in 2022 – one day longer than in 2021. You will notice the difference between this and PastureBase, 255 v 280 days. This programme takes into account the calving pattern of the herd, so if cows are not calved they will not be let out. Hence, the lower figure.
- » Interestingly, they spent a whopping €1,039/ha on fertiliser compared with €593 in 2021 – the higher fertiliser price being the main reason.

A lot of good messages can be derived from these stats, albeit from a very small number of the top farmers. But with projections for fertiliser and meal prices set to remain high this year, dairy farmers would need to control inputs a lot better. Milk price is projected to decrease to 50c/l or lower, therefore, spend on the basis of this.

#### MEAL FEEDING LEVELS TO REDUCE ANNUAL QUANTITY

- » Farmers must take active actions to reduce meal feeding from an average of 1,200kg/cow/year.
- » Table 1, suggestions by my discussion groups, outlines various levels of meal that can be fed each month depending on the annual meal feeding goal they wish to achieve. One farmer who compiled some of these figures is making great profit/cow from feeding 770kg and achieving 515kg MS/cow. He said nobody should need to feed more than 900kg per cow per year. Look at the meal feeding in Table 1 for 900kg and noone could say cows are underfed.

**Table 1: Suggested meal feeding and % protein levels per month to achieve various annual meal feeding targets. [Source: discussion groups]**

Month	Feeding rate kg/cow/D	Feeding rate kg/cow/D	Feeding rate kg/cow/D	Feeding rate kg/cow/D	Protein %
February	2	2	2.5	4	16
March	4	3	4	4	14
April	2	2.5	3	3	12
May	1	1	1.5	2	12
June	0	1	1	2	12
July	0	1	1.5	2	12
August	2	2	2	2	12
September	2	2	3	3	12
October	2	2	3	3	12
November	2	2	3	3	14
December	2	2	3	3	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>500kg</b>	<b>600kg</b>	<b>800kg</b>	<b>900kg</b>	

- » Why are farmers feeding so much/too much meal annually? The usual excuses are:
  - Not enough grass in spring and autumn – controllable
  - Grass not good enough in summer – controllable
  - Cows won't go in-calf in May-June (myth)
  - Milk price is great (no logic!)
  - It helps cashflow, particularly, in spring and late autumn (myth)
  - Surprisingly honest reasons arose:
    - Feeder calibration was 20-30 per cent incorrect – controllable
    - Staff took it on themselves to "feed whatever they wished" (become the boss)
    - Feeders need adjusting for various types of feed – controllable
    - "I never really planned the amounts" – controllable
    - Quantity being fed was never adjusted for availability of grass (Controllable)
    - Too slow to react when grass became plentiful – controllable

The return on feeding extra meal to increase yield is only 3-4 per cent according to Moorepark.

#### USE SLURRY INSTEAD OF NITROGEN

There is no doubt but that with nitrogen being so expensive and with environmental pressure, we need to adopt practices that help us reduce the amount of bag N we use. The following suggestions should be practised:

1. Apply a max of 29kg/ha (23 units/acre) in spring of protected urea to the area planned for bag N. Where slurry is not being used, use



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- bag N.
2. Use slurry strategically instead of bag N, as it contains 6-8 units N, 5 units P and 30 units K per 1,000 gallons if the slurry dry matter is 7-9 per cent.
    - 2,500 gallons/acre on the 40 per cent to be grazed from March 17 to end of first rotation.
    - 2,500 gallons on the first 30 per cent of area grazed from let out to 1st March.
    - 2,500 gallons on the 30 per cent area grazed from March 1-17.
  3. Apply bag Nitrogen 4 to 6 weeks after the first application – the higher the stocking rate (SR), the shorter the period; but with good use of slurry, you should be able to get to April 1 with one bag of protected urea.
  4. Replace some of the bag N with slurry for first cut silage.
  5. Make as much 1st cut silage as possible as this saves on N as well as reducing overall contractor costs.
  6. Diluting slurry with soiled water will increase the efficiency of utilisation of N in the slurry.
  7. Avoid making a second 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.
  11. Sow (in April-May) red clover on 'outside' land because you will grow 16-18 tonnes grass DM/ha with little or no nitrogen – a 'no brainer'; but order both white and red clovers NOW as they are likely to be scarce.
- » **Remember the following facts (research) on nitrogen use efficiency on grassland. It is:**
- 63 per cent - when the pH, the Phosphate (P) and Potash (K) are optimum;
  - 54 per cent - when P is deficient;
  - 57 per cent - when K deficient;
  - 53 per cent - when P & K are deficient;
  - 35 per cent - when P, K and lime are deficient.
- » **I hope you can deduct from this the element having the greatest effect! LIME – a 28 per cent reduction in the efficiency of N.**
- 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 2023 – bring ALL fields up to pH 6.5 this year. No excuses about weather, grass cover, silage – plan to make it happen.
  - Phosphorous and potash must be brought up to Index 3 and 4 levels so as to grow adequate grass with less nitrogen – be convinced.
  - More meal is not the solution to less N as the following

economic annual returns show:

- Increased soil P & K levels = 152 per cent return;
  - Reseed full farm in eight-year cycle = 96 per cent return;
  - Increasing meal to increase milk = 3.2 per cent;
  - Increasing N, which we now cannot do = 48 per cent.
- » **I can't understand why we are so committed to meal at the price of it and less to applying lime, P, K and sulphur.**

### MILK RECORD IN 2023

Many farmers, as a result of major expansion over the last few years, are overstocked in the milking parlour with 20 per cent "bad cows" in the herd. Money can be made by clearer thinking on this dilemma. By weighing cows in June - July, inserting the data on ICBF, you will be able to rank the cows based on kg milk solids produced per kg cow body weight.

Take the case of 100-cow farmer producing 450kg MS per cow, making an average profit/cow of €1,500, with the lowest 10 cows doing 340kg each and a profit of €700/cow. We did a partial budget on the scenario of selling off the 10 "bad cows":

- On the negative side he will lose the profit on 10 cows - €7,000.
  - On the positive side he will "save" 55 tonnes DM (10 x 5,500) or 63.21 tonnes meal equivalent, which is worth €25,284. He would be milking one row of cows less - a saving of 20 minutes/day for 280 day or 93 hours at €20 per hour, equals €1,860.
  - Therefore, for a decision of doing less work he will be €20,144 better off. He will also have 10 extra cows, probably late calvers, to sell at probably €1,200 each, which can be put to productive use.
  - The 90 cows remaining will only have to milk 38kg MS more each to make up the "loss" of 3,400kg MS produced by the 10 cows sold. 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; 400kg MS; 4 per cent fat and 3.5 per cent 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 kg MS.**
- » **Do milk recording in 2023 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 percentage fat and protein..**

