

FARMERS MONTHLY



SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

EXCLUSIVE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MINISTER CHARLIE McCONOLOGUE, FRANK O'MARA, MAIREAD McGUINNESS, PHIL HOGAN, MICHAEL MILEY, AND MANY MORE

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BEEF2024

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Dé Céadaoin, 26 Meitheamh | 9rn



Teagasc, an Ghráinseach, Dún Samhnaí, Co. na Mí

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Buaicphointí

Bain páirt i ndíospóireachtaí painéil lena gclúdófar príomhábhair ar fud raon de chórais táirgthe eallaigh mairteola i rith an lae.

Ná caill na taispeántais maidir le húsáid uiré cosanta, leatóirí a chalabhrú agus bonneagar feirme.

Féach ar an eallach ó na staidéir éagsúla ar laonna eallaigh agus ar eallach déiríochta go heallach mairteola ag an nGráinseach agus féach na prionsabail a bhaineann le breith shábháilte laonna agus beostoc a láimhseáil lenár n-ionsamhlóirí bó.

JUNE 2024

EDITORIAL

PUTTING THE PRIMARY PRODUCER FIRST

Primary producers are at the end of the queue. They take whatever is left after everyone else has gotten their share. Commodity production lends itself to this economic model, with producers left helpless to improve their lot. Take it or leave it is the mantra of those who wield the economic power. This is commonplace across the world as farmers are pitted against each other to produce food as cheaply as possible and sell it for whatever the processors, traders, supermarkets and consumers deem is sufficient to keep them on the treadmill. It is a life-support system. Producers operate at low or non-existent margins, with basic supports provided from the public purse to keep them alive, if not kicking.

There is a revolution happening in Irish land use that we must use to improve the economic outcomes for primary producers. Energy production offers an opportunity to rebalance the profit pyramid in favour of the primary producer. The proposed Irish biomethane industry, much promoted, but not yet established at scale, offers the opportunity for a new economic model. Last month's Government decision to provide a €40m kickstart to an Irish biodigester industry of scale is welcome. Developers in the private sector may anticipate strong financial returns from this latest energy rush but what's in it for landowners? The digesters need feedstocks including silage and slurry. There is already a modest pricing mechanism being touted as the going rate for this raw feedstock, with mild sweeteners, including a return of digestate for use as fertiliser. The sums proposed are for farmers to decide upon in terms of whether it is worth their while to engage in the supply chain. The figures are far from generous and may or may not equate to or exceed what can be returned from other enterprises.



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

What is clear is that biodigester feedstock producers are not currently being offered a piece of the action, a percentage or profit share of the end price for the gas produced, for instance. Neither have there been any proposals for increased cost of production price increases or consumer price indexation methodologies to build in higher prices for feedstock producers into the future. Upward-only rent reviews may be out of fashion in house and office rentals but would be a valuable option for contracted feedstock supplies to a biodigester industry.

For this new outlet for our produce, we should not accept traditional commodity production payment models that have ill served farmers in the past. The erosion in value of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments over the decades has left farmers with a fraction of the original supports for food production. Neither inflation nor increased production costs were accounted for in CAP payments. This was not an inadvertent omission by those who control the purse strings. It was a deliberate policy to gradually, by inflationary stealth, reduce the real cost of food production subsidisation, knowing the willingness of producers to run ever faster to stand still. Those who fell off the treadmill, and thousands of Irish farmers have done so over the decades, have had their land subsumed into larger-scale units as producers continue the chase for greater efficiencies, delivering at best, static or falling incomes on a per-unit-of-production and per-hectare basis. The reality is too obvious to ignore. Unless we demand a new payment model for supplying feedstocks to an emerging biogas industry, farmers will continue to take whatever is left after everyone else gets their share. Biomethane production offers an opportunity to change the profitability model in favour of the primary producer.

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UPFRONT TONY O'REILLY – A MARKETING MAESTRO

Last month, we heard the sad news of the death of Tony O'Reilly, who is credited with developing the Kerrygold brand back in 1962. Tony was chief executive of An Bord Baine (now Ornu) from 1961-1966 and led the campaign to make the Kerrygold butter brand a premier butter offering, firstly in the UK, and then more globally.

From those beginnings, Kerrygold butter is now the leading Irish food brand and is a market leader in Germany, the US and other countries across the world.

After a stellar rugby career that included record-breaking try-scoring achievements with Ireland and the Lions, Tony left An Bord Baine in 1966 to become managing director of the Irish Sugar Company, with the initial challenge of rejuvenating its Erin Foods subsidiary, which had become heavily loss-making. A commercial tie-up with the Heinz Corporation led to him taking up the role of managing director for the UK with the American food manufacturer. Ultimately, his destiny took him to the US where he became chief executive and president of Heinz, positions which, hitherto, had been the exclusive remit of members of the Heinz family. Tony maintained his Irish business links and built up an impressive portfolio of companies including Independent Newspapers and Waterford Wedgwood. He always believed in the power of financial



Tony O'Reilly (centre) pictured at an early marketing session during his time as chief executive of An Bord Baine. Photo: Courtesy of Ornu.

leverage to accumulate business assets and, ultimately, a relatively minor debt call from his creditors in the wake of Ireland's economic crisis over a decade ago, led to his financial downfall and he had to sell off the jewels in his business and lifestyle crown including his beloved Castlemartin Estate in Co. Kildare. I was introduced to him in 1982 by a former colleague, the late Noel Lawlor, who worked in An Bord Baine's press office and I was impressed by his charisma, his business acumen and, most of all, his marketing prowess. He was the ultimate Irish marketeer. He was one of the early Irish food and business entrepreneurs, and his achievements across the globe are unmatched. Perhaps he flew too close to

the sun, but he deserves full recognition for his business achievements, his sporting brilliance, and his huge commitment to Ireland through his establishment, with Dan Rooney, of the Ireland Funds. It was Tony, and the late Vincent Colgan who headed up the press office in An Bord Baine, that presented the famous 'Bull' statue in 1965 to the Guild of Agricultural Journalists. The trophy is still competed for biannually across the island and this year the Guild Awards will be presented in November. The winner is crowned Journalist of the Year, receiving the Bull as the ultimate accolade for agricultural journalism. This year will be significant, as we raise a glass to the late Tony O'Reilly.

May he rest in peace. DM.

NEW DUTCH GOVERNMENT BACKS DEROGATION

Looking for solace and support from the decision of the new Dutch Government to seek an ongoing Nitrates Derogation, may be a false hope. Our livestock sectors are chalk and cheese. The Dutch farm as many cattle in a space the size of Munster as we do on the entire island. Add in a major pig-production sector that dwarfs our own and the comparisons are negligible. We have a far better case for a derogation than the Dutch, given our relatively extensive livestock-production sector. Our water quality, though in need of further improvement, is superior to that in the Netherlands, or in most countries in the European Union, for that matter. We must paddle our own canoe, and seek a singular derogation based on the merits of our case. A long-term extension of the Nitrates Derogation for Irish livestock farming remains a critical goal to maintaining the viability of our grass-based livestock production system.



IFA CALLS FOR DIESEL-PRICE REDUCTION

We see it again and again. Input costs adjust upwards quickly as soon supply or production costs justify price increases. The same holds true of services costs, including, especially, financial costs. Interest rates move upwards on foot of inflation-suppressing monetary policies. When inflation is suppressed, downwards movements in interest rates are slow. The same, in fairness, can be said for deposit rates –

slow to rise, far quicker to reduce when the opportunity occurs. For farmers, diesel costs are a perfect example of the slow reduction phenomenon. When oil prices rise, fuel price rises follow quickly. Recent months have seen significant reductions in oil prices, which have been tardily and incompletely followed by fuel price reductions. We are being gouged in every direction.

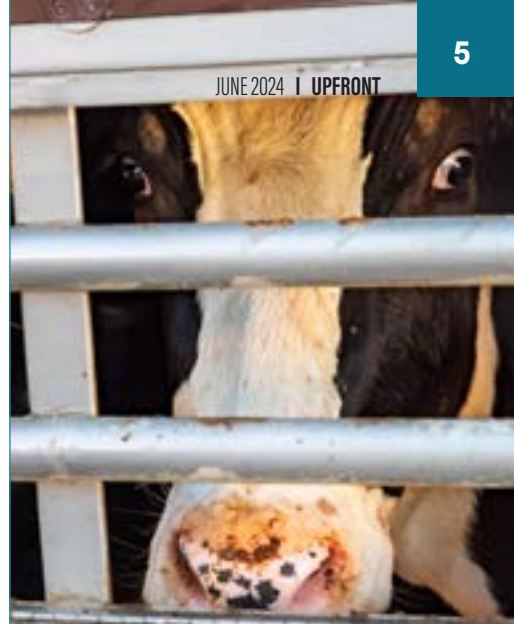
UK BANS LIVE EXPORTS – WHAT NEXT?

Despite the UK no longer being part of the European Union (EU), its Government's decision to ban live exports has implications for Irish livestock exports.

Our reliance, in particular, on live exports of young calves, leaves us vulnerable to any EU changes in livestock movement regulations which would further impede our ability to supply calves for veal units on the continent. In addition, we have a thriving trade in weanlings and store cattle to various destinations in Europe and further afield. At the other end of the planet, Australia has commenced the process of winding down live exports of sheep. Over the past month, Irish livestock shippers moved large numbers of ram lambs abroad. It's a valuable, if irregular, market outlet for lamb producers.

As members of the Single Market, we can claim a legitimate right to be able to sell livestock

across the EU. That, however, may count for little in the long run if regulatory impositions eventually make such trade impractical. The loss of a pressure-release valve for surplus calves on this island would have serious implications in terms of managing and maintaining an additional cattle population of up to 200,000 head, or double that in the normal two-year lifecycle of male animals. It's not something we want to consider, but that doesn't make it a potential challenge of major proportions in the years ahead. We have set ourselves against early slaughter of young calves. It is a practical solution, but not a publicly acceptable option. The current eight-week moratorium on slaughter is generally being observed with a few exceptions. That said, if this limit is kept in place and not adjusted upwards, then it may become an alternative, even with the additional care costs,



to any long-term disruption or stymieing of our live calf export trade. There was a hope that Rosé eight-month-old veal could be a viable outlet. Alas, this is either a very slow burner or a non-runner.

KERRY CELEBRATES 30 YEARS IN LATIN AMERICA

Thirty years ago, Kerry opened a manufacturing plant in Mexico and four years later moved into Brazil. In that time Kerry now has 14 production sites including two regional technology and innovation centres in Mexico and Brazil, employing 3,000 personnel in the two countries. It's an incredible achievement for the company, adding substantially to its global reach and reputation.

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IRISH BUTTER WARS IN THE US

If milk producers were not the ultimate losers, the possible spectacle of Lakeland shipping bulk butter to a site in Pennsylvania to be packaged into consumer-sized units by an American company, Vital Farms, literally next door to a plant run by Ornu, would be a cause of some humour. Not so, though, if this represents a loss of value to the primary producers of Irish butter. Ornu's strategy of targeting the US market with Kerrygold butter has been a singular marketing success. The Kerrygold brand owner's potential option of shipping bulk butter to the US, with the final gold-wrapped consumer packaging carried out at a cheese-manufacturing facility the co-op had earmarked for closure, is being mooted, it is rumoured, as a partial solution to a labour deficit in the Kerrygold plant in Mitchelstown, which is making it problematic to run the facility at optimum capacity. The move by Lakeland is less easily understood. One can accept the desire to maximise product value and Irish butter is increasingly popular in the US. However, when we already have Ornu, a cooperatively owned entity, operating at full scale in the US market, with strong routes to market, high consumer awareness and support, and a premium pricing position, how much sense does it make for the producers and suppliers of Irish butter to become effective competitors in that market. The comparison with Irish whiskey sales is not a valid one, if only because Irish whiskey manufacturers are natural competitors given their individual ownership structures. Irish buttermakers can piggy-back off each other to an extent in the US market, but pricing is usually the ultimate product differentiation. Tirlán too, is progressing its own butter offering in the US market. If the product differentiation is not being made on price, this needs to be proven, because American consumers tell us that is not the case. Ornu passes back all surplus funds to its owners, including Tirlán. Competing against each other is a race to the bottom. Irish milk producers are the ultimate losers.



LIDL'S SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR BEEF FARMERS

The Lidl supermarket chain has launched an innovative sustainable support programme for Irish beef farmers. The Lidl Sustainable Beef Programme has been developed in partnership with Liffey Meats, Bord Bia and Irish beef farmers. Twenty beef farmers, who are suppliers to Lidl, from counties Wexford, Cavan, Galway, Longford, Meath, Roscommon and Westmeath, have signed up to participate in the programme. Through the industry-leading programme, participating farmers will benefit from on-farm knowledge sharing sessions, where farmers and industry experts will share best practice in sustainability.



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LIVING ON THE EDGE

CATHAL BOHANE
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

Things can change very quickly in farming. Just over a month ago we were running out of silage and wondering if we will ever have an opportunity to graze again. This has now rectified itself and this deficit is turning to a surplus. We must look forward and act to manage this. As the saying goes, 'if we only look to the past and the present, we are certain to miss the future.'

Grass growth is running above 80kg of dry matter (DM) per hectare, (ha) with some areas experiencing even more than this. Unless we are stocked over four cows/ha, then we are building a surplus as grass is growing faster than consumption. Maintaining your average farm cover at 150-170kg/cow and shortening the rotation length to target your ideal cover of around 1,300kg DM is key. This will mean living on the edge a little more and having less than two weeks grass ahead of you. This will ensure quality in the grass that your animals are eating and by going into lighter covers you will maintain quality in subsequent rotations. Such management will drive milk yield and solids and create a consistent delivery of energy to help support body condition and fertility.

What happens on many farms around the country is, usually in the absence of measurement, we err on the side of caution where covers continue to build. We have rotation of three weeks-plus and, with 80kg of growth per day, we are entering into 1,600-1,700kg covers which are of lower digestibility and energy, resulting in tumbling milk protein and milk production. Not alone are we losing quality, but we are also losing intakes, as we force cows to graze to 4-5cm residuals which they wouldn't do if they had a choice. The loss of quality and quantity combine to mean a massive drop in energy. The issues don't just dwell in the present though as higher residuals will push more stem and lower quality grass into subsequent rotations.

Measurement will allow you to be calculated and accurate in your decision-making on whether to graze or take out paddocks for silage/bales. Naturally, we will have weather events which will affect growth or grazing time and utilisation. The very worst-case scenario is from time to time we will need to feed these high-quality bales back. If we are taking out paddocks for silage, then these need to be done immediately to not alone ensure quality but also to get this paddock/field back into the rotation as quickly as possible.

The over-arching theme is to live on the edge to achieve high quality. Measurement will allow us to do this with a degree of certainty and needs to happen twice per week during this period.

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UPCOMING BIOMETHANE CONFERENCE TO FOCUS ON NATIONAL STRATEGY

The Government's National Biomethane Strategy will be under the spotlight at the 2024 Biomethane Conference, organised by the Renewable Gas Forum Ireland (RGFI). The event takes place at Croke Park on June 12.

The conference, held in partnership with KPMG Sustainable Futures, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Department for Environment, Climate and Communications, will be timely for stakeholders interested in anaerobic digestion (AD) biomethane and circular-bioeconomy opportunities.

"To meet the Climate Action Plan and achieve the national target of 5.7 TWh biomethane production by 2030, Ireland needs to construct 150-200 large-scale AD biomethane plants. This sector will play a key role in Ireland's decarbonisation, circular bioeconomy, and energy security and storage," said PJ McCarthy, CEO of RGFI.

The conference will be addressed by agriculture and environment ministers, Charlie McConalogue and Eamon Ryan, representatives from Ireland and Northern Ireland's Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the European Biogas Association (EBA), farmers – both as feedstock suppliers and AD developers, Dr Paul Crossan and Dr Ciara Beausang of Teagasc, Tom Arnold, chair of the Food Vision 2030 strategy committee, and industry representatives from Nephin Energy, BioCore, Future Biogas, and the Dairy Processing Technology Centre.

"This significant networking event marks the transition from vision to action, focusing on finance and funding, planning, licensing, technology, and sustainability. The utilisation of natural resources to produce bio-products of bio fertiliser and biogenic CO₂ also present valuable bio refinery opportunities, given their decarbonisation value and high demand," PJ added.

TAMS AND PLANNING DELAYS SLOWING ENVIRONMENTAL WORK ON FARMS

Speaking at the launch of the 'Better Farming for Water' campaign by Teagasc recently, Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) president Francie Gorman said farmers want to improve water quality and that they will embrace the eight actions set out in the campaign, but that delays are slowing the pace of adoption.

"Making more farmers want to do the right thing and making more targeted advice available is a positive step. Everyone needs to get behind it to make it work," he said.

"It is important that Teagasc is given the resources to properly implement the campaign. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and all arms of the State must also step up to the plate. Delays in TAMS and in the planning process are slowing farmers down in carrying out environmental works on their farms," he said.

"Every farmer should be eligible to apply for TAMS and the costing must be realistic. The reality is that we need to be able to develop our farm businesses while improving water quality. Reducing farming activity is not the answer. The economic and social contribution of farming in rural areas will not be replaced by anything else. That's why this campaign is so important," he said.



Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

After the votes are counted and 720 MEPs (including 14 from Ireland) are elected to the tenth European Parliament, attention will turn quickly to the shaping of the European Commission. Who will be the president? And who will be Ireland's next EU commissioner?

At time of writing (a week is a long time in politics, even in Europe), there is rising speculation that the road back to power for outgoing EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, may not be as smooth as she had hoped. While, for the moment, she has the backing of the European People's Party (EPP) to be their nominee for head of the EU Commission, and assuming that the EPP will be largest party in the new Parliament, her coronation by a majority of MEPs and heads of government is not as concrete as she would like.

That doesn't mean that the nomination from one of the other political groupings is going to beat her, rather she may be replaced as the EPP candidate if there is a feeling that she is not going to get the requisite political support required. And that is down to a series of missteps which have not gone down well in Brussels, most recently the appointment by her of a German politician to the role of EU (small and medium-sized enterprises) SME envoy. Markus Pieper was appointed to the post despite the view that there were better qualified candidates and von der Leyen was accused of favouritism. Just one day into the job, Pieper resigned. Most notably, France and Spain have, so far, kept their powder dry on endorsing her candidacy.

Meanwhile, the Irish Government will nominate its commissioner in the coming weeks. Outgoing commissioner, Mairead McGuinness, had indicated a preference to stay on in her role before Christmas, but it quickly became clear that Fianna Fáil was never going to give Fine Gael the prestigious post for another five years. It's their 'pick' this time. So, there has been plenty of speculation as to who that may be with names like Michael McGrath, Charlie McConalogue, Billy Kelleher or maybe the main man himself, Micheál Martin, being mentioned around Brussels. The feeling is that if for some reason a deal was struck to leave Mairead McGuinness in the job, she would be in a strong position to become a Commission vice-president and take the agriculture portfolio if she wanted it as the EPP, of which Fine Gael is a member, has said it will demand in the divvying out of commissionerships. But barring a bizarre turn of events and depending on the shake out of the local and European election results, Fianna Fáil will insist on taking back the job last held by one of their own, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn who served as European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science from 2010 to 2014. For EU political anoraks, its popcorn time. But more importantly for farmers right across Europe, the next Parliament and Commission will be the most important in a generation in terms of deciding what direction the legislative pathway ahead will go.



STRATEGIC TRACE MINERAL INJECTION BYPASSES THE HARSH RUMEN ENVIRONMENT AND "MINERAL TIE UP"

In 2013, a survey of grass samples from 44 farms across Ireland showed pasture trace mineral levels at 73%, 50% and 38% of lactating dairy cow requirements for copper, zinc and selenium respectively, meaning cattle can be on the threshold of subclinical or clinical trace mineral deficiency during the grazing season¹.

Daily oral trace mineral intake is essential for maintenance, but the issue of low pasture trace minerals is exacerbated by trace minerals being relatively poorly absorbed from the digestive tract regardless of the source².

Furthermore, oral trace minerals face the additional challenges of antagonists such as sulphur, molybdenum & iron. These antagonists can bind to the essential trace minerals like copper and selenium, "tying them up" and decreasing absorption further³. Some continental beef breeds are relatively poor milkers, coupled with low trace mineral levels in the milk, means that as calves at grass grow they will deplete their trace mineral stores, which could lead to subclinical or clinical deficiency developing mid-season, adversely affecting growth rates⁴.

In regions that have pastures high in antagonists like parts of the US or Australia, strategic trace mineral injection has for years been an effective way to overcome this challenge. Strategic trace mineral injection has been documented as a means to rapidly increase cattle's trace mineral stores ahead of high demand periods.

In a 2012 study, supplementing cattle with a trace mineral injection showed statistically significant increases in plasma trace minerals within 8-12hrs post injection and increased liver levels within 24hrs⁵.

Hartman et al (2018) demonstrated that beef cattle fed a diet containing greater concentrations of antagonists like sulphur and molybdenum had greatly decreased liver trace mineral stores. As part of this study, the cattle's trace mineral stores were attempted to be restored by either trace mineral injection along with a maintenance diet or by high trace mineral diets alone. Regardless of the dietary antagonism present, trace mineral injection rapidly improved the copper and selenium status of the cattle. Oral trace minerals supplied at 150% of the daily trace mineral requirement from organic/inorganic blend took 28 days to recover optimal trace mineral levels and an inorganic diet, also at 150% of daily trace mineral requirement, took 42 days⁶.

Cattle grazing pastures that have poor trace mineral levels or a high antagonist burden are at increased risk of developing subclinical trace mineral deficiency and this may negatively affect performance.

Good oral nutrition is essential for maintenance, but oral nutrition alone can take weeks to build back up the trace mineral stores in depleted cattle. Injectable trace mineral supplementation has been shown to quickly restore mineral reserves and thus could improve herd performance through high demand periods and support profitability.

ASK YOUR VET ABOUT STRATEGIC TRACE MINERAL INJECTION.

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CALLS MADE FOR CLARITY ON BIOMETHANE STRATEGY AT ICOS AGM

At the recent Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS) AGM, the organisation's president, Edward Carr addressed the pressing issues facing farmers in a year marked by significant challenges, including poor milk prices, high input costs, adverse weather, and negative public perceptions.

"Farmers are experiencing increasingly difficult circumstances. They've faced a perfect storm of poor milk prices, stubbornly high input prices, locked-in high overhead costs, and appalling weather. On top of this, the public narrative often treats food producers as if they're some kind of environmental criminals. This puts immense pressure on our farmers, when factually they are doing more to address sustainability and emissions reduction than many other sectors

of our economy.

"People need to wake up to this fact; stop stigmatising and instead support farmers to achieve even more in the interests of food security and necessary climate action, which we 100% acknowledge as a priority for our sector and for Ireland."

He stressed the need for clearer and more decisive action from the Government regarding the recently published biomethane strategy: "ICOS welcomes the publication, but we need far more clarity. The document lacks detail on how capital grants will operate, specifics around the Renewable Heat Obligation (RHO), and the formation of an effective industry charter. The current €40m capital funding is woefully inadequate.

"Clear guidelines are essential to create certainty for investment decisions and to

engage farmers and co-operatives effectively. We see opportunities for additional income streams for farmers and rural regions; for example, integrating slurry storage and nutrient management solutions, and kick-starting Ireland's bioeconomy at a commercial scale.

"We welcome the reference to 'Project Development Assistance' for co-operative projects and insist that co-operatives must be fully involved in deploying an agri-led AD strategy. We are eager to participate in developing the industry charter and consulting with the Department on how Project Development Assistance can work for co-operatives. However, we urgently need clarity around capital grants, the RHO, and other critical definitions and particularly sustainability."

FREE EVENTS FOR FARMERS CONSIDERING PLANTING

A series of free events will take place in June and September giving owners of Irish forests an opportunity to share their personal planting stories. The 'Realising the Potential of Family-Owned Forestry' events are hosted by members of Irish Forest Owners, an organisation of forest-owner-producer groups that supports and represents private forest owners across Ireland. The free walks and talks are open to the public interested in forestry and the importance of growing trees.

More than half of forested land in Ireland is in private ownership and the majority is owned by farmers. Almost all, 90 per cent, of this forestry is less than 30 years of age, therefore, the real potential of family-owned forestry is only beginning to be revealed, Irish Forest Owners chair, Derek McCabe, said.

"At these open events, which are supported by funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, farmers, those considering entering the sector and the wider public will hear directly from private forest owners about why they planted, the benefits and pitfalls, what they've learned and how they are realising the economic potential of their forest.

"Our events are targeted at farmers and landowners considering planting; those who will inherit a forest, such as second-generation forest owners who want to know more. We're also hoping to attract those who have forestry and who want to learn more and meet other forest owners."

The in-forest walk and information events will also cover the economics of softwoods (conifers) and hardwoods (broadleaves); the benefits of farm forestry;

forest management options as well as advice from forest owners. Information will also be shared on forestry and taxation, forest management certification and the benefits of producer groups.

June events

6.30pm, June 11: Owen Cooney's forest, Lisnabantry, Virginia, Co. Cavan, across from A82PX76.

6.30pm, June 13: John McDonald's forest, Rosenallis, Laois/Offaly border, R32PF53 and follow signs.

11am, June 18: Ruth Young's forest, Rathdowney, Laois/Tipperary border, R32 R2E7.

7pm, June 20: Tom Hickey's forest, Carickahilla, Stradbally, Co. Waterford, X42 RR04 and follow signs.

"Family-owned forestry is not just planting trees; it's about creating a sustainable and beneficial relationship between the land, the community and the environment. The essence of family-owned forestry is about fostering a harmonious balance where ecological stewardship and community development go hand in hand. By integrating forestry into agricultural practices, communities can reap the benefits of a healthier environment, enhanced biodiversity, and economic opportunities, all while contributing to the global effort against climate change. It's a holistic approach that enriches both the land and the lives of those who depend on it," Derek said



ICMSA president, Denis Drennan with Taoiseach Simon Harris.

TAOISEACH GIVES NITRATES DEROGATION COMMITMENT

President of the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (ICMSA), Denis Drennan, recently met with Taoiseach Simon Harris to discuss the 'serious short- and long-term challenges facing the agriculture sector' that required speedy and concerted responses from both Government and the EU.

"We addressed a number of key issues with the taoiseach including Budget 2025, climate action and agriculture, the Nitrates Derogation, the future of CAP, live exports, Mercosur and Government engagement with the farm sector. The taoiseach gave a commitment to improving engagement with farmers and working collaboratively to deal with the emergency situations we are facing," said the ICMSA president. While this is welcome, engagement is not enough, said Denis: "We need action and a whole series of measures that will stop the draining away of confidence and investment from the one area in which Ireland indisputably is a world-leader: farming and sustainable food production. As first steps in this process, the ICMSA asked the taoiseach to deliver on the Programme for Government commitment to introduce an income volatility measure for farmers, to introduce a 70 per cent grant for slurry storage investments, greater flexibility regarding TAMS and – most critically – to ensure that Ireland retains its Nitrates Derogation. We welcome his commitment to play an active role in relation to the retention of the derogation and the need for a whole-of-sector approach to ensure the retention of our largest indigenous industry delivering economic activity in every townland in Ireland.

"We have to believe that Taoiseach Harris will carry through on that commitment to engage and work collaboratively towards the goals that we all see. The alternative is that steady month-on-month draining away of the confidence and future that will have the most serious ramifications for the rural areas and for our indigenous exports; we'll lose the next generation and become even more dependent on FDI that is almost completely confined to Dublin and a few other urban centres. This is a moment of choice, and the Government must realise that," he said.



Summer management

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

After a tumultuous start to the grazing season, the focus regarding nutrition at this point in the year should be simply centred around always having high quality grass available to the main grazing herd. Quality in grass this time of year can often be a struggle, with a constant balancing act between having enough, taking out surplus and holding quality in paddocks ahead of cows.

Assessing grass availability on the platform as often as possible (weekly at a minimum) to make well informed, timely decisions around taking out surplus grass to maintain quality and pre-grazing yields at 1,200 -1,400 kg DM/ha. Where pre-grazing yields are higher, it will be extremely difficult to graze out these paddocks to target residuals (3.5-4cm), resulting in poor grass utilisation and negatively affecting quality in the subsequent rotation. When grazing heavy covers of grass, it is worthwhile to also remember that for every 4% reduction in grass digestibility, milk solids yield will consequently reduce by approximately 5%.

Concentrate feeding rates for the summer months can often be a topic of debate. However, before pulling back feeding rates a few factors must be taken into consideration. Grass availability and quality should be the first dictating factor, as well as condition of the main herd/current point in the breeding season, coupled with their current milk output.

At this point crude protein requirements of the cow are being well matched by grazed grass, and low protein concentrates ($\leq 15\%$) should be used. A 1% reduction in concentrate crude protein % during the grazing season could potentially result in a 5% reduction in GHG and ammonia emissions.

Typical feeding rates at grass, depending on milk output and grazing conditions/grass quality:

Month	Grazing Conditions	Potential Milk Yield from Grass (L)	20 litres	25 litres	30 litres
June	Good	22	-	1.2	3.2
	Average	19.5	0.2	2.2	4.2
	Poor	17	1.2	3.2	5.2
July	Good	19	0.4	2.4	4.4
	Average	16.5	1.4	3.4	5.4
	Poor	14	2.4	4.4	6.4

Due to the late spring, reseeding plans in many cases had been delayed/postponed. However, it is imperative that when the opportunity arises to proceed with reseeding plans - The target being to reseed 10% of the grazing platform annually.

For further advice, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit www.agritech.ie.



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SAFETY AT SILAGE TIME

CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, ADVISES ON SAFE PRACTICE DURING SILAGE SEASON

Silage season is underway and farmers and contractors around the country are very busy with what is potentially a very dangerous activity – silage making. It's imperative that farmers and contractors avoid rushing the job; not taking enough time and care can result in disastrous consequences. The repercussions of serious accidents extend beyond physical harm, affecting the quality of life, mental health, and financial well-being of those affected and their families.

Good planning and safety management are key to ensuring that silage harvesting is carried out in a safe manner. Farmers and contractors need to be aware of the dangers associated with this activity and take the necessary precautions to reduce the risks. Additional care is required where there are children living on or visiting the farm. Children should never be present when silage-making activities are ongoing, and farmers should ensure they are adequately supervised at all times.

