

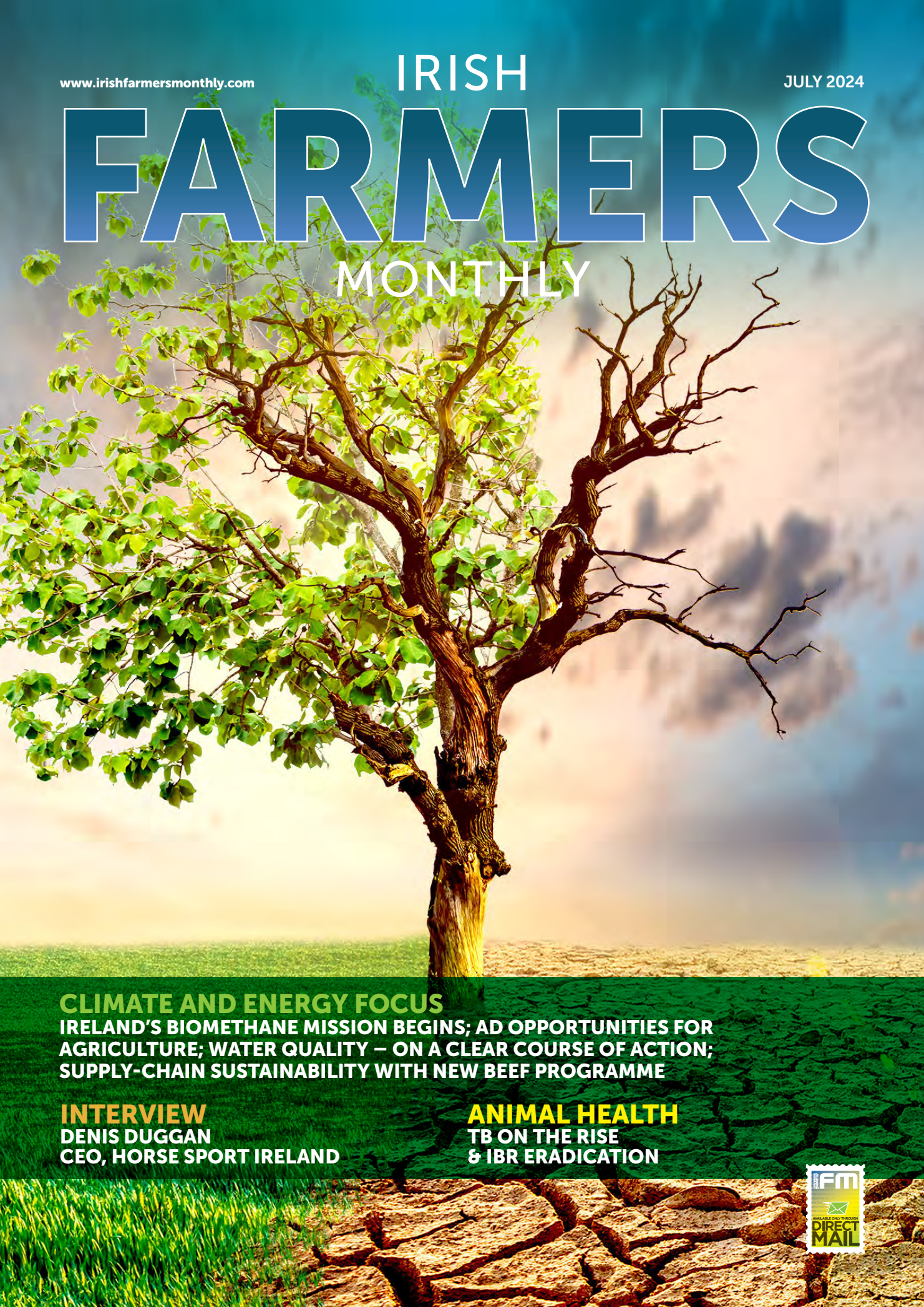
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IRISH

JULY 2024

# FARMERS

MONTHLY



## CLIMATE AND ENERGY FOCUS

IRELAND'S BIOMETHANE MISSION BEGINS; AD OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRICULTURE; WATER QUALITY – ON A CLEAR COURSE OF ACTION; SUPPLY-CHAIN SUSTAINABILITY WITH NEW BEEF PROGRAMME

## INTERVIEW

DENIS DUGGAN  
CEO, HORSE SPORT IRELAND

## ANIMAL HEALTH

TB ON THE RISE  
& IBR ERADICATION







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JULY 2024

# EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

## THE GREATER SCHEME OF THINGS

Was it a sleight of hand or practical politics? Either way, there was little doubt that, as asserted in a previous *Irish Farmers Monthly* editorial, the long-promised, or threatened, adoption of the EU's Nature Restoration Law had only been postponed for the duration of EU parliamentary elections. For the time being, Irish State-owned peatland will suffice to account for Ireland's contribution towards nature restoration, at least up to 2030. After that, and especially after 2040, all bets are off as to how much land will be required to comply with the new European law, and where that land will be sourced. In all likelihood, drained and farmed peatland will be required to make up shortfalls in the land area designated as in need of restoration. Much of that drainage, carried out decades ago, is already compromised, so decisions of what changes are required to comply with restoration standards may mean little change in land management in many cases when the time for decisions comes around.

Anyway, the somewhat cynical, politically motivated postponement of the now enacted law, may only be a foretaste of what is to come. The deliberate absence of cost/benefit analyses on many of the EU's propositions on changes in agricultural practices and trade negotiations would suggest that the economic effects on farm families across Europe are relatively incidental in the greater scheme of things. Policy contradictions abound. A trade agreement with the Mercosur countries of South America is contingent on no deforested land being used to produce beef or grain destined for Europe. Already, the South Americans are developing strategies to comply with this requirement. Only produce from non-deforested land will be sent to Europe. With targets set to increase output substantially

in the coming years, these countries may continue to cut down Amazonian rainforest and send the produce from the newly available farmland to other countries with less stringent concerns around where the food is sourced. It is another variation on carbon leakage. The EU negotiators will clap themselves on the back for their firm stance on deforestation, while the rainforests will continue to be denuded. The only virtuous policy would be to ban all produce from countries that continue to expand their production base through ongoing deforestation. That, however, is not a pragmatic option for the European Union which has an urgent need to increase exports of high-tech products, services and intellectual property to the vast consumer markets of South America. Resultant reductions in beef, grain or milk prices for European farmers are of little consequence in this greater scheme of things.

What is most unforgivable are the ongoing demands for urgent livestock reductions on Irish farms in the name of climate change mitigation, while there is an inexplicable silence from the same people around increases in livestock production, globally. The South American ambition in that regard is well recognised. Elsewhere, India is expanding its dairy herd at an exponential rate. Likewise, China is developing industrial-scale dairy farms that are so far removed from Irish family-farmed milk-production enterprises that they bear no comparison. Even the largest Irish dairy farm is an infinitesimal fraction of the size of China's largest dairy farm. Bengbu Farm in Anhui province, owned by Modern Farming, has 40,000 animals, including 20,000 lactating cows that are milked in eight rotary parlours. The entire farm takes up only 600 acres. How does that compare to stocking rates under our Nitrates Derogation regulations?

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## 60 YEARS OF OAK PARK RESEARCH

Teagasc celebrates 60 years of Oak Park in July. Photo: Teagasc.

**Teagasc's Oak Park Crops Research Centre celebrates 60 years of agricultural innovation this month, and is hosting an open day on Saturday, July 13 to mark the occasion.** This event will provide an insight to the work being carried out at the centre and will outline the progress of Irish agriculture and crop production over the past 60 years. Oak Park House and the attached museum

will also be open to visitors on the day. The advancements in Irish crop productivity in the intervening years have been stupendous. John Spink, head of crops at Oak Park, cites average spring barley yields of less than one tonne per hectare in 1964. The yield now stands in excess of 7.5 tonnes per hectare. Vast amounts of manual labour and a large herd of workhorses were still

being slowly replaced by mechanisation on Irish farms all those years ago and the Oak Park open day will display the evolution of tractors, tillage equipment and harvesters in the intervening years to 2024. As well as tours of the facilities, fields and forests of Oak Park, there will be a barbecue, bouncy castles and plenty of chat with Edward Hayden hosting a KCLR 96FM roadshow on site.

The investigation exposed evidence of systemic flaws in the traceability of horses. Photo: RTÉ Investigates.

## HORSE ABATTOIR CLOSURE

**The scenes of cruelty to horses witnessed on the recent RTÉ Investigates programme are unforgivable.** The programme, which examined the Irish and European horse industries, used hidden cameras to expose the abuse that horses can suffer after they leave the spotlight. It also uncovered evidence of systemic flaws in the traceability of horses and how this was threatening the human food chain across Europe. Incidences like these should remove any qualms that we have around unauthorised videoing of individuals and scenes that need public exposure. The same attitude should apply to all illegal activities including riotous behaviour, protests outside politicians' homes, and other anti-social behaviour. Apart from the general obvious acts of

cruelty, there were clear deficiencies around what most of us would assume should be normal enforcement of animal-welfare regulations. Farming is one of the most regulated sectors in the Irish economy. Unfortunately, exceptional cases bring the entire industry into disrepute. The maltreatment of animals, no less than humans, cannot be condoned in any circumstances. Kneejerk reactions from well-meaning onlookers are of little use. Permanent closure of the only horse abattoir in the country would be clearly counter-productive. Enforcement of and regular monitoring of established welfare standards around animal care and management are the practical responses, not ill-conceived and impractical suggestions.





Eamon Ryan addressing the recent national biomethane conference. Photo: Jason Clarke.

## EAMON RYAN DEPARTURE

*Irish Farmers Monthly* interviewed Minister for the Environment, Climate, Communications and Transport, Eamon Ryan\* in recent months. He came across as an affable, sincere-minded individual with a very genuine focus on improving the world, at least according to his beliefs on how that should be achieved. He was at pains to stress that he had no antagonism whatsoever towards farming or farmers. In some respects, it is unfortunate that the Green agenda, as enunciated and driven by Eamon Ryan's Green Party policies in Government was, to some extent, highjacked by more extreme advocates of environmental change who propose actions which directly impact on the economic sustainability of Irish family farms and the Irish economy as a whole. It must be said that, however well-meaning Eamon Ryan and his fellow Green Party parliamentarians have been over the years, there is a natural and understandable disconnect between what the Greens advocate and what farmers believe to be in their own best interests. Irish people are attempting to chart a course between improving their natural and built environments and at the same time, protecting their living standards. That applies to everyone in Irish society. The introduction of carbon taxes is a costly imposition on incomes, however necessary they may or may not be to the saving of the planet. Likewise, the perceived total focus on public transport, cycling and the development of infrastructure to support that focus, seems, in the eyes of many road users to ignore certain realities. A dispersed rural population necessitates private transport use and should be equally supported in terms of infrastructure development. Farmers believe that the imposition of increased environmental regulation, loading additional costs on farmers, has not been adequately measured or sufficiently acknowledged by those who firmly advocate these impositions. Some reactions to Green Party policies and actions are selfish, as is understandable. We all want a clean environment, lower carbon emissions and a high standard of living. When it comes to curtailments in flying or travel generally, higher heating costs, less access to fast fashion, the cost and inconvenience of ever more elaborate recycling regulations, among a range of green advocacies, our preference is mostly that someone else should pay. Will Eamon Ryan's parliamentary and ministerial legacies be viewed positively or negatively over the longer term? That, obviously, remains to be seen.

*\*At time of print, Eamon Ryan still held this ministerial position.*

## SUCKLED CALVES COULD BENEFIT FROM A TRACE MINERAL SUPPLEMENTATION DURING THE GRAZING SEASON

Significant trace mineral transfer in the last trimester of pregnancy leads to liver minerals levels in calves at birth which are typically higher than the dam's levels.

Diseases of significant importance (diarrhoea, perinatal mortality and vaccine failure) have been linked to inadequate transfer of copper, selenium and zinc in beef and dairy calves when the cow has poor trace mineral levels pre-calving<sup>1</sup>. This pre-birth loading of the calf's liver occurs because cow milk is an exceptionally poor source of trace minerals<sup>2</sup>.

Some continental beef breeds are relatively poor milkers, coupled with the low trace mineral levels in milk, means that as calves grow they will deplete their trace mineral stores, which could lead to subclinical or



clinical deficiency developing mid-season, adversely affecting growth rates<sup>3</sup>. For example, copper deficiency has been linked with poor growth in cattle, zinc deficiency is characterised by poorer growth and loss of appetite and selenium deficiency is a known cause of reduced growth and ill-thrift in cattle<sup>2</sup>.

Livestock farmers are advised to talk to their veterinary surgeon about how an injectable combination trace mineral may benefit their calves during the grazing season.

In a study published by Iowa State University, during a 90-day period, marginally deficient steers supplemented with a combination injectable trace mineral maintained greater average daily gains than control cattle. Additionally, supplemented steers had numerically greater dry matter intakes than controls during the first few weeks of the trial<sup>4</sup>.

Injectable trace minerals bypass the harsh rumen environment and rapidly raise circulating mineral levels in cattle within 8-10hr and after 24hr key mineral storage organs like the liver show raised mineral concentrations<sup>5</sup>.

For years a combination, injectable trace mineral solution has been trusted by farmers and vets around the world to maintain trace mineral supply in their herds throughout the grazing season, a vital period for growth and performance in young stock.

## ASK YOUR VET ABOUT STRATEGIC TRACE MINERAL INJECTION.

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## ANOTHER RED MEAT CULTURE WAR

Last month, Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis and Governor Kay Ivey of Alabama both signed laws banning the sale of lab-grown meat in their states. DeSantis said he will save US beef from the global elite and its authoritarian plans, adding that Florida is fighting back against the global elite's plan to force the world to eat meat grown in a petri dish. Last year, two companies were given federal approval in the US to grow beef and chicken patties (burgers) and nuggets, by immersing animal cells in nutrient-rich broths. The idea is that this could provide a no-kill, more climate-friendly alternative to traditional livestock farming. But cultivating meat in an industrial process requires the utilisation of a lot of costly amino acids and

growth hormones, and this is not commercially viable, certainly if the laboratory-grown meat products are to compete on price with animal-sourced meat products. That economic fact may reflect as much on the relatively low price of meat as it does on the higher cost of an alternative meat production system.

Meanwhile, plant-juice alternatives to milk accounted for 15 per cent of the market in the US in 2020. Alongside this erosion of dairy-input dominance across the range of milk uses, the US plant-based 'fake-meat' market is slowly gaining market share and was valued at \$4.5bn in 2023. It is forecast to grow by 20 per cent up to 2030 in the US. This has not been a seamless upward trajectory. Market analysts suggest that while consumers show



a willingness to try out alternatives to meat products, most return to traditional diets over time. Price, as well as taste and texture, are dominant purchasing influencers. Over time, further refinements in alternative non-meat products, especially in these critical factors, may deliver increased market share. For livestock producers, there is considerable reassurance from the fact that, as consumption in traditional markets for meat and milk is, at best, plateauing, demand continues to rise in emerging markets which would traditionally have had a more vegetable-based diet.

## DOCTORS McHUGH AND MAGAN

Unlike our neighbouring country, Ireland does not have an official 'honours' system to recognise outstanding achievements in Irish society. Our universities, however, fill that gap on occasion by awarding honorary degrees and doctorates to acknowledge outstanding contributions of Irish citizens to this country. Last month, two well-known and highly respected individuals in the field of Irish agriculture were awarded honorary doctorates. Trinity College Dublin (TCD) awarded a doctorate to Anna May McHugh, managing director of the National Ploughing Association (NPA) for her devotion to the organisation and to the advancement of Irish agriculture, generally, over her career. The TCD accolade described Anna May as being 'ahead of her time' and a 'beacon for women in a man's world'. She has led the NPA for over five decades and continues to exude enthusiasm and professionalism in her role.

Mike Magan, a leader in the co-op movement, former chair of Animal Health Ireland and an outstanding grassland farmer, also received an honorary doctorate last month, in his case from University College



Dr Anna May McHugh.



Dr Mike Magan.

Dublin. The award recognises Mike's 'extraordinary contribution to the Irish dairy industry, to AHI, to UCD, and to Irish society more broadly'. The former president of the Irish Grassland Association has been a zealous advocate of grass-based livestock production in this country over his entire farming career.

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# InTouch



## HEAT STRESS

**CATHAL BOHANE**  
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

When we think about heat stress in cattle or cows, we sometimes think of Mediterranean countries which have to deal with all the associated problems. They have to invest heavily in permanent infrastructure and methods to counteract these events. Here, in this part of the world however, we can usually count on one hand the number of days we hit the 30s in degrees, if at all. Nevertheless, we are now experiencing more extremes in weather. Heat stress is not just about temperature – it also involves humidity. It can be seen from the chart below that even at higher temperatures, it is humidity that can tip the balance of stress for the animal.

The ideal temperature for cattle is between 5 to 15°C; beyond this, while the cow is still comfortable, they are using energy to control their body temperature. This is where we get into heat stress where the animal struggles to control her body temperature. Heat stress will negatively affect a wide variety of areas, from yield (10-25 per cent), decreased conception rate and immunity, increased risk of mastitis and lameness, as well as poor rumen function.

| °c | Relative Humidity % |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
|----|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
|    | 20                  | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100 |
| 24 |                     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
| 26 |                     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
| 28 |                     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
| 30 |                     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
| 32 |                     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
|  | No Heat Stress       |
|  | Moderate Heat Stress |
|  | Severe Heat Stress   |

Putting measures in place is important to counteract these effects; they are only short-term so any changes can be cheap and cheerful. Making sure that cows have enough water available is the priority, so put measures in place to increase a reserve of water (seven litres per cow). When standing in the yard, offering shade or having a sprinkler-type system will add to cooling but cows should be able to dry as well, rather than being constantly wet.

The next big step is to maintain intake; this can drop by 10 per cent in even moderately hot weather, which has knock-on effects on yield, milk solids and fertility. Giving cows fresh grass at the coolest part of the day, increasing concentrates with a higher maize content and adding fat to the diet are just some measures you can use to help alleviate the issues.

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## COMERAGHS WILD FESTIVAL TO SHOWCASE TRADITIONAL SKILLS

Bread baked the old-fashioned way, butter churning, sheep shearing by hand, and a working sheepdog demonstration are among the traditional skills to be showcased at the **Comeraghs Wild Festival in July**. The community-run, authentic festival celebrates its 10th birthday this year and showcases the culture, history, traditions and the magnetic beauty of the stunning Comeragh Mountains and surrounding hinterland. Renowned Comeragh Lamb producer and local sheep farmer, Willie Drohan, is back by popular demand for this year's event and he and his family will be hosting a sheep shearing and working sheepdog demonstration at Cooney's Yard, just below his family homestead on Saturday, July 13.

Willie and other skilled and experienced sheep shearers will expertly remove the wool from the flock the old-fashioned way, using a traditional shears. Their trusted and talented sheepdogs will also be on display, showcasing their incredible herding abilities. Local historian, Sheila Murphy, will be on hand to tell a few stories while local musicians will provide the music.

This year's festival opens in Curraghmore House and Gardens on Saturday, July 6, with an open-air concert kicking off with specially-formed local band, Country Gold, and also featuring Ceol and The High Kings. Celebrations continue the following Thursday to Sunday with a mix of events in the mountains and in the sea which include surfing, hill walking, mountain biking, a concert in an intimate church featuring Lisa Hannigan, Gemma Hayes and Paul Noonan; live music, singing and storytelling events as well as open air dancing.

This year's programme also features a Feast in the Forest in magical Crough Wood prepared by Eamo & Ro chefs, Eamonn Connors and Roisin O'Connor. Only 50 places are available for the long table feast cooked over a custom-built pit and served in a specially constructed marquee in the shadow of the Comeragh Mountains.



Pictured at the launch of the Mountain Splendour Tour are Willie Drohan; Comeragh Mountain Lamb; Clotilde Kiely, Comeragh Mountain Farm; and Andrew Malcolm, forager. Photo: John Bermingham.





Damien O'Reilly  
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

## LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

In the run up to the recent European Parliament elections, I listened to many of the TV and radio debates and discussions. It was a laborious and often frustrating exercise. This writer arrived in Brussels in late 2022, wet behind the ears when it came to understanding the complex dynamics of the European Parliament, the intermingling policy decision-making process of all the EU institutions, and the raw politics which knits it all together.

To work in the so-called Brussels bubble, one has no choice but to become immersed in it all, to understand how the wheels of the EU turn. So, admittedly, somewhat smugly, I couldn't but guffaw at the lack of a basic understanding of how the EU works as I listened to some of the interviewers, commentators, and candidates. Even during the fallout of the election, the brickbats were flying, full of misnomers when it comes to an appreciation about the workings of the EU. One of the complaints about the recent election was the sheer number of candidates in each constituency, which included complete no-hopers. Credit to them for putting their name on the ballot paper. But if we are to look at raising the bar to make it onto the ballot paper, maybe a basic theory-test entrance exam on candidates' knowledge of the EU might be one way of shortening the list.

### DEROGATION DEBATE

One issue which cropped up was the Nitrates Derogation. It is a very sensitive topic that is causing a lot of angst among dairy farmers. The big worry relates to what will happen at the end of 2025 when the EU Commission will revisit Ireland's situation and decide whether to grant another derogation. Currently, it is hanging by a thread. Derogations to the Nitrates Directive are granted to applicant countries who can demonstrate that the derogation will not impact negatively on water quality.