### COW CARE

- » **Make sure all dry cows are getting 2-3 oz per head of a good**



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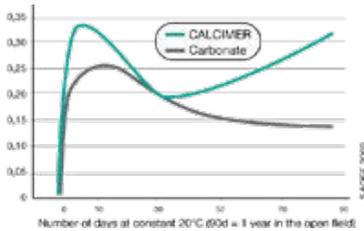
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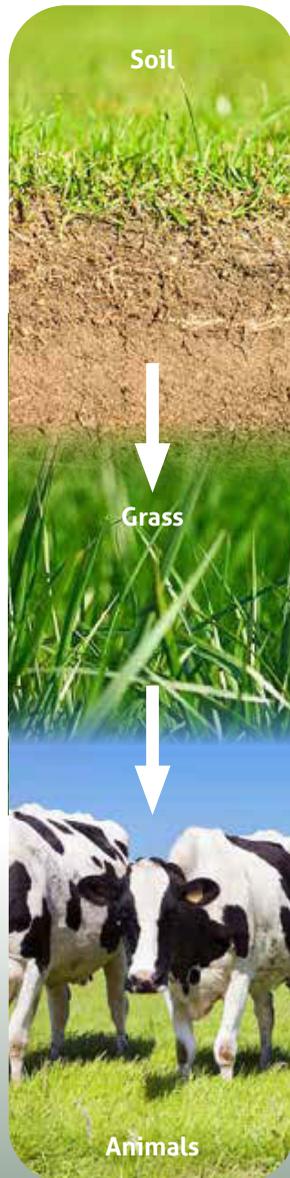


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#### Nutrient Uptake

- ✓ Soil pH optimises nutrient availability in the soil and efficiency of fertilisers
- ✓ Root stimulant allows better nutrient uptake by the plant roots
- ✓ Natural source of trace elements
- ✓ Breakdown of organic matter and slurry to release nutrients

#### Grass Quality

- ✓ Nutritionally superior grass with higher Calcium and Phosphorus contents
- ✓ **13-18 % increase in P content**
- ✓ **8-17 % increase in Ca content** (On-farm grazing trials comparing mineral contents in grazed grass with or without physiolith application)

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. Farmers tell me that the best practice that they have found for reducing lameness was astroturf on the roadway.
- » Encourage daytime calving by feeding silage during the night only (removing leftovers in the morning). 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. Talk to a neighbour who might be interested in doing night-time calving for yourself and a neighbouring dairy farmer for €150/night. The advantages are immense!
- » 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.
- » Feed a little meal (0.5 to 1kg) for two 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.
  - Post calving this year, farmers should feed 2-4kg meal with grass and minimum silage. Very heavy covers exist now on some farms, but most farms have lower overall covers... confirm for yourself.
  - Farmers should be restricting the quantity of good silage being eaten by late calvers in very good body condition by feeding 2-3kg DM of straw. Cows calving in BCSs greater than 3.3 are at great risk of losing more than 0.5 BCS from calving to mating which will result in both submission and pregnancy to first service being reduced by up to 50 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively.

### 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 May 1 must be 320+kg and they are likely to put on 0.8kg/hd/day between February 1 and then, they now should weigh at least 250kg.

- For every kg they are less than that, they must be fed 4-5kg meal. If they are 30kg below target, they must get 120-150kg meal (16-18 per cent P) between now and May 1

- , or 1.5 kg/hd/day over the 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 200-210kg.
- This is a very good option if you are planning to sell these animals or expand.
- Let all out to grass in early February, 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 two hours from the calf's birth.
  - Give at least three litres.
  - Give another two litres within the next six hours.
  - A stomach tube (done correctly) alleviates some of the feeding problems. Most farmers now use it as a time saver and it guarantees consumption of two to three litres in that first feed.
  - To check the quality of the colostrum, use a refractometer.
- » 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 two 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 on top of technical issues and overcome current challenges.
- » Consider using contractors more in 2023, because of on-farm labour shortage, 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 reseeding 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 and personal health suffers.

The four legs to our 2023 table are: **consolidating, communication, control and cash.**

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# A NEW LEASE OF LIFE WITH THE T7.300

PRODUCTIVITY, EFFICIENCY, AND UPTIME HAVE ALL BEEN ENHANCED IN NEW HOLLAND'S NEW FLAGSHIP T7.300 MODEL, WHICH WAS UNVEILED AT SIMA 2022. HERE, WE LOOK AT SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS NEW MACHINE

**New Holland's T7.300 was created in response to customer feedback that indicated a need for a tractor with more power but without the downside of bigger frames, more weight, and without sacrificing manoeuvrability, according to head of tractors at New Holland, Oscar Baroncelli. Enter the T7.300 Long Wheelbase.**

"We took up their challenge and developed a machine that delivers greater engine power with larger tyres, with no increase at all in overall dimension," he explains, describing it as the 'ultimate performance density'. What does this mean, exactly? Well, the T7.300 features an FPT Industrial NEF 6 engine that has been enhanced with a raft of features and improvements. It delivers 280hp maximum power for draft work and 300hp for PTO and haulage tasks. The new electronically variable geometry turbo ensures high torque and fuel efficiency at low rpms. The tractor meets Stage V emissions standards with a high e-SCR-only after-treatment system that optimises power, responsiveness, and fuel

economy, the company says. Customers will be able to spend more time in the fields, with an 18 per cent increase in fuel capacity, and minimise their operational costs with a service interval that's 50 per cent longer than some competitors, according to New Holland. The new model features an upgraded version of the company's popular Auto Command transmission, which further adds to the tractor's efficiency.

## CAPABILITIES, CAPACITIES AND CONNECTIVITY

New Holland has also extended the tractor's overall capabilities with increased axle capacities and a higher gross vehicle weight, and 2.05m-tall tyres increase traction and performance while respecting the soil – all while maintaining the same overall dimensions of the existing T7 models, delivering on the ultimate performance density claim, the company says. The T7.300 caters for customers' need for more processing power, greater implement connectivity and automation, as well as

in-cab convenience. And New Holland says customers will also benefit from its best intelligent farming innovations: the efficiency-boosting PLM Intelligence and IntelliView 12 monitor, and the SideWinder Ultra fully adjustable armrest for ergonomic intuitive operation. Tractor Implement Management connects the tractor to implements with ease, ensuring communication to and from the implement.

The new T7.300 Long Wheelbase with PLM Intelligence boasts 300hp for PTO and haulage jobs, while maintaining the wheelbase and dimensions of the current T7 range. Its Horizon Ultra cab is said to be the quietest on the market, with the new active cab suspension.

## INNOVATION AND AUTOMATION

The new model also features award-winning smart innovations in tractor-implement



automation, which, the company says, will deliver tangible benefits for customers: the integrated large square baler control that optimises interaction between the tractor and baler; anticipating the crop compression results in a 15 per cent reduction in cab movement; a more consistent PTO speed; and a 12 per cent reduction in fuel consumption through the baling cycle. The unique CentreView places the display directly in front of the driver while the award-winning Intelligent Trailer Brake delivers stability in conditions that call for it.

#### QUIETEST CAB ON THE MARKET

According to New Holland, the new T7.300 offers the superior comfort of the Horizon Ultra cab, the quietest on the market, with 66dBA. It also features a new Comfort Ride suspension, the active electro-hydraulic system 'decouples' the cab movement from the chassis with a 'skyhook' control logic to deliver a supremely smooth ride. The T7 Long Wheelbase range has a well-earned reputation for hydraulic performance, and the T7.300 is no exception, according to New Holland. New features include decouple-under-pressure, high-flow, electro-hydraulic remotes that have fully configurable controls, and a new hydraulic circuit with an optimised design that reduces connections by 30 per cent and features remote test ports for fast fault finding. Customers will manage heavy implements with confidence with the new self-centring hydraulic stabilisers with adjustable lock point. The customisable advanced joystick controls up to six remote valves, providing excellent operator ergonomics.

#### MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY AND UPTIME

The new T7.300 benefits from New Holland's advanced PLM Intelligence solutions that integrate digital technologies to deliver a smart and connected agriculture, enabling customers to maximise the machine's productivity while optimising yield and input costs, New Holland says. PLM Intelligence allows all best-in-class field applications such as IntelliSteer 1.5cm accuracy autosteering, IntelliTurn and headland sequences management and Isobus compatibilities for Section Control and VRA, to increase productivity, reduce costs and increase comfort.

New Holland vice-president of sales, Sean Lennon, said: "We are expanding our machinery lines to serve the cash-crop segment. It's an area where New Holland historically has a strong tradition and a segment where we have had important results in the past years. This new addition is developed following what we have already done in the T7 range, upgraded according to the needs and desires of cash-crop farmers and contractors. It's a step forward to gain an even more prominent position in this specific segment."



## WORDS OF KINDNESS

**February has arrived. The days are starting to get that bit longer now and we await the spring sowing season and associated activities on the farm. This is my favourite time of year as it creates great anticipation of what the months ahead will bring. Will we get a wet spring? A dry summer? A wet harvest? And so on. Farming is a gamble, and we roll the dice with the Irish weather**

I am grateful for the brighter days now. Over the Christmas period, we had a death in our family, and we also lost a dear neighbour and a friend, all over a few short weeks. Our parish has been in mourning. During that time, neighbours came out and helped with the wakes, opening and stewarding fields for all the cars to park in; putting up lights to guide people safely as they came to pay respects; digging the graves; providing soup, sandwiches, and kind words. This is a part of rural Ireland where neighbours help neighbours in their times of need. A local funeral is a parish affair. It involves everyone in its traditions, and extracts the milk of human kindness. Long may this continue. To all our readers who lost loved ones and friends over the Christmas season, I offer my deepest sympathies.

Now, down to a bit of business, and at the time of writing, factory beef prices were set to rise as demand exceeds supply – the Chinese market is driving this demand. Marts are also reporting high prices and steady trade, which is good news for the beef industry at the start of the year. Tillage farmers are facing a rise in seed prices this year with prices up about €155 per tonne over last year, or €13 per acre over the same time last year. This, coupled with fertiliser prices and other costs, will leave farmers hoping that harvest prices remain strong like last year.

Over the last six months, there has been a spate of farm-machinery robberies, both here and in Northern Ireland. I feel like not a week goes by now, without agri-media carrying a story about a stolen piece of kit. Tractors and equipment stolen in the south have been recovered over the border, and tractors stolen in the UK have appeared both in the north and south. Break-ins on farms are at an all-time high with everything from quads to tools been stolen. Gardaí are warning farmers to be vigilant when it comes to machinery and particularly when it comes to buying equipment. Their recommendations are not to be afraid to ask the seller plenty of questions about the piece, to look for proof of ownership, and not to pay cash for the transaction.

In 2022, new tractor sales fell by 10 per cent. A total of 2,125 units were registered in 2022, down from 2,366 in 2021 (241 units). Overall, it was not a bad year considering all the factors such as supply issues and price concerns.

In early January, LAMMA returned to its usual slot, taking place in the NEC in Birmingham, and attracting more than 34,000 visitors and 600 stands over the two-day event. Irish farmers and contractors were well represented there, and the mood was positive. Irish manufacturers too were well represented as the UK market is a very important one for them. Until next month, farm wisely, farm safely.



## A TYRE FOR TRAILERS, TANKERS AND SPREADERS

**How can a tyre float over loose soil or grassland, provide traction on the road, carry heavy loads, and avoid soil compaction?** These were the questions that BKT considered, and have answered, with its new radial flotation tyre.

A dilemma for many farmers, when it comes to choosing the right tyre, is finding one that can cope with completely different requirements on the road and in the fields, according to the Indian tyre company. A solution to this comes with its recent addition Ridemax FL 615, a radial flotation tyre that is suitable for the free rolling wheels of trailers, tankers and spreaders. The Ridemax FL 615 has a steel-belted structure that provides high puncture resistance along with increased durability and high load capacity. The rounded shoulder and large footprint area ensure reduced soil compaction making the tyre an ideal partner for operations on grassland, according to a BKT spokesperson.

In addition, low-rolling resistance and top self-cleaning properties round up its distinguishing features making the tyre particularly suitable for transport applications with heavy loads and weights. "In a nutshell, Ridemax FL 615 can cope with the increasing distance between plots and protect the soil at the same time," said the spokesperson. Ridemax FL 615 is available, currently, in size 800/65 R 32.



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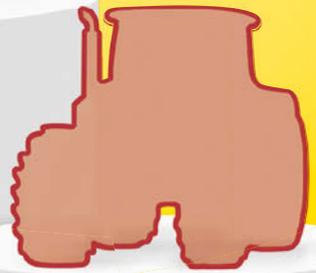
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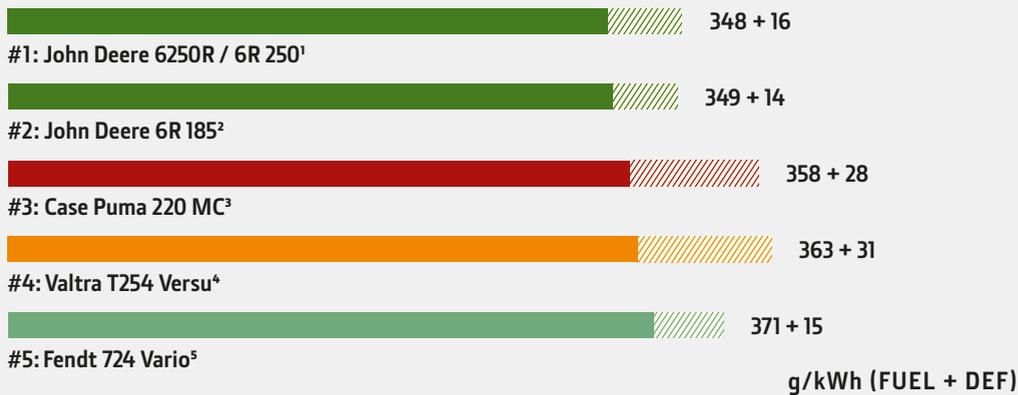
**6R 185**

**6R 250**

**PUMA 220 MC**



## DLG-POWERMIX-TRANSPORT TEST 2.0 TOP 5 RANKING.



Since 2018, the John Deere 6R 250 is leading in the DLG-PowerMix-Transport Test 2.0 (Transport application)<sup>1</sup> – at 348 g/kWh Diesel and 16 g/kWh DEF, the 6R 250 delivered the lowest fuel consumption compared to all competitors tested so far<sup>1</sup>. 6R 250 saves you more fuel on transport.