TRACTOR AND MACHINERY SAFETY

Over the 10-year period 2014-2023, 51 per cent of all fatal farm accidents involved farm vehicles and machinery, 44 per cent involved vehicles (83 fatalities) and 7 per cent machinery (13 fatalities). Seventy per cent of all farm fatalities involved persons aged 55 years or older. The powerful vehicles and machinery used during silage-making pose the greatest danger and particular attention should be given to ensuring that tractors, trailers, mowers, harvesters and balers are maintained in good condition, adequately guarded and only used by competent trained operators. Most tractor accidents are caused because of inexperienced operators, speed, lack of concentration, steep gradient, poor driver vision, unguarded parts and poor mechanical condition of tractor and/or trailer. Because of this, it is essential that measures are taken to avoid each of these hazards. Special attention must be given to ensure all brakes are serviced on tractors and trailers as there have been a significant number of serious and fatal accident due to brakes not working adequately. Before attempting to clear blockages in balers, switch off the engine, disengage the PTO and wait until all rotating parts have stopped moving. Where possible, install reverse drive mechanisms to allow blockages to be cleared without manual intervention.

FATIGUE – A MAJOR FACTOR

Fatigue is more than feeling tired; it is a decline in mental and/or physical performance, generally, due to insufficient sleep. It can be caused by sleep loss, extended wakefulness, high workload or disruption of your internal body clock. Fatigue reduces your ability to carry out your work safely and effectively. Noticing the signs and symptoms of fatigue in yourself is an important first step to enable you to do something about it. You may notice fatigue because you make more mistakes, make poor judgements and take greater risks. To help reduce fatigue it is important that you manage your workload, get adequate sleep, stay hydrated and take regular breaks.

DRIVE SAFELY ON THE ROAD

Ensure vehicles are operated at a safe speed, well lit up and that they are maintained in a road-worthy condition. It's essential that all lights, mirrors, indicators and wipers are fully functioning, clean and visible. Safe access and egress from all farmyards and fields must be ensured to avoid road traffic accidents. In addition, farmers and contractors must be careful not to drag muck onto the public road as this may cause vehicles to skid, lose control and or overturn.

BE VIGILANT OF RECREATIONAL USERS

Silage vehicles and machinery are large and wide so extra care and vigilance need to be taken on narrow country roads as recreational users could be around the next bend. We would also encourage all pedestrians and cyclists to wear high-visibility vests, use the correct side of the road, keep in a single file and listen out for road vehicles, especially when using narrow bendy country roads.

DON'T OVERFILL PIT/CLAMP

There's always the temptation to fit in that extra bit of silage into the silage pit/clamp, however this can be extremely dangerous as it can result in the surrounding walls or silage pit/clamp collapsing, especially when dealing with excessively wet grass. Building the silage pit excessively high puts the operator at undue risk. As a general rule, the finished silage pit/camp should slope at no more than 45° to the retaining walls. The width across the top of the finished silage pit should be a minimum of three times the width of the loader, including dual wheels. Loader operators must be able

to ensure the stability of the rolling equipment to prevent loss of control or overturns. Where silage pits/clamps are full to a safe level and where more grass is required to be harvested, the option of baled silage should be considered.

STACK BALES SAFELY

For those that are making bales, ensure that they are stacked in a safe manner, as in recent years several farmers have been fatally injured by falling bales.

Always think safety first!

Statistical sources: Health & Safety Authority data.

KEY STEPS TO MACHINERY OPERATION DURING SILAGE SEASON

- ▶ **Maintain tractors and machinery in a safe condition and ensure you check them for defects at the start of every day.**
- ▶ **Only allow competent experienced people to operate tractors and machinery.**
- ▶ **Know your machinery and use machinery correctly.**
- ▶ **Avoid rushing, don't take shortcuts and always be vigilant.**
- ▶ **Be alert to the signs and symptoms of fatigue and take action when required.**
- ▶ **Ensure all moving parts, such as the PTO shaft, are guarded properly.**
- ▶ **Disengage the PTO and switch off the tractor engine before attempting to clear blockages.**
- ▶ **Wear suitable clothing when working with machinery.**
- ▶ **Keep children away from the silage activity.**

For more farm safety information, scan the code:



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PROGRESSIVE PIG FARMING DELIVERS MORE THAN PRODUCTION BENEFITS



MAUREEN PRENDERGAST, SWINE TECHNICAL MANAGER, MSD ANIMAL HEALTH, LOOKS AT HOW VACCINES AND MONITORING CAN HELP PIG FARMERS IMPROVE PRODUCTION EFFICIENCY AND RAISE HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE AND PROFITABLE PIGS

Welfare and sustainability have become buzzwords in the livestock industry in recent years. While they are important goals for many farmers, the link with improved production and financial benefits is the basis for the economic viability of a farming business. Healthy animals create a smaller carbon footprint, producing more food from fewer resources, with the emission of fewer greenhouse gases (GHGs) resulting in environmentally responsible protein production. As prosperity and populations grow, the demand for livestock products is expected to rise too.

SMALLER CARBON FOOTPRINT

Production efficiency starts with healthy animals that can reach their genetic potential with fewer inputs and interventions. Modern genetics seek to constantly develop robust breeding animals that produce healthy, viable piglets, better feed conversion and improved disease resistance.

Improved standards of stockmanship, housing, feeding and hygiene will reduce stress and disease, whether viral, bacterial or from other causes. Research at Teagasc has shown that implementing biosecurity practices related to feed, water and equipment supply, and practices related to disease management and hygiene between buildings, was associated with lower mortality in growing pigs. However, the prevention of disease through vaccination remains an important part of ensuring a healthy, productive pig herd. Vaccination against common piglet pathogens, such as PRRS, PCV, *Mycoplasma hyopneumoniae* and *Lawsonia intracellularis* have been shown to reduce the need for veterinary intervention and the use of antibiotics. Studies have demonstrated that PRRS caused a reduction of 15 per cent in annual output, through reduced fertility, reduced growth rates and increased mortality. The delivery of vaccine via the needle-free

IDAL device has been shown to reduce disease transmission of PRRS virus within herds, which has both welfare and economic benefits.

MEASURING GROWTH AND FEED CONVERSION

The bulk of emissions from the pig industry come from feed production and manure storage. Studies have shown that reducing feed use has the greatest potential for GHG emissions reduction associated with pig farming. Systems that require more feed to produce the same quantity of meat have greater energy use, GHG emissions, ecological impacts and increased potential to pollute water courses with excessive nutrient run-off. Ireland's pig industry has been shown to be one of the most efficient in Europe, producing the lowest CO₂ equivalent per kilogramme of pork produced in the EU in an early benchmark study. However, the impact of transport on imported ingredients in Irish pig feed remains. While other countries have made great reductions in carbon footprint of pork production, studies in Ireland have shown that replacement of imported soya protein and greater use of by-products could reduce the carbon footprint of pork production

even further, but more evidence needs to be produced on the maintenance of performance using home grown rations.

With over 40 per cent to 60 per cent of pork's carbon footprint coming from feed it's easy to see how maximising feed conversion can also improve the industry's sustainability. Improved weight gain can result in fewer days to slaughter and significantly reduce the amount of feed required in the finishing stage.

Monitoring feed consumption and benchmarking feed conversion ratio (FCR) is a good way to monitor productivity and costs. In a farrow-to-finish system with stable numbers in every stage of production, this can be done by calculating the total amount of feed on a weekly or monthly basis, divided by pigs to slaughter in the same period (taking into account any gilts being moved out of the main system). Teagasc estimates that the top 10 per cent of farms achieve a weaning-to-sale FCR of 2.25 compared with an average of 2.45 and this equates to 33.4kg less feed required. Infection with

L. intracellularis, the bacterial cause of ileitis, has been shown to significantly reduce feed efficiency and growth rates in pigs. It does this by initiating permanent thickening of the last part of the small intestine, the ileum, which



Needle-free vaccination reduces disease transmission.

is an essential area for protein absorption, particularly lysine. Infected animals react very differently depending on their age at the time of infection, but reduced growth resulting in uneven pigs, with or without diarrhoea, is seen most commonly. Vaccination against *L. intracellularis* has been shown in a German study, involving nine large pig farms, to reduce FCR and reduce the use of antibiotics. The vaccine in piglets was shown to improve the overall carbon footprint across all the farms by 2.5 per cent.

THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY






Technology does not reduce the need for good stockmanship, but it can be a great aid to busy farmers. Using the needle-free IDAL device for sow and piglet vaccination has benefits for both farm staff and livestock through reduced risk of needle stick injuries and potential carcass damage. The reduced vaccine dose of only 0.2ml means less packaging and transport costs, reduced refrigeration costs throughout the supply chain and no need for replacement needles or their disposal. A recent development in Ireland's pig industry is the launch of the LeeO monitoring and management system. LeeO uses tag and weighing technology to monitor and track individual pigs from farrow to finish. An app is used to record all relevant data, including weights, treatments, service and pedigree. The system removes the requirement for a paper record, reduces errors and allows better pacing of work practices to improve efficiency throughout the farm.

Analysis of this data means that any on-farm changes to feeding or management practices can be accurately assessed. Real-time monitoring of outcomes will also allow farmers to exploit genetic potential by measuring a wide range of metrics, including birth weight, finishing rates, health and reproductive efficiency to optimise feed efficiency and productivity.

Farmers should always discuss the need for vaccination with their vet who can also advise on infection control and on-farm biosecurity.



Technology can benefit farm management.

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Dr Hazel Rooney.

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF DIETARY SELENIUM FOR OPTIMAL PIG HEALTH

PIG PRODUCERS ARE CONTINUALLY STRIVING FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE IN THEIR HERDS. PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO DIETARY MICRO INGREDIENTS IS PIVOTAL FOR ACHIEVING THESE GOALS – AND SELENIUM IS A PARTICULARLY KEY PLAYER, WRITES DR HAZEL ROONEY, ALLTECH

As an essential trace mineral, selenium is involved in a multitude of physiological processes that are critical for a pig's wellbeing, ranging from immune functions and antioxidant defences to reproductive performance and muscle development.

The form in which selenium is presented is the main determinant of its efficacy, with differences noted between the inorganic and organic forms of this trace element. In more recent years, research studying the potential benefits of organic selenium supplementation to optimise production outcomes and enhance animal welfare has gained significant interest among the feed and livestock industry. In this article, we will consider the role of selenium in pig nutrition, explore its impact on pig health and growth performance, and highlight some practical strategies for harnessing its full potential in pig diets.

WHAT IS SELENIUM, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR PIGS?

Selenium is an essential trace mineral for pigs. As a key component of selenoproteins, selenium plays a critical role in several functions, such as:

- ▶ Selenium supports immune functions by

modulating inflammatory responses;

- ▶ The mitigation of oxidative stress, thanks to its powerful antioxidant properties;
- ▶ Selenium is important for reproductive health and fertility in pigs; and
- ▶ Growth and development, by contributing to several physiological processes that are essential for optimal performance.

Selenium deficiency can be a cause of concern in pig production, as inadequate selenium intake can lead to a range of health issues, including weakened immune responses, impaired growth and development, poor reproductive performance and muscular dystrophy. Additionally, selenium deficiency can exacerbate oxidative stress and inflammation, further compromising overall pig health and welfare. Pigs are particularly susceptible to selenium deficiency due to their limited ability to store selenium in the body, as well as their high metabolic demands for this essential trace mineral.

Since having an adequate intake of selenium through the diet is so important, it is essential to implement proactive measures that will help prevent deficiency and ensure that the pig's selenium requirements are met, helping producers achieve optimal production

efficiency and profitability while also providing consumers with a nutritious source of protein.

ARE ALL SELENIUM SOURCES THE SAME?

No, not all sources of dietary selenium for pigs are the same. The source in which dietary selenium is provided drives its bioavailability and effectiveness, so it's important to select the optimal dietary selenium source to foster the best performance from pigs. Inorganic selenium has long served as the traditional form of selenium supplementation in pig feed, predominantly in the form of sodium selenite. More recently, however, the feed and livestock industry has begun re-examining the use of sodium selenite due to increasing concerns over its negative interactions with other minerals in the diet, poor bioavailability and overall safety issues.

Organic selenium, on the other hand, has been found to be a more effective source of the trace element, thanks to its higher bioavailability and retention in bodily tissues compared to inorganic selenium. These outcomes can primarily be attributed to the fact that organic selenium sources, such as selenium-enriched yeast, are absorbed and utilised more efficiently by the pig's body. In fact, peer-reviewed research clearly demonstrates that dietary intervention with organic selenium results in an increased number of live young per animal, as well as the stimulation of immune function, overall

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Figure 1. Benefits of dietary selenium supplementation in sows, piglets and grower/finisher pigs.

SELENIUM SUPPLEMENTATION

Organic selenium supplementation is now widely recognised as a key element for improving pig nutrition, health and wellbeing. Sel-Plex, from Alltech, is an organic selenium yeast derived from a proprietary strain of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* yeast that has been enriched with selenium through a natural fermentation process. Unlike synthetic forms of selenium, such as sodium selenite or sodium selenate, Sel-Plex provides selenium in an organic form that is more bioavailable and readily absorbed by pigs. Backed by more than 30 years of research and having featured in over 300 peer-reviewed performance studies to date, Sel-Plex is the most studied and proven form of organic selenium available on the market today. Our research trials have highlighted multiple key benefits of supplementation with organic selenium in the form of Sel-Plex, including:

- ▶ **Increased bioavailability:** The organic selenium in Sel-Plex is better absorbed, stored and utilized by the pig compared to inorganic selenium, helping boost the pig's defence system;
- ▶ **Lower toxicity:** Sel-Plex poses relatively few, if any, toxicity concerns for humans or livestock;
- ▶ **Complete supplementation:** Sel-Plex is designed to completely replace all supplementary organic and inorganic selenium sources in the diet; and
- ▶ **Elevated pig performance:** Research and commercial trials have shown that Sel-Plex supplementation results in increased sow reproductive performance, higher selenium concentrations in weaned piglets and more optimal meat quality.

With its superior bioavailability, safety and performance benefits, Alltech's Sel-Plex stands as a trusted and effective selenium source, helping promote overall health, welfare and productivity in pigs.

improvements in animal health and an enhanced shelf life for meat, milk and eggs. As these benefits illustrate, supplementation with an effective organic selenium source has the ability to not only improve pig health but also to enhance overall performance and, in doing so, increase profitability at the farm level.

CONCLUSION

The utilisation of dietary selenium holds immense promise for unlocking optimal health and performance in pigs. As an essential trace mineral, selenium plays a pivotal role in numerous physiological processes that are critical for pig well-being, including immune function, antioxidant defences, reproductive performance and muscle development. By ensuring adequate selenium intake through the diet, pig producers can support the overall health and productivity of their herds. Among the various selenium sources available, both inorganic and organic, Sel-Plex provides selenium in a form that is highly bioavailable and readily utilised by pigs, leading to improved selenium retention in the tissue, enhanced antioxidant activity and strengthened immune function. Moreover, Sel-Plex has been extensively researched and validated for its positive effects on growth performance and reproductive efficiency in pigs, making it a trusted and effective solution for pig producers. As the pig industry continues to evolve, harnessing the power of organic selenium sources in pig diets represents a proactive approach to optimising nutrition, promoting animal welfare and ensuring sustainable production practices.

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SILAGE-BALE QUALITY: PITFALLS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

A COMMON-ENOUGH ISSUE ENCOUNTERED WITH BALED SILAGE IS THE FILM SPLITTING AFTER THE BALE HAS BEEN WRAPPED. HERE, WE LOOK AT THE CAUSES AND WAYS TO PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING

Balewrap splitting can occur weeks, even months, after the wrapping is done. It is most likely to occur with heavy bales of low dry-matter (DM) silage made during broken weather conditions. Unless these bales have been carefully wrapped with a quality balewrap film they are quite likely to burst after handling, transport, stacking, and during storage.

Sometimes, the quality of the wrap can be problematic. The high tensile strength and tear resistance of the silage film is important, as is puncture and tear resistance. Film elasticity, tack or cling capacity are also important as is the UV light inhibitor used to protect film from degradation during storage.

It is essential to use a quality brand with good strength, puncture resistance, elasticity and UV stability standards as well as a double-sided cling. Seven and nine-layer patented extrusion technology is now the gold standard for silage film wrap. With 'Pro-film technology' (manufactured by Silotite) the individual film layers are compacted together through heating, stretching and conditioning.

BALING PROTOCOLS

Film splitting can also be caused by insufficient

film cover on the bale. Contractors must fully brief new and less experienced employees on the importance of applying enough turns to the bale to achieve full bale cover – generally, four film layers with a minimum of 50 per cent overlap. All contractors must also be aware of, and follow, machinery manufacturers' guidelines – this is addressed later. Before baling, it is always a good idea to lift and spread the grass with a tedder or a rake. Ensure the swath is the same height and depth across the full width when entering the mouth of the baler – this ensures production of firm and well-shaped bales. This results in heavier but fewer bales per acre, thereby reducing costs. In addition, well-shaped bales are easier to wrap properly and to handle without causing damage.

It is very important to avoid pick-up tines disturbing the soil, otherwise crude ash can cause contamination in the bale. This can result in the increased presence of harmful organisms which can have potential health implications for livestock consuming this material. If slurry is not incorporated into the soil, ideally using a shallow disc injector, there is a risk of contamination with harmful bacteria.

MACHINERY MANUFACTURERS' GUIDELINES

All bale-wrapper manufacturers recommend the following guidelines:

1. Count the number of turns required to completely cover the bale;
2. Add one extra turn (to compensate for the narrowing of the film from the start of the cycle, when the film is held in the cut-and-catch mechanism);
3. Multiply this number by two for four-film layers or by three for six-film layers.

Note that the 'extra' turn is added onto the first number, when the bale is covered the first time and not at the end of the calculation. If the bale diameter is slightly more than 1.2m, the diameter becomes greater, which affects the accuracy of the 50 per cent overlap target. In this instance, more turns will be required to ensure full and complete coverage of the bale. Please note, it takes half a turn (two sides of the bale) for the balewrap film to open up to its full width on the bale.

When wrapping big square bales, irrespective of crop type, the bale should be wrapped as if applying six-film layers. Unlike a round bale, which maintains the same position on the balewrapper as it rotates and provides a

Ash Dieback Disease

NEW Financial Support Available to Affected Landowners

The Government recently approved a new Climate Action Performance Payment of €5,000 per hectare for ash forest owners affected by ash dieback. The site clearance grant has also been doubled to €2,000/ha.

Ash forest owners who have not already entered one of the reconstitution schemes for ash dieback are encouraged to join the Reconstitution Ash Dieback Scheme (RADS) 2023–27 to become eligible for the new payment. If forest owners joined one of the Department’s previous schemes, then they are also eligible for the CAPP payment, provided they have replanted.

Ash Forest Owners will be eligible to receive the additional Climate Action Performance Payment (CAPP) of €5,000 per hectare when their sites have been cleared and they have carried out replanting, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Reconstitution Ash Dieback Scheme.

This will be paid in three instalments, as follows:

- ▶ €2,500 can be applied for after 1st grant on Ash reconstitution scheme
- ▶ €1,250 can be applied for after 2nd grant on Ash reconstitution scheme if the forest owner is out of premiums or at the end of their premiums if they are still in receipt
- ▶ €1,250 can be applied for the following year

Note: The Climate Action Performance Payment will be exempted from income tax by virtue of section 232(2) TCA.

How to apply for the CAPP instalments?

The Reconstitution Ash Dieback Scheme 2023–2027 is now open. To apply for support under this scheme, contact a Registered Forester and ask them to make an application on your behalf. Details of this scheme and a list of FAQs on the Climate Action Performance Payment Scheme are available on the Department’s website: www.gov.ie/ashdiebacksupports

What supports are available for Site Clearance and Replanting?

Owners of forests affected by Ash Dieback may apply for support under the Reconstitution Ash Dieback Scheme 2023–2027 (RADS), which opened on the 24 July 2023 as part of the New Forestry programme. RADS supports owners of ash plantations to clear their site and replant with trees in line with the new Forestry Programme.

To mitigate the cost of clearance there has been a 100% increase in the site clearance grant rate from €1,000 – €2,000 per hectare. For applicants whose sites are still in premium they will continue to receive the premium due for the remaining years.

They will also receive a once-off top-up payment equivalent to the difference between the existing premium and the associated new Forest Type (FT) premium they opt for under the new Programme. We have provided a couple of examples to assist in understanding the funding available when opting for a specific Forest Type.

Funding examples

Example A

Forest owner with 3 hectares of Ash who has not entered the scheme but decides to replant Native forests (FT 1) under the new Forestry programme will be entitled to the following payments.

Payment Type	Rate per hectare	Total for 3ha forest
Site clearance	€2,000	€6,000
Replanting Native Forest (FT 1)	€6,744	€20,232
Climate Action Performance Payment	€5,000	€15,000
TOTAL		€41,232

For more information visit gov.ie/ashdiebacksupports

Funding examples

Example B

Forest owner with 4 hectares (ha) of Ash who who has not entered the scheme but decides to replant Agroforestry (FT 8) under the new Forestry programme will be entitled to the following payments.

Payment Type	Rate per hectare	Total for 4ha forest
Site clearance	€2,000	€8,000
Replanting Agroforestry (FT 8)	€8,555	€34,220
Climate Action Performance Payment	€5,000	€20,000
TOTAL		€62,220

For more information visit gov.ie/ashdiebacksupports

There are seven Forest Types available under the scheme.

Forest type	Planting option	Description	Grant/ha (including fencing)
1	Native forests	Plant a forest with a mix of native tree species.	€6,744
6	Broadleaves – oak or beech	Plant pure oak or beech forests for timber.	€6,744
7	Other Broadleaves	Plant a mix of faster growing broadleaf species.	€4,314
8	Agroforestry	Silvopastoral systems (trees and grass)	€8,555
10	Continuous cover forestry	Create a continuous cover forest system with conifer and broadleaf trees.	€5,421
11	Mixed high forests: conifer, 20% broadleaves	Plant a diverse conifer forest for timber production with 20% broadleaf species.	€4,452
12	Mixed high forests with mainly spruce, 20% broadleaves	Plant a mainly spruce forest for timber production with 20% broadleaf species.	€3,858

If you’re interested in reading more about the Forest Types available under the new afforestation programme and their respective annual premiums, which can last up to 20 years, check out how much you could get paid by visiting gov.ie/forestry



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
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PARTNER PROMOTION

uniform shape for the film to be applied to, the position of a square bale is constantly changing as it turns on the balewrapper. Because of this, the bale should be wrapped as if applying six film layers to the bale. This is the only way to ensure there are four layers of the balewrap everywhere on the bale.

POTENTIAL PRE-STRETCH UNIT (PSU) PROBLEMS

The PSU on the bale wrapper is calibrated, through the gears, to stretch the film between the paired rollers by 70 per cent. This is to ensure the film width overlaps by the required 50 per cent overlap. However, there is the possibility that the film will also stretch between the rollers and the bale, when the film will 'neck-down' more than it should, which will affect the percentage overlap of each film layer application to the bale. This can easily be checked by measuring the width of the last film application on the end of the bale. The correct film 'neck down' for 750mm wide film neck-down should be 580-600mm (see graphics). If secondary stretch occurs, it will increase film 'neck-down' and

reduce the amount of over-lap between each successive film layer, creating areas on the bale with less than the required number of layers.

If the PSU rollers on the wrapper are dirty or sticky, dirt and crop debris can easily become stuck to the rollers, causing damage to the film as it passes over them. It is not necessary for the film to have been punctured to cause it to break, often the smallest piece of dirt or debris can create a weakness in the film as it is being stretched that will cause it to fail. Areas of the bale with fewer than the minimum required are difficult to see on black bales. The part of the bale with fewer film layers will eventually split either through weathering or as the bale settles in the stack. Sometimes the wrapping is so incorrect that only a single layer covers the bale in some places. This may be due to inexperienced operators not following the manufacturers' advice on bale wrapping. If the PSU rollers are sticky with film tack residue, the film will begin to stick to the rollers, causing 'secondary-stretch', which will reduce the film width being applied to the bale. To avoid this problem, PSU rollers should

be cleaned regularly, by rubbing vigorously with a cloth soaked in a solvent based cleaner. If the PSU has rubber coated rollers, it may be necessary to clean the surface, then rub down with a hard wire brush, to create a grip on the rollers.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The relatively new Film & Film (F&F) system is an innovative dual-wrapping method, which combines the use of SilotitePro balewrap and Baletite netwrap replacement film. The bale is effectively cross wrapped, so the overall film protection is much improved. This results in better shaped and more compact bales which can better withstand handling and have a longer storage life. Using baler film instead of netwrap, the F&F wrapping system helps to reduce silage losses, virtually eliminating mould growth and preventing silage becoming enmeshed during feed out. By using film to bind the bale together, removal and recycling of the film is made easier as the farmer is only left with one product to recycle and can avoid the time-consuming job of separating netwrap from the stretch film.

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REDUCING ABORTION RATES IN YOUR FLOCK

ELEANOR BRADY MVB MRCVS, RUMINANT VETERINARY MANAGER, MSD ANIMAL HEALTH, EXPLORES THE TWO MOST COMMON CAUSES OF OVINE ABORTION IN IRELAND, AND OUTLINES THE WAYS TO MITIGATE THEIR PRESENCE IN AND IMPACT ON YOUR FLOCK

Many Irish flocks will experience a few abortions each year, but how many abortions is too many? Targets for abortion and overall empty rate are set at <2 per cent and <5 per cent, respectively, although many flock owners accept rates higher than this. Approximately one third of lamb losses occur between tupping and scanning, another third is lost to abortion or stillbirth, and the remaining third die in the neonatal period. Abortion in ewes can happen due to non-

infectious causes, such as injury or twin-lamb disease. But when abortion rates rise above 2 per cent an infectious agent should be suspected.

COMMON CAUSES

The two most common causes of ovine abortion in Ireland are *Chlamydophila abortus* – also known as enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE) and *Toxoplasma gondii* (toxoplasmosis). In the most recent *All Island Disease*

Surveillance Report, 28 per cent of foetuses submitted to regional veterinary laboratories were positive for EAE, while 20 per cent were positive for toxoplasmosis. Other infectious causes of ewe abortion include listeriosis, campylobacteriosis, leptospirosis, salmonellosis, border disease virus, Schmallenberg virus and *Escherichia coli*. Without diagnosis, ewe abortion outbreaks are impossible to address. It is advised to submit aborted foetuses plus accompanying placentas to your nearest veterinary laboratory. Samples should be submitted as soon as possible, as aborted materials begin to degrade rapidly or may be scavenged by wildlife, making them less suitable for diagnostic testing. Ewes can also be blood

tested three weeks post abortion, although these results may be less reliable in some instances. Both EAE and toxoplasmosis are readily identifiable in fresh foetuses and placentas if present.

It is worth noting that both EAE and toxoplasmosis are transmissible to humans (zoonotic). In a 1990 study carried out in Northern Ireland, 11.1 per cent of farmers' blood tested positive for *Chlamydia psittaci* (now called *Chlamydia abortus*) antibodies and 73.5 per cent tested positive for *T. gondii* antibodies. Exposure to these pathogens can pose harm to immunocompromised or pregnant people. Pregnant women should avoid contact with sheep for this reason, particularly around lambing time. EAE can also cause flu-like symptoms in children and adults. Care should always be taken when handling aborted materials and aborted ewes, and when caring for weak lambs.

ENZOOTIC ABORTION OF EWES

EAE caused by the bacterium *C. abortus*, is usually introduced to a flock by purchasing infected replacement ewes. Naïve ewes contract this bacterium during the previous year's lambing season and carry it until the following lambing season, when they will usually abort. Infection occurs when they are exposed to the foetal fluids or aborted materials of infected ewes and they, in turn, newly infect other naïve ewes at the following lambing season, and so the cycle continues. Abortions usually occur in the last three weeks of pregnancy, when 'abortion storms' can commonly occur. Aborted ewes can remain infectious to naïve ewes for approximately three weeks after aborting. Lambs born to infected ewes can be infected with *C. abortus* at an early age and, in the case of ewe lambs, go on to abort at first lambing. Following EAE abortion, ewes may subsequently have normal lambings but continue to harbour and shed the bacterium. EAE control measures include quarantining aborted ewes, maintaining a closed flock,

purchasing replacements from EAE-free flocks, prophylactic antibiotic treatment and vaccination. Aborted ewes should be quarantined for a minimum of four weeks and should be kept well away from replacements, in particular. The most recent advice is to keep aborted ewes in the flock once the quarantine period has passed, as these ewes will have acquired immunity to the bacterium and will heighten flock immunity overall. The antibiotic oxytetracycline can also be used to reduce abortions in the face of an outbreak. Vaccinating with a product such as Enzovax provides protection against EAE and is an effective method of reducing EAE abortions in an infected flock. Vaccination of ewes already infected with *C. abortus* will also reduce the incidence of abortion in this cohort, though it is important to realise that some may abort due to latent infection that was present silently prior to vaccination. Usually only one Enzovax vaccination is required over the lifetime of the ewe. However, in some instances, ewes over four years of age may require a booster. Ewes should be vaccinated with Enzovax at least four weeks pre-lambing.

TOXOPLASMOSIS

T. gondii is a protozoal parasite found in the ewe's environment. It can infect all warm-blooded mammals, including humans. Cat faeces, lambing ewes, and undercooked meat have historically been sources of toxoplasmosis infection in humans. The cat is the definitive host of the parasite. Young cats often get infected when they go out hunting for the first time. Rodents and birds are reservoirs for the parasite, which infects the cat on ingestion of these prey. The young cat is infected for approximately a week before it becomes immune and no longer sheds the parasite in its faeces. Fifty grams of cat faeces can contain 5,000,000 *T. gondii* oocysts (eggs). While most studies in the past have shown that thousands of oocysts are required to produce abortion in ewes, a recent study found abortions in sheep fed only 10 oocysts

in mid-pregnancy. Toxoplasma oocysts can survive in the environment for up to two years. Sheep are infected with *T. gondii* on ingestion of oocysts in feed or soil. Clinical signs of toxoplasmosis in ewes depend on when the ewe is initially infected. A non-pregnant ewe infected with *T. gondii* may show no signs and becomes immune to the parasite. A ewe infected in early pregnancy may appear barren at scanning or suffer early embryonic death. Later infections result in abortions, mummified foetuses and the birth of weak lambs that may die shortly after birth. Control measures for toxoplasmosis differ from those of EAE, as toxoplasmosis is not a ewe-to-ewe disease. As mentioned previously, only young cats shed *T. gondii* oocysts and for a short period of time. It is recommended to keep neutered adult cats on farm as vital rodent control. The presence of neutered adult cats will deter young strays from entering farm grounds. Cats should not be able to access feed stores. Ewes confirmed to have aborted due to toxoplasmosis should be immune for life and can be kept in the flock. Control of toxoplasmosis can prove difficult due to the parasite being ubiquitous in the environment.

