

# IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY



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FEBRUARY 2025

# EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

## RADICAL OR REDUNDANT?

### The new Government make-up reflects the voting preferences of the electorate, at least regarding the main elements of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

As the parties that could find common ground in a Programme for Government, they are natural coalition partners. Independent TDs make up the slack for a secure Dáil majority. They have proved in the past to be reliable when it comes to sticking if and when the going gets tough. None of the minor parties seem to have the bottle to face into governing, without insisting on disproportionate demands being met, far exceeding their electoral mandate. We must hope for a stable government for the next five years. We must also hope for a radical approach towards resolving the challenges, known and unknown, facing the country. Rural Ireland will hope that the influence of rural Independents, will be reflected in the actual delivery of the Programme for Government. Reckless spending as a substitute for efficiency gains would represent a poor return for our taxes. Just throwing money at problems hasn't worked in the past and it won't work in the future. We are in a relatively good place, provided we manage our public finances prudently, prioritise wisely and prepare for the economic challenges ahead. We have full employment, a strongly growing economy, budget surpluses, high educational standards and opportunities, a well-fed population and the highest life expectancy in the EU.

This year will be an important year for Ireland. With Trump in the White House and the EU declining in competitiveness, the Irish Government will need to hit the ground running on housing, climate, water, infrastructure and immigration. There is no room for complacency.

Irish farmers continue to make a valuable contribution to the Irish economy. This is especially true in many parts of rural Ireland where farm output continues to

be the major contributor of economic activity. Like the best attributes of Irish butter, income from food production and processing spreads richly and widely across rural communities. Farm income is spent locally many times over, as Ciaran Fitzgerald so clearly confirms in his column in these pages.

The year ahead may resolve several imponderables for Irish farmers, for better or worse. By year's end, we should know whether the Nitrates Derogation will continue. If water quality stabilises or improves further, the outlook is positive. We must hope for a longer-term confirmation of retention to allow farmers to plan. A continuing threat to the derogation, or continuing reductions are, both demoralising and erode confidence among the farming community. Likewise, by year's end, we are likely to know the outcome of the much-heralded EU trade deals with the South American countries as well as with Canada. Given the instability of global trade currently and the delicate state of several European economies, most notably Germany and France, there is every reason to believe that both contentious trade deals will be ratified, perhaps with some further reassurances to alleviate the concerns of EU beef producers.

Meanwhile, price is still a key determinant of both confidence and economic wellbeing for Irish farmers. The surge in beef and sheep prices is both welcome and timely. Both sectors have been under significant income and confidence pressures, as evidenced by the continuing reduction in both suckler farms and sheep production. Produce prices are not the only reason for the decline in numbers, as labour, workload, age and lack of generational renewal are co-causes; but price still dominates, even as a short-term delaying mechanism pending a resolution of other structural issues facing Irish farming.

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## MILK GETS FURTHER HEALTH ENDORSEMENT

Recognition of the nutritional value of milk is well understood. Its role in enhancing bone structure and strength has been recognised by medical researchers for many years. New research funded by Cancer Research UK now confirms a wider beneficial role for milk and dairy products, generally, in disease prevention. Oxford University researchers have discovered that consuming an additional 300mg of calcium per day can be linked to reducing the risk of bowel cancer by almost 20 per cent. That amount of calcium is roughly equivalent to the calcium content of a large glass of milk. The research findings come from a very large-scale study using information gleaned from the dietary habits of half a million women over a period spanning 16 years. The background parameters of the research were an investigation of links between almost 100 food items consumed and the development of bowel cancer. The conclusions are clear. Calcium has a protective role in assisting the body's defence mechanisms against bowel cancer and since milk is a rich and readily available source of calcium, ensuring adequate intakes of milk can help to reduce the risk of developing bowel cancer. Dark green vegetables, high in calcium, can also be beneficial in the diet, though volumes need to be quite high due to relatively lower calcium content. Given the acknowledgement of the close links between diet and bowel cancer, and the potential role of an affordable and multi-beneficial nutrient in the form of milk products in guarding against the disease, increasing milk intake could deliver reductions in the fourth most prevalent cancer in humans. What is not clear or fully investigated is whether calcium supplements or calcium-fortified foods would have the same beneficial effect in reducing cancer risk.

## JUSTIN HEADS UP GAME-CHANGING TECH DEVELOPMENT

We note that Justin McCarthy is to become executive chair of Glasport Rumen Tech. Kieran Mahon's Roebuck Food Group has acquired a controlling interest in the early-stage biotechnology company based in Galway and intends injecting upwards of €8.5m in further research and product development in the company. Glasport Rumen Tech focuses on greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation in agriculture, allowing



Justin McCarthy.

farmers to increase productivity and profitability while reducing their emissions. RumenGlas, a potentially transformative product, is a ruminant feed additive in the early stages of production, which has been showing significant methane, CO<sub>2</sub> and other GHG emissions reductions in ruminant livestock trials. Justin is a former editor and CEO of the *Irish Farmers Journal*.

## ICMSA'S 75TH BIRTHDAY

The ICMSA will celebrate its 75th anniversary in May this year. The organisation was founded in 1950, following a ministerial announcement that dairy farmers were facing a reduction in milk price. This led to creamery boards across the country looking for an organisation to be set up to represent the industry, and the ICMSA was established. Some of the early leaders included the late Con Scully, Tom O'Dwyer, Sean Kelly, Anthony Leddy and John Feely who all served as presidents of the organisation.

## COLLABORATIVE RATHER THAN COMPETITIVE

Only a year into their jobs as farm leaders, Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) president, Francie Gorman and Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (ICMSA) president, Denis Drennan have hit the ground running. They complement each other in a manner we haven't seen in some time. We need more of the same in 2025, with a cooperative approach rather than a competitive one. Both Francie and Denis are articulate in media interviews, and both understand the issues and challenges that face their members.



Francie Gorman, president, IFA.



Denis Drennan, president, ICMSA.

Francie is the seventeenth IFA president and when elected said that he wanted to unify farmers so that the collective voice can have an impact on decisions, whether they are made in Brussels or in Ireland. He has also highlighted how farmers are portrayed negatively in the climate debate and how farmers need to change the narrative. Denis has extensive experience gained through previously held roles in Macra and as a LEADER representative. He has consistently said he believes farm incomes would be to the forefront of his presidency, a comment he reiterated at the ICMSA's AGM last December. He, like Francie, is conscious of misinformation, and the need to reposition farmers and promote their role in protecting the environment. The ICMSA has a big birthday this year, celebrating 75 years representing farm families, while the IFA kicked off its 70th anniversary celebrations with a big coup of securing the attendance of the new EU Agriculture Commissioner, Christophe Hansen, at the organisation's AGM last month. Francie and Denis fit the leadership profiles that farmers need to represent them in these challenging times. Cooperation and collaboration should be the order of the day, particularly in negotiations with Government and the EU bodies.

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## DAWN FARM FOODS

**Congratulations are due to Larry Murrin and his team on 40 years in business.** Larry has built Dawn Farm Foods into the largest business-to-business (B2B) supplier in Europe of pre-cooked meats, plant protein, fermented, and dried sausage ingredients. The company supplies the world's leading brands across more than 50 international markets in the UK, Asia and Africa, as well as Europe. Dawn Farm Foods was a founding member of the Bord Bia Origin Green sustainability programme and recently achieved ISO 50001 accreditation. Its range of products are processed in Ireland, where the company has two plants, with manufacturing facilities also well established in Northampton in the UK and Saarland in Germany. Dawn Farm Foods currently employs 1,500 staff across its Irish and international operations.

Niamh Bambrick, is now agricultural sustainability manager, Bord Bia.

## BAMBRICK JOINS BORD BIA

**Former president of the Agricultural Science Association (ASA), Niamh Bambrick, has joined Bord Bia as agricultural sustainability manager.**

Niamh did an amazing job during her term of office in the ASA. She has moved from Mullinahone Cooperative where she filled the role of manager of the livestock identification and intelligence division within the coop. We wish her well in her new role.



Photo: [www.bordbia.ie](http://www.bordbia.ie)

## BORD BIA 30 YEARS ON

**Bord Bia ended 2024 with a celebratory reflection on 30 years of successful endeavour by the promotional body.** Since its inception, Bord Bia's remit has been extended and enlarged so that it is now an essential guardian of our food and drinks production standards, as well as our primary international promotional body for the sector. The Irish Food Board was the brainchild of the late Joe Walsh, who was Minister for Agriculture when Bord Bia was formed. The country previously had two agencies responsible for food and meat, and a merger between CBF (Córas Beostoic agus Feola – the Irish Meat and Livestock Board) and the food division of An Bord Trachtála was a far-sighted initiative that has worked out extremely well for Irish agriculture. Bord Bia was established in December 1994, and the first CEO was Michael Duffy, former food director of the IDA. This was an interesting appointment at the time as many expected

Paddy Moore to get the job. Paddy took on the role of chief operations officer and worked with the new CEO before joining the late Minister for Agriculture, Joe Walsh, as his special adviser. In 2004, Bord Bia took on responsibility for horticulture with its amalgamation with Bord Glas, and five years later took over the marketing of seafood from Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM). The organisation has been fortunate over the years in having strong business leaders at the helm. When Michael Duffy moved across to the RDS as CEO, Aidan Cotter took on two terms as CEO and instigated the Origin Green programme. Tara McCarthy also headed up Bord Bia before joining Alltech as global vice president of ESG in 2022. Bord Bia then appointed Michael Murphy as interim CEO, before Jim O'Toole took the reins. Late last year, the organisation was awarded €3.2m in EU funding, specifically to promote dairy in Asia. It's current budget to promote and market the Irish food industry globally is €60m.

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## InTouch

### FOCUS FOR 100

CATHAL BOHANE,  
INTOUCH NUTRITION

**The cycle begins again with the arrival of new calves. The next 100 days are not only the busiest period on spring-calving farms but also the most important.**

The fertility cycle is the cornerstone of any spring-calving system, and these 100 days encompass the period between calving and returning to being in calf again. During this time, there are critical considerations such as production, silage, grass, and the weather, to name but a few. At Alltech, we have created a programme called 'Focus for 100'. Having worked with farmers for over 40 years, delivering on-farm advice, we understand that there are many parameters to get right during this period. When everything goes smoothly, the results can be fantastic. However, when one or two elements fall out of sync, things can go wrong very quickly. Below are some of the main parameters to consider.

#### BODY CONDITION SCORE

Calving cows in the right condition and minimising losses in early lactation are key. Milk yield itself does not cause issues in early lactation – intake is the issue. If we can ensure the cow eats enough, everything else will take care of itself. Aim to design the diet for cows at peak milk yield, providing the necessary silage, grass, and concentrates. Many farms tend to underfeed concentrates during early lactation, supported by the fact that cows produce fantastic milk solids. However, the true value of correct, targeted nutrition becomes evident after six weeks (mid-March).

#### IMMUNITY

A healthy cow and calf are essential. A solid dry-cow programme is the starting point, as the majority of metabolic issues and culling reasons occur around calving. Ensuring cows' immunity is robust through proper nutrition and management is crucial. One well-researched approach is the appropriate use of mineral nutrition. Feeding a high-quality dry-cow mineral and then a post-calving mineral at the correct rate is essential. Our research into organic forms of copper, zinc, manganese, and selenium has demonstrated positive effects on metabolic issues, milk yield, somatic cell count (SCC), fertility, and age at calving. It is important to consult your supplier for the right mineral programme for your farming system.

#### RUMEN HEALTH

The cow's rumen undergoes significant changes over the coming weeks, shifting from consuming 11kg of dry matter to 20kg, from no concentrates to over 8kg, and from grass silage to fresh grass and back again, with varying dry matter and quality. Ensuring the rumen functions effectively in this dynamic environment is vital. While we cannot control the system or the weather, we can protect the rumen from peaks and troughs by including good levels of fibre – both digestible (e.g. pulps) and effective (e.g. straw). Using a yeast supplement in concentrates is also important for rumen protection. Our research has shown that yeast can improve milk yield, fat, and protein percentages, as well as positively impact fertility, highlighting the importance of rumen health in early lactation.

#### EXPERT ADVICE

It is essential to speak with your nutritionist or advisor about these points. While you cannot know everything about every aspect of farming, there are experts who specialise in these areas and work on them daily. You can contact our nutrition team at 059 910 1320.

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**Claudia Saumell, client development manager at Bord Bia; Karen White, head of sales and marketing at Ahascragh Distillery; and Michael Cullen, commercial director at Shackleton's Milling at the launch of Bord Bia's Accelerated Export Growth Programme.**

## NEW EXPORT-GROWTH PROGRAMME TO FOCUS ON UK MARKET

**Bord Bia recently launched a new programme to assist Irish food and drink businesses in exploring export-growth opportunities, and the UK will be a key market for the companies taking part.**

The Accelerated Export Growth (AEG) Programme offers companies tailored supports aimed at advancing the next generation of high-growth exporters in Ireland, according to Bord Bia. The inaugural programme includes companies such as Nutshed, a producer of peanut butter and plant-based confectionary; Ahascragh Distillers Ltd, Ireland's first zero-emissions distillery producing whiskey and gin products; and Shackleton's, a producer of gluten-free flour, bread, and cake mixes. Over a 12-month period, the programme will support 11 businesses, most of which are in the prepared consumer foods (PCF) category. According to Bord Bia, the PCF sector saw continued export growth in 2024, reaching €3.4bn in value, an increase of 7 per cent compared to the previous year.

The UK market accounted for two-thirds of PCF exports and experienced an 11 per cent increase in 2024, making it the most significant market for the sector, according to recent statistics from Bord Bia. For companies participating in the AEG programme, the UK will be a primary focus, with a market visit planned in April 2025.





Damien O'Reilly  
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

## LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

**As we try to tackle climate change, all areas of society are in scope in terms of implementing ways to decarbonise, reuse, recycle, and do better.** But farmers feel that they are disproportionately blamed in the climate emergency. All they see and hear are people complaining that there are too many cows. But when we take a step back, it is farmers who are probably disproportionate in their analysis. Heightened awareness among all of us means that our ears prick up when we hear discussions which interest us.

For example, if you follow a football team, you tune in when they are mentioned but tune out for the rest of the time. Hence, you may feel that it is always your team that the pundits are giving out about having not heard the criticisms of the other teams.

In the social-media age, few professions get a free pass. I tell this to the farmers I meet who complain that they are unfairly targeted. And while there is plenty of evidence to show that social media and some mainstream media commentary on farming can be tiresome in terms of always using the farmer as the 'poster-boy' to highlight the climate crisis, it isn't always the case. Aviation, transport, data centres and households are held up to scrutiny also. It's just that the farmers' ears don't prick up when that discussion is happening. I recently met a politician who took a lot of flak online following one of the elections in 2024. They told me that in real life, not once were they accosted or accused of the vehemence being meted out online. It was good anecdotal proof that the online world and the real world are parallel universes, and it is why farmers shouldn't pay much heed to the noise online either.

Further proof of this came last month when the latest Eurobarometer survey was published. Eurobarometer has been going since 1974 and captures public opinion with comprehensive surveys on topics affecting EU citizens. Every few years it conducts a survey on attitudes towards agriculture. And the news from this survey of over 25,000 EU citizens, including Irish respondents, shows broad support for the role of farmers.

The EU wide headline is 92 per cent say that in the EU 'agriculture and rural areas are important for our future'. Meanwhile 73 per cent of Irish respondents 'agreed' that 'agriculture has already made a major contribution to fighting climate change' compared to 62 per cent of total EU wide respondents. And three out of four Irish respondents believe that the 'Common Agricultural Policy benefits all citizens and not just farmers' while 82 per cent believe that the financial supports which farmers get from CAP is 'too low' or 'about right'.

The results completely fly in the face of what farmers think is the public perception of what they do. Have a look for yourself.  
<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>



## Why quality Colostrum remains key for calves

Maeve Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

The importance of colostrum management protocol cannot be over-emphasised, as many scour-related issues on farm directly correlate to insufficient passive transfer.

### Feeding colostrum on farm

**The '3-2-1 Rule' is worth recalling at this time of year:**

- 1: Offer milk from the dam's first milking
- 2: Within the first two hours of birth
- 3: Offer at least three litres (10% of birthweight)

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

Pooling colostrum is regularly practiced on farm due to labour constraints. However, combining colostrum from several cows increases the risk of disease spread (e.g., Johnes), reduces passive transfer and dilutes high-quality colostrum. Therefore, aim to offer calves a 'one-dam-to-one' calf system to avoid such issues occurring.

It is also important to remember that the calf's first opportunity to get an infection is through its navel or mouth. Therefore teats, the underbelly of the cow and contact with the calving pen bedding can become a source of infection for a new-born calf. Prolonged time spent in the calving areas is frequently a key issue with disease transfer in herds.

High levels of hygiene are required when collecting, feeding and storing colostrum, with research indicating that clean (no dirt contamination) colostrum allows for increased antibody absorption. Bacterial contamination competes with antibodies at gut level, resulting in reduced passive transfer.

Recent survey results from Moorepark of 48 commercial farms highlighted that stomach tubes and bottles with teats had the greatest quantity of bacteria present.

Excess colostrum can be stored in a fridge at 4°. However, bacteria will still grow so it can only be refrigerated safely for 24-48 hours. It is an all-too-common sight to see buckets of colostrum in the parlour/dairy, where ambient conditions arise, bacterial counts can double every 20 mins.

