

# IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY



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EDITOR, ANDREW MEREDITH

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MARCH 2025

# EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

## STRIDE ON

**The rising tide in cattle prices is certainly lifting all boats. Every category of animal from newborn calf to finished steer has seen an increase in price for sellers and is a welcome experience after several years of mediocre values.**

Prices are still considerably adrift of what is available across the Irish Sea, an issue I discuss with Andrew Meredith, editor of the UK's *Farmers Weekly* in this issue. Leaving that pricing discrepancy aside – some of which can be attributed to UK domestic consumers preference for locally produced British beef – the higher price thresholds couldn't have come at a better time for Irish livestock producers. The beef suckler herd has been under pressure for several years as evidenced by year-on-year reductions in suckler farmer numbers. Price hasn't been the only reason for the decline in numbers, but higher prices, provided they solidify over an extended period, will certainly deliver more confidence into the sector. Livestock production costs generally have risen in recent years and margins have been increasingly tight, so the higher prices we are experiencing have provided a welcome respite.

Right now, there is a global beef deficit, with droughts and other pressures driving breeding numbers down in some major beef-producing regions, none more so than in the US. Even if climatic conditions, conducive to a surge in production, improve in the US, that will take time to feed into the finished beef market. Being realistic, we must take note of the risk of some consumer resistance to higher prices. In a deficit scenario, that should only have a limited impact, at least in the short term, as the ongoing global growth in middle-class consumers and a consequent rise in discretionary spending should offset any reticence to pay more for beef, as a recognised premium meat product. We should not, however, underestimate the potential for growth in global cattle

production over the longer term. The predicted rise in South American beef output, with spectacular growth in cattle numbers expected on Brazilian cattle farms over the coming decade, should also provide a note of caution. On the contrary, Irish beef production is unlikely to increase substantially, if at all, over the coming period. There are too many downside pressures to anticipate any other outcome. Even if Irish suckler cow numbers stabilise – an unlikely outcome – lower carcass weights, driven by younger slaughtering and a greater proportion of lighter-finishing Angus/Hereford cattle coming from the dairy herd, will impact total tonnages produced nationally. That suggests ongoing supply-side pressures on beef processors – a good outcome for producers. However, given that we export 90 per cent of production, prices will still be impacted by global pricing and production volumes. Mercosur, if ratified, as is increasingly likely, will eventually dampen European and Irish beef pricing, as will any surge in British beef purchases from Australia and New Zealand. Increased UK beef imports arising from the trade agreements now in place between the UK and Australia/New Zealand have not yet materialised, with closer export outlets, especially China, soaking up extra production from Australian cattle farms. China's efforts to increase domestic supply, allied to heightened geopolitical trade friction, could have negative consequences, sooner or later, on Irish beef prices. Another space we must monitor closely is the demand trend for white meats. Already significantly cheaper than red meat, chicken and pork are the real competitors for global consumer meat preference. The strides made in productivity and technology adoption by the white meat production sectors have not been matched by the land-demanding red meat sectors. Not all the challenges are at the other side of the fence.

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## TRACTOR SALES DOWN BY 11 PER CENT

**Tractor sales, that much relied-on indicator of farmer confidence, were down by 11 per cent in January compared to the same month in 2024.**

While livestock prices have picked up considerably and should put buying power into the sector, grain prices remain in the doldrums and tillage farmers may be holding off on big-ticket purchases including tractors. It's early days yet, however, and January was impacted by an extended Christmas break as well as significant snow and storm disruptions. The figures for February weren't available at time of print but will hopefully show some upward trends as machinery dealers look towards the early months for their highest sales. A total of 382 new tractors were registered in January, the Farm Tractor and Machinery Trade Association (FTMTA) confirmed to *Irish Farmers Monthly*. Cork continued its record of highest new tractor registrations with 54 tractors sold

in January, outselling the Tipperary region with 45 tractors sold, and Galway some distance behind with 25 sales. Over one quarter of tractor sales in January were in the 161hp to 200hp bracket, while the 100hp to 140hp category decreased in popularity by almost five percentage points. Meanwhile, the demand for higher, 200hp plus, horsepower tractors was stable, accounting for more than one in 10 purchases, meaning that the ongoing trend towards higher horsepower continues. Demand for imported second-hand tractors was slightly down on the comparable January 2024 statistics at one 194 units. Telescopic loader purchases, which had been increasing year on year, fell in January 2025 compared to the same month in 2024. Sales totalled 156, a reduction of four units compared to January 2024, with JCB and Manitou continuing to dominate, sharing almost 80 per cent of the market between the two brands.