Over the past three decades, Ireland has managed to do just that, but that is becoming increasingly difficult as the EU becomes more focussed on meeting stricter climate, biodiversity and water-quality-protection targets. The directorate general in the EU Commission which holds the file on nitrates is DG Envi or the Commissioner for the Environment. They refer to the Environmental Protection Agency reports for guidance on whether Ireland is meeting its commitment on water quality. To put it bluntly, they are not interested in any other measure of the success of the Irish dairy sector apart from water quality and environmental impact. Economic and social impacts are not on their radar. And, once a derogation is granted, Ireland must secure the support of the other 26 Member States. It has nothing to do with the European Parliament. MEPs have little or no say in the matter although they might try to put in a good word for us. So, I wondered why it came up so much during the pre-election debates. If anything, it is farmers on the ground, their co-ops and their advisors that have more influence in securing an extension to the derogation by continuing with their hard work in mitigating against water quality loss which in turn will hopefully be reflected in EPA water quality reports over the next 18 months. There is a whole-of-sector approach to improving water quality. Every co-op in the country is operating incentive schemes with farmers to protect water quality and that is why the most recent EPA report on water was so frustrating in that the hard work on farms is not yet showing in the results. That work must continue. But farmers and other stakeholders need to know, there is little our MEPs can do about it. It is all about convincing the EU Commissioner for the Environment, and doing so with evidence.



Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon pictured at the Teagasc Beef 2024 open day in Grange with Edward O Riordan, Teagasc; Alan Kelly, UCD; and Paul Smith, Teagasc.

## MINISTER LAUNCHES ISA 'BREEDER'S CHOICE' CLASS

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue launched the Irish Shows Association's (ISA) 2024 'Breeder's Choice' class at the Teagasc Beef 2024 open day in Grange, Co. Meath. The prize fund for the class is €50,000 and is part of a five-year investment of €250,000 in the Irish agricultural showing scene by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This class, administered by ISA, is aimed at showcasing the best of beef breeding heifers. It is open to four- and five-star breeding heifers in two separate classes – traditional breeds and continental breeds. Pedigree as well as commercial heifers are eligible for the classes. Over the course of the summer, more than 60 shows will benefit from this class.

The requirement for four and five star in-calf or maiden heifers aligns to the aims of the Suckler Carbon Efficiency Programme (SCBP) to increase the number of these heifers in the suckler herd. Four- and five-star animals in the suckler herd can bring greater milk as well as overall efficiency to beef animals.

Minister McConalogue said: "It is appropriate that the launch takes place at Beef 2024 open day which has the theme of 'Securing your Future' and where we have high-performing suckler herds on display for all to see. These are surrounded by the latest technologies to assist farmers to play their part in addressing the environmental challenges of water quality, climate mitigation and biodiversity.

"The Breeders Choice also links to the National Genotyping Programme which I launched last year. This is a collaborative initiative between government, industry and farmers enabling Ireland to take the first step in achieving a fully genotyped national herd and places us firmly at the forefront when it comes to national sustainability efforts."





The international TotY jury, composed of 25 journalists from 25 countries - including *Irish Farmers Monthly's* Noel Dunne (front row, far right).

## THE BATTLE BEGINS FOR TOTY 2025

The 2025 Tractor of the Year (TotY) competition has officially kicked off as an international jury comprised of 25 journalists from 25 countries convened in Milan recently to review this year's hot contenders. Seventeen of the world's leading tractor manufacturers are competing with a total of 21 tractors across various TotY categories, showcasing their latest innovations

and technological advancements.

The TotY 2025 winners will be revealed on November 6, 2024, during the opening day of EIMA International. Attendees will witness the technological marvels of the finalist tractors in the outdoor area, with two daily parades featuring detailed descriptions by an expert speaker. The categories and contenders are as follows:

### TOTY HIGHPOWER

Dedicated to high-power tractors with more than 300 horsepower, this category features formidable contenders:

- ▶ JCB 8830 iCON
- ▶ New Holland T7.340 HD
- ▶ Massey Ferguson 9S.425
- ▶ Case IH Quadtrac 715 ASF Connect
- ▶ Valtra S416

### TOTY MIDPOWER

For tractors with power ranging between 150-280 horsepower, the competition is fierce:

- ▶ Claas Arion 660
- ▶ Case IH Puma ASF Connect CVXDrive
- ▶ McCormick X7624 VT-Drive
- ▶ Valtra N175 Direct
- ▶ Fendt 620 Vario

### TOTY UTILITY

This category is for multi-purpose tractors with power between 70-150 horsepower and maximum operating weight of 9,000kg. Finalists are:

- ▶ Massey Ferguson
- ▶ Steyr 4120 Plus
- ▶ Lindner 70 LDrive
- ▶ Hattat T4125
- ▶ Fendt e107 Vario
- ▶ Tafe 7515

### TOTY SPECIALIZED

This is focused on tractors over 40 horsepower for orchards, vineyards, hills and mountains. The following tractors are competing for the award:

- ▶ Yanmar YT359
- ▶ Antonio Carraro Tony 8900 TRG
- ▶ Keestrac/Rigitrac B1e/SKE 40
- ▶ Landini Trekker 4
- ▶ Ferrari E-Astral

### TOTYBOT

A new addition this year, the TotYBot category focuses on robotic tractors without cabins, equipped with three-point hitch, PTO, or electric power transfer to implements. These tractors must be available in the European Market and have a minimum Technical Readiness Level (TRL) of 8. Candidates will undergo a different evaluation process, contenders for this new TotY category will be:

- ▶ Agxeed 5.115T2
- ▶ Autoagri ICS 20
- ▶ Field Robotics Hammerhead
- ▶ Black Shire RC 3075

### TOTY SUSTAINABLE

By the end of July, the jury will select up to five finalists from all the presented tractors. This category evaluates environmental impact, including emissions and on-board technology that enhances operational efficiency, active and passive safety, and fuel consumption reduction.



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## BEAUTIES AND A BEAST



A fine, pure-bred Simental bull, bred by Philip Shore in Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny, now living his best life on Tom Bruton's farm in Summerhill, Co. Meath. Photo courtesy of Tom Bruton.

## TEAGASC FORESTRY OPEN DAY

Teagasc, Oak Park, in Carlow hosts a forestry open in July providing opportunity for exploration and learning on all aspects of forestry. In setting the scene for this important upcoming event, forestry advisor, Frances McHugh, explains that it will highlight the broad range of applied forestry research that is ongoing and how this collaborative work integrates with and supports Teagasc forestry advisory, training and education programmes. There will be demonstrations of a wide range of collaborative forestry research themes in the beautiful woodlands of the Teagasc Oak Park Research Centre. Teagasc forestry research staff will be on hand to showcase ongoing work on tree improvement, breeding for disease tolerance, broadleaf and conifer forest management, increasing resilience of our forests to climate change, forest carbon, agroforestry and socioeconomic factors influencing forestry uptake. Attendees can engage with Teagasc's forestry advisory and education staff who will be available on the day to address any forestry queries to do with new forestry creation options, forest management topics, chainsaw safety or indeed forestry training and education options. The open day takes place on July 4.



## Time to Stock Take

Maeve Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

In recent weeks, slow growth has been the common factor noted across the regions, with much of the focus devoted to balancing grass availability and maintaining quality.

Where grass growth is slow, wasting grass must be avoided. Residuals of 3.5-4cm must be achieved in order to create high-quality covers for the next rotation when growth rates will hopefully rectify themselves. Grass walks should be undertaken at least once weekly but ideally twice weekly where grass is tight.

Milk output must also be monitored; average milk yield decline should be no greater than 2.5% per week at this point in the lactation.

Where volume or solids are falling quicker than this, quality and quantity of grass needs to be revised. Where quality is low, or silage is reintroduced into the diet, ensure the cows' energy requirements are being met accordingly. Increased supplementation may be required.

Reduced energy density in the diet will result in decreased milk protein % and reduced milk output. Once growth has increased and quality has been rectified (with breeding also concluding), feeding rates can be reduced.

Looking ahead to the winter, now is a good time to assess how much fodder is on farm with first cuts completed, while some early 2nd cuts and surplus bales have been taken.

With forage stocks depleted due to the late spring, it's important to plan for the forthcoming winter while noting how much subsequent forage remains unharvested.

At this point, 2024 Spring-born calves should have smoothly transitioned to grazing.

Weighing scales remain one of the most underutilised management tools on farm and should be used to gauge where we are at regarding target weights ~ 200kg by mid-September (33% of mature cow weight) or 0.7-0.8kg/hd/day.

Parasite burdens can also have a huge impact on youngstock performance over the 1st grazing season and should be discussed on a herd-by-herd basis with your veterinary practitioner.

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



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# AGRICULTURAL VEHICLE SAFETY ON THE ROAD

CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, URGES ALL OPERATORS OF AGRICULTURAL VEHICLES TO MAINTAIN SAFE SPEEDS AND ENSURE PROPER LIGHTING WHEN TRAVELING ON PUBLIC ROADS



**Ensuring safety on the road is a critical responsibility for farmers and agricultural contractors.** Agricultural vehicle accidents are often the result of several key factors:

- ▶ Excessive speed – driving too fast for conditions;
- ▶ Inexperienced operators – lack of adequate training and experience;
- ▶ Distraction and fatigue – reduced attention and alertness;
- ▶ Poor visibility and lighting – inadequate visibility and insufficient vehicle lighting;
- ▶ Overloading – trailers carrying excessive or oversized loads; and
- ▶ Mechanical issues – poor vehicle condition and maintenance.

Preventing these accidents involves maintaining a safe speed, ensuring vehicle compliance with regulations and safety standards, and keeping the vehicle in good mechanical condition. Operators must be competent, free from distractions and well rested. Using hand-held mobile phones while driving is illegal and dangerous as it significantly increases the risk of accidents.

## VIGILANCE AROUND RECREATIONAL USERS

Operators of large tractors, trailers and machinery must exercise extra caution, especially on narrow country roads. We would also encourage pedestrians and cyclists to wear high-visibility vests, use the correct side of the road, travel in single file, and stay alert for approaching vehicles.

## VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

Regular maintenance of agricultural vehicles and implements is crucial for safety. Key areas

to check include:

- ▶ Lights and indicators – ensure all lights and indicators are functioning properly;
- ▶ Brakes and tyres – check for effective braking systems and well-maintained tyres;
- ▶ Windows, mirrors and wipers – keep them clean for maximum visibility and maintain the wipers in good working order; and
- ▶ Steering and hydraulics – regularly inspect and maintain these systems.

## IMPORTANCE OF PROPER LIGHTING

Using agricultural vehicles with inadequate lighting poses significant safety risks. Rear-end collisions often occur due to misjudging speed differences and side-impact collisions can happen during wide turns. Ensure vehicles are equipped with full lighting systems, including side lamps, headlamps, rear lamps, stop lamps, direction indicators, amber beacons and number plate lighting.

## SECURING LOADS

Overloading trailers can lead to instability and inadequate braking distances. Regulations specify maximum weight loads, vehicle lengths, and widths for public roads. Farmers and contractors should familiarise themselves with these standards; guidance is available on the Road Safety Authority website. Oversized loads, particularly on narrow, winding roads, must be driven with extra caution. A warning vehicle should precede large machinery like combines to alert oncoming traffic. Ensure all loads are well-secured to prevent materials from falling or spilling onto the road.

## USE OF SIGNAGE

Strategically placed warning signs can significantly reduce accident risks. During harvest time, place signs along roadways and at farm/field entrances, especially concealed ones, to alert passing traffic about large machinery using the roadway.

## ROAD CLEAN-UP

The Roads Act 1993 mandates keeping public roads clear of hazardous materials. Agricultural machinery operators must try to maintain roads in a clean manner, washing down vehicle tyres when necessary to prevent mud and stones from being carried onto public roads.

## SUMMARY

Remember, always drive at a safe speed and be considerate of other road users. Proper vehicle maintenance, appropriate lighting, secure loads, and vigilance can prevent many accidents. By following these guidelines, farmers and agricultural contractors can significantly improve road safety for everyone

Scan here for more information:





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**MUCH OF THE PUBLIC DEBATE  
IN IRELAND ON GLOBAL FOOD  
CHALLENGES IGNORES INDUSTRY  
COMPETENCE AND EXPERTISE IN  
FAVOUR OF LOCAL OBSESSIONS  
AND PREJUDICES**



Ciaran Fitzgerald  
Agri-food economist

# FIRST, KILL ALL THE COWS!

**The simplistic ‘kill all the cows’ outlook  
is neither helpful nor grounded in  
reality, writes Ciaran Fitzgerald**

It's difficult, verging on farcical at times, to witness how small-island-minded and self absorbed the public narrative around climate challenges and environmental impacts has become in Ireland.

Reducing cow numbers – culling, killing – whatever you want to call it, seems to be the solution put forward by various organisations and agencies. Whether it relates to meeting Ireland's overall carbon-emissions reduction target or delivering on the Nitrates Directive.

The clarion call to cull cattle has become so encompassing, in terms of solving the ailments of the country that, at this rate, it may well become a solution to the delays and price escalations of the new children's hospital. And why stop there? What about the failure since the mid-1950s to build a metro link between Dublin Airport and the city centre (despite spending €300m on consultants before any digging or tunnelling has taken place)? Reducing cattle numbers will surely sort that out. Right?

## Food security

In the ‘real’ world the need to balance climate impacts with the equal imperative of meeting increasing global

food demand is very much a key focus. Indeed, the Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), adopted at the Conference of Parties (COP) 21 in 2015, specifically ‘recognises the fundamental priority of safeguarding food security’ and commits its members (including Ireland) to resolving to ‘foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production’.

Moreover, and more recently, as an input to the recent COP 28 in December 2023, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), submitted a detailed and comprehensive report focussed on balancing the challenge of decarbonisation with the equal challenge of feeding a growing global population. The FAO report emphasised ‘improving animal health, adopting better breeding practices, and reducing food loss and waste while also focussing on emissions reduction’.

This contrasts greatly with the public narrative in Ireland – the food island – where the general theme revolves around culling cows.

## Reality check

There is an entirely pragmatic basis for promoting this more balanced and constructive approach, in my view. It is most likely driven by the fact that, as per figure 1, while livestock emissions in the EU, US and



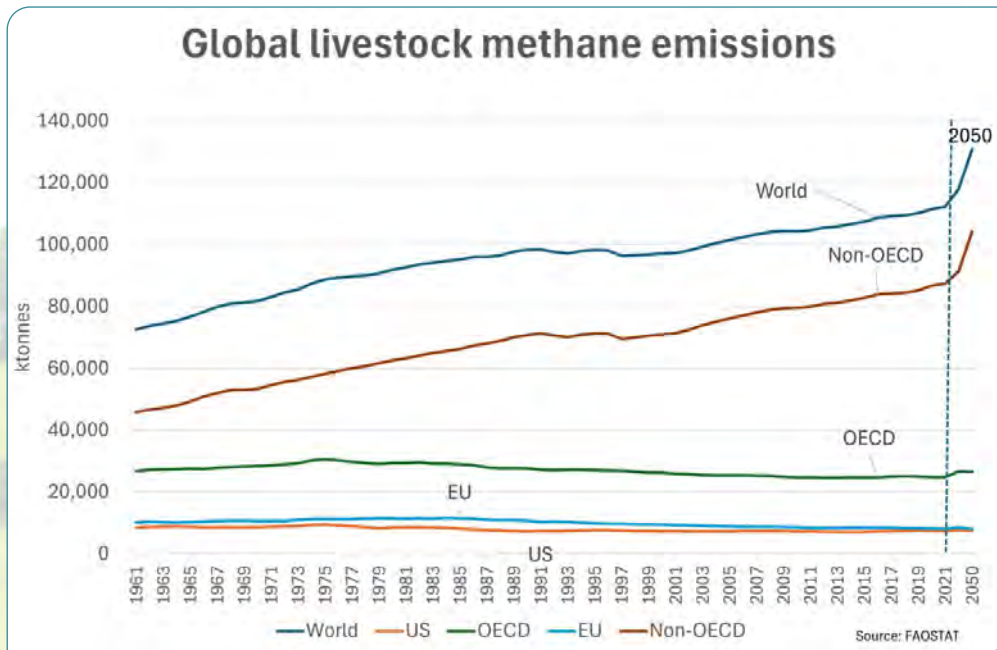


Figure 1: Livestock emissions in the EU, US and other OECD countries are in decline.

other OECD 'regulated' countries are in decline, livestock emissions from 'non-regulated' regions are increasing. This reflects the reality that increasing global demand for meat and dairy will be met by unregulated regions. This is a lose-lose for global climate impacts, especially if the blind obsession with constraining output in Ireland and the EU continues.

What the Paris Agreement has not done, nor the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), nor any of the 28 COP iterations, is to declare dairy and meats as non-sustainable foods. They have also not suggested that plant-based foods are the only sustainable future food types. But you would be forgiven – in Ireland anyway – for thinking that the opposite is true.

But this does not reflect the balanced approach to climate challenges as set out in global agreements, nor does it stand up against nutritional science and dietary experts.

### A sustainable model

Ninety per cent of our dairy and meat production is exported to 120 countries, globally. And there are many thousands of Irish people in Irish companies who, every day, engage with customers, worldwide and respond to evolving global demand for sustainable food. Their real-world competence and

expertise are dismissed as 'industry prejudice' in this very shrill, tribal, binary diktat on food, agriculture, climate and environment.

In essence, much of the public debate in Ireland on global food challenges ignores industry competence and expertise in favour of local obsessions and prejudices. The full picture in terms of the critical balance between global food and global decarbonisation imperatives is dismissed or excluded while the proven realities of carbon leakage impacts are also dismissed.

And yet the people of Ireland are very aware of challenging debates in countries like Germany over the need to decarbonise that economy while sustaining a core car industry that still produces internal-combustion-engine cars, or the continuing importance of coal mining in Poland for its economy, energy security and employment, for instance. It is about time, in my view, that the broader trade-off debates, and the embedded, very real, 'practitioner' competence in meeting global customer requirements, are properly included in the national debate in a balanced, constructive manner. Realistic, constructive debate must replace the incestuous, small-island agenda that has demonised livestock farming through weaponising emissions-accounting protocols and has completely ignored the need for balance and global perspective.





# TB ON THE RISE

**THE NUMBER OF HERDS LOCKED UP DUE TO TUBERCULOSIS (TB) HAS INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS. MATT O'KEEFFE SPOKE TO TJ MAHER, CHAIR OF THE IRISH FARMERS' ASSOCIATION'S (IFA'S) ANIMAL HEALTH COMMITTEE ABOUT THE SITUATION**

According to the most recent figures from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the total number of reactors removed in the last 12 months to the end of quarter one of 2024 has risen to 30,332 from 23,977. This is a herd-incidence of five per cent, up from 4.4 per cent during the same period.

The scale of the problem is extremely concerning, said TJ, with this incidence level not seen for 15 years. And he was critical of the DAFM's response so far. "Unfortunately, there have been many outbreaks in south Leinster, and we have been very frustrated by the failure of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to deal adequately with the situation. Over the last two years, there has been an exceptionally

large number of outbreaks. Wicklow has, historically, been one of the worst counties in the country and now we have other areas with big disease breakdowns. The spread into intensive dairy areas has been alarming. We are extremely disappointed, to put it mildly, at the lack of progress that's been made in arresting the spread of TB. We raised the issue at meetings in early June with the secretary general of the DAFM, Brendan Gleeson, and senior veterinary inspector, Martin Blake." TJ said it is the IFA's view that the DAFM has failed to take seriously the need to further invest in the management and control of the wildlife programme and also in the proper support structures that were agreed with the DAFM last year for farmers who have been impacted by the disease.

## **SUBSTANTIAL BREAKDOWNS**

Delving a little deeper into a recent TB surge, TJ highlights the case of north Kilkenny, and why vaccination alone is not an effective way to manage it. "Historically it was a very good region, with one of the first badger-vaccination programmes. Substantial breakdowns have taken place, however, and this has been repeated in other parts of the country where vaccination has been the primary method of wildlife management. It's our view that we now need to reassess that approach. Badger-population management is as crucial as a vaccination programme. It appears that when the vaccination programme has been operated on its own, the badger population has increased exponentially, and when disease gets into that population it spreads quite quickly and is transferred into the cattle population. The biggest difficulty is when the disease gets into bigger herds, mainly dairy herds, it is very difficult eliminate it."





### HIT-AND-MISS VACCINE

Asked if badger vaccination is a hit-and-miss response, TJ said that while it can be effective, studies suggest that it is not an adequate response. "Again, looking at Kilkenny as a region, we have had exponential TB growth there in the last two years, despite very good vaccination programmes being in place, and previously low levels of disease. The reality is, historically, when we have failed to control the overall numbers of the badger population, we have failed to control the spread of disease everywhere. And this is an issue that obviously relates to other wildlife sources, because in Wicklow, north Wexford, east Kildare and south county Dublin, where there are huge numbers of deer, there has been clear evidence of spread between deer and livestock. The management of that population is equally critical. We are happy that the Deer Stakeholder Forum has started focussing people's minds on an agreed policy, but we still haven't seen enough deer removed.

## BADGER-POPULATION MANAGEMENT IS AS CRUCIAL AS A VACCINATION PROGRAMME

There's an acknowledgement that there's an overpopulation of deer in certain areas. Population density is the key management tool across all secondary hosts. If you're a beef or dairy or suckler farmer and you have your stock removed for disease control, all the wildlife that are carrying the disease are left around. That is extremely frustrating." Despite a great improvement in on-farm biosecurity measures, farms are not immune to the spread of TB when it involves wildlife. "Irish livestock breeding farms have dramatically improved biosecurity measures over the last decade," said TJ. "There's the use of vaccination programmes and effective disinfection and cleaning techniques. The management of young stock has improved dramatically. However, the badger has proved extremely adept at integrating into modern farming methods. A simple example of this involves electric fences now being set back from perimeters and from the boundaries of water courses. Unfortunately, this provides perfect habitats in which badgers can establish their dens in a secure location and from where they can visit farmyards where food sources such as maize, beet or loose meal, especially in wintertime, are available. Also, rotationally grazed animals are only in the field once every three weeks, which leaves badgers with plenty of time to establish and increase their populations in those environments. Farmers have an important role in assisting the DAFM in managing the badger population. We need to know where badgers have setts on the farm and identify these to DAFM officials. In addition, we must ensure there is no access by livestock to sett entrances or badger-cleaning areas, close to setts."