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## TEAGASC PILOTS NEW ADVISORY STRATEGY

Following a 'major review' of how Teagasc delivers its advisory supports to farmer clients, the authority recently launched a new advisory strategy in two of its regions. Head of the Teagasc advisory programme, Tom Curran explained: "The amount and complexity of schemes has greatly increased demands on both farmers and advisors in recent years. Our staff have worked very hard to keep up with this workload and this has reduced the time they have for technical on-farm advice. We are keen to address the strong feedback from clients highlighting the need and the benefits to being able to retain and strengthen a high quality technical and farm business advisory support service to clients and to the wider farming sectors." The new strategy is being piloted in the Wicklow, Carlow, Wexford Teagasc advisory region and in the Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim advisory region. The impact on farmer clients will be minimal, according to Teagasc, as clients will continue to retain a main point of contact with Teagasc through a designated advisor. An enterprise advisor will be allocated to clients who want to keep improving technical performance, efficiency, productivity and growing their farm business. Discussion groups will also be mainly facilitated by these Enterprise Advisors. Specialised Scheme Advisors will work closely alongside Enterprise Advisors to provide schemes and regulation support to these clients. Farm advisors will continue to support farmers who rely on schemes for a significant portion of their farm income in addition to the technical service they require.

## €1.5M FOR TRADITIONAL BUILDING SCHEME

The 2025 Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme is open for applications, with €1.5m earmarked for it. Minister for Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and the Marine, Martin Heydon, said the scheme, which received a prestigious Europa Nostra heritage award in 2024, ensures that farmers can continue to renovate and repurpose traditional farm buildings, 'preserving our history for future generations'.

The scheme is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and run in partnership with the Heritage Council. It encourages investment by farmers in the conservation of traditional farm buildings and structures of significant heritage value that contribute to our rural landscape, such as historic yard surfaces, buildings, gates and gate pillars that form part of the working farm. Many of the supported structures also provide roosting sites for bats and nesting sites for birds.

The closing date for applications is March 10. A grant award will cover up to 75 per cent of the cost of the works, with a maximum available grant of €30,000. Chief executive of the Heritage Council, Virginia Teehan, commented: "The Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme is a beacon of excellence in heritage conservation, having transformed over 1,000 vulnerable farm buildings and farm structures since 2008 into functional assets that remain at the heart of farm life. Winning the Grand Prix at the Europa Nostra Awards last year highlights the unique value of this scheme, which not only safeguards Ireland's built heritage but also empowers farmers with the skills to carry out repairs that protect biodiversity, preserve protected species, and contribute to the sustainability of farming practices for future generations."



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## €17BN – A RECORD YEAR FOR IRISH FOOD AND DRINK

The value of Ireland's food, drink and horticulture exports increased by 5 per cent in 2024, to a record €17bn, according to Bord Bia's Export Performance and Prospects Report published recently.

Higher pricing was the primary driver of growth in 2024, as cost pressures and inflation continued to affect businesses and consumers, according to Bord Bia. However, several categories recorded volume, as well as value growth, most notably within seafood, prepared consumer foods (PCF), and meat and livestock. The value of Irish dairy exports, which is the largest category of food exports, remained stable at €6.3bn, despite weather conditions throughout the year affecting grass-growth. Total meat and livestock exports increased by 6 per cent to €4.3bn driven by higher volumes and values across beef, pigmeat and livestock.

The value of drink exports grew by 19 per cent to just over €2.1bn, with ready-to-drink (RTD) beverages achieving a threefold increase year-on-year to €235m. Whiskey exports increased by 13 per cent to a value of more than €1bn. Exports in the prepared consumer foods (PCF) sector were worth €3.4bn, which was an increase of 7 per cent, while seafood exports recorded a 9 per cent increase to approximately €595m. Exports of cereals and horticulture increased by 4 per cent in value to a total of €325m in 2024.

## 60% GRANT NOW AVAILABLE FOR SLURRY STORAGE

Farmers can now apply for the recently introduced 60 per cent grant aid for slurry and manure storage under the latest tranche (tranche 6) of the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS 3). This was launched by Minister for Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and the Marine, Martin Heydon, last month.

There will be no obvious change to the application process, so farmers and/or their advisors should continue to submit applications in the normal manner, the minister advised. In addition to the 60 per cent grant aid for a number of investments, there will be a separate ring-fenced ceiling of €90,000.

### Main investments available at 60%:

- ▶ Manure pit
- ▶ Mass concrete tank, including precast tanks
- ▶ Circular slurry stores
- ▶ Geo membrane lined store

Commenting, the minister said: "This enhanced grant rate will encourage farmers to invest in nutrient storage on their holdings to create additional storage capacity, especially in a time of uncertain weather patterns.

"TAMS has been, and continues to be, a hugely successful and beneficial scheme to the farming community and the wider rural economy. It has delivered key modernisation, environmental and safety improvements on thousands of farms across the country. I believe these additional enhancements will attract further interest in the scheme and deliver additional benefits, especially in terms of overall water quality."

Minister Heydon also confirmed all tranche closing dates for this year. Tranche 6 of TAMS 3 will close for applications on March 7 with upcoming 2025 tranches closing on June 6, September 5, and December 5.

## €19M TO IRISH HORTICULTURE SECTOR IN 2024

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) issued €19m in payments to the Irish horticulture sector in 2024 through a range of schemes, including the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector, the EU Producer Organisation Scheme for the Fruit and Vegetable Sector, the Schemes of Investment Aid for Innovation and Diversification in Horticulture and the Horticulture Crisis Fund.

In relation to the five recognised fruit and vegetable producer organisations in Ireland with members across the high wire, fruit, field vegetable and mushroom sectors, a total of €78m was paid out to horticulture growers under the EU Producer Organisation Scheme for the Fruit and Vegetable Sector in 2024. This scheme supports producers to mitigate climate change, improve product quality, boost value of the products, prevent and manage crises and increase the planning of production and concentration of supply.

## TRACE MINERALS & FERTILITY

### Kate Ingram BVetMed MRCVS

Topping up trace minerals in cows prior to breeding helps ensure optimum levels are available when the cows' reserves may otherwise be depleted. The final trimester of pregnancy is a high-demand period for trace minerals with the fast-growing foetus depleting its dam's stores and the onset of colostrum production also requiring trace minerals.

Calving and the onset of lactation do nothing to decrease this demand and this, coupled with the requirements of the immune system to defend against fresh cow challenges such as mastitis and metritis, is why the transition period is considered one of the highest-demand periods of the production cycle of dairy cows.

It is no wonder, therefore, that this is the period where even well-supplemented cows and heifers can tip into sub-clinical deficiency if their intakes cannot keep up with this high demand.

For block-calving herds it is paramount that cows return to cyclicity soon after calving. To achieve the aim of one calf per cow per year, cows have only 12 weeks to get back in calf or risk slipping back in the block. A multitude of factors can delay how quickly a cow will return to oestrus after calving, for example issues such as dystocia, metabolic diseases and uterine infections. Avoiding problems at calving, preventing fresh cow diseases and ensuring good nutrition all contribute to minimising these issues. Ensuring adequate trace-element supplies at this time will also help as they are not only important for immune function and reducing the impact of oxidative stress but are needed for a variety of roles within the reproductive system.

**Manganese** – required for the production of hormones such as progesterone, oestrogen and testosterone, which are critical for the reproductive cycle.

**Zinc** – essential for the onset of oestrus. Also vital for the lining of the uterus to repair after calving, for the return to normal oestrous and maintenance of the uterine lining for embryo implantation.

**Selenium** – deficiency causes neonatal mortality, increased rates of retained foetal membranes, metritis, mastitis, abortions, poor fertility and increased susceptibility to infections in ruminants.<sup>1</sup>

**Copper** – low levels can result in poor fertility, manifested as delayed or suppressed oestrus.<sup>2</sup>

**Iodine** – when lacking may lead to early embryonic death, foetal resorption, abortion, stillbirth or the birth of weak young. It is also commonly associated with prolonged gestation and parturition, and retained placentas.<sup>3</sup>

**Cobalt** – the most common indicator of deficiency of this trace mineral is a reduced conception rate.

**ASK YOUR VET ABOUT STRATEGIC TRACE MINERAL INJECTION.**

Although supplementing cattle is important to meet their trace-mineral demands, oversupply can have negative effects so it is important to take advice from your vet or nutritionist when considering a supplementation programme. Factors such as the current mineral status of the animals, additional sources of trace minerals and the likely demand for minerals should all be taken into account when formulating a mineral-supplementation plan.

Ensuring optimal trace mineral levels in cows and heifers prior to breeding helps: replace stores lost during the transition period; minimises the impact of sub-clinical deficiency on immune function; and aids the return to cyclicity and fertility.

Talk to your vet about how injectable trace minerals may benefit your herd at high-demand periods such as pre breeding.

References on request





# HANDLING SLURRY SAFELY: ESSENTIAL TIPS

CIARAN ROCHE, RISK MANAGER WITH FBD, SHARES ESSENTIAL ADVICE ON THE SAFE HANDLING OF SLURRY

Working with slurry is an inherently dangerous task, presenting hazards such as toxic gas exposure, drowning, and power-take-off (PTO) accidents. Despite the known dangers, incidents continue to occur when safety precautions are neglected. Tragically, lives have been lost, and many farmers have faced near misses with lethal gases when attempting to remove cattle from sheds during agitation or when re-entering a building before lethal gases have been allowed to dissipate to a safe level. To protect yourself, your family, and your livestock, always prioritise safety when managing slurry facilities and handling activities.

## KEY SLURRY HAZARDS

There are three primary hazards to assess and control:

1. Slurry gases;
2. Slurry tank openings; and
3. Slurry tankers and the PTO.

### 1. SLURRY GAS - THE SILENT KILLER

Hydrogen sulphide, a highly toxic gas, is released during the bacterial decomposition of slurry. This gas is odourless and can be deadly. The greatest gas release occurs:

- ▶ When the crust is broken;
- ▶ In the first 30 minutes of agitation;
- ▶ In deep tanks during agitation; and
- ▶ After several months of storage.

There are a number of golden rules for managing slurry gas risks.

### Ventilate

- ▶ Choose a windy day to disperse gas

quickly; and

- ▶ Open all shed doors and ventilation outlets.

### Evacuate

- ▶ Remove all people and animals from the shed.

### Agitate

- ▶ Avoid standing on or near slats or agitation points;
- ▶ Agitate from outside the shed whenever possible and consider moving internal agitation points to external areas;
- ▶ Wait at least 30 minutes post-agitation before entering the shed;
- ▶ Have at least two people present during agitation for added safety; and
- ▶ Never smoke near the shed during agitation.

### 2. SLURRY TANK PROTECTION

Unprotected slurry tanks have been the cause of fatal drownings involving children, farmers, and contractors. To prevent these tragedies:

#### ▶ Fence off

Secure open slurry tanks with an unclimbable safety wall or fence at least 1.8m high. Install locked gates of similar standard.

#### ▶ Safety manhole covers

Ensure all tanks have safety access covers at agitation points.

#### ▶ Temporary precautions

Use temporary covers or guardrails if safety covers are not available, along with warning

signs. However, this is a temporary solution. Replace unsafe access points/covers promptly.

#### ▶ Regular inspections

Check slats frequently for signs of wear or damage and replace them as appropriate.

### 3. PTO SAFETY: PREVENTING ENTANGLEMENT

The PTO shaft can be a deadly hazard if not properly guarded. Entanglement with exposed bolts, universal joints, or other rotating components can lead to severe injury or death.

#### ▶ PTO safety tips

Ensure the PTO is fully guarded with a PTO shaft guard, U guard, and O guard. Regularly inspect and maintain all guards to ensure they remain in good condition. By following these simple but essential precautions, you can minimise the dangers associated with slurry handling and create a safer farming environment.

Always think safety first; your life and livelihood depend on it.

For more farm safety information, scan the code



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Minister Martin Heydon pictured in Brussels recently. Photo: DAFM.



# SETTING OUT HIS STALL: PRIORITIES OF THE NEW MINISTER

MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD, FISHERIES AND THE MARINE, MARTIN HEYDON, WAS FULLY IMMERSSED IN HIS NEW PORTFOLIO WHEN MATT O'KEEFFE INTERVIEWED HIM JUST FOUR DAYS AFTER HIS APPOINTMENT. HERE, HE OUTLINES HIS TOP PRIORITIES FOR IRISH AGRICULTURE AS HE TAKES THE MINISTERIAL REINS

Minister Heydon had already attended a council meeting of EU agriculture ministers in Brussels, and was just back from a visit to storm-damaged areas around the country. A full assessment of the impact on farms and businesses is awaited, he said (at the time of interview) in order to provide assistance where possible in restoring operations.

The former Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) – appointed to that office in July 2020 – has very much hit the ground running since taking over from predecessor, Charlie McConalogue. His previous role has him well versed in the agricultural sector, its issues, and challenges.

## THE PRIORITY LIST

And he has three key priorities, he said, that he is sharpening his focus on. Top of the list is the retention of the Nitrates Derogation, followed by the need to address the complexities of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and other regulations imposed on farmers, and the third strand is generational renewal.

"Nitrates must be number one in my first year," he said. "It's critically important, not only for farmers directly impacted – it involves more than the 7,000 derogation farmers – but for the entire farming community. It impacts every farmer in terms of land availability. If you're a tillage farmer, you're concerned especially regarding leasing land. A derogation farmer



**OUR SCHEMES GET MORE COMPLEX INSTEAD OF LESS, AND WE MUST LOOK AT HOW WE CAN DELIVER REAL SIMPLIFICATION**

with 80 cows might have to drop to 60 or 65. That's the difference between being viable and not viable.

"The impact on rural Ireland would be catastrophic if we were to lose the Nitrates Derogation. We are making progress in terms of investing in water quality, and I am confident we can turn the trend in the same way farmers have reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. There are indications that the measures the farmers are taking are having a positive impact. We do need to look



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## POTENTIAL YOUNG FARMERS WILL VOTE WITH THEIR FEET IF THEY'RE ASKED TO TAKE A LESSER QUALITY OF LIFE THAN THEIR PEERS

at it over the longer term. I made that point in Brussels," he pointed out.

### REINTEGRATING OUR FARMER-AGE PROFILE

Ireland assumes the EU presidency in 17 months' time and the Irish agriculture minister intends to use the lead up and six-month duration to good effect: "That gives me a short window to lay down the building blocks and let my colleagues across Europe know what Ireland wants to achieve from the next CAP reform. One of the things we want to achieve is simplification. Our schemes get more complex instead of less, and we must look at how we can deliver real simplification."

Succession, he said, is another area he is keen to deliver on: "That's the third leg of my priorities tool. The average age of farmers is 58 in Ireland. It is not an outlier by international standards. This is a trend worldwide of an ageing farming population and a struggle to get the next generation involved. I'm very open to seeing what we can come up with. My predecessor, Charlie McConalogue, established a Commission on Generational Renewal in Farming. It is due to report back in the second quarter of this year. I will see what the report says. I'm very keen to look at some existing grants that have a very low take-up. I think they need tweaking to ensure that they get a greater level of participation and that we support farmers more in the succession space. "Ultimately, at the back of all the challenges around succession, is income and viability. Potential young farmers will vote with their feet if they're asked to take a lesser quality of life than their peers; if they're asked to survive on less income than they could get in other jobs. I will actively look to support greater income opportunities for farmers, young and older. That means ensuring we get the best return for our produce, broadening market access and encouraging alternative farm-based opportunities. On

the tax side and on the support side, there's definitely more we can do to encourage that transition from the older generation to the next, while recognising that an older generation has a huge corporate knowledge and an awful lot to give."

### THE MERCOSUR QUESTION

Irish and European farm organisations are very concerned about the potential impact of a trade deal with South American countries, specifically on beef prices. What is this minister's take on Mercosur? "There are various assessments on the impact of Mercosur. Right now, 200,000 tonnes of beef comes into Europe from Mercosur countries at a very high tariff (or tariff-rate quota [TRQ] as it's called). If Mercosur goes through, much of that high tariff beef will flip into the proposed lower tariff tonnage, at least initially. You would presume then that the high tariff beef allowance would be replaced. It may or may not be. Then there would be an economic impact on the beef sector. The point that I made in the council meeting is that economics is one side of it. How can Europe continue to ask farmers to deliver higher environmental standards, while on the other hand, potentially importing product that doesn't meet the same transparency and production standards? I'm working very closely with Simon Harris as Minister Foreign Affairs and Trade, as we continue to make this point about a lack of reciprocal standards. We must work with like-minded countries as we would require a 35 per cent blocking minority in terms of population to prevent Mercosur being implemented." On the general threat of US-imposed tariffs on European products, Minister Heydon had this to say: "We need good interpersonal relations with international trading partners and I'm confident we can engage with the Americans and remind them that while we sell a lot of Irish produce into the US, there are Irish companies who employ up on 100,000 people over there. Good trade

relations are mutually beneficial. Trade disruption doesn't suit anybody."

### TB UPSURGE

The upsurge in TB incidences around the country is not news to the minister. "It's likely I'm going to have proposals before me, some of them quite stringent, in department briefings in the coming weeks," he said. "And I will take my time and consider them. Firstly, I recognise the devastation that TB causes on farms. It's clear to me the eradication scheme is not fit for purpose, and we need a reset of how we approach the problem. I do want to give farmers confidence that this is something we can turn around. It is costing farmers and the State a huge amount of money. From a trade perspective, beyond the end of the decade, this could really come back to pinch us. Our approach to TB eradication must be changed."

### CALF EXPORTS

On the issue of calf exports, he commented that the export trade is a 'crucial release valve.' "It needs to continue while we pivot away from our reliance on live exports. We are investing heavily in better genetics and sexed semen and supporting the calf-to-beef scheme. We all accept calf exports are not going to last forever. There are headwinds coming. That's why I met with my Dutch counterpart on the fringe of the Council meeting. I made it clear that Ireland can't be disadvantaged because of its island location. We must have access to the Single Market. But I am aware there are many politicians in the Dutch Parliament who openly criticise Irish calf imports. It's not necessarily a discussion based on science or the good animal welfare standards of our exporters. Buyers are very happy with the quality and health of our animals. We continue to work on alternatives because it is a big vulnerability for us to be so dependent on something we don't fully control."