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<sup>1</sup> Profi Test Results, Tractor-Test "John Deere 6250R: More Vario", 06/2018; www.profi.de/DLG-PowerMix-Transport Test 2.0 (Transport application); page 10 to 16; [https://pruefberichte.dlg.org/filestorage/0618\\_John\\_Deere\\_6250R.pdf](https://pruefberichte.dlg.org/filestorage/0618_John_Deere_6250R.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> DLG-PowerMix Test Nr. 7369; ([www.dlg.org](http://www.dlg.org))

<sup>3</sup> Profi 09-2019 page 10 to 16 ([www.profi.de](http://www.profi.de))

<sup>4</sup> Profi 08-2018 page 10 to 16 ([www.profi.de](http://www.profi.de))

<sup>5</sup> Profi 11-2021 page 14 to 20 ([www.profi.de](http://www.profi.de))



## A TRACK-AND-FIELD SOLUTION

Agriforce BK T71 is the first of a brand-new series of rubber tracks for the farming sector, from BKT – particularly for high-power tractors employed in soil-tillage and row-crop applications. Tracks can be more functional compared to tyres, the company has said, explaining that track-driven tractors can run at higher speeds in fields, at the same power, and show increased fuel efficiency. This enhanced productivity and performance spurred the Indian tyre company to extend its product range with a new track category. First off, the tread of Agriforce BK T71 is made of a high-performance compound that offers the advantage of extraordinary

resistance against cuts, wear and tear. The optimised tread pattern provides excellent traction and ride comfort, while the drive lugs of the positive drive system have an optimised shape to ensure extraordinary flexibility, according to the company.

In addition, the track carcass has been reinforced with four layers of high-tensile steel cords.

The development of this new track offering comes as a result of feedback from customers, according to the company, which has also invested in a new specific track-manufacturing plant on its Bhuj production site in India.



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### PRO CUT 285/320 MP NEW

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- ✓ Folding Cover for Easy Access to Cutting Bar
- ✓ Mechanical Lock for Transport
- ✓ Drive Shield Module & Walterscheid Driveline
- ✓ Friction clutch and overrun protection
- ✓ 4 mm Cranked Heavy Duty Blade
- ✓ Easy Access to Hitching of Tractor to Mower

### TEDD-AIR 570

- ✓ 4 Rotor - 5.7 Meters
- ✓ Hook Tines. 3. 7 Tine Arms per Rotor
- ✓ Full Automatic Headland Management
- ✓ Super Flotation Follows Land Contours Closely
- ✓ Heavy-Duty Build Quality & 16 x 6.5 - 8 Tyres

### TEDD-AIR 840

- ✓ 6 Rotor - 8.4 Meters
- ✓ Hook Tines. 3. 7 Tine Arms per Rotor
- ✓ Full Automatic Headland Management
- ✓ Super Flotation Follows Land Contours Closely
- ✓ Heavy-Duty Build Quality & 16 x 6.5 - 8 Tyres

### PRO CUT 210/240/280

- ✓ Available in three sizes 7', 8' & 9' with Superior Flotation
- ✓ Galvanized Curtain Frame & Multi-band Belt Driven
- ✓ Bronze Bushing on Main Pivot Point & Tool Box
- ✓ Heavy Duty Cutter Bar & Topping Skids Included

### PRO CUT 3000 MP

- ✓ Hydraulic Floating Suspension with Swarth Wheels
- ✓ Tripod Legs to Park Mower in a Vertical Position
- ✓ Folding Cover for Easy Access to Cutting Discs
- ✓ Indicator Lights & Mechanical Lock for Transport
- ✓ Shear-Hub Protection Mechanism in Cutter-Bed
- ✓ 25mm Gears in Cutter-Bed & Walterscheid Driveline
- ✓ Friction Clutch and Over-Run Protection
- ✓ 4mm Cranked Heavy Duty Blade
- ✓ Easy Access to Hitching of Tractor to Mower

### PRO CUT 3000 TC

- ✓ Hardox Semi-Swing Steel Tines & Shear Hub Discs
- ✓ Friction Clutch, Overrun Clutch & 25 mm Cutterbed Gears
- ✓ 3 Position Conditioner Plate Setting & Heavy Duty Bearings
- ✓ Adjustable Swarth Gate & Wear Plates Fitted
- ✓ Adjustable Spreading Vanes/Gate
- ✓ Walterscheid Drivelines & Comer Gearbox & Cutting Bed
- ✓ Kennfixx Quick Release Hydraulic Grips

### PRO CUT 2600/3000 MC

- ✓ Quick Fit Blades with Hydraulic Floating Suspension
- ✓ Swath Wheel & Mechanical Lock for Transport
- ✓ Indicator Lights & Drive shield module in cutter-bar
- ✓ 25mm Gears in Cutter-Bar with Walterscheid Driveline
- ✓ Friction Clutch and Over-Run
- ✓ 4mm Cranked Heavy Duty Blades
- ✓ Easy Access to Hitching of Tractor to Mower

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## IT PAYS TO PREPARE



**Tom Murphy**

Professional Agricultural Contractors of Ireland

We are now well into a new year and February is the month for serious thinking and planning before we set off on a new contracting season. Any agricultural contractor, whether an old hand or new to the business, who doesn't sit down at this time and study how things went last year could be in for trouble.

How solid is your customer base? How many of your clients paid within your terms? Do you have the capacity for more business? Are there some clients you should give a miss this year? Have you discussed a work plan and pricing with your farmers?

Contractors love every piece of machinery they own and hate to part with anything, just in case it's needed, no matter how often it is being used (or not). But you need to be hard-hearted when it comes to your machinery and whether you should hold on to it. Think of it this way: that could be hundreds, if not thousands, of euro sitting out in the yard, rather than in your pocket!

Yes, parting is sweet sorrow, but extra money in the bank is sweeter. The most important thing to figure out is how much profit you will carry forward after all your bills are paid and you have received a reasonable salary for all the hours you put into operating your business. Now, and only now, having carried out an honest review, should you plan for the purchase and/or replacement of any machinery

and there certainly is a fantastic array of machinery out there at what I believe are very good prices.

While carrying out the above is an essential part of running a successful business, it is all to no avail if you are not charging enough to give you a profit to keep your business going.

A reasonable profit at the end of the year is very important if you are to continue in business and be there for the farmers for whom you have provided a service for so many years.

### A 10 PER CENT INCREASE...AT LEAST

If you ended last year with a small bank balance, or you are still carrying an overdraft, maybe it is time for you to plan your exit from the contracting business. Farmers know how much everything has increased over recent years and particularly over the last year. Some media reports suggest a 5 per cent increase in contractor prices but, in all honesty, that wouldn't even cover bank charges for your overdraft facility going forward. It's entirely down to each business what they decide but nothing less than 10 per cent can be justified.

In addition, because the cost of fuel is so volatile, you need to have a separate agreement to cover what is the most expensive element of all contracting work.

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IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY

## KRONE RELEASES NEW, UPDATED 'JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES' MOWER

Five years after the EasyCut B 950 Collect was introduced at Agritechnica 2017, Krone has released an update to this butterfly mower with grouping augers. The new version also offers an Isobus-compatible comfort control as an option for enhanced operator comfort. Without conditioners, the EasyCut B 950 Collect is lightweight and compact and is the ideal mower for tackling sloping fields and boggy ground, the company says. The massive cross augers group crops into compact swaths in no time at all. Grass is mowed gently and swathed without showing any signs of conditioning. The EasyCut B 950 Collect offers a working width of 9.45m when operated in configuration with a 3.2m front mower. The swathers open and close hydraulically for an easy selection of three swathing modes – regular, left or right, and no swathing – and each can be selected on the move from the tractor cab. A particularly innovative feature is the independent swathing option. This means with one swath board closed, the EasyCut B 950 Collect groups 12m of crop into four swaths – ideal for the Krone Swadro TC 1250/TC 1370 four-rotor rakes and efficient crop management in hotter and drier summers, saving time and inputs throughout – in the name of sustainability. The butterfly combination has the famous EasyCut cutterbar including SafeCut, SmartCut and integral break-back system. Its ground contouring comes from the patented DuoGrip suspension and hydraulic suspension that is controlled from the tractor cab. Also very practical is the independent lift-out feature which is standard specification and particularly useful in awkward corners or short ground.