Vaccination against *T. gondii* is regarded as the only way to control the effects of the parasite in an infected flock. Toxovax vaccination reduces the effects of infection with the parasite, namely early embryonic death, barrenness and abortion. Generally, only one vaccination is required during the lifetime of the ewe. Natural exposure to the parasite boosts immunity. Rarely, where natural exposure may not have occurred, a second Toxovax vaccination is given after two lambing seasons. Toxovax should be administered at least three weeks pre-tupping. Vaccination, in combination with disease control protocols, is your flock's best bet against EAE and toxoplasmosis. If these conditions have been diagnosed in your flock, speak to your vet about implementing a vaccination programme.

'OUR OPPORTUNITIES WILL LIE IN THE CHALLENGES'

PROFESSOR FRANK MONAHAN, DEAN OF AGRICULTURE AND HEAD OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN (UCD) SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCE, LOOKS AT HOW EDUCATION AND RESEARCH HAVE CHANGED AND DEVELOPED OVER THE YEARS AND HOW UCD HAS RESPONDED TO THESE SHIFTS

UCD's School of Agriculture and Food Science has been the centre of education for Ireland's agri-food industry for decades. Many of the school's alumni are leaders in the sector today, heading up global food companies, research bodies, and semi-State organisations. Professor Frank Monahan notes that constantly evaluating the curricula has allowed the school to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to education in this fast-paced sector: "We have always been good at evaluating our curricula over the years and, at key points along the way, we have reviewed and shifted our focus. In the past, for example, our focus was on general food production, but we now offer degrees across the full food chain, including food science and human nutrition – from 'farm to fork', as they say. Within that, we also have more specialisation, covering areas such as agri-environmental science, agri-economics, food business management, ag-technology and smart agriculture. So, a broadening of the curriculum beyond agricultural production, alongside more specialisation, has ensured we are preparing our students for a wide range of careers in the industry." Flexibility around the delivery of this education is also something that has also changed over the years. "Online learning is something that has grown and we have introduced electives and options so that students can tailor their education. UCD launched the Horizons programme where students can take six modules over the course of a degree in totally different areas, like languages. This also allows students to take electives from the School of Agriculture and Food Science: our module Food Diet and Health is one of the most popular in the university – and this helps us to get the message out there regarding our agri-food industry to others in UCD."

LEARNING VERSUS LECTURING

Frank explains that the way things are taught has also changed: "Today, we talk about



Professor Frank Monahan.

teaching and learning rather than lecturing. This is a big shift in how we teach. All new staff here take a teaching qualification as part of their training. As students can access much more information online, we have to offer something more than information to make the courses worthwhile and relevant: whether that be group discussions or field trips. It has to be engaging for students. The other thing to note is that our degrees have always been underpinned by science and in today's digital world, with access to so much information, it can be difficult to figure out what is real and correct. While basic science doesn't change much, applied science does and we try to direct our students towards authentic, trustworthy, peer-reviewed material." Frank adds that there are huge positives that come from the flexible learning that is offered today: "Online learning means we can have a much more diverse student base, our reach is broader and we have lots of international students we would not have had 50 years ago. I am also very proud of the gender balance we have here in the school: roughly 50 per cent of our students are female and the same for our staff in the faculty. When I

first came to the faculty there was just one woman on the academic staff. This is a big and welcome change, and we were the first school in UCD to receive a Silver Athena Swan Award, which demonstrates our commitment to gender equality and broader diversity and inclusion issues."

RESEARCH FOCUS

Looking at how research has developed, Frank states: "Well, there is a lot more research now, that is for sure! I came here in the 1990s and, at that point, there was a real growth in investment, particularly in the agri-food area, driven by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). Today, these projects are more multi-institutional, more multi-disciplinary and also multi-million when it comes to funding. For example, with funding from Science Foundation Ireland, the DAFM has just launched a new €35m joint research centre on sustainable food systems, which is co-led by UCD. This Co-Centre for Sustainable Food Systems will be jointly managed by UCD, Queen's University Belfast and University of Sheffield. The aim of the project is to bring together world-class researchers from the islands of Ireland and Britain to conduct research on areas ranging from food safety, production and governance to nutrition, plant and animal science, and behavioural change. "We also now work with behavioural scientists and psychologists in the context of farming. What we have found is that you can do all the research, gather all the data and make all the recommendations based on these findings but if you don't have uptake from the farming community and the industry it will have no impact. So, we work much more closely with the social sciences to tackle this issue and ensure our research has impact." Frank explains also that over 95 per cent of academics at the school are research active and this feeds into the teaching at the school, meaning that students can gain the

most recent knowledge directly from their lecturers, and be involved in this research.

CONSUMER TRENDS AND INDUSTRY PRIORITIES

Climate change and environmental impacts, Frank says, have to be part of the discussion around agriculture at every level: "Many of the projects we are working on are done in the context of the challenges we are facing regarding the environment and biodiversity, and at the same time ensuring that agriculture remains economically viable. All of these factors have to feed into everything we do. A lot of our research questions now are also influenced by industry and informed by the needs of the sector and industry, which makes our research much more practical and applicable. The consumer diet has changed dramatically over the years – we are far from the 'meat and two veg' diet of long ago. And consumers are much more informed about food, nutrition and production. So, we need to be cognisant of this in all that we do to ensure that our graduates are well placed for the wide variety of career choices available to them. I am always astounded at the diverse

Professor Frank Monahan was appointed to the role of dean of agriculture and head of UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science in September 2021. He previously held roles as associate dean for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and head of Food Science and Nutrition in the School of Agriculture and Food Science at UCD. He is a food scientist, with a PhD in Food Science and Technology from University College Cork following a BSc in Biochemistry from UCD. Professor Monahan joined UCD after a post-doctorate at the University of California, Davis. His research and teaching focus mainly on animal-derived foods, including meat, with a particular interest in how farm production affects the composition, quality and authenticity of foods of animal origin. He has also had a deep involvement with UCD Volunteers Overseas, chairing its board of trustees for a number of years.

career options that our graduates take."

LOOKING FORWARD

Concluding, Frank says: "We see our role here at the school as being critical in educating leaders for the agri-food sector in the widest

sense and that includes our graduates being involved in industry, in research, in farming representative organisations, in science, in the media and on the farm. We feel very connected to farmers across the country. We offer programmes in agricultural extension and innovation, for example, training graduates who will go out on farms and help translate the science to farmers, which will hopefully assist farmers in adapting to the ongoing challenges they are facing. There is a lot of negativity directed at the sector and we need to be advocates for truth and sound science and, through this, promote Irish agriculture. It is very clear that we need to be able to adapt very quickly to change, but the opportunities will lie in the challenges, for sure. I can see growth in areas like forestry, horticulture and ecosystem services and technology; our fundamental production agriculture will remain, but there will be increasingly a focus on those areas. "We will always need food and so our graduates will always be in demand. When we look to our alumni, we take great pride in where they are today as leaders of our agri-food sector."

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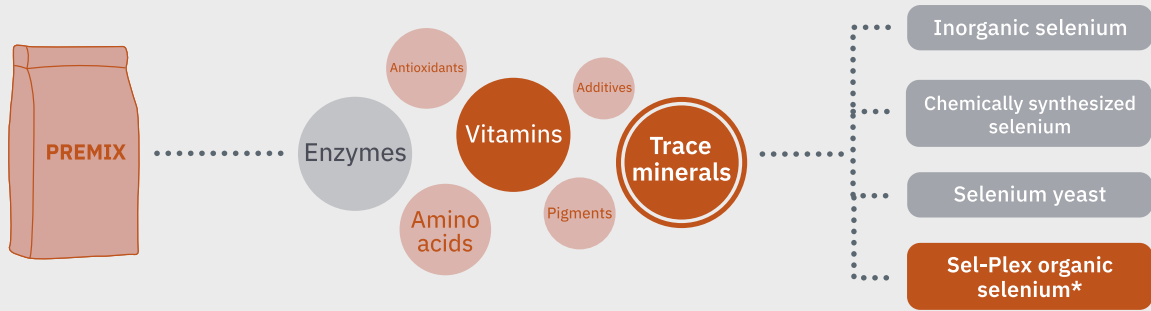
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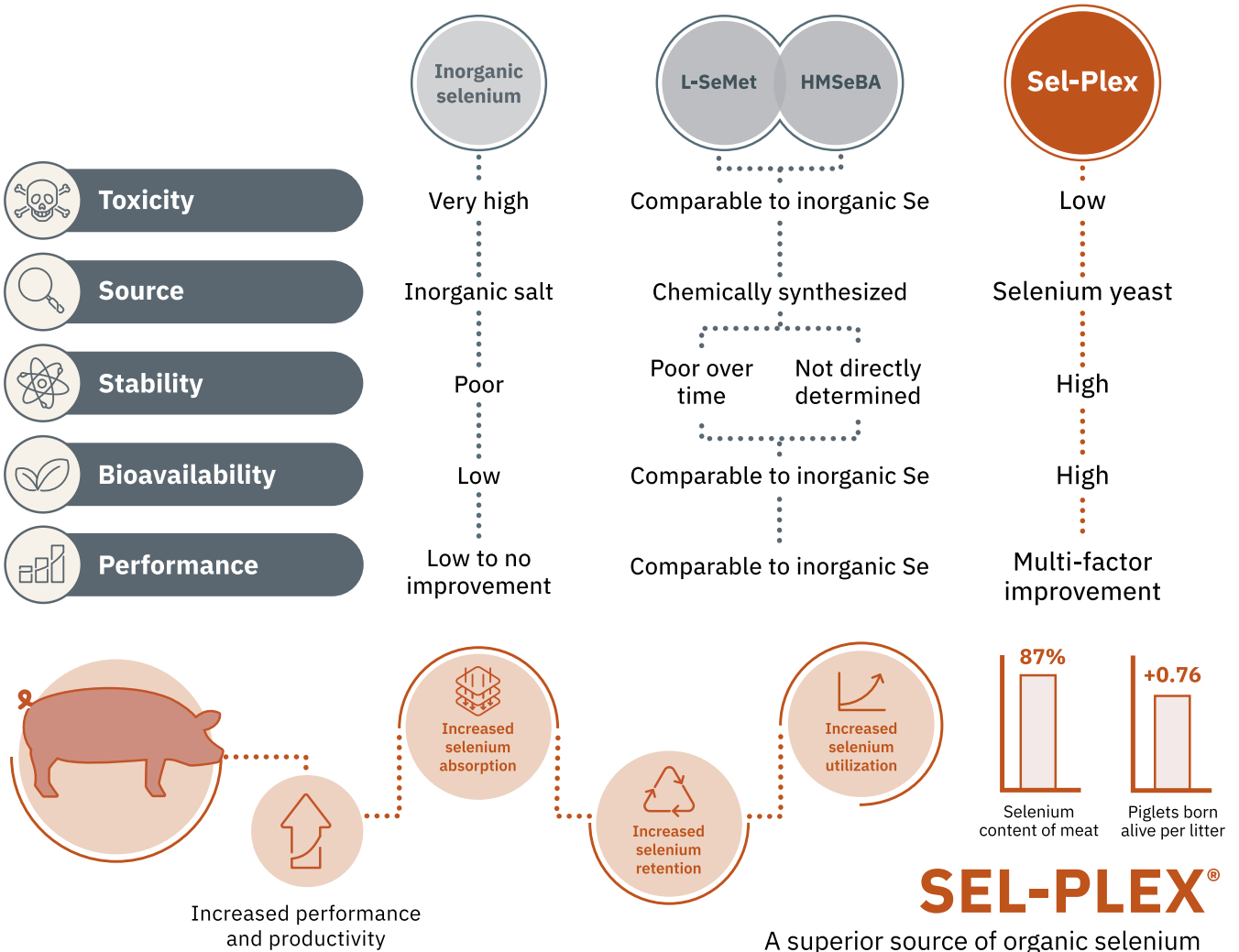


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Source: Chen et al., Animal Feed Science and Technology 221 (2016) 111-123; Mahan et al., J ANIM SCI 2014, 92:4991-4997



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Irish Farmers Monthly goes for gold

Irish Farmers Monthly editor, Matt O’Keeffe, reflects on the magazine title’s golden anniversary and some of the adventures along the way

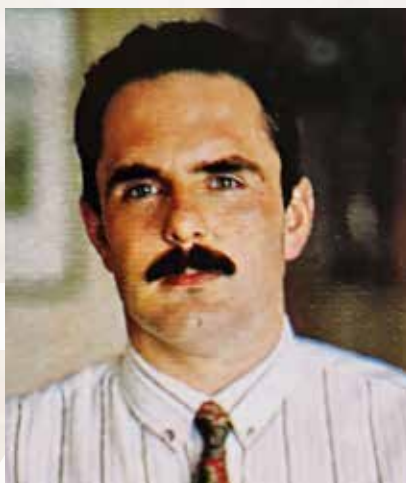
This year marks 50 years of *Irish Farmers Monthly* being published without interruption. While many other farming-oriented magazines have come and gone, ‘*The Monthly*’ has survived and thrived for a half century. That achievement is primarily down to the entrepreneurship, professionalism and tenacity of David Markey and his wife and partner, Mai.

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of *Irish Farmers Monthly*, we asked a range of high-profile individuals, many of whom have lived through the most momentous events in Irish and European agriculture over the five decades, to provide their unique insights on developments in Irish agriculture.

By coincidence, or otherwise, *The Monthly*’s lifespan almost entirely mirrors that of Ireland’s membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) as it was known. We joined in 1973, the year before *Irish Farmers Monthly* was founded. The following year, 1975, marked the beginning of the close association of *Irish Farmers Monthly* with the Markey family, as David began working on the magazine. The following year, he and Mai purchased the title from the original owners.

Unique insights

It is surely a mark of great respect for the publication that everyone who was asked to contribute their thoughts on the progress and future prospects of Irish agriculture agreed to participate in this special 50th anniversary edition. Our contributor selection ranges across farmers, young and old,



Matt O’Keeffe’s picture byline in *Irish Farmers Monthly* during the 1990s.

academics and politicians. Farmer representatives also provide a perspective as do researchers, advisors and economists. Two of our leading columnists, Matt Ryan and Ciaran Fitzgerald, give their perspectives of how farming and the Irish agri-food sectors have transformed during the past 50 years.

Influence of the EU

The influence of EU membership has been well covered by *The Monthly* over the years and the introduction of the Letter from Brussels by Damien O’Reilly in recent times further adds to that coverage. In our special edition, reflections on Brussels and the broader global importance of agriculture and food production are provided by Mairead McGuinness and Phil Hogan. Closer to home, Liam Downey gives his opinion on the ‘game-changer’ influences on Irish farming during his involvement as a leader of the

research, advisory and education structures for half a century. Meanwhile, Frank O’Mara, the current Teagasc director, looks forward to the continuing evolution of agriculture and what those changes may mean for everyone involved.

It would be easy to understate the changes in Irish agriculture since 1974. The industry has completely transformed in 50 years. On the debit side, our farming population has halved. Add in the reduction in the broader farm workforce and the figures are quite staggering. Farm enterprise profiles have transformed. Sixty-five thousand farms hosted a dairy enterprise in 1974; that number today is barely in excess of 17,000. Beet production was a central and economically essential enterprise on Irish tillage farms. Today, the beet industry is a distant memory. Continental beef breeds were the exception on Irish cattle farms. Today, they are the bulwark of the suckler sector. On the milk-processing side, we had hundreds of small-scale dairy co-operatives. Amalgamation, consolidation and take-overs have moved the sector from local producers of butter and whey to global players in value-added diverse dairy produce. Think of the gestation and development of Kerry and Tirlán as prime examples of that transformation. In 1974, Clover Meats was a fine example of Irish co-operative endeavour in meat processing with a global reach. Clover is long gone, replaced, in the main, by privately owned meat-processing businesses with global reach.



This year marks the 50th anniversary of *Irish Farmers Monthly*.

Reporting and encouraging

Over the years, *Irish Farmers Monthly* has reported on and encouraged ambition in Irish agriculture. The first edition would have reported average milk yields of 500 gallons (2,500 litres) per cow. Those figures have more than doubled with *pro rata* butterfat and protein increases. Grain yields had yet to benefit from the gains delivered over the following decades by improved seed genetics, crop protectants and high inputs that have given our tillage farmers the ability to produce some of the highest yields in the world. On many of our drystock farms, animal longevity – rather than breeding and grass management – was the primary driver of beef production. Cattle changed hands in marts multiple times before reaching a slaughterhouse. They almost spent as much time being transported to and from sales yards as in the fields grazing.

The game is far from played, as *The Monthly* regularly reports. There is still enormous potential to improve grass production. Land use has changed over the past half century and the future holds even greater challenges and prospects as we move towards a more nuanced agricultural model reflecting the needs of society and the planet. One hundred years ago,

space and fodder were needed for the four-legged horsepower on farms. Future farming enterprises will provide fodder and space for energy production. Fifty years ago, a 50-acre farm could support a larger family than is the norm today, including the provision of financial support for the career development of those who would not be the next farmer. Far greater farm output and scale are required today to make those family commitments and deliver viable farm incomes. The drift from agriculture continues to reduce the farm population, though,

positively, many farms are still owned and managed part-time, and are an essential element of rural communities. For what has been lost, much has been gained in rural Ireland. *The Monthly* reported on the surge in dairy co-op amalgamations, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. The small, local co-ops were closed, ending 100 years of parish-based dairy co-ops. The replacement structures have provided thousands of jobs in rural Ireland and diversified into added-value products that can deliver better returns for milk producers. Kerrygold was born over a decade before the *Irish Farmers Monthly* began its life. It is a colossal brand across the globe. Will the recent protected geographical indication (PGI) accolade for Irish grass-fed beef deliver similar success in the years ahead for our beef produce? *IFM* will continue to monitor progress in a new era of Irish farming. Finally, *Irish Farmers Monthly* is grateful to everyone who has supported and read *The Monthly* over the years. We are fully committed to continuing to provide informed coverage of Irish and international agricultural research, advice and practical farm management in the years ahead.



A GLASS MADE BY NATURE WE'RE COMMITTED



**16,190 DAIRY FARMS HAVE SIGNED UP
TO SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION (SDAS)***

Source: Bord Bia's Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS) 2024

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'A steadfast companion to farmers'

In this foreword from Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConologue, he outlines the importance of agri-media in chronicling the evolution of farming over the last 50 years, and he looks forward to the future of farming in Ireland, and the stories it will unearth

It is important to have a diverse range of voices to share the experiences of farmers within their community and beyond. *Irish Farmers Monthly* has played a major role in this area. As we commemorate the publication's 50th anniversary, it is with pride and reflection that we look back on half a century of dedicated service to the agricultural community of Ireland. This milestone is not just a celebration of a publication, but a testament to the resilience, innovation, and progress of Irish agriculture itself.

Documenting the journey

Since its inception, *Irish Farmers Monthly* has been a steadfast companion to farmers across the country, providing invaluable insights, updates, and guidance. Over the years, it has chronicled the evolution of Irish farming, from traditional practices to modern, technology-driven methods. Its journey mirrors the broader transformation that Irish agriculture has undergone, particularly since Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community in 1973. *Irish Farmers Monthly* has been there almost from the beginning to document our evolving relationship with our European partners. Membership was a pivotal moment, overwhelmingly supported by the Irish people. It opened new doors and provided unprecedented opportunities for our agricultural sector.

One of the most significant aspects of our membership of the European Union is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP has facilitated advancements in



Charlie McConologue, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

our agriculture sector, providing financial support, fostering innovation, and facilitating advancements in sustainable farming practices. Through the CAP, we have been able to invest in our farming communities, modernise agriculture, and protect our landscapes.

Challenges and opportunities

As we look to the future, however, the challenges we face are increasingly complex, particularly in relation to climate change. The need to reduce substantially the emissions from agriculture while maintaining productivity is paramount. We need to produce more food but we need to do so in the most sustainable way possible. How the Irish agri-food sector is playing our part is set out in our Food Vision 2030 strategy for Ireland. The vision of that cross sectoral strategy is to see Ireland become a world leader in sustainable food systems. Education, training, and research will be critical in equipping the next generation of farmers to meet these challenges. Empowering farmers and agri-food-chain producers to embrace innovation is instrumental to Irish agriculture, making it more

competitive and sustainable on the world stage.

Farm supports

My own approach, consistently, has been and remains to support farm families economically and to meet the strategic needs of the sector. Funding provided by Government supports the sector's environmental ambition, improves competitiveness, and directly supports farmer incomes.

This government secured the highest ever funding for an Irish CAP programme with just under €10bn being provided directly to farmers and rural communities until 2027. We have a substantially funded agri-environmental scheme in the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES), worth €1.5bn, which rewards farmers for their committed environmental efforts.

Ireland's new forestry programme is the most ambitious in the State's history, with supports increased by up to 66 per cent, and a new 20-year premium period exclusively for farmers, placing the farmer at the centre of our national afforestation strategy.

The pages of *Irish Farmers Monthly* will continue to document our progress, providing a platform for sharing knowledge and celebrating achievements. As we embark on the next 50 years, we do so with optimism and determination, committed to building a sustainable and prosperous future for our farmers and our nation.

I thank *Irish Farmers Monthly* for being part of this incredible journey. Here's to the next half-century of growth, innovation, and collaboration.



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David Markey, publisher, IFP Media with Matt O'Keeffe, editor, *Irish Farmers Monthly*, pictured in the RDS in 2014 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the magazine.

From new kid on the block to publishing pro

David and Mai Markey have been synonymous with IFP Media and its flagship publication, *Irish Farmers Monthly*, for the past 50 years. A former president of the Irish and International Guilds of Agricultural Journalists, David has earned the respect and admiration of journalists, farmers, and the broader agricultural industry. Here, he reflects, with some humour, on his initial entry into the world of agricultural publishing

My first ever experience on a farm, came when I visited Mai's uncle's farm in Cloneen, Co. Tipperary, in 1974. At that stage I thought milk simply came out of a bottle! Those few days on the farm gave me a better understanding of the work that goes into farming and the huge contribution that farmers make to the economy and countryside. Over the following five decades, I have seen many changes in Irish agriculture and have visited farms all over the world. Today, the current challenges for Irish farmers on climate are daunting and I congratulate the farming community for engaging and working with their respective farm

organisations and government to achieve the targets. *Irish Farmers Monthly* was founded in 1974 and I joined the publication the following year, working firstly as a photographer and then across all areas of the business. In 1976, Mai and I bought the title. My father-in-law, John Galligan went guarantor for me with AIB, and I borrowed £5,000. You could have bought a four-bedroom house for that kind of money, but this was an opportunity to own a business, and we took it. I will always be indebted to John for his faith in me. *Irish Farmers Monthly* was the first monthly farming magazine

in Ireland and other publishers followed that lead with *The Progressive Farmer* and *The Farmer*, later *The Practical Farmer*, established in the late 1970s. None of them, however, proved to have the success or longevity of '*The Monthly*' and had disappeared by the end of the 1980s.

An exciting time

The 1970s were an exciting time to be involved in agricultural publishing. Ireland had become a member of the European Economic Community the year before *The Monthly* was founded and, with the occasional hiccup, Irish farming was on the rise. Tractor sales

are always a good barometer of the health of the sector and by 1979, tractor sales in Ireland were topping 9,000 units per year. While the *Irish Farmers Journal* was the number-one title in the market as a weekly farmer-facing publication, we wanted to be the leading monthly title and we built our readership, our advertising clientele, and our publishing expertise to the stage where we became the brand leader as a dedicated monthly farming magazine.

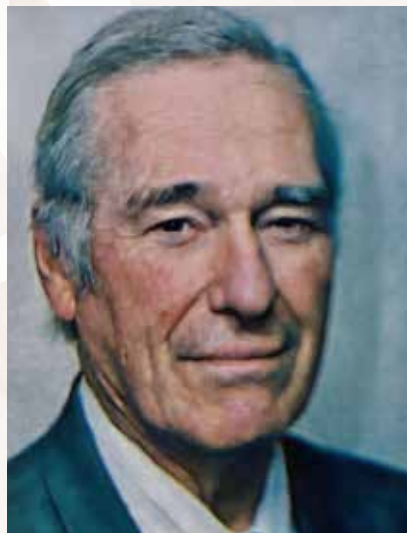
Irish Farmers Monthly was always editorially led, because I believed that if we were strong editorially then the advertising would follow, and we knew we needed to deliver good copy month-on-month. Over the years, we have had some great editors, who each brought their own style to the publication. That has allowed the title to evolve into the magazine we have today. We changed to direct mail in 2005 after the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the introduction of the Single Farm Payment. That initiative was well received, with farmers, advertisers and industry leaders all receiving a copy of *The Monthly* directly through An Post. This new model meant that we could directly target commercial farmers in the different sectors, and offer something unique to the market, a monthly direct-mail magazine. Reflecting the age of electronic interaction, we have also developed an online version of *The Monthly*, as well as a regularly updated e-zine, which can be accessed through our website.

Great names, great writers

We have been fortunate to have some great columnists over the years, and I want to mention a couple that stand out. Firstly, the late John Neill Watson who was our machinery editor for many years. He had retired from Massey Ferguson and his son asked me to let him write a piece for *The Monthly*. He did, and he



stayed with us for 14 years. It was John who came up with the idea of producing a dedicated farm-machinery publication, namely the *Irish Farm Machinery & Equipment Yearbook*. I still fondly remember our trips to SIMA, the Royal Show and the Smithfield Show. The second name I want to pick out is the late Willie Ryan who had worked for the *Irish Farmers Journal* before moving to the *Sunday Journal*, and then on to edit *Irish Farmers Monthly*. Willie was pure talent, and his passing was a great loss to agricultural journalism and to me, personally.



The late John Neill Watson, machinery editor of *Irish Farmers Monthly* for many years.

My third stand-out contributor is Matt Ryan, one of the most respected dairy advisors in the country and a pioneer in the development of discussion groups. Matt began writing his

Management Hints column in *The Monthly* almost 35 years ago and it is still one of the most popular and widely read contributions in the magazine.

Relationships are important and I greatly value those that have been built up with the title over our decades of publication. I particularly thank our supporters and contributors in Teagasc, University College Dublin, Bord Bia, Ornuia, National Dairy Council, RDS, Alltech, Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association, Macra, Irish Farmers' Association and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for their courtesy to us over the years.

A final word

Over the five decades, the company has faced many challenges including three recessions, which put many family businesses to the sword. We persevered, survived, and thrived.

I thank our advertisers who have supported us from day one and continue to support us today. You don't have a publication without readers and I acknowledge and thank each and every one of our subscribers who continue to receive *Irish Farmers Monthly* by direct mail each month.

I also want to pay particular tribute to our loyal staff and management over the years, and to my family for their support, particularly my wife Mai, son Karl, and daughter Rebecca who is the chief executive of the IFP Media Group.

Tuning and turning – half a century of agri-media

Michael Miley has worked in broadcasting, print journalism and public relations since graduating from University College Dublin in 1972. Having been immersed in the agri-media world since then, he has witnessed its evolution firsthand and, here, he gives an overview of that time

When *Irish Farmers Monthly* hit the streets in October 1974, the population of Ireland was just over three million people, two million fewer than today. Farmers accounted for almost a quarter of the workforce and agriculture contributed 40 per cent of total exports.

The media landscape had a very different shape to that of today. When I joined RTÉ as a raw graduate in October 1972, there was just one radio station, Radio Éireann, covering the entire country. Radio na Gaeltachta was established that year, but it took a further seven years, until May 1979, for 2FM to be launched. It was another 10 years before Independent, commercial national and local radio stations came on air. The launch of some 35 national,

regional and local stations from 1989 onwards, as well as a plethora of community broadcasters, resulted in a transformation in radio listenership patterns. Rural communities, in particular, embraced their local radio stations in much the same way as they had previously done with their local newspapers and, within a few years, a number of the stations had captured more than a 50 per cent share of the listenership in their catchment.

The latest Joint National Listenership Research report, published in May 2024, shows that 52 per cent of adults tune into their local or regional station every day and 44 per cent listen to a national station. In Cork and the south-west, over 60 per cent listen to their local station while the figure

for the north-west region is 58 per cent. RTÉ Radio 1 remains the most popular station with a listenership share of just over 20 per cent and the top 13 radio programmes are all on RTÉ Radio 1. The Pat Kenny Show on Newstalk is number 14.

Focus on radio

In 1974, RTÉ devoted one and a half hours a week to programmes about farming. Farming Progress, presented by Matt Dempsey, a lively half-hour discussion on the big issues in farming, was broadcast on Wednesday evening; while On the Land, presented by Michael Dillon, involving interviews with key scientists and farmers and reports on the world of agri-food, was broadcast on Saturday evenings. A third programme, Country Call, presented by Peter Murphy, was broadcast at 6pm every Sunday. It covered the current affairs and political issues that dominated the farming and rural landscape.

In 1975, the daily agricultural news programme, Farm Diary, was launched. Broadcast at 6.20pm Monday to Friday, the brief was to deliver a fast-paced roundup of the day's big stories affecting the agri-food industry. Astonishingly, RTÉ did not appoint an agriculture correspondent in its news division until 1978, more than five years after Ireland joined the EEC. This writer had the 'honour' of presenting the first Farm Diary on April 3, 1975. Later that year, I was joined by Jimmy Brett, and



Published in *Irish Farmers Monthly* in 1989: Michael Miley who was head of communications for Teagasc at that time, and Ursula Connolly, who was marketing manager, Rhone-Poulenc, pictured at a reception for the Young Agricultural Journalist of the Year awards.

we built a strong listenership to the programme. We both moved to different pastures in 1979/80. We were followed by a succession of presenters and producers over the next 20 years, all recruited and managed under the fatherly guidance of Joe Murray, the long-serving head of agricultural programmes in RTÉ radio and television.