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Ciaran Fitzgerald  
Agri-food economist

## OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

**End-of-year prices for Irish milk, beef, pigmeat and lamb were all strong and the outlook is relatively robust for next year, writes agri-food economist, Ciaran Fitzgerald**

**This positive outlook, I believe, presents an opportunity for Irish agriculture to shake off the negativity of the last four to five years of environmental onslaught, and remind Ireland Inc. of the unique, positive impact of the sector across the Irish economy.**

As the hi-tech modern Irish economy has emerged over the last 20 years or so, largely based on multinational inward investment, it has become even more vital for the Irish agricultural sector to demonstrate and articulate its unique and substantial impact on the Irish economy.

And nobody can more credibly express the ongoing and future relevance of Irish farming in the Irish economy better than Irish farmers. Unfortunately, the agri-sector is, perhaps, too modest about its contribution to our economy, instead placing an understandable emphasis on cyclical income concerns, which can create a misleading impression to the public of a sector declining in economic relevance.

The point in raising this issue is that, the underestimation of Irish agricultural economic value, combined with an overstatement of its negative environmental impact, has been used to encourage the constraining of Irish agricultural output. This was particularly evident in the promotion of herd reduction as the 'solution' to Ireland's national emissions-reduction challenge over the last five years.

### Growing

I believe that more attention should be drawn to the most recent Central Statistics Office (CSO) agricultural output report, which showed gross output at €11.6bn in 2024: up 4 per cent on 2023. But even more significantly, it was more than 65 per cent higher than the value of agricultural output for 2013, 2014 and 2015, which, pre-milk-quota abolition, was marooned at €7bn for each of those years. Most importantly, this annualised extra €4.5bn in the value of agricultural output with an expenditure multiplier of 2.0, as established by the CSO, has resulted in an increase in additional Irish economy expenditure of €9bn annually!

Moreover, the increase in output value in 2024 was almost totally

price-driven with milk volumes, in particular, reduced versus 2023 and 2022 while milk prices increased by 7 per cent. Recently, Bord Bia's annual report on the value of food and drink exports revealed that in 2024, they were worth just over €17bn – an increase in overall value of 5 per cent (image below).



### Positive economic and political outlook

With the formation of the new Government following the November election, the great hope for Irish agriculture and its food and drink businesses must be that the serial vilification of the sector – which seemed to dominate what constituted the public debate over the last few years – is replaced by a more balanced, objective, national discourse.

And, by the way, a more informed, balanced appreciation of Irish agriculture's economic and environmental impacts does not mean that decarbonisation of Irish agriculture will be mothballed in any way.

While essentially ignored by media commentators, the fact that 90 per cent of the production of Irish grass-based dairy and meat is exported to the equivalent of 45-50 million consumers, in over 120 countries worldwide, means that meaningful, verifiable, sustainability and decarbonisation production and processing methods, are a core principal of the Ireland's unique selling point (USP) in the global food market.



## NOBODY CAN MORE CREDIBLY EXPRESS THE ONGOING AND FUTURE RELEVANCE OF IRISH FARMING IN THE IRISH ECONOMY BETTER THAN IRISH FARMERS

So, whether through increasing implementation of Teagasc's Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) on farm emissions-reduction methods, or investment in (very expensive) decarbonisation of processing plants, or indeed through addressing the improved water quality requirements of the Nitrates Directive, Ireland's broad agri-sector will continue to embrace its decarbonisation and environmental impact challenges.

This commitment to evolving global customer and consumer standards is vital to sustaining and growing global markets. This, in turn, is the key factor underpinning our agri-food sector's unique local Irish-economy impact: export values of €17 bn and an Irish-economy spend of €18bn (the highest of any business sector, local or multinational) directly and indirectly supporting 220,000 jobs across the Irish economy. The future for Irish agriculture seems positive, as presented in Teagasc's *Outlook 2025 - Situation and Outlook for Irish Agriculture*, and the 2024-2035 EU agricultural outlook.

Indeed, the EU report predicts a continuation of the northward drift in EU food production because of the relative drought conditions in Mediterranean regions. On that basis, we can expect that more food will need to be produced in Ireland in the years ahead. An overall decline in EU beef production and consumption in response to dietary and sustainability challenges can also underpin a growth opportunity for Ireland as can stabilisation of EU dairy output and consumption.

However, the future for Irish agriculture, in terms of delivering increased sustainable economic value will come from investment in value added rather than through the type of volume increase achieved post quota abolition.

Let's hope our politicians have the clarity of vision to support this key sector of the economy, not least as we see concerns about how the multinational sector might be constrained by the new US regime. Ireland needs more than one economic horse in the race!



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# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FACE OF CHANGE

**BILLY KELLEHER, MEP FOR IRELAND SOUTH, DISCUSSED A RANGE OF ISSUES LIKELY TO IMPACT IRELAND IN THE COMING YEARS, WITH EDITOR, MATT O' KEEFFE**

**New-Government formation has been a hot - and at times, heated - topic for some time on these shores, and for good reason.**

The creation of a stable Government is hugely important, observes Billy, and he believes we have achieved that. "We have a Government that has a strong policy agenda and a commitment to stay the course for five years. There is a lot of geopolitical and economic uncertainty globally and we need political stability. There is a new president in the White House and that could change global market dynamics in terms of trade tariffs, disruption of trading blocs and agreements. EU trade will be put under pressure, so there are significant challenges in that area alone."

But there are also huge opportunities to seize: "A Government that is committed and stable, and can make difficult decisions, when necessary, will be critical. The incoming Government must make big decisions around infrastructure development, ensuring that the economy continues to expand, and that will require significant changes in how we do business. We cannot accept cost overruns and delays such as what happened with the

children's hospital.

"We have a huge amount of investment to put into water, into housing, into the electricity grid and the generation of electricity and that will require efficient planning and execution. Ireland is struggling in terms of bringing forward big infrastructure on time and within budget."



**THERE IS A LOT OF GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY GLOBALLY AND WE NEED POLITICAL STABILITY**

## **AGRICULTURE TO THE FORE**

Agriculture must be to the fore, the Fianna Fáil MEP said, adding that there is a lot of anxiety and concern within the farming community at the moment. "In the longer term farmers need policy continuity and certainty. They have always been price takers, that's the nature of the business, but they need clarity around

regulation and policy so that farmers can get on with the business of investing in and managing their businesses."

## **A CHANGING EMPHASIS**

The European Parliament has a changed political profile since the June 2024 election, Billy agrees: "You can sense the change in emphasis. The Parliament has gone more to the right, especially on the big political issues around immigration and the environment. Equally, it's become more centrist on agricultural issues. I'd like to see common sense prevailing.

"In terms of regulation and legislation going through the Parliament, it very often depends on the makeup of the members. Previous Parliaments would have had a very strong green agenda and while much of that legislation is written in stone, how it's implemented should be more moderate. Timelines and excessive regulations around the green agenda that were being pushed in previous Parliaments and Governments across Europe may be diluted a bit now. We don't want to dilute to the point where we

roll back on our ambition and fall between all the stools, but we need a practical approach. Financial support for farmers in the continuing transition is required. We have to get that balance right. The same applies to the Nitrates Directive, where farmers are uncertain about their future. The water quality review should provide clarity so that farmers can get on with what they do best – farming and producing high-quality food at a reasonable cost to the consumer. I want the Government to fight tooth and nail to retain the derogation. Its loss would put pressure on the entire agricultural sector because of the scarcity of land and would reduce competitiveness and efficiency. We have a good story to tell around Irish agriculture's impact on the environment in terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and water quality."

### A STRONG VOICE FOR AGRICULTURE

In relation to the recently appointed European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, Christophe Hansen from Luxembourg, Billy says he 'comes across as a person who understands farming and has strong connections with the sector'. "He will bring an enthusiasm that was missing under the previous commissioner," says Billy. "You need an agriculture commissioner who defends farming in the European Commission. The environmental agenda has been dominant, and we need a balanced approach. Most agricultural policies are now looked at through the environmental prism, first and foremost. We need all aspects of legislation and policy to be subjected to impact assessments on farming. That has been absent over the past five years."

### PAYING FOR PROGRESS

The Cork-born farmer and politician highlighted the financial challenges facing Europe and if the financing will be there to facilitate a broader agenda that encompasses both the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)



## I WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO FIGHT TOOTH AND NAIL TO RETAIN THE DEROGATION

and the environmental ambition? "That's going to be one of the biggest challenges facing Europe," he says. "The war in Ukraine, the cost of energy, the loss of economic competitiveness in Germany and the debt challenges in France are all aspects of the problem. How does Europe finance itself? Nobody has come up with a solution to that." We're afraid to ask the question because we may not like the answer," he says. "Ireland is a net contributor. It contributes more to Europe than it gets out in direct payments. The key issue here is, if we want Europe to do more on agriculture, if we want it to do more on the environmental pillar, if we want to sustain family farms, then Europe must have a larger budget. The EU doesn't have access to its own budgetary provisions, so it has to depend on Member States' contributions, and most are reluctant to increase their funding. France and Germany are in deep financial trouble. If you look under the bonnet at the figures in terms of budget, demographics and output, they are significantly challenged, with Germany teetering on recession. They are two major economies that won't be writing big cheques anytime soon or wanting to increase the European budget. Whether we like it in

### MERCOSUR - BILLY'S TAKE

"The implications of the proposed Mercosur trade deal for Ireland and Europe have not been fully fleshed out. We need to be absolutely sure that Irish farmers do not lose out from its ratification. The original deal in 2019 was, and remains, unacceptable to me. I've heard little to suggest the new deal will be any better. However, I want to see the final legal text and to speak to all stakeholders before I make up my mind one way or another."

Ireland or not, countries across Europe are under pressure to increase their military spending because of the threat of Russian invasion of the Baltics, Romania, Poland and Finland. These countries are saying they can't increase EU contributions because they must spend on military to guarantee their defence and their obligations to NATO. There will be pressure on EU budgets because of low growth, lack of competitiveness, as well as the prioritising of security.

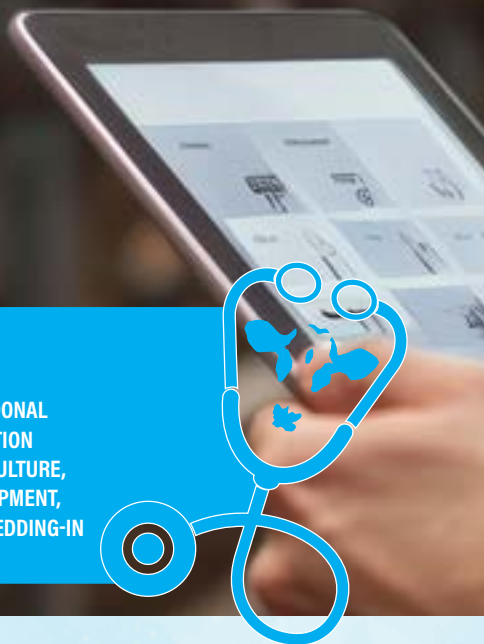
"The issue of rebalancing payments between east and west in the EU is also a financial challenge. Eastern European countries are saying, why are farmers in the old west getting more per hectare in direct payments than those in the newer countries that joined from 2004 onwards?"

### THE TRUMP CHALLENGE

Billy Kelleher says the EU and the US must work out some rational way of ensuring that we don't have tariffs that ultimately hurt everyone, because tariffs invariably increase costs: "If America puts tariffs on imports, it increases costs for American consumers and businesses. The same thing happens from a European perspective. I am concerned that some actions will be taken by the Trump presidency to preserve credibility and you can sense that the Trump administration is obsessed with manufacturing and bringing jobs home, so that would have an impact on Europe. For Ireland, it's not only about trade tariffs on the agri sector, but also the overall potential impact on the Irish economy."



Donal Lynch MVB.



## WHAT DOES THE VET SAY?

THIS MONTH, BERNIE COMMINS CAUGHT UP WITH VETERINARY SURGEON, DONAL LYNCH TO GET HIS PERSPECTIVE ON THE NATIONAL VETERINARY PRESCRIPTION DATABASE THAT WAS LAUNCHED RECENTLY BY THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE (DAFM). WHILE IN THEORY IT IS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT, DONAL FEELS THERE ARE STILL CONCERNS THAT NEED ADDRESSING AND BEDDING-IN TIME WILL BE REQUIRED

### BC: THE LONG-AWAITED NATIONAL VETERINARY PRESCRIPTION SYSTEM (NVPS) HAS FINALLY BEEN LAUNCHED. WHAT IS YOUR GENERAL VIEW ON THE FINAL PRODUCT?

**DL:** The NVPS has been much talked about since 2019 and in theory it can be a positive development for the veterinary service that our farmers require. It should mean that a farmer can access all their prescriptions for all medicines in one place. However, we have to be realistic in that no new system of this magnitude is going to fall seamlessly into place.

### BC: CAN YOU PROVIDE AN OUTLINE OF HOW IT WORKS NOW ON THE FARM?

**DL:** Essentially, there will be limited change for the farmer when the vet goes out to a sick animal. But the prescription will now have to be uploaded by the vet to the national database. There will, however, be further changes in relation to worming products in June when a prescription will have to be completed before supply.

### BC: INITIALLY, WHEN THIS SYSTEM WAS MOOTED, VETS EXPRESSED A NUMBER OF CONCERNS ABOUT IT AND ITS ON-FARM

### PRACTICALITY - HAVE THESE CONCERNS BEEN ADDRESSED?

**DL:** There is no doubt that the new system will have significant challenges for vets in getting prescriptions uploaded in a timely fashion, and there will have to be an understanding on all sides that any initiative such as this will need a significant bedding-in period. Certainly, some of the practical challenges have been addressed but there are many more that still have not been identified.

### BC: WHY IS THE NVPS IMPORTANT FROM AN ANIMAL HEALTH AND, INDEED, A FOOD-PRODUCING PERSPECTIVE?

**DL:** Ireland as a country prides itself in producing the very best food from animal origin in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable manner. As farmers we can pride ourselves on the way we use these important resources and this will allow us to prove that not only are we all doing a good job, but we are leading by example to strive for continued improvement. Over the last 20 years, we have collectively improved production through disease management and prevention while advancing the overall production model.

### BC: IS THERE AN ADDITIONAL COST TO THE FARMER AS A RESULT OF THIS NVPS SYSTEM?

**DL:** Regrettably, with any new system there is a cost, and the details of how this new system will affect the cost of doing business as a vet, a merchant or a farmer are still very unclear. There will be additional IT and manpower costs on all sides.



**WE HAVE TO BE REALISTIC IN THAT NO NEW SYSTEM OF THIS MAGNITUDE IS GOING TO FALL SEAMLESSLY INTO PLACE**

### BC: CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE NVPS FOR VET AND FARMER?

**DL:** The system will be available as an app, but everyone seems to acknowledge that for the NVPS to work practically the vet will have to use a computer system called a practice management system (PMS), and this is where some of the additional cost arises.



## THIS SHOULD FACILITATE FARMERS HAVING ACCESS TO THEIR MEDICINE DATA IN AN EASY-TO-USE AND WORKABLE FORMAT

One would assume that the system will be available to farmers as a one-stop shop to acquire all their medicine supply records. The PMS system will be where the vet creates the prescription and this system will then interact with the department's NVPS to upload the required details. The cost to the vet here is threefold involving vet time to create the prescription in the appropriate format, administration time to support this, and the cost of providing and supporting the aforementioned PMS.

### **BC: IF A FARMER DOES NOT HAVE A SMART PHONE/IF THERE IS NO SIGNAL IN AN AREA, HOW DOES IT THEN WORK?**

**DL:** The details of this are still a little unclear, if a vet treats an animal or provides a medicine they can issue a paper prescription from their system and the NVPS prescription will sit in the background, however if the prescription is issued to be filled elsewhere then I would assume that the prescription number required can be issued on paper rather than by text message or more likely by both. The issue with signal would be

more of an issue for the vet uploading the prescription so this means that there has to be an allowable gap between prescribing and uploading.

### **BC: A NUMBER OF VETS FLAGGED CONCERNS ABOUT SHARING FARMERS' DATA WITH THE DATA PROTECTION COMMITTEE. IS THIS A CONCERN YOU HAVE/HAD?**

**DL:** Of course, as vets we are always conscious of the importance of confidentiality and security of farmer data. The DAFM will have to be responsible for the security of this data and that the system complies with the law in relation to data security.

### **BC: TO WHAT EXTENT WILL THE DAFM BE MONITORING THE DATABASE AND ENFORCING RESTRICTIONS ON MEDICINE PROVISION?**

**DL:** The department has always been responsible for the monitoring of medicine usage in animals. This includes from the level of manufacturer, distributor, prescriber, supplier and end user through to appropriate

disposal. The NVPS will facilitate more remote monitoring of some of the links in this chain. Restrictions and control will be the remit of the department and in some cases the veterinary council.

### **BC: OVERALL, IS THE NVPS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT?**

**DL:** As farmers and vets we have always embraced new technologies and IT systems, they are not always seamless transitions and I still have many concerns about the working of the system. All that being said this should facilitate farmers having access to their medicine data in an easy-to-use and workable format.

### **BC: WHAT CONCERNS DO YOU STILL HAVE?**

**DL:** The concerns are many as with any new system. They include the cost for vets and farmers, the details of the uploading of the data and technical glitches that will arise as we continue to use the system. It will be important that vets, farmers the department and all other stakeholders engage to resolve any of the issues that arise as we progress.