From a farmer's perspective, it's critical that there are far more boots on the ground, but there is a problem with this, explains TJ. "Our major difficulty with the DAFM is that we entered into a financial agreement 12 months ago relating to increased support for farmers, increased investment in the programme by farmers through higher levies, and increased investment in the wildlife programme. While there is some additional investment, it was supposed to go from €3m to €9m. The reality is we are still short of agricultural officers on

the ground, and we are still short of farm-relief operatives in the required areas to engage in badger TB testing and control. We now have a situation where the financial improvements that we negotiated for farmers who were unlucky enough to go down with the disease are not being paid promptly. They're due quite a lot of money, and the system the DAFM has operated, provides very little clarity for the farmers of the actual sums that have been transferred to them or any amounts that are outstanding to them."

### INCREASED RESTRICTIONS

TJ does not agree that further herd movement and trading restrictions should be introduced: "The evidence to support increased restrictions on farmers is not strong enough. We have negotiated a reassessment of the testing protocol around contiguous herds with the DAFM. Herds that would have had two animals failing a test, no longer prompt a contiguous programme around that area. The threshold is now three infected animals. I recommend people be vigilant with the animals they are purchasing, and we have a change in regulation on the purchase and sale of breeding stock. The EU animal health law, introduced last year, requires breeding animals or males over 30 months of age to have at least a six-month pre-movement test or have a post-movement test done. "And if we remember that 75 per cent of all reactors are in our breeding stock, it is crucial that if a farmer is investing a large sum of money on purchasing good quality breeding stock, he ensures that the relevant TB test is as close to the purchase date as possible. That's good risk management. On the wider scale of increased restrictions of animal movements, the testing done on breeding cows over the last six months hasn't indicated that the spread of disease can be immediately captured by increased testing, and we do an awful lot of testing in Ireland. We do over nine and a half million tests for a population of six million cattle with testing ongoing for the past 60 years. We have better quality testing than ever, yet TB incidence has risen from two per cent to five per cent. More testing is not the solution."





# UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

**IRELAND'S EQUINE INDUSTRY IS UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT CURRENTLY FOR BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REASONS. DENIS DUGGAN, CEO OF HORSE SPORT IRELAND (HSI), ADDRESSES THE CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY AND HIGHLIGHTS THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT ALSO EXIST**

**The recent RTÉ Investigates exposé into horse-welfare issues and traceability in the food chain has garnered widespread condemnation; while the upcoming Olympics Games in Paris will celebrate Ireland's leading position within the horse sport arena.**

Denis is keen to address the former issue: "The single biggest challenge for the industry as a whole right now is our social license, which has been compounded by the recent RTÉ investigation. First and foremost, I want to state that we unequivocally condemn the practices that were witnessed – it was absolutely abhorrent – and I want to compliment the investigation and the work Conor Ryan and his team did at RTÉ. We are very aware that horses hold a special place in the collective heart of the Irish people – there is a love and fascination of horses in Ireland. When I witnessed the abuse evident in this programme, both from a welfare and a traceability point of view, I was shocked: it has

absolutely no place in the industry or sport. The activity we saw here was illegal," he said. "Social license is the tacit support and acceptance an industry receives from society as a whole. In Horse Sport Ireland, we are very conscious of the impact that loss of that social license to operate could potentially have on our sport and industry. At an international level, the International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI) commissioned an Ethics and Welfare report in 2023 and in the last month the FEI announced that it was putting over €1m into supporting an action plan on ethics and welfare within the equine sports industry. This is key as there is an existential threat here – it is suggested that some sports could potentially be removed from the Olympics in Los Angeles (2028) or Brisbane (2032) and it would be catastrophic if this happened to the equine sector. That would be a huge economic threat to breeders and producers here, and to 'Ireland Inc.' The equine sports industry contributes over a

€1.5bn to the Irish economy and employs over 20,000 people. So, we need to tackle this challenge at a national, European, and global level."

## **SUSTAINABLE EFFORTS**

The second big challenge currently facing the equine industry, Denis says, is one that every sector is tackling: climate action. "Sustainability and climate change are two areas that every industry needs to address. I was very aware of this coming into my role here, having been with Macra previously. This was a huge topic for us at Macra and I was surprised two years ago that it wasn't being spoken about more in equine at the time. But it is a priority. The horse is very economical with grassland as well, so we have a very positive environmental and climate story to tell. Horse Sport Ireland has worked with the British Equestrian Federation and environmental specialists, White Griffin, to undertake a research project into the risks, challenges and opportunities of environmental sustainability in equestrianism, equine breeding, and equine sport, and we launched this research last year at the RDS Dublin Horse Show. This has created a baseline





Pictured at the launch of the Horse Sport Ireland Studbook Series at Karlswood in Meath, home of Irish Olympian Cian O'Connor is: Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue (centre) with breeding director of Irish Warmblood Studbook of Ireland, Tom Reid; Horse Sport Ireland head of breeding innovation and development, Sonja Egan; Aga Khan-winning rider and Irish Olympian, Cian O'Connor; and Horse Sport Ireland CEO, Denis Duggan. Photo: David Fitzgerald/Sportsfile



Denis Duggan, CEO, Horse Sport Ireland, with Irish sport horse, Danos Lola, during the Studbook Series Launch 2022 at the National Horse Sport Arena. Photo: Stephen McCarthy/Sportsfile.

regarding where the industry is at from an environmental perspective. Riding centres and training yards are actually making strides on daily basis, be it across biodiversity measures or water or grassland management, which is great to see. Over the course of the summer of 2022, we organised a number of equine farm walks where the topics of grassland management and sustainability were to the fore.

And we have some great stories to tell across our sustainability efforts, from rainwater harvesting at a Tipperary Equine Centre to the fantastic sustainability measures that Festina Lente are undertaking in terms of their programmes at their therapeutic riding centre."

### CHALLENGE TO OPPORTUNITY

These challenges outlined above by Denis also present huge opportunities, he says: "If we tackle these challenges then we will tap into a lot of opportunity and success for the industry. And, if we look at our British counterparts for example, our sector is much more embedded with the agriculture sector, which brings a lot of benefits. For example, access to funding through the Department of

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has been key. The inclusion last year of equine measures within the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) scheme was a great win. This is not available in Northern Ireland or the UK. We were very strong in our lobbying here; and we worked with Ifac on quantifying scale of demand in order to publish a report called *The Business of Breeding 2022*, which was influential as regards identifying the business need. It was the result of a collective action of all stakeholders, and we are very grateful to the DAFM for the funding. Another significant piece of funding – particularly for rare breeds such as the Connemara pony and the Irish Draught horse – is that those who are eligible to apply for Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) can now apply for an additional top-up payment for that rare breed if registered in the relevant stud book."

### OLYMPIC HOPES

With the Olympic Games around the corner, Denis is looking forward to attending in his capacity as CEO of HSI: "This will be my first Olympics in this role – the last time I attended the Olympics was in Sydney in 2000 as a spectator. We are absolutely fortunate to be living through a golden era of equestrian sport. In the last two to three years we have climbed the world ranking in show jumping and we are now world number one. From a team momentum perspective this is a great place to be. Our athletes compete with athletes of other nations all over the world regularly – that has been a part of Michael Blake's approach (the Chef d'Equipe for

Ireland) – and so we are strong, and we are used to winning. Not being on that podium has become a rarity. We are fortunate that we qualified in both eventing and jumping on our first opportunity at the FEI World Championships in 2022 so that has been great in terms of planning and investing for Paris. We have teams qualified in showjumping and eventing and one individual athlete qualified in dressage. We will be announcing our nominated para-equestrian athletes in the coming weeks who will compete in the Paralympics in September. And, we have four Irish-bred horses in the teams as well (two Irish Sport Horses in the jumping team – James Kann Cruise and Pacino Amiro – and one Irish Sport Horse, and one other Irish-bred horse in the eventing team – Action Lady M and Colorado Blue respectively), which is fantastic from an Irish breeding point of view."

### NEW ONLINE PASSPORTS

Denis said that he is excited to see a new online passport system launch in early July. "We have undertaken a huge transformation project to modernise our IT system for processing passports online which will be a big benefit to the industry. Not only will it help towards improving security, which is crucial in light of the RTÉ investigation, but it will also make it more efficient for those breeders applying. We are in the final stages of testing, and it will be up and running for a soft launch in the coming weeks. We hope to see a turnaround of processing happen between 20-40 days (as opposed to eight to 10 weeks); however the postal system will still exist for those who want to use it."





# A FLEXIBLE FUTURE

DR KIERAN MEADE AND DR FIONA LALOR, DIRECTORS OF THE ONLINE MSc PROGRAMMES IN ANIMAL SCIENCE AND FOOD NUTRITION AND HEALTH, RESPECTIVELY, AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN (UCD), DISCUSS THE RISING INTEREST IN POSTGRADUATE E-LEARNING EVIDENT IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCE



Dr Kieran Meade, UCD.



Dr Fiona Lalor, UCD.

**There is a lot to be said in favour of an on-campus college experience.** University facilities, experiential learning, and the human connection with peers and educators are major benefits. We all know too well how long periods of isolation can dampen our enthusiasm, limit our social development and impact negatively on our mental health. It is for these reasons that UCD promotes an on-campus experience for undergraduate students.

## POST-COVID

However, the Covid-19 experience has led many people to re-evaluate their priorities and for postgraduate education, in particular, there are valid reasons underpinning the increasing interest in online or e-learning courses<sup>1</sup>. Combined with the cost-of-living and accommodation crises in cities, including Dublin, e-learning courses offer an important release valve for a significant proportion of people who don't want to, or can't, join the daily commute.

Covid-19 forced many educators to transition to online course delivery overnight, and the last couple of years has seen a return, in large part, to in-person teaching. Studies are now capturing the lessons learned from this experience and identifying ways in which

in-person teaching can be augmented or replaced with hybrid and online offerings going forward. Maximising the potential impact of online learning in an appropriate way is a key priority, making best use of the skills that were gained during the pandemic so that these skills are not lost, and the proficiency required to teach online is capitalised upon.

## FLEXIBILITY

Of course, challenges remain. Specifically, maintaining motivation without peer support can result in increased dropout rates. However, with creativity, solutions are available including tools to promote online engagement and peer support. In addition, rather than a focus on the delivery of course materials as in a traditional lecture, content can be made available in recorded formats online and tutorials and asynchronous discussion threads used to promote student engagement with lecturing staff. Furthermore, online courses inevitably increase the diversity of students enrolled, thereby enriching everyone's learning.

In addition, it is hard to put a price on the flexibility of remote learning when one is based outside the centre of learning, where transport connections are limited and where mobility issues or family obligations preclude relocation to the campus, in either a temporary or permanent manner. In agriculture, many students currently enrolled are in employment and often on-farm, a lifestyle which is particularly suited to flexible e-learning.

## DIGITAL TOOLS

In 2022, the European Commission launched the European Digital Education Hub to enable

educators to harness the potential of new digital technologies. Supporting teaching and learning in a digital world is also a key strategic priority of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2019). Despite a steep learning curve for us in response to the pandemic, all indications are that online learning is here to stay. There will always be benefits to the in-person college experience but for postgraduate students, the reduced cost, efficiency and flexibility of remote learning may be just the route to career development and future success. UCD ranks within the top one per cent of higher education institutions worldwide and is a leader in the provision of online teaching options. Many online modules are now also available as short, industry-aligned and accredited courses known as micro-credentials – for details see the UCD website. Students enrolling on these courses may also avail of the Learner Fee Subsidy Scheme to reduce course costs. UCD qualifications are recognised both nationally and internationally. In addition, UCD makes no distinction between a qualification delivered on campus or through e-learning. Every UCD course is subject to the same quality assurance procedures regardless of the mode of delivery. Within the School of Agriculture and Food Science, UCD (ranked 24th in the world) online postgraduate courses are available in Food Science as well as a new MSc, Diploma and Certificate options in Animal Science. The future is bright, the future is e-learning.

<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum (2022). [www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/online-learning-courses-reskill-skills-gap/](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/online-learning-courses-reskill-skills-gap/)



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# FIVE DECADES OF MEMORIES

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Dr Joe Mannion and Jim Phelan, University College Dublin, and Jim Cully, Animal Health Specialist, ACOT, report on the results of the ACOT/UCD calf mortality survey.

## Survey Shows Calf Mortality at Over Six Per Cent

**Countrywide**  
The study, jointly reported by ACOT and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, examined 2,400 farms from 25 counties. Fully detailed participation in the ACOT's Calf Mortality Survey came from 1,500 farms, with 1,000 farms providing detailed data on calf deaths and sicknesses on three farms from November 1983 and the end of April 1986.  
Every effort was made to ensure that all losses on study farms were accurately recorded. Record-keeping, as completed by students for much of the six months of the study period were checked by



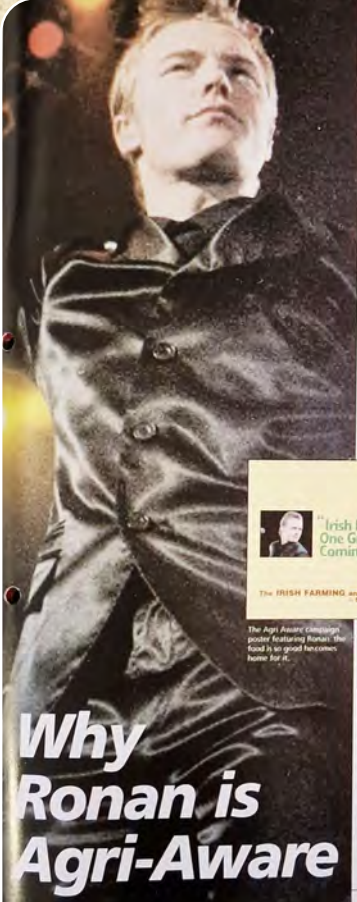
IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY  
FEBRUARY 1988 Price 75p (incl. Tax)  
15th Anniversary Issue 1975-1990  
Calf Rearing  
Farming in Switzerland  
Borrowing  
New Horse Committee  
Winners + Losers - 1989 Reviewed

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY  
OCTOBER 1994 Price 95p (incl. Tax)  
DAN BROWNE  
Preview of New Machines at "Ploughing"  
TOUGH TIMES AHEAD FOR MEAT INDUSTRY

Farming Outlook '88  
Back To Harsh Reality After One Good Year  
1987 Prices Up

▲ A selection of adverts, articles and covers from down through the years.





“You can't beat a good steak” said Ronan Keating in this piece from 1999. He may have been an unlikely ambassador for farming and food but at that time he was a worldwide star following his Boyzone success, and was embarking on a solo career. The steak quote may well have earned him a few new fans in the farming community!

Ronan Keating may be a city boy, but he knows how important Irish agriculture is to the economy. The food's great too, so much so that he comes home just for it. Irish farmers and the food industry are a success story to be proud as he told Farm Home.

“I love different types of food and I am lucky because to eat in many great restaurants all over the world,” Ronan explained. “Coming home to traditional Irish food is the best though. It is what I was raised on and you can't beat that.”

“I have simple needs,” he admits, relishing the quality meat, fresh vegetables and superior preparation which believes typifies Irish food. “You can't beat a good steak.”

**Promoting Irish Food**

Ronan has recently agreed to lend his support to the new Awareness Trust campaign to promote Irish food and to highlight the very important role that the food industry plays in the economy.

“I believe that Irish cuisine has come a long way,” he says. Emphatically disagreeing with the common enough notion that Irish food is plain, Ronan insists that Ireland has many indigenous dishes which, when prepared correctly, can compete on an equal footing with the rest of the world. “Everyone has different taste buds and it would not be fair to say that one country's cuisine is better than another's.” Having said that, “I love Irish food and I think the quality is excellent in comparison to other countries.”

**The urban-rural divide**

Ronan may have had a Dublin upbringing, but his father grew up on a farm in County Antrim, so from a childhood holiday there. He keeps horses at his Kildare home, and insists that he will always call Ireland home even if his solo career takes off in the United States, his most pious export to do so. “I love Irish food and I think the quality is excellent in comparison to other countries.”

It is his ability to appeal to both rural and urban people that makes him such a valuable ambassador.



**Irish Food... One Great Reason for Coming Home**

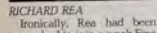
The Agri-Aware campaign promoter features Ronan Keating as a good ambassador for Irish food.

# Why Ronan is Agri-Aware

**Seen & Heard**

## Rea Fails To Get Fine Gael Nomination

AGRICULTURAL consultant Richard Rea lost out in the political in-fighting in Laois/O'flaherty Fine Gael when he was challenged for a nomination there. Rea, who is a substitute Fine Gael MEP in Munster, was regarded as a potentially strong candidate in Laois/O'flaherty and some consider that it was this strength which was his undoing as Fine Gaels looked to their seats.



**RICHARD REA**  
Ironically, Rea had been approached to join a weak Fine Gael ticket in Tipperary South, his former political base, but had turned it down in favour of a tilt at Laois/O'flaherty. Any election clashes with Brother Joe of the IFA are thus avoided. And Cathy O'flaherty of the Progressive Democrats, who can be expected to draw much the same type of support as Richard Rea was expected to gather, has a better chance of a seat in Laois/O'flaherty.

## No Guarantees

WITH Ballibeoro Co-op under intense pressure from Lough Egan, its bankers and Tir Lathghain (in that order) it is no wonder that its suppliers are feeling anxious. At a recent advisory meeting Ballibeoro receiver Michael Kelly was asked if he could fully guarantee payment for milk delivered. With an honesty which must be rare among accountants, Kelly replied: “I can't guarantee anything — I only have a half share in a house”.

# The Fine Gael Death Wish

The ham-fisted way in which John Bruton's Budget proposals were presented caused the spotlight was on cuts, road or otherwise, in the agriculture budget. Certainly there was an overall cut in the agriculture estimate but Bruton opted to emphasise the worst features.

His document *Principal Features of 1987 Budget Proposals* deals with the research and advisory services as follows. ACOT/AFT: reduce level of services. Savings to the value of £4 million are to be achieved over the two bodies in 1987 through economies including the introduction of increases of charges for services. Total saving - £4 million in 1987.

Not surprisingly the media and the public took him at his word and the cut representing over 10 per cent of the State grant to ACOT/AFT was fully lamented. The Minister for Agriculture went along with it on the basis that agriculture had to suffer as part of the general pattern.

In reality there is no cut proposed in State aid for ACOT/AFT. Their combined State grant would be increased by almost £1 million on the 1986 figure, a modest increase of just over two per cent.

Listed ‘cuts’ in allocations for livestock and the university colleges are equally not cuts at all as grants are being increased in both cases. Even the hard-pressed (f) civil servants in the Department of Agriculture can relax about the proposed ‘cut’ of £220,000 in their travelling expenses, in reality the allocation to keep them on the road is increased by 10 per cent.

The sleight of hand employed by John Bruton in presenting his figures is the most peculiar kind. With his party facing the electorate he, for reasons best known to himself, turned actual increases in allocations into ‘cuts’, a trick which beats the infamous ‘children's shoes’ of 1982 into insignificance.



**JOHN BRUTON**

**Either Fine Gael have gone collectively mad or they want very badly to get out of Government. That's the almost inescapable conclusion from the presentation of their Budget proposals, particularly with reference to agriculture.**

The explanation — which everyone seemed reluctant to disclose — is that Bruton's savings or cuts do not in any way refer to differences between 1986 allocations and 1987 proposals. They refer instead to the difference between his allocations proposed in January and some figure thought up by someone somewhere at an earlier stage of the Budget '87 game.

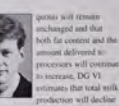


**GARRET FITZGERALD**

**EURO REPORT**

# Commission Forecasts Long Term Trends

Towards the end of April, the European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture (DG VI) produced a working document outlining the long term prospects for the grain, milk and meat markets.



**Michael Quigley, European Affairs Officer of ICOS summarises the main points.**

2002 and will begin to apply the Common Agricultural Policy in its present form and that they will probably align their prices to EU levels.

DG VI estimates that a continuous reduction in the number of dairy cows and a lower recovery in milk yields will lead to lower than expected production up to the year 2002. The implementation of quotas by the CEECs should then stabilise production. The price alignment to EU levels should slow down the gross domestic use leading to a doubling of the producer surplus between 2002-2005 to 2 million tonnes.

Beef production is forecast to increase in the CEECs and with lower demand, a surplus of 485,000 by 2005 is forecast. Growth in both the production and consumption of pigmeat is expected, leading to a surplus of 250,000 in 2005.

Forecasts for cereal production at 84 million tonnes in 2005 is lower than expected and with higher than expected demand, the CEEC-10 would be expected to be net importers of 1 million tonnes in 2005. These figures assume a outside rate of 17.5%.

**World Market**  
The outlook for the world market is quite favourable on all fronts with growing consumption of food products expected. World trade is expected to rise by 2005 with higher demand and world prices due to population growth and rising incomes. Domestic consumption is also expected to increase but not as quickly as in the past. World food demand and trade will expand faster during 1995-2005 than during the 1980s or the 1960s according to DG VI. For milk and dairy products, DG VI estimates that consumption will increase over the next decade for all products except skimmed milk powder. Butter trade is expected to stabilise by 2001 and then rise until 2005. The world trade in cheese will increase significantly mainly within the OECD and the South and East Asia.