Farm Diary, later renamed Farm News, remained an important source of information for and about the agri-food industry until the mid-2000s. Many of its presenters moved on to diverse roles within and outside of the agri-food sector. The longest serving were Frances Shanahan and Damien O'Reilly. The programme was removed from the RTÉ schedule more than 10 years ago.



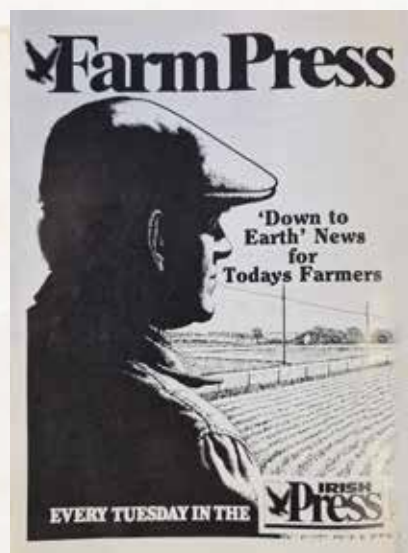
Damien O'Reilly headed up CountryWide on RTÉ Radio 1 for 13 years before leaving at the end of 2022 to take up the position of EU affairs and communications manager for ICOS.

On the weekly programming front, Farming Progress and On the Land were merged into a single programme, Agriview, in the late 1970s. It had a number of presenters, from Matt Dempsey to Damien O'Reilly, who presented the last show in 2004. A new weekly programme, Farm Week, was initiated in the 1990s and was broadcast on Saturday morning. It was presented initially by Joe Murray and later by Frances Shanahan. It was replaced by CountryWide, the high-profile rural affairs programme presented for many years by Damien O'Reilly. Following Damien's departure from RTÉ, the programme is now presented by Philip Boucher-Hayes. It forms an important part of RTÉ's Saturday morning schedule and has a current listenership of over 250,000.

Farming on TV

The RTÉ television schedule in the years following EEC entry included the weekly programme Landmark, which was broadcast at peak viewing time. Presented by Joe Murray and a host of others it ran from 1973 to 1987. As the 1990s appeared, the style of agricultural programmes on television changed. In 1992, Jim Miley and Jerry O'Callaghan presented a 26-part series of programmes, Taking Stock, which tackled the major issues facing farmers and rural Ireland. It paved the way for a style of television that appealed to a wider audience.

The following year, Ear to the Ground hit the screen. Produced by Agtel, the independent production company established by agricultural graduates John Cummins and Liam Lavelle, the programme has now completed its thirty-first consecutive season on RTÉ 1. It must rank as one of the longest-running factual television programmes in Europe, if not the world. Current EU commissioner, Mairead McGuinness was among the early presenters. The



An ad for Farm Press (published by the Irish Press) in the June 1989 issue of Irish Farmers Monthly.

programme is presented for the past decade or so by Darragh McCullough, Helen Carroll, and Ella McSweeney.

Other television channels have also dipped their toe in farming and rural affairs. These include TG4 with An Tuath Nua and Feirm Factor, and the more recent series, Contractors.

Since 1978, RTÉ has continued to employ an agriculture correspondent in its news division. The first was Paddy Smith. Others who filled the role include John McAleese, Michael Lally, Joe O'Brien, George Lee, and the current agriculture and consumer affairs correspondent, Joe Mag Raollaigh.

Print-media scene

The *Irish Farmers Journal* has been the dominant player in the agricultural media scene over the past 50 years. In 1974, the editor Paddy O'Keeffe had built a team of bright writers. Des Maguire, one of the country's leading news journalists, was recruited from the *Irish Press* in 1972 and was news editor and deputy editor of the *Irish Farmers Journal* until his untimely death in 2003, aged 57. The team of expert writers included John Dardis on tillage, Con Hurley on dairying, John Shirley on beef, Matt Dempsey



Three members of the Landmark team in a shot taken for the *RTÉ Guide* in May 1987. Presenter/reporter, Gerry Scully; RTÉ head of agricultural programmes, Joe Murray; and presenter/reporter, Larry Tallon. Photo: RTÉ Archives.

on EEC affairs, and Noel O'Reilly on machinery, as well as a number of entertaining and provocative columnists. Circulation of the paper exceeded 70,000 copies a week in the 1970s.

Matt Dempsey replaced Paddy O'Keeffe as editor in 1988 and the *Journal's* weekly sales remained remarkably stable right through to the mid-2000s when sales dipped to around 67,000. However, in 2013 when Justin McCarthy took the editor's chair, sales had climbed back again to over 70,000 copies. This was at a time when circulation of all national newspapers was in freefall and is testament to the *Journal's* appeal to its target readership.

In common with all print media, circulation of the *Journal* has dropped during the past decade. The latest figures I have seen are for 2018 when the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) reported weekly sales of just over 62,000, a very healthy number considering what has happened to print media, generally.

On the front pages

The decade after EEC entry was the golden period in agricultural journalism in national newspapers. Each of the four national dailies at the time had their own agriculture correspondent – Aengus Fanning

in the *Independent*, Willie Kealy in the *Irish Press*, Michael Browner in the *Irish Times* and Dick Cullinane in the *Cork Examiner*. Throughout the 1970s, their stories on developments in Brussels and on a rapidly developing and energetic industry at home were regularly on the front pages.

The papers continued to maintain a focus on agricultural issues over the following decades but with varying vigour, reflecting changes in society and a reduction in the relative importance of agriculture in the overall economy. Aengus Fanning moved from the agriculture portfolio in the early 1980s and was editor of the *Sunday Independent* from 1984 until his death in 2012.

PJ Cunningham, Gerry Mulligan and Willie Dillon followed Fanning as the *Independent's* agriculture correspondents. The focus progressively moved from agriculture to consumer issues, and they regularly struggled to find space for conventional agricultural stories. The last agriculture and food correspondent for the *Independent* was Aideen Sheehan who left the role in 2015.

In the *Irish Press*, Willie Kealy was followed for varying durations by Stephen O'Byrnes, Darragh McDonald and Tim Ryan. The last agricultural correspondent with the

Irish Press was Chris Dooley who was the incumbent when the *Irish Press* Group closed down in 1995. In the *Irish Times*, Michael Browner, who died following a long period of ill health, was succeeded as agriculture correspondent by Fergus Pyle, who later edited the paper. He was succeeded by Ella Shanahan. The longest-serving agriculture correspondent with the *Irish Times* was Sean MacConnell who filled the role for 22 years until his retirement at the end of 2011. Sadly, Ella and Sean are no longer with us.

A notable feature of the *Irish Times* agriculture from the mid-1970s was the earthy daily column from Michael Dillon. While the paper had a low farmer readership, comment and analysis by the highly respected Dillon on the big topics affecting the sector had a wide readership, especially among industry figures and policy makers for more than 15 years until Michael's death in 1992.

In the *Examiner*, Dick Cullinane held the agriculture fort until his death in 1994, aged 49. He was succeeded as agriculture correspondent by Ralph Riegel while Brian O'Mahony regularly monitored developments in the food industry in the paper's business pages. In 1997, Ray Ryan took over agriculture coverage and filled the role with great distinction for the following 13 years until his retirement in 2010. Ray's by-line still regularly appears across the pages of the *Examiner*. The last agriculture correspondent with the *Examiner* was Joe Dermody.

Short sojourn

In 1980, a national weekly agricultural newspaper emerged, the *Sunday Journal*. It was established with London-Irish money and this writer was recruited as editor. Willie Kealy left the *Irish Press* to become deputy editor. Other journalists included Willie Ryan, who moved from the *Irish Farmers Journal*, and Liam Nolan, a previous



Tom McGuire former head RTÉ Radio 1 and Richard Halloran, former president of the Irish Guild of Agricultural Journalists, presenting *Irish Examiner* farming editor, Rachel Martin with an award for Best Climate Change Reporting at the Guild of Agricultural Journalists' biennial awards in 2022.

high-profile presenter with RTÉ radio and television. Within a short time, a boardroom row emerged over shareholding. The paper was taken over by Joe Moore of the PMPA insurance group and the paper editorial direction was radically changed. This writer also changed direction and left to head up the public-relations function of the newly established advisory and training service, ACOT. The *Sunday Journal* limped on for a couple of years and eventually closed down. The collapse of the PMPA group followed soon afterwards.

The supplements

The weekly agricultural supplements in the *Irish Independent* and the *Examiner* have been a constant feature of the agricultural media for the past 50 years. The first issue of the *Farming Independent* was published in January 1969. It was edited by Jim Norton who joined the *Independent* in 1957 as its agriculture correspondent. In the early years, the *Farming Independent* was published in the paper's Saturday edition before moving to its current slot on Tuesday.

Frank Mulrennan was appointed editor of the *Farming Independent* and it was expanded into a 32-page tabloid supplement. Frank became business editor of the *Independent* in 1996 and Mairead McGuinness took over as *Farming*

Independent editor. She edited the supplement until 2004 when she was elected a member of the European Parliament. Maeve Dineen succeeded Mairead as editor. She was succeeded by Declan O'Brien who later handed over the reins to Louise Hogan. The current editor of the *Farming Independent* is Margaret Donnelly who previously edited *Irish Farmers Monthly* and also worked with *Agriland*.

The first edition of the *Farm Exam* was published in 1977. It has continued to appear in the Thursday edition of the *Cork Examiner*, now the *Irish Examiner*, for the past 47 years. Dick Cullinane was editor for the first 17 years. He was succeeded by Stephen Cadogan who edited the *Farm Exam*, now called *Examiner Farming* for more than 30 years until his well-earned retirement. The current editor is Rachel Martin.

Magazines

When it comes to magazines, *Irish Farmers Monthly* is the kingpin. It is a great tribute to the creativity, business acumen and hard work of David Markey and his team that the publication has adapted and prospered over the past half century. Over the period, a number of other magazines have come and gone. These include *The Farmer* and *The Progressive Farmer*, both launched in 1979. *The Farmer*, edited by Paddy Smith, RTÉ's first agriculture correspondent, was

published by *Business & Finance*. It changed its name in 1981 to *The Practical Farmer* and went direct mail. It ceased publication in 1989. *The Progressive Farmer*, published by Tara Publishing, was edited by Maurice Henry. It closed in 1984. *Co-op Ireland*, a magazine supported by ICOS, was launched in the 1980s. It ran for about 10 years and ceased publication in 1994.

In 1990, Teagasc launched its own bi-monthly magazine *Today's Farm*. This writer was its first editor, and I was succeeded by John Keating. The editor for most of the last 20 years is Mark Moore. The magazine is mailed to the Teagasc's 40,000-plus service as part of the organisation's advisory and farm management service.

Move to online

The explosion in online and social media has radically changed communications over the past decade and has created massive challenges for conventional media organisations. *Agriland*, launched in 2013, has become a serious player in online communications in agriculture and food. The *Irish Farmers Journal* and others have responded with their own online services behind a paywall. I was shocked recently to hear recently that 70 per cent of the advertising spend in Ireland is now channelled through social media. This is having an enormous impact on print and broadcast media. Seventeen local newspapers in Ireland have closed over the last decade or so. We may not be far away from the time when some of our national newspapers will not appear on certain days in the week.

On the agricultural front, my hope is that quality, expert and balanced journalism will prevail and whoever is reflecting back on the next 50 years media trends in farming and food will be able to say that readers, viewers, listeners and scrollers got a good service.

Science and technology: past, present, and future

Professor Frank O'Mara, director of Teagasc, explores the past, present, and future roles of science and technology in the agri-food industry



Professor Frank O'Mara.

The last 50 years have brought huge social, economic, and cultural changes to Ireland and this transformation has also been witnessed in agriculture. This period coincided with Ireland's membership of the EU (the European Economic Community at the time of our joining in 1973). Over that time, Irish agriculture has modernised, mechanised and specialised. The number of farms has reduced from 250,000 in 1973 to 135,000 in 2020. Average farm size has increased, and this structural change has been particularly noteworthy in the dairy sector where dairy farm numbers have reduced from 57,000 in 1975 to about 16,000 today, while average dairy farm size has trebled over that period to 65 hectares (ha). Tillage farms have also grown and specialised, and a major change affecting the tillage sector has been the loss of the sugar-processing industry. There has also been huge change in the pig, poultry and horticulture sectors. In 1960, 111,000 farms had pigs and we produced one million pigs. Today, we have 280 highly specialised pig farms producing 3.8 million pigs. Likewise, our poultry sector is now dominated by very modern, specialised units. The number of horticultural growers has reduced significantly, but there are a small number who operate at a significant scale using modern high-tech facilities and production systems. The emergence of a successful mushroom industry over this time has also been a significant

development. Another change over this time has been the increase in forestry from 4 per cent of land area to almost 12 per cent today with about 1.4 million tonnes of forest and wood-based products exported annually.

Productivity

Farming employed 16 per cent of the labour force in 1973 compared to 4 per cent today. Productivity has grown significantly, particularly in the dairy, tillage and pig sectors. From 1973 to 2022, milk yield per cow has increased by 157 per cent from 2,190kg to 5,625kg, with significant increases in milk fat and protein percentages, also. Beef carcass weights have increased by 27 per cent from 260kg to 329kg. Weaning rates per ewe have increased from 1.30 to 1.38 lambs/ewe. Wheat and barley yields have increased by 137 per cent and 100 per cent respectively to 10.1 t/ha and 8.0t/ha. Carcass output per sow has increased from 990kg/year to 2,298kg/year. These productivity increases have resulted from a combination of better animal and crop genetics, and better management.

Investment and income

Huge investment has taken place on farms. The Farm Modernisation Scheme was the first big scheme to encourage the development of farms and this set a culture in motion to use financial incentives to achieve change through the 1980s to the present day where the Targeted Agricultural

Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) supports on-farm investments. Farm incomes remain challenging for many farmers, especially small- and medium-sized farms and those in the drystock and tillage sectors. Dairy farms are the enterprise with the highest family-farm income, followed by tillage, but even within these sectors, volatility from year to year due to weather, and output and input prices, is a challenge. There has been a significant increase in the number of farm families engaging in off-farm employment, which has grown from 31 per cent of farm households in 1993 to 57 per cent today. The EU has had a major direct impact on farm income, originally through market-support mechanisms, followed by subsidies linked to production levels, until the MacSharry reforms introduced the direct income supports which were coupled to production. The subsequent Fischler Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform decoupled these direct supports from production. The evolution in farm supports has continued and the current schemes are a combination of income support with measures built in to encourage change in farming practices of a technical nature and also from an environmental perspective. A big focus now and in future schemes is on not-for-profit results-based environmental schemes to achieve the scheme objectives at farm level. Other EU policies have also had a major impact on farming, from the introduction of milk quotas in

1984 and their subsequent removal in 2015, to environmental policies, laws, regulations and directives such as the Nitrates Directive and the Water Framework Directive which have had a major impact with regard to storage and use of organic manures and fertilisers, and stocking rate. Other policies such as the EU (and national) climate policy, the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies are all very important and impactful on farming.

Education evolution

Throughout this time, advisory, education and research services have played a major role in shaping Irish agriculture and helping it adapt to external drivers. The separate research and advisory and education organisations merged to form a single entity, Teagasc, in

1988, leading to a closer alignment of research outputs with the advice delivered on the ground and the course curriculum delivered in the education programme. A strong private consultancy sector has emerged over this time.

Teagasc research and knowledge transfer has played a major role in supporting innovation and technology development and adoption across the agriculture and horticulture industries. For our grass-based dairy, beef and sheep enterprises, technologies to improve grass production and utilisation (and nutrient management) and to improve animal genetics are critical and have been a major focus of research and knowledge transfer. Systems to optimise grass production, utilisation and conservation based on research have been widely

adopted on dairy, beef and sheep farms and tools like PastureBase Ireland and the Pasture Profit Index are very important to support decision making by farmers. From 1995 to 2022, grass utilisation on dairy farms increased from 6.7t/ha to 8.2t/ha. The establishment of the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) was a very important development for the industry. Teagasc has worked closely with the ICBF in developing and supporting farmers to use breeding tools. The Economic Breeding Index (EBI) and equivalent breeding indices for beef cattle and sheep, give farmers the tools to breed better animals suited to grass-based systems for production. Progress has been faster with the EBI than sheep or beef breeding indices. Since the EBI was introduced in 2001, the EBI of first lactation animal has

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increased from -€24 to €151, and great progress has been made in improving fertility and milk composition of cows in grass-based systems. In more recent times, genomics and sexed semen have been important developments. Other technologies such as those that support better management of manures, and better financial management have also been very important and reflect the power of the combined research and knowledge transfer activities of Teagasc. In the tillage sector, improved crop varieties, and better crop nutrition and pest control have been the key technologies supporting the higher yields, with a big focus of these topics by research and knowledge transfer.

Advisory

The role of the advisor has changed from being an instructor to where the advisor often acts as a knowledge broker. One place where this is evident is discussion groups, where farmers share information and learn from each other, and the advisor acts an organiser and facilitator. Advisors and farmers now have access to a range of digital tools such as Profit Monitor, NMP online, PastureBase, and the environmental benchmarking and the decision support tool, AgNav, being developed by Teagasc, ICBF and Bord Bia will be a very important one for the future. Another positive development has been partnerships in the form of joint programmes with dairy co-ops, and similar programme with the meat and grain industry. Finally, campaigns such as Protein350, the EBI, and more recently, Grass10, the Signpost Programme, FutureBeef and DairyBeef 500 have been very successful for supporting the adoption of particular technologies.

Agri-education

It is hard to over emphasise the importance of education in the

development of Irish agriculture. Further education in Teagasc has changed a lot over the last 50 years. The Teagasc Certificate in Farming was introduced in 1982 and was rapidly recognised as the standard educational qualification for entry to farming. Its modern equivalent, the Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Agriculture or the Green Cert, is highly popular and delivered through Teagasc or private colleges, and also through part-time and distance education courses. The reintroduction of apprenticeships in agriculture and horticulture in 2023 was a major development. The third-level education sector has also changed dramatically, with agricultural degrees now offered in many universities including the new technological universities. It is likely that agricultural education and training over the coming decade will involve a blend of Level 5 and 6 certificates, apprenticeships and Level 7 and 8 degrees. Teagasc courses will maintain a blend of practical skills and learning (50 per cent of time at practicals/50 per cent classroom) with a practical learning placement on host farms, which students can now pursue internationally, including the UK, Europe, America, Australia, and New Zealand. Ensuring that the science and knowledge transfer from research and advisory is embedded in curricula and practical experience, including the necessary knowledge for farming with challenges like climate change, water quality, biodiversity and diversification, is an ongoing priority.

Future

For the future, global priorities of food and nutrition security along with climate change, biodiversity loss and water quality will remain, and production systems must keep advancing and making progress in all these dimensions. Consumers are getting further removed from food production

and an understanding of its complexities, and at the same time are becoming more interested in their food and its nutritional qualities, its impact on their health, and how it is produced from an ethical and sustainability point of view. Standards in terms of food safety and residues will continue to rise. For many years, food systems have operated in a very globalised manner, but in recent years, geo-political change and the rise of nationalism is driving a greater focus on food security, and the resilience of food systems. Social change will also be important, with succession emerging as a significant issue not just in Ireland but in many countries, and part-time farming is likely to continue to increase. In this complex world, research and knowledge transfer will be ever more important. Farmers will be better informed and educated, but the landscape is getting so complex that they will need even greater advisory support, and research questions will be more complex and require multidisciplinary approaches to adequately address them. Research and advisory and education services need to see food production as a system, and changes to the system need to be evaluated not just for their impact on one factor such as profit (or sustainability), but considering these two important dimensions and others simultaneously. For Teagasc, the economic sustainability of farmers and improving the international competitiveness of our industries will remain a priority, as will food quality and safety. Undoubtedly, environmental sustainability will continue to be a major focus, as will topics like animal welfare, soil health, labour efficiency and succession. We will use developments in science and technology to the maximum for the benefit of our industry and our environment.

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Always a hot topic

The European Parliament elections have elevated farming to among the big topics on the agenda. But in the 50 years of Ireland's EU membership, agriculture has always been a key sector and a hot topic, writes EU Commissioner Mairead McGuinness

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the founding policies of the European Union. It has provided us with an abundant supply of safe, high-quality food. It has given farmers the certainty of EU budgetary support. The CAP has evolved, just as the EU has evolved. In its early days, driven by guaranteed prices, our farmers responded to the need for increased production. Today, the focus is on sustainable production – taking a more holistic approach to our food supply chain, and incorporating environment and climate issues.

So the CAP is more complex, the demands on farmers more intense, and it is hardly a surprise that farmers are raising their voices and protesting over commodity prices, bureaucracy and genuine fears for their future. Agriculture is impacted by events outside of farmers' control – including unusual weather patterns driven by climate change. Geopolitical developments also impact.

The Single Market

Farmers voted overwhelmingly in favour of EU membership in the referendum to join the EU in 1973 and despite the many challenges faced by Irish farmers over the past 50 years, the benefits of access to the EU single market are significant.

But it has not been a problem-free half century. Guaranteed prices drove increased production, resulting in beef and butter mountains and wine lakes. This required further reforms of the

CAP. Farmers were encouraged to drain land, remove hedgerows, make fields bigger, and increase fertiliser use.

Over time, guaranteed prices were replaced by land-linked payments and a balancing out of payments between farmers.

Agricultural decision-making changed significantly with the Lisbon Treaty which gave the European Parliament an equal role in reforming the CAP with farm ministers.

I was directly involved in the reforms of 2013 – the first time Parliament was directly involved with EU farm ministers in negotiating reforms.

The involvement of the European Parliament brought greater transparency to the negotiations. It brought more voices and issues to the fore – broadening the policy-making agenda to include consideration of the environment, and including views of a whole spectrum of voices, including different NGOs.

Today's challenges

Today's farmers need a very broad range of skills, including how to use technology, how to keep soils in a healthy state and how to address biodiversity and climate issues.

The European Green Deal has a target of reaching climate neutrality by 2050, and we are committed to being 90 per cent of the way there by 2040. All sectors are required to contribute to this target, including agriculture.

In Ireland, the debate got off on the wrong footing when speculation

about culling the national herd was headline news, pitting farmers against environmentalists and vice versa.

As often happens, the policy of 'modernising' agriculture in the early days of the CAP led to unforeseen consequences because of a lack of understanding of the importance of natural habitats, the impact of land drainage and the value of green cover.

Farmers who followed past advice are concerned by what they see as a return to the past.

This shift in thinking requires a recognition that past policy led us to the problems we are tackling today and that we made some policy mistakes.

Instead of farmers seeing climate action as a threat, I believe that our farmers can lead the change, because they are closest to the land and their very future is at stake. Already there are many good examples of farmers taking action to address both biodiversity loss and climate change.

Farmers manage natural resources on which their livelihoods depend and, in turn, we depend on farmers' abilities to manage land, biodiversity and water, to generate food, feed, fibre, fuels and other biomass in a sustainable way, maintaining the resources in good condition so that they can continue to produce for future generations. As a major food-producing and exporting country, Ireland needs to assert its sustainability credentials. The challenge we face is how to address unsustainable aspects of our food systems and support



Mairead McGuinness carved out a very successful career in agricultural media following her graduation in 1980 from University College Dublin. Among her roles, she worked as a radio producer then researcher in RTÉ, presented *Ear to the Ground*, and was editor of the *Farming Independent*. It gave her a firm foundation when she entered European politics in 2004. Above: Mairead is photographed on an unidentified farm during the filming of *Landmark*, RTÉ's series on agricultural matters, in September 1981. Photo: RTÉ Archives.

farmers in the green transition – building resilience and ensuring lasting food security, while protecting farmers' livelihoods. Another big transformation for farmers is advances in technology. Digital technologies like precision farming allow for more efficient use of inputs, helping to keep costs down, while also supporting our environmental goals on reducing pollution and preventing over-use. Agriculture research and innovation are key to finding solutions to problems, including those posed by climate change.

Future

But it is a difficult time for farmers as they navigate the need to generate an income while responding to the many demands for more sustainable production systems.

Farmer unrest has not gone unnoticed. European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen addressed the reality faced by some farmers forced to sell their products below production cost, describing this as unacceptable, and stressing the need to strengthen farmers' negotiating power. The Commission has proposed simplifying aspects of the CAP and reducing administrative burden.

A strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture is underway since January 2024. This brings together farmers, environmentalists, financial institutions, academics and others who can shape our farming and food future. The group's report, expected in the summer, will help to inform the work of the next European Commission, including around

budget and further reforms of the CAP.

Farmers are enablers in this agenda on sustainability, but they can only play their part with the right supports, the right skills, innovation and the right motivation.

But perhaps a much greater crisis looms – who will farm for the future? As today's young generation have a choice of employment possibilities, will they be willing to live and work with the unpredictability of farming? Yet despite all these uncertainties, we will see many farm families from children through to grandparents parade their livestock at county agriculture shows throughout the country this summer – as they did 50 years ago when Ireland joined the then European Economic Community.

The development of agri-advisory services

Liam Downey was director of Teagasc from 1994 to 2001 and has been an adjunct professor of archaeology at University College Dublin and of biology at Maynooth University. More recently Liam has become a historian of many aspects of Irish agriculture. In this contribution to mark 50 years of *Irish Farmers Monthly* he reflects on how Irish agricultural advisory services developed over this period

When we go back to the 1960s, each county had its own advisory service with the County Committees of Agriculture. It was decided to bring them all into one national advisory service and the job I had was to unify services across the country. This was a prelude to, or in tandem



Liam Downey pictured when he was director of Teagasc. Photo: Teagasc.

with, membership of the European Economic Community, now the European Union, and that's really what we were gearing for the whole time. The other milestones in that whole endeavour, especially with ACOT (now Teagasc) was the specialisation of advisory services. Up to then, an agricultural advisor was a general practitioner (GP), like a medical GP. Now, we had dedicated advisors in dairying, beef, tillage, sheep and horticulture. Another very important milestone was the development of the Green Cert. Agricultural education was not in a good position at that time, so we imitated what they had in Denmark, where 'folk schools' – non-formal adult educational offerings – had existed for more than 100 years. The other two major developments around that time included the formation of discussion groups and the introduction of charges for services. The government at the time insisted we do that. Quite honestly, even though the charges were modest, they changed the ethos of the advisory service and made it much more businesslike and near to a world-class advisory service. That model still exists today.

Financial management

We also had management specialists who were concentrating on the financial side. In the 1980s there was a big financial crisis in farming, and a campaign was

mounted by ACOT, in conjunction with the Irish Farmers' Association, to support farmers in financial difficulty. Tom Clinton was particularly involved in helping farmers to manage their debts and negotiate solutions with banks.

Food research

Fifty years ago, there was a big deficiency in food quality analysis and product diversification. We knew little or nothing about product longevity, for instance. Dan Brown, Michael Walsh and others did huge work in developing food research. Over a 10-year period, on the food side of Moorpark, we looked at all the dairy products we were making, established how long they lasted, what determined their quality and over 10 years we built a huge amount of knowledge. That's what provided the quality control systems which were adopted by the creameries and ultimately by An Bord Bainne, the precursor of Ornuia.

Some things never change

Today we see a lot of advisors' time taken up with scheme and income-support scheme applications. That's not new. The same issue arose around the Farm Modernisation Scheme back in the 1980s. I was not in the service at the time but there was a huge amount of bureaucracy attached, so some things have not changed. There's a huge job to be done by



An Irish Farmers Monthly article from October 1987 revealing severe cuts in State funding to ACOT (now Teagasc) and the Agricultural Institute.

the advisory service, especially with regards to environmental matters,

and there's very good research going on in Teagasc on developing mitigation measures. We need to ensure the advisory service has the space to disseminate that advice and I know Teagasc has developed specialist units for that purpose.

What is the future?

Ireland needs to develop a new model of Irish agriculture that is sustainably competitive. We separate the two things too often. There's no point in getting obsessed with the environment unless we're competitive. The production systems are competitive, so we need to talk about an agricultural model that is sustainably competitive. Land is now being demanded for so many novel uses, infringing on the traditional food-production model. While I don't mean to be critical of some of the things it's

being used for, I could never see some of the alternative enterprises doing anything like dairy farming would do for the viability of rural Ireland and creating enterprise in rural Ireland. We need to establish a balance between environmental goals and competitiveness goals.

Liam Downey's latest book, *Cottage Industry in Post-medieval Ireland*, will be launched in the Royal Irish Academy on October 1. A fellow Corkonian, the tánaiste, Micheál Martin, is special guest on the evening. The latest publication adds to previous food and agriculture-related books by Liam including *Historical Irish Dairy Products*, which he co-wrote.

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Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

An economic perspective

Ciaran Fitzgerald reflects on the immense economic changes in the Irish agri-food sector over the past 50 years and ponders the prospects for the Irish farm sector in the years to come

EU agricultural policy has dominated Irish agricultural output over the last 50 years, not just in terms of income supports or market access but fundamentally, as reflected (for example) in the fact that sugar is no longer produced in Ireland.

The Irish domestic consumer market for food has never sustained Irish agricultural output. Even the recent growth in population in the Irish republic to five million people pales in comparison to the market size of the UK with 66 million, France with a population of 68 million and Germany with almost 84 million people. Irish livestock farms have sufficient output to provide beef and milk products to 45 million consumers.

Because almost 90 per cent of our output is exported/traded historically, Irish agricultural output, incomes, product profile and market focus have been much more affected by EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) than, for example, the UK or Germany where a large home market and large-scale supermarket buying power have been the definitive influences on food-production policy, notwithstanding EU agricultural support schemes and policies.

An export focus

This focus on exports by the Irish agri-sector, reflects the economic reality first identified in the 1950s by TK Whitaker, that Irish companies and international companies based in Ireland must have an export focus to thrive and survive.

Exports and trade mechanisms framed how EU policies and price supports from the 1970s to the mid-1990s not only led to a huge increase in intervention stocks but also created an 'opportunity cost' barrier, I would suggest, for Irish companies wanting to sell directly to global markets.