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A black cow with a yellow ear tag is looking down at a black and white spotted calf lying in a field of dry hay. The cow's head is in the upper left, and the calf is in the lower right. The background is a soft-focus field of hay.

# FOCUS

CALF & COW HEALTH



# BREAKING NEW GROUND IN DAIRY-CALF HEALTH AND WELFARE

**A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT LED BY TEAGASC, WITH UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN (UCD) AND THE IRISH CATTLE BREEDING FEDERATION (ICBF) AIMS TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF CALVES BORN ON DAIRY FARMS WHETHER THEY REMAIN ON THEIR FARM OF BIRTH, MOVE TO BEEF FARMS, OR ARE DESTINED TO BE LIVE EXPORTED TO OTHER EU COUNTRIES. BERNIE COMMINS SPOKE TO WELCALF PROJECT LEAD, DR EMER KENNEDY, AND HER TEAGASC COLLEAGUE, DR MUIREANN CONNEELY TO FIND OUT MORE**

**In 2024, Irish calf exports dominated the live cattle trade, according to recently published statistics from Bord Bia.** Overall, the sector was valued at €340m last year, an increase of almost 30 per cent on 2023 levels, and calf shipments accounted for 56 per cent of the total, or around 200,000 head. Live-calf exports from Ireland are hugely important, but they are in choppy waters. EU proposals around transport time, mid-transport feeding, space allowance, and age of calf will, undoubtedly, have implications for our calf exports. Aspects of the Netherlands' – our biggest importer of calves – 'veal forward plan' will also prove problematic. It sets out a maximum feeding interval of 14 hours, but total journey time there from Ireland is greater than that. Additionally, although not connected to calf transportation, that plan will signal a red light for Irish calf imports in 2026 because Ireland has not yet achieved an infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR)-free status.

## PHYSICAL FEEDING UNFEASIBLE

One aspect of the WELCalf project will

address transportation issues for unweaned dairy calves. "The legislation is changing," says Dr Kennedy. "Essentially, we are going to have to feed calves while they're undergoing transport. So, the question arises, how do we do that? We must develop a way to feed calves while they are on the transport truck," she adds. The researchers hope to develop a prototype automatic feeder that will allow calves to access milk replacer while being transported, and Teagasc is currently seeking a commercial partner to progress this. It is ambitious and will be costly but must be achieved.

Teagasc previously trialled mid-transport feeding from Ireland to the Netherlands last October using a truck brought in from Germany specifically for this purpose. It involved manual feeding by the transport staff, which is not a feasible long-term plan for a variety of reasons.

"So, what we need, essentially, is an automatic feeder in the trucks," says Dr Kennedy. This is new territory but will be a game changer for live exports. She adds: "If we manage to develop it, I think there will be

a lot of interest from Europe because there are a lot of young calves undergoing long-distance journeys on the continent, and the same rules will apply to them."

## MITIGATING MEASURES

Dr Conneely, who is heading up the live transportation side of the WELCalf project provides some further detail on research that has been done and what is to come: "What the [existing] research has shown us is that one of the main issues for calves when travelling from Ireland overseas involving truck and ferry transport, is the long feeding intervals – that is how long the calves spend without food. As a result, they get hypoglycaemic and that has welfare implications." Dr Conneely has done extensive research into the welfare of dairy calves undergoing long-distance road and ferry transport as part of the MOOVE project. She continues: "A lot of that work focused on looking at methods to mitigate these [implications]. So, in one study, we wanted to see if we fed calves more before the journey – an extra feed the night before and a bigger

feed on the morning – do they [calves] do better than what was the standard protocol at the time. And they did. They were in better shape physiologically when they got as far as the lairage in France. But that effect didn't actually last as far as the veal farm, because they've got another period [of transport] before they get there from the lairage, and they go again without food."

Although the Moove researchers found that by feeding the calves more they could improve their physiological status, they were still outside of the reference range for glucose, as well as other indicators of energy balance, hydration and stress, explains Dr Conneely. "So, while they had better energy balance, they were still abnormal. Feeding them more improved them, but not enough," she says. This led to the mid-ferry feeding trial last October, as mentioned earlier. And while not a long-term solution, the effect of that experiment proved positive. Dr Conneely explains: "The calves were in better shape when they got to the lairage in France. And the calves that had received the feed midway through the ferry had higher glucose levels, but it was just logistically very challenging."

Additionally, they found that the calves were inclined to lie down after feeding, Dr Conneely explains: "We had little pedometers on the calves to measure their behaviour, and we found that the ones that had received milk had a tendency to lie down a bit more. It was just a tendency. It wasn't a clear effect, but they're lying down a bit more potentially because they're

feeling a little bit more settled, and a little bit more comfortable following the feeds."

The WELCalf project takes it from here, Dr Conneely explains: "The project aims to feed calves using an automated system so that each calf would get an allocated amount of milk replacer that they can access as they wish throughout the journey. It is basically using the same technology that is already in



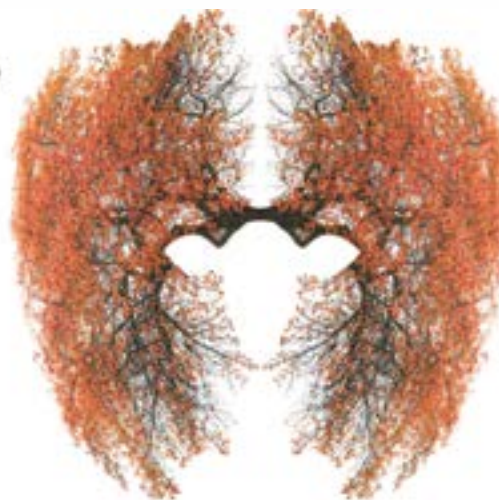
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use for automatic feeding systems for calves on farms." This automated feeding must also be individualised so that each calf is assured of its own feed allocation.

"Once we have a prototype, then we would intend to trial it and see does it work? Do calves drink from it when they're allowed, when they have access, and we may do some sort of simulated studies first here."

### PRECARIOUS

Commenting on the precariousness of Ireland's live calf exports, Dr Conneely says that they are a necessary component of Ireland's farming system as it currently exists, so everything must be done to maximise the welfare of the animals: "From my point of view, these trips are happening, the calves are going abroad, and it is really important for everyone involved in the live transportation of calves to ensure that their welfare is of the highest standard. We want to make it as welfare-friendly a journey as possible. There are big challenges with that, but we are working to ensure that we minimise the stress they experience as much as possible."

It is hoped that a prototype system may be ready to start testing next year – assuming all goes to plan. "The EU is looking closely at us, and they are happy that we are working to address this, but they want to see progress on it, so it is a high-priority task for us," says Dr Conneely.

### WELCALF GOALS

Live-exports transport, also known as 'intra-community trade', is just one aspect of the WELCalf project and there several other important calf-health issues that will be explored.

Teagasc has previously conducted dairy-farm research relating to both cow and calf health and welfare, but the missing research link has been in the area of dairy-calf-to beef farms, explains Dr Kennedy. "We aim to visit both dairy farms and dairy-calf-to-beef farms. We will look at the attitude of farmers towards calf rearing and calf welfare, and we will try to ascertain if there are barriers to ensuring high levels of welfare on both farm types."

WELCalf researchers will also collect data on farmers' current calf-rearing-management practices, and they will assess the housing infrastructure that's available also. For example, Dr Kennedy explains, if a situation arises where calves have to stay on-farm for longer than expected, the research



Individualised automatic calf-feeding technology is already in use on farms, so the researchers aim to replicate this in a live-exports truck environment.

Photo: Matt O'Keefe.

will ascertain if there is sufficient calf accommodation provided for them, what is the standard of those facilities, and are there any plans for future investment?

Dr Kennedy continues: "We'll also look at the breeding policy that the farmers are putting in place: are they using sexed semen, or the Dairy Beef Index, how are farmers selecting bulls, and basically how are they adding value to non-replacement animals to make sure that they have a more saleable animal, an animal that dairy-calf-to-beef farmers would want to buy."

"Similarly, we'll talk to the beef farmers and try to understand what they want, like, what would make it more likely for them to buy calves from a dairy farmer so that, potentially, we'd be able to find more homes for these calves."

### BASELINE

WELCalf also aims to develop an application to collect real-time data relating to key animal-welfare traits. This information will help farmers identify the risk factors associated with poor health and welfare. Dr Kennedy explains: "We want to determine the baseline of calf welfare on Irish farms. Involved in this [project] are the ICBF, UCD and ourselves and the hope is that we will be able to develop an app where we'll be able to collect data in real time in terms of health; if calves are being treated for illness or if there are instances of morbidity on the farm. We will collect that data and that in turn would feed into the ICBF database."

### TOOLKIT

Another facet of the research will look at the development of a calf-health 'toolkit', which will be led by lecturer and assistant professor at the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine, Catherine McAloon. With the toolkit, Dr Kennedy says, they want to 'design and validate a suite of targeted calf-management interventions that promote best health outcomes in line with international best

practice and calf rearing and bespoke to Irish dairy and dairy calf to beef systems'.

"We will visit the farms, do our baseline assessment, and if there are farms with issues, then we'll go back to those farms and design a strategy specific to that farm to help improve the system and give the farmer [the tools of] the toolkit to address any issues and, hopefully, improve calf health and calf welfare. Then, we will reassess it and see how well this kind of specific tailored advice works in a given system." The success of the toolkit will be assessed and that will determine its suitability for national rollout on farms. Additionally, the risk factors associated with summer scour syndrome will also be explored.

### KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Dr Kennedy comments that, very often, when it comes to calf health and welfare, it is about getting the simple things right: "It is about getting the colostrum right, getting the hygiene right, knowing what to do if there's an outbreak of scour. And while a lot of that information is already out there, people don't necessarily always take that information on board. So as part of the research, we will work with the social scientists to try to understand why farmers may not be taking that information on board and to understand do we need to change our messaging to encourage people to do so?"

### RESULTS

According to the researchers, results will be shared from an early stage to maximise the impact of the research. And the knowledge outcomes will, they say, inform policy, change practice, drive more research, and be used for education purposes. The technologies developed during the course of the project can be used beyond the lifetime of this project to continue to provide ways of improving calf welfare. The various aspects of the research will run simultaneously with a dedicated team working in each area to make sure that the deliverables are achieved.

Closing Date:  
6<sup>th</sup> March 2025

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# SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN SEXED-SEMEN UPTAKE

**MATT O'KEEFFE** ATTENDED THE RECENT ANNUAL IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION'S (IGA) DAIRY CONFERENCE, WHERE **MARGARET KELLEHER** OF THE IRISH CATTLE BREEDING FEDERATION (ICBF) PROVIDED SOME INTERESTING DETAIL ON THE ADOPTION OF SEXED SEMEN. HERE, MATT GIVES A RUNDOWN OF THE MAIN POINTS, AS WELL AS OVERVIEWS OF SOME OF THE OTHER CALF-RELATED TOPICS ADDRESSED

One of the biggest developments in Irish dairy breeding in recent years has been the widespread adoption of sexed semen as a technology that allows farmers to choose the sex of their calves to best economic advantage. Figures presented to this year's IGA conference by Margaret showed the trends clearly: "More recently, the use of sexed semen has significantly increased on dairy farms, with over 20 per cent of total artificial insemination (AI) services using this method in 2024, an increase of over 50 per cent in only two years." Progress made in the reliability of the technology has been significant and has, undoubtedly, contributed to the increased uptake. Margaret said: "Although using sexed semen traditionally lowers conception rates, analysis over five years of field data from the ICBF shows that the relative performance of sexed semen compared to conventional semen is 92 per cent. This indicates a significant improvement in the technology over the past five years and therefore it is little surprise that the uptake has doubled in the last two years."

“  
**FARMERS ARE TARGETING THEIR BREEDING STRATEGIES AT CALVING A COHORT OF DAIRY HEIFERS THAT MEET THEIR REPLACEMENT NEEDS ONLY**

## TARGETED BREEDING

As the reliability of sexed semen has improved significantly, delivering greater confidence to users, the necessity to adopt the technology has also increased. This is most certainly the case in herds with a large proportion of cross breeding with Jersey bloodlines. The male offspring are of very low economic value and sexed semen offers an opportunity to target selected cows for breeding replacements and using beef breeds for the remainder of the herd. Another reason for the increased use of sexed semen is the current plateauing of herd size on many farms. The era of rapid enlargement of the Irish dairy sector has closed, at least for now. That means farmers

are targeting their breeding strategies at calving a cohort of dairy heifers that meet their replacement needs only, with the remainder being bred to beef breeds. The advantages are clear. Higher value surplus calves, higher merit replacements and a more viable source of higher commercial beef value (CBV) calves for the beef sector.

## CLEAR-CUT ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES

The ICBF representative summed up the benefits to the wider industry: "The profit potential for dairy farmers is enhanced and beef farmers have a supply of calves that have a reduced age to slaughter and require lower inputs through their lives. Last year marked the first time the number of beef calves born from dairy cows has surpassed the number of dairy calves born from dairy cows during the peak spring calving season - over 53 per cent of the calves born by April 20 were beef-dairy cross progeny.

Margaret struck a note of concern, however, around the increased adoption of sexed semen that needs to be monitored and managed: "Challenges remain, particularly

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with the shrinking population of dairy male calves available for selecting the next generation of AI dairy sires. To continue advancing the genetic merit of the national herd, technologies such as wider genotyping of the national herd and more precise mating decisions will be essential. These tools will play a critical role in sustaining and enhancing genetic progress in the years ahead."

### CALF-TIME MANAGEMENT

The measuring and management of spring labour time-use on dairy farms was explored

at the IGA conference by Conor Hogan of Teagasc's Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, based at Moorepark. Conor first provided a broad overview of time use and management, commenting that 57 per cent of all farm labour input occurs during the spring/summer period with 33 per cent devoted to the springtime work burden. The figures were gleaned from a five-month study of 76 spring-calving Irish dairy herds from February to June, inclusive.

Moving from the general to the specific, Conor noted that one of the major work-related areas studied and measured

related to calf care. This, the study showed, accounted for 20 per cent of work time in the peak months of February and March, making it a significant, time-demanding task. Strategies to reduce time input on farms included: contract rearing calves post-weaning, selling bull calves, use of automatic calf feeders, and training calves in group pens. These four activities, Conor explained to his audience, had the largest potential to reduce time input. "For example, farms that adopted automated calf feeding saw a 21 per cent improvement in calf-care efficiency." It was noted that certain labour-efficient

technologies, including automatic calf feeders, require large capital expenditure and a cost-benefit analysis is necessary on individual farms to justify such investment.

### SELLING CALVES

The most effective means of reducing calf-time input, said Conor is by selling all surplus calves. This strategy does come with a critical caveat: calf care is critical. "Selling calves, as with calf management in general, requires excellent calf-health management," said Conor. The Teagasc study showed that selecting beef AI using the Dairy Beef Index is the optimum means of ensuring quality beef calves. Best practice calf management from birth was also emphasised by the farmer cohort involved in the study, including testing colostrum quality and following the 1-2-3 rule of using first milk from the cow, feeding it within two hours and feeding three litres at first feed. There was also good advice provided from the Teagasc study on the longer-term management of calves: "Investments in calf housing, particularly where there is the expectation of keeping calves for the longer term, and automation such as automatic feeders, milk carts and pumps, were highlighted as significant time-saving measures. Adequate bedding and vaccination were also emphasised as important to prevent future calf-health challenges."



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# COW MANAGEMENT AND CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTATION

THOMAS O'SULLIVAN, INTOUCH FEEDING SPECIALIST, ALLTECH, DISCUSSES THE MANAGEMENT OF FRESHLY CALVED DAIRY COWS AND THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTATION



Thomas O'Sullivan, Alltech.

**Managing freshly calved dairy cows is a critical aspect of dairy farming, directly influencing the health of both the cow and her calf, as well as the overall productivity of the herd.** This period, often referred to as the transition period, requires close attention to nutrition, health and overall management

practices. The cornerstone to managing freshly calved cows correctly is based around trying to increase their dry matter intake, to get sufficient energy to meet their demands post-calving.

## NUTRITION FOR FRESH COWS

Immediately after calving, the cow should be monitored closely for signs of distress or complications, such as retained placenta, milk fever, or uterine prolapse. Early intervention is key to preventing long-term health issues. At this time, a cow's energy needs to increase daily. Bear in mind that the stress of calving causes her to reduce feed intake, reducing the amount of energy she consumes and resulting in a negative-energy balance. To reduce the negative-energy deficit, aim for an energy-dense diet during the first two to three weeks post-calving. While cows remain indoors, it is important that you have established the best-quality feed in the yard

for them. Some will have maize silage, whole crop or beet in the diet, and these ingredients are ideal in early lactation to boost total dry matter intake and energy intake. The more intake you can achieve on a full indoor diet, the more cows can consume when they eventually head to grass when weather and ground conditions allow. Proper nutrition during the fresh period – the first three to four weeks post-calving – is critical for recovery and the start of lactation. Try to ensure that the diets are balanced in protein, fibre, and minerals.

## THE POWER OF CALCIUM

Freshly calved cows are at higher risk for health complications. Regular monitoring can help detect and address issues early. Common post-calving issues are:

### ► Milk fever (hypocalcaemia)

Symptoms include muscle weakness, inability to stand, and cold ears.

► **Ketosis**

Monitor for reduced appetite and energy.

► **Displaced abomasum**

Watch for reduced feed intake and bloating.