Beef consumption and trade is expected to increase by 2005 as meat demand will increase. Pigmeat trade will also rise due to higher demand in Mexico, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong. Feed grain trade is forecast to grow due to increased meat demand and feed requirements. What trade is also projected to rise due to strong demand influenced by China, South-East Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

The statistical analysis provided by Commissioner Fischer with a basis for the CAP 2000 paper which will outline options for reforming the CAP later this year. While a number of the assumptions underlying this report are unrealistic (no change in the CAP or GATT until 2005, a stable rate of 17.5%, 10 countries joining the EU in 2002), it does indicate certain trends and highlights the need to reform the

▲ In this report from 1997, ICOS European affairs officer, Michael Quigley, summarised the main points from a document that outlined the long-term prospects for grain, milk and meat markets. The forecast was produced by the European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture, and it predicted that, in a European context, and assuming that quotas remained unchanged, then total milk production would decline by just 3% by 2025. Beef production was also expected to decline slightly, while pig consumption was set to increase moderately, .5 per cent, with production increasing by a similar amount.

▲ This 1987 report outlined what the author referred to as the 'ham-fisted' way in which Fine Gael finance minister at the time, the late John Bruton, presented his budget proposals. The report indicates that, although there was an overall cut to the agriculture budget, Mr Bruton seemed to over-exaggerate the actual impact - an odd approach. In his 1987 budget proposal report, he stated that savings to the value of £4m were to be achieved across ACOT/AFT. But this is not what happened. "In reality there is no cut proposed in State aid for ACOT/AFT. Their combined State grant would be increased by almost £1m on the 1986 figure, a modest increase of just over two per cent."





# FARMING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

## *Resilient and Sustainable Farming Systems*

Tuesday, 16 July | 10am - 3pm  
Teagasc, Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford

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At the Open Day, the steps farmers can take to enhance the soils on their farms, increase biodiversity, maintain and improve the quality of water bodies, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester more carbon, will be outlined.

### What will you see?

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- Better Farming for Water: 8-Actions for Change
- Biodiversity
- Dairy and dairy-beef systems
- The Signpost Programme
- Teagasc Advisory and Education
- Health and Safety for Sustainable Farming



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scan the QR code  
for more info!

For more information visit:  
[www.teagasc.ie/farming4future](http://www.teagasc.ie/farming4future)



A scenic landscape featuring a calm lake nestled between green, rocky hills. In the foreground, a rocky path winds through tall grass and purple flowers. The sky is filled with dramatic, grey clouds. The word 'FOCUS' is overlaid in large, green, outlined letters at the top of the image.

# FOCUS

CLIMATE AND ENERGY



An example of an on-farm biomethane plant.



# IRELAND'S BIOMETHANE MISSION BEGINS

DR PATRICK WARD, EUROPE & ASIA PACIFIC APPLICATIONS MANAGER AT ALLTECH, REVIEWS THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING IRELAND'S BIOMETHANE INDUSTRY



Dr Patrick Ward, Alltech.

**The recent Renewable Gas Forum Ireland (RGFI) biomethane conference marked the beginning of Ireland's mission to produce 5.7 TerraWatt hours (TWh) of biomethane with a target of over 150 anaerobic digestion (AD) plants by 2030.** The conference – which was held in partnership with KPMG Sustainable Futures, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, and the Department for Environment, Climate and Communications was attended by ministers Charlie McConalogue and Eamon Ryan\* – highlighted the crucial role of governmental support, including a new €40m capital expenditure funding for biomethane plants. However, concerns were raised about the lengthy planning permission process and the need to build expertise within each county council.

Minister Ryan emphasised that protecting water quality would be integral to State support for the biomethane industry, drawing lessons from the eutrophication issues faced by Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland.

While biogas is well established in Northern Ireland, biomethane is poised for enhanced growth across the island. It needs to. The European Biogas Association (EBA) states a need for 35 billion cubic metres of biomethane annually by 2030, with Europe aiming to produce 111 billion cubic metres by 2040.

## IN CONTEXT

To provide context and additional reading material, in April 2024, the EBA commissioned a Guidehouse report to present the biomethane outlook for Europe. In May 2024, the Irish Government published its National Biomethane Strategy along with grants for the biomethane industry. On June 12, the RGFI held its annual conference with all key stakeholders represented, and on June 18, 2024, Davy, in conjunction with Bank of Ireland, published a white paper, *The role and contribution of biomethane in decarbonising the agricultural sector*.

Furthermore, on June 18, the 2nd EBA





## CRISIS COULD BECOME OPPORTUNITY AND TURN DIGESTATE INTO A VALUABLE RESOURCE

*Investment Outlook on Biomethane* was published, highlighting the continued deep interest across the region and states in Europe. We may be at a slow jog in this race rather than a full sprint, but we are going in the right direction.

### ASKING QUESTIONS

Despite the Government grant and Ireland's ample agricultural grassland and animal-waste resources, significant questions remain for stakeholders. Notably, what will State funding look like beyond 2026? Building a biomethane plant is capital intensive, with costs estimated at €15-€20m for a plant producing about 500 cubic metres of biomethane per hour. Clear future support mechanisms are essential. Will there be a guaranteed price for biomethane? The recent Davy white paper suggested that natural gas has an assumed 3.5c/kWh price but a 3.25MW anaerobic digestion (AD) plant would need a higher biomethane price of 12.5c/kWh to justify a 12.5 per cent return on equity, while a larger 10MW plant would need 10.6c/kWh to achieve the same return. These estimates were debated at the white paper launch, but the underlying message is clear: a market for premium-priced biomethane is crucial for the industry's success. One piece of the puzzle still missing is the renewable heat obligation (RHO), which has been in development since 2021. Both ministers at the RGFI conference referenced an RHO

publication in autumn, so we will have to wait to see if Irish biomethane prospects will be bright.

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

In addition to financial support, addressing environmental concerns such as biogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is vital. Approximately 20-40 per cent of the biogas produced in anaerobic digestion is CO<sub>2</sub>. Potential solutions like methanation, which involves adding hydrogen to carbon dioxide – hydrogenation – to produce more methane are possible. While this is not commonplace in the AD industry yet, I can see this process becoming mandatory in the future or at least a prerequisite of the planning process.

Another environmental concern is the nutrient profile in digestate. Approximately 90 per cent of what goes into an anaerobic digester comes out as digestate, which is high in nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). Without proper management, this could lead to soil nutrient overload, as seen in Northern Ireland. However, with appropriate separation technology and pre-treatment of slurry, this challenge can be managed. Crisis could become opportunity and turn digestate into a valuable resource, reducing reliance on imported synthetic fertilisers.

### A STEADY PACE

The Republic of Ireland has a significant

opportunity to develop its AD industry. Recalling studies from Teagasc, to meet the biomethane target, an estimated total land area of 120,000 hectares, which accounts for less than 3 per cent of available agricultural land, will be required to cultivate the necessary silage for AD plants. Additionally, winter slurry from around 1.3 million cattle will be needed, representing roughly 20 per cent of all winter cattle slurry production in Ireland. The National Biomethane Strategy and insights from the RGFI conference provide a robust framework for this biomethane development. With the right policies, financial supports, and industry collaboration, Ireland can achieve its climate goals and establish a sustainable, thriving AD sector. By integrating sustainable practices and leveraging technological advancements, Ireland can ensure that its AD industry not only meets energy demands but also contributes positively to environmental and economic goals. The involvement of experienced companies will be crucial in this transition, providing the necessary expertise and innovative solutions to drive the sector forward. As the saying goes, 'it's a marathon, not a sprint'. The path to a thriving biomethane industry may be long but, with persistence and collaboration, Ireland will make it to the finishing line.

*\*At time of print, Eamon Ryan was leader of the Green Party.*





**MATT O'KEEFFE ATTENDED THE RECENT NATIONAL CONFERENCE, IRELAND BIOMETHANE - PATHWAY TO 2030, ORGANISED BY RENEWABLE GAS FORUM IRELAND (RGFI) IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE (DAFM), THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND COMMUNICATIONS, AND KPMG. HERE, HE RECAPS ON THE MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM THE EVENT**

The old adage, 'where there's muck, there's money' certainly seems to apply to biomethane production, if the large attendance at the recent biomethane conference held at Croke Park is any indication. A cross-section of interested parties, including would-be developers, financiers, co-op representatives, researchers, advisors and farmers received a comprehensive appraisal of how a biomethane industry at scale could reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, substitute imported energy requirements, deliver a profitable alternative to existing farm enterprises; and secure a new, long-term industry for rural Ireland.

#### **GROWTH POTENTIAL**

While biomethane production is commonplace across Europe, it is very much in its infancy in Ireland. The potential for further growth in the sector in a European context, as well as the development of a

viable industry in Ireland, was well outlined. Currently, in the EU, anaerobic digestion accounts for 3.4 billion cubic metres of output. By 2030 it is anticipated that the production figure will rise to 38 billion cubic metres. Rising by another 30 billion cubic metres by 2040, continued growth in production could see up to 90 billion cubic metres being produced within the EU by 2050. Translating that into gas output, biomethane production could supply 85 per cent of Europe's gas needs by 2040. If delivered, that would provide enormous energy security for Europe, while also delivering on energy sustainability requirements and building an industry of scale and value.

#### **WIDE-RANGING BENEFITS**

The benefits of large-scale biomethane production do not end there, as the Croke Park conference attendees were reassured. The digestate from the production system could provide an alternative to the use of

synthetic or chemical fertilisers. With 31 million tonnes of digestate dry matter being produced annually in Europe already, that is sufficient to displace 15 per cent of nitrogen-based fertiliser. The nitrogen demand across the EU is running in the region of 22 million tonnes per year so a 15 per cent substitution rate delivers a not-insignificant alternative source for 3.3 million tonnes of synthetic nitrogenous fertiliser.

Phosphorous fertiliser substitution is in the order of 11 per cent, with total demand estimated at 2.8 million tonnes annually, while 3.1 million tonnes of potassium fertiliser are used in the EU each year and figures produced at the biomethane conference stated that biomethane digestate currently replaces 6 per cent of that demand. All of that adds up to a significant reduction in GHG production of 10 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent, as calculated for 2022. Natural, or fossilised, gas is the main ingredient in the production of synthetic fertilisers, so the replacement of 15 per cent of that synthetic fertiliser requirement with biomethane digestate could save two billion cubic metres of that finite natural gas. There is another major substitute opportunity in the form of CO<sub>2</sub> production. As well as an important environmental gas, it is also





Pictured at Ireland Biomethane - Pathway to 2030: PJ McCarthy, CEO, RGF; Dr Anne Marie Henihan, centre director, Dairy Processing Technology Centre; JP Prendergast, chair, RGF; and Denis Drennan, president, ICMSA. Photo: Jason Clarke.

used in industrial processes including food packaging. Biomethane production units produce CO<sub>2</sub> in addition to methane. The capture and use of biogenic CO<sub>2</sub>, as it is termed, can offset CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to the atmosphere, another valuable contribution to climate change mitigation measures.

#### ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SUPPLY

For the Irish economy, specifically, the establishment of a viable biomethane industry has significant benefits, as discussed at the conference. Ireland's current gas demand is running at 57 TerraWatt hours (TWh) and 75 per cent of that gas is imported. We still have significant supply from the Corrib Gas Field, but that will diminish quickly in the coming years, with no other potential sources being explored. That is mainly a result of Government policy, which is not encouraging oil or gas exploration, even though it is believed that there are large oil and gas deposits in the Barryroe Field off the south Cork coast. Current biomethane production in Ireland accounts for 0.001 per cent of our gas demand. The Government target is to increase that figure to 1 TWh by the end of next year, rising to 5.7 TWh by 2030. That would represent a significant, though not a transformative, reduction in our energy import requirements. The reality is that the development of a new natural gas field such as Barryroe, if its promise were to be fulfilled, at the scale of the existing Corrib Field, would

deliver far more energy at far lower cost than biomethane production. The optimum strategy would be the development of both sources, delivering cost-effective energy to the Irish economy with a high degree of energy security, an increasing risk factor in a volatile world.

#### IMPRESSIVE AMBITION

Nevertheless, the scale of ambition for Irish-produced biomethane is impressive. Working from what is described as an 'agri-centric strategy', the intention is to utilise up to 120,000 hectares of grass silage as well as large volumes of animal slurry to fuel up to 200 new biodigester plants. This, in turn, would result in the creation of 3,000 new jobs, mostly in rural Ireland. The strategy refers to supplying feedstock for these plants and the utilisation of digestate, and not specifically to active downstream involvement of farmers and landowners in this new industry. That is why it is so important, from a farmer perspective, that structures are developed to allow farmers to actively participate in the nascent biomethane industry over and above being providers of raw materials to fuel the plants and recipients of the residue after gas extraction. The real action, in terms of profits and return on investment comes from active involvement and ownership of the assets involved. The commitment of the co-op sector to develop a series of large-scale biodigesters across the country offers one access route for

farmers and landowners to participate more fully in this new energy production industry.

#### ENABLING REQUIREMENTS

While biodigester technology is well developed and relatively simple to construct, there are several critical enabling requirements to be developed before it can deliver on its potential in Ireland. The first requirement is that it is an industry that is acceptable to those living in proximity to the proposed plants. We have seen much opposition to wind turbines around the country. Solar farm installations are now becoming a matter of contention in some rural communities. It must be taken for granted that biodigester plants will be a cause of concern, over safety, odour and transport infrastructure overload. Whether these concerns are well-founded or not is immaterial. They will have to be actively addressed. Other practical requirements include ease of grid access, whether through direct pipelines or by road transport to access points. The marketing of this gas is another issue. Talk of mandatory inclusion in existing fuel mixes must translate into policy and legislation if a viable, long-term market is to be established. Ultimately, consumers, householders, businesses and large industries will have to accept that they will face higher energy costs, given the current cost of natural gas, versus the much higher cost of turning muck (grass and slurry) into money (gas).





# WATER QUALITY: ON A CLEAR COURSE OF ACTION

**EFFORTS ARE INCREASING TO DELIVER WATER-QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. TEAGASC HAS A COLLABORATIVE STRATEGY IN PLACE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WATERS PROGRAMME (LAWPRO), AND THE CO-OPS, TO WORK WITH LANDOWNERS TO INTRODUCE A RANGE OF MEASURES ON FARMS TO IMPROVE WATER-QUALITY OUTCOMES**

Deirdre Glynn is a sustainability advisor with Teagasc focussing on water quality. Alongside Aidan O'Donovan, a farm sustainability advisor with Tirlán, and Brian Casey, a catchment scientist with LAWPRO, Deirdre discusses the various support measures now in place to assist farmers' efforts to improve water quality outcomes. She began by outlining new funding of up to €50m now available through the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) aimed at assisting farmers in putting money into water protection measures on their farms: "Our collaborative efforts with Tirlán and LAWPRO have been in place since 2019. We have been advising farmers on actions that would improve water quality in their areas and remediate the pressures on water quality from farm practices and infrastructures. Up to now, these actions have been completely voluntary by farmers and did have a cost attached. We studied the actions that farmers were implementing on their farms, and we compiled cost/benefit analyses of the impacts of the actions being taken to reduce nitrate, phosphate and sediment losses. We understood that, even though farmers were fully cooperative, some actions

were not being undertaken because of the prohibitive costs involved.

"Teagasc and Dairy Sustainability Ireland (the latter is a collaborative project with Bord Bia, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and a number of Ireland's dairy processors) got together and set up the Waters EIP, which is focussed on priority areas for action in improving quality in our freshwater courses and groundwaters. There is tiered access to the programme funding with €10m available annually. There is a suite of 41 farm-based mitigation actions that can be supported under the programme. The target under the Water Framework Directive is to achieve good water quality status in our watercourses. The most recent water-quality report suggests a standstill in terms of improvement. Some watercourses have remained at their previous standard, some have improved, and others have disimproved. This new source of funding includes everything from developing a water plan, nitrogen-use-efficiency planning, aid for solar water pumps to remove the necessity for cattle to drink in watercourses, the establishment of linear and spatial buffers,

catch crops, multispecies swards, nutrient-management plans and farmer-training courses among the list of 41 potentially adoptable measures on farms. It really is a comprehensive list of financial supports to help farmers take the actions identified as necessary to improve water quality outcomes on farms. It remains a voluntary programme, and we have found very high engagement levels among the farmers we visit. The second tier of access is to maintain and restore watercourses to good quality status."

## **NITRATE REDUCTION IS A PRIORITY**

Brian outlined current watercourse standards: "One of the biggest issues in the southeast is the level of nitrates in the watercourses. High nitrates levels have a negative quality effect on our coastal waters and estuaries, more so than in the actual streams and rivers. Algal blooms are an obvious example of this off our coasts, where rivers enter the sea. That's the reason for the big push to get our nitrates levels down." There are big variations, he explained, in nitrates levels depending on a range of factors including rainfall, time of year and soil types. "Heavier, less permeable soils



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are less likely to lose nitrates to watercourses. Free-draining soils tend to leach more nitrates. Excess nitrogen in the soil during the growing season doesn't show up until later on in the year after heavier rainfall levels in wintertime. While there is natural mineralisation of nitrogen in the soil, there is an emphasis on managing additional nitrogen applications to minimise losses from these sources. We have seen some improvements in the priority areas for action (PAAs). These improvements have been greater than those areas outside of PAAs."

#### CO-OP COMMITMENT

The work being undertaken by co-ops currently includes farm walks to demonstrate water-quality actions being undertaken on individual farms. Aidan explained that these farm walks are all about raising awareness of what can be achieved through the individual actions of landowners: "Alongside these initiatives, Tirlán supports a range of sustainability and water improvement actions through its annual Sustainability Payment Scheme, which provides financial support for

#### What is an algal bloom?

This occurs when there is a rapid increase in algae in freshwater or marine water systems that can have negative impacts on other organisms.

farmers to take on initiatives on their farms. It is paid out through an additional milk price payment of 0.5c/L. Seven actions from a list of 20 potential options must be undertaken to qualify for the payment. Some of the priority actions we target on farms include fencing off watercourses, the use of low-emission-slurry-spreading technology, the development of a water-quality plan under Teagasc's Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme, eliminating farmyard runoff and the use of protected urea."

#### FARMER BUY-IN

The degree of engagement with farmers is considerable, Deirdre confirmed: "We engage in one-to-one discussions with hundreds of farmers as well as bringing farmers together

in groups to tackle issues in areas where watercourse frontages, for instance, for instance are shared. The financed initiatives are specific to nitrates and phosphates and sediment. There are different actions or initiatives most suited to combating nitrate losses or phosphate losses. It is reassuring that, where remedial actions have been taken, in many cases we have found water quality improvements. The financial support measures under the EIP will bolster more farm-based actions that should deliver further improvements over time. In many cases we have identified actions that should be taken on individual farms and groups of farms. The actions have to be practical and achievable. "Now we can re-engage with farmers, in the knowledge that we have access to financial support to help farmers deliver further actions and consequent improvements to water quality outcomes. While these supports are a big advance, I do acknowledge that further support will be necessary in the years ahead as we prioritise water quality improvements and ensure that farmers can play their part in delivering higher water quality standards."

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# KICKSTARTING A BIOMETHANE INDUSTRY

CEO OF THE IRISH BIOENERGY ASSOCIATION, SEÁN FINAN, RECENTLY SPOKE TO **MATT O'KEEFFE** ABOUT RENEWABLE ENERGY IN GENERAL AND, SPECIFICALLY, ON PROGRESS BEING MADE TO ESTABLISH A BIOMETHANE INDUSTRY OF SCALE IN IRELAND

In May, the Government finally published the eagerly anticipated National Biomethane Strategy, which outlined an initial capital investment of €40m, sought under Ireland's application for REPowerEU funding. While he welcomed the strategy, Seán said it was a long time coming, and he stressed that further market certainty is required from the Government to provide the necessary conditions to attract investment and ensure the long-term viability and financial sustainability of the biomethane sector.

"The Government has indicated that the €40m is for capital support. The reality is that it's quite a small figure in the greater scale required for the development of this industry. The Government has a target of 5.7 TeraWatt hours (TWh) of biomethane production, which is the output of 200 plants of scale. The €40m figure would provide capital support for maybe eight or 10 plants. So, it's only really a start. We're concerned about whether it would be enough to attract any interest from an investment perspective."

At the recent Pathway to 2030 biomethane conference, chair of the Renewable Gas Forum Ireland (RGFI), PJ McCarthy put this level of capital funding into perspective: "If Ireland is to achieve the 2030 target for biomethane and emissions reduction, this requires €1bn in future support to ensure the development of the additional plants needed."

## FARMER INVOLVEMENT

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, has been quoted



CEO of the Irish BioEnergy Association, Seán Finan.

several times since the biomethane strategy launch that it is 'farmer centric' and 'agri led'. But is farmer involvement worthwhile? "Certainly," said Seán. "There is a potential for co-operatives like Tirlán and Dairygold to get involved and apply for these capital-support grants. These could be also utilised by a group of farmers in a co-op or a company who come together to plan a project and get involved at that level.

"It remains to be seen whether the Government capital will be enough to attract the investment that will be required," he reiterated.

"Farmer involvement in potentially owning and running these plants, in the form of a co-operative or a private company, could

provide an opportunity to get involved in more than the supply of feedstocks. There needs to be farmer involvement at all levels and key to farmer involvement is that they get paid adequately for what they produce. There is a concern that capital support isn't the best mechanism to fund that, given that there's an ongoing feedstock requirement at these plants and that feeding requirement, from a cost perspective, is considerably greater than the current price paid for gas. There's a bit to go yet in terms of understanding how the various obligation schemes that are going to be placed on the fossil-fuel market will work, what level of ambition those schemes will have and then how that can translate back into paying farmers for their feedstocks, or indeed for farmers who want to get involved and invest money in the sector."