In the dairy sector, intervention support was confined to butter and skim milk powder, which also had aids to private storage (APS) schemes; whereas cheddar cheese had no intervention support or APS support, a factor that was seen to limit Irish cheese production in the 1980s and 1990s. Beef export refunds and/or access to intervention also gave a more predictable return than beef sales to commercial customers across the EU in the 1980s and 1990s.

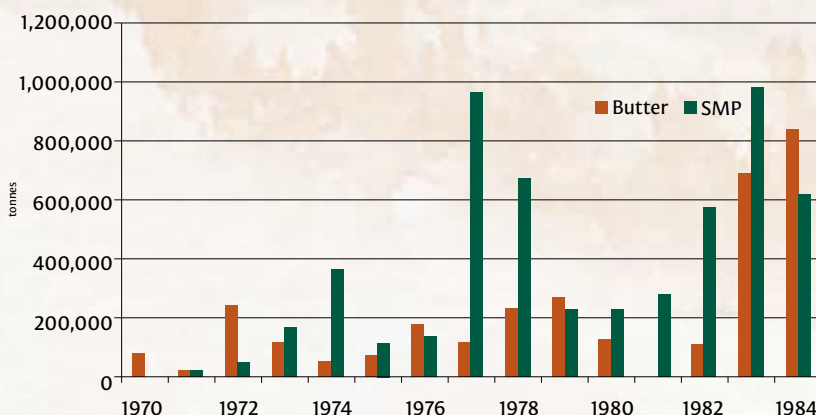
Three CAP evolutions

In looking at the evolution of EU policy on Irish agriculture over the last 50 years, I would suggest three distinct phases. Firstly, the price support phase 1972-1992, through intervention, internal subsidies and export refunds, with the policy

focus on increasing EU food self-sufficiency, while supporting farm incomes. For Ireland this phase lasted from our joining the EU in 1972 until the McSharry CAP reforms in 1992. While the goal of food self-sufficiency was being achieved, the dramatic increase in intervention stocks led to pressures to ensure that CAP policy was 'market driven, not support led'.

The direct-income phase introduced from 1992 onwards, continued until the abolition of milk quotas in 2015. Farm incomes were to be supported by direct payments, with free markets ensuring supply/demand match up. In the direct income payment phase, the intervention price for beef was reduced by approximately 40 per cent, with direct payments for suckler cows and 10- and 22-month male animals introduced as a compensation that would both support farm incomes and allow greater focus on 'real markets'. In addition, the evolution in direct income supports was increasingly impacted post 2000 by commitments to World Trade

Figure 1: EU public intervention stocks (year-end basis) 1970-1984.



Source: European Commission.



'Quality Food Can Lift Farm Prices'

Minister for Food JOE WALSH was the political star of 1987 on the agricultural front. A strong media lobby failed to get him appointed as Minister for Agriculture but Walsh made the most of his opportunities in Food and had a higher public profile than many members of the Cabinet.

He talked to the *Irish Farmers' Monthly* about his first nine months in office and his views on the food industry and the opportunities it offers for farmers.

... food. Again, we are talking of more production but more selling. The future lies with the European consumer and the big question is selling the consumer will go for more produce and we are fortunate that the range of production, he says, then again, the pay back to the farmer, especially, has a premium price, the Minister says.

"We need to include a sense of responsibility to the consumer and develop the products for that market. That way I can see prices to our farmers getting above others in Europe. As consumer markets are developed, the pressure of subsidy will be reduced and farmers will have more and more control."

DAIRY INDUSTRY

With the emphasis on quality Joe Walsh opposes the notion of selling or buying a surplus. He points out that the sale of milk is illegal and says that the quality of the Dairy Produce Act which is underway will be at the question of providing a credible, independent testing system for milk. "But, in any farm practice, should be bought on the basis of its contents."

"In the long term the dairy industry will be based on buying solids or water which is expensive, Ireland has the lowest level of solids in milk in Europe. The solids are the protein and lactose and I believe that protein is the best constituent to test for. It makes little sense to test for

In a January 1988 issue of *Irish Farmers Monthly*, Minister for Food, Joe Walsh, said that the food industry is one of the keys to economic recovery but he was very critical of the marketing of same or, rather, the lack of it.

Non-policy

It is difficult not to see current EU policy and elements of the public narrative that are not based in science around EU food production as a 'non-policy'; particularly weak or, at best, wishful regarding the fundamentals of food supply, farm incomes or food prices. The current 'non-policy' CAP, I suggest, would benefit from the introduction of some form of crop insurance scheme (as exists in the US), which might address price and income volatility issues not just in grain but in the milk and meat sectors also.

Disconnected aspirations

The constraints on core EU food production from ever-increasing regulation and input restrictions – which remorselessly push up food production costs in the EU without any sense of how this

Organisation policies that required income supports for farmers to be decoupled from stock numbers and so 'decoupling' was introduced by the 2000 CAP reform. At this time, a number of EU countries – though not Ireland – opted for the retention of a coupled suckler cow payment.

The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri (FAPRI-MU)/Teagasc forecast that this would lead to an 18 per cent reduction in suckler cow numbers, which did not happen until recent years, with suckler cow numbers in 2023 down 316,000 or 30 per cent versus the peak in 2012.

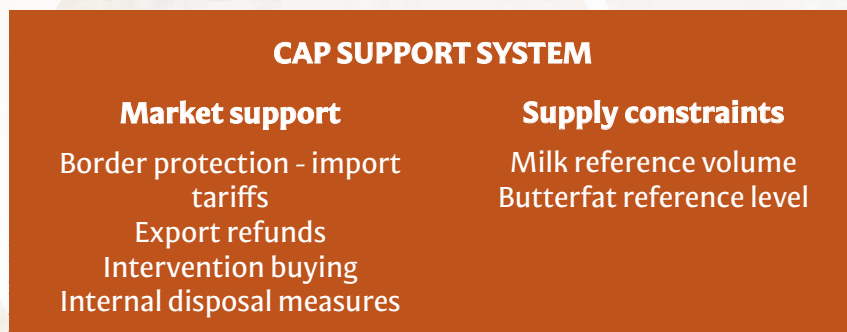
Different dairy policy

Throughout this phase, the dairy sector hung on to price supports through the intervention model, with a balance between production constraints and income supports ensuring a price range between 28c/L and 32c/L.

At the time of the introduction of milk quotas in 1984 Ireland produced just under five billion litres of milk from 80,000 dairy farmers. When milk quotas were abolished dairy farmer numbers had declined to 17,000.

In 2005 the EU proposed to abolish quotas from 2015, with internal supports for the dairy sector being

Figure 2: Structure of the CAP for dairy.



Source: Teagasc.

The Green Deal evolution

Post quota abolition and the introduction of the EU Green Deal, the philosophy of non-intervened markets still rules but EU policy seems oblivious to price or income volatility, with the primary focus on the non-food issues, principally the environmental impacts of EU agriculture.

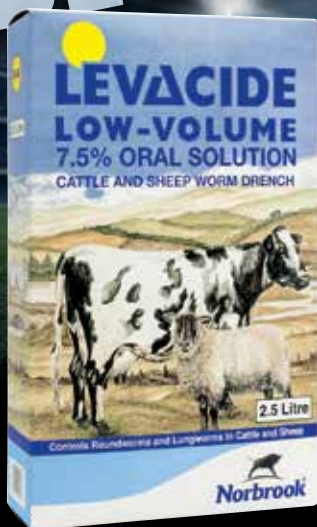
This has meant a focus on greening of direct supports while, in parallel, imposing production cost increases through EU regulation of food production, including proposals to restrict usage of pesticides and fertilisers under the Green Deal.

increased cost is recovered from EU food retailers, and where these costs are not being applied to food from outside EU – have been well documented by FAO/OECD, the USDA and EU studies.

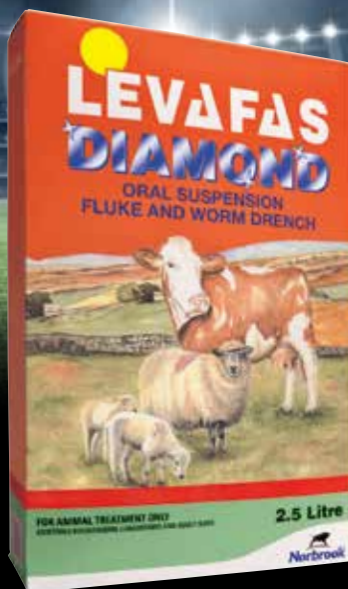
Moreover, analysis of how renewable energy supplies were introduced and sustained by long-term price guarantees and investment supports surely shows what can be done by joined up thinking.

Current EU non-policy on agriculture is not sustainable. Joined-up thinking on costs, prices and environmental impacts is required.

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A lot done...

In this contribution, the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) reflects on 50 years of the association and some of the agricultural milestones along the way that would have been to the fore on the pages of *Irish Farmers Monthly*

The 50 years of *Irish Farmers Monthly* coincides neatly with Ireland's membership of the Economic European Community (EEC), now the European Union (EU). Prior to the EEC-accession referendum in May 1972, the leadership of what was then the National Farmers' Association (NFA) was already looking to the future. Decisions in Brussels would have a significant impact on farming in Ireland. It was imperative to be prepared to provide the strongest possible representation for the farming community.

In 1971, the NFA brought Cork Milk Producers, Leinster Milk Producers, and Beet & Vegetable Growers' Association into the fold and the name changed from the NFA to the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA). A meeting of the National Council that December, chaired by TJ Maher, ratified the change. A referendum to join the EEC was passed in May 1972 and we became members on January 1, 1973.

The IFA established a full-time presence in Brussels when Alan Dukes became the first director of European affairs. This was a big statement of intent and granted access to an extraordinary range of issues.

Eyes and ears

Based in an office close to the centre of decision-making, it meant the IFA had eyes and ears at the heart of the EEC. The key to the IFA's influence in Europe was the creation of strong alliances with like-minded groups. The French farming union, the FNSEA, was a close ally and the relationship with the German DBV was also very strong. Another



June 1989's *The Very End* comprised three IFA-focused stories: a report on a dairy committee meeting attended by then president, Tom Clinton; another highlighting the European election candidates seeking the farming vote; and a third on upcoming IFA elections.

significant initiative came to fruition in July, 1972 when the Irish Farm Centre was officially opened at Bluebell on the Naas Road by then taoiseach, Jack Lynch.

It brought the IFA, Macra na Feirme, FBD and the *Irish Farmers Journal* under one roof. The city-centre office in Earlsfort Terrace – not far from the Four Provinces Ballroom on Harcourt St where the NFA was founded in 1955 – was sold.

The presidency of Paddy Lane was dominated by the thorny issue of taxation. High-level interactions with the taoiseach and the finance minister required expert guidance from experts such as chief economist, Con Lucey and the head of taxation with IFAC, Joe Hickey.

Challenging 80s

The 1980s were to prove very challenging for farmers and, by extension, for the IFA. The benefits of EEC membership gave way to a crushing reduction in farm incomes, record debt levels and savage interest-rate hikes.

The biggest issue confronting Donie Cashman was the prospect of a limit on milk production via a quota system. The resources of the organisation were deployed to convince the Government that milk production was a vital national interest for Ireland.

The then taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald and the Minister for Agriculture, Austin Deasy worked at EU level to make the case and Ireland secured a quota that was 20 per cent higher than what the Commission had proposed. One of the highlights of the campaign led by the new general secretary, Michael Berkery was a mass rally in Thurles attended by 40,000 farmers. The president of ICTU, John Carroll represented those who worked in the dairy-processing sector, which underlined the importance of the issue.

Forty years on

Now, some 40 years later, the IFA has the retention of the Nitrates Derogation as one of its priorities. The case made in the 1980s – that Ireland's unique production model justified a different outcome – underpins the current campaign. An emerging issue during the terms of office of Joe Rea and Tom Clinton was the impact of trade talks. General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), sought to impose rules on import tariffs, export refunds and domestic supports. It was the forerunner to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and would dominate farm policy at EU level.

The IFA also had to keep a check on how the political winds were blowing. The general election of

1987 saw the return of Charles Haughey to the Office of Taoiseach. The seeds of social partnership were sown with the Programme for National Recovery. The economy and the national finances were in a precarious position and decisive action was required. Con Lucey would remark nearly 20 years later that 'the table around which the social partners negotiate is where the major economic decisions are reached'.

For Alan Gillis, the shadow of trade talks between the EU and the US loomed large. The agriculture commissioner, Ray MacSharry proposed a cut of 30 per cent in farm supports over a 10-year period. A protest outside the US Embassy served as a warning that grain farmers could not be sacrificed. John Donnelly would find that BSE and the ongoing reform of the CAP via the global trade agenda would dominate his time. The response

to BSE was an example of the IFA diverting its resources to deal with an unexpected crisis.

The beef blockade of 2000, led by Tom Parlon, along with the tractorcade of 2004, led by John Dillon, showed the ability of the to harness and mobilise farmers from around the country. It also demonstrated that agility was needed to confront whatever issue was in front of us.

By the mid-2000s, efforts at WTO level stepped up with Peter Mandelson at the helm. The presidency of Padraig Walshe was consumed with campaigns against trade liberalisation and the import of Brazilian beef that didn't meet EU standards. Both required a combination of high-level negotiation at EU level and street protest to amplify the issue on the domestic political front.

The campaign on Brazilian beef, undertaken with the *Irish Farmers*

Journal, would propel John Bryan to the presidency, where the shape of the CAP post-2014 was the key issue.

In 2015, the IFA celebrated 60 years, under the presidency of Eddie Downey. The standoff with beef factories a year earlier marked the busiest time of his term. Joe Healy was the second president from the west of Ireland and continued the tradition of former Macra na Feirme presidents becoming IFA president. From an organisational point of view, the early term of Tim Cullinan was dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. It brought about significant changes in terms of online discussions and methods of getting work done on behalf of farmers.

The IFA will mark its own anniversary next year when we will be 70 years in existence. Under the helm of Francie Gorman, our work on behalf of farmers will continue.

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'The crises addressed on these pages have been dizzying'

The Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (ICMSA) and *Irish Farmers Monthly* have been working together since 1982. Here, ICMSA president, Denis Drennan, reviews the relationship and the important role of agri-media



Denis Drennan.

Nineteen-eighty-two was a different time and different place. Everything seems to have changed since then and it's actually more difficult to identify the constants than it is to recount and measure the changes. One constant in that time, however, is the relationship between the ICMSA and the *Irish Farmers Monthly* team.

We have endeavoured, since our first meeting, to shed light on the problems that affect both Irish farming and the wider agri-sector. We might emphasise different aspects of that relationship: *Irish Farmers Monthly*, for example, might focus on the wider commercial dimension – outside the farm gates – while the ICMSA always focusses on the welfare of the family farm unit, particularly the dairy family farm – inside the farm gates. That

being said, we have agreed on much more than we have differed and long ago agreed on the principle that has guided the relationship since: it is not enough to identify the problem, we must – absolutely must – bring forward possible solutions. I don't know whether we ever sat down and consciously agreed on this joint approach. I doubt it. It was probably more of a 'meeting of minds' where the ethos of both the magazine and the association coincided and, recognising a similar focus and approach, we decided to travel along always within shouting distance of each other.

A valued platform

All my predecessors have valued the platform that *Irish Farmers Monthly* provided and still provides, and we have used our pages and articles

to try to summarise a particular question and then advance a coherent response. We have never been asked to edit or 'tilt' an argument or editorial and we have always valued the independence of the magazine in Irish agri-media, where, sometimes, the prominence given to some argument was very definitely related to who was uttering it and what organisation they represented. We have never been asked to 'soften our cough' or avoid a challenge to one of the companies and corporations advertising in the magazine. We noticed that and we appreciated it. The issues and crises that we've addressed through these pages are dizzying. Some of those that caused the most heated stories now look so dated and irrelevant that we wonder how they ever gripped us at all. But some of the issues only just emerging back in 1982 have grown since to throw giant shadows that would have been impossible to imagine when they were first noted back in the days of Charlie and Garret. Back then, we heard the first murmurings about 'farmer margin' and the growing role and dominance of the multiple retailers was remarked upon. But we were assured they (the retailers) would never be able to challenge the role of the farmers in setting the price of food. We publicly expressed our doubts and in these very pages. Unfortunately, the policymakers chose to ignore the issue and we – certainly we farmers – are all paying a heavy price for that neglect.



A double-page spread of ICMSA news from a 1989 issue of *Irish Farmers Monthly*.

Flawed policy

Who could have imagined then that the switch to direct payments and the 'buying into subvention' supports would be unceremoniously repurposed as cudgels and clubs with which to beat farmers for not keeping up with the latest iteration of 'sustainability' or environmental compliance? The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) direct payment was supposed to bridge the gap between what food cost to produce and the lower prices the European Economic Community – as it was known then – wanted their urban populations to pay for it. The ICMSA called it as it was at the time. 'Farm subventions' were actually subventions to the retailers that they would quickly 'build into' the prices they were going to offer farmers. We knew what they were going to say. 'We know this is less than it cost to produce. But you'll be able to 'top up' with the supports and subventions and keep going for another year.'

It was flawed policy then and it is still now. The grabbing intent of the retailers and the complicity of their political sponsors have now allied to the quasi-religious wave of environmentalism that fastened so unfairly on farmers as the 'baddies' in their simplistic morality tale. All now use the direct payment system to further their various causes.

We are now at a point where we still need a place to go where we can exchange ideas about possible solutions and

where all of us on the 'farmer' side of what is becoming an increasingly acrimonious and often hysterical argument can pause, take stock, and work through the data and facts to solutions that can work for most of the people most of the time. Because that is what is the most marked contrast between now and then: we now seem to live in a political world where the winner takes it all.

Our opponents do not want us restrained or diminished; they want us gone. Commercial farming of any kind or degree is now something to be regulated and policed and, eventually, ended. The ICMSA will never accept that. We will never accept that as even the premise for discussion, and we will avail of every platform and forum to put forward sound, reasonable and

most importantly, doable policies that move the situation forward. To do that, we need sound, reasonable media that understand the problems and are as committed to the solutions as we are. The best of those has always been *Irish Farmers Monthly* and our ties are of the kind that do not break. Good luck to all at it and we hope you're there in 2074, because we'll still need you.

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Freehick-Atley, R. 2025. Bovine mastitis. All-Ireland Annual Disease Surveillance, p.71.

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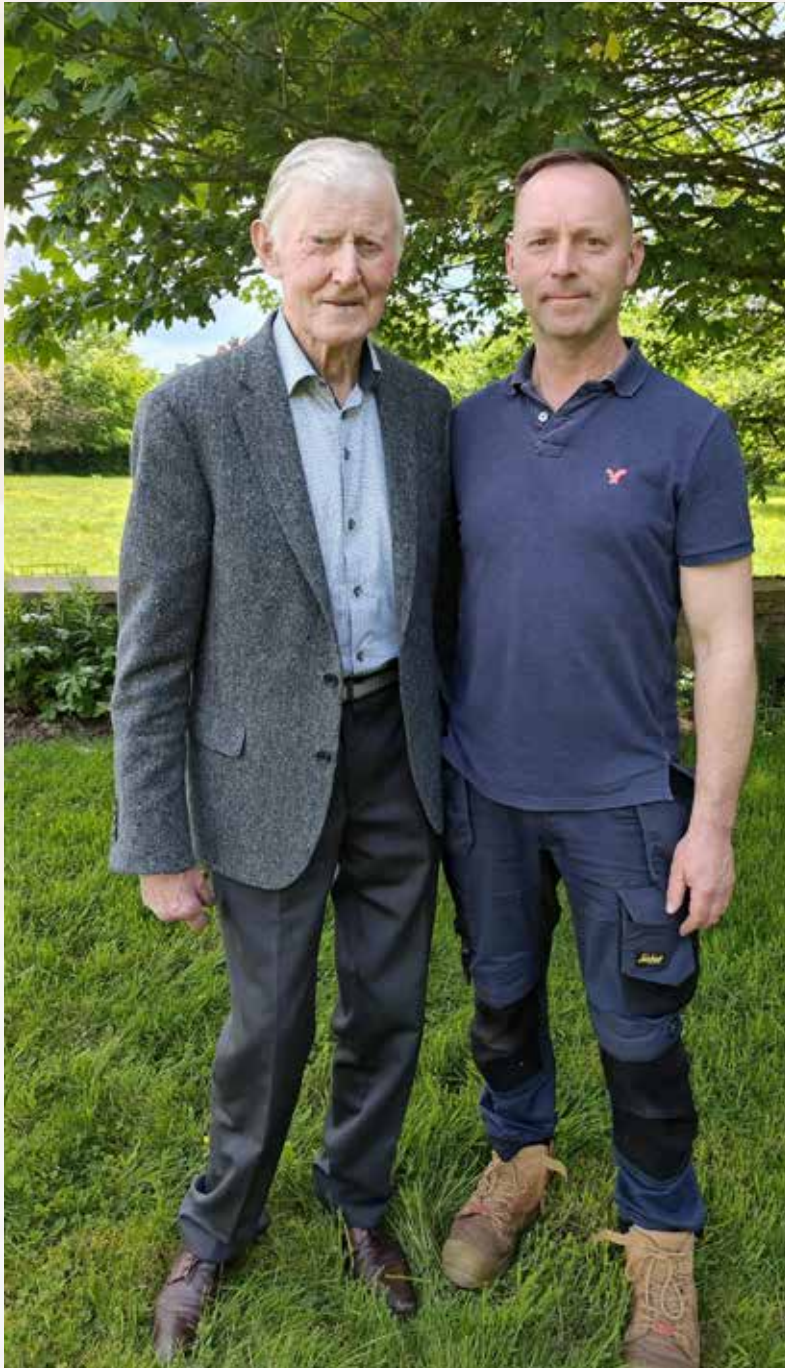
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Cultivating change over 50 years

Hugh Ryan has seen seismic changes in Irish agriculture over the almost eight decades he has been farming. Hugh – along with his wife, Maureen and son, Eugene – grows a range of crops on their tillage farm near the Rock of Dunamase in Co. Laois. Here, the family come together to review some of the major influences on Irish agriculture



Hugh Ryan with this son Eugene.

The past five decades have taken Irish agriculture on an extraordinary journey, marked by changes in practices, policies, and technologies that have influenced the nation's rural landscape, economy, and environment. The 1970s marked a period of transition, characterised by the gradual adoption of modern farming practices and the accession of Ireland into the European Economic Community (EEC). Membership brought access to markets and financial support through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Subsidies motivated farmers to increase production, leading to the intensification of livestock and dairy farming.

Mechanisation played a pivotal role, with tractors, combine harvesters, and other machinery replacing traditional manual labour. Improved breeding techniques and the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides boosted yields, but also raised concerns about environmental sustainability and reliance on external inputs.

The late 20th century saw a growing awareness of environmental issues and the need for more sustainable farming practices. Agri-environmental schemes, such as the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) and the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS), encouraged farmers to adopt conservation measures, including habitat preservation, organic farming, and reduced chemical usage. These initiatives aimed to balance production with environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. This period saw a trend towards farm diversification, as farmers sought alternative income sources.

Agri-tourism, farm shops, artisanal food production, and renewable-energy projects emerged as viable options.



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The turn of the millennium brought rapid technological advancements in Irish agriculture, revolutionising farming practices

High-tech food production

Precision farming technologies – such as GPS-guided machinery and yield monitoring systems – enabled farmers to optimise resource use, improve crop management, and minimise environmental impact. Advances in biotechnology and genetic engineering led to the development of genetically modified (GM) crops and improved livestock breeds, promising higher yields, and disease resistance. Globalisation continued to shape Irish food production, with increased trade, foreign investment, and market integration. Irish agricultural products gained access to international markets, facilitated by trade agreements and initiatives like Bord Bia's Origin Green programme, which promoted Ireland's sustainable food production credentials.

Sustainability

Increased awareness of climate change and its implications for agriculture characterised the 2010s, prompting a renewed focus on sustainability and climate resilience. The Climate Action Plan 2019 outlined ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve carbon sequestration, and enhance environmental sustainability. Farmers were encouraged to adopt practices such as agroforestry, conservation tillage, and nutrient management planning to mitigate their environmental

footprint and adapt to changing climatic conditions. Additionally, consumer preferences shifted towards sustainably produced food, driving demand for organic, locally sourced, and environmentally friendly products. Farmers responded by diversifying their production methods, adopting agro-ecological practices, and embracing certification schemes to validate their commitment to sustainability. The early 2020s witnessed the widespread adoption of digital technologies in Irish agriculture, facilitating data-driven decision-making, precision agriculture and supply chain management. Advances in technology enabled farmers to monitor crop health, track livestock movements, and ensure traceability and transparency throughout the food supply chain.

Tillage transformation

The tillage sector in Ireland has undergone significant development over the past 50 years, driven by changes in agricultural practices, technology, market demands, and policy. The success of the sugar-beet industry during the 1970s and 1980s saw sugar beet as a viable crop for Irish tillage farmers. Changes in EU agricultural policies in the 1990s, coupled with increased competition from imported sugar and alternative sweeteners, threatened the viability of domestic sugar production and culminated with the Irish Sugar Company announcing, in 2006, the closure of its sugar-beet processing factories. This decision not only resulted in the loss of hundreds of jobs but also signalled the end of large-scale sugar beet production in Ireland and huge knock-on effects for the tillage sector. Increased mechanisation in the latter half of the 20th century led to improved efficiency and productivity, allowing growers to increase scale. They have diversified their cropping to include oilseed rape, beans, and maize, driven by changing consumer

preferences, market opportunities, and agronomic considerations. The adoption of new technologies has transformed the tillage sector. Precision agriculture techniques, including GPS-guided machinery, variable rate application of inputs, and drone imaging, have enabled farmers to optimise crop yields while minimising inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides. A growing emphasis on environmental sustainability has encouraged farmers to adopt practices such as minimum tillage and cover crops to improve soil health, reduce erosion, and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. Agri-environmental schemes and certification programmes have incentivised tillage farmers to adopt more sustainable practices while maintaining profitability. Global market trends and trade policies influence the tillage sector in Ireland, with fluctuations in commodity prices, currency exchange rates, and trade agreements having a significant impact on farm incomes and cropping decisions. Despite technological improvements and policy support, the tillage sector faces major challenges, including land availability, commodity prices, unpredictable weather patterns, pest and disease pressures, the three-crop and crop rotation rules, and rising input costs. Notwithstanding these, there are opportunities for innovation and adaptation, particularly in areas such as agri-tech, sustainable growth, and value-added processing.

Generational transfer

Succession planning on Irish farms continues to present challenges entwined with the complexities of family dynamics, legal and tax implications, financial considerations, and unique characteristics of the sector including land fragmentation, market volatility, changing agricultural policies, and environmental regulations. Addressing these challenges requires

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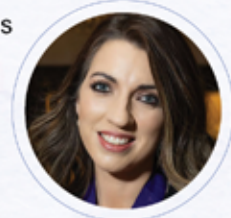
The admin burden

Farmers are facing a growing administrative burden, with a massive rise in regulations, which has a consequent impact on farm family incomes. These include the redirection of CAP away from supporting food production to curbing farm output and implementing new environmental rules. The proposed Mercosur trade deal could devastate the Irish beef sector, in particular. Europe is placing additional stipulations on its farmers, while simultaneously seeking to increase food imports from South America, produced

to much lower environmental standards at a higher carbon footprint. Unnecessarily complicated schemes have led to delayed payments thus increasing pressure on farms. By limiting funding to environmental schemes farmers are being prevented from achieving environmental ambition. While emissions from Irish agriculture contribute to a higher proportion of our overall domestic emissions in comparison to our European counterparts, a failure to recognise the role of heavy industry across Europe in diluting the impact of their agricultural emissions disregards the fact that Irish farmers are amongst the most sustainable producers of food in the world and have made huge changes to

reduce emissions and improve biodiversity. The reduction to the Nitrates Derogation, the Nature Restoration Law, the Industrial Emissions Directive, and the lack of flexibility with new regulations further threaten farmers as food producers. Irish farming reflects a dynamic relationship between technological innovation, policy evolution, and societal demands. While advances have enhanced productivity, efficiency, and market competitiveness, they have also raised environmental, social, and ethical considerations. Sustainable intensification, technology, and flexibility will be critical to addressing these challenges and ensuring long-term viability and sustainability.

On behalf of Veterinary Ireland, I extend our heartfelt congratulations to the *Irish Farmers Monthly* team on their 50th Anniversary. As we celebrate this milestone, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the integral role that veterinarians have played in supporting Irish agriculture over the past 50 years.



Over the past five decades, the relationship between veterinarians and farmers has gone from strength to strength, the vet is now very much a crucial part of any farming enterprise. Vets have played a pivotal role in shaping a more sustainable future for Irish farming through the advancements in technology, diagnostics, herd health planning and responsible use of medicines. I myself am very proud to be both a vet and a dairy farmer, a combined role that encompasses my two major passions in life. The *Irish Farmers Monthly* has been a regular addition to our kitchen table over the years and for many more to come.

Congratulations once again to all the team in *Irish Farmers Monthly* on this remarkable milestone and the invaluable contribution to the agricultural community in Ireland over the past 50 years.

Hazell Mullins

Hazell Mullins
President of Veterinary Ireland

Veterinary Ireland

Veterinary Ireland
13 The Courtyard, Kilcarbery Park, Nangor Road, Dublin 22.
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Looking back to look forward

In this contribution to *Irish Farmers Monthly's* fiftieth jubilee, former Fine Gael minister and European commissioner, Phil Hogan looks at what has been achieved in Irish and European agriculture and what is required for a successful future

A golden jubilee is a wonderful milestone. It is not easy to achieve and it takes a lot of commitment from staff and cooperation from stakeholders. In today's fast-moving world of mass media, it is remarkable that *Irish Farmers Monthly* has been so successful and it is appropriate that 50 years of good quality information flow between the publication and agricultural stakeholders should be celebrated.

Transformational change

The level of change in all aspects of agriculture since 1974 has been transformational. Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community offered enormous opportunities to farmers in terms of modernisation, new innovations, and greater market diversification. The heavy reliance on the UK market was substantially reduced and the returns to farmers in terms of volume and price around the world led to substantial investment. More farmers became commercially oriented, and the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) became a market-driven policy. The raw primary production was largely replaced by product development. The recent iterations of policy reform have led to greater emphasis on the role of the farmer in carrying out other tasks, such as climate change mitigation and environment management, on behalf of society. These programmes and food policies are driven by international agreements such as the UN Climate Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals. These developments lead to tensions if the changes required are



Phil Hogan, former EU commissioner and Fine Gael minister.

too fast and the compensation is uncertain.