## THIS PERIOD, OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE TRANSITION PERIOD, REQUIRES CLOSE ATTENTION TO NUTRITION, HEALTH AND OVERALL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Proper nutrition and feeding practices can prevent many of these issues. For instance, calcium supplementation in freshly calved cows offers a range of benefits, particularly during the critical postpartum period. This practice supports metabolic health, prevents disorders, and improves overall productivity. Fresh cows experience a significant drop in blood calcium levels due to the sudden demand for milk production. Calcium supplementation helps restore these calcium levels, reducing the risk of both clinical and subclinical hypocalcaemia. This is vital, because in addition to causing muscle weakness and an inability to stand, clinical hypocalcaemia leads to a higher risk of secondary infections. Adequate calcium is also essential for proper immune cell function. By ensuring sufficient calcium levels, cows are better equipped to fight off infections such as mastitis and metritis when they do occur. Calcium also helps with the closing of the teat end after milking, reducing the risk of high somatic cell count and mastitis, and it is critical for the synthesis and secretion of milk.

### SUPPLEMENTATION METHODS

Ensuring adequate calcium levels supports early lactation, helping cows reach their peak milk production potential. There are a number of methods of calcium supplementation:

► **Oral calcium boluses**


These are easy to administer and provide a quick boost in calcium levels. These are often given immediately after calving and repeated 12 to 24 hours later.

► **Feeding limestone flour through a total mixed ration**


This is a cheap and easy way of ensuring cows get enough calcium. It's important to check the feed rate of your parlour nuts, as if cows are not being buffer fed, then this will likely be the only way to supplement calcium in the diet.

### CONCLUSION

Calcium supplementation in the fresh cow group is a proactive measure that significantly enhances cow health and productivity. By preventing hypocalcaemia and supporting critical physiological functions, supplementation contributes to better milk yield, reduced disease incidence, and improved reproductive performance. This investment in early lactation management pays off through healthier cows and increased profitability for the dairy operation.



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- 2) Pushing frame growth along with fleshing calves simultaneously for replacement stock;
- 3) promoting muscle laydown and development with frame growth in beef calves; and
- 4) Catering for the export industry.

All Auctus calf-milk replacers include high-quality dairy ingredients and keep the health of the calf at the core of the formulations. All seven products include the well-renowned triple-shield protection.

## Triple-shield protection

Triple-shield protection comprises three components:

- a) A suite of enzymes, which increases the growth of intestinal micro flora;

Auctus has now launched the newest edition to its calf-milk-replacer product range, which now comprises seven calf-milk replacers. Auctus now has the most comprehensive range of milk replacers available on the market. Opti-Skim and Opti-Mum with added lung guard protection has just been introduced and gives the farmer the option to rear their calves on a skim-based product, delivering high quality proteins to push daily live weight gains from the first week of life.



- b) Sodium bicarbonate is used to keep the acid balance healthy in the newborn calf; and
- c) Sodium butyrate is added to ensure the feed conversion efficiency in the abomasum is maximised.

The more protected the calves are, the better they are equipped to deal with challenges including pathogenic issues like cryptosporidium or coccidiosis, or

bacteria such as Escherichia coli or salmonella.

All seven products contain the same extremely strong vitamin and trace element package. This ensures that the calf will have no mineral deficiencies and, in turn, will strengthen the calf's immunity to deal with any challenges.

Only the highest quality dairy ingredients are used in Auctus powders, and they are balanced with the most digestible proteins and fats available. When choosing a calf-milk replacer, it is very important to get the protein and oil and fat levels right for both frame growth and muscle and fat cover. But the ash and fibre content are equally as important as these figures determine what type of proteins are used and to what level. The ash content should be no greater than 8% and fibre content should be no greater than 0.2% in any calf-milk replacer. Anything above this level indicates that ingredients used are less digestible for a calf and issues can follow. Auctus prides itself in using no greater than 7.0% ash and 0.1% fibre in any product.

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

## Get in touch

You can contact Auctus by phoning 043 6683200, emailing [info@auctus.ie](mailto:info@auctus.ie), or contacting your local business manager:

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## Seamus Whitty strengthens Auctus sales-and-support team

Seamus Whitty from Taghmon in Co. Wexford, comes to Auctus with a vast amount of experience, having qualified with a degree in agricultural science from UCD. For the past 10

years, Seamus has been working in the south Wexford and Waterford areas for a well-respected feed mill, where he also concentrated on selling young-animal-feed products - namely calf-milk replacer.

Seamus joins Auctus as business development manager to further develop his experience in the agricultural industry, where Auctus has become a very well-respected and household brand throughout Ireland, both north and south. Seamus will be supporting and promoting the Auctus product range in the south of Ireland, covering Cork, Waterford, south Tipperary, Wexford, Kilkenny, Laois, Carlow, Kildare and Wicklow.



# CALF EXPORTS CRITICAL TO IRISH LIVESTOCK SECTOR

**MATT O'KEEFE** LOOKS AT THE STATE OF AFFAIRS OF IRISH LIVE CALF EXPORTS, AND WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD FOR THIS CRITICAL ASPECT OF OUR LIVESTOCK SECTOR

**Last year, live calf exports from Ireland reached 200,000 head, just a few thousand short of the 2023 peak.** The numbers had been increasing year on year until 2024: with 140,000 exported in 2021; close to 170,000 calves leaving the country in 2022; and more than 200,000 shipped in 2023. Exports of calves can be described as a pressure valve for surplus numbers. Demand on the continent is strong for Irish calves with confidence among buyers and veal producers that they are getting healthy stock that thrive well.

## NETHERLANDS CALF TRADE IN JEOPARDY

The major countries importing Irish calves include the Netherlands, Spain and Italy. Most concern is around exports to the Netherlands, where increasing regulation could strangle the trade in the coming years. There is an expectation that few, if any, Irish calves will be able to access the Dutch market next year, if the intentions of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature come to fruition. The Dutch authorities are intent on creating an infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR)-free cattle herd in the

coming years. While IBR is not a high-category disease within the Irish cattle herd, we do not have a certified IBR-free disease status. The rules we operate under in the Single Market preclude an outright ban on the free movement of animals to continental Europe, except under exceptional circumstances, but increasing regulatory restrictions may make the calf export trade uneconomic to some countries.

## MAIN EXPORT DESTINATIONS

Apart from the Netherlands, the main export opportunities for Irish calves in recent years have been Spain and Italy. While numbers exported to The Netherlands have reduced from the 2023 peak, coming down from the 106,000 high to 77,000 last year – a 25 per cent reduction – calf exports to Spanish farms have increased in the same period, from 54,000 in 2023 to 70,000 last year. The Italian calf import trade with Ireland remained stable over the past two years, hovering around the 20,000 head mark annually.

## FMD OUTBREAK IN GERMANY

Right now, there is one exceptional

circumstance that may inhibit calf exports to the Netherlands. The recent outbreak of foot-and-mouth (FMD) disease (one case confirmed at time of print) in the east of Germany has caused a cessation of calf imports to the Netherlands from Germany. Animal transport restrictions are in place and will remain until any risk of FMD spreading from the initial danger zone is removed. On the face of it, the transport ban would imply a risk to Irish calf exports to the Netherlands this year. Denis Drennan, president of Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA) takes a contrary view: "The demand for Irish calf exports to Holland will only increase because the German import option is closed off. The Dutch veal units will need supplies of calves for the 2025 Christmas market and the obvious choice is to increase imports from Irish farms, especially given that the health-and-welfare status of Irish calves is so high and Dutch veal producers have recognised this over the years."

While that analysis is somewhat reassuring in the short term, the longer implications of Dutch moves towards IBR-free status will put increasing pressure on Animal Health

Ireland (AHI) to implement a fully-fledged IBR eradication programme as soon as practicable. The fact that the bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme worked well, apart from the final hurdle of eliminating the last few per cent of cases, should provide a general template for IBR removal from the Irish herd. As the Netherlands moves towards eradication in the next few years, we cannot afford to be far behind.

#### MORE SUITABLE CALVES FOR EXPORT

As the application of sexed-semen technology accelerates here, there should be more availability of suitable calves both for the export market and for dairy-calf-to-beef farms in Ireland. Fewer pure dairy-type bull calves being bred on Irish farms is good news for both outlets. The greater the beefing quality of calves for sale off Irish dairy farms, the more demand will increase, as the reliability of converting those calves into finished steers or for early slaughter as veal calves on the continent, becomes even more viable.



### THERE IS AN EXPECTATION THAT FEW, IF ANY, IRISH CALVES WILL BE ABLE TO ACCESS THE DUTCH MARKET NEXT YEAR

#### WELFARE TO THE FORE

Welfare of calves transported over long distances, in this case, from Irish farms to continental veal units, has improved exponentially in recent years. The low morbidity figures alone, as well as the strong ongoing demand for Irish calves, confirms this reality. Nevertheless, even higher welfare, health and transport standards are not only expected, but also demanded. The latest regulation to come into force next year will be ready availability, at least twice in a 28-hour period, of milk-based nourishment. While there are no transport vehicles currently in operation that can provide this upcoming

requirement, there is an expectation that the technology and vehicle structure to facilitate regular feeds, will be developed soon. It all comes at a considerable cost, in both capital expenditure, as well as running costs, and likely reductions of calf numbers per vehicle as space is devoted to feeding facilities. These are the practical obstacles to ensuring a continuing calf export trade. As Irish dairy-cow numbers peak and potentially contract, allied to improving beef traits in calves being sold off breeding farms, there may well be increasing interest among Irish farmer buyers for these calves, thus alleviating the pressure to export calves. This is in the current context of high and rising beef prices. Should that continue, the higher price of weanlings and stores may encourage more cattle farmers to examine the economics of rearing calves to beef or forward stores. We are in a period of flux in Irish cattle farming, and much will depend on the outcome of a likely Mercosur trade agreement, as well as ongoing reductions in cattle breeding numbers across Europe, the US and elsewhere.

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# PNEUMONIA – GETTING AHEAD OF THE GAME

**EMMA SARGENT MVB, RUMINANT VETERINARY AREA MANAGER, MSD ANIMAL HEALTH, PROVIDES GUIDANCE ON THE BEST WAY TO GET AHEAD OF BOVINE RESPIRATORY DISEASE (BRD), COMMONLY KNOWN AS PNEUMONIA, THIS SPRING**

Calving season is well and truly upon us once again, and a busy period lies ahead on farm. Disease outbreaks in the calf shed can be an unwelcome, stressful and costly problem. Bovine respiratory disease (BRD), or pneumonia, continues to be one of the most common disease entities on Irish farms, accounting for 38.8 per cent of deaths in one-to five-month-old calves. Calves in their first month of life are also at risk, with 11 per cent of deaths in this age group attributable to BRD.<sup>1</sup> These figures have increased from 2022 to 2023 by 4.6 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively.

## PNEUMONIA'S IMPACT

Pneumonia is a multifactorial disease, meaning that calf immunity, environment, management and many different viruses and bacteria can all have a role to play in an outbreak of disease. Stress is a common trigger for it – moving or mixing calves, cold temperatures, dietary changes or disbudding can be high risk activities as stress reduces the ability of the immune system to fight disease. Viruses such as RSV, PI3 and bovine coronavirus take advantage of a weakened immune system and may invade the respiratory system, damaging the lung tissue and making it easier for bacteria such as *Mannheimia haemolytica* to multiply. Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) is

another viral disease that causes inflammation of the upper airway. Once an animal becomes infected with IBR, they remain a lifelong carrier and may shed the virus at times of stress, acting as a constant source of infection in the herd.

It is the damage to the airways, along with the inflammatory response of the animal as it tries to fight the infection, that causes the visible signs of illness in affected calves such as reduced feed intake, fever, coughing, panting and nasal discharge. Secondary bacterial infection is often severe and may be fatal. Diagnosis of what diseases are involved requires laboratory analysis of samples taken by your vet.



**Figure 1. The multifactorial nature of calf pneumonia.**  
Source: Animal Health Ireland.

## COST OF CALF PNEUMONIA?

The cost of dealing with a BRD outbreak is not to be underestimated. Immediate expenses such as vet bills, medicines and labour inputs may seem significant, however, it is the long-term effect on lifetime productivity of affected animals that has the biggest economic impact. Pre-weaning growth rates decrease by eight percent for calves experiencing pneumonia. Beef calves can suffer losses of up to 202g average daily liveweight gain (ADLWG) after severe respiratory illness, resulting in longer finishing periods and impaired carcass quality.<sup>2</sup> Dairy heifers with a history of lung damage in the first eight weeks of life have a 525kg decrease in milk production in their first lactation on average.<sup>3</sup> UK research estimates the total lifetime cost of respiratory disease to be approximately £772 (~€934) for affected dairy heifers; £327 (~€395) for dairy-bred beef and £263 (~€318) for beef suckler calves.<sup>2</sup> Outbreaks of pneumonia in the calf shed not only affect the sick animals, but their pen mates too. Whilst these cohorts may not show any clinical signs of disease, they may be also infected and have hidden lung damage. Visibly affected animals are often just the tip of the iceberg. Given the significant short and long-term impacts that this common issue has on the efficiency and productivity of our herds, it makes economic sense to adopt a preventative approach to protect our young calves.

## HOW CAN WE CONTROL BRD?

### - Minimising infectious pressure

Control of calfhood illness relies on maximising calf immunity while minimising

## PARTNER PROMOTION

infectious pressure, i.e. exposure to disease. It is impossible to eliminate viruses and bacteria on-farm, but management practices can help to significantly reduce the build-up of these bugs in the environment.

Maintaining good hygiene in the calving pen will help to reduce disease exposure of the vulnerable newborn calf, as many bugs are shed from the cow at this time. Removing the calf from this area immediately after birth is also beneficial in this regard, as is keeping calves in a separate airspace to older stock.

Calf housing is also an important area to consider when trying to minimise infectious pressure. Wet and dirty bedding can be a breeding ground for viruses and bacteria, as well as acting as a calf stressor by reducing lying time and drawing body heat from the calf. In addition, wet bedding contributes to increased humidity in the shed, favouring disease. In situations where ventilation is suboptimal, issues can be minimised by reducing the stocking rate. A minimum of 1.5m<sup>2</sup> floor space is required per calf, with 2.5m<sup>2</sup> per calf being preferable. Calculating the peak number of calves you expect to house and working out the floor space you have available is a worthwhile exercise pre-calving, so that plans can be put in place to utilise alternative accommodation if needed.

#### - Maximising calf immunity

Young calves need a robust immune system to fight off disease challenges. Colostrum is the most important contributor to calf immunity. Aim to feed three to four litres of high-quality, first-milking colostrum to each calf within two hours of birth, using clean equipment to minimise disease spread. Prolonged feeding of transition milk, the milk following colostrum before the cow produces whole milk (approximately milkings two to six) also has a positive effect of calf immunity.<sup>4</sup>

Minimising stress is the next step to improve calf immunity. Well-fed calves are better able to fight disease. Aim to feed a minimum of 15 per cent of the bodyweight of the calf per day in transition milk or good quality milk replacer. Increase amounts being fed by one litre for every 10-degree

Celsius drop in temperature below 15 degrees Celsius to avoid energy deficits – a thermometer in the calf shed is a useful tool to monitor this. Keeping bedding clean and dry, providing plentiful straw for nesting and minimising draughts also helps calves to maintain body temperature and stay healthy. Providing access to clean water at all times is essential. Other ways to minimise stress include pain management at time of disbudding, minimising re-grouping and separating stressful events such as disbudding, dietary changes and change of housing.

Vaccination is a useful tool to boost calf immunity against specific infectious causes of BRD. Vaccines stimulate the animal's immune system to produce antibodies. These antibodies help the animal to fight infection when they encounter it.

#### OPTIONS FOR VACCINATION

So, what vaccines should be used to protect calves against pneumonia and when? Farm-to-farm variations in calf stressors, management and causes of disease means that it depends on each farm's individual circumstances. Your vet is often the best point of contact when formulating a plan, as they can identify unique farm risks, provide diagnostics to determine what disease may be present and advise an appropriate vaccination strategy based on all contributing factors.

#### OPPORTUNITY

Along with good husbandry practices and environmental, nutritional, and concurrent disease management, early vaccination is key to increasing calf immunity in the face of respiratory disease. Protecting young calves against the insidious effects of BRD allows us to maximise their peak feed conversion efficiency prior to weaning, thus improving their lifetime productivity. We can also minimise deaths, reduce antimicrobial usage and improve animal welfare. We estimate that approximately 35 per cent of calves in Ireland received a vaccine against BRD in 2023. That leaves around 65 per cent of calves vulnerable to respiratory disease. There is a huge opportunity for us as an industry

Bovilis INtranasal RSP Live, providing protection against RSV and PI3, and Bovilis Nasalgen-C, providing protection against bovine coronavirus, are two live intranasal vaccines that are licensed for use from the day of birth. These vaccines may be of choice where calves are needing the earliest possible protection against viral pneumonia, or when a rapid onset of immunity is required e.g. bought-in calves. Bovilis Bovipast RSP is an injectable vaccine that protects against RSV, PI3 and *M. haemolytica*. This inactivated vaccine can be given subcutaneously from approximately two weeks of age. Bovilis Bovipast RSP can provide the broadest protection in one vaccine against viral and bacterial calf pneumonia. It can be used as a follow-on to early intranasal vaccination for comprehensive protection, or in advance of risk periods such as disbudding, castration, transport or weaning.

Bovilis IBR Marker Live provides protection against IBR (caused by BHV-1). It is a live vaccine that can be given to calves from two weeks of age by the intranasal route (and either intranasally or intramuscularly from three months of age). Bovilis IBR Marker Live can be given at the same time as Bovilis Bovipast RSP from three weeks of age.

to execute early vaccination programmes and protect the future productivity and sustainability of our herds.

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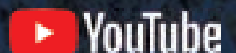
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# KETOSIS – INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION IN SEASONAL CALVING HERDS

**MAURA LANGAN, NORBROOK VETERINARY ADVISOR, UPDATES *IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY* ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY INTERVENTION TO PREVENT KETOSIS IN SEASONAL CALVING HERDS**



Maura Langan, Norbrook veterinary advisor.