Combined with SectionControl, it can also control the front mower. Like all EasyCut models, the EasyCut B 950 skids are made from hardened steel which comes as standard specification. Gliding gently on the sward, this flotation skid ensures the cleanest cut in the field. There is a new lever on the nearside guard which increases the space between the mower and tractor for straightforward easy coupling. For intuitive operation, there is the optional Isobus-compatible Comfort control available now in addition to the standard electric control box. All have colour touchscreens where all major functions are displayed to the operator for ease of use.

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## A SMALL PACKAGE THAT PACKS A BIG PUNCH



**Who says size doesn't matter? And, the smaller, the better, it would seem, if JCB's recent addition to its telescopic handler range is anything to go by. Here, we take look at some of the big features on JCB's smallest handler, to date.** JCB's compact

514-40 has been 'designed to go to places and get into spaces where no other telehandler can' according to the company, and with a height of just 1.8m and a width of 1.56m, it certainly has the capability to be a versatile machine! As well as being suitable for agricultural-related tasks, it is also a good fit in construction and landscaping sectors, and is at home at events too. The telehandler is powered by a low maintenance 24.7hp (18.4kW) diesel engine that meets the EU Stage V emissions standard without the need for a complex diesel particulate filter (DPF) or any diesel exhaust fluid, minimising operating costs for customers and simplifying operation. This three-cylinder, 1.1L engine, which boasts 66.9Nm of torque, drives through a proven Bosch hydrostatic transmission to a two-speed Linde motor, delivering a maximum travel speed of 10mph (15km/h). Permanent four-wheel drive and four-wheel steering give the 514-40 the all-terrain capabilities synonymous with JCB's market-leading Loadall range, according to the company. The maximum lift capacity is 1,400kg, while maximum lift height is 4m, making this an ideal machine for numerous industry sectors. Lift capacity at full reach is 525kg. With an unladen weight of 2,695kg, the machine boasts a 17 per cent higher power-to-weight ratio than the Loadall 516-40. However, the 514-40 newcomer can be transported on a lightweight 3.5-tonne trailer behind a 4x4 or a light commercial vehicle, making it easier, quicker and less expensive to move it between distant work locations. The full width operator's cab is 20 per cent larger than the previous 516-40 and a full 200mm wider than competitor models to provide the operator with a comfortable working environment, while the extensive glazing delivers excellent visibility to all four corners. The cab will be instantly familiar to operators of other Loadall models, with JCB's intuitive ergonomic controls making the 514-40 one of the easiest machines to operate.

- ▶ Low maintenance 24.7hp (18.4kW) diesel engine requires no DPF or diesel engine fluid (DEF) to meet Stage V emission standards.
- ▶ 82 per cent shared JCB componentry ensures quality, ease of maintenance, and maximum uptime.
- ▶ Full-width cab is up to 200mm wider than competitors, delivering more operator space.
- ▶ Best-in-class lift capacity at full height is 12 per cent higher than competitors.
- ▶ 17 per cent increase in power-to-weight ratio over the previous generation 516-40.
- ▶ Increased manoeuvrability for the tightest working sites.

Standard features include a 50mm tow ball with seven-pin electrics, reversing alarm, road lights, the patented JCB load control system and JCB's LiveLink Lite telematics system, while options include an LED work light package, and amber and green beacons with an orange seat belt, which can all be protected by JCB's immobiliser key pad. The 514-40 boasts a new lightweight tool carrier and is capable of working with floating forks or a 0.41cu/m bucket, while double-acting auxiliary hydraulics make it possible to operate a range of JCB attachments, increasing the versatility of this compact machine. Customers can also choose between a range of industrial and turf-compatible tyres.

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## LEMKEN ACQUIRES SEEDING TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST

German agricultural machinery specialist, Lemken, and South African company, Equalizer, have reached an acquisition agreement, which will significantly expand Lemken's seeding technology product portfolio. With a focus on minimal ground disturbance to no-till farming, the Equalizer product range includes precision planters with up to 36 rows and seed drills with a working width of up to 24m. The acquisition is expected to be completed by spring 2023, once regulatory approvals have been obtained. Lemken CEO, Anthony van der Ley, said he believes that the Equalizer portfolio perfectly complements Lemken's seed-drill segment and constitutes an important building block for further growth.

"There is no overlap in our portfolios. Equalizer offers solutions for customers and markets that Lemken has not been able to serve, so far. In terms of our growth strategy, the Equalizer planters and seeders – also in combination with air carts – close a current gap in our product range." An additional, optimal synergy arises for Lemken precision seeding technology, as the Delta-Row technology developed by the company is complemented by single-row technology established by Equalizer, according to the CEO. Equalizer, which, like Lemken, is a family business, was founded in Cape Town in 2000 and currently employs 180 people. The company serves not only its South African home market, where it is the market leader in precision seeding, but also Australia as its most important export market.

"We see great potential for new products with Lemken on our side, and we look forward to our future collaboration. At the same time, we are proud that this agreement reaffirms the success and hard work of the entire Equalizer



Lemken CEO, Anthony van der Ley; owner, Nicola Lemken; and Equalizer managing director, Gideon Schreuder, after signing the contract.

team and our local dealers over the past 22 years," said Equalizer's founder and managing director, Gideon Schreuder, emphasising that Equalizer will continue to support its customers as an innovative and reliable partner.

### FERTILIZER SPREADERS

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## SULKY DOING ITS BIT TO REDUCE FERTILISER USAGE AND INCREASE YIELDS

Sulky has introduced a top-of-the-range mounted spreader with the arrival of the new X40+ and X50+ models. With the patented Sulky Epsilon spreading system, the two models achieve working widths of 44m and 50m, respectively, with application rates of 520g/min allowing spreading at higher forward speeds with higher application rates. The Epsilon spreading system delivers full width overlap between inward and outward passes – four layers per disc, eight layers in total – with high tolerances to setting errors, cross winds, and lower-quality fertiliser, according to the company.

The patented Sulky Econov System with WPB (on-board weighing device) provides continuous automatic weighing and application-rate calibration with the only boom section management system that delivers true boom section control in a crescent shape to match the regular twin disc machine spread pattern. The Econov system automatically readjusts the application rate in accordance with the number of boom sections closed. Effectively reducing lodging risks on headlands and short ground, the system



delivers fertiliser savings up to 15 per cent and ensures more accurate overall spreading application with increased crop yields, the company says.

Ready to spread (RTS) provides 100 per cent automatic adjustment of application rates and width settings using Sulky Fertitest, the unique online, 24/7, machine-setting service for Sulky spreaders.

Fertitest provides working width and rate settings for over 450 fertilisers, seeds and

slug pellets with direct access via computer, smartphone or QR code. Quartz 800, the new Sulky Isobus universal terminal, enables the spreading area to be managed on a curve to obtain headland stopping and starting without over or under application.