Midlands MEP,  
Maria Walsh.

## MEPs ACTIVE ON EU AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

**Recently, Midlands MEP, Maria Walsh, was appointed to a new role on the EU Agriculture Committee.** She is now the standing rapporteur for UK matters on the European Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. She will report back on policy issues discussed by the Committee around UK/EU interactions. The MEP has been noticed as a regular user of X and LinkedIn as have her fellow Irish MEPs, Barry Cowen and Cian Mullooly. Both new European Parliament representatives have hit the ground running with Cowen appointed to the Agricultural Committee, and Mullooly registered as a substitute member of the critical policy-making body. Mullooly appointed the former ICMSA president, Pat O'Rourke, to look after his public relations (PR) in Ireland, while in Brussels John Harkin, son of former MEP Marian Harkin, will look after PR. Another strong connection with Irish agri lobbying is the appointment by Barry Cowen of Paddy Gunning as his adviser. Gunning is a son of the former IFA senior executive, Gerry Gunning, the same period in 2022.

## NATIONAL CULTIVATE WEEK

**Next month, Cultivate Credit Union will host National Cultivate Week, bringing together Credit Unions and their members to highlight the important roles farmers play in their local communities.** It's all part of the Credit Union movement's efforts to attract more clients in the farming community. Strictly speaking, as a co-operative body, Credit Union clients could be referred to as shareholders. The agriculture-focused Cultivate loan programme has been making impressive inroads into farm lending since the initiative was launched by a group of Galway-based Credit Unions eight years ago. Since then, Cultivate has positioned itself nationally as a strong alternative to the pillar banks in relation to farmer lending, with the most recent lending review for the first half of 2024 showing Cultivate farming loans up 33 per cent on the same period in 2023 and up 128 per cent on the same period in 2022.



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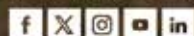


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## FUNDING IS THE CRUX

The so-called Vision for European Agriculture faces one overarching obstacle. While noises around the next CAP and general EU agricultural policies are positive, there is unlikely to be increased funding available, so it remains a case of the cake being spread more thinly across the major priorities. Environmental rehabilitation will continue to be centre stage, and funding will reflect that fact. Food production, over and above basic EU food security thresholds, will not be a priority, despite utterances to the contrary. Ultimately,

that will determine the direction of Irish and European farming over the coming decades. The ongoing march towards levelling EU farm payments under the convergence programme will ultimately reset food production in favour of extensive rather than intensive farming. The distant prospect of Ukraine joining the European Union should jolt European farmers into realising the real implications of competing with large scale landholdings, especially in grain production. Ukrainian membership is not a realisable prospect for many years

ahead, if ever. Russia will not contemplate Ukraine joining NATO and neither will it look favourably, in any lopsided peace negotiation aided and abetted by President Trump, on the country joining the European Union. Meanwhile Western Europe will continue to increase spending on defence as the US retreats from its long-standing protection of its fellow NATO members on the Continent. That leaves no additional funding available for supporting agriculture, no matter what soft words are uttered to the contrary.

## AGRI AWARE'S FARM WALK & TALK SERIES

**Returning for a sixteenth consecutive year, Agri Aware's Farm Walk & Talk series sees more than 4,000 students attend 15 events scheduled (from February 26) to March 20.**

The Agri Aware team, alongside event partners Teagasc, the *Irish Farmers Journal*, the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science and patrons will deliver talks and demonstrations on all elements of

the Leaving Certificate agricultural science curriculum at each of the events.

Agri Aware's executive director, Marcus O'Halloran explained that Farm Walk & Talk is the organisation's flagship secondary school event. He said that the need to promote the leaving

certificate agricultural science subject has never been greater. He said that although the event is designed for students already studying the subject, there is hope that the awareness created by the series creates will encourage younger students to take the subject.



Students studying agricultural science for the Leaving Certificate will have the chance to engage with industry experts and gain hands-on experience at one of Agri Aware's Farm Walk & Talk events.