**Ketosis is a common metabolic disease in dairy cattle and occurs when the animal's energy intake fails to meet its needs, and the cow begins to draw from her body reserves in a continuous state of negative energy balance (NEB).** Some degree of NEB is relatively normal in recently calved cows, but the extent to which it occurs and how long it lasts are key factors in how the cow transitions into productive lactation. "Essentially, ketosis occurs when the metabolic processes in the liver are being overwhelmed, and ketones are produced," says Maura. "Unfortunately, elevated levels of ketones in the blood, urine or milk result in a suppression of the cow's appetite, creating a vicious circle that results in weight loss and a drop in milk yield," she explains. As well as elevated ketone levels, cows with ketosis can display clinical signs of the condition. Clinical signs include: dullness, reduced feed intake, reduced milk production, and may include behavioural changes such as excessive licking or aggression as well as staggering. "Clinical ketosis is often the tip of the iceberg, and in many herds, we find that

a greater number of cows are suffering from the subclinical form of the disease. Studies have shown that reduced milk yield, lower milk protein production, increased prevalence of LDAs (left displacement of the abomasum) and, ultimately, reduced fertility are all associated with subclinical ketosis, so farmers should really be aware of the impact it can have on the productivity of their herd," adds Maura.

Body condition score (BCS) at calving is a key determinant of ketosis risk. Fat cows with a BCS of  $\geq 3.5$  have reduced late dry period/early lactation feed intake predisposing them to ketosis. Farmers are encouraged to BCS regularly with a BCS of 3.0-3.25 at calving being the target.

While the risk of ketosis is greatest in fat cows, thin cows are also susceptible. Any cow with additional energy needs, such as high yielders, those carrying twins or with any disease or inflammation will also be at risk of ketosis.

"Where possible, farmers should identify 'at risk' cows in the weeks prior to calving and remain vigilant in the first couple of weeks of lactation as even correctly conditioned, low-risk cows may be susceptible if stressed; for example, following a caesarean, a difficult calving or a case of milk fever," says Maura.

## TREATMENT

Treatment of ketosis is aimed at re-establishing normal glucose levels and reducing serum ketone concentrations. By breaking the cycle of ketone production, appetite recovers and the animal's voluntary intake begins to meet energy requirements. Treatment can include veterinary intervention through the administration of intravenous dextrose and possibly steroids to stimulate glucose production in the liver. For the most

part, treatment of ketosis centres on the provision of glucose precursors in the form of glycerol, propylene glycol or propionates. "Norbrook has introduced a bolus called Ketonor+ that contains propionate as a source of glucose for at risk cows and also contains vitamins A and E, selenium, niacin, cobalt and yeast to support the liver, rumen and immune system. Two Ketonor+ boluses given to 'at risk' cows will provide a readily available energy source right when it is needed. This helps to break the cycle of ketone production and helps her to want to start eating again. Ketonor+ is cost-effective, does not contain antimicrobials, has no withdrawal period and is easy to administer in busy seasonal calving herds," she explains. Although ketosis is usually seen during very early lactation, it can occur any time that the cow experiences NEB. Many vets are now recommending the use of Ketonor+ boluses alongside pain relief (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) as well as antibiotics in the treatment of metritis, mastitis, LDAs and even lameness. The theory being that a reduction of pain and sustained energy levels improves welfare and promotes recovery in sick or convalescent cows. "As an industry we're increasingly adopting technology like collars, tags and boluses that allow us to monitor subtle physiological changes in individual cows. This technology can indicate very early changes to rumination, activity and body temperature and is able to alert the farmer before the cow displays any visible signs of disease. Although it can't offer a definitive diagnosis, feed intake and energy requirements are so finely balanced in those first weeks that these cows may also be at risk of ketosis. In cases like these, early intervention with a bolus is appropriate," says Maura

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## MESSAGES

- Why was 2024 the second-best year ever for dairy farmers?
- Examine your PastureBase report so that you grow your grass utilisation percentage in 2025.
- Make sure to have a spring grazing plan.
- Take steps to reduce dependence on nitrogen (N).
- Cow and calf care must be prioritised in February.



By Matt Ryan

### LOOK BACK AT BEST YEAR SINCE 2000!

- » It makes us feel good to look back, particularly in a good year. And, although it is said that we learn more about ourselves when we lose or don't do well, we can still learn from a good year because it was mainly driven by milk price. Let's look at the figures from a relatively small number of farmers. They can be used to set your standards when planning for this year and next year.
  - Milk price was 55.8c/L, increased by 10c/L due in greater part, to better markets. Percentage fat (F) increased by 0.07 while percentage protein (P) increased by 0.08. The highest milk price achieved was 62c/L while the lowest was 51.8c/L. On the average yield of a 5,500-litre cow, that was €440/cow.
  - The kilogrammes of milk solids (MS) produced increased by 10kg to 480kg/cow, driven by 15% increase in meal feeding to 2.36kg MS (target is 1kg or less).
  - Cows produced 89% of their body weight (target is 100%+) – up from 86%.
  - Costs are a major issue ranging from 30c/L to 44c/L and farmers are struggling to reduce them.
    - Meal is a huge attitudinal issue; I publish Table 1 (see page 52) to give a planning guide for targets. But the stocking rate (SR) on milking platform (MP) is the issue and should be targeted at 2.8-2.9 cows per hectare (ha) so that cows realise their full potential from grass.
    - Contractor costs have risen substantially in the last two to three years and farmers need to derive efficiencies on their own farms to mitigate same.
  - Vet and animal health costs have also risen a lot – be very conscious of preventative care to reduce these.
  - The total and comparative costs of producing one kilogramme of MS increased from €4.53 and €3.30 to €4.67 and €3.34, respectively. This represents a relatively small increase of 3.1% and 3%, respectively. This suggests that farmers made a big effort to control costs in 2024 – partially due to milk price predictions being low early in the year.
  - Comparative profit per kilogramme of MS increased from €2.54 to €3.39 – an increase of 33.5%.
  - Somatic cell count (SCC) has remained the same but cow cull rate has increased from 21% to 30%. TB has been a big factor as well as farmers reducing cow numbers.
  - Grass utilised decreased by 13% from 9.9 to 8.75 tonnes (t) DM/ha. This was due mainly to poor growth and lower SRs.
  - Interesting, that this group of farmers increased EBI and cow fertility by over €23 and €22, respectively, to €240 and €119 each.
  - Profit/ha is up over 50% to approximately €2,000/ha –

remember these are some of the better farmers around.

- » A lot of good messages and targets! Address costs, address milk price by increasing % F and P, and cow culling rate must be managed down to 13-14% for a crossbred herd, and 16-17% for a black and white herd, and stocking rate must decrease on milking platforms.
- » Compare your costs with your peer and plan to reduce them.

### MAKE USE OF PASTUREBASE AND GRASS UTILISED DATA

- » Grass grown in 2025 was down one by one tonne DM/ha. Farms on wettish soils were less affected. Let us examine PastureBase data under various headings.
- » Number of grazings: The target is 10 and my groups are averaging 7.2 with the best being 9.7.
  - As each grazing gives an extra 1.3t of grass, it is vital to get as near as possible to 10.
  - There are two keys to achieving this; start the second grazing as near to April 1 as possible and don't start the last grazing until October 8-12. Then stick to a 19-21-day rotation for the main growing season,
- » Number of silage cuts: This increased in 2025 to 0.75. Because silage made as bales is very expensive, farmers must plan this and take out a number of paddocks for a main cut from May to June, working on a grazing area per cow of 4-4.5ha, cutting the minimum as bales.
- » Tonnes DM/ha: The target is 13-16. The highest I have seen last year is 15.9t. It is crucial to achieve target pre-grazing covers, not forgetting soil fertility etc,
  - Pre-grazing covers per hectare during the year:
    - Spring: 1,460kg DM.
    - Summer: 1,600kg DM.
    - Autumn: 1,800kg DM.
- » Winter growth is an interesting piece of information to have but unfortunately too many farmers do not have an end-of-year or an end-of-January measurement to establish that information – it has ranged from 86-375kg DM growth over last winter. This information can help you decide, based on several years' data, your closing and opening cover targets. Overall stocking rate on MP: With this you have the SRs for spring, summer and autumn from which you can easily see whether you are overstocked, as many are, comparing growth rates with demand during each period.
- » Opening and closing covers: The average opening cover in 2024 was 900kg DM, pretty close to recommended levels. The closing cover for autumn 2024 was 783kg DM. With winter growth of 250kg DM this year, as per last, that means we should have an

opening cover in 2025 of 1,033kg DM/ha on these farms.

- » Dates of 'let-out' and housing: These tell us the length of the grazing season in days – very useful in telling society the length of time your cows spend at grass by comparison with European cows.
- » Grass utilised per hectare: I have a little programme that calculates this. Teagasc has added this to one of its dairy profit monitor reports. The detail it gives my clients is very useful:
  - Grass utilised is one of the KPIs of dairy farming, and from this report you will have the grass utilised on the WHOLE farm (rented and out-farms).
  - You can compare the quantity utilised each year – each additional tonne adds €180+ to farm profit/ha.
  - The target percentage of homegrown grass in a cow's diet is 90%; this is when optimum profit is generated.
    - A good question related to this is: "What percentage of the farmer's income comes from photosynthesis?" Ideally, 90%!
  - The grazing season length for the herd is 270 days, which is a function of:
    - Let-out date by day and by night.
    - Housing date by day and by night.
    - The calving pattern of the herd – this has a big influence on days at grass because cows that have not calved will not be let out to eat valuable spring grass.
  - Feed conversion efficiency: It is measured as the kilogramme of MS produced per tonne DM available on farm. The target is 90+ kg MS per tonne of DM. I place great emphasis on this as it tells me, if it is low relative to target, that:
    - Too much meal was fed when grass would have sustained the yield.
    - Excessive meal was fed when the response to meal feeding was low.
    - Meal quality may have been poor.
    - The cows' genetics wasn't good enough to deliver a good yield of milk solids.
    - Grass was in short supply; might be due to overstocking or a growth issue.
    - Grass was stemmy – poor feeding value.
    - It could be due to poor BCS, particularly in spring.
    - The age (lactations) of herd will influence it also; for instance, first lactation cows will only yield 83.3% of third-

lactation cows.

- » Dairy farmers should make 2025 the year of maximising grass in the cow's diet.
- » The targets set in this section will have relevance in achieving this goal.

#### SPRING GRAZING PLANNING:

- » The spring rotation plan is vital and should be followed to the letter of the law.
  - Any farmer not using this is not serious about grazing cows in spring to make €2.80/cow/day profit.
  - Feeding more meal and/or silage will see us revert to where we were 20 years ago.
- » Can I guarantee you that if you let out your cows to grass on February 10 that you will have enough grass until early April and not run short?
  - Yes, I can! How?
  - The spring rotation planner does all that for you.
  - Get it from your adviser (PastureBase).
- » This planner will show you the area of ground you allocate to your cows each day from let out until the second rotation starts.
  - You must never give more than the specified area of ground; otherwise, you will finish the first rotation too soon. If you do not have enough grass on that area, you must feed meal and/or silage. This will be indicated by the allocated area being 'skinned' and the cows looking empty and hungry.
- » You must have 30% of the available grazing area grazed by March 1 and 60% by March 17. These dates are 14-20 days later on wettish farms.
- » This is because you won't have enough grass on the second rotation in early April, because for every 1% you are below these targets you will have 14kg DM/ha less grass in April.
  - You need 50 to 60 days from grazing the first paddocks in February to the next time they are grazed in April.
  - The summary is:
    - Graze 30% in February; these paddocks should be dry, closer to the yard, with multiple access points, sheltered, with covers 800-1,000kg DM/ha, recently reseeded, and the quickest growing. If silage is being cut from milking platform due to low stocking rate, then these paddocks/fields should be grazed during this period so that they can be grazed again in early-April.



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- Graze 30% from March 1-17; with heavier covers, greater than 1,200kg DM/ha, further from the yard with many access entrances and pretty dry.
  - Graze the last 40% by April 5; these paddocks will have been grazed last in autumn, have poorer grazing infrastructures, old grass types, and slower growing.
- » **Good management practices are required to graze land in February:**
- On-off: three hours out grazing is an essential practice. This prevents poaching damage and is most neglected in Ireland.
  - Because of the amount of grass on farms this year, it is certain that farmers must have cows out full-time from very early February – my definition of full-time is two to three hours after both morning and evening milking.
  - Do the morning milking at 7am and the evening milking at 3pm or 4pm bringing the cows back in to very, very little silage from 6pm to 7pm.
  - To graze the 30-35% target, start grazing light covers and then the heavy covers around February 20-25 when a lot of cows are calved, and they have a much-improved appetite.
  - As gut fill is a major cause of poor grazing activity, minimum silage should be fed. In fact, unless you are very short of grass, no silage should be fed – increase meal levels.
- » **The first rotation should end as near as possible to April 1 because:**
- Moorepark has said that farmers whose first rotation ends around that time grow most grass.
  - It is partly explained by the fact that they also say that each extra grazing rotation results in 1,300kg DM/ha being grown.
- » **If, because of a wet spell, you fall behind on the area being grazed, you must catch-up by grazing larger areas per day when the weather dries up. Otherwise, you will miss the 30% and 60% targets.**
- » **Because you know, for certain, the area being allocated each day, set up the stakes for seven to 10 days in advance to save labour.**
- Spread the advised N and/or slurry at the end of January/early February and then put up several days with temporary paddocks,
- » **Associated with this practice is to graze the silage ground twice, if any on milking platform. It will save on meals in early April and give higher yield, higher percentage of F and P and improved body condition score (BCS).**

## STEPS TO REDUCE NITROGEN

- » **With N being so expensive, and environmental pressures being so heavy, we need to adopt practices that help us reduce the amount of N (bag) we use. The following suggestions should be practiced:**
- Follow the Teagasc N fertiliser and slurry application plan for the end of January/February (three weeks later for wettish farm).
    - Cattle slurry: Spread 2,000 gallons/acre on 40% of the farm with covers less than 1,000kg DM/ha.
    - Spread no N on the first 15% of the MP to be grazed.
    - Spread 23 units protected urea/acre on the next 15% of the farm to be grazed.

- Spread 23 units N/acre on next 30% of MP to be grazed.
  - Apply bag N four to six weeks after the first application – the higher the stocking SR, the shorter the period.
  - Replace some of the bag N with slurry for first-cut silage.
  - Make as much first-cut silage as possible as this saves on N – farmers very remiss on this advice.
  - Diluting slurry with soiled water will increase the efficiency of utilisation of N in the slurry.
  - Avoid making a second cut of silage if possible – hence the need to do winter feed budgets early.
  - Plan to build autumn grass cover by extending the rotation from mid-July to late-July.
  - Keep records of quantities and dates of application N on PastureBase – then study the outcomes.
  - White clover has the potential to halve the amount of bag N used – so plan to sow from April to May. But use N on clover swards in February as per normal treatment.
- » **Remember the following facts (research) on N-use efficiency on grassland. It is:**
- 63% when the pH, the phosphate (P) and potash (K) are optimum.
  - 54% when P is deficient.
  - 57% when K is deficient.
  - 53% when P and K are deficient.
  - 35% when P, K and lime are deficient.
- » **I hope you can deduce from this that the element having the greatest effect is lime – a 28% reduction in the efficiency of N.**
- All soils have background N (averaging 140 kg/ha) and it won't be released to its maximum without lime.
  - The message is clear for 2025 – bring ALL fields up to pH 6.5. No excuses about weather, cost, grass cover, silage – plan to make it happen.
  - P and K must be applied based on soil results, now.
- » **With soil temperatures on January 12 at 7.5 degrees, farmers should be ready at the earliest opportunity to spread slurry and protected urea.**
- Have slurry tanks agitated (with care), use the umbilical system where possible – as cheap as vacuum tanker spreading,
  - Have the required amount of N and 10:10:20 in the yard, obeying appropriate spreading date regulations.

## MEAL FEEDING LEVELS ARE OUT OF CONTROL

- » **Farmers must take active actions to reduce meal feeding from an average of 1,300+ kg/cow/year.**
- The advice is to feed 1kg meal per kg MS, or 0.1kg per L produced.
- » **Table 1 outlines various levels of meal that can be fed each month depending on your annual meal feeding goal.**
- Nobody, but nobody, stocked at advised SRs on the MP should need to feed more than 800kg meal/cow.
- » **Why are farmers feeding so much/too much meal annually? The usual excuses are:**
- Not enough grass in spring and autumn (controllable).
  - Grass not good enough in summer (controllable).
  - Cows won't go in calf in May-June (myth).
  - Milk price is great (no logic!).

- It helps cashflow, particularly, in spring and late autumn (myth).

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

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

- » **Surprising honest reasons arose:**
  - Feeder calibration was 20-30% incorrect (controllable).
  - Staff took it on themselves to 'feed whatever they wished' (become the boss).
  - Feeders need adjusting for various types of feed (controllable).
  - 'Look, I never really planned the amounts' (controllable).
  - Quantity being fed was never adjusted for availability of grass (controllable).
  - Too slow to react when grass became plentiful (controllable).
- » **Be aware that for every €1 spent on meal the actual cost is €1.40 and the return of meal being fed above recommended is 3-4%. Pathetic waste of money.**

### SHORT NOTES

- » **Giving colostrum early is the most important way to prevent calf rearing problems associated with scours and pneumonia and follow the 1, 2, 3 rule.**
  - Use colostrum from the first milking for the first calf feed.
  - Give colostrum within two hours from the calf's birth.
  - Give at least 3L.
  - Give another 2L within the next six hours.
  - A stomach tube (done correctly) alleviates some of the feeding problems. Most farmers now use it as a time saver and it guarantees consumption of 2-3L in that first feed.
  - To check the quality of the colostrum, use a refractometer –

many farmers now do!