## COMPETITIVENESS

Discussing the competitiveness of supplying slurry or grass to biodigesters, Seán said: "There will be opportunities in certain parts of the country for farmers, but in other parts of the country, land competition is greater, so that would pose bigger challenges. The big thing about the price is that it fluctuates, depending on the input cost and a mechanism needs to be developed whereby some form of benchmark pricing is published on a regular basis and that is potentially used as the basis for the price that farmers are paid. But the mechanism for that is not clear. "If farmers aren't adequately paid, then there's going to be a challenge around getting the feedstock. The reality is that it's going to be





more economically viable to put that tonne of dry matter into a dairy cow and produce milk than if put into a sheep or a beef animal, given the market returns that are currently there. There's quite a bit to be worked out here from the perspective of how we ensure that farmers are paid adequately for what they produce because without farmers the industry won't develop."

#### CONTINUITY OF SUPPLY

"Biogas plants will require some form of medium- to long-term contracting. So how do you balance that with the potential fluctuations in the price of feedstocks. That's something that needs to be assessed. We very strongly highlighted during our engagements with Government and other stakeholders that there would be some form of feed-in tariff and that feed-in tariff could fluctuate based on fluctuations in the feedstock pricing.

"With the capital grant, you get a once-off support. Then you must fend for yourself. This goes back to my first comment on whether that will be enough to encourage people to invest in this industry. It remains to be seen. There is no other industry across Europe that has used capital grants to encourage the development of a biomethane industry. They've all had some form of ongoing operational support." He said it was disappointing that this approach is not being considered, explored or referenced in the strategy.

"Ongoing operational support has been the funding mechanism of choice used in



### THERE IS NO OTHER INDUSTRY ACROSS EUROPE THAT HAS USED CAPITAL GRANTS TO ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BIOMETHANE INDUSTRY

many developing and established European biomethane markets including Denmark, which is broadly lauded as a best-practice example.

"Coming back to the feedstock question, if you have ongoing operational support, there can be inbuilt mechanisms which allow fluctuations and flexibilities around feedstock pricing. As a result, you have some flexibility in what you can pay, because your guarantee is around the gas price. If the gas price fluctuates up and down your support could fluctuate up and down. But the Government is very reluctant to get involved in a scheme like that, considering the volumes of funding required.

"However, that funding could be spread over a 15-year period. Whereas if you invest to develop the sector, that's all front-loaded towards building the facilities. We have a long way to go in terms of how this rolls out."

#### RENEWABLE HEAT OBLIGATION

The strategy commits to the introduction of a renewable heat obligation (RHO) in the heat sector in 2024 which will incentivise suppliers of fossil fuels used for heat, to

ensure a proportion of the energy they supply is renewable. Until the details of this obligation are finalised it is not possible to determine if it will constitute an adequate market stimulant, said Seán.

"They're talking about an RHO, which means that fossil gas would include a percentage of biogas within the gas blend. That would drive a market for biogas and would also drive a viable price for biogas and that's the scheme currently in development. For an RHO to work, it has to be ambitious. It must obligate a large percentage of the market. There's no good in having a scheme where the threshold is low. You need to have an ambition to get to a high percentage rate by 2030 or 2035. As a result, you'll need significant volumes of biogas that can be put directly into the grid or into fossil gas. The renewable obligation certificates created by the gas can be used to offset the renewable gas obligation.

"We currently see that in the transport sector where there is an obligation scheme on liquid fuels. That provides a mechanism by which the biogas industry could be funded and provide a base in terms of the market for biogas and biomethane. It ultimately will depend on the design of that scheme and the design hasn't been published yet, though it has been referred to in the strategy. It is up to promoters and developers to look at their economics and figure out whether this cap-and-support is a mechanism that they can avail of to build a facility and then have the ability to pay enough for feedstocks to provide farmers with the returns that they require to make a margin."



Francis Mallon, CEO Liffey Meats; JP Scally, CEO Lidl Ireland and Northern Ireland; and Jim O'Toole, CEO Bord Bia. Photo: Julien Behal Photography.



# ACHIEVING SUPPLY-CHAIN SUSTAINABILITY

**MORE THAN 20 BEEF FARMERS HAVE SIGNED UP TO A NEW SUSTAINABLE-BEEF PROGRAMME THAT INVOLVES PRODUCER, PROCESSOR AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME, RETAILER. FUNDING OF MORE THAN €200,000 HAS BEEN COMMITTED BY LIDL IRELAND, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CAVAN-BASED PROCESSOR, LIFFEY MEATS AND SUPPORTED BY BORD BIA.**

**BERNIE COMMINS SPOKE TO CHRISTOPHER MCGOWAN, LIFFEY MEATS SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER ABOUT THIS FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND INITIATIVE AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR FARMERS, CONSUMERS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Farmers adapting their practices to become more sustainable is certainly not a new concept.** While the majority of climate- and environmental-related headlines appear to pertain to the dairy-sector, the beef side, too, is playing an important role in helping agriculture to achieve its 25 per cent emissions-reduction target. Reducing finishing age, improving herd health and implementing better breeding-management strategies are just some of the actions being taken by beef farmers.

And the beef-processing side, too, is part of this change. According to Meat Industry

Ireland (MII), since 2015, its beef-processing members have invested more than €150m in a range of sustainability initiatives and have achieved important results on behalf of the sector. Working within the reimits of Origin Green and the Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme, both run by Bord Bia, are just some of the ways the sector has been doing its bit.

Now, for the first time in Ireland, a retailer has come on board to, in its own words, help 'implement innovative sustainable farming practices in order to reduce carbon emissions associated with beef farming.'

An initial investment of €200,000 has been committed over four years, according to Lidl, which will also 'create greater awareness of the environmental challenges associated with beef farming among consumers and to share insight on the initiatives undertaken by the participating farmers to make beef more sustainable.'

More than 20 beef farmers currently supplying Lidl, through Liffey Meats, from counties Cavan, Galway, Longford, Meath, Roscommon, Westmeath, and Wexford have signed up, to date, and according to the retailer, that number is expected to double over the coming months.



## SIGNIFICANCE OF SCHEME

The sustainability programme comprises four 'scopes' Christopher explains. These are concerned with: reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and carbon footprint; allocating areas of biodiversity; improving water quality; and animal-welfare training and practices. "And within those four scopes, there is an array of various actions pending geographical location or farming model that each farmer must execute," says Christopher. "All those actions are calculated and measured through the AgNav platform overseen by Bord Bia, which verifies that they have been carried out. Liffey Meats then sources the cattle from the participating farmers that have implemented the required sustainable practices," he adds.

The programme is very much in its infancy and, as such, the impact to participating farmers' bottom lines is not quantifiable, but there are other benefits, according to Christopher. Farmers want to play their part in the climate movement and, ultimately, to be able to produce sustainable beef that meets customers' demands and delivers on consumers' expectations. This programme will help them along that journey.

He comments: "We all have a part to play, as we are all part of the one supply chain, that's our collaborative approach. From their point of view, farmers want to be in the know, and compliant with regulations that will come down the supply chain to [help us] hit our 2030 and 2050 targets. There is a keen interest in protecting their business; they want to maintain their level of production and throughput. They also want to protect their livelihoods for future generations," he says. "This is really phase one of the programme, as such, and how this looks in the next 15-20 years remains to be seen. But there are benefits to farmers already. We have carried out soil testing, we will prescribe nutrient-management plans, we are working with them to improve water quality, and we will assist them with animal-welfare training and practices. So, we are very much providing farmers with a service to understand where they are at and where they need to get to on their sustainability journey."

A statement from Lidl referred to the programme as being very much at its 'embryonic stage'. It added: "Over the coming years and as more of our supplier farmers participate in the programme, we will work with our partners at Bord Bia and Liffey Meats

on how we can best support the expansion and development of the programme." The retailer also said that it will assess over the coming years what support it can provide as the programme develops.

## COLLAB IS KEY

But what sets this sustainability programme apart from the range of climate-focussed initiatives that are already in place across the sector, and being undertaken by farmers? For one, collaboration between farmer, processor and retailer, such as this, is unique. Lidl is the first retailer to launch such a programme. And, as well as that, the existing relationship between Liffey Meats and its farmer suppliers is very important in the overall strength of the collaboration. Christopher says: "It is a more intimate relationship that we have. We are actively engaging with the farmers on the ground. For example, I have been out myself doing soil testing, along with other parties, and with the farmer. We are a familiar face. We have long-established relationships with the participating farmers. We share knowledge on what the retail markets demand as regards carcass finish, muscle conformation and fat score. There is very much direct engagement on the ground with familiar faces. We are all working together to deliver a sustainable product."

## CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

The challenges to farmers in achieving climate and environmental markers, as well as the on-farm changes that are being made to reach them, are important to communicate to consumers. Christopher agrees that Lidl has a role to play in educating consumers: "Lidl has always been very informative to consumers on the origin of their beef. I have no doubt that they will be instrumental in sharing the knowledge of what's involved in sustainable beef sourcing and processing to the consumers. It is important that the consumer understands what's involved because you would like to think that it would be a more preferred option on a retail shelf considering that it's a sustainably sourced product, but in order to get that message across to the consumer you need to be able to demonstrate that the product has had a positive impact on the supply chain, rural Ireland and the environment."

But it also requires consumers to pay more for more, right? Christopher comments: "If the consumer is educated about what it takes



Christopher McGowan, Liffey Meats sustainability manager.

to get a product to that stage [sustainably produced] you would like to think that people would pay more for higher quality, responsible sourcing, better animal welfare, that there is no negative impact along the supply chain." The use of the AgNav sustainability platform also gives it teeth, says Christopher. Jointly developed by Teagasc, the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and Bord Bia, the AgNav platform utilises the collective knowledge of the three agencies to provide farmers with data, decision-making tools and guidance to help them meet emissions targets on their farms. "It gives it real substance and accreditation, with real calculations and measurement tools, and science," says Christopher.

All Liffey Meats farmer suppliers who are involved in this sustainable beef programme are now signed up to this digital-data platform, Christopher says, and any new farmers will follow suit. "We will be holding workshops for farmers on how to navigate the tool. But the beauty of AgNav is that it gives farmers





Students from the local primary school in Ballyjamesduff participating in the Liffey Meats Green Academy programme as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility. Also in view is Liffey Meats' 3MW wind turbine that's operational since 2018.

### LIDL'S VIEWPOINT

JP Scally, chief executive officer of Lidl Ireland and Northern Ireland said: "The industry faces a significant challenge in reducing its environmental footprint and as a responsible retailer, we know that we have an important role to play in supporting our beef farmers to reduce their environmental impact. We appreciate that this issue is very important to our customers as well, and that is why we will be keeping them informed of developments from the Lidl Sustainable Beef Programme as our farmers trial new methods and processes to make Irish beef a more sustainable product."

access to practical and attainable solutions to continue their responsible and sustainable beef production."

### FUTURE

With positive momentum behind the launch of a programme such as this, Christopher shares his thoughts on the future and what it might hold for the agri-business sector, generally: "Ninety per cent of our product is exported so we need to be to the fore on initiatives such as Bord Bia's Origin Green, of which Liffey Meats is a gold member, so I see that as a real fundamental requirement for agri-businesses to operate and grow within the food sector. That includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving biodiversity, improving water quality, and working with our suppliers. So, considering

how heavily dependent we are on export markets, we have to be the most attractive and appealing to customers internationally and show them what we are doing from an environmental impact point of view. Customers, in general, both domestically and internationally can buy our products in confidence that our supply chain has had a positive impact both socially and environmentally on the environment." Christopher outlines some of the practical measures that Liffey Meats is taking in order to operate with a smaller carbon footprint and environmental impact: "We installed a 3MW wind turbine in 2018, and are establishing a 4MW solar farm on 14 acres of land. Between the solar panels and the wind turbine, we will be using 100 per cent renewable energy that is being produced here on site. We are also a

### A FARMER'S VIEWPOINT

Joseph Smyth is one of the first farmers to sign up to the new Lidl Sustainable Beef Programme. He said that as a growing and future-focussed business, they are delighted to be part of an industry-leading programme designed specifically for Irish beef farmers. "With direct access to support from Bord Bia, Liffey Meats and Lidl Ireland, this programme will be a major step forward, it will help us become more sustainable and make our business more efficient at the same time, ultimately delivering the product that the consumer wants."

partner of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan. "We also work locally with primary and secondary schools through our Liffey Meats Green Academy Programme, educating local kids on the topic of sustainability, reducing, reusing recycling, biodiversity. Our science-based targets on our scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions have now been approved. All these things have a positive impact on the supply chain. That is the journey we have gone on to play our part in having a more sustainable supply chain and to make a positive impact on the environment."





Rory Mannion, Bord Bia.

# KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

**RORY MANNION, AGRI-SUSTAINABILITY SPECIALIST, ORIGIN GREEN, AT BORD BIA, HIGHLIGHTS THE CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARM SUSTAINABILITY LEARNING HUB AND HOW IT IS ASSISTING IRELAND'S FARMERS TO IMPROVE THEIR PRACTICES ACROSS A VARIETY OF KEY ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS**

In 2021, Bord Bia launched the first module in its online learning hub to help farmers gain knowledge on the responsible use of antibiotics. The course was developed in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and Animal Health Ireland and was primarily targeted at pig producers. Today, Bord Bia's Farm Sustainability Learning Hub has, so far, registered almost 10,000 farmers across a range of sectors who have access to short, optional modules on topics such as farm emissions, biodiversity, energy efficiency, soil health, water quality, and animal welfare.

Rory explains: "We conduct a lot of research in terms of farmers' attitudes towards climate action and one of the key messages we see is that farmers want to make the transition to more sustainable practices. They view themselves as custodians of the land, but they need more guidance and support. We felt it was right for us – especially with an electronic touchpoint already in place with our quality assurance schemes and with boots on the ground – to deliver this support with an online learning hub. For each new module we have reached out to other relevant stakeholders and expert agencies to help develop the courses so that we

can support farmers on their journey to deliver on climate action targets and other areas of farm sustainability." Alongside working with expert bodies such as Teagasc, Bord Bia has also developed courses in conjunction with processors such as Dairygold and Kerry. "We have worked with milk processors like Dairygold and Kerry to create courses for their suppliers and that has been integrated as part of their sustainability bonus programmes – Grassroots and Evolve, respectively." Commenting on the development of the learning hub, Rory explains that feedback has been very positive and new modules are in the pipeline: "User feedback shows that the modules have been very well received. Every farmer who completes a module gives it a rating and we are averaging 4.9 stars out of 5, with positive comments about the modules. "We make sure the modules are very user-friendly: they average 25-30 minutes long and include video, audio, multiple-choice questions and exercises to keep our learners engaged and to ensure they can take on the key messages in an efficient way." The overall aim, Rory says, is to keep increasing registrations to the learning platform and ultimately drive change at farm level as a result.

There are currently 13 free modules available to members of the sustainable assurance schemes for beef, lamb, dairy, pigmeat and horticulture. Below are some examples.

**Energy efficiency in agriculture:**

Developed by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), this module provides an introduction to energy use on the farm. The module aims to help farmers identify the key areas for energy efficiency and the activities that can be adopted to reduce energy use on farm.

**Water quality:** Bord Bia has worked with Teagasc to develop a concise but comprehensive module on water quality for Irish farms. Farmers will learn about the regulation and assessment of water quality in Ireland, and how agriculture affects water quality. Crucially, the module will provide users with farm-based solutions to improving water quality.

**Soil health:** The soil health module, developed in conjunction with Teagasc, provides information on how soil health can directly impact the performance of soil functions and shows how to assess soil health in ways such as the Soil Index System and with other biological and physical indicators.

**Animal welfare:** Using guidelines from Animal Health Ireland and Teagasc, Bord Bia has developed a new set of modules on animal welfare. While good stockmanship is second nature to most farmers, the modules ask farmers to consider any areas of animal welfare that may need improvement or greater consideration. The introductory module covers the key principles of animal health and welfare including animal husbandry, body condition scoring, hygiene and animal-based indicators.





# TIMESCALE FOR IBR ERADICATION

DR MARIA GUEL BENZU, PROGRAMME MANAGER FOR BVD AND IBR WITH ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND (AHI), PROVIDED A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS AT TEAGASC'S ANNUAL BEEF CONFERENCE OF AN ERADICATION PROGRAMME FOR INFECTIOUS BOVINE RHINOTRACHEITIS (IBR) FROM THE IRISH LIVESTOCK HERD. MATT O'KEEFE GIVES A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS

**The highly infectious nature of the IBR virus, which affects the respiratory system of animals, makes it particularly difficult to control let alone, ultimately, eradicate.**

Because of this, the timescale for eradication is prolonged, with an estimate from Dr Guelbenzu that it could take 16 years to complete such a programme. Given the extended time lag in an ongoing programme by AHI to rid livestock in this country of bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD), that 16-year period may even be somewhat optimistic. Time, as they say, will tell.

## LIFELONG DISEASE

The health impacts of IBR are considerable, though most animals do recover to a greater or lesser extent, from the disease. Unfortunately, they go on to be lifelong carriers. The disease becomes latent in the animals

unless, or until, they come under some health or environmental stress and they can shed the virus at that stage, again infecting other animals in the herd, or neighbouring herds where transmission distances are close enough. The disease is present at similar levels in both suckler and dairy herds in the country. A rough estimate is that the virus is transmissible, in favourable environmental circumstances, to other animals within five metres, so not only is there a close-proximity transmission route, but there are also air and windblown transmission properties to consider. Younger animals are particularly susceptible to serious outcomes from IBR infection, including death or long-term compromised health.

In milking cows, an IBR infection results in milk loss, while abortion is also a potential outcome



**THE INCREASING RESTRICTIONS ON ANTIBIOTIC USAGE WILL IMPACT OUR ABILITY TO TREAT THE SECONDARY HEALTH EFFECTS OF IBR**

in some cases. Presuming the animal does recover from the infection, a return to normal health takes up to three weeks.

## WIDESPREAD INFECTION

At this initial stage of a campaign of eradication, it should be noted that IBR is almost ubiquitous in the national herd with three-quarters of herds having animals that



have been exposed to the virus and are, therefore, carriers of the infectious disease, though not necessarily active transmitters to fellow animals in the herd.

An IBR eradication programme, apart from the health benefits for animals, is hugely important to secure cattle and semen/embryo exports into the future as more countries adopt a policy of only accepting animals from IBR-free countries. The impacts are threefold, including: health and welfare; economic impact; and livestock-trade implications, as Dr Guelbenzu explained. Our live-export trade of calves is particularly important and any IBR-induced restrictions to that trade would be serious, especially given the ongoing pressures already being experienced in that trade, where close to 200,000 calves are exported annually. Add in weanling and store-cattle exports and the necessity of curtailing and ultimately eliminating IBR infection in our livestock becomes even more critical. As a side observation, the increasing restrictions on antibiotic usage will impact our ability to treat the secondary health effects of IBR infection in the future.

### IBR-FREE STATUS

Several countries in the European Union have achieved IBR-free status, Dr Guelbenzu confirmed. These include Norway, Sweden and Denmark, as well as Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic. Switzerland is also free of IBR in its livestock herd. Add in Belgium and France, where IBR-eradication programmes are progressing rapidly, and it becomes clear that any lagging behind by Ireland is not an optimal approach. Our main calf-export markets of the Netherlands and Spain are due to implement eradication programmes, with consequent restrictions on imports of animals from countries with high IBR infection rates in its herds, such as Ireland.

### THREE-PHASE APPROACH

An IBR-eradication programme will be multi-pronged, including widespread vaccination over many years, as well as high biosecurity measures for non-infected herds, though those herds remain permanently under risk of infection from external sources, either from bought-in stock, infection from contiguous IBR-infected herds or even through transmission from livestock transport vehicles or manual transmission from those people

working with the animals and carrying in the virus from an external source.

The practicalities of an IBR-eradication programme include three phases, starting with an initial reduction period, a full-scale eradication phase and, finally, a monitoring phase to ensure complete and permanent eradication has been achieved. Vaccination will form a central aspect of the control and, hopefully, eventual eradication of the disease from Irish cattle herds.