Agri Aware chair, Shay Galvin with the national winners of the Farm Safety First programme Gavin Joy, Eoin Quilter and Eoghan O'Regan from St Michael's College, Listowel, Co. Kerry, alongside Minister of State with Responsibility for Farm Safety at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Healy-Rae.

## MOTORISED MAGNETIC SLURRY COVER WINS AWARD

Students Eoin Quilter, Gavin Joy, and Eoghan O'Regan from St Michael's College in Listowel, Co. Kerry won the group award at the Agri Aware Farm Safety First programme. Participating students were tasked with creating something that reflected their learnings from the Farm Safety First programme. Eoin, Gavin and Eoghan worked together to design a motorised magnetic slurry tank cover. The students said they believe that young farmers are more likely to embrace innovative ideas and technology to make farms safer and their design is targeted towards that audience.

Minister of State with responsibility for Farm Safety at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Healy-Rae recently presented prizes to the national winners of the Agri Aware Farm Safety First programme.

Presenting the students with their award certificates and a prize of €600, the minister said: "Eoin, Gavin and Eoghan and their teacher Rebecca Stapleton are to be congratulated for their work and innovation to improve safety around slurry handling by designing a motorised and magnetic slurry tank cover. Slurry is an important resource on our farms, but we must never forget that slurry is potentially lethal, and its storage, handling and spreading are high risk activities which have led to close calls, injuries and unfortunately, fatalities."

The Farm Safety First programme is supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. It aims to raise awareness about the challenges and dangers in farming, promote safe farm practices and provide guidance to transition year students currently working on farms or considering a future in farming. The programme covers a range of farm safety topics, including personal safety, identifying hazards, livestock safety, and best practices when working with machinery. The programme has been a great success in its pilot year, according to Agri Aware, receiving a wide range of creative entries from students nationwide. In its first year, the programme saw more than 6,300 students register to participate in the programme. Furthermore, 35 farm safety workshops were held across the country, complemented by farm safety videos and other resources for students to engage with.



## Best practices to encourage rumen development

Maevé Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

While the initial days/weeks of calf rearing may appear to be the most labour-intensive stage for farmers, the first season at grass can prove a more difficult phase for them to manage.

Nutritionally, success is measured by developing the calf as best as possible prior to introducing grazed grass. Given that newborn calves are born with undeveloped rumens, the initial objective is to assist such rumen development prior to being weaned off milk. This enables them to become cost-effective forage consumers.

Rumen development begins within the first few days of life and is advanced by exposure to healthy bacteria from the environment and the consumption of solid feeds. Introducing a palatable calf-starter ration/nut from three days of age (18% Crude Protein) is important, along with access to fresh, clean water and high-quality clean straw ad-libitum (no haylage/silage).

Weaning on a weight basis alone can create a false sense of security in terms of how ready calves are for the next stage of nutrition. Weaning shouldn't be considered until calves are intaking a minimum of 1.5kg concentrate/day in grouped pens – which indicates that the calf's dry matter intakes can cope with the transition to a 100% solid diet.

Year-on-year, cases of calves suffering from setbacks following their introduction to grass can also prove a major influencing factor.

Nutritionally, Spring grass can be high in oils like conjugated linoleic acid, sugars and potentially nitrogen, which young, underdeveloped rumens can find it hard to adjust to. Low covers of grass also have very little fibre, which is a key substrate for good rumen health.

Calves aren't fully functioning ruminants, which is why additional care and attention is required at so critical a phase in their development.

Greater rumen development in early life can help combat such issues, alongside the following: offering concentrates post-turnout, grazing slightly heavier covers until calves have adapted to grazing, offering a fibre source to ease the transition and/or strip grazing calves to ensure stem content is also being grazed.