- » **Because February is a crucial month to set things up for the year, discussion groups should meet on farm for a quick technical meeting to check what is happening on each other's farms so as not to make mistakes that are preventable.**
  - Stay in touch by using WhatsApp or a Zoom chat to keep advisors well informed.
- » **Consider using contractors more in 2025 for:**
  - Dehorning calves.
  - Feeding out silage and cleaning yards twice per week.
  - Spreading fertilisers in bulk and slurry with the umbilical system (the only way to do it!).
  - Contract rearing of calves and heifers.
  - Contract labour for all or some farm chores (large units).
  - All reseeding work.
  - All lameness preventative care.
  - All capital investment work. Farmers must refrain from this as it is putting huge strain on the labour to run the farm and efficiencies suffer.
- » **Milk recording is almost a mandatory requirement now because of mastitis treatment benefits and the data to allow you select out the best cows.**
- » **As the bulling heifer weight targets of most heifers on May 1 must be 320+ kg and they are likely to put on 0.8kg/head/day between February 1 and then, they now should weigh at least 250kg.**
  - For every kg they are less than that, they must be fed 4-5kg meal. If they are 30kg below target, they must get 120-150kg meal (16-18% P) between now and May 1 or 1.5kg/head/day over whole period or twice that over half the time.
- » **Cow care - all staff must be aware of its importance.**
  - Prevent lameness, mastitis, metritis, ketosis, milk fever, grass tetany, IBR, BVD, being too thin or over-fat.
  - Use your vet wisely to see you through these preventative practices.
  - Associated with this is the need to do once-a-day milking in February to free up time – this is a practice that has economic as well as labour-saving benefits.
- » **Let cows and R2s out to grass at the earliest opportunity.**

### QUOTE FOR THE MONTH

**"High achievement always take place in the framework of high expectations" – Charles Ketterin**





# PUMA 240 – MORE POWER, MORE PURPOSE

**'FROM THE CAB' THIS MONTH, NOEL DUNNE REVIEWS THE PUMA 240, THE LARGEST CASE IH MODEL NOW AVAILABLE WITH POWERDRIVE, AND DEVELOPED IN RESPONSE TO A DEMAND FOR CONTINUOUSLY VARIABLE TRANSMISSION ALTERNATIVE AT 240HP**

According to Case IH, the 240/270hp (rated/max with boost) Case IH Puma 240 can now be specified with a PowerDrive full powershift as an alternative to the standard CVXDrive continuously variable transmission. This, according to the company, provides buyers with more choice at this power level to match tasks, workloads and budgets.

Available on Puma 240 models with either electronic or mechanical remote valves, the new transmission option provides 18 or 19 forward speeds, depending on whether the tractor is ordered in 40km/hr or 50km/hr

maximum speed configuration. Both provide six reverse speeds. The largest Puma model previously available with PowerDrive full powershift was the 220hp/260hp (rated/max with boost) Puma 220, meaning the new Puma 240 with PowerDrive offers 8 per cent more power in a Puma powershift package, with key transmission components upgraded to match.

Elsewhere in the Puma range, customers can now choose larger Group 48 (2.05m) tyres for the Puma 185 and 200 with CVXDrive (previously only on the Puma 220/240/260 with CVXDrive). In addition, the class 4.5

front axle is available on the full powershift Puma 185/200/220/240 with PowerDrive. This boosts load capacity by 13 per cent, meeting the needs of customers operating front-mounted equipment or a loader. The axle upgrades permit an increased gross vehicle weight of 14,000kg on Puma models with PowerDrive. On Puma tractors with CVXDrive this figure is 15,000kg, thanks to engine side rails and a combination of the HD rear and class 4.5 front axles.

Like other Case IH machines, the new model is compatible with FieldOps, Case IH's new all-in-one data management mobile app and web platform, which connects and integrates agronomic insights and machine performance data, providing farmers with a comprehensive all-brand fleet overview regardless of their machine makes.





**NOEL DUNNE**  
Machinery Editor

## POSITIVE VIBES

**Well readers, it is February already.** The farming year is well on its way with slurry, hedgecutting, ploughing – where possible – and tillage kits all being looked at. Storm Éowyn brought things to a halt, along with the few days of snow we had in January, but it is now, as I pen this, getting back to business as usual, thankfully. Change has been the name of January's game and we have Trump back in the White House again, Micheál Martin is the new taoiseach, and Martin Heydon is the new agriculture minister. A long-overdue ceasefire in Gaza will, hopefully, stick and it is possible that Russia and Ukraine might broker a deal. We hope for white smoke there and a more stable environment for all. So now, down to the business in hand. It is said that good news doesn't sell newspapers and be that as it may, since the start of January this year, there has

been some great positivity, and it deserves headlines! Beef prices are at record levels; up and higher than what was paid back in June 2022 when record prices were achieved. This year could be the year of a beef resurgence. The sheep trade is very strong with factories willing to pay top prices. The live trade has also jumped upwards. Dairy is still forging ahead and tillage farmers are more confident about prices this harvest season. So there are bright lights at the end of tunnels and green shoots of growth appearing in the agri-scene. This is great for the sector, and for restoring confidence. Now, back to the newly elected Government and its proposed plan for farming in this country. Some of the items on the table include an increase in a sheep and suckler payment scheme, and a farm retirement scheme, which I feel, personally, will open the gates to more young farmers coming in to the business. We have an ageing farmer population; the youth is the future. There is also to be a red-line stance on the controversial Mercosur deal, and we will have more on these developments over the next few months. On the machinery front, I visited LAMMA 2025 last month and what a fantastic show it was! More than 650 stands covering all things agri. Here is a quick roundup of the runners and riders who launched new kit at the show. First up is SlurryKat, the Northern Ireland-based manufacturer, that launched a new 24m dribble bar; Kubota launched the new Kubota M7 series of tractors along with a new Kubota pivot loader; and UK-based Teagle launched two new

models of straw blowers – I will have more on these in later issues. Major Equipment launched a new mulching header for mulching larger materials. Massey launched the new 5M series, Case showed an extensive range of new kit, and New Holland showed its new T5 tractor and all the latest models over all ranges. Mastek uncovered its new Combi Engine Pump, Quicke showed its all-new N-series front loader (full information available from Farmhand), and McHale Engineering showed its new range of balers and rakes for the 2025 grass season. JCB made a big announcement at the show when they formally announced a new dealer set up in Ireland – full details in our machinery section. The company also showed an extensive range of new and upgraded kit as well. Though the Irish tractor market dipped last year by 12 per cent year on year, and the UK had its worst year in tractor sales since 1998, down by 13 per cent, year on year, there was an upbeat and positive mood at LAMMA. Here, as the Spring Farm Machinery shows take place, reports are coming in that the air of confidence is slowly starting to creep in here, too. There are far more positive vibes now than this time last year. To finish, I would like to wish the incoming president of the Farm Tractor and Machinery Trade Association (FTMTA), Maurice Kelly, of Kelly's of Borris, and his new committee, the very best for 2025/2026. Until next month, farm wisely, farm safely!



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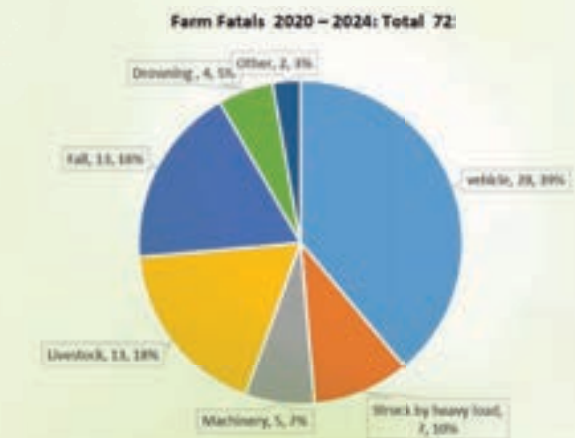
## MAKE FARMING A SAFE BET

Regrettably, the agricultural sector still has the highest rate of workplace fatality and serious injury. In 2024, farming families lost 12 loved ones and many more are coping with looking after a seriously injured member of their family, while making life-changing decisions as to whether they continue to operate the farm or sell up. It may appear heartless to say but very often this painful situation could be avoided.

Over the years, tractors and trailers have remained to the fore as the main causes of fatalities and serious injuries. Brakes not functioning, handbrakes not applied before getting off the tractor, not having full visibility when reversing, stopping on an incline where the tractor slides forwards or backwards, are among the many incidents recorded. Regular vehicle maintenance is not optional, it is essential.

### LONELY WORK

In the five years from 2020 to 2024 there were 72 fatalities. The accompanying chart clearly shows the areas where people working in agriculture need to be extra careful. Farming is a lonely job; in most occupations work is carried out with another worker or with regular interaction with others. Most farmers spend a considerable amount of the working day alone with time to dwell on all their worries, whether financial, prices, pressure of work, family and health. The long working day leaves little time to switch off before the next day starts. Stress and a heavy workload bring with it the temptation to cut corners, to save what may be perceived as valuable time. In reality it takes no more than a few minutes during the day to assess the consequences of your actions: applying the handbrake; dismounting the tractor properly and not jumping down from the cab; cleaning mirrors; taking extra care around



animals, especially newly calved cows; paying attention to your safety when carrying out maintenance on buildings particularly when using ladders and carrying out roof repairs.

Now, I know this might be a case of stating the obvious but unfortunately not following the obvious is the cause of these fatalities, particularly in farmers over 65 who are shown to be the most vulnerable.

### 171 FARM FATALITIES

PAC Ireland is a member of the Farm Safety Partnership Committee, which is an advisory committee to the board of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). It comprises the main farming organisations and they have drawn up a four-year strategy to reduce farm fatalities and serious injuries and to identify mental health and wellbeing issues that need to be addressed. This strategy will be highlighted in the media over the coming months, however, no matter how hard they work or amount of time this committee gives, it will be to no avail unless every farmer takes the time each day to give thought to where they might be vulnerable and to seek help if necessary and to recognise that as we get older we are not as agile as we used to be. Finally, and most importantly, farmers must reject the idea that because you have been doing this all your life, you'll be ok. Everyone is vulnerable. Over the last five years, 71 farmers have lost their lives, with many more seriously injured, and over the last 10 years, a staggering 171 farmers have lost their lives. My wish for 2025 is for all farmers and those who work on farms to arrive home safely – every day!

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Pictured at the opening of the new Digital Experience Centre: Sam Turnnidge, technical specialist - digital solutions and tractors; Andy Bell, digital product manager - onboard digital solutions; James Walsh, digital product manager - offboard digital solutions; Christian Radons, Claas Group executive board member with responsibility for the global service and sales business unit; Rob Fillingham, head of digital business; Trevor Tyrrell, senior vice president (Western Europe & Oceania) Claas; and Simon Brownless, digital solutions consultant.

## CLAAS LAUNCHES NEW DIGITAL EXPERIENCE CENTRE

Claas has developed a new Digital Experience Centre at its UK headquarters at Saxham, Suffolk. The facilities were officially opened before the end of 2024 and form part of Claas's digital platform, Claas connect. This brings together all Claas digital solutions into one cloud-based platform, from machine configuration and product information through to operating instructions, service advice, licence management and precision farming solutions, all seamlessly connected and accessed via a single ID log-in.

According to the company, rapid development of digital technology now available to farmers can be bewildering. The new Digital Experience Centre enables customers to use, experience and be guided through the functions and benefits of Claas connect. Visitors can also

now be walked through the intelligent steering systems available on Claas products, so that they can gain a better understanding of the technology and the benefits this can bring to their business.

Speaking at the opening, Christian Radons, Claas Group executive board member with responsibility for the global service and sales business unit, reiterated the important role that Claas connect plays as an integral part of the connectivity between customers' machines and their farm business software.

The launch of the new Digital Experience Centre follows the establishment of the new Digital Business Team at Saxham which provides both machine-mounted and office-based support for digital solutions, led by Rob Fillingham, head of digital business.






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## JOHN DEERE'S NEW GATOR

### John Deere recently launched its new diesel Gator XUV 875M utility vehicle.

Designed to improve productivity across various tasks, it offers increased cargo capacity, enhanced comfort, and improved functionality, the company says.

Some key features of the new gator include the 22.8hp engine with a fuel tank volume of 42.4 litres, a seating capacity for three (suitable for off-road use), a cargo box capacity of 454kg, and fully independent suspension with 203/229mm travel (front/rear).

According to John Deere, the Gator XUV 875M builds on the reliability of previous models with an updated rear suspension design and tuned shock absorbers to enhance comfort.

Key improvements include relocating the air intake 30cm higher to ensure cleaner air intake, thus protecting the engine. Additionally, the new continuously variable transmission (CVT) air intake and exhaust system helps to draw cleaner air, protecting the system from debris, water, and mud.

The redesigned cargo box of the Gator XUV 875M offers 13 per cent more space than the XUV865M model, allowing for greater carrying capacity. Other key features of the cargo box are:

- ▶ Increased width to enhance cargo capacity and reduce mud sling;
- ▶ 12V SAE power port for added convenience;
- ▶ Five divider slots on the side and three at

the front to secure items;

- ▶ Option to create a second level of storage;
- ▶ Redesigned tailgate with a flat work surface, metric and imperial measurements, v-groove for cutting pipe, anti-gravity pockets, bump stops, and cup holders;
- ▶ Integrated clamping points to secure items;
- ▶ Fold-flat tie-downs in the front-middle and four corners of the load bed;
- ▶ Tie-down pockets for securing loads that obstruct access to the D-rings inside the cargo box; and
- ▶ Four stake pockets on each side to accommodate stake pocket clamps for tool storage.

John Deere product manager for gator utility vehicles and compact utility tractors in Europe, Peter Nelder, commented: "The redesigned cargo box on the Gator XUV 875M is a very significant improvement, offering more space and functionality for our customers. The added width and integrated clamping points provide users with greater flexibility and convenience, making it easier to carry and secure a variety of items."

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Mark Lennox, sales director, DA Forgie, receiving Merlo Dealer of the Year 2024 Award from speaker, Jenny Radcliffe aka 'The People Hacker'; and Shaun Groom, general manager, Merlo UK and Ireland.

## DA FORGIE CELEBRATES OVERALL MERLO AWARD

Northern Ireland-based dealer, DA Forgie, recently scooped the overall win at Merlo's dealer awards, which coincided with the company's annual conference. The conference, titled 'Together We Thrive', featured a wide range of topics presented by industry experts and Merlo team members including market insights from the Construction Equipment Association (CEA) and Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA) who provided valuable overviews of the current industry landscape.

The conference offered the opportunity to recognise and thank Merlo dealers for their outstanding performance throughout 2024, and a number of awards were presented, in addition to DA Forgie's overall award, to companies across the UK. Shaun Groom, general manager, Merlo UK and Ireland said: "We've packed a lot into our conference this year. It's been a fantastic opportunity to share our vision for working together with our dealers, thank them for their support, and together, look forward to embracing the opportunities and innovations that lie ahead in 2025."



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## NEW HORSCH AVATAR LC INCREASES CAPACITY

Horsch recently announced a new model in the Avatar drill family with increased capacity and the ability to deliver up to four separate components. The Avatar 12.25 LC comes as standard with a 9,400-litre triple tank that is split 50:15:35. In addition, a Horsch MiniDrill with a 400-litre capacity can also be mounted to the drill. Available as a 12m model only, the Avatar LC offers a 3,000-litre increase over the 12m Avatar SD. The seed wagon layout increases the drilling window with the large tyre widths reducing compaction even in wet soil conditions. The

double support wheels at the wings ensure low tracks and optimum adaption to the soil. With its one-row design of SingleDisc coulters and a row spacing of 25cm, the Avatar 12.25 LC is ideal for mechanical population control and for different sowing methods, such as direct seed, mulch seed and into standing catch crops. Thanks to the well-proven folding design, the transport dimensions are very compact with an outside width of three metres for road transport. The Avatar is the direct drilling expert that is flexible, robust and precise. It can be used

universally from direct drilling to cultivated soils. The high coulter pressure of up to 350 kg per individual row and maintenance-free bearings ensure a reliable and effective performance. Depth control at the individual coulter and adjustable closing wheels result in precision drilling in a wide range of conditions. The Avatar SD is available from 3m to 8m working widths with a 16cm row spacing, and 8m to 18m with a 25cm row spacing. The Avatar SL is a 6m mounted model with 25cm or 30cm row spacing that operates in combination with the Horsch Partner FT front tank.



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MACHINERY



Pictured at LAMMA 2025: Louise Hemmings, JCB Agriculture general manager; Kevin O'Riordan, Atkins Farm Machinery; Joe Whelan, Whelan's Garage; Billy Murphy, Kilkenny Agri Machinery; Charles Hutcheson, Armstrong Machinery; and JCB Agriculture MD, John Smith.

## JCB RESTRUCTURES IRISH DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

JCB is to restructure the Irish distribution of its growing range of agricultural products in Ireland with the appointment of a network of new dealers, the company announced recently. The appointments take effect from February 1, 2025 and will strengthen JCB's presence in the Irish agricultural market, the company said.

JCB Agriculture MD, John Smith said: "We look forward to working closely with our new dealer network to provide first-class products and support to our agricultural customers. The JCB agricultural range is expanding quickly, and this restructure will allow renewed focus on a market which is very important to JCB." The new distribution arrangements will see the appointment of the following dealers:

- ▶ Whelan's Garage, covering Galway, Clare and Limerick;
- ▶ Atkins Farm Machinery, covering Cork;
- ▶ Kilkenny Agri Machinery, covering Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford, Tipperary and Laois, Carlow, Wicklow, Kildare and Offaly; and
- ▶ Armstrong Machinery, covering Dublin, Meath, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan.