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**HIPRABOVIS® IBR MARKER LIVE** Lyophilisate and solvent for suspension for injection for cattle. **COMPOSITION PER DOSE:** Each dose of 2 ml contains: Lyophilisate: Live gE- tk- double-gene deleted Bovine Herpes Virus type 1 (BoHV-1), strain CEDDEL 10<sup>7</sup> - 10<sup>8</sup> CCID<sub>50</sub>. Solvent: Phosphate buffer solution. **INDICATIONS:** For the active immunisation of cattle from 3 months of age against Bovine Herpes Virus type 1 (BoHV-1) to reduce the clinical signs of infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) and field virus infection. **ROUTE OF ADMINISTRATION:** Intramuscular. **ONSET OF IMMUNITY:** 21 days after completion of the basic vaccination scheme. **DURATION OF IMMUNITY:** 6 months after completion of the basic vaccination scheme. **SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS:** Vaccinate healthy animals only. **ADVERSE REACTIONS:** A slight increase in body temperature up to 1 °C is common within 4 days following vaccination. Occasionally, an increase in rectal temperature up to 1.63 °C in adult cows and up to 2.18 °C in calves may be observed. This transient rise in temperature is spontaneously resolved within 48 hours without treatment and it is not related to a fibrile process. A transient inflammation at the inoculation site is common in cattle within 72 hours post-vaccination. This slight swelling lasts for less than 24 hours in most cases. Vaccination might exceptionally cause hypersensitivity reactions. In such cases, an appropriate symptomatic treatment should be administered. **USE DURING PREGNANCY OR LACTATION:** Can be used during pregnancy and lactation. **RECOMMENDED VACCINATION PROGRAMME:** Cattle: from the age of 3 months onwards. The recommended initial dose is 1 injection of 2 ml of the reconstituted vaccine per animal. The animal should be revaccinated 3 weeks later with the same dose. Thereafter a single booster dose of 2 ml should be administered every six months. The method of administration is by intramuscular route, in the neck muscles. Reconstitute the lyophilized tablet with the entire contents of the enclosed solvent to obtain a suspension for injection. The solvent should be allowed to warm to a temperature between 15 °C to 20 °C before reconstitution of the lyophilized tablet. **OVERDOSE:** No adverse reactions except those mentioned above were observed after the administration of a 10-fold vaccine dose. **WITHDRAWAL PERIOD:** Zero days. **INCOMPATIBILITIES:** Do not mix with any other veterinary medicinal product, except the solvent supplied for use with the veterinary medicinal product. **SHELF LIFE:** Shelf life of the lyophilisate as packaged for sale: 2 years. Shelf life after reconstitution: 6 hours. **SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS FOR STORAGE:** Store and transport refrigerated (2°C - 8°C). Do not freeze. Keep out of the sight and reach of children. Keep the bottles in the outer carton in order to protect from light. For veterinary use. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION NUMBERS:** 5 doses: EU/2/10/114/001; 25 doses: EU/2/10/114/002. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION HOLDER:** Laboratorios Hipra, S.A., Amer (Girona), SPAIN. **LEGAL CATEGORIES:** ROI: POM and Prescription only veterinary medicine for further information contact your veterinary medicine prescriber.

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AS PART OF ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND'S (AHI's) CONTINUING FOCUS ON LOWERING MASTITIS LEVELS AND SOMATIC CELL COUNTS (SCCs) IN IRISH DAIRY HERDS, IT HAS DEVELOPED A NEW VETERINARY-LED CONSULT FOR FARMERS CALLED CELL COUNT SOLUTIONS

# COLLABORATING ON MASTITIS CONTROL

In its recent newsletter, AHI outlines that the objective of this free consult is to 'help facilitate a collaborative approach between service providers and herdowners, to ensure better SCC and mastitis control on farms.' It highlights the important roles that different professions play in supporting herdowners in the management of mastitis including farm and milk-quality advisors, veterinary practitioners, and milking-machine technicians.

## MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The consult has been developed by AHI and the CellCheck Technical Working Group to provide a framework to kickstart ongoing multi-disciplinary support for dairy farmers

who struggle with mastitis and/or high SCC levels, according to AHI.

It emphasises that all service providers including veterinary practitioners, milking-machine technicians, farm advisors and milk-quality advisors that wish to be involved in these consults need to complete training. This training, AHI says, provides the tools to support and assist dairy farmers to develop a strategy that will ultimately lead them to better mastitis control and less antibiotic use on their farms. The latter is one important aspect of mastitis prevention, which has gained increased prominence given the necessity under EU regulations, to minimise antibiotic use in general and, in addition, eliminate blanket use of antibiotics in dry-cow therapy programmes. During the consult, all relevant

areas, including the cow, the milking routine, the environment and records will be examined to enable a farm-specific plan to be created. The herdowner nominates the service providers they want to include on the team, such as farm advisor, milking-machine technician and vet. The consult is available throughout the entire lactation and there are no eligibility requirements necessary to register. This service is funded through the Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH) and supported by the Rural Development Programme and coordinated by AHI.

## POST-MILKING TEAT-SPRAYING

Highlighting one of the most important aspects of teat care and mastitis prevention,





AHI points to post-milking teat disinfection as one of the key steps and one that is often overlooked or inadequately carried out in the milking parlour. Michelle McGrath, CellCheck assistant programme manager describes teat spraying as 'the hidden gem' such is the importance she places on a properly carried out and regular teat-spraying programme on dairy farms. She calculates that teat spraying can reduce the risk of new mastitis infections by 50 per cent or more, but it can only achieve this if it is done thoroughly and throughout the entire lactation. "If the whole teat is disinfected after milking, it reduces the bacterial load and, thus, the risk of infection. Certain bacteria (*Staphylococcus aureus* and *Streptococcus agalactiae*) in milk from an infected cow may be found on the liners and transferred to the teat skin of the next five to six cows that are milked with that unit. Once on the teat skin, the bacteria multiply (especially at sites of teat lesions), and so increase the risk of infection of the quarter via the teat canal."

Michelle describes how post-milking teat disinfection also helps keep teat skin healthy and heal teat lesions, and these actions, she says, have an important contribution to mastitis control. "Proper application of teat disinfectants is essential for optimal results as the benefits of teat disinfection are lost if the teat disinfectant does not cover all the teat skin. While spraying may be quicker and more convenient than teat dipping, ensuring thorough coverage is key to its effectiveness. It is essential that the entire teat (everywhere the liner has touched) is disinfected and not just the teat end," she says.

She urges farmers to choose a teat-spray product carefully: "When choosing a disinfectant beware of unregistered products. Unregistered products may not provide the desired level of protection and can pose risks from residues to both animal and human health as well as the

## TEAT SPRAYING CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF NEW MASTITIS INFECTIONS BY 50 PER CENT OR MORE

environment. If the product is registered it will have either a PCS or a Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) – previously IMB – number on the drum label."

Michelle further highlights the fact that teat disinfectants making a medicinal claim (e.g. aid in the prevention of mastitis) are subject

to registration and regulation by the HPRA. If no medicinal claim is made, teat disinfectants are classed as biocides, and these are subject to registration and regulation by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

Further information in the AHI newsletter provides straightforward advice on product selection: "Ready to use (RTU) products are recommended as best practice, particularly for farms experiencing difficulties sourcing water of adequate quality or mixing solutions consistently."

In Mastitis Control

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Froehlich-Kelly, R. 2020. Bovine mastitis. All-Island Animal Disease Surveillance, p.31.

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These products are not licensed for concurrent use. A decision to use either of these vaccines before or after any other veterinary medicinal product therefore needs to be made on a case-by-case basis.

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## MESSAGES

- Young farmers be good to your partners/spouses.
- Your third-last nitrogen application but take account of clover content.
- Control docks but not if grass under stress!
- Weigh replacements and manage accordingly.
- Stop bulling in or around July 6-12.
- To overcome winterfeed problems be aware of the value of feedstuffs.
- Active management of grass is now required.
- Listen to Sean O'Donnell on the Dairy Edge podcast on how he manages his finances.



By Matt Ryan

### BE GOOD TO PARTNERS/SPOUSES

- » Recently a mother and farmer in her 60s asked me to remind young male farmers, in particular, to 'be good' to wives/partners.
- » I don't know why she was motivated to ask but when you look at the facts, she has a point.
- » Many young partners/spouses are working off-farm, she said, and commented the following:
  - Many of these partners are driving long journeys to and from work each day, sometimes taking one to two hours.
  - They are preparing children for, delivering them to, and collecting them from crèches and school.
  - Then, they work an eight-hour day.
  - They prepare meals, sometimes breakfast dinner, and tea.
  - They wash and iron clothes.
  - They clean and tidy the house.
  - They oversee children's homework.
  - They prepare children for bed.
  - And more.
- » What did she mean by 'be good'? She explained:
  - First of all, realise all the tasks that women – in this example – have to undertake.
  - Then, help with the household duties as listed above.
  - A woman's life on a farm can sometimes be very lonely (this particular woman was a stay-at-home mother, far removed from college friends and family).
  - Socialise more as a couple, going to events other than funerals, weddings, matches, church, community meetings, etc.
- » Why does 'being good' in this context not happen more often?
  - Is it attitude? Men sometimes feel that they have to work very long hours on farm to get the work done and deliver income to the household. That is probably true, but most are very disorganised when it comes to time management.
  - Is it not 'cool' to say: 'I have to help with the housework' or 'I can't go out as I have to put the children to bed'?
  - Why do some farmers milk late in the evening? I have heard it said that they do so to miss the bedlam in the house before the

young children settle down for bed.

- » With divorce or separation an option now and occurring more frequently in Irish society, people have options.
- » A change of attitude is required:
  - Define what are your most important priorities in life.
    - Several years ago, when I was promoting better time management on farms, I asked each member of the discussion group to write down the answer to the following question: If you were told you had six months to live, what would you do during that period?
    - Almost 100 per cent answered that they would spend more time with their family.
    - Men giving a greater commitment to family life and sharing the household workload will bring about a massive change in how they manage their farms and their time on their farms.
  - It should not be necessary to work every hour of the day to get the work done.
    - If you are pretty organised and having to work long hours, then it is certain you need to employ help on the farm, or cut back on the scale of your operation,
    - Be aware of all the new technologies that time-save on farms.
  - Household help, in many cases, is required – unfortunately, some men object to this practice. Maybe au pairs would help in the early stages of child-rearing?
  - Make a family-time-management plan and operate your farm to allow you to deliver on our greatest priority – more time with family.
- » Self-analysis on this topic is painful and guilt-ridden for all of us.

### CASH VERY TIGHT ON FARMS

- » A terribly difficult year has resulted in cash being very tight on many farms.
- » Now is the time to take action:
  - Take steps to reduce cost and unnecessary spending,



- Reduce stock numbers on the farm,
  - Poor milkers, eating the same amount of grass as good ones, should be sold.
  - Non-pregnant cows, lame cows, high SCC cows should be culled now.
  - Carrying extra replacements is totally unjustifiable.
- » Listen to dairy farmer, Sean O'Donnell on the Teagasc Dairy Edge podcast on the simple ways he manages his finances. It is an excellent listen!

### THIRD-LAST NITROGEN

- » Hard to believe! But be sure to apply as the return on money invested is massive.
  - One should take advantage of good growth rates to build up winter feed reserves.
  - But always make quality bales in such circumstances to feed instead of purchased meal when grass is tight.
  - Follow the recommendations given in Table 1, making sure you use up your full nitrogen (N) allowance
  - If lower stocking rate, no N until mid-August.
  - It may be possible to use slightly more on milking blocks if less is used elsewhere.
  - Remember, by late July, over 80 per cent of your annual N should have been applied.
  - If, in early July you haven't over 66 per cent of your N applied, rectify by applying a bit more now, otherwise, you will not be able to build up grass in autumn.
  - For every one tonne of dry matter (DM) your grass yield is lower than last year and you are up-to-date on N spread, then there is an extra 25kg (20 units) N in the soil. Take into consideration when applying N now.

**Table 1: Nitrogen application (Kg/N/ha) strategy, based on clover content in April. Source: Teagasc.**

| April average sward clover content | July Two rotations   | Total kg/N/ha (units/acre) |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Grass sward                        | 28 (23 units/acre)   | 212 (174 units/acre)       |
| 5%                                 | 20 (16.5 units/acre) | 175 (144 units/acre)       |
| 10%                                | 10 (8.2 units/acre)  | 150 (123 units/acre)       |
| 15%                                | Soiled water         | 130 (107 units/acre)       |
| 20%                                | Soiled water         | 105 (86 units/acre)        |

- » Protected urea is the N product of choice.
- » Stick with one spreading day of the whole farm in the month.
  - There will be some cover of grass to give a shading effect from the sun and there will probably be more dew on the grass.
  - It is working well on farms, but according to Moorepark it results in 3-5% less in grass growth during the main summer months. This is small for the benefits and farmers are wasting much more than that amount of grass by poor grazing management.
- » Sulphur deficiency is widespread on a wide range of soils.
  - Between May and September, 20 units/acre should be applied on all light soils. If not yet applied, do it now.
- » Where potassium (K) and phosphorous (P) are less than optimum, there is merit in applying one bag 27:2.5:5 in July.
  - Very many farms are low in potash – one bag of muriate of potash should now be applied to fields low in K.
- » Lime should be applied now after silage cutting – it is the most important of all soil nutrients.
  - Only apply slurry where it should go – silage ground.
  - For every four bales of silage taken off the grazing area, apply 100 gallons of slurry,

### PUT VALUE ON FEEDSTUFFS

- » Because of the impending deficit of winter feed, we need to look, now, at the cost/value of other feeds relative to barley (€240/t) and soyabean meal (€48/t), so as to make good economic decisions.
- » Table 2 gives you the value of dry feeds relative to barley (€240/t) and Soyabean Meal (€478/t).
  - It is noticeable that all are more expensive than the barley-soya combo. Except the PKE quotation but the high percentage protein may cause issues for derogation farmers.
    - I have been informed that the company selling PKE will give you a letter to say that you were buffer feeding due to grass shortage and needed the extra protein in the diet – your planner will send the letter to the relevant authority.
  - Insert your own cost in the right-hand column and compare.
- » I have inserted some actual costs, received from farmers.
- » To interpret the table:
  - UFL defines the energy level in the feed – the higher the better.
  - PDIE defines the protein level in the meal; to get the percentage figure divide the figure in the column by 10.
- » Beet pulp is a great feed with grass as it has high energy with



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### digestible fibre.

- Soya hulls are an excellent source of fibre and of moderate energy (UFL).
- Palm kernal can be self-fed in the paddock but be careful not to over-feed.

**Table 2: Value of feedstuffs relative to barley and soyabean meal.**

| Dry feeds   | UFL (kg/DM) | PDIE (kg/DM) | Value € (t/ DM) | DM % | Value € (per t as fed) | Actual cost € (per t as fed) |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Barley      | 1.16        | 103          | 277             | 86.6 | 240                    | 240                          |
| Soya        | 1.18        | 269          | 553             | 86.4 | 478                    | 478                          |
| Wheat       | 1.16        | 106          | 282             | 86.6 | 244                    | -                            |
| Oats        | 1.03        | 84           | 234             | 87.4 | 204                    | -                            |
| Citrus pulp | 1.16        | 91           | 257             | 87.5 | 225                    | 245                          |
| Beet pulp   | 1.14        | 98           | 267             | 88.1 | 235                    | 272                          |
| Soya hulls  | 1.01        | 107          | 270             | 87.9 | 237                    | 210-270                      |
| Palm kernal | 0.96        | 143          | 325             | 89.0 | 289                    | 235-245                      |
| Pollard     | 0.87        | 90           | 229             | 88.0 | 201                    | -                            |

- » Table 3 gives you the value of wet feeds relative to barley (€240/t) and soyabean meal (€478/t).
- » The issues with buying wet feeds is:
  - You can easily buy 'a pig in a poke' because without analysis you don't know what you are getting for your money.
  - The DM of the product changes the value.
  - You also need to factor in a 10 per cent wastage loss onto the cost.
- » Before buying a wet feed, you must do an estimate of the cost and compare with the 'value per tonne' column.

**Table 3: Value of wet feeds relative to barley and soyabean meal.**

| Dry feeds                 | UFL (kg/DM) | PDIE (kg/DM) | Value € (t/DM) | DM % | Value € (per t as fed) |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|------|------------------------|
| Grass silage (72% DMD)    | 0.81        | 68           | 187            | 20   | 37                     |
| Grass silage (65% DMD)    | 0.72        | 60           | 166            | 20   | 33                     |
| Hay (good)                | 0.69        | 75           | 188            | 85   | 159                    |
| Barley straw              | 0.44        | 46           | 117            | 88   | 103                    |
| Fodder beet               | 1.11        | 10           | 268            | 22   | 59                     |
| Maize silage (25% starch) | 0.80        | 68           | 186            | 32   | 60                     |
| Maize silage (25% starch) | 0.70        | 68           | 177            | 45   | 80                     |
| Baled silage (70% DMD)    | 0.81        | 68           | 187            | 30   | 34                     |
| Baled silage (65% DMD)    | 0.72        | 60           | 166            | 30   | 30                     |

- » Now is the time to make decisions to overcome a winter-feed crisis.

### TIME TO CONTROL DOCKS

- » Docks are the bane of dairy farmers' lives and, apart from being unsightly, cost money. One dock (big one) every 35m<sup>2</sup> reduces grass yield by 1% per acre, which represents a loss €7-€13 per acre.
- » One, decide on the spray to use.
  - This decision is based on the amount of clover in the pasture.
  - Type of dock also influences choice.
- » Best results are got by spraying three to four weeks after cutting silage.
  - Grass growth is slow relative to the growth of the dock.
  - Grass ground cover is low resulting in less loss of grass yield.
  - Spray now in July or August.
  - Spray on warm, sultry days.
  - If going to stitch in clover next year, kill the docks this year.
- » Give serious consideration to spot spraying where docks aren't too plentiful.
  - A job for a holiday student – make sure to show him/her how and get them to think how to map out the area to be done so as to miss none.

### CHECK R1s AND R2s WEIGHTS

- » On July 1, R1s should be 27% of the cows' weight:
  - Friesian (560kg) – 150kg.
  - Jersey cross (530kg) – 143kg.
  - Calves less that these weights must get special attention.
- » Calf weight at six months has a major influence on bulling weight, which influences the following:
  - They will not calve in the first 15 days of the calving season.
  - First calvers are yielding 500-1,000L of milk below their potential, mainly because they are too small at calving.
  - I find the wastage from first to second calvings is very high, due to R2s calving down too small and being badly managed from calving to service.
- » Research has shown that moderate R1s on July 1 can make good weanlings on November 1 if grazing management between July and November is top drawer.
- » Practice the leader-follower system.
  - R1s should graze in front of the cows or the R2s.
  - Calves will thrive really well while the R2s will also perform well.
  - Don't graze too tight and top if necessary. Parasites will have no effect on the calves.
- » All farms have late, small R1s. How do you manage them to gain most weight cheaply with as little extra work as possible?
  - Let these graze in front of the main bunch of calves on the very best of grass.
  - If that isn't possible give them fresh grass in front of cows or



R2s.

- Stay feeding milk/replacer to them until they are 125-130kg weight.
  - 1-2kg of meal could be justified to these but don't keep them near the house in a calf paddock to feed meals because parasites will prevent thrive.
  - Another option is to put two small calves in each cow paddock and leave them there, even as cows come to the paddock. They will thrive really well, and no meals or dosing is needed. This is called the 'buddy-buddy' system of management. All you need is two strands of wire and I know farmers who have successfully done it.
  - It is best to give best quality grass and no meals than to give them poor quality grass with meals.
  - Move calves into aftergrass, particularly on outside farms and keep them on it for as long as possible.
- » No meals should be fed to strong calves, that is, calves 10-15kg above target.
- » To prevent stomach worms with minimum dosing, keep calves on aftergrass as long as possible.
- Give a white or yellow dose in early July and move to aftergrass, having left them on the old paddock to 'flush out' all the worms.
- » R2 targets – 67% of mature cow weight now:
- Friesian: 375kg.
  - Jersey cross: 355kg.
- » Animals under these weights should get priority treatment. By grazing them with calves or else in front of the main heifer mob. Very small animals will respond to meals (16-18% P).
- » If you have replacements out on contract, you must have weights for all animals now; done by an independent scales person. The ICBF provides this service and it is good value.
- All agreements should have this clause included as it reassures both parties.
- » Keep R2s away from areas where flies are prevalent.

### WHEN TO STOP BREEDING?

- » Decide on your last calving date for 2025. It is high time farmers tightened up the calving pattern because late calvers are generally infertile and uneconomical.
- » Relate service date to calving date and act.

| Service | Calving date |
|---------|--------------|
| July 6  | April 15     |
| July 12 | April 21     |
| July 18 | April 27     |
| July 24 | May 3        |

- » The following targets should be set as the absolute limit to finish bulling:
- Dry land: July 6.

- 'Late' land: July 12
- » With two to three weeks of the breeding season remaining, vigilance is required to identify all bulling cows.
- The pay off will be great with fewer cull cows to off load – a loss of €700-€1,000 per cow.
  - Put a chin-ball on the stock bull to identify the expected calving date.
  - You need one bull per 20-25 expected bulling cows.

### MANAGE GRASS BY MEASURING

- » No one would have predicted that the difficult management of grass would continue from spring to July.
- Grass DM yields per hectare are reduced by 0.5t on average.
  - Silage quantities in pits is greatly reduced and will pose a big challenge for next winter.
  - Milk solids (MS) yield per cow are down 30kg; a drop in farm profits, to date of €60-€90 per cow.
- » On July 1, we are halfway through the grass year. Can we recover lost ground? We must try! How?
- » Maintain the highest quality grass and minimise topping by achieving target grass covers for the farm stocking rate and rotation length.
- If you must top, only do one to two paddocks per week so as to prevent shortages in next rotation.
- » Table 4 outlines the target grazing covers.

**Table 4: Grazing targets for various grazing stocking rates**

| Stocking rate (cows/ha) | Rotation length (days) | Daily demands (kg DM/ha) | Pre-grazing cover (kg DM/ha) | Average farm cover (kg DM/ha) |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 4.0                     | 25                     | 72                       | 1,850                        | 800                           |
| 3.5                     | 25                     | 63                       | 1,625                        | 700                           |
| 3.0                     | 25                     | 54                       | 1,400                        | 600                           |
| 2.7                     | 25                     | 49                       | 1,275                        | 540                           |
| 2.47                    | 25                     | 45                       | 1,175                        | 490                           |
| 2.20                    | 25                     | 40                       | 1,050                        | 440                           |
| 2.00                    | 25                     | 36                       | 950                          | 400                           |

- » Your DIY to estimating grass cover is as follows:
- a. Establish your stocking rate (cows per hectare) on the grazing area.
  - b. Work on a rotation length of 25 days approx. – it could be 21-22 days if growth is over 70kg DM/day (possible).
  - c. Calculate daily demand per hectare by multiplying your stocking rate by 18 which is the number of kilogrammes of DM that should be given to a cow for a day.
  - d. Calculate the pre-grazing cover (PGC) by multiplying the rotation length by your daily grass demand and adding on post-grazing residual, targeted at 50kg DM/ha.
- » Finally, calculate the average farm cover (AFC) required by multiplying your stocking rate by 200 (220 in wet land) – 180



would be ok with high growth rates.