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



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## InTouch

### FOCUS FOR 100

CATHAL BOHANE,  
INTOUCH NUTRITION

As mentioned in my previous article, Alltech has commenced a campaign called Focus for 100, highlighting the importance of the first 100 days of a cow's lactation. This is the period during which we have the most influence over the health, productivity, and fertility of the animal for the season ahead. However, it is also the time when we face the greatest challenges in these areas. The block nature of the spring-calving cycle means that any issue that develops can quickly 'snowball' into a significant problem, potentially derailing the season. Having worked with farmers in Ireland for over 40 years, we have identified a list of common issues and their solutions, which form the focus of this campaign. One such issue is low milk protein levels around mid-March. When cows calve, they mobilise body fat or condition to compensate for their low intake – this is known as negative energy balance (NEB). Initially, cows will produce exceptionally high milk protein and butterfat levels – much higher than typically expected for the herd. Unfortunately, this can create a false impression that an inadequate diet is working well. The real impact is not exposed until around mid-March, or approximately six weeks post-calving, when cows approach a positive energy balance and begin to lose significantly less body condition – or may have no more to lose. At this stage, milk protein percentages reflect the actual diet and body condition of the cows. While a return to more normalised milk protein levels is expected, they can sometimes be too low, with herd averages around 3.10 per cent – indicating that some cows may be producing <3 per cent, which is concerning.

Steps to counteract or prevent this:

- ▶ Post-calving, a cow's diet should be based on peak milk yield rather than current or average yields.
- ▶ Maximise intake, whether from grazed grass, silage, or concentrate. Cows should never be left hungry or without feed for extended periods. While quality is important, quantity is usually the limiting factor in early lactation.
- ▶ Base concentrate levels on milk yield and silage quality, which should be tested. As a general rule, for average-quality silage, every kilogramma of milk should receive 0.33kg of concentrate. This can be adjusted upwards for poor silage and downwards for high-quality silage, alternative feeds like maize, or if cows are grazing.
- ▶ Maximise the proportion of grazed grass in early lactation and meet grazing targets to support subsequent rotations.
- ▶ Adjust feeding levels appropriately in response to weather changes. When cows' diets shift due to adverse weather, revert to indoor feeding levels for concentrates. Grass intake can drop by 4-5kg of DM, so simply adding 1-2kg in the parlour is insufficient – silage may be required.
- ▶ Support rumen health by balancing effective and digestible fibre in the diet – such as straw, silage, and pulp/hulls. Adding a live yeast supplement to the concentrate can also help mitigate fluctuations in rumen function.
- ▶ Monitor body condition changes by taking pictures of cows from behind with your phone for reference. You may be surprised by the differences over time.

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## TEAGASC APPOINTS NEW CATTLE SPECIALIST

Teagasc has appointed a new cattle specialist, David Argue (pictured above), who will be based at Ballyhaise and will cover the northeast of the country. David is a sustainable agriculture graduate (Hons) from Dundalk Institute of Technology, and has also completed a MSc. in animal behaviour and welfare at Queens University Belfast.

David is currently a Teagasc business and technology drystock advisor covering Louth/Meath/Dublin/Laois/Kildare advisory region. He previously worked as a Teagasc Green Acres calf-to-beef cattle advisor and in his early career he was an education officer in both Ballyhaise Agricultural College and in the Teagasc Advisory Office in Teagasc Claremorris. He is from a drystock farming background in Co. Cavan. Speaking following his appointment, David said: "I'm looking forward to working with farmers, advisors and the wider agricultural industry, bringing science-backed technical messages to support cattle farmers to be profitable and sustainable. For example, there are opportunities for more farmers, both dairy and beef producers, to use the Commercial Beef Value (CBV) index as a criteria for purchasing calves. By integrating this innovative technology farmers can gain invaluable insights into the genetic potential of the calves particularly regarding carcass weight, conformation, and predicted age at slaughter." Pearse Kelly, head of Teagasc's drystock knowledge-transfer department said David brings valuable experience and knowledge to the cattle-specialist team. "I look forward to working closely with him as we exchange technical knowledge with cattle producers, from the Teagasc beef research programme."





Damien O'Reilly  
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

## LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

**The EU Commissioner for Food and Agriculture, Christoph Hansen, has hit the ground running in his first 100 days.** He has appointed his 27-person European Board on Agriculture and Food (EBAF), which includes a representative each from COPA and COGECA, the European umbrella body of which ICOS and the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) are members. And, he has published a 28-page *Vision for the Future of Agriculture* document which 'aims to create a fair and competitive food system that provides affordable and sustainable food for everyone.'

It is a follow on from the Strategic Dialogue set up 12 months ago by EU president, Ursula von der Leyen, to mend fences with farmers who protested across Europe – angry with the unworkable legislative proposals that the Commission was pushing on farmers, but which were totally unworkable. It was a concession by the EU Commission that the authoritarian approach spearheaded by former EU Commissioner, Franz Timmermans (since returned to the Netherlands to head the Green Party) was over the top.