Transition pathways to income resilience

Environmental transition is necessary, but stakeholders need to be respected and be part of the solution to our societal objectives. Farmers and co-operatives need to work together to identify transition pathways to income resilience. The unacceptable delay in the adoption of a bioeconomy and biomethane

strategy in Ireland is depriving farmers from additional income opportunities from such activities as anaerobic digestion and carbon farming. Investments on farms in these areas is being unnecessarily delayed due to absence of policy certainty.

These policies and their implementation will offer additional income opportunities to farmers and help to deliver good environmental practice. These incentives will deliver good water quality and protect the Nitrates Derogation, which is essential for jobs in the agri-food sector as well as farm incomes. In my experience, farmers will respond if there are good incentives.

Multiplier effects of trade

Over the past 50 years, the EU has been successful in driving quality production and keeping a close watch on the world markets. Our farmers have delivered for European citizens in terms of food security, value-added in the food chain, and through providing large numbers of jobs in rural areas. There are seven million people in agri-related employment in the rural areas of Europe. Furthermore, the agricultural trade balance between the EU and the rest of the world jumped from zero to €60bn in the years 2014-2019. The multiplier impact is enormous. For each €1bn of exports, 14,000 jobs are created in rural Europe.

What about the future?

There are many unknowns for European agriculture. For example, the CAP budget will be under pressure from the future

enlargement of the EU. Our exports to Asia could be impacted by disruption in the trade routes from issues as disparate as oceanic piracy to the war in Ukraine. Food security, at a time of war, should not be taken for granted. However, we should try to adapt and be positive.

The EU is a champion of food quality. All actors need to share in the fruits of this reality. The farmer must be included at all stages, to help deliver for all of us. Transition pathways are needed along the entire supply chain. Government and co-operatives must lead.

We need to design evidence-based mitigation plans to finance transition and protect incomes.

New technologies, including artificial intelligence, are already with us. We need to embrace the positive aspects of digitisation and innovation.

In addition, a leaner, more effective

and less bureaucratic payments control system must be designed. Agri-advisory services should be strengthened in order to guide transition and innovation. Farmers must not feel that they are on their own throughout these changes. Water quality must be prioritised if dairy and beef producers, plus the rural economy, are to continue receiving the benefits of the Nitrates Derogation.

Specific actions are necessary to incentivise our young people to farm or process raw materials in rural areas.

I wish to acknowledge the various ministers of agriculture, EU commissioners for agriculture, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine staff, agency staff, farm leaders and all the people that tried to help farmers to adjust to change and make an income. It is a wonderful industry.

Phil Hogan held two EU commissionerships between 2014 and 2022 as European Commissioner for Trade and as European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. He previously served as Irish Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government from 2011 to 2014 and Minister of State at the Department of Finance from 1994 to 1995, as well as a TD for the Carlow-Kilkenny constituency from 1989 to 2014. Latterly, Phil has established a consultancy service – Hogan Strategic Advisory Services – with an international clientele that includes JP Morgan, Vodafone, Ardagh and international law firm DLA Piper.



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The River Slaney Project aligns with and provides advice on how to access the Government's recently announced €60 million European Innovation Partnership (EIP) 'Farming for Water' project. The current phase of the collaborative project targets the River Slaney catchment area in counties Wexford, Carlow and Wicklow.

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HERE FOR GOOD

Five decades of memories

Welcome to our next trip down memory lane, as we celebrate a milestone fiftieth year for *Irish Farmers Monthly*, and publish this very special anniversary issue. This month, we take a look at some of the covers and advertisements that featured during the 1980s and 1990s



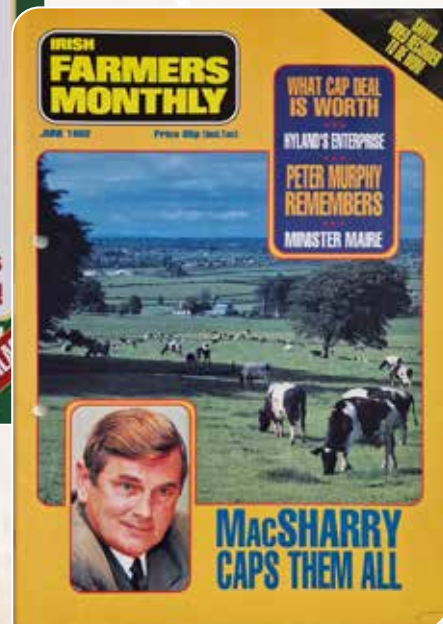
◀ January 1988

IFA president, Tom Clinton, dubbed here as the 'action man' was the cover star. Inside, a double-page spread looked at his election campaign the previous year, when he was mistakenly seen by some as part of an 'amateurish team'. However, he stole a lead in that campaign and held onto it.



◀ May 1997

The general election of June 1997 was the cover topic for the May issue. The election of Tommy McGuire as president of Macra was also flagged, in addition to tips for good baled silage.



◀ May 1989

A hay-baling scene is depicted on the cover of May 1989, with an inset of Sher Rafique, a Pakistani businessman who set up Halal Meat Packers in Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo. Inside, we featured a five-page in-depth feature on the man who rivalled Larry Goodman at that time.

▶ June 1992

The 1992 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is still viewed as the most significant in the history of the evolution of the CAP, and Ray MacSharry, who was agriculture commissioner at the time, is synonymous with said reform. Generally speaking, it saw the overall CAP budget reduced and promoted a shift in policy from a market support system to more direct income supports. In this issue, Ray MacSharry graces the cover while inside, that reform and what it meant is given the once over.



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A selection of the more memorable adverts that appeared in *Irish Farmers Monthly* over the years.

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'Change is inevitable and a natural part of life'



Matt Ryan.

Agricultural consultant and *Irish Farmers Monthly's* Management Hints author, Matt Ryan, writes about changes in farm-management practice over the last 50 years

I have been involved in giving advice to farmers for the last 55 years. Do I give the same advice now as I gave then in 1969? No, of course not. Change is inevitable and a natural part of life. Change takes place as a result of farmers' circumstances, societal demands, and political requirements.

In the 1960s and 1970s, advisers gave advice on all enterprises but in my first job in Co. Laois, each adviser had to get 40 to 50 farmers to do farm accounts, using the old grey book from the Department of Agriculture and fisheries (as it was known at that time).

It was a great learning experience for both farmer and adviser. Seeing is believing and I learned that dairying

was three times more profitable than cattle, and two-and-a-half times more profitable than tillage – sugar beet and potatoes being the exception – and this ratio hasn't changed in all that time. From this, I became a 'one-track-mind' adviser, promoting dairying, where it conformed to farmer viability considerations, as the only show in town based on economics. Hence, the reason I concentrate on the management changes that have taken place in dairying.

Unrecognisable farming landscape

Farming now is unrecognisable to that of 50, 60 and 70 years ago, similar to society in general.

Let's recap. I milked cows by hand in the late fifties and sixties – I was useless compared to my mother



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and another lady from next door who used to come in and milk during the turf-saving or hay-making seasons when the men would never milk in the evenings. Milking changed from hand milking to the mobile two-unit national bucket, to the bucket and pipeline in the cow-byre, to the abreast parlour, to the herringbone (from four-unit to 40-unit) and, more recently, to the rotary parlour and the robot

systems. What is next, I wonder? Similar changes have taken place in relation to housing cows, from the cow byre to loose housing to cubicles. Slurry-storage changes have become essential as cow numbers increased from nine cows, on average, per farm in 1960 to approximately 100 cows now. All these changes were driven by labour considerations and regulatory requirements. Small creameries existed

in almost every parish in the main dairying counties. I brought milk by horse transport, in two 20-gallon churns, to Rearcross Creamery and then to Bilboa Creamery after my father had a disagreement with the manager over the percentage fat in his milk. That's how you were paid then, and it was sampled and tested on the spot. Your status as a farmer was determined by the number of churns

you had on the cart – sometimes water was added to increase the number of churns. On many farms, milk was kept cool by storing the churn in a nearby water stream. With lowish levels of hygiene and poor cooling facilities, the total bacterial count was an issue. Advisers did many night classes on the methods of milking and producing high quality milk.

Breed changes

Shorthorn cows were the main dairy breed in the early 20th century, replaced by British Friesian, and then Holstein genetics increased from 7 per cent in 1976 to 80 per cent in 2000. Paddy O'Keeffe, former editor of the *Irish Farmers Journal*, was the main advocate; however, Dermot Cahill, manager of Dovea AI centre, strongly opposed the trend. Herd fertility decreased from 1990 to 2000 as measured by calving rate, which decreased from 62 per cent to 52 per cent, and calving interval increased from 386 days to 396 days. Policy makers noted this and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF), headed by Brian Wickham, was established early in the 21st century. Our dairy-herd genetics are now the envy of world dairying because of the ICBF. The Jersey breed began to increase in numbers late in the 20th century, to the annoyance of some and to the joy of others. Given the current focus on beef animals from the



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dairy herd, it is worth recording that in 1981/1982, calf-to-beef (565kg at two-year-old) gave a gross margin of £220 compared with £260 per livestock unit from dairying. This hasn't repeated itself often enough since.

Farming schemes

The then Department of Agriculture and Fisheries directed the national advisory and training body (County Committee of Agriculture, ACOT, and finally, Teagasc) to operationalise various schemes which were seen as necessary encouragement for farmers to adopt new practices. During the period under review, we had the Small Farm Scheme, the Farm Modernisation Scheme, the rescue package in the 1980s and various EU-driven subsidy schemes which have resulted in more frustrating bureaucracy for farmers. All for the better or worse? One wonders.

Grass remains the profit driver

The main drivers of dairy profitability in Ireland always were,

and always will be, high-quality grass production and an efficient cow to convert it into milk. Contrary to widespread belief, the principles of growing grass haven't changed over the years – photosynthesis on the leaf, a three-leaf plant, a new leaf grows every five to seven days during summer, tillering, going to seed in May-June, etc. But a lot has changed on the management of grass. From the 1960s to the 1990s, grassland management revolved around planning for a six-to-nine-month winter, all silage driven. Sulphuric or formic acid, molasses and enzymes were deemed essential to preserve excess nitrogen-driven grass yields.

New horizons

Discussion group trips to New Zealand opened farmers' horizons to other ways of managing grass and dairying. In the early 1990s, a huge public debate took place on extended grazing. It was all about adopting practices that shortened

the winter, to give the cow more grazed grass in her diet by letting her out earlier in spring and keeping her out later in the autumn. Nitrogen use is the big change. I had farmers who made great profits by using 350+ units of nitrogen per acre (430kg/ha). Now, farmers must use less than 200/acre, while the exact quantity used is based on purchase receipts. In the early 1990s when we visited New Zealand, they were using little or no nitrogen, it was all clover. If we had brought back that practice, we would have saved ourselves a lot of nitrogen-clover grief now.

Environmental considerations

Politically and socially, farming is now driven by environmental considerations. We must implement new requirements and modify existing management practices. Like the adoption of new practices in the past, this is challenging. We are as good as any other country in the world producing kilogrammes of milk solids with low CO₂ emissions – we can improve further. Our water quality, the greatest of all our challenges, is showing signs of improvement. While our surface and underground water is better than most EU countries, we now need to adopt the recommended practices to recover lost ground. Technology changes have been dramatic: better heat detection; early health problem identification; automatic drafting; efficient management data recording; staff and discussion group chats on WhatsApp; and apps for nearly every task. Discussion groups are stronger in Ireland than anywhere else – the need for them now is greater than ever due to advisers being tied-up on admin issues and farmers being more isolated. Dairying, while a 24/7 job, has been a rewarding life for many farm families. They have risen to every challenge presented to them and delivered.



Old milk churns like these were used to transport the milk from farm to co-op.

Milestones and their journeys

In a special contribution to this anniversary issue of *Irish Farmers Monthly*, Anna May McHugh, managing director of the National Ploughing Association (NPA) looks at the evolution of the NPA's annual agricultural show, the National Ploughing Championships

Over the 50 years of *Irish Farmers Monthly* being in publication, we have witnessed huge changes in the National Ploughing Championships (The Ploughing). It was around that era (when the magazine was established) that a lot more machinery and cars started to be exhibited and the whole thing opened up; as most people, in the earlier years, viewed the event as simply for ploughing competitions. In the following years The Ploughing became a very successful commercial event as well as a showcase for ploughing skills. We progressed gradually by incorporating more side events, making it popular with a wider audience. If you go back almost another 50 years to when the NPA was established and ran its first competition in 1931, the event only cost £9/3/6 (nine pounds, three shillings, and sixpence) to organise.

Infrastructure development

In 1981, we introduced the steel roadways. They weren't available in Ireland, so we rented them from abroad and we still do that today. The financial cost of outright purchase would have been beyond NPA resources, so we have to bring them in every year. There would also be issues with washing, maintenance and storage. Over the years we introduced more elaborate services including

telecommunications, electrical systems, water sources and improved sanitation. In latter years, the internet has become so important that we invested in a big upgrade. Now, most of our entrance fee interactions are done electronically, as has happened with GAA and other public events.

A movable feast

We have continued to move The Ploughing to different sites over the years. People get tired of the one site. There's an attraction about going to different locations and

venues.

On the other hand, there are challenges in moving to a new site every few years. Cooperation between a lot of neighbouring farms is needed and good road access points are also required. Potential traffic congestion is an important factor. Only a few sites are totally suitable. We do appreciate the inconvenience for the farmers involved as well as neighbours and local residents. Our attitude is that unless we are welcomed, we are better off somewhere else. There is a prestige in hosting The Ploughing for county ploughing associations and that is a driver of changing sites regularly.

Adding new attractions

We introduced a fashion show in 1984 and that was a big attraction. People don't want to look at machinery or ploughing all day. In 1988, we introduced the livestock exhibits and in 1995, in Ballacolla, we introduced the pony games. Enterprise Ireland introduced the Innovation Arena 10 years ago and that has been a big attraction for visitors. We're very fortunate to have them because they bring in potential buyers from other countries who visit and do business with other exhibitors at The Ploughing. All the additions and changes have enhanced the whole ploughing experience.

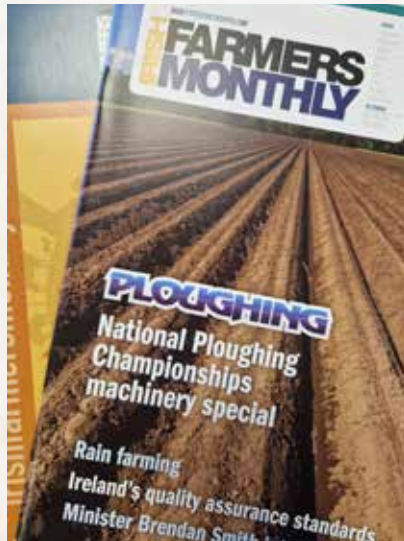


In 2014, Anna May featured in an article to mark 40 years of *Irish Farmers Monthly*, which acknowledged the women who shaped Irish agriculture.

Changing the ploughing competitions

We have classes for all ages and they must qualify through their county ploughing associations. They compete in their local matches, then compete in the county event, and the county winners go through to the national event. We introduced the reversible plough class, which I never thought the general public would be attracted to. But, in fact, there's more detail and measuring attached to it than the conventional class and it has become very popular with competitors and spectators. That reflects the fact that reversible ploughing is so common on tillage farms. You can't stand still.

Getting young people interested and committed is a problem in many organisations. We have



From 2008, a special ploughing-related cover of *Irish Farmers Monthly*.

novice classes, both for the reversible and conventional, to encourage young people to become involved. It starts with local events

and progresses to The Ploughing. Alongside that, a few counties come to do horse ploughing, which a lot of the younger people come to see because it is a spectacle they have never seen before. President Higgins always looks at the horse ploughing as he did it himself as a boy back on the home farm in Clare.

Highly esteemed plough people

Our plough men and women are held in high esteem, at home and abroad. There's a social side to The Ploughing as well, there

is great camaraderie. The whole attitude has changed over the years regarding women. I was ploughing against the tide when I became national secretary of the NPA – more than 70 years ago. It was a male-dominated world in the very early years, I'd have to say. There were very few women in national organisations at the time. But that has all changed now for the better.

Looking forward

A 13-year partnership with Aldi came to an end earlier this year but we've a new sponsor, and we could get an overall sponsor for the whole event, but that's something we have no intention of doing as we want to maintain our NPA name and independence. We will never change the name. I think the founder of the NPA, JJ Bergin, would be turning in his grave if we talked about changing the name of NPA. If there's any new additions that we can add, we'll be open to discussion. If anyone has some good proposal to put to us, the door is always open for improvement. We'll always look to try and improve it year after year and if we were guaranteed good weather everything would be perfect. It's nearly been raining continuously since last year's ploughing event. The Ploughing helps to keep interest in rural Ireland. We construct a temporary town in the middle of the countryside and that's a major attraction where people can come and enjoy a day's outing. It's also an opportunity for exhibitors to show their wares and services. It's educational, with a range of Government agencies involved. Teagasc, county councils and Government departments. They come to do business and we facilitate that. In conclusion, may I thank David and Mai Markey for their support over the years. They have always been positively disposed to the NPA and we appreciate that. Congratulations on 50 years of *Irish Farmers Monthly*.

Farm Home

In October the Ploughing Championships will culminate in Offaly for the first time. John Magner recently visited the very capable team of the winners, David and Grace Gannon.

All roads will lead to Offaly

It was Grace's idea. The former nurse and current E & B partner milked the farm she and her husband Patrick ran as a sideline for the last 10 years. The Ploughing Championships. That was in 1995, the year the 'Lamb-hair' Laker family hosted the event.

It's been a busy 200 years for the Gannon since then. The activity of organising the event with the National Ploughing Association coincided with the growth of a E & B business established in early 1995. And that's before the task of

running a 400-acre beef and tillage farm in what is now called the Gannon farm in south Dublin farming stock. Patrick's father was a mixed farmer and his brother, John, a milker, runs an agri-supply store in the neighbouring village of Rath. His only son is married to a farmer and lives locally. Grace was a staff cardiologist, working in Dublin, Naas and Slough, having studied at Rugeley St. Hospital.

As you would expect from any Ploughing team, the Gannon's farm, Parkmore, is a

smallhold collection. It fell more from head, Susan Wals, is engaged and several work is given to a local youth

Some 294 acres of F and E-rich ground is given to 114 cows, 5 heifer cows, 100 calves are finished in 180 days and 200 animals are finished per annum. Profigne Glensons, Charolais and Angus bulls are stocked. The stocking rate is 1.8 units per acre.

The Gannon's have a sheep breeding quota of 184 ewes, but Patrick says he is "pleasing with the breeding and for stocking and finishing seasons". At the moment the

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A feature in *Irish Farmers Monthly* about the The Ploughing taking place on the Grennan farm in Co. Offaly.

A most important cog

Agriculture and food may comprise our largest indigenous sector but it would not exist without the support of the machinery sector. Geoff Daly, managing director of Farmec Ireland, provides an overview of the sector, the role of the machinery trade association, and the people and companies at its heart

Agriculture and food comprise Ireland's largest sector, and the farm machinery industry is an integral and essential participant. Sustainable mechanisation continues to play an important role in the provision of suitable machinery, operator training, and back-up supply of spare parts and services to ensure that agricultural production is environmentally sustainable and more efficient in growing crops.

In 2021, according to CEMA, the body that represents the European agricultural machinery industry, Ireland was the 17th largest agricultural machinery market in Europe. Ireland's total production of agricultural machinery was in excess of €180m, while in terms of trading, €510m worth was imported and €270m worth was exported.

Representative body

A representative body is a vital support for such an important industry, and in Ireland that job falls to the Farm Tractor and Machinery Trade Association (FTMTA) which is the official representative body of the farm machinery trade. Based at its headquarters close to Naas in Co. Kildare, the FTMTA is a vital force in representing the interests of the farm machinery industry in Ireland.

The history of tractor and machinery trade representation goes back over 100 years. The first representative body was formed in 1912 and was followed by a number of representative associations operating on behalf of the machinery trade up to the name change to the FTMTA in 1969.



Managing director of Farmec Ireland, Geoff Daly.

The two principal original promoters of the establishment of the FTMTA were Tom Lenehan, Lenehans of Dublin, who served as president in 1965/67, and Paddy McGee, McGees of Ardee who served as president from 1967/70. Since then, 29 people have served as president of the association on a two-year cycle supported by the executive director and his staff, and a council formed from representatives of the farm tractor and machinery trade in Ireland.

My involvement

My involvement in the FTMTA started in the mid-seventies when my good friend, the late JR Perry, nominated me to join the council. In those days, the council meetings took place in rented hotel rooms mainly in Dublin city. I can remember the Clarence Hotel in Dublin being a popular venue for

council meetings and discussions thereafter. The secretary then was Miceal Willis Murphy assisted by Mai Branigan. Both of these people were fully involved in the running of the affairs of the association and Miceal was especially determined that the council affairs were diligently executed.

Over the years, a wide range of important matters affecting the machinery trade were dealt with including relationships with other bodies involved in agriculture in Ireland such as An Foras Taluntais (forerunner organisation to Teagasc), farm organisations like the IFA, ICMSA, Macra, the NPA and UK and European organisations such as BAGMA and CLIMMAR. I suppose, some of the major milestones in the FTMTA's history are the Farm Machinery Show, first held in the RDS in 1989, then Replace with Grass & Muck held in 2010, and the move to the FTMTA headquarters at New Hall, Naas, Co. Kildare.

For a long time, others had talked about the unsuitability of existing shows in operation in Ireland. In 1987, I visited Holland and together with Michael Moroney, then machinery editor at the *Irish Farmers Journal* we met with the organisers of the RAI Show.

Influential players

Over the years, many personalities made a very large positive impact in the development of farming and farm machinery in Ireland. Individuals that I would have known and stand out for me include Paddy McGee, Tom Lenehan, Joe Murphy, Denis

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Tractor Guide '89



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COMPILED BY JOHN HEILL WATSON

A selection of machinery-related content from *Irish Farmers Monthly* in the 1980s and 1990s.

Scrivener, DH Sherrard, Pa (Paddy) Pentony, John Perry, Sean Barlow, and Peter Wolfe to mention a few.

Paddy McGee was one of the founding members of the present day FTMTA. McGees imported one of the first combines into Ireland in around 1935 and went on to be one of the most important machinery suppliers in the country. The company was probably the best training ground for aspiring farm machinery dealers in Ireland. In all, some 10 farm machinery businesses in north Leinster were established by individuals who learned their trade in McGees, including myself. I met Tom Lenehan when I worked for McGees.

Lenehans, McGees, Murphy Machinery and Lucey and O'Connell in Cork were joint Vicon machinery importers in Ireland back in the 1960s. Meetings were held a few times each year with the four importers. At one such meeting, I remember raising the correspondence between Joe Murphy and Denis Scrivener in the *Irish Farmers Journal* both extolling the virtues of their respective fertiliser spreaders, Vicon for Joe and Amazone for Denis. My concern was that the exchange was bad publicity for Vicon. Joe listened patiently and then responded: "Young fella, the only bad publicity you can get is an obituary notice in the newspaper." That finished the conversation fairly quickly.

Denis Scrivener was another pioneer in the development of the machinery trade in Ireland. He introduced and marketed such names as Quicke, Amazone and Krone machinery with great success and built a massive company that continues today. Paddy Pentony started as a bulk buyer of fertiliser, sprays and such like for large farmers in north county Dublin. Travelling to European shows, he acquired Hardi sprayers as a base for a business that grew over a few short years. At one stage, Pa was the owner of two Rolls Royce cars and used to drive them in and around the NPA site at the ploughing exhibition.

Sherrards of Cork was a pioneer in the retail trade in Ireland and one of the first to have a country wide branch network. DH Sherrard had a small office in the front area of the premises in Ballintemple. He was somewhat reclusive and an appointment was required to visit him. The Sherrard company was very close to McGees through the Allis Chambers tractor business.

Sean Barlo built up a large farm business including branches in Kilkenny, Waterford and Tipperary. He also had business interests outside farm machinery. Sean was a meticulous note taker at meetings and was very apt to quote from them, subsequently. He drove a hard bargain in his dealings but it was always said by his suppliers that 'your money was as safe with Sean as it would be with the Bank of England'.

The evolution of a family farm

Des and Annie Kehoe were married 71 years ago, in the same year they started farming at Rockfield, near Gowran, Co. Kilkenny. Their son, Brendan, has been on the farming journey with them for the past 40 years and their grandson, Dara, helps out too. Des and Annie have vivid memories of their farming lives and here, share the highs and lows of farming over five decades

The farm had been rented out and was quite run down when we arrived. Our first years were very difficult because we hadn't much income coming in. The cheapest option was tillage, because you could get the seed and fertiliser on credit at the mill and pay for it after the harvest. Some of the fields had never been tilled and we got some great crops in the early years. Sugar beet gave the best return, though it involved a lot of physical labour, before machinery, mono-seeds and herbicides made it much easier. Eighteen acres of beet back then would have been hugely laborious because there was no mechanisation. The plants had to be thinned and weeded by hand. It took 30 pounds of seed to sow an acre before the single seeders were developed. The first harvesters used to toss out too much, but before that you had to pull beet by hand and top each one with a knife. We were able to pull an acre of beet in the day, then load it onto trailers and bring it into the yard before being loaded again and drawn to the factory in Carlow. I bought one of the first beet harvesters in the parish and pulled beet for other growers. That helped pay for the machine and make a profit as well.

Dairy by degrees

We built up a herd of dairy cows by degrees. During the 1970s, as we were building up the herd, we were hit by both tuberculosis and brucellosis, wiping out the herd at different times. We bought replacements from Northern



Des and Annie, and their son, Brendan (left).

Ireland which was TB-free at the time but, ultimately, it meant that when quotas came in, we had a smaller herd than we had hoped for and that really influenced all our farming decisions until the end of quotas 30 years later. Getting more quota was difficult and expensive. Our first milking machine was a bucket plant and then we put up a milking parlour. Today we have a modernised herringbone, so it has come a long way. When quotas were abolished, Brendan increased cow numbers and there's a 100-cow herd on the farm today.

Alternative enterprises

Because we couldn't expand in milk production, we took other options, mainly in the farmyard. Poultry for egg production, was one of the alternative enterprises we developed, supplying a local hatchery. The idea was to have three farms supplying at different times to ensure continuity. It was a

two-year production cycle and then you started over with a new flock. I copied a version of an egg cleaner I had seen on a farm in Wexford and that made egg handling and packing much easier and less labour intensive. It was a profitable business until the hatchery closed and we had to consider other options. With the sheds in place,

Clover closure

In the 1980s we saw the closure of Clover Meats. It was farmer-owned and the biggest beef processor in the country for many decades. That was a big disappointment, as it left cattle producers without any ownership or control of beef processing. My father, Ross Kehoe, had worked for Clover in China in the early part of the last century. It really was a successful international business in scale and profitability at its peak.



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we started rearing turkeys for a breeder. Again, that worked well for a period until costs and over-production caught up. The first white turkeys came into Shannon from the US and we collected them there and reared them until they went for breeding. We were up to 2,000 turkeys at peak. We grew seven acres of raspberries for a jam manufacturer for a time and hired locals for picking and so on. There was great fun in that, and the returns were good. Initially, we thought the pickers would eat all the berries. The buyers told us to let them eat all they want and then they would never eat another raspberry. That worked. It was hard work but very enjoyable with all the locals chatting and working together.

Community activists

We were always committed to our communities, with heavy involvement in the parish as well as the formation of the National

Farmers' Association, later the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA), the establishment of a local co-operative mart, the formation of FBD and IFAC. I was the first chairman of the Kilkenny Farm Relief Service and my involvement in IFA as national dairy chairman and South Leinster vice-president meant that Annie had a very hands-on role in running the farm over the years.

Avonmore amalgamation

The coming together over the past 50 years of the local co-ops in this region, into Avonmore, then Glanbia, and now Tirlán, was a huge development for milk producers. It allowed us to diversify into value-added products and when the quotas were abolished there was enough financial strength and scale to build extra processing facilities. Farmer ownership and control is very important, even though we still argue over milk price.

Farm transfer supports

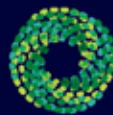
Brendan recollects some of the positive actions that helped him into his farming career: "After I finished a two-year course in Rockwell Agricultural College, I came back to farm full time. I started a sheep flock to lift income. The Young Farmer Installation Aid was in place when I was taking over the management of the farm. That provided some bit of finance and the Early Retirement Scheme allowed Dad to step back. Those were very useful initiatives, and we could do with similar today. "It's my turn now to pass the farm on to another generation and that's a major challenge for every farm family in that position. You have to balance the needs of everyone, those retiring and the next generation, Dara in our case, hoping to make a living from the farm."

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A young farmer's perspective

Liam Hanrahan, chair of Macra's National Agricultural Affairs Committee, provides a young farmer's perspective on the progress achieved over the past five decades and how he believes farming will prosper in the years ahead

The evolution of Irish agriculture over the past 50 years has been an immense journey, filled with great challenges but also great opportunities. Over this period, the landscape of Irish farming has changed dramatically through major advances in a wide range of technologies, however the practice of producing food to the highest standards in our grass-based system has remained the same. In the 1970s it was quite common to have multiple farm enterprises with most farmyards supplying milk, producing beef, keeping pigs and hens, and growing vegetables. Today, we see larger herds with specialised enterprises and major advances in the likes of milking equipment and a wide range of other machinery. Our own farm, near Doonbeg in Co. Clare, is no different. Where once cows were milked by hand or with basic milking systems, they are now milked in herringbone or rotary parlours, allowing for larger scale operations to be managed more efficiently. Machinery has increased in size and technology has replaced physical labour. The level of advancement in Irish agriculture has been astonishing and is testament as to why Irish food is so highly sought after right across the world.