- » If the PGC is greater than the target figure, then the 'strong' paddocks should be removed for cutting only if the AFC is also greater than the target.
- » If the PGC and AFC are less than the targets, then meal (palm kernal or soya hulls) or baled silage (preferable option if silage not scarce) must be introduced.
- » Any farmer not measuring grass will not survive this financially difficult year.
- » This is the way to manage your grass to maximise milk yield and protein so as to increase farm profits.

#### BRIEF NOTES

- » Now is the time to prepare for August reseeding but AFC will have a huge influence on this decision:
  - Identify the poorest grass-yielding field on PastureBase, as the economic response will be greatest on these.
  - Spray silage or grazing (1,200+ grass cover) fields with roundup in mid-late July, cut/graze of seven to 10 days later, leaving no trash and then sow by way of min-till. Apply lime and N, P and K.

- » Start to build up Autumn grass from July 20-26, either by:
  - Reducing stocking rate.
    - Because of the winterfeed situation, this must be high priority; start NOW by selling off poor yielder, high SCC cows and cows not in calf.
  - Increasing nitrogen.
  - Closing up for a third cut to graze on July 20-26 is the best option.
    - Stock cows on the grazing area at 3.6-4 cows/ha; apply two bags 0:7:30 and 50-60 units N per acre
  - Slowing down rotation length to 26-30 days.
  - As first cuts were taken early, it is important to cut second cuts six weeks after the first cut. Yield will not improve and the quality, usually low, will deteriorate fast.
  - A strong case can be made this year to feed 3-4 kg meal to reduce daily grazing demand during this 'build-up' period.
- » Castrate bull calves – more advisable advice is to sell off now.
- » Cow lameness is an issue of many farm; the wet year and damaged roadways hasn't helped. Get the FRS to look at the herd.
- » Empty slurry tanks now – use trailed and shoe.
- » Winter feed is going to be an issue on many farms as overall grass yield is down; therefore, begin steps now to minimise the problem later.
  - Refer to last months management hints for detail.
  - With expected good growth rates, it should be possible to close up significant areas for silage by stocking cows at 3.6-4 cows per ha and R2s at 2,400kg/ha. Fertilise the remainder for silage.
  - PKE is easier fed now to cows than during winter and should be used to keep grazing SR high.
  - Value for money rented silage ground may be available.
- » To free up some time:
  - Milk cows 13 times per week.
  - Milk cows at 16-8-hour intervals.
  - Spread fertiliser once per month.
  - Instead of topping, cut strong paddocks for silage and graze at correct cover.
  - From what I see and hear most dairy farmers badly need a complete break off farm for a week or so. As it was a very difficult year, all farmers have not had a break – not even one day or night – since February 1. Make a plan to get away for a break.

#### QUOTES OF THE MONTH

**"Don't say 'I help around the house' because who are you helping?"**

Author unknown (but could be my wife of 52 years!).

**"Never regret the things you did; you regret the things you didn't do."**

Michael Flatley.



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# MAXIMISING OUTPUT, MINIMISING LOSSES

**THE NEW FLAGSHIP NEW HOLLAND CR11 COMBINE, PREVIEWED AT AGRITECHNICA 2023, HAS BEEN JOINED BY A CR10 COMPANION MODEL. BOTH HARVESTERS - BUILT AT NEW HOLLAND'S COMBINE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN ZEDELGEM, BELGIUM - FEATURE INNOVATIVE NEW TECHNOLOGY DESIGNED TO HELP THE LARGEST FARMING ENTERPRISES MAXIMISE OUTPUT, MINIMISE LOSSES, AND REDUCE TOTAL COST OF HARVESTING, ACCORDING TO THE COMPANY. WE TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT THEY OFFER**

The primary difference between the two models is in power and grain tank size, to ensure the new combines match the needs of a broad range of large farm enterprises. The CR11 features a 20,000L grain tank and a 15.9L FPT Cursor 16 engine producing 775hp. The CR10 engine is a 12.9L FPT Cursor 13 generating 635hp, while its grain tank holds 16,000L. Beyond additional power and grain capacity, the key features, according to the company, that take these combines into a new league in terms of output, sample quality, and loss minimisation include longer twin rotors and the new Twin-Clean cleaning system.

## MORE CAPACITY

From the front, these new flagship CR combines are designed to handle greater

volumes of crop. Cutterbar widths of 10.6-15.0m (35-50ft) are available in fixed, flexible knife, movable knife and draper formats. Corn/maize heads of 12-16 rows are also available, and unloading auger lengths can be specified to match all header widths. There are three driveline options to meet all header requirements - standard with fixed drive, standard with variable drive, and a variable heavy-duty system. On the variable driveline, a CVT drive unit on the engine gearbox allows header/feeder speed to be varied depending on crop and field conditions. Feeder/header reversing is achieved via a hydraulic motor on the fixed speed driveline, and with the CVT drive on the variable speed driveline. The elevator is equipped as standard with front-face adjustment and lateral-tilt remote controlled from the cab. From here the crop

is fed to New Holland's proven Dynamic Feed Roll system, which can now be reversed - simultaneously with the elevator and the rotors - in the event of a blockage. The DFR accelerates the crop and splits it into two even streams to feed the two longitudinal threshing and separating rotors that follow. A large stone trap in front of the DFR can be emptied either manually or, optionally, remotely via hydraulic activation from the cab. New Holland was the first to launch a combine featuring two longitudinal rotors at its heart, pioneering its Twin Rotor threshing and separation technology almost 50 years ago, in 1975. Over time, its design has evolved to ensure it meets similarly evolving demands for throughput, grain protection, grain retention and straw quality. In the new CR10 and CR11, the two 600mm (24in) rotors are of increased diameter and length, providing greater capacity for the crop to circulate and for the grain to be threshed and separated. Each rotor features 40 standard rasp bars, eight HX raspbars and 12 spiked raspbars. The HX units combine the height of spiked raspbars with the profile of the standard units, with a greater sidewall angle helping



accelerate crop flow in the transition zone of the stepped rotor cage, between the threshing zone and the separation zone. Vane angle can be remotely controlled from the cab, and the new vane design aids crop ejection should the rotors need to be reversed.

### ALL-NEW TWINCLEAN CLEANING SHOE

The new TwinClean cleaning shoe incorporates multiple features to boost throughput and minimise grain loss. It consists of two sieve systems in sequence, each having its own upper and lower sieve and clean grain auger, and is based around a large grainpan with an increased fallstep to the first upper sieve. Airflow is provided by a high-power cleaning shoe fan. Two automatic cross distribution mechanisms, one on the grainpan and one on the upper sieves, guarantee an even cleaning shoe load in all conditions. Two sets of pressure sensors, one on the grainpan and one on the upper sieves, continuously measure the cleaning shoe load and detect any anomalies in material distribution between left and right. A side-shake mechanism adds a lateral component to the grainpan and sieve movement which evens out the material over the cleaning shoe's full width. As such, the cleaning shoe can compensate for uneven feeding and side slopes up to 28 per cent. Overall size of the complete sieve area is 8.76m<sup>2</sup>.

### GRAIN TANKS THAT MAXIMISE AUTONOMY

The CR11 grain tank holds 20,000L with an unloading rate of 210L/sec, while the CR10 tank holds 16,000L and has a 159L/sec unloading rate. Cross-auger shut-off allows the unloading auger to be fully emptied even when the grain tank still holds grain. On the CR11, an option allows unloading speed to be reduced by 50 per cent by disengaging the front cross auger, aiding topping-off of trailers. All unloading augers feature a pivoting spout, to aid even filling and allow tractors to keep on track.

### CHOPPERS

CR10 and CR11 combines can be equipped with either a standard integrated chopper or a high hood-mounted fine-chop unit. While the first of these is intended for dry conditions, the high hood-mounted unit is targeted at users needing to process high straw volumes to a fine chop and distribute material across a wide cutting width. The standard integrated chopper features 60 fixed blades which work in conjunction with 52 counter knives working at 3,000rpm for chopping, or at 800rpm for straw swath laying. Manual adjustment of the counter knives is standard, and remote hydraulic adjustment optional. A driven roller assists straw ejection when swathing, or into the spreader impellers when chopping. The two hydraulically driven 800mm impellers, each equipped with three paddles, spread chopped material at widths up to 15m (50ft). An oscillating deflector behind the spreaders creates a dynamic pulsating effect on the residue spreading to ensure even distribution over the full cutting width. The high hood chopper option leads with a 500mm beater with two rows of spikes and two rows of blades, plus a non-perforated beater pan. This is followed by a six-row chopper with 88 flail knives and 67 counter knives. The chopper can operate at low (900rpm) or high (3,600rpm) speed, with a neutral position for free movement when servicing is required. Remote chopper speed selection is optional. The pair of hydraulically driven 970mm-diameter impellers on this unit each feature five paddles, capable of distributing material at up to 18m (61ft). As on the standard unit, an oscillating deflector is again fitted

behind the spreaders on the high hood chopper, to dynamically pulse the residue across the full cutting width. The IntelliSpread option uses radars to continuously assess the full width of the residue spread and automatically adjust left and right spreader speed to guarantee full width spreading. Further options include remote selection of chopper door position, chopper gears and counterknives. Also optional is a chopper load indicator, which provides information on chopper power consumption.

### TECHNOLOGY PLUS COMFORT

The CR10/CR11 cab, which sits beneath new roof styling and has a 25L handwash tank with integrated soap dispenser located by its access steps, features multiple upgrades. Operation is made easier through incorporation of twin IntelliView 12 touchscreen terminals. Both combines are equipped with three cameras, providing views to the rear, of the grain tank and of the unloading auger spout, while a 360° bird's eye view camera is optional, as is a trailer hitch camera. Elsewhere in the revised cab, changes include new-style brake pedals and foot pegs, a luxury steering wheel and premium cloth or leather seats, plus new multizone climate control with floor level air ducts. A new Bluetooth radio allows operation of the radio and a mobile phone via the radio control panel in the roof liner, or one of the IntelliView 12 touchscreens. Externally, new mirrors provide a wider view angle, with the right-hand unit optionally electrically foldable, while windscreen access steps aid glass cleaning. A comprehensive lighting package includes four LED beacons (two at the front and two strips at the rear), 13 cab-mounted LED worklights, two stubble LED lights, one unloading auger LED light, one grain tank LED light, eight rear LED worklights, two LED sidelights, three undershield LED strips, two engine service LED strips and an LED sieve strip. Optional 'far distance' lights of 36,000 lumens with 500m reach can be integrated under each of the cab roof wings. There is also an additional portable worklight.

### PRECISION TO MATCH PERFORMANCE

New CR10 and CR11 combines are equipped with precision farming technology packages designed to match the needs of the largest farms. A Core PLM Intelligence package covers the most commonly specified requirements, such as IntelliSense, where automatic adjustments occur according to the harvest strategy chosen by the operator, whether limited loss, best grain quality, maximum capacity, or fixed throughput. The second option is an Advanced PLM Intelligence bundle, aimed at those with the most advanced demands. The CR10 and CR11 feature a two-speed hydrostatic transmission and TerraLock semi-automatic diff lock which is engaged manually and disengaged automatically depending on steering angle and forward speed. Models specified with SmartTrax are available with three track belt width options of 660mm/26in, 810mm/32in and 910mm/36in, with rubber or hydraulic cushioning. Respective overall machine widths are 3.49m, 3.79m and 3.99m. For certain markets a wide beam configuration is available in combination with 910mm/36in tracks, with an overall machine width of 4.8m. Where a wheeled machine is preferred, New Holland and Michelin have co-developed 900mm-wide tyres of 2.32m diameter (VF 900/65 R46), to minimise compaction and maximise traction. Alternatives tyre options are VF 800/70 R46 (2.32m diameter) and VF900/60 R38 (2.05m diameter).





**Tom Murphy**  
Professional Agricultural  
Contractors of Ireland



## UNFAIR TAX

**It appears from the many calls to our office that contractors in certain parts of the country are being hit with commercial tax bills that are, in some cases, quite substantial. Local authorities in the south of the country, but not exclusively, are seeking commercial-rate revenue associated with contractors' workshops and sheds used to house their machinery.**

While local authorities are well within their rights to do this, it does hit some businesses harder than others, especially those agricultural contractors who do not farm. Why? Because Revenue does not recognise agricultural contractors as part of the agricultural sector but designates them part of the service industry. PAC Ireland has campaigned to have this changed, however the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and indeed successive ministers have constantly given us the deaf ear.

When agricultural contractors are also farmers, it is difficult for local authorities to assess how much contracting they do to apportion the correct amount of tax, so it becomes a grey area. Of course, it's probable that local authorities would be wary of taking on the mighty farming lobby. The crux of the problem is that many agricultural contractors are full-time and do not farm as well. In these cases, their businesses can be hit with very high rates of tax.

This creates an unfair advantage for contractors who farm against those who don't. Full-time contractors can be heavily taxed and must add this additional overhead to the prices they charge. It is important for all contractors to join PAC Ireland's campaign to put an end to this unacceptable burden and lobby their TDs for the agricultural-contracting sector to be brought under the umbrella of the agriculture.



**FAREWELL, PAT GRIFFIN**

At the last meeting of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee (FSPAC), Pat Griffin, senior

inspector, announced his retirement. I must say this came as a surprise to everyone. I have worked with Pat for too many years to remember and I've seen at close hand his dedication to reducing serious injuries and fatalities in the farming sector. A plain-speaking man, he was always ready to listen. He wanted all stakeholders to have an input into policies and actions when dealing with the health, safety and wellbeing of those working in agriculture. When Pat joined the HSA agricultural department, he got the backing of the board to reorganise how the HSA approached the serious situation in the farming sector, with its high figures of fatalities each year. He established the FSPAC, a statutory committee of the authority chaired by a board member. This meant that every HSA board meeting received a full report from the FSPAC.

Pat steered this new group to produce a four-year plan, which saw five working groups prepare a farm safety action plan with recommendations to reduce fatalities. There is no doubt that this initiative worked and the format he created will continue. Pat can retire with the satisfaction that he made a major contribution and many lives have been saved through his dedication to what must have been a very difficult job. Guímid scor fada agus sona duit, from all at PAC Ireland.

### STAY SAFE

Finally, July and August are the months when fatalities and serious injuries can occur. I urge all those involved in agriculture to take great care. Time pressures, stress, fatigue and dehydration can lead to lapses of concentration. Cutting corners to save a few minutes could be the worst decision you ever make. Please stay safe.



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## CLAAS CELEBRATES HALF A MILLION COMBINE HARVESTERS

**Claas has reached a milestone in its combine-harvester history, with half a million of the machines built since the very first Claas MDB combine was produced in 1936.** This was followed by the Hercules/SF, which was the first European-built self-propelled combine harvester, in 1953. Since then, Claas combine harvesters such as Matador, Senator, Dominator and most recently the Lexion have set new standards both for technology and high levels of output and efficiency. Alongside this has been the development of operator assistance systems such as yield mapping in the early 1990s, telematics in 2005, and now CEMOS introduced in 2013, Claas outlined. Claas will recognise this major milestone with several anniversary machines, sporting a special paint finish and branding. In addition all combines manufactured this year will have celebratory stickers on them.



**NOEL DUNNE**  
Machinery editor

## 'GIVE THE FARMING COMMUNITY MORE OF A VOICE'

**Well readers, as I sit here and pen this month's column, not much has changed weather-wise since last month. You could get burnt in the morning and rained on in the evening. Hello Irish summer!**

There has been a lot of hay made though around me this year, but when I enquired there was none for sale. 'We could need this yet', was the reply, or 'it could be a long winter'. Farmers are preparing to avoid falling into a fodder trap and end up being short. Remember last year, it hardly stopped raining after The Ploughing and it turned into a long, wet winter. So every possible blade of grass has to be saved now and farmers have to try and squeeze that extra cut, if the weather will allow it. I can see grain harvesting and hay- and silage-making going hand in hand this year. I don't fancy the contractor's job this year – do they go combining or foraging? Pick your machine and go. All these decisions are weather driven, and cause an overlap of work, putting pressure on the contractor and machinery available. Good luck to them all over the coming weeks. I am not really a political animal myself. I would be very honest and say I would vote for whatever party would look after the interests of farmers and the wider agri-business industry – within reason. Now, unless you were locked in a barn for the last month you know we had local and European election frenzies going on up and down the country. This time, I took quite an interest in our local elections here in Co. Laois. I personally know some of the candidates who put themselves forward; some, I do not; and others are life-serving members of the county council who just top the poll all the time, anyway. One reason for my interest this time was because a neighbour and friend of mine was running for the first time. He had been co-opted to fill a position left vacant after the sad passing of another local representative. Now, this friend of mine is a farmer with a young family,

understands local issues and national issues, and would have been an excellent person to have as a liaison between the urban and rural councillors, communicating all the goings on in the country and understanding what is happening in the towns. Sadly, he missed out by very narrow margins, so tight that there was a re-count.

I was at the count centre and I can tell you it is not a place for the faint hearted. The highs, the lows, the happiness, and the disappointment – pain etched on the faces of the losers, relief on the faces of the winners. The place is an emotional rollercoaster. But my point is that it is important to have a rural-urban balance in local politics. We need voices from all sides. I would dearly like to find out exactly how many farmers stood for both the European elections and local elections. Not many, not enough. This is my call out to young farmers: get involved in local politics, and give the farming community more of a voice in your own county.

Recently, Tractor of the Year (TotY) 2025 kicked off in Milan with 25 different journalists – myself included, as the Irish representative – getting the opportunity to see 17 world-leading tractor manufacturers show 21 tractors across various TotY categories. I will have more on this in the August issue.

After talking to my friends and journalists in Italy who all represent key farming publications and networks in Europe, the common factor and main points of discussion around the dinner table were to do with the uncertainty in agriculture – weather, commodity prices, input prices, cost of machinery replacement in all countries. This is not just an Irish problem where sometimes we think the Government doesn't really get farming issues. I can tell you it is a major issue in many countries in Europe. Many of my colleagues feel that it is a short-term blip. We will wait and see.

To wrap up this month, I want to offer my sincerest and deepest condolences to my cousin, Pat Scully's, family and many friends of Cherry Hill House, Ballyhyland, Co. Laois. Pat sadly passed away in late June. He was a visionary and a leader when it came to dairy farming. He made things work in hard times, and he built, bit by bit, one of the finest dairy enterprises in his area. His son, Donald Scully, now runs the business, ably assisted by his family – three generations now on the farm. Donald is well known in dairy sectors through his involvement at the top level in the ICMSA and his appointment back in 2022 to the Teagasc Authority. Once again, our sincere condolences to Pat's wife Kathleen, son Donald, daughter Lisa, brothers Tom and Peter. Until next month, farm safely, farm wisely.





## AXIAL-FLOW COMBINE SNAPS UP INTERNATIONAL DESIGN PRIZE

**Case IH's Axial-Flow combine has won the Red Dot Design Award for product design. Judged annually, the Red Dot Design Award has become one of the most sought-after marks of quality for good design.**

Core details of the new Case IH AF series Axial-Flow were revealed at Agritechnica 2023, and the new combine recently made its full global debut in North America. It is designed with a renewed focus on helping users to maximise output per engine hour while minimising losses and grain damage,

retaining the proven Axial-Flow principle of rotary threshing and separation, the company has said.

Major advances in the new AF include a 775hp engine, an active dynamic cleaning system, 20,000L grain tank, 210L/second unloading rate and headers of up to 15m (50ft). Users benefit from performance-enhancing technology including AFS Harvest Command, to minimise losses, maximise throughput and protect grain quality, helping experienced users get even more from their combine, and inexperienced ones quickly

become proficient operators, to assist in tackling labour challenges.

"The receipt of a Red Dot Design Award is a great honour for the design team behind the new Axial Flow," says David Wilkie, industrial design director at Case IH parent CNH.

"We wanted to create a look that showed this combine is much more than a refresh of existing ideas in terms of internal engineering, and is something really very different. I'm really pleased the Red Dot jury recognized our efforts to create a style that matches the Axial-Flow AF's considerable substance."

Farmers delivering farm plastics for recycling to Kilmallock bring-centre last year

## IRISH FARMERS RECYCLE PLASTIC FROM 20 MILLION BALES

**Irish farmers recycled plastic from the equivalent of 20 million silage bales in 2023 and in doing so achieved a 95 per cent recycling rate, according to the Irish Farm Films Producers' Group (IFFPG).** The vast majority of the plastic was collected at 200 bring centres, coordinated by the IFFPG and located in marts, co-ops and agri-merchants. Almost 40 per cent of what was collected was processed at Irish recycling facilities, representing a boost to the circular economy in Ireland, according to the IFFPG. Farm plastics recycling in Ireland is coordinated by IFFPG, which is the national farm plastics compliance scheme. IFFPG, which is a not-for-profit body, has recycled almost 500,000 tonnes of farm plastics waste since its establishment in 1998. The scheme is funded by both the farm plastics industry and farmers, and approved by the Minister for the Environment. It is an excellent example of what can be achieved when key stakeholders in a sector come together to work for the betterment of the environment, says the IFFPG.

More than 38,000 tonnes of silage wrap and pit cover waste were recycled in 2023, which represented a record 95 per cent recycling rate. Collection figures at some bring centres were impressive. For example, 550 tonnes of waste was collected at Kilmallock bring centre which is the equivalent to plastic from 275,000 silage bales, while 582 farmers used the Ballinarobe bring centre over a two-day period.