The EBAF will be chaired by Commissioner Hansen and among its aims includes providing high-level advice to the Commission on strategic policy developments for the Vision for the Future of Agriculture, published recently. This much anticipated document does what it says on the tin; it sets out the Commission's vision for the agri-food sector during the course of this mandate and beyond. Cynics might say it's just window dressing by the Commission to keep farmers off the streets of Brussels. But the more pragmatic reaction is that at least the Commission recognises the important societal role that farmers and co-operatives play in the EU. Farmers are recognised as entrepreneurs and innovators who play a crucial role in addressing climate challenges, protecting the environment, supporting the bioeconomy, and contributing to society as a whole. The vision document also identifies the sector's demographic and economic fragilities, bringing the issues of farm income, competitiveness, innovation, cooperation and generational renewal back to the fore. In fact, the Commission seems serious about finding ways to make farming more attractive to young farmers. The age profile of farmers is not just an Irish problem, it is EU-wide with 12 per cent of farmers under 40 years' old.

One hundred days into his new job, Hansen is saying all the right things and the fact that he will be the chair of the EBAF is a positive sign of walking the walk. But his biggest challenge will be protecting and improving the Common Agricultural Policy and its financing as part of the much-anticipated multiannual financial framework.



## CASE STUDY CORK 2020: IMPROVING PREGNANCY RATES IN HEIFERS WITH INJECTABLE TRACE MINERALS

Herd fertility in pasture-based dairy farms is a key driver of farm economics<sup>1</sup>. According to Teagasc, "a cow calving in May will generate €400 less profit than a cow calving in February, due to higher feed costs and reduced yield. For every 100 cows, compact calving is worth on average €10,000 – €12,000 (€100 – €120 per cow/ year)"<sup>2</sup>.

Age is particularly important in farming systems with restricted calving periods. Teagasc advise that the first step towards improving calving distribution is ensure heifers conceive early in the breeding season to generate large numbers of early-calving heifers<sup>1,2</sup>.

On a pasture-based farm in Cork in 2019 a farmer reported fertility issues in a group of 22 mixed British and Holstein Friesian heifers weighing 340-390 kg. Submission rate was low as only 17/22 received AI. Only 14/17 held to first service and 5 heifers did not come bulling for the first 3 weeks of the breeding season - all heifers eventually went in calf to the bull by the end of June when he was removed. When some of the heifers calved it was at the end of April, too late in the farmer's opinion.

The farmer wanted to get as many replacement heifers from these heifers as possible. He used conventional semen and each heifer only got one straw before the bull was introduced after the first 3 weeks. Due to the poor submission rate and his late calving heifers in 2019, the farmer sought advice from his local vet and in 2020 the farmer treated his heifers with a combination injectable trace mineral containing Zinc, Copper, Manganese and Selenium, 30 days prior to AI.

In the 2020 group there were 20 heifers - a submission rate of 90% in the first 3 weeks of breeding was achieved with 18/20 in calf to first service AI, the remaining 2 heifers showed signs of oestrus later but did not receive AI. The overall result therefore was a 90% submission rate in the first 3 weeks of service with 95% in calf to first service. Of the remaining heifers, one heifer held her first service to the bull and the other held to her second service. They were all scanned on the 7/08/20 and 20/20 were in calf > 85 days with 18 > 105 days in calf.

	2019	2020
Submission rate	77%	90%
Pregnancy in first 3wks of Breeding Season	64%	95%

It is estimated that every open day outside of the compact calving window costs the system €3.08/day/head<sup>3</sup>.

Heifers born in the first 21 days of the breeding season will come off grass heavier and hit puberty earlier meaning more efficient reproduction in the herd, a key driver of profitability. Age and weight at first breeding are closely correlated<sup>1</sup>. Heifers that were heavier at the start of breeding had increased incidence of oestrus and higher pregnancy rates at the end of the season than lighter animals<sup>1</sup>. In a 2013 study, it was reported that younger calving heifers achieved more days in milk over 5 years, with >44% of their days alive spent in milk production compared with only 18% - 40% in cows calving later<sup>4</sup>. Thus, good heifer fertility results in the best subsequent performance in future lactations.