The number of boom sections increases to 12 spreading sections for the full working width when connected to Isobus. The Connected Nutrient Management (CNM) project, managed by John Deere in partnership with Sulky and three other companies, is a user-friendly, optimised, nutrient-management system enabling the precise application of the required amount of chemical fertilisers on specific sub-areas.

Maintaining the nutrient balance of the field from harvest to harvest currently involves extensive calculation and planning efforts for the farmer. The CNM system supports planning and optimisation with a holistic, overall monitoring of the harvest history and includes technologies for accurate fertiliser application via a new continuous information channel using the Sulky Fertitest fertiliser database, according to the company.



### CAVALLO ZEUS Twin Disc Fertiliser Spreader

- Basic model 18cwt with stainless steel extensions available to increase capacity to 1 tonne or 2 tonne capacity
- Stainless steel spinning discs, vanes and vibrating pans
- Hydraulic shut off on either side as standard
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- Central Gearbox controlling spinning plates
- Spreading width between 12 and 18 metres

#### OPTIONAL EXTRAS:

- Filtering grid
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- Lighting Kit
- 24 metre vanes can be fitted for wider spreading width



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## PÖTTINGER ACQUIRES 'PERFECT FIT' ITALIAN ARABLE MACHINERY COMPANY

Pöttinger has acquired Italian arable-farming-machinery manufacturer, MaterMacc. The acquisition, which was completed in November 2022, will see Pöttinger's existing range of seed drills expanded to include precision-seeding technology.

MaterMacc, based in San Vito al Tagliamento in northern Italy, is known for precision-seeding technology, mechanical- and pneumatic-seeding technology, chopping technology, and other original equipment manufacturer (OEM) components.

"The products, the passion for agriculture, the location and, above all, the workforce complement each other very well and show many

parallels to the family business, Pöttinger," according to a Pöttinger spokesperson. MaterMacc currently employs around 80 people and Pöttinger has confirmed that all staff will be retained, as well as the MaterMacc factory.

"The further plans are that, for the time being, the brand, sales, service network and the spare-parts supply will remain the same. However, Pöttinger will contribute its know-how in the best possible way in order to achieve the usual success in the new segments. MaterMacc's existing customers will continue to have access to the trusted service and support."



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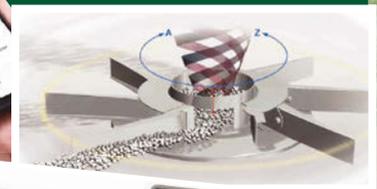
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# COWS AT CALVING

**CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, DISCUSSES THE SAFETY RISKS WHEN MANAGING COWS AT CALVING TIME AS THEY CAN BE NERVOUS, AGITATED, EXCITED AND AGGRESSIVE**



**It is important for farmers to protect themselves at calving time, as cows can be particularly dangerous.**

Sadly, during the last 10 years, 38 people have been killed in livestock accidents on Irish farms and many more have been seriously injured. Thirty-two per cent of these fatal accidents were as a result of attacks by cows with calves; 24 per cent were caused by an individual being knocked over by 18 per cent can be attributed to attacks by bulls; and an additional 16 per cent can be attributed to attacks by cattle.<sup>1</sup> Over half (52 per cent) of all farming accidents involve livestock<sup>2</sup>. While most serious and fatal accidents are associated with handling cows at calving and handling of bulls, a significant number of accidents occur during routine tasks such as herding, loading, drenching, vaccinating and testing.

## PROTECT YOURSELF AT CALVING TIME

Cows at calving time can be nervous, agitated, excited and aggressive, even animals that are normally very docile. Particular caution is required where dangerous behavioural warning signs are identified pre or post calving. Remember that any cow at calving time can have a sudden change of behaviour. The calving facility should be well designed, have a calving gate, be tidy and well-bedded with clean, dry straw, be free of obstructions and have good lighting. A calving pen should minimise the direct physical contact between the cow/heifer and the farmer. The pen should be designed so as to allow the calving gate to pivot from a pillar at the front of the

pen beside the head-gate; this provides protection to the farmer as it rotates inwards. This contrasts with entering the pen with a cow to manoeuvre her into a calving gate. When calving cows/heifers ensure they are safely secured in a fully operational calving gate. It is essential for the farmer to establish an adequate physical barrier between themselves and the cow and never turn their back on a cow following calving. Always ensure that there is adequate help at hand. If appropriate a calving jack should be used as this can reduce the risk of back injury. Cows generally become very agitated directly after calving. After a cow calves, leave the cow and calf alone for 20-30 minutes to bond. This will allow the cow to calm down. If it is necessary to assist a newborn calf with suckling, safely put the cow back in the calving gate and assist the calf to feed or alternatively feed it colostrum using a bucket with a teat. Calves often bawl when they are being tagged and this may cause the mother to attack in an aggressive and protective manner. Ensure the cow is securely isolated from you when tagging their calf.

## REMEMBER

- ▶ Remember all cows with calf will be protective of their young and this makes them potentially very dangerous. Keep children away from calving cows and cows with a newborn calf.
- ▶ If calving aggression lasts for more than a few days, cull the cow after calf is weaned as aggression is a genetic trait.

## CATTLE HANDLERS

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

## FACILITIES

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

## Always think safety first.

Search FBD farm safety, online; or visit [fdb.ie/farm-insurance/farm-safety](http://fdb.ie/farm-insurance/farm-safety) for more information.

<sup>1</sup> Health & Safety Authority report on main causes of deaths in agriculture and forestry 2012-2021.

<sup>2</sup> 2021 Teagasc National Farm Survey.

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CEO of Master Chefs, Pat O'Sullivan.

IN A BID TO SUPPORT ITS ZERO-WASTE AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY, A LIMERICK-BASED EVENT-CATERING COMPANY TOOK THE SIGNIFICANT STEP TO PURCHASE A 20-ACRE FARM, WHICH IS CURRENTLY UNDER CONVERSION TO ORGANICS. **BERNIE COMMINS** CAUGHT UP WITH MASTER CHEF'S CEO, PAT O'SULLIVAN, ABOUT THIS DECISION AND HIS PLANS TO DEVELOP A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR FOOD PRODUCTION AND EDUCATION AT THE FARM

# MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFT



**Buying a farm might seem like an odd move for an event-catering company. Food is, obviously, an integral part of such a business, but producing that food is an added task that most companies will not take on.** Not so, however, for Master Chefs, and its CEO, Pat O'Sullivan, who embarked on a venture with a difference in 2021, purchasing a 20-acre farm at Ballyneety, Co. Limerick.

An ambition to purchase land had been burning away in the background for a number of years, says Pat, and it was sparked by a number of things.

"We have long held the ambition to be as self-sustainable as possible and have looked at purchasing land a number of times over the years but never quite found the right land quality in the right geographical location. "Quality of produce has always been a bug bear of mine but I think Covid made this even worse, as well as the unavailability of certain produce, the supply chain is unreliable. This particular patch of land became available some 18 months ago and it is only a 10-minute drive from our existing food-production facility in Ballysimon, so the stars aligned." Following 18 months of research and planning – farm layout and a growing cycle that matches the company's food demands – Pat says they aim to have their first crops in the late spring 2023.