The volume of farm plastics recycled has increased by 40 per cent in the last five years alone. This significant increase can be attributed to more plastic going on the market due to the abolition of the milk quota, better grassland management and more recently Bord Bia inspections. For Irish farmers, farm plastics recycling has become a mainstream activity, with their local bring-centre considered both the most convenient (average distance of six miles for farmers) and cost effective (€50 charge for plastic from 250 bales) means of managing their waste plastic. These factors, as well as a desire by farmers to

be environmentally responsible, have resulted in the recycling rate for farm plastics being consistently the highest for any plastic waste stream in the country.

In 2023, IFFPG supplied almost 40 per cent of collected material to Irish facilities and in doing so fully met their intake requirements. In the case of both Enva in Carrickmacross and Sabrina in Littleton, silage wrap and pit covers are recycled into pellets which are later sold to manufacturers for conversion into construction film, refuse sacks and garden furniture. In the case of IFF Ltd, a recycler based in west Clare, an example of the circular economy in action can be seen as this company converts fertiliser bag waste into fence posts for sale to Irish farmers. Farm plastics waste which cannot be recycled in Ireland is exported under strict waste legislation for recycling elsewhere in Europe. However, record recycling levels in recent years at a time of escalating recycling costs due to global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have dramatically increased costs to IFFPG, it says. For example, the scheme's overall costs increased from €3m in 2018 to €8m in 2023. This, according to IFFPG, has necessitated increases to both the recycling levy and collection charges in recent years, with the minimum collection charge increasing from €35 to €50 per half tonne at bring centres this year.





## KRONE ADDS TOP-OF-THE-RANGE MODEL TO R SERIES DISC MOWERS

**Krone is adding a new top-of-the-range model to its R series disc mowers, the EasyCut R 450, with a working width of 4.5m.**

This rear-mounted mower ensures maximum driving stability thanks to its telescopic counterweight and horizontal folding mechanism for road transport. The new ECR 450 was presented to the public for the first time in France recently at the Salon de l'herbe et des fourrages.

The EasyCut 450 mower can be operated with all Krone front-mounted mowers up to and including a working width of four metres, always ensuring an optimum overcut, according to the company. Adjustable lower

link holders and outrigger arms, which can be mounted in different positions, ensure perfect swathing.

The EasyCut R 450 is equipped with a hydraulically telescoping mechanism which can be optionally loaded with up to 10 plates of 50kg each. This greatly improves the handling characteristics of the mower in the field. The weight, which can be up to 500kg, moves outwards by 60cm in a fully automatic sequence-controlled manner. This allows the ballasting of the machine to be optimised and the lower links of the tractor are loaded more evenly. As a result, the power requirement is only around 74kW or 100hp.

The patented DuoGrip suspension ensures outstanding ground tracking across the entire working width, even in the most difficult conditions. An integrated pendulum stop cylinder pulls the mower unit onto the outrigger arm in the headland position, ensuring smooth driving behaviour even on uneven ground and during fast turning manoeuvres. This maximises headland lifting. The technical basis for the EasyCut R 450 is the all-round welded EasyCut cutterbar, lubricated for life, with eight cutting discs and two mower drums. The patented SafeCut cutterbar protection system and hydraulic impact damage protection system prevent the machine from extensive damaged. The EasyCut R 450 is hydraulically swivelled horizontally to the rear for transport. In doing so, the counterweight is automatically retracted so that the transport width is less than 2.5 metres. With the standard LED lighting including a warning panel the rear mounted mower can be transported in complete safety on public roads. When the work is done, the mower can be safely parked using the standard parking supports which remain on the machine.

## 5 REASONS TO BUY A **KRONE** MOWER



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# FARMING FROM THE OFFICE?

**AUTONOMOUS TRACTORS ARE STARTING TO APPEAR ON THE MARKET IN IRELAND, BOTH FROM IRISH MANUFACTURERS AND FOREIGN SHORES, WRITES ALISTAIR CHAMBERS, WHO GIVES AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT IS AVAILABLE AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS**



The AgBot 5.115T2 was a highlight of the Kellys of Borris open day. Photo: Alistair Chambers.

Earlier this year, Kellys of Borris hosted several open days to celebrate 30 years of being Claas dealers. While there, I had the opportunity to see the latest autonomous arrival to the Irish tractor market from Dutch manufacturers, AgXceed, in which Claas has a minority shareholding since 2021.

## THE AGBOT

Stood in a tent at one of the open days was the tracked AgXceed AgBot 5.115T2. This is powered by a 4.1L Deutz diesel engine producing 156hp, which is used to power an electric drivetrain with a speed range of 0 to 13.5km/h. This would cover nearly every field operation in Ireland. One advantage of the AgBot is that it can be specified in differing track widths and has a standard three-point linkage system, which allows for the use of equipment that is already on farm. Hydraulic power is delivered to the machine via four double-acting spools and it can lift up to 8 tonnes (t) on the rear and 3t on the front linkage. The unit weighs in at 7.8t unladen. AgXceed claims that the AgBot is capable of working for 20 hours at 75 per cent before needing to refill its 350L fuel and 30L AdBlue tanks.

## THE AUTONOMY BIT

That's all the oily bits but the brain of the operation is the autonomy. The AgBot is covered in sensors both for accuracy and

safety. There are four different sensor types on it: LiDAR (light detection and ranging); radar; ultrasonic; and contact. These allow the machine to work without someone directly in control. Some of the sensor types may be affected by climatic or working conditions and it can only work autonomously with three of the four systems in perfect working order. If the AgBot meets/sees an obstacle, it will stop and message the operator/owner. A selection of cameras onboard can be used to view the issue and decide whether manual intervention is required.

## GPS

Novtel supplies the GPS guidance with the AgBot. It gives accuracy of +/- 2.5cm and the ability to transfer data in both directions.

Once within its geofenced area, the AgBot is fully autonomous, and it can be set up to work with many different implements. Once fields are mapped and each implement programmed into the system, the operator just needs to pick the field on the online system and send the machine on its way.

## THE SMALLER OPERATION

From an Irish point of view, Acres Machinery, based in Co. Roscommon, is producing the iTarra autonomous tractor, which is considered to be a solution for the smaller operation. It can be purchased at a price that is similar to standard tractors, or the technology can be added to an existing tractor for a fraction of the cost.

The iTarra has some very nice features including the ability to be operated via a virtual reality headset from a remote location. This feature gives the iTarra cross-industry adaptability that is not available with other machines. The other standout feature is the ability to autonomously attach to implements using a very smart magnetic pin system.

## HIGH PRECISION

At the other end of the spectrum is the ingenious FarmDroid, which sows and undertakes weed control completely autonomously. The levels of precision required are very high with an RTK (real time kinematic) base station within 10km being essential. The reason for this is that the FarmDroid knows exactly where it has planted the seeds and, therefore, it knows where to weed without damaging the crop. Obviously, this machine will be used for high-value crops such as vegetable or sugar beet. The



The iTarra's virtual reality mode allows you to carry out tasks remotely. Photo: itarra.com



FarmDroid is completely electrically powered with a set of solar panels installed so it can work 24/7 with little or no intervention. Forward-working speeds are slow in comparison to tractor work but the precision and ability to work constantly makes this machine an option on some enterprises. As the FarmDroid is small and light, it greatly reduces compaction in the field and the fact that it is completely CO2 neutral means that not only is it helping the earth locally, it is also contributing to the bigger picture of reducing CO2 from agriculture.

### FUTURE FARMING

Many of the big-brand tractor manufacturers are heavily involved with autonomous technology, with CNH having projects in the red and the blue camps, and AGCO undertaking similar with Fendt, Massey and Valtra brands to different levels. It is safe to assume that for large-scale food production across the world, autonomous tractors will, over the next decade, become very common. In the large grain-growing areas of eastern Europe, the Americas and Australia, large



The FarmDroid machine on display at Agritechnica. Photo: farmdroid.com.

tractors may well roam freely without direct human interaction, but I suspect these will be 'standard tractors' for the foreseeable future to allow operators to monitor and/or set up the equipment before setting it off to work. On the local front, we are probably a bit further away due to the scale difference and the fact that tractors used in Ireland must often function like a Swiss army knife with their many different roles from field work

to yard work and everything in between. Obviously, some of the more specialist growers of vegetables or beet in Ireland may have use for one of the machines mentioned in this piece as a labour-saving and output-improving measure, but on the average Irish farm they don't fit the bill just yet. So farming from the farm office isn't a reality for the majority right now but for a small few it may be on the horizon.



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Denis Drennan  
President ICMSA

## THE REGULATORY 'CHICKENS' ARE COMING HOME TO ROOST

**The recent announcement by Tirlán of a round of voluntary redundancies seems to have been met with surprise in some quarters.** The general reporting of the announcement seemed to dwell disproportionately on the poor weather as a likely cause for the slide in production volumes cited as the most obvious cause for the 'restructuring'. That this was an element can't be doubted; the idea that it is the decisive element is, bluntly, ridiculous. There's a much more valid explanation for the collapse in milk production that will likely see volumes back by approximately 10 per cent by year's end. I believe the explanation is that after two years of low prices, high inputs, uncertainty about the future, and relentless regulatory pressure that farmer morale has effectively collapsed. The irresistible pressure being exerted by the Government and the EU to 'shrink' our dairy sector has now resulted in undermining the confidence in our sector and this generation of dairy farmers – and, more importantly, the next generation of dairy farmers – are now voting with their feet and 'getting out'.

### BETWEEN A ROCK

The politicians who we might have reasonably expected to comment on this reverse have been deafeningly silent. We might wonder why, but then realise that we're between elections – those on June 7 and the general election most observers now feel is 'nailed on' for the end of October. Nobody will want to draw attention to their Government's abject failure in the very sector in which Ireland has – or had – a world-leading reputation for excellence, sustainability, and research. So, we can't expect too many to note the current collapse in investment, income and volumes in the dairy sector that the very same politicians would have agreed until recently was the jewel in Ireland's farming crown. Even more noticeable was the lack of

comment from the media's always available horde of 'activists' from the environmental NGOs; they must have struggled to resist hitting that note of triumph. These collapsing figures are what they have been seeking for the better part of the decade. They seem to have won their battle against us – for now, anyway. But they are going to come up very short against a problem that they won't have anticipated and that they don't seem to much care about.

### NEGATIVE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

As the revenues from milk start falling away, the rural economies that flourished on the basis of the 'milk multiplier' effect will now experience that same multiplier effect but in negative. That reality is already apparent – the Tirlán announcement is just the beginning. And, as farmers' income streams stop flowing out the gate into the wider community, consternation is going to replace complacency in those politicians who presided over the implementation of policies that did no favours for the dairy sector. As the order books for rural companies and contractors empty and as the phones don't ring with new business, the full extent of the economic impetus provided by dairy farming will become quickly apparent. The ICMSA has been stressing it for years and has produced the figures and data to support our argument that this 'milk multiplier' is actually the economic engine for huge areas of the State, most specifically huge areas of Munster and south Leinster. We pointed out that this exact mixture of low prices, high inputs, and increasing regulatory pressures would undermine that tradition and economic force, but we were ignored or simply fobbed off. We might be about to see our warnings and expressions of alarm vindicated and proved right. It gives us no satisfaction to see it (and it mixes a metaphor where the dairy sector is concerned) but perhaps the regulatory chickens are coming home to roost?

### KNOCK-ON IMPACT

The ICMSA has repeatedly described as delusional the idea that the Irish dairy sector could, in some way, be 'shrunk' without massive consequential 'knock-on' damage to the wider economy in those areas where the production and processing of milk is almost the flagship economic activity. We insisted, time and again, that dairy farming is not just an aspect of the rural economy, but – right across swathes of the country – is almost the total of that rural economy. We warned repeatedly that the quite deliberate efforts of some so-called environmental commentators or 'activists' to make an artificial distinction between farming and 'a rural economy' were both false and misleading. We are about to be proved right, yet again.

The 150 redundancies that Tirlán are seeking may be just the beginning of a wider sector restructuring; we are in danger of entering a period of decline of the sector that more than any other provided prosperity and economic prospects to rural areas all across the State. The tragedy – and in time it will be judged as exactly that – is that it was perfectly possible to move smoothly towards our environmental targets while preserving our world-leading dairy sector and the rural economic bulwark it represents. We have, on numerous occasions, outlined how that can be achieved and why it is so necessary. Instead, the Government and the EU have decided on a crude policy which has resulted in regulating dairy farmers out of existence at the prompting of a chorus of self-appointed and self-important commentators. There's no point in the Government denying that this has not been the policy; the evidence is all around us in the crashing farm incomes, the plunging volumes of production and emptying order books. Those are now joined by the first announcement of voluntary redundancies. And that's the irony here, because all this damage was itself 'voluntary'; our Government decided to do it when there were other less destructive alternatives available.



Chefs from the Dutch and Swedish chapters of the Chefs' Irish Beef Club visiting John Phelan on his beef farm in Kilkenny, with representatives from Bord Bia.



# FROM THE FIELD TO THE FORK

**KILKENNY BEEF FARMER, JOHN PHELAN, RECENTLY HOSTED VISITING CHEFS FROM THE DUTCH AND SWEDISH CHAPTERS OF THE CHEFS' IRISH BEEF CLUB. THESE SPECIAL GUESTS, THROUGH THEIR CULINARY EXPERTISE, ADVOCATE FOR IRISH BEEF IN SOME OF THE MOST RENOWNED RESTAURANTS IN EUROPE AND MATT O'KEEFFE WAS THERE TO FIND OUT MORE**

The Chefs' Irish Beef Club, founded by Bord Bia 20 years ago, has over 90 award-winning member chefs spread across eight chapters in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.

**"Any opportunity I can get to showcase Irish beef, I'll take it hands down," John said.** "I believe we have an excellent product for sale. I believe that we have a great climate here in Ireland to be able to produce excellent quality beef. And if I get an opportunity to showcase that, I'm going to take it and hopefully help Bord Bia and everyone involved in producing and promoting Irish beef."

## A FIRST-CLASS PRODUCT

The quality of the stock on the Phelan farm is extremely impressive. John described the production system: "We're a store-to-beef system. So, we buy one-to-two-year-old stores, all good continental-type heifers. Our target purchase weights are between 350-400kg. They'll go to grass when they arrive on the farm and are sold at two years of age. They will spend some time indoors during the lifecycle on the farm and then they will be finished off grass. "We predominantly sell to Dawn Meats and,

of course, they have weight and quality preferences based on what the consumer wants, what the businesses they sell to want, in terms of carcass weights, cuts and quality. We plan our purchasing and production strategies at the start of each year. There's no point having a product that you can't sell. "We have built up a good relationship with Dawn but that doesn't mean that you don't go elsewhere to check the market. Dawn knows the type of stock that we have. A large majority of our cattle, almost 90 per cent of our stock last year, were R+ or greater. So, we're hitting the specifications that Dawn's customers want. Our carcass kill-outs are averaging around 385kg and the demand is for carcass weights between 380-400kg. All our continental-type breed heifers are hitting those targets."

## GRASS PRODUCTION DRIVER

"Growing grass in Ireland is one of the best things we do, but controlling it is a different story. The only way you can control grass





Some of the visiting chefs from the Dutch and Swedish chapters on the farm of John Phelan, Blanchville House, Co. Kilkenny.

in terms of managing growth and use is by having paddocks and waterways systems and roadways and by back-fencing to allow grass recover quickly after each grazing. At peak grass growth, the cattle on the farm are rotating around the paddocks in less than three weeks. That maintains grass quality and maximises utilisation."

And the burden of regulation is ever present, John explained: "You need to have full traceability. As farmers, we have a lot more jobs to do, so it's definitely getting harder over time, but there are apps and different technologies to make it a little bit easier. We must be able to provide proof of our standards. The new Protected Geographical Indicator for grass-fed beef is not a game changer, but it does help. All these things help. It's up to Bord Bia and the Dawns and ABPs to maximise the benefits. I'm trying to produce good quality beef to showcase it to my customers, and we're relying on processors and promoters to do their part in selling our grass-fed beef across Europe."

### A SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT

On the wider definition of sustainability, John said: "Obviously there's environmental sustainability, and you must have economic sustainability as well. We use all the

sustainability tools we can on the farm. We're grass measuring, soil testing, and spreading manures using low-emission technologies."

### BORD BIA PERSPECTIVE

Joe Burke is beef specialist with Bord Bia. He described the enthusiasm of the European chefs on their visit to an Irish cattle farm: "These guys have an amazing interest. Once they understood Irish food and its credentials, they were buyers, they were believers. Then, they come here and they get the proof. They don't just buy the product, they then go out to people at their tables and explain in detail why Irish beef and other Irish food products are on their tables. That's invaluable." Paul Nolan of Dawn Meats was also on the Phelan farm visit. He took up the challenge facing beef processors: "In terms of the challenge as a processor and a seller of Irish beef, we understand fully that these chefs are very consistent in what they're looking for in terms of the specifications. If you're dealing with people for 10 and 15 years, you build up that understanding and you know their business back to front. They have a fair idea about ours, and it works very well in that sense."

The importance of the Chefs' Irish Beef Club

should not be taken for granted, Joe said: "It is a really powerful network. In total, we have 60 chefs who are visiting from eight different markets and, in total within the network, we have over 90 chefs. They are certainly battling hard for us in terms of their influence within their own restaurants and within their own businesses. It's not just Irish beef, but other food products as well. We are talking to them here about everything from Irish lamb to cheese. There's pigmeat and seafood products that they're going to be tasting. Our aim is to highlight to the chefs and, ultimately, their customers, the quality and variety of Irish food produce. Their influence extends widely because they're key opinion leaders within their markets. A lot of them are very strong in terms of their ability to network, whether it be through social media or even through their own TV programmes and food blogs. We have 15 members of the Dutch Chefs' Irish Beef Club chapter here as well as Swedish and Belgian members, with other nationalities visiting similar beef farms across the country. Eight different European markets are represented among the delegation in total. It's the 20-year celebration of the establishment of the Chefs' Irish Beef Club so this visit is a very special event."





MATT O'KEEFE  
EDITOR

# CAN THE IRISH ECONOMY DELIVER 4.4% GROWTH NEXT YEAR?

**The latest economic report from Davy is optimistic.** The headline quote from the report is that Ireland is on the cusp of rapid growth. Taken at face value, there is little enough to argue against in that hypothesis. The expectation from the Bank of Ireland-owned stockbroker is that Irish economic growth will increase to 4.5 per cent this year, with only a marginally lower economic growth prospect for next year. Part of the calculation for 2024 is already baked in. As we enter quarter three, the economy is on course for the 4.5 per cent estimate. With all the economic and political headwinds potentially facing the global economy over the next 18 months, assurances on a 4.4 per cent growth rate for the Irish economy for 2025 cannot be guaranteed. Think Trump, China/EU/US trade stand-offs, continuing and potential military escalations in Ukraine and the Middle East, and there is more cause for caution than optimism regarding economic growth prospects.

## DRIVERS

The Davy economic forecast is based on 2 per cent employment growth this year as well as rapidly increasing housebuilding. These economic drivers are reinforced by low inflation and continuing budget surpluses. The certainty that the current Government will spend that surplus in the October budget

to garner votes in the soon-to-follow general election, could, in turn, as the Davy report notes, drive up inflationary pressures above the desired 2 per cent. That would reduce the 4.4 per cent growth forecast by Davy for 2025. The Davy report warns that threats to competitiveness must be tackled to avoid a slowdown in foreign-direct investment (FDI) and job creation. The mechanisms to avoid this are not clearly set out. We already have among the highest energy prices in the EU with further hikes in carbon taxes in the offing. Add in the restructured EU corporate tax rates and we have a further erosion of our popularity as an FDI destination. Davy points to investment of €30bn being needed to meet the target of 5GW of offshore and 11GW of onshore wind and solar capacity by 2030. Private capital to meet these targets is readily available. What is in considerable doubt is the ability of would-be developers to overcome the considerable regulatory and planning barriers to these developments, certainly in a six-year timescale. While some tweaking of planning regulations has been implemented, inordinate delays will continue to hinder development.

## POPULATION GROWTH

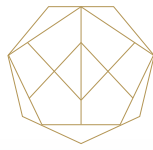
If Davy's population growth forecasts up to 2030 are realised, then current expectations

under the National Planning Framework (NPF) will be completely displaced. As quoted in the Davy report, the NPF estimate is a population of 5.5 million by 2030, assuming a continuing high immigration trend. Davy's figure is almost 500,000 ahead of that. A six million population figure, if realised, would pose considerable government expenditure pressures. Housing, education, health, social welfare and job creation targets would all be impacted. Significant economic stresses would only be manageable if that 4.4 per cent Davy economic growth forecast for next year continues indefinitely. House builds alone would require up to 85,000 new units annually up to 2030, a figure that is not realistically achievable in that timeframe.

## UNKNOWNNS

Ultimately, the Irish economy is heavily reliant on the health of the global economy, with a large FDI sector, an agriculture industry that exports 90 per cent of production, and an increasing reliance on foreign labour. Our economic wellbeing in the years ahead will depend on a reduction in military/political tensions in eastern Europe and the Middle East, a calming in the rising trade tensions across the world, especially between the US and China, as well as a return to lower interest rates. None of these is a given.





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1. Herds with high prevalence of IBR may need to vaccinate calves from 2 weeks of age intranasally. Next vaccine should be given at 3-4 months of age either intranasally or intramuscularly.
2. Intramuscular Vaccination.
3. Cowley DJB et al, Aspects of bovine herpesvirus infection in dairy and beef herds in the Republic of Ireland. Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica 2011, 53:40.
4. Kynotec data April 2020.

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