Pre-breeding supplementation helps to raise not only the trace minerals but also the essential enzyme levels rapidly and effectively which could assist farmers to get cows and heifers back in calf in a tighter calving pattern.

A study from a leading US university demonstrated that cows receiving injectable trace mineral supplementation prior to mating had improved conception rates to fixed time AI and an improved calving distribution compared to those that did not receive supplementation<sup>5</sup>.

**Further information available from: Virbac Ltd. Unit 16 Woolpit Business Park, Windmill Avenue, Woolpit, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP30 9UP.**

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Tommy Ryan, Doon, Co. Limerick; Lydia McGrath, Rathourcey, Ballincurra, Midleton, Co. Cork; Denis Drennan, president of ICMSA; Andrew Graham, Wells, Gorey, Co. Wicklow; and Cian Commons, Brownstown, Navan, Co. Meath at the presentation of the cheques.

## FARMING STUDENTS PRESENTED WITH JOHN FEELY SCHOLARSHIP CHEQUES

**Four farming students were recently presented with the 2024 John Feely Foundation Scholarships.**

Tommy Ryan from Limerick; Lydia McGrath from Cork; Andrew Graham from Wicklow; and Cian Commons from Meath, were each presented with €1,500 at a special reception at the ICMSA's head office in Limerick, John Feely House.

ICMSA president, Denis Drennan appealed to the young farming students to stay in contact with the organisation and to engage with their fellow farmers through responsible

groups that can analyse and help bring forward the solutions that would allow their own and future generations of Irish farmers to thrive.

This scholarship is open to sons and daughters of ICMSA members who are in their first year of studying farming or specified farm-related courses at accredited institutions or colleges. A scholarship is reserved for each of the ICMSA's four regions and nominations must be made by a member and submitted from September to a published date before the AGM.

## FARMERS URGED TO ACT ON ZONED LAND TAX

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) is reminding farmers with land that may fall under the scope of the residential zoned land tax (RZLT) to make themselves fully aware of the 2025 updated zoning maps in their county. These maps were updated in January. Lands that are zoned residential and serviced are liable for the tax at 3 per cent of the market value.

Following on from lobbying on RZLT by IFA last year, the then Minister for Finance, Jack Chambers, announced an exemption for landowners in Budget 2025. In order to avail of this one-year exemption, landowners must make an application to their local authority to have their lands re-zoned based on the current economic activity on the land. IFA farm business chair, Bill O'Keeffe, says that landowners with affected land must apply before March 31 to their local county council to de-zone their land, if they wish to avail of this exemption. Details of how to make a submission for de-zoning are available on the website of each local authority.

The IFA says it believes that hundreds of farmers around the country have land on the outskirts of towns and villages that has been zoned residential, often without the knowledge of the landowner. It is important that landowners check the zoned land maps in their county.

"The IFA has objected to RZLT being imposed on farmland since it was first announced in 2021 and continues to campaign for a permanent solution that will remove farmland from the scope of RZLT. The exemption announced in last year's budget is only in place for 2025," said Bill.

"We all understand the need to build new homes, but the RZLT is not the instrument that will solve the current deficit in housing supply. There are many other barriers to the supply of new housing that the Government needs to address. IFA will continue this campaign to have all farmland excluded from the scope of RZLT. It is important that farmers realize they must act before the March deadline and apply for their lands to be re-zoned regardless of previous applications," he said.

## INDUSTRIAL HEMP POTENTIAL HIGHLIGHTED

**Teagasc and Textiles Composites International recently hosted the Industrial Hemp Conference at the Teagasc's Ashtown Food Research Centre.**

The event aimed to draw attention to the promising role of industrial hemp in sustainable development, while also highlighting the need for strategic market and structural developments to support its growth in Ireland.

The conference brought together industry experts, stakeholders, and innovators, focused on hemp's potential to revolutionise sectors such as construction, biotextiles, and the bioeconomy.

Barry Caslin, Teagasc's energy and rural development specialist provided a cautious

perspective on hemp cultivation for Irish farmers. While hemp offers numerous agronomic benefits, such as improving soil health and acting as an excellent break crop, he emphasised the importance of establishing robust markets and structures before encouraging widespread cultivation. "This event marks a starting point and catalyst for growth in this sector; however, the right structures need to be in place to ensure success," he noted. Panel discussions addressed friendly building practices, sustainable fashion, and policy frameworks, and experts shared insights on hemp's fire-retardant properties, carbon-sequestration capabilities, and its potential to transform the construction sector.