### ORGANIC ROUTE

Currently, the organic-conversion process is underway at the farm, Pat says. Although there has been no application of chemicals to the land since it was purchased, they are embarking on a two-year certification process. Pat explains that, although they do not need to be certified as organic, and it is not their intention to sell any of their

produce on the open market – they will grow on demand – it was the only option he considered.

"We are going organic because we don't agree with the use of pesticides, we want to grow our crops naturally, the appearance, taste and flavour are vastly better than chemically enhanced produce." Before commercial fertiliser came on the market, farms were all organic anyway: "We just didn't have a title for it back then," says Pat. "I'm seeing a huge upturn in interest in organic farming, biodiversity, our environment, and, generally, looking at new ways to utilise land. On land that isn't suited for dairy or farming on a commercial scale, particularly in parts of the country like south Kerry where I'm from, farmers need to look at alternative ways and also how to get maximum value from the land they have," he says.

### FARM PLANS

Alongside crop growing and food production, the company has had to develop infrastructure and other facilities – some of which may not be so common on other traditional farms.

"We are just putting up a shed, which will be used to house machinery as well as part-processing the crops coming off the land. We envisage cleaning off and packaging the produce onsite before delivering to our factory in Ballysimon," explains Pat.

They will also operate a composting system on the farm. "The compostable wet waste and compostable packaging from all our sites nationwide will be brought back to Ballyneety, composted and returned to the soil. This is part of our stated aim to become a zero-waste business."

While there are no plans to introduce

livestock to the farming enterprise right now, Pat says that he has a vision to house some animals for education purposes in the future. This forms part of an overall plan for the farm to become an educational centre of excellence.

"Apart from being a functional supply support for our business, our aim is for it to become an educational centre of excellence where we can bring our customers, colleagues, school children and, generally, anyone who would benefit from seeing where our food comes from.

"We need to reset the barometer and show our children what real food looks and tastes like. Carrots don't always grow straight, kids need to know that. We are programmed towards the perfect-shaped vegetable that, in a blind tasting, you would struggle to tell the difference between a carrot and a turnip, they taste rather insipid.

"The big supermarket chains have dictated what sells to the eye, farmers are compliant because they need a market, they have to discard anything that doesn't fit the image, it's nonsense. We want to show anyone that's interested that there is a different way, a better way. Ultimately, in due course, we will take it a stage further and show kids how to cook and sustain themselves, teach them the complete cycle from farm to table to farm."

### CATERING FOR THE MASSES

These are ambitious plans but, looking a little closer at the company behind them, they seem fully achievable. Innovation and development have been high on the agenda for more than 20 years at Master Chefs – and food is its passion. Farming, to produce quality and healthy food to sustain that passion, is a logical step.

The company caters for all aspects of



Farmers are compliant because they need a market, they have to discard anything that doesn't fit the image, it's nonsense

### KIND TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Sustainability and zero waste ambitions are very important to Master Chefs and it has introduced a number of initiatives in these areas. Pat explains: "Our ground waste coffee is collected from all our sites by avid gardeners and added to the soil. It adds nitrogen to the compost, aids drainage, retains water, and aerates the compost.

"We ferment produce to prevent waste, this is hugely beneficial and easy to do with vegetables, but we also make our own Kombucha, Miso, Kimchi, sourdough breads, etc.

"In our outlets at the University of Galway we have banned the use of single use coffee cups. I believe they are the first university to undertake such a radical step, they are very focused on the environment and we have had no negative feedback."

healthily," says Pat.

He describes Master Chefs as the 'mother ship that facilitates all the projects in which it is involved.'

"We are very conscious that our success should not be taken for granted, we are

blessed that our work is rewarded by loyal customers. We very much believe in giving back to society and we continue to do that in multiple ways.

"Examples are hiring individuals who have served time in prison, this is a huge step for individuals to reintegrate into society, give them a focus and break the cycle. We work with homeless families where we can, especially those with children to provide nourishing meals. We delivered thousands to meals to elderly members of our community who were isolating and in fear when Covid hit." Masters of their craft, for sure.

### CATERING FOR THE A-LIST CLASSES

Master Chefs has catered for the masses as well as the A-list classes. Among the stars to sample the best Irish produce that the company serves up are: King Charles and Queen Consort Camilla; Elton John; Rod Stewart; Pink; Bob Dylan, Cliff Richard, Michael Flatley, and the late Lisa Marie Presley.

Thomond Park and Munster rugby home games, this includes looking after the team's dietary needs; it operates across the third-level education sector with multiple university campus contracts along with significant presence in the healthcare and sports and leisure sectors; it has catered for many of Ireland's largest sporting, education and corporate events, including the JP McManus Pro-Am golf tournament and National Ploughing Championships, and multiple concerts in Thomond Park. And, it has a purpose-built, 10,000sq ft artisan food factory that produces a broad 'free from' range encompassing sugar-free, dairy-free and gluten-free products.

"We work on a daily basis with the Munster rugby dietitian in creating recipes for high-performance athletes. This has benefited our culinary team by broadening their knowledge in the 'free-from' category. You can eat like an athlete in our outlets, which is hugely popular with the younger generation.

"Our youth are better educated on what they put into their bodies and relate food with health much better than we ever did. We want to do our piece to continue that education and make it easy for our customers to eat

# SILENCE ON DAIRY RETIREMENT/REDUCTION SCHEME CONTINUES

I'm writing this on the January 26 and, as of that date, there is still no word about the Government's intentions around much rumoured dairy reduction/retirement scheme. Silence around intentions and the absence of any detail would be damaging in any sector – but in farming it can be ruinous. This silence, speculation and uncertainty has reduced what should be a decisive policy step to a matter of playing with dairy families' futures.

ICMSA participated in both the Food Vision Dairy Group and the Food Vision Beef and Sheep Group in the same good faith as we'd like to think that was the approach of all the other parties. Both groups contributed – and were set up on the basis of contributing – to informing the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McCauley, of the actions and policy needed to move forward on climate change. One of those policy recommendations was the need to introduce a dairy reduction/retirement scheme and the Government representatives enthusiastically endorsed that idea as a means to reduce the so-called national herd. The problem is that they haven't announced a thing since then which is problematic, when the lead-in time for making decisions on dairy farms is at least two years. Individuals and families that might have considered this scheme are still left completely in the dark as regards when or how or what might be involved and we're already into the 2023 calving season with the 2024 breeding programmes being planned. Farmers can't think in terms of political cycles and PR calendars; we have



to work seasons in advance. And we can't play a 'will they, won't they?' game – we can't afford it and it's grossly irresponsible and unfair to ask us to play along. I have to be as blunt as the situation requires: if the minister is serious about such a scheme, a decision on the details will have to be announced within the next month. The minister must know that there are many suckler farmers disappointed that their 'exit' scheme – again, much mused upon by official sources – never materialised. That had better not happen again and a simple glance at the dairy calendar should convince those with responsibility of the need to get all the information on payments rates and timeframes out as quickly as possible – and certainly within the next month.

A prerequisite for any retirement/reduction scheme is that it should be voluntary. Payment rates agreed need to reflect the income loss as a result of making the reduction required by the scheme, but also a sufficient level of incentive to join the

scheme in the first place. In addition, as part of the conditions of the scheme, we will argue that it should be possible for the farmer to lease his or her land subject to certain stipulations.