Regulatory drivers of change

European agricultural policies, especially the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), have had a major impact on Irish agriculture. Over the past 50 years, CAP has consistently changed and been reformed, milk quotas were introduced and abolished, and



Liam Hanrahan, pictured in 2019 when he won the FBD Young Farmer of the Year award.

farming has adapted to become more productive and efficient across all fronts. Milk quotas had a stagnating effect on our dairy industry with only those farmers fortunate enough to secure extra quota during this time being able to develop and increase the productivity of their farms. Today, we have environmental challenges in the areas of carbon, methane and water quality; however, we also have major advances in animal breeding and genetics, grassland management tools, access to research and development (R&D) and technology adoption. Science will continue to

provide us with pathways to tackle these challenges. New farming techniques and technologies will reduce emissions and mitigate impacts on water quality, ensuring further enhancement of the sustainability of our production systems into the future. The introduction of the Economic Breeding Index and widespread use of AI have driven major advancements around animal breeding and genetics. Animals now can be easily and accurately selected for their productivity and survivability traits, allowing herd efficiency improvements at a fast pace with the likes of the

recently implemented genomic schemes advancing this further. Grass measurement is common practice and precision fertiliser application has ensured vast improvements in the productivity and efficiency of grassland farming over the years. Novel technologies – as they are developed and adopted – will further aid in environmental efficiency, soil health enhancement and increased sustainability.

The farmer's voice

The importance of strong farmer representation cannot be over-stated – it is absolutely vital that the voice of our industry is heard. Macra has been a cornerstone of Irish farming over the past 50 years and longer, ensuring that young farmer representation has been to the forefront of agricultural policies. The organisation has also provided an extremely important social outlet for young people in rural Ireland, with the fundamentals and core values of the organisation remaining consistent throughout. The unique qualities of the organisation should be noted by all; Macra has something for everyone to get involved in at whatever level they wish, be that in competitions, rural youth or agricultural issues and has certainly provided me with many thoroughly enjoyable opportunities and experiences. While I have been lucky enough to chair the Agricultural Affairs sub-committee of National Council for the past two years, there are many leaders

within the organisation voicing young farmer and rural youth needs. Indeed, a vast number of extremely prominent farm leaders have come through the organisation in the past, providing a legacy that I am sure will continue long into the future.

Generation renewal policies have been a long-standing action area for Macra over the last 50 years, with the need for youth in our industry being just as important now as ever. Rural Ireland requires young people to prosper, with Macra advocating across many areas to encourage a vibrant rural Ireland to live in and enjoy. Macra has contributed significantly to the areas of dairy, tillage, beef, animal health, nitrates and water quality policies and much more. Access to land and access to finance are two consistent challenges for young farmers and we continuously advocate for favourable policies here. Indeed, there have been many demonstrations organised by Macra over the years with 'Steps for our Future' last year being the most recent, where Macra members walked from Athy, where the organisation was first founded, to Merrion square to meet our political representatives. Macra has also been a voice in Europe through – the European Council of Young Farmers – for a long number of years which allows young farmer organisations from across Europe to communicate as one in a joint effort to achieve agricultural prosperity and better opportunities and supports for young farmers.

The next generation

There is no doubt that achieving environmental targets today is a major challenge, but farming has faced challenges in the past and emerged stronger and better positioned than ever. Irish farming can and will adapt through the implementation of science and progressive policies. Agricultural output reduction policies are not welcomed by Macra as they will only hinder progress and deter investment, implementation and involvement by the next generation. We believe that, while further change and improvements are required in our farming systems, these can be achieved through forward-thinking policies supported and endorsed by modern science and research. The uptake and implementation of improved practices is essential to continuous improvement at farm level and requires a joined-up thinking, solutions-based, approach.

Ongoing generational renewal policies are required to further enhance this, increase the number of young people farming, inject vibrancy into our industry and achieve sustainability for all. This is possible through the implementation of attractive policies that ensure financial stability and environmental progress side-by-side. If a comparable level of advancement of the past 50 years in Irish farming can be achieved in the next 50 years, there is no doubt Irish agriculture will be one of the most exciting, forward-thinking industries and an attractive career choice for young Irish people.



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MESSAGES

- You must play your part in improving water quality in your area.
- Do your winter-feed requirement checks now.
- Know your June grazing targets and stick to them.
- Forage crops, sown now, are a winter-feed option.
- Replacements need your constant attention – June is an important month!
- June is a crucial month in the breeding season.



By Matt Ryan

TIPS TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN YOUR AREA!

- » This aspect of your farming requires your serious attention NOW!
- » Recently, Gillian Delehanty, agricultural scientist, Tipperary County Council, gave an on-farm talk and assessment to a discussion group on this topic. It was non-threatening but simple, good advice on some of the steps farmers should take to improve local water quality.
- » All farmers are worried about enforcement but if we know what to do and then act, we will have nothing to worry about.
 - Prosecution is the last step of a five-step enforcement measure.
 - Many (250) on-farm inspections are planned for this year. This is to increase to 350 in 2025.
- » We MUST improve the quality of our domestic water supply and in our streams and rivers. Gillian's suggestions will go a long way toward achieving that aim. These are outlined below.
- » Minimisation of soiled water
 - 'An occupier of a holding shall take all reasonable steps as are necessary for the purpose of minimising the amount of soiled water produced on the holding'.
 - Common breaches:
 - Gutters and downpipes broken or missing.
 - Clean water allowed to flow into soiled yards.
 - Feeding yards diverted to slatted tanks or clean water system.
- » Organic fertiliser – storage and management
 - 'Livestock manure must be collected and held prior to landspreading in a manner that prevents run off/seepage to ground or surface water'.
 - Common breaches:
 - Inadequate or poorly constructed channels or no channels anywhere.
 - Automatic scrapers can result in slurry accumulating outside the shed.
 - Seepage from straw bedded sheds (eg. calf house).
 - Overflowing slatted tanks, farmyard manure (FYM) pits and effluent tanks.
- » FYM storage
 - Few have any dedicated FYM pit. Why?
 - Build up under stock in sheds, but this limited.
- Stored on silage pit – not really practical and effluent is often discharged to surface water drainage systems.
- Dumped on back of silage pit or shed – not satisfactory.
- Remember, there is significant seepage from FYM pits.
- Note the following:
 - The spreading period is from January 12 to the November 1. Field storage is ok after January 12 but it cannot be within 20m of an open watercourse; and it cannot be within 50m-250m of a drinking water extraction point.
 - FYM pits must have an effluent collection tank, which must be leak proof, while effluent must be stored for 16 weeks.
- » Organic fertiliser – structural integrity
 - 'Storage facilities for livestock manure and other organic fertilisers, soiled water and effluent from dungsteads, FYM pits or silage pits shall be maintained free of structural defects'.
 - Common breaches:
 - Tanks cracked or leaking.
 - Silage pits with poor surfaces or cracks.
 - Dungsteads.
 - FYM pits.
- » Slurry and soiled water spreading
 - Common breaches:
 - Spreading outside the following window allowances.
 - October 1 to January 12.
 - 100m-200m from public water supply.
 - 25m from a well.
 - 15m from karst feature, eg. swallow hole or sinking stream.
 - 5m-10m from watercourses (10 weeks applies to two weeks prior to and two weeks post closed period).
 - Upward-facing splash plates, rain guns, or irrigators.
 - Spreading from public roads or farm/cow roadways,
 - Spreading on wet, waterlogged, or frozen ground.
- » Silage pits and baled silage
 - Common breaches:
 - Very poor surfaces.
 - No walls.
 - Blocked effluent channels.
 - No channels.

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THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION

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- Channels diverted to drains or watercourses.
 - Diversion sump forgotten about.
 - Effluent escaping.
 - Baled silage must be situated at least 20m from a watercourse or water extraction point.
- » **Cow roads**
- 'There must be no direct run-off of soiled water from roadways to water courses' (came into effect on January 1, 2021).
 - Very significant amounts of sediment are washed into streams.
 - More of a problem now as herds are larger.
 - Solutions:
 - Silt traps.
 - Cambering away from drains.
 - Re-locating paddock entrance.
 - Planting trees, shrubs, etc. between roadway and watercourse.
 - Divert as much rainwater off the roadway as possible.
- » **De-sludging your septic tank**
- Don't mix with animal slurry – limit the area receiving it.
 - De-sludge from September to October – this allows six months before grazing in March.
 - Be aware of the Dairy Quality Assurance Scheme restrictions.
 - Don't de-sludge your family or neighbour's domestic wastewater treatment system – you need a waste collection permit for this.
 - De-sludge every two to three years.
- » **Your 'to-do-list'**
- Check out your farmyard (and outfarm/land) on www.bing.com/maps to see a bird's eye view of any obvious signs of pollution

from your farmyard.

- Check out www.catchments.ie to establish the water quality in streams and rivers near you.
 - Check your cow roadways during and after heavy rain.
 - Check where the surface water is going – any signs of sewage fungus?
 - Walk drains/streams/rivers adjacent or close by for evidence of pollution.
 - Clean channels.
 - Put in kerbs to help contain slurry/soiled water in yards.
 - Check gutters and downpipes.
 - Do FYM pits meet the requirements?
 - Carefully examine silage pits.
 - Minimise soiled water yards and install soiled water tank.
- » **Because of the importance of water quality, many more farm inspections are going to occur. Be prepared and do your bit!**

WINTER FEED: THE GREAT CHALLENGE!

- With little or no reserves of silage from winter 2023-2024, serious planning needs to take place now if you are to avoid a problem this coming winter.
- Most farmers are struggling to get adequate-sized first-cut silage this year.
 - All weather related.
 - All the discussion around nitrogen is influencing the amount of nitrogen used in the year to date.
 - Hence, a shortage of grass for grazing has prevented farmers closing up silage ground, even though a lot of light, early silage was cut in May.



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Table 1: Cost per tonne utilisable dry matter of forage winter feeds. Source: Teagasc, Moorepark, April 2023.

	Grazed grass	Grass + white clover	First & second cut pit silage	First & second cut bale silage	Three-cut red clover	Maize silage**	Fodder beet	Purchased rolled barley (€360/t)
Relative cost to grass per energy utilised (UFL)*	1.0	0.7	4.2	4.5	4.2	4.3	3.4	6.1 2.9**

*This value excludes land charge associated with feeds. If you include land charge, purchased barley is 2.9 tonnes more expensive than grazed grass.

**Includes a land charge.

- By mid-June you should have 80% to 90% of your silage in the pit – this won't be achieved.
- If falling short of that target, you must do something about it.
- Check now:
 - The quantity of silage you have – allow for dry silage.
 - The amount of silage you require.
 - The following is each animal's requirement in kg DM/day: cow = 11kg; in-calf heifer = 9kg; and a weanling = 5kg.
 - Thus, you will be able to calculate your deficit.
- Check what you have in pit or in bales to date – every 45ft³ holds one tonne of silage in a pit.
- What are the choices, if short now?
 - Grow more grass and cut more silage.
 - Grow forage crops.
 - Buy silage, either on shank, in bales or pit silage.
 - Buy fodder beet, maize, whole crop or palm kernal/soya hulls.
 - Reduce stocking rate now or carry less stock next winter.
- The basic principle for June is to keep growing as much grass as you possibly can:
 - For second cut, apply N (80 units) and use the equivalent of two bags 0:7:30 per acre to supply phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) but more where fertility is low.
 - Stock the cows and cattle at 3.5 to 3.8 livestock units/ha on the grazing area, so that you can close up larger areas for silage cutting.
 - You should only top pastures as a last resort because it is a grass-wasting exercise and something we can't afford this year. If grass is getting strong, take out the surplus as round bales.
- Kale or rape are options to consider – discussed below – but they must be sown now.
- Some farmers are grossly over stocked, carrying poor milkers, high somatic cell count/mastitis-prone cows and lame cows. Sell off now.
 - Use milk-recording data and personal knowledge to weed them out.
- If short, you cannot justify having too many replacement units on the farm – there might be a case for treating the very poor ones as beef animals as the trade for them has been poor.

BE AWARE OF YOUR GRZING TARGETS

- Achieve grazing targets to provide adequate quality grazing grass.
- The following are the grass-cover targets for various grazing stocking rates in kg DM per hectare that drive grass quality and yield during June:

Stocking (SR) rate (cows/ha)	Pre-grazing cover (SR x 18 x 21 + 50)*	Average farm cover (SR x 180)**
3.0	1,180	540
3.5	1,380	630
3.7	1,450	670
3.9	1,524	702

*Stocking rate x daily allowance x rotation length + residual = Kg DM/ha.

**Stocking rate x recommended cover per cow = kg DM/ha.

» This is basic, fundamental knowledge required to manage grass to best effect.

- Farmers are very slow to act on the wedge data – remember grass grows grass and low covers grow less.
- If you are under these target covers you will run short of grass and if over these, grass will get too stemmy. Cows will under-perform if either of these two situations arise.
- The advised grazing stocking rate for June and July is 3.5 to 3.9 cows/ha.
- To grow grass, you need nitrogen (28 kg/ha) and sulphur (15-20 units to year-end) now.
 - Spread any remaining slurry on second-cut silage fields on 'damp' days.
- Spread lime on bare silage fields earmarked for grazing and other 'bare' grazing fields that need lime.
 - Generally, all fields need two tonnes/acre of lime every two to three years.

FORAGE CROPS: A VIABLE OPTION!

- Forage crops – kale, forage rape, redstart, swedes and stubble turnips – may be an option worth considering if you are to be short of winter feed.
 - You still have time to sow all these now, but swedes must be sown before mid-June.
- These crops have a few advantages:
 - They can fill a winter-feed deficit and allow animals to have shorter indoor housing requirements.
 - They can be grown on another farm.
 - But they are weather dependent for feeding, fencing/ allocation of feed and mineral supplementation – challenges to be overcome during winter.
- Table 1 outlines the cost per tonne of dry matter (DM) utilised.
- Table 2 outlines sowing dates, grazing dates, possible yields, seeding rates and some general management considerations.

Table 2: Summary of forage crop management.

Trait	Kale	Redstart	Swedes	Stubble turnips
Sowing date	May to June	Mid-June to Mid-August	Mid-May to June	June, July, Aug
Grazing date	Aug to Feb	Sept to Feb	Oct to Feb	Oct to Feb
Yield (tonne DM/ha)	6 to 9	6 to 8	6 to 9	3 to 4
Seeding rate (kg/acre)	1.6 to 2.0 4.5 if broadcast	3.5 to 4	to 0.4 2 if broadcast	2.0 3 if broadcast
General	Easy to manage. Good feed value. Weed may be an issue.	Ready to graze 90-110 days post sowing. Good regrowth.	If feeding cattle, best to store and feed through diet feeder.	Introduce gradually. Not winter hardy. Roughage and minerals required.

- Let us examine kale a little more because it is the most frequently used. An 8 tonne/ha crop of kale will be the cheapest source of feed next winter.
 - It is 80% dry matter digestibility (DMD), as good as barley.
 - It and fodder beet will cost less than €1.50/day to feed a cow next winter.
 - The expected yield is 8-12 tonnes DM/ha with early-June sowing.

- A 10-tonne/ha average crop and allocating 4kg and 75kg, respectively, to weanlings and cows per day (with another roughage), the crop will feed 40 weanlings or 20 cows for 60 days.
- The weanlings and cows will gain 0.6kg and 0.25kg, respectively, per day.
 - Sow where fields need to be reseeded or after first cut silage.
 - Requirements:
 - Sow in early June – thereafter one tonne/ha/week DM is lost.
 - A fine, firm seed bed is essential.
 - Seed can be drilled or broadcast (need higher seeding rate) at 4.5kg/ha to 5kg/ha.
 - Sow kale once per five years in same field to avoid clubroot.
 - You need a soil pH of 6.5 to 7.0.
 - Nitrogen: It needs 100kg/ha (80units/acre) split in two applications, the second one at the two to three-leaf stage.
 - For a soil index 3, apply 30 P (24/acre) and 170 K(140/acre) at sowing. Poorer soils require more.
 - Watch out for pests as the crop develops.
 - There should be a run-back area available to the animals during feeding.

BREEDING SEASON CHECK-UP!

- » We are now in the most difficult part of the breeding season because fewer cows are in heat.
- » You must 'up' your heat observation efforts.
- » If more than 25% of cows are repeating then you have a problem.
 - Look at the repeat trends and analyse the situation.
 - Consult your vet.
- » Bull late calvers at 35-40 days after calving with a young test bull (easy calving with a minus 7+ days for calving interval). The same principle applies to repeat AI bulls being used.
- » Some farmers with infertile herds are scanning cows served more than 32-40 days to confirm pregnancy.
 - A great idea.
 - You can't do this unless you have exact records of when first served.
- » Farmers must use five straws for every heifer required next year – use beef AI from then on. If using a stock bull be aware of the following:
 - One young bull to every 20 empty cows.
 - One mature bull to every 20-30 empty cows.
 - When using two bulls, rotate them every 24 hours so that they can rest and feed themselves.
 - If possible, avoid bulls having to walk cow distances and particularly not have around collecting yards.
 - Don't use him if you haven't done all the checks on him:
 - Confirm that he is fertile.
 - Confirm that he has all vaccines that your cows get.
 - Confirm that he is in good health and not lame.

PRIORITISE REPLACEMENTS THIS MONTH

- You must know target weights so that you can make sure animals achieve the correct calving down weights. The following are June targets:

	% mature cow	Holstein Fr	Jersey X
Yearlings (R2s):	63	367	342
Calves (R1s):	23	135	127

- The cow's mature weight is got by weighing third calvers and older cows in June – worth doing NOW. You can also estimate the herds' mature weight by using the maintenance data on your herds EBI


- Cow maintenance sub-index €20 = 541kg.
- For every €1 deviation from this, add or subtract 5kg weight
- You must weigh replacements regularly to make sure you know what's happening and, therefore, deal with underweight animals. This advice is imperative for contract heifer rearers/farmers with heifers on contract so that no disputes occur later in the year.
- The key is the six-month weight. It must be:
 - 550kg herd = 165kg.
 - 500kg herd = 150kg.
 - From six months to nine months, we must keep weight gain to 0.7kg to 0.8kg, so as not to deposit fat around the mammary glands.
- The summer is when you get 'cheap weight gain in heifers' – don't miss out!
- R1 stage:
- Calves must always be on the best grass, with residuals eaten off by 1.5-year-old heifers or cows (Table 3).
 - This leader-follower system results in best weight gains and natural parasites control and immunity.


Table 3: Performance (kg) of calves at grass under different grazing systems.

Source: Teagasc.

	12 weeks	20 weeks	30 weeks	Gain/day
Calves and adults	80	115	167	0.68
Calves only	82	111	142	0.5

- Small calves would benefit from milk and/or meals in June.
- Big calves on good grass require no meals as the economics is poor – the conversion rate is 8:1.
- Stay on top of parasites such as hooose and stomach worms.




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- Dose for hoose (Table 4 shows a significant weight difference) when oldest calf starts to cough and dose for stomach worms, if not on the Ivermectin programmes, with a white/yellow dose in late June and move onto after-grass.

Table 4: Effect of mild hoose on calf weight gain (kg). Source: Teagasc.

	Initial weight	Weight gain	No. of days	Gain/day
Treated animals	71.4	26.8	37	0.72
Untreated animals	71.9	18.2	37	0.49

- And dose for stomach worms (Table 5), if not on the Ivermectin programmes, with a white/yellow dose in late June and move onto after-grass. Table 5 shows a weight difference of 24.3 kgs when comparing calves dosed for stomach worms in early-July and those not dosed. Obvious, what to do and when to do.

Table 5: Effect of stomach worms on calf growth (kg). (Source: Teagasc).

	Pre July	Post July	Difference
Infection controlled	42.8	42.6	
Infection not controlled	42.8	18.3	24.3

- R2 stage:
 - Heifers mated after June 12 will calve down after March 22 – it is too late to start calving heifers into a herd. If she hasn't 'held' by now there is something wrong with her – beef her!
 - Underweight heifers may need to be separated out and run with calves on best grass or fed 1kg to 2kg meal separately.

BRIEF MESSAGES

- If your target is to feed less than 800kg/cow this year, then you should not be feeding more than 1.5kg/cow/day of 10% to 12% ration.
- Change milk liners after 2,000 milkings:

- If you have 10 rows being miked twice/day, then each liner has to do 20 milkings per day. Therefore, in that situation the liners need to be changed after 100 days (2,000 divided by 20) milking (3.3 months). If not changed, mastitis and SCC levels will increase.

- High SCC/mastitis cows:
 - If the cow is a repeat offender, get rid of her.
 - Test the milking machine again and change liners.
 - You will need to pre and post dip all cows to reduce the spread.
 - Dip the clusters in parasetic acid after milking an infected cow.
 - Wear gloves.
 - Consult your co-op adviser.
- High TBC:
 - Is your bulk tank cooling the milk fast enough? Get it checked out.
 - Is your cleaning procedure correct.
 - Use your co-op adviser to sort out.
- Time off:
 - Plan to be only milking five to six days per week – get relief in!
 - Plan to work fewer than 60 hours per week.
 - Plan now, by booking, a two-week holiday away from the farm, preferably, where there is sun.
 - Do a 16-8-hour milking interval, so as to have a half-decent lifestyle.
 - If you are not able to meet these targets, then there is something wrong with the workload you have laid out for yourself or your system is very labour demanding.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

The cow and the grass respond to your management demands.

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MF 9S 'DESIGNED FOR FARMERS AND BY FARMERS'

MASSEY FERGUSON'S RECENTLY LAUNCHED MF 9S SERIES INCLUDES SIX MODELS WITH POWERS FROM 285HP TO 425HP AND FEATURING THE INNOVATIVE PROTEC-U DESIGN. ACCORDING TO THE COMPANY, THE MF9S BRINGS MORE POWER, COMFORT, CONTROL AND AUTOMATION TO THE SECTOR. DESIGNED TO DELIVER OPTIMUM VERSATILITY, THE NEW LARGE FRAME MF 9S ARE ALL EQUIPPED WITH THE RENOWNED DYNA-VT TRANSMISSION AS STANDARD AND COME WITH HOST OF NEW FEATURES TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE, MASSEY FERGUSON SAYS

Thierry Lhotte, vice president and managing director, Massey Ferguson, Europe and Middle East, comments: "The MF 9S is the new flagship for Massey Ferguson's straightforward, dependable and connected 'New Tractor Era'. Our journey began in July 2020, with the launch of the MF 8S. This revolutionary tractor, is the result of seven years of intensive customer research across the world, inspiring the development of the MF 5S, MF 6S and MF 7S Series – designed for farmers and by farmers." The flagship tractor range, which is the first to feature the new Massey Ferguson logo, builds on the success of its predecessor, adds Jérôme Aubrion, director of marketing Massey Ferguson, Europe & Middle East: "As well as continuing to deliver outstanding performance and reliability, the MF 9S tractors combine an enhanced user experience with innovative technology to create a true all-rounder. All are equipped to Massey Ferguson's Exclusive specification, which provides ultimate comfort, productivity and connectivity with MF Guide and MF Connect as standard. With the launch of the MF 9S, come additional new options, including MF AutoTurn, AutoHeadland, TIM – Tractor Implement Management and a Central Tyre Inflation System (CTIS)."

POWERFUL PERFORMANCE

The MF 9S Series offers powers from 285hp to 425hp. Along with Massey Ferguson's unique Protec-U design, all models are equipped with an enhanced engine design and updated Dyna-VT transmission to improve performance and productivity. Equipped ready for smart farming, the tractors come with MF Guide and MF Connect telemetry as standard, while comfort and control are further enhanced with the new MF AutoTurn, AutoHeadland and Isobus Tractor Implement Management options.

STRAIGHTFORWARD STAGE V ENGINE POWER

Power for all MF 9S models is delivered by the well proven six-cylinder, 8.4L AGCO Power engine. Engine Power Management (EPM) boosts torque up to 1,750Nm and generates up to 30hp of extra power at speeds above 15km/h for PTO and hydraulic applications on all models (except the MF 9S.425). The engine complies with the Stage V emissions regulations using a simplified version of the renowned All-In-One system, which no longer uses an EGR valve. Instead, it employs a new, straightforward turbocharging system, with a single, advanced turbo. Together, the company notes that these updates greatly

increase reliability and reduce maintenance costs. Engines complying with Tier 3 emission regulations are also available, depending on specific market requirements. To provide plenty of capacity for long working days, without the need for refills, a 10 per cent larger, 660L fuel tank as well as a 68L AdBlue tank also feature. The engine is designed to run on hydrogenated vegetable oil fuel, to provide more sustainable operations.

CAB COMFORT

Massey Ferguson's Protec-U engine and cab installation delivers unrivalled visibility and comfort. The company states that key to its success is an 18cm gap that isolates the encapsulated engine from the cab. This reduces noise, heat and vibration inside the cab that, at 69dBa, is one of the quietest on the market. With a volume of 3.4m³ it's also one of the most spacious workplaces in the sector. The Premium specification seat is fitted with a large comfortable armrest, which holds the Datatronic 5 touchscreen terminal and Multipad joystick. These provide optimum control and setting of all the main functions, including the electric spool valves. Operators working long days will find that, as well as a ventilated box under the passenger seat, there is also a wide range of storage compartments,



NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

HALFWAY THERE

Well readers, here we are halfway through 2024, and still battling the weather. Today, we get saturated, tomorrow, we get sunburned, and on it rolls. But the grass is growing, and the winter crops are thickening up, and we look forward to, I hope, finer weeks ahead.

The planting season for potatoes and spring cereals all ran late this year here in Ireland and across Europe, too. High interest rates, low prices, and bad weather contributed to a drop in demand for new farm machinery to its lowest levels in at least seven years.

European tractor registrations reduced by 4.9 per cent year on year compared to 2022 and 2023 and the two largest markets in Europe – Germany and France – saw a small increase in tractor sales, while the UK also had a slight increase in new tractor sales.

There has been plenty of action in the machinery industry in the last month. Case New Holland (CNH) completed the sale of its agri-plough business to a German investment company called FairCap. The Överum plough brand would have sold well in Ireland over the years and, no doubt, we will see its return.

Pronar, the Polish machinery manufacturer has appointed a new dealer, Cavan Autotrac, to look after customers in Cavan and surrounding areas for the extensive Pronar range of machinery, which consists of mowers, tedders, rakes, and much more besides.

Lynx Engineering Ireland is now importing and distributing the Netherlands-based Agribumper range, suitable to fit tractors from 100hp to 240hp. Front bumpers have started to become very popular over the last few years. Malone Farm Machinery has just appointed JA Alexander & Son machinery sales as full-line machinery dealer for its extensive range of grass equipment etc. The company will cover the Tyrone and Fermanagh area.

Redrock Machinery Ltd has announced the purchase of the Ktwo and Warwick trailer brands. The Armagh-based company purchased the brands after they went into administration last March. The Ktwo muck spreader would be well known to Irish farmers and contractors. The Farm Tractor & Machinery Trade Association (FTMTA) online booking system is open now for trade stands for this year's event which will be held once again in Punchestown on November 12, 13 and 14.

Exhibiting companies can simply log in to the association's website or just call the office directly. All the big names in the tractor industry are in and it should make for a very interesting show at the end of the year.

And, finally, this is a very important milestone for *Irish Farmers Monthly* as this month we celebrate 50 years in business. The ever-changing Irish farming sector has been extensively covered in these pages for half a century, and will continue to be covered well in to the future.

I would like personally thank the Markey family for their vision in bringing to market a well-presented, well-respected publication. Years ago, I use to purchase it, when I was in school, from O'Reilly's old shop in Ballybrittas – long since gone. It was always in the middle of the rack between *Ireland's Own* and the *RTÉ Guide*. Lasting memories! Here's to the 75th, and the 100th, and so on! Long live the simple, basic things in life like a good magazine or newspaper with a cup of tea. So, put on the kettle, put the feet up, and enjoy all that this issue has to offer!

cup and bottle holders located in convenient positions. A powerful heating and demisting system, with climate control air-conditioning maintains a comfortable temperature, with 14 outlets that operators can adjust to direct the airflow. On top of the Exclusive specification, is a further Professional Package option, which provides an air hose connection and electrical supply mounted near the steps, along with a portable toolbox, hose, blow gun and torch.

AUTOMATION

With the MF 9S, Massey Ferguson is also introducing new levels of automation. MF AutoTurn, an option for MF Guide, automatically steers the tractor into the next wayline. With AutoHeadland two headland sequences can also be automatically started and stopped, according to the tractor GPS position. With the Trimble GPS receiver delivering sub-metre precision as standard, this not only improves repeatable accuracy but also relieves the operator of repetitive tasks. Massey Ferguson says that this full automated package increases productivity and accuracy, reduces soil compaction at the headland as well as cutting fuel consumption.

PROTECT SOIL AND CUT FUEL CONSUMPTION

All MF 9S tractors come with the option of Massey Ferguson's new Central Tyre Inflation System (CTIS). Controlled through Datatronic 5 or Fieldstar 5 terminals, it quickly adjusts pressure to reduce compaction and achieve optimum traction. Employing a twin, 650L/min compressor, it takes just four minutes to increase pressure in typical set of VF 710/75R42 + VF 620/75 R30 tyres from 0.8 bar to 1.6 bar. Massey Ferguson notes that CTIS is proven to reduce fuel consumption by 10 per cent to 15 per cent, as well as cut compaction by facilitating a footprint that's up to 150 per cent larger; adding that at the same time the system can increase traction and reduce unnecessary tyre wear.



John Deere's new S7 Series combines will be showcased at Cereals 2024.



The 5M Series will also be making its Cereals debut in June.



FIRST LOOK AT NEW JOHN DEERE PRODUCTS AT CEREALS

Farmers will get their first look at John Deere's new S7 Series combines at Cereals as the company showcases a whole range of product launches and updates announced in recent months. Four new models are now available to arable farmers from the 449hp S7700 up to the range-topping 617hp S790.

The 75t per hour machines sit between the smaller T Series and John Deere's largest X9 Series models. In development, some of the best-loved features of the X9 Series have filtered across to the S7 Series, while operators also get a host of new technology that the company notes are designed to improve grain quality, operator comfort, and machine efficiency.