## MINISTER CALLS ON PUBLIC TO PROTECT OUR BIRDS

**Minister for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity, Christopher O'Sullivan is calling on the public to protect our birds and nature as the spring season begins.**

The bird nesting season for our garden and countryside birds takes place from March 1 to August 31. During this time, wildlife - notably birds - will begin constructing their homes and bringing new life into their habitats. Hedgerows provide shelter, as well as food, for them and other wildlife and legislation prohibits damage to hedgerows from the beginning of March until the end of August, with limited exemptions.

Commenting, the minister said: "At this time of year we all love to hear and see our birds as they go about building their nests, finding a mate, preparing to breed and fledge their chicks. Hedgerows are a unique feature of the Irish landscape, playing an important role in biodiversity, agriculture, and cultural heritage. Good quality hedgerows are especially important to provide food and shelter for our birds and protect their nests and eggs from predators. By protecting our hedgerows, we are ensuring that our most precious birds and wildlife are protected at a time when they are at their most vulnerable."

Under Section 40 of the Wildlife Act 1976 the cutting, grubbing, burning or other destruction of 'vegetation growing in any hedge or ditch' between March 1 and August 31 is prohibited to safeguard nesting birds and other wildlife during their critical breeding season.

Irish legislation recognises that there may be some circumstances when hedgecutting is required for specific and important reasons. These exemptions from the restricted hedge cutting season only apply in a limited range of circumstances. Hedgecutting may be allowed to ensure public safety, such as preventing obstruction of public roads or maintaining sightlines at junctions. But it is still an offence under Section 22 of the Wildlife Act 1976 to willfully destroy, injure, or mutilate the eggs or nest of a wild bird or to willfully disturb a wild bird on or near a nest containing eggs or un-flown young birds at any time of the year. It is strongly advised that works take place outside the nesting season. If works must take place when nesting birds may be present, it is necessary to carry out checks for

nests and breeding birds prior to such works being undertaken. And there is no exemption to the burning of vegetation during the closed/restricted season.

Niall Ó Donnchú, NPWS director general said: "Members of the public, landowners and farmers are key partners for us in our nature protection work. And we know that we can rely on that partnership for nature. As ever, we appeal to the public and landowners to be aware of their obligations under Section 40 of the Wildlife Act and to take the necessary precautions to protect our wildlife. Your hedgerow is their home." He added that breaches of the Wildlife Act constitute a wildlife crime, and evidence of deliberate damage will be investigated and may result in prosecution. In 2024 the NPWS initiated 13 prosecution cases for alleged offences under Section 40 of the Wildlife Act and have successfully prosecuted many others in previous years.

RECYCLE  
FOR  
GOOD



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For further information, please visit [weeireland.ie/farmfencebatteries](http://weeireland.ie/farmfencebatteries) or contact: [operations@weeireland.ie](mailto:operations@weeireland.ie)





## LIGHT UP: BE SAFE, BE SEEN

CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, ADVISES ALL FARMERS TO LIGHT UP, BE SAFE, AND BE SEEN - AND ENSURE GOOD VISIBILITY - WHEN WORKING ON THE FARM, ESPECIALLY DURING THE DARK MORNINGS AND EVENINGS

Short daylight working hours and intensive operations around the farmyard and buildings create additional risk at this time of the year, making visibility and lighting crucial for safety. Ensuring your yards, buildings, and vehicles are well lit and properly maintained can significantly reduce accidents and improve working conditions.

Farm tractors and machinery are large and have numerous blind spots making it difficult for drivers to see pedestrians; wearing high-visibility clothing while working near vehicles increases your chances of being seen and staying safe.

### LIGHTING

Good lighting is essential for working areas as it helps identify hazards in low-light conditions and ensures smooth farm operations. Key considerations include:

- ▶ Install and maintain adequate lighting in all working areas, including farmyards and buildings. When doing this work, use a mobile elevated work platform (MEWP) for added safety if the light fixtures are at height;
- ▶ Select light fittings that are suitable for farm environments and comply with appropriate IP ratings for water and dust resistance;
- ▶ Outdoor floodlights should have a minimum protection rating of IP55 to withstand harsh weather conditions; and
- ▶ The minimum level of protection for all fittings in farm installations is IP44 – for light fittings, mains electric fences and all other equipment such as plugs, sockets, light switches, motor starters, isolators and fuseboards.
- ▶ In wet locations like milking parlours and

dairies, the minimum protection level against moisture is increased to five for all electrical equipment.