### CAVALLO ZEUS Twin Disc Fertiliser Spreader

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

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



### COSMO Fertiliser spreader

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- 12 Metre Spreading Width
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## LAMMA HITS THE SPOT

NOEL DUNNE TRAVELLED TO THE UK LAST MONTH FOR THE ANNUAL AND HIGHLY ANTICIPATED LAMMA FARM MACHINERY SHOW, WHICH TOOK PLACE IN THE NEC IN BIRMINGHAM. ACROSS 11 HALLS, MORE THAN 650 EXHIBITORS - INCLUDING A LARGE ATTENDANCE OF IRISH MANUFACTURERS - WELCOMED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF VISITORS OVER THE TWO-DAY EVENT, WHERE NETWORKING, KNOWLEDGE STATIONS, AND LAUNCHES WERE THE NAME OF THE GAME. HERE IS A SELECTION OF IMAGES, CAPTURED BY NOEL, OF JUST SOME OF THE IRISH FARMERS, DEALERS, AND MANUFACTURERS WHO ATTENDED LAMMA 2025



Declan Wilson, Coolroe, Co. Laois in front of the all-new Massey 5S - making its LAMMA show debut - with Lindsey Haddon, Agco UK.



Team Atkins from Co. Cork at the Fendt stand at LAMMA 2025: Conor McCarthy, Mark Wolfe, and Kevin O'Riordan.



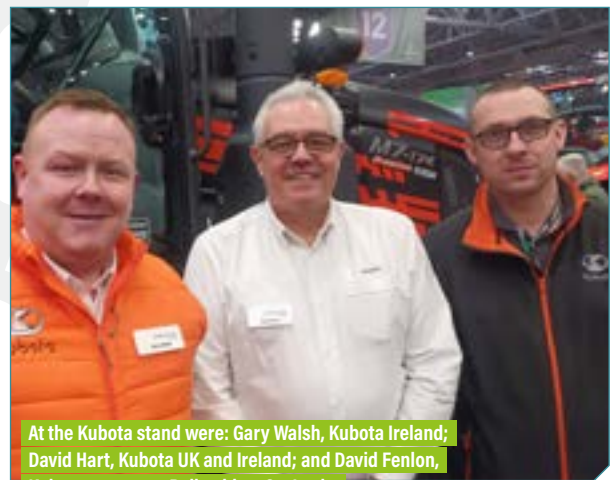
Pictured at the Samasz stand: Karolina Niewiadomska, Samasz, Poland with Irish importers Timmy and Sharon O'Brien, Egmont Agri.



Pictured at the McHale stand: McHale customer, Declan Wilson, Coolroe, Co. Laois with Paul McHale, and Alistair Chambers, Moon, Co. Kildare.



Emma Choptiany and Clodagh Cavanagh from Abbey Machinery at the Abbey Machinery stand.

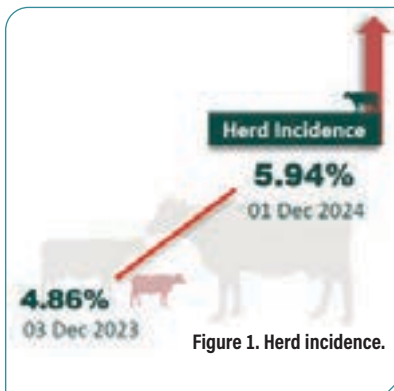


At the Kubota stand were: Gary Walsh, Kubota Ireland; David Hart, Kubota UK and Ireland; and David Fenlon, Kubota customer, Ballyadden, Co. Laois.



Denis Drennan  
President, ICMSA

# TB OR NOT TB – WHAT IS THE QUESTION?



**Last year saw bovine TB become rife in many areas of the country and there is now a real fear – certainly evident in our day-to-day interactions with members and in the contributions made at our December AGM – that the disease may get out of control in 2025.**

The herd incidence (above) in 2024 has risen by over one percentage point over the course of just the previous 12 months. To put this in context, the herd incidence lay at 3.72 per cent in 2019. This shows that the incidence has risen as much in the 12 months up to December 2024 as it had risen in the previous four years!

Figure 2 shows where those new restrictions are being applied across Ireland but without the data for the six counties in the north of Ireland. The red patches indicate the areas where there have been the most frequent 'new' outbreaks while the green does not mean lowest incidence, but the lowest number of 'new' outbreaks. There are areas of the map in green that are among the worst affected areas in the State. Overall, now we have had over 40,000 reactor animals detected and removed in the last 12 months. The breakdown of this shows that over 70 per cent are dairy animals with the remainder either suckler or beef. In fact, as of the present time, we are looking at one in five of all dairy herds down with TB.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

At our national AGM, we heard the secretary general of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Brendan Gleeson, admit that he is losing sleep over the issue, and he was assured 'from the floor' that he is not alone. His anxieties are fully shared by farmers and not least the 6,000 herd owners currently restricted.

On that occasion, Brendan confirmed that there would be a new approach to TB in 2025 and he was assured that the ICMSA is of the firm believe that there needs to a complete overhaul of the programme. We know, for instance, that extra resources will need to be put into the wildlife programme focussed on ensuring that badgers and deer are contained. The picture is harder and more complex when we must look inside of our own farms. The next and much more problematic question arises around the test and what happens if you go down. The test has limitations, these are well known, and no further use is served by listing them. But one fact does bear repeating and that is that even if you have a clear test, you cannot be certain that there is not a reactor still in the herd. This is especially the case if you have had an outbreak in the last three to five years. That fact is indisputable and based on all the data. We are likely looking at extra restrictions being brought forward to deal with those cows that are in a herd that are testing clear – but have been in a herd that has been restricted. These animals are considered high risk and it seems certain that they will be treated differently into the future.

There will also be differences where farmers are asked to blood test their animals after a breakdown on the skin test. Statistics show that those herds who do blood tests after a skin test will last five times longer between breakdown than those who skin test alone.

## CHANGES

The ICMSA is at the table of the TB Forum and is working progressively to ensure that

those farmers whose herds are free from TB stay that way, and make sure those who are restricted get out of that category as quickly as possible. We will insist that farmers are treated with respect in all and every circumstance – and most specifically when they find themselves hit hard by the kind of surging TB stats that we see now. But we must accept that changes – some of which may not be popular – must happen if we are to hold up and begin to push back on this surge. I must repeat what our deputy president said on the matter some months ago: "We cannot go on pursuing TB eradication measures that are demonstrably not working. We can't keep doing what just is not working as bovine TB surges across farms all over the State."

He is right. Whatever we do, we can't stay doing what is obviously failing. ICMSA is ready to hear the new measures, and we'll respond at that stage and in the interests of an effective eradication programme and, most importantly, in the interests of the farmers who are the ultimate victims of the present ineffective system. Quite clearly, treating all farmers involved fairly will be the decisive requirement.

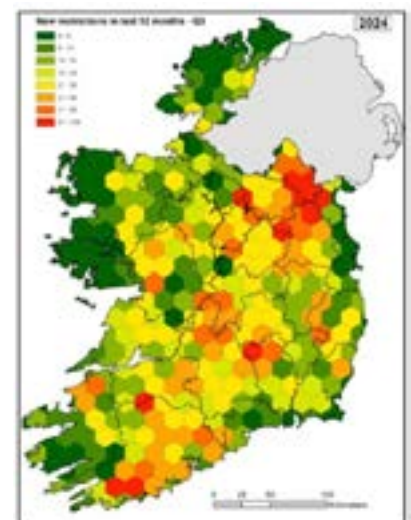


Figure 2.



# A FRESH FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

**SUSTAINABILITY AND AGRICULTURE, AS WE KNOW, ARE LIKE PEAS AND CARROTS AND IN RECENT WEEKS, A GLUT OF LAUNCHES AND PROJECTS WITH A SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED. BERNIE COMMINS REVIEWS THE LATEST IN AWARDS, SOLAR PROJECTS, AND FINANCIAL PRODUCTS**

Last month, Tirlán launched its first dairy and sustainability awards. It is urging its farmer suppliers to enter, or nominate, fellow farmers in recognition of their work to deliver high quality milk sustainably. The Tirlán Dairy and Sustainability Awards 2025 will celebrate the achievements of dairy farmers who demonstrate 'excellent practices in milk quality, animal welfare, farm management and adopting sustainability practices' according to the co-op. John Murphy, Tirlán chairperson, said it is important to recognise and drive awareness among consumers and the general public of the great work carried out by Tirlán farmers.

"Our family-farm suppliers have a long heritage of striving to deliver the highest quality milk from well-managed, grass-fed herds for our consumers to enjoy through our many award-winning products, including the number-one dairy brand Avonmore. They have been exceptional adopters of new technologies and continue to further enhance sustainability on their farms through a focus on reducing on-farm emissions and allowing space for nature."

## ENTRIES

Nominations for the inaugural awards are now open online on [www.tirlanfarmlife.com](http://www.tirlanfarmlife.com), where all information can be found about the award categories. Suppliers will also be selected to go forward

for entry based on criteria including both milk quality test results, technical reports, and sustainability data.

The closing date is February 14. All applications shortlisted will be assessed by a judging panel. The overall award, general awards, and special recognition category winners will be announced at a ceremony on April 29, 2025.

The Cathal Moran Innovation Award will also be offered in recognition of innovative practices on farm within the Tirlán catchment area. Cathal Moran was always recognised as an enthusiastic adopter of new technologies as part of the Tirlán Teagasc Future Farm programme and always strove to be innovative and lead by example. "We would like to offer this award to recognise those who strive to innovate with a vision of improving their farm sustainably for the future," said John. Two further special recognition awards will acknowledge exceptional contributions of Tirlán milk drivers and farm employees.

## DAWN MEATS' SOLAR PROJECT

Meanwhile, in Co. Waterford, Dawn Meats continues its quest for sustainability by investing €1.5m in a newly completed solar panel project at its Grannagh site. The 18-month project involved the installation of 3,500 solar roof panels covering 8,397 square metres. The panels will produce 1,560,000kWh of power annually, which is



## SINCE 2020, DAWN MEATS HAS SOURCED 100 PER CENT RENEWABLE ENERGY TO POWER ITS SITES. WITH FURTHER INVESTMENT, THE COMPANY IS WORKING TOWARDS ON-SITE RENEWABLE ENERGY GENERATION ACROSS ALL SITES AS PART OF ITS PLAN FOUR ZERO SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

### FINDING VALUE IN WASTE

Veterinary pharmaceutical company, Norbrook, recently published its first-ever sustainability report, which the company says underscores its commitment to 'creating positive environmental and community impacts.' The report highlighted Norbrook's recycling of 98 per cent of its waste, with just 2 per cent being non-recyclable. One 'groundbreaking' process, according to Norbrook, to manage the non-recyclable waste transforms non-recyclable materials into solid recovered fuel (SRF), which is used by the cement industry as a cleaner alternative to traditional fossil fuels. This helps to reduce landfill use and methane emissions and lower the demand for oil, coal and gas. The cumulative effect of greener energy transition efforts since 2016 have led to a 63 per cent decline in carbon emissions.

,the equivalent of 40 per cent of the yearly electricity usage at the Grannagh site. The energy generated is enough to power 210 homes for an entire year and is expected to deliver a return on investment in four and a half years, depending on future electricity unit price rates. The Grannagh site was deemed suitable for the use of solar panels as its southern location offers optimal sunlight exposure. It also had available roof space, which meant the project did not require additional planning permission. The move is part of the company's wider plans to maximise renewable energy generation at its sites and similar solar facilities are due to be installed at other Dawn Meats plants in Ireland and the UK. Since 2020, Dawn Meats has sourced 100 per cent renewable energy to power its sites. With further investment, the company is working towards on-site renewable energy generation across all sites as part of its Plan Four Zero sustainability strategy.

### SUSTAINABILITY-LINKED LOANS FOR TILLAGE FARMERS

Irish Distillers is partnering with Bank of Ireland to offer sustainability-linked loans to tillage farmers for the very first time. These Enviroflex loans are designed to incentivise farmers to continue implementing sustainability focused improvements on their land.

Irish Distillers is now the first to partner with Bank of Ireland to support the roll-out of these loans to the tillage sector, with sustainability-linked financing now available to participants of Irish Distillers' Sustainable Green Spring Barley Scheme.

This scheme was launched in 2020 and is a tailored sustainability

programme for barley growers to support the long-term viability of the spring-barley sector in Ireland by incentivising and rewarding growers for delivering environmental and biodiversity initiatives on their farms. The programme is founded on three major commitments:

1. Enhancing biodiversity on Irish tillage farms;
2. Improving the sustainability of the spring barley sector; and
3. Supporting farmers in reducing their carbon footprint.

To qualify for an additional financial premium as part of this scheme, barley growers are required to implement eight essential measures, and must also choose an additional three to four measures which specifically have a direct and positive impact on biodiversity. Graham Caulwell, head of sustainability and compliance, Irish Distillers commented: "Irish Distillers has a proud history of buying quality grain from Irish farmers to produce our whiskeys and we are committed to working in partnership with our growers to respond to the challenges of climate change and to promote sustainable agriculture through initiatives such as our Sustainable Green Spring Barley Scheme. "We are proud to partner with Bank of Ireland to provide further funding options to tillage farmers to strengthen our shared goal of improving our collective environmental footprint through new practices and innovative technologies and supporting the economic viability of barley growing in Ireland."

### DAIRYGOLD'S SUSTAINABILITY BONUS

Dairygold recently announced that it is updating its Grassroots Milk Supplier Sustainability Bonus to offer a 33 per cent increase in the payment, which will result in approximately €14m being paid out to participating farmers annually.

The Grassroots Milk Supplier Sustainability Bonus was introduced in 2023, offering 0.75c/L (equivalent) of milk to participating milk suppliers. Since its launch in 2023, Dairygold has paid out more than €17m to participating milk suppliers and 93 per cent of milk supplied to Dairygold is sourced from farms participating in the Grassroots programme.

This updated bonus offers Dairygold suppliers the opportunity to receive 1c/L (equivalent) by participating in impactful sustainability actions, including protecting water quality, use of protected urea to reduce greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions, participation in a soil health programme, engaging in milk recording herd health and genetics programmes along with farmer training and education. It also includes new elements, focused on farm nutrient balance training and action, and on herd genetics. Nutrient balance is a leading metric for water quality impact. Awareness of it at individual farm level will help to drive additional appropriate action to protect water quality. The herd genetics measures, including dairy beef, will further enhance herd performance to support more sustainable and profitable farming.



MATT O'KEEFFE  
EDITOR



## CHARGING TOWARDS A FOSSIL-FUEL-FREE FUTURE

The new Government programme is both comprehensive, in a general way, and quite vague in the provision of specifics in many instances. One instance is the strategy on advancing renewable-energy production on land and sea. The amount of activity on the ground is quite astounding. Comparing it to a gold rush is not an exaggeration. Nearly every landowner in the country has been approached with a view to siting wind turbines, or installing land or roof-based solar panels. And we haven't seen the half of it yet, as the biodigester industry begins to crank up where farmers will be inundated with offers to supply grass, silage, beet, slurry and other feed sources for the production of biomethane. Hardly a day passes without some reference in the media, online and elsewhere, to another renewable project in planning, passed for development, objected to, appealed, being constructed or up and running. The courts have become involved, adjudicating on whether environmental and renewable energy dictates take priority over planning decisions and county development plans.

### LONG-TERM IMPACT?

The game is on, and little or no analysis or impact assessment has gone into the long-term implications of many of these developments, over and above the seemingly absolute necessity to change the country from being fossil fuel-dependent to renewable

### THE COURTS HAVE BECOME INVOLVED, ADJUDICATING ON WHETHER ENVIRONMENTAL AND RENEWABLE ENERGY DICTATES TAKE PRIORITY OVER PLANNING DECISIONS

energy dependent. The recent storm and snow-induced electricity outages have not created a discussion on whether we should even be entirely rocking to the AC/DC tune that seems to be the only path ahead. At the risk of suggesting that the absolute sanctity of landownership rights should not be entirely sacrosanct, there is merit in at least discussing and developing some broad guidelines around land use for solar and other energy-production uses. If farmers can make more return from developing solar units on their farms, they should be perfectly entitled to do so, up to a point. Is it the best use of fertile land in a world where food-productive land is becoming increasingly scarce? At a micro individual farm level, it is for landowners to make up their own minds. At a macro national land use level, there should be at least room for discussion and prioritisation. Where there are alternative means of achieving solar renewable goals from a national perspective, they should be prioritised and incentivised

to the extent that they at least compete, from a financial return perspective, with turning thousands of acres of fertile land into solar complexes.

### PRACTICAL PROPOSITION

Imagination is required. Solar panel installation on farm buildings is going ahead at speed. That's a positive development. Take the scenario one step further, if only for the sake of debate. Is the cost for developers of covering entire farmyards with roofing to facilitate solar panel installation greater than the cost of submerging solar panel-bearing buttresses into thousands of acres of cropland? A secondary benefit from this strategy would be the further mitigation of run-off from farmyards entering our streams and rivers. The construction of solar panelled roofs over every uncovered slurry tank on every farm in the country, co-financed by solar developers and carbon taxes is a practical proposition. Of course, developers prefer economies of scale. That imprimatur should be at least diluted by the need to ensure that we do not look back in 20 years' time and wonder why we let it happen. There is a seemingly endless flood of investment available to develop renewable energy projects. That is not a good enough reason to let the sector develop without the thought, at least, that there may be better ways of progressing towards a fossil fuel-free future.

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