The versatile new 5M will also be making its Cereals debut with the 5130M broadening the upper power class of the portfolio with a maximum output of up to 135hp. According to John Deere, new PowrQuad PLUS and Powr8 transmission options for the 5M Series provide farmers with solutions for a wide range of tasks, while the technology allows operators to experience continuous pulling power with smooth gear shifts within the selected group. It will be a busy two days of demonstrations

in the Spray and Sprayers Arena as John Deere publicly puts three models through their paces. The 24m R740i trailed sprayer and 36m R962i will be joined in the ring by the 340M self-propelled sprayer, being exhibited at Cereals for the first time since its launch at Agritechnica 2024. Showcasing John Deere's constant development of crop spraying technology, all three have the unique PowrSpray dual-circuit solution system, with benefits including fast filling for a swift turnaround and more hectares sprayed per day. The sprayers also have Active Pause for fast yet relaxed chemical filling, Fast Direct Rate Control with more than 98 per cent application accuracy, as well as automatic filling, automated agitation and multi-mode rinsing systems. The company notes that the sprayers have low running costs with no scheduled maintenance requirement and only half the moving parts of a conventional solution system. Additional features include John Deere's in-house developed Individual Nozzle Control system – reducing overlaps or misses to the minimum as well as helping reduce input costs – and John Deere ISOBUS control systems capable of variable rate applications, spot-spraying, documentation,

and work planning with synchronisation to the John Deere Operations Center. John Deere's tactical marketing manager, Chris Wiltshire, said: "It has been a busy six months of product launches and updates so we're really keen to show farmers these machines and their technology up close. We've also got a couple of surprises in store which visitors will have to wait until the event to find out about."

Visitors will be able to see the 8R410 tractor with stepless eAutoPowr – the first 400hp machine to gain the revolutionary gearbox – and the ability to offboard power to trailed implements. Precision farming specialists will also be on hand to showcase the raft of technological functionality available to John Deere customers, such as HarvestLab 3000, DataSync, AutoTrac, and AutoPath. John Deere announced the launch of three new 9RX models earlier this year, including what is now the world's most powerful production tractor offering a maximum power output of 913hp. While the new models will not be at the show, tractor specialists will be on hand to answer questions about the range and their suitability for large arable operations in the UK and Ireland.

McHale Fusion 4 Plus winner, Ger Kenny, pictured with members of his family, Kilmaine GAA/LGFA committee and Paul McHale.



KILMAINE GAA'S 'WIN A FUSION 4' WINNER ANNOUNCED

Kilmaine GAA/LGFA's long-awaited raffle for the 'Win A Fusion 4 Plus' in association with McHale was held on April 19 where the lucky winners of the main prize and the runner-up prizes were announced.

A successful evening was held in the local Kilmaine Community Hall, which saw a lot of effort put in for a great night of entertainment

with a large crowd in attendance to see who the lucky winner would be. MC on night, Jonathan Mullin, chatted with an array of guests from the committee, club and sponsors before inviting CEO for the Connacht Council of the GAA, John Prenty, to pull the winning ticket.

There was a large number of entries for this

successful raffle, but the main prize went to Ger Kenny from Headford, Co. Galway. Ger was thrilled with the win and has decided to take the McHale Fusion 4 Plus. Commenting, he said: "I am absolutely delighted! I was shocked to get the call to tell me I had won!"

The runner-up prizes were also announced on the night and went to the following:

2nd - 02403: Pat Donnellan, Shrule - €1,000

3rd - 08286: Sigita Gudelyte, Oranmore - €1,000

4th - 11470: Emma O'Doherty, Donegal - €500

5th - 11941: Kenneth Egan, Tuam - €500

6th - 18955: Patricia McGrath, Kilmaine - €500

7th - 17350: Martin Kilgarriff, Claregalway - €500

8th - 07061: Patrick Boyle, Tralee - €500

9th - 04701: Andrew Stephenson, Leitrim - €500

Kilmaine GAA/LGFA would like to thank all involved in the organisation of a great event and a huge thank you to everyone locally, nationally, and internationally who supported the fundraiser. The funds raised will be of huge benefit to the development of the new required facilities in Kilmaine.

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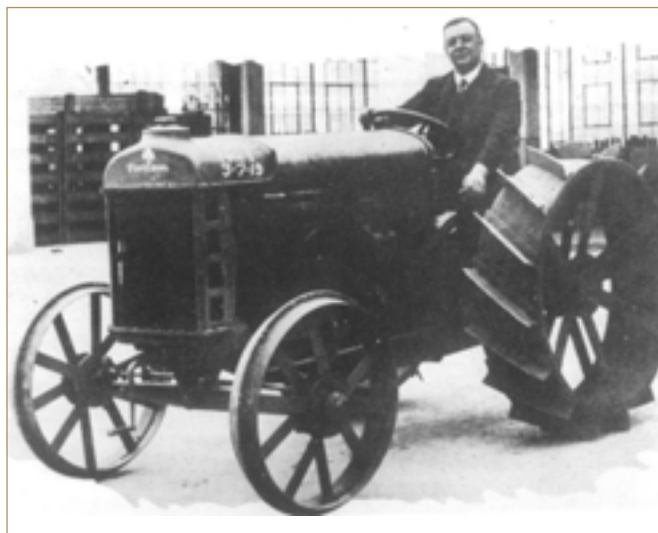


A DRIVING FORCE

Over the last 50 years, Ireland has increased its agricultural output beyond all expectations. It has become a driving force behind Ireland's economic success enabling the expansion of co-operatives that have grown into international players, have, it is said, a combined turnover of €14bn, and employ 12,000 people. It is fair to say that this incredible growth is down to generations of family-run farms with cheap labour doing hard work, and allowed others down the chain to build international companies. These entrepreneurs had incredible vision but sadly farming families never really reaped the rewards they deserve.

ROLE OF CONTRACTORS

I have paid tribute to farmers and their families who enabled this growth, but none of this would have been possible without agricultural contractors and their families. Over decades, this group took huge risks investing in machinery to support farmers in meeting the targets set for increased agricultural output. They did this without any financial help and with no support from the government or the EU. Agricultural contractors continue to provide vital services to farmers and without



From the book, *Are you still below? The Ford Marina Plant, Cork 1917-1984* by Miriam Nyhan, this image shows the first Fordson tractor, manufactured at Henry Ford & Son Ltd, which came off the line on July 3, 1919. Published by Collins Press. Source: Cork City Library.

them most farms in Ireland would not perform as well as they do today. Although the 1970s is rightly considered to be a period of significant expansion in farm machinery it should be noted that Ireland produced tractors in Cork in 1919, when the Fordson rolled off the assembly line. The 1980s saw EU policies begin to influence modernisation and intensification in Irish farming and this was encouraged through subsidies. With the expansion of dairy and grain production, contractors needed to invest in more sophisticated machinery as they were now required, not only for harvesting but also for ploughing, seeding, spraying, and fertilising. All these services were highly mechanised and technologically driven. During the 1990s and early 2000s further advances were made in GPS thus enabling precision farming; this new technology was provided almost exclusively by contractors. During this period Ireland, like the rest of Europe, saw a growing trend in farm consolidation bringing with it more farm specialisation. This resulted in a greater reliance on contractors, as the cost of new technologies came at a price farmers could not afford. Without the services of agricultural contractors and their considerable investment in the latest technologies, the increase in farm production would not have been viable and the cornerstone of the Irish economy would not have been possible.

RISK BUT NOT MUCH REWARD

The growth of the agricultural sector over the last 50 years was impacted by volatile markets, fluctuating prices for agricultural produce and a changing Common Agricultural Policy, which affected the profitability of many Irish farms and consequently contracting businesses. To continue to provide a quality service contractors must maintain cutting-edge machinery, requiring substantial capital investment and stringent financial planning. They are in the most high-risk business with no financial help by way of subsidies unlike their farmer clients.

Over the years this has forced some contractors to diversify outside traditional farming services into environmental and land management work. Going forward contractors will still be a lifeline to farmers and a significant contributor to the Irish economy in their own right. Their perseverance and adaptability in a rapidly changing environment deserves, in my opinion, much greater respect and recognition for their commitment to Irish agriculture. It's now time to acknowledge the agricultural contracting sector as an irreplaceable and essential component of the rural economy and finally bring them under the umbrella of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.



THE NEW CENIO 4000-2 CULTIVATOR

Amazone has launched the Cenio 4000-2, a folding mulch cultivator in a 4m working width. The introduction of this new hydraulic-folding model complements the existing Cenio product range of 3m, 3.5m and 4m rigid machines. The Cenio can be used with tractors from 105hp to 275hp. The three-point linkage mounted Cenio is a three-row mulch cultivator with interchangeable shares for depths from 5cm to 30cm. This enables the cultivator to be used for both shallow stubble cultivation as well as medium-deep and deep-loosening soil tillage. With a tine spacing of 30cm, Amazone notes that the Cenio can work with large amounts of crop residue, evenly mixing the matter back into the soil without blockages.

The Cenio Special is equipped with shear bolt overload protection and the Cenio Super comes with spring overload protection and a trip force of 500kg. This spring overload device provides optimum protection for the Cenio in stony conditions, and the tines easily hold the pre-set working depth, even under hard conditions. An extensive selection of share variants from the C-Mix-3 system are available, enabling the Cenio to work across a variety of applications. The 320mm wide duckfoot share or the 360mm wide C-Mix wing share can be used for full-surface cutting in stubble. The 100mm or 80mm wide C-Mix share can be used for primary soil tillage and the 40mm wide C-Mix share is effective for deep soil loosening

down to 30cm.

The working depth of the Cenio 4000-2 is hydraulically adjusted from the tractor cab. The depth can be tailored to suit the field and soil conditions on the move and an easy-to-read scale is used for orientation. Fine-serrated, 410 mm diameter concave discs are available for levelling the soil behind the tines. With maintenance free bearings, the discs have a high self-driving effect combined with good crumbling of the soil. The automatic disc levelling system means the height of the levelling unit is automatically adjusted via the parallelogram linkage when the working depth of the tines is changed. This ensures the levelling quality always remains the same, even when the working depth is changed, and the operator workload is further reduced.

There is a choice of seven rollers for reconsolidating the soil. In the event of widely varying fields on a farm, the roller can be exchanged with minimum effort thanks to the quick-change system. The rollers can also be supplemented by an optional single-row harrow system.



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LATEST FROM KVERNELAND

Two new launches from Kverneland this year have hit the market - a new high-capacity tedder with impressive 15.6m working width and a new 8.75m QuattroLink triple-mower conditioner



Kverneland's 85156 C has a working width of 15.6m.

HIGH-CAPACITY TEDDER

According to Kverneland, the new 85156 C offers greater productivity in all crop types. With close to 16m working width and 14 rotors, it is designed with high output and excellent crop quality in mind. All elements

of the 85156 C are dimensioned with intensive usage in mind, focusing on providing more productivity and reduced downtime.

Featuring 14 small diameter rotors, the company notes that this tedder is designed for excellent crop turning in almost any conditions. The small diameter rotor design provides a generous overlap between the rotors, giving an efficient pick-up and turning of the crop as well as equal distribution over the complete working width.

The company states: "Accurate ground following is paramount to achieve an excellent feed result. Especially in challenging and demanding field conditions. You want to efficiently turn the crop, not the soil. The Kverneland solution to following the ground across the full working width of 15.6m is the new TerraFlow solution. This new ground following system provides a highly flexible frame allowing each of the 14

rotors to accurately follow ground contours. With its new solution for connecting tedder unit and carrier frame, the rotors are able to flex and adapt to ground contour independent of the carrier frame. This means tine distance to ground remains constant providing clean and accurate work and a uniform crop flow." The Kverneland 85156 C is fitted with generous 380/55-17 tyres to give enough stability of the tedder and ensure good ground protection. 500/50-17 tyres are available as option. To cut downtime to a minimum the Kverneland 85156 C is specifically designed for easy operation and maintenance. The operator of this tedder will enjoy its easy maintenance specifications with long service intervals. Greasing points are limited to a minimum and driveline (except the PTO), rotors and most of the joints are maintenance-free. All it requires to operate the Kverneland 85156 C is a single-acting valve ram for raising and lowering the tedder and a double action valve ram for the folding action, so this tedder is suited for most tractors. The 85156 C folds into a transport width below 3m and it driven like a trailer on road smoothly following behind the tractor.



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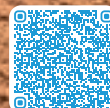
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Kverneland's QuattroLink triple-mower conditioner.

QUATTROLINK TRIPLE-MOWER CONDITIONER

Kverneland has expanded its offering in the triple-mower segment with two new triple-mower conditioner combinations: two 8.75m combinations with the innovative QuattroLink suspension concept specifically designed for long productive working days. The heavy-duty build Kverneland 5387 MT is based on the 3300 series platform and includes well-established features like QuattroLink suspension concept, SemiSwing steel tine conditioning and dual adjustment of conditioner plate. The company notes that the 5387 MT is developed for maximum productivity and offers excellent ground tracking, easy operation, and outstanding versatility. Comprising two 3.2m mowing units, each with eight round Kverneland discs, this combination can be operated by tractors starting from 180hp. The 5387 MT is easy to

handle and operate and is available with simple mechanical controls as standard, or the extra comfort of the Dual Lift Control joystick for electro-hydraulic folding and unfolding as an option.

"The Kverneland 5387 MT takes all the strong features of the well-established 10m triple mower 53100 MT into a more compact package. This is a productive, easy to handle and versatile mower," explains Jelle Hospes, product manager, disc mowers.

Kverneland 5387 MT is available in a BX version with belt merger for efficient crop collection. The

belt merger offers significant possibilities to improve productivity and quality of output. The swath belts are designed for work with massive volumes of crop, including heavy first cut silage. Featuring high-speed belts that will operate up to 1500rpm, they can carry high crop volumes and place the grass into even, narrow swaths. Open centre tractor hydraulics and the pre-selection control box, which comes as standard with the machine, power the Kverneland 5387 MT BX.

According to Kverneland, the QuattroLink suspension provides accurate ground-following ability and generous working range, while the four-arm suspension concept provides the mowing unit with exceptional flexibility in adapting to demanding ground contours. The mowing pattern is flexible with a vertical working range of 400mm upwards and 300mm downwards and a transverse adaptation range of 30°.



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KRONE SWADRO TC 1570: 'STABLE AND SMOOTH RUNNING'

The new Krone Swadro TC 1570 is centred around the well-proven V-frame concept adapted from the world's largest centre six-rotor rake, the Swadro TC 2000. The company states that this concept gives the machine a flexible working width of up to 15.7m and makes it extremely stable and smooth running. Using the new intuitive user interface, the entire machine can be operated from the tractor cab via an Isobus-compatible terminal or in combination with an Isobus joystick.

The working width of the four-rotor rake centre delivery can be variably adjusted from 11m up to 15.7m via the front rotors guided by the V-outriggers. The two

V-outriggers can be retracted and extended independently of each other ensuring field corners and obstacles can also be raked around effortlessly. The outriggers are each supported by a wheel in the front area enabling quiet running, especially at high speeds and during fast turning on the headland. Hydraulically adjustable outrigger arms of the rear rotors mean that swaths can be produced in a width of 1.40m to 2.90m. In addition to the V-frame concept, Krone notes that the integrated vibration damping also ensures that the machine runs smoothly in the headland position. A Soft-Down automatic lowering mechanism ensures that the outrigger arms are decelerated just before

the rotors touch down, ensuring that they land gently on the ground. This company says that this protects both the machine and the grass, while also minimising the turning time at the headland.

Fifteen tine arms on each rotor, each with four tines on the front and five tines on the rear rotors enable work quality to be maintained at higher driving speeds. With electrical rotor height adjustment, the height of each rotor can be adjusted individually, or all rotors can be adjusted simultaneously via the operating terminal to suit the working conditions. The Swadro TC 1570 is equipped with a category II/III pendulum-suspended two-point hitch. This reliably compensates for uneven ground and gives the rake enormous manoeuvrability thanks to its large steering angle.

Krone states that with its unique V-frame concept, advanced technology and the highest level of operator comfort – combined with all the familiar Krone features such as Krone Jet Effect for lift up and set down of the rotors without dragging dirt into the crop, a lubricated for life and maintenance free rotor gearbox, Duramax cam-track and one piece tine arm – the Swadro TC 1570 achieves a previously unattained level of performance in the four-rotor rake class.

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UNDERSTANDING REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Last September I spent two days in Amsterdam, at the second annual Regenerative Agriculture and Food Systems Summit. In the space of just a couple of years, this has become the topic that big food companies want to talk about. It offers huge potential in helping to fix what is clearly a broken food system. This is the chance, as one of the opening speakers put it 'to rewrite the narrative of agriculture.' But could it offer more than that?

At its heart, regenerative agriculture is about the soil and there are five underlying principles: don't disturb the soil; keep the soils surface covered; keep living roots in the soil; grow a diverse range of crops; and bring grazing animals back to the land. That might sound a little like 'conservation agriculture' or 'biological farming' systems but regenerative should go further and encompass farmer wellbeing and profitability too. As more than one speaker noted at the summit, 'farmers can't go green if they're in the red.' Whether food companies, governments or consumers are prepared to help fix the system remains moot. 'Who' will pay for regenerative farming is one of many live debates which come under a broad theme of 'what' regenerative farming can deliver – environmentally, economically and socially.

There are layers of questions beneath this, including: Can it achieve greenhouse gas reductions on the scale that some companies forecast? Will consumers pay more for regeneratively-farmed products – and should they even have to? Where do livestock, with their considerable environmental impact, fit into these systems? Can cows or chickens or pigs that are housed their entire lives be regenerative, for example? Can genetically modified or edited crops, or controversial chemicals like glyphosate be part of regenerative systems?

However, one area that remains under the radar is health. Everyone is talking about 'healthy soil' but as far as I can see there is little consideration of human health (at least in across 'big food'). It was mentioned only briefly in two days, and more than a dozen panels and presentations in Amsterdam. "We haven't talked about the food we are producing," explains Geraldine Gilbert, food transition lead UK and Europe for Forum for the Future, an international sustainability non-profit organisation.

Gilbert was one of the few to ask: Where does diet fit into the current discourse? In one session she left Nestlé group head of sustainable agriculture thinking about this very question. It is about "people's demands,"

said Pascal Chapot. (Food companies always say they are there to grow and sell what people want to eat).

The response reminded me of another event I was involved in last year. I was on a panel to discuss the media's role in disseminating information around controversial climate topics like eating less meat. However, it was Professor Tim Benton, research director at the Chatham House think-tank, who stole the show (organised by Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming). Something he said stuck with me: "We don't need to grow more food, we need to grow different food in different ways."

Looking at the Amsterdam summit through this lens leads me to wonder, are we witnessing a full transition of the food system – one that is low impact and fair and leads to accessible, affordable and sustainable food. Or not? I am still chewing this over but there are a few things to consider.

The first is this idea that regenerative farming is simply being woven into, or layered on top of, the current food system – what Adele Jones, executive director at the Sustainable Food Trust (SFT), refers to as 'tweaks around the edges'. In a conversation we had as part of a report for Footprint, a sustainability platform, she warned that the current

dialogue, dominated of course by the major corporates, is leaning towards how to sell the concept.

"People come at it the wrong way around. They think of a label and then work backwards," Jones explains. Whether the marketing teams at major food companies ruin regenerative by greenwashing before it's even germinated is certainly creating unease. It is a slightly woolly concept, and opinions are split on whether a stricter set of rules, or a certification, would actually make or break it.

CLEAR AS MUD

A label might provide an antidote to greenwashing but it's not a sure bet (just ask anyone who has labelled goods with the now damaged concept of carbon neutrality). A more holistic ecolabel (which I discussed in a previous article for *The Food Chain*) could incorporate some of the benefits of regenerative approaches, like nature restoration, reduced use of chemical inputs, lower greenhouse gas emissions and higher animal welfare. "We need some clarity in this chaos," says Maria Coronado Robles, global

head of sustainability insights at Euromonitor. Consensus on one label will be hard to find though. Much as it will for a regenerative agriculture one. The Regen10 group, an initiative involving major food companies and farming organisations globally, that was launched at the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow UK in 2021, is developing a framework for regenerative agriculture that it wants 500 million farmers to be involved with by 2030. For now, companies are by and large going their own way, which is risky. "Companies and consumers are both left wondering 'what's what?'" says Coronado Robles.

Given its profile, there is relatively little research on how consumers feel about regenerative farming and food. Research published in September by McCain Foods and Demos, a think tank, did show that 70 per cent of people are not yet familiar with the term 'regenerative farming' but there is significant support (around 70 per cent) for the practice in principle.

What appears to be clearer, is that people want more (trustworthy) information so they

can choose sustainable foods that align with their values. However, with myriad green claims thrown at them every time they shop or eat out, they are left baffled – and even by some of the simpler claims to verify. Like carbon. Bord Bia's Thinking House report, titled *Consumer & Carbon Cutting through the Carbon Jargon*, showed support for a global and European-recognised standard for carbon impacts was particularly high in Ireland. There is currently a lot of confusion about the claims and who to trust. It seems that companies may be ploughing a similar furrow with regenerative agriculture: there is already unease that, as with net-zero, there are currently more promises being made than progress.

"Substance is key to build trust with both investors and consumers," says Max Boucher, senior R&E manager (biodiversity and oceans) at Fairr, an investor consortium that represents over \$70tn in combined assets. Boucher and his colleagues have just unpicked the commitments on regenerative agriculture that have been made by 79 of the world's largest agri-food companies. Of

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the 50 that publicly refer to the potential of regenerative agriculture as a solution to the climate and biodiversity crises, 32 have yet to put in place any formal quantitative company-wide targets to achieve those ambitions. Once again there is a lot of talk about soil health in the narratives but nothing about human health, nor the nutritional value of crops grown regeneratively. Should healthy soils not equal healthy crops and animals and in turn healthy people? I posed this question to one of the panellists in Amsterdam recently. He suggested that some early research is producing signs that healthy soil produces more nutrient dense food that enhances human health, but the challenge is "nailing concrete cause and effect in such a complex 'system of systems'. It is certainly something people are looking at," he added.

Two of those looking hardest are David Montgomery and Anne Biklé, authors of the book: *What your food ate*. "One of the big conclusions of the book is that what's good for the land is good for us too," explained Montgomery in a recent Investing in Regenerative Agriculture and Food podcast. They reviewed some 1,000 papers during their research and have also produced a peer-reviewed paper of their own, in the journal *PeerJ*. They studied paired vegetable, wheat and beef/pork farms which followed either conventional or regenerative practices for five to 10 years. Their paper notes that, despite the small sample sizes, 'all three crop comparisons showed differences in micronutrient and phytochemical concentrations that suggest soil health is an under-appreciated influence on nutrient density, particularly for phytochemicals not conventionally considered nutrients but nonetheless relevant to chronic disease prevention. Likewise, regenerative grazing practices produced meat with a better fatty acid profile than conventional and regional health-promoting brands.'

Stephan van Vliet, a researcher at Duke University School of Medicine in the US, is another looking in detail at the way food is produced and its nutritional quality. "What we're seeing initially in our data is that definitely, the ranchers that use these agroecological [or regenerative] practices, such as rotational grazing on biodiverse pastures, moving the animals around regularly, not overgrazing on the pasture, end up with the most favourable omega-6 to

[omega]-3 ratios," he said recently. There are also positive signs regarding saturated fats as well as phytonutrients – the compounds we get from eating plants but can also come in "meaningful amounts" from eating grass-fed animals, though we don't yet know whether consuming these in meat has any human health effects, van Vliet explained.



NUTRIENTS AND NUANCE

Though our health isn't front of mind when regenerative is discussed, start to dig and there is quite a bit going on. The Bionutrient Food Association (BFA) in the US has recently written about the assessments it has conducted on over 5,000 samples of almost 30 different crops across two continents. They showed that individual metrics like local vs. grocery store, organic vs. not organic, this variety vs. that variety, are not a good identifier of the overall nutrient levels of a crop. It is the overall system function of the soil, instead of claims like no-till or cover crop, which is 'much more likely' to be the dominant causal factor in determining the quality of crops produced. So, we can't be tweaking around those edges.

There is far more work to do of course (the BFA is doing human trials comparing grass-fed, grain-fed, and plant-based 'meat' on a subset of the beef). But the potential of regenerative approaches to provide more nutritious food offers hope following plentiful research showing how our food may well look bigger and juicer than ever yet nutrient levels are falling.

It will certainly take time for us to learn about regenerative farming: what works, who

benefits, and how it can scale. It will also take time to help consumers understand what it means for them, not to mention how they can identify it in stores (Waitrose and Marks-and-Spencer already have products available). Organic by contrast is simple, explains Gill Wilson, sustainability marketing professor at IE Business School in Madrid, Spain. Consumers see it as 'no pesticides, better for my health' and that's all they need to know.

CRUNCH TIME

The debate over the nutritional qualities of organic food is more nuanced than that but it's one that many consumers perceive to be true. They also see them as more environmentally friendly and natural, but again it's not always clear cut. Whether regenerative will allow such perceptions to grow remains to be seen. Companies like PepsiCo have already begun planting the seed though. By focusing on regenerative practices, our farmers can grow nutritious quality potatoes, which we can all enjoy, says a spokesperson from Walkers. But can a packet of crisps really be part of a regenerative food system?

This article first appeared in Safefood's *The Food Chain*, December 2023.

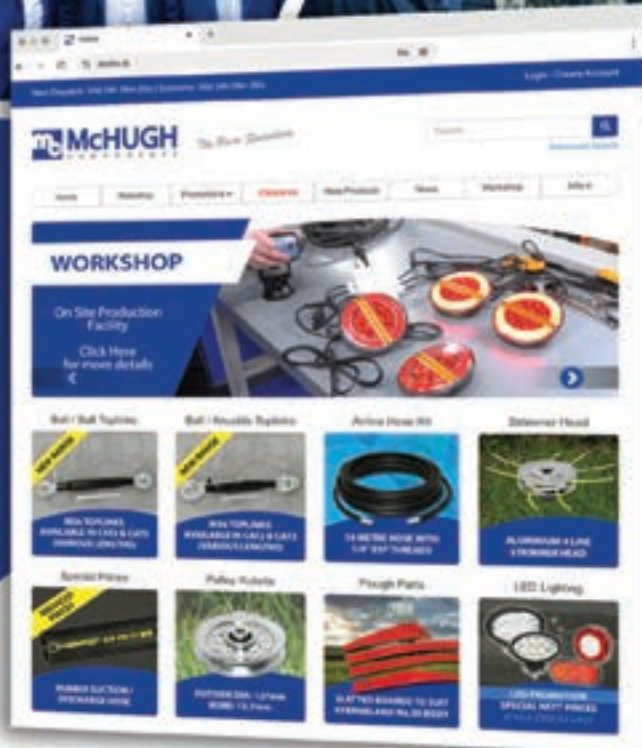


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David Burrows is a freelance writer specialising in sustainability within the food chain. A graduate in agricultural sciences, he researches and writes features and reports for publications including Just-Food.com, FoodNavigator.com, FoodserviceFootprint.com, *Poultry Business*, *Pig World*, *The Grocer*, and *Transform*.



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MATT O'KEEFE
EDITOR

IS THE DRIVE TO BATTERY POWER RUNNING OUT OF ROAD?

We may well be nearing the demise of the internal combustion engine (ICE), but not just yet; if for no other reason than the drive towards electric vehicles (EVs) has been a premature departure with the cart being put before the horse. We have driven the promotion of battery-powered transport before the infrastructure is fully in place to recharge the batteries. For some, this is not an issue. If you commute over long distances, however, it is very much an issue and will remain so for the foreseeable future. What does not seem to be fully realised is that time and peace of mind are precious commodities for most of us. Even the establishment of as many charging points as there are fuel pumps is unlikely to sufficiently shorten the time it takes to recharge to the extent that most road users will be willing to commit to battery power for some time to come. Not only is battery power too reliant on extended recharging periods, with too few charging points, the internal combustion engine still provides a trustworthy alternative mode of dependable transport. Recent reductions in sales of battery-powered cars may be just a hiccup on the journey or it may signal something far deeper and more important. Once those who can readily afford the additional

upfront expense of a battery-driven car are on board, the real challenge will be to coerce or persuade the rest of the road-commuter population to switch to EV – a far bigger challenge.

Battery technology is moving towards higher power capacity, ultimately (it is hoped) removing the range anxiety that is a barrier to more widespread adoption of EVs as the transport mode of choice. Toyota has committed to bringing potentially revolutionary battery technologies to the market within the next two years. If the advance predictions are delivered on, then the age of the battery car may finally arrive. The development by Toyota of solid-state batteries is expected to provide a twenty per cent increase in cruising range and a charging time of 10 minutes or less. Further down the R&D line, the auto company is developing higher specification lithium-ion solid-state battery technology with 50 per cent more driving range than existing performance batteries.

Meanwhile, ICE-powered tractors will remain the *modus operandi* on most farms for some time to come. Gradually, methane, hydrogen and other renewable fuels may replace diesel as the main fuel source. Battery-driven high horsepower

tractors are a long way off, unless or until novel battery technologies eventually reduce the size and weight required. For farmyard operations, electric-powered loaders and small tractors are a viable option, though initial purchase cost remains a challenge in competing with diesel-powered models. Where the operational hours are relatively short with idle intervals available to recharge, battery power becomes a viable option. On the contrary, where the machine is at field work for long hours at a remove from a farmyard charging point, there is no possibility, using current battery technology, that electrical power can replace the current dependence on the internal combustion engine. What has gone almost unnoticed are the revolutionary changes that have taken place in power tools and machines. Automated lawnmowers are an increasingly popular, if costly, option for lawn cutting. Drills, saws, angle-grinders and screwdrivers have been available with battery power for several years. The flexibility of operating a battery-powered drill compared to one with a cable attached to an electrical power source, makes one wonder how we ever managed without it. Will our reflections on EV cars be the same in twenty years' time?



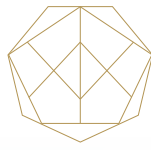
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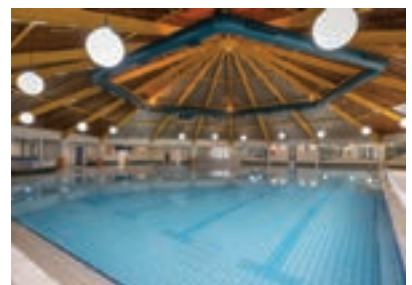
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1. Herds with high prevalence of IBR may need to vaccinate calves from 2 weeks of age intranasally. Next vaccine should be given at 3-4 months of age either intranasally or intramuscularly.
2. Intramuscular Vaccination.
3. Cowley DJB et al, Aspects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

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