The Government has been very good at talking about climate action and their commitment to supporting the agriculture sector – but way too much of that support is just that: talk. It's not too much, surely, to ask the minister and his department to refrain from speculating and increasing expectations about retirement schemes if they are not really proceeding with them in earnest.

This is all way too serious for this kind of hyping and raising hopes. There's a responsibility that comes with all this and, frankly, I'm surprised that I have to remind the ministers and his officials of this when all they have to do is remember the length of a breeding cycle and then look at a calendar. If that retirement/reduction scheme is going to happen at all, then there are four weeks to spell it out in full detail.



The continuing export of calves as a pressure-release valve for surplus numbers will, at best, be a restricted practice in the years ahead



# ANIMAL WELFARE



## DEVELOPING CALF-REARING ALTERNATIVES

In an era of high animal-welfare regulation, especially in relation to calves, we must assume, in the absence of any other probability, that even more stringent standards will be imposed in the years ahead. These impositions, as we read in the Tirlán commentary in this issue, will not be confined to our official regulators. Increasingly, there will be animal-welfare demands made along the marketing chain up to and including supermarkets and consumers. This time last year, we praised the efforts of Irish MEP, Billy Kelleher, and some of his colleagues, to mitigate the most extreme aspects of proposed EU legislation to reduce animal transport times, age of transport, and distances under which cattle movements would be permitted. Taken to the extreme, the transport of cattle between the extreme ends of Cork and Kerry could have been banned. While such restrictions seem laughable, the fact that they were proposed seriously should be a warning of what is in prospect should EU parliamentarians – of whom very few have any appreciable knowledge of the practicalities of livestock farming – decide to revisit the subject of animal movement around the EU. Ireland is the most vulnerable to change. Exporting livestock, inevitably, means long

travel distances and times. There is a tide and it is running against us. Billy Kelleher *et al.* will not hold back that tide indefinitely. The continuing export of calves as a pressure-release valve for surplus numbers will, at best, be a restricted practice in the years ahead. Planning for that eventuality is both necessary and prudent. In addition, slaughtering young calves of limited economic value cannot continue and 2023 must herald the end of herd-breeding strategies that, inevitably, give rise to the birth of sub-economic calves.

### ROBUST SYSTEM

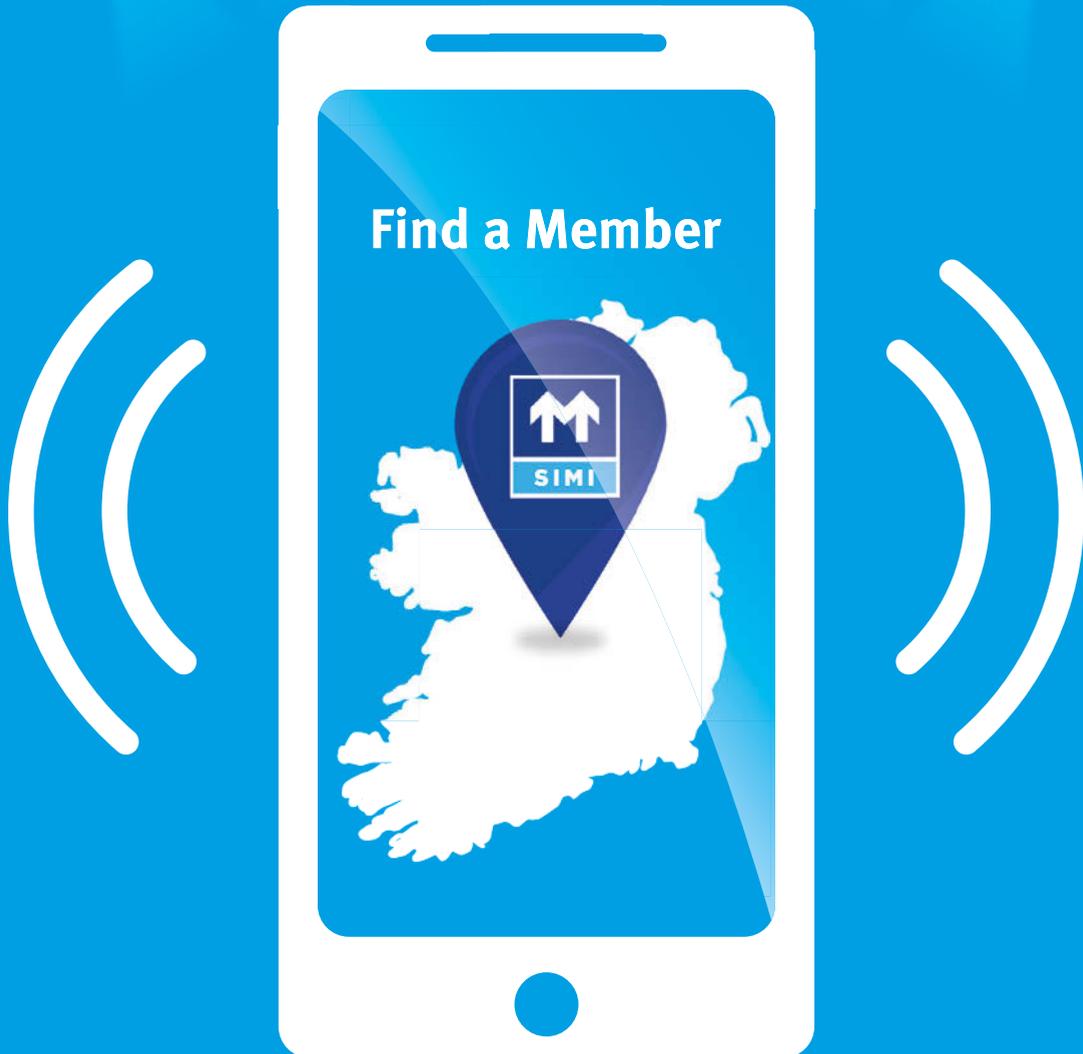
We are building a more robust breeding system through the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and Teagasc which can add more economic value to dairy-beef calves and ensure that non-replacement calves from dairy farms can be moved through the food chain in a manner that delivers both high welfare and profitability. While breeding progress is being made, it is, inevitably, a slow burner. The development of dairy calf-to-beef enterprises is well advanced. It must be made more attractive, and quickly. To encourage further participation, a generous grant aid of 80-90 per cent support for the purchase of automated calf-feeder

systems would be a positive development. The benefits, in terms of improved calf welfare, alone make it logical. Add in the necessity of creating more dairy-calf-to-beef enterprises and the logic is even more pressing. In addition, we have a tried and tested dairy-replacement contract-rearing system in place. After some reticence, increasing numbers of dairy and cattle farmers have adopted this practice. It facilitates milk producers in maximising milk output and ensures a profit margin for cattle farmers rearing dairy replacement heifers. The question now is should this concept be extended to the rearing on contract of non-dairy replacement cattle. Bull calves in the main, but also dairy beef heifers could be reared on contract on cattle farms. After allowing for rearing costs, any profit accruing could revert to the dairy owner or be shared by the two parties. That is a matter for contractual negotiation. The critical issue is to make it as attractive as possible for all involved. It would not necessarily be for mass adoption, no more than outsourcing the rearing of dairy replacements is universally adopted, but it would offer another alternative and options are what we need right now. The Teagasc EveryCalf Project is a potential blueprint.

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