### ELECTRICAL SAFETY

It is good practice to periodically check the electrical installations and equipment on your farm to ensure that they are safe. Electrical fittings can become damaged due to wear and tear, so be sure to repair and replace all electrical items when necessary and check that fittings have the correct IP ratings. An electrical contractor should always be used to carry out this work. You should also check that your residual current device (RCD) is working correctly, both mechanically and electrically. Test your RCD monthly by pressing the test button. Remember to reset the switch after testing. Using portable electrical tools and equipment such as a power washer can cause electrocution. Always visually check that leads are not damaged. Never handle electrical equipment with wet hands or near water.

### LOW-VISIBILITY CONDITIONS

Poor visibility can be caused by unfavourable environmental conditions outside of your control, such as low natural light levels, sun glare, rain, snow, fog and dust. Other causes are within your control and can be addressed before problems arise, such as dirty or frozen windows and mirrors, lack of lighting in the yard and ineffective vehicle lights. Reduced visibility will increase the risk of a vehicle accident, so it is imperative that drivers take the appropriate measures to optimise their vision by ensuring lights are functioning properly before driving and keeping windows and mirrors clean. Additionally, adjust driving

behaviour in low-visibility conditions by slowing down and staying alert.

### ROAD SAFETY DURING LIGHT-UP HOURS

There are serious road-safety risks associated with using poorly lit agricultural vehicles on public roads. To prevent accidents:

- ▶ Always drive at a safe speed and make sure vehicle lights are turned on;
- ▶ Ensure all farm vehicles are equipped with fully functioning lights, including side lamps, headlamps, rear lamps, stop lamps, indicators, amber beacons, and number plate lighting;
- ▶ Be mindful of rear-end collisions which often happen when motorists are travelling behind agricultural vehicles and misjudge the speed difference between their own vehicle and the slower-moving agricultural one;
- ▶ Take extra care when making wide turns to avoid side-impact collisions; and
- ▶ Be vigilant of other road users.

Great care needs to be taken when driving large tractors, trailers and machinery, especially on narrow country roads. We would also encourage all pedestrians and cyclists to wear high-visibility vests, use the correct side of the road, keep in a single file and listen out for road vehicles, especially when using narrow country roads.

Remember, always think safety first

For more farm safety information, scan the code



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# BUILDING ON 200 YEARS OF INNOVATION

WHILE HUGE STRIDES HAVE BEEN MADE IN TERMS OF INCREASING YIELD AND RESILIENCE OF CEREALS, THE STEPS HAVE BEEN SMALLER WHEN IT COMES TO GRASSES AND CLOVER. BUT THAT IS QUICKLY CHANGING, PAUL BILLINGS, THE UK AND IRELAND MANAGING DIRECTOR OF GERMINAL, TOLD MATT O'KEEFFE

This year marks the 200th anniversary of seed specialists, **Germinal**. It is an impressive feat. "This year we're celebrating this anniversary, with the same family, now the sixth generation, in ownership over all those years," said Paul. "That puts me in mind of farmers who manage inter-generational businesses. They look after the farm for the next generation and that's what's happened within Germinal." And with that milestone has come a number of initiatives, he said: "We have used the landmark anniversary to launch some major initiatives around our grass and clover products. To bring a new trait or a new variety into the marketplace can take 15 to 20 years. It's not for the faint hearted. Being a business of such longstanding gives us an edge in that we know what we're doing."

Germinal has been investing 'for a long time' in its range of Climate Smart products, said Paul. He added: "Sometimes it's difficult to know what the market wants in 20 years but if you're doing research, you start it today for 2055. We must predict the future and that involves a changing climate and managing that changing climate for the benefit of farmers. A lot of people think that being climate smart is all about reducing emissions. That's only part of it. Farmers face big



**Paul Billings, Germinal MD.**

challenges. One of them is producing enough food for the world's population. The UN is predicting that we must produce as much food in the next 40 years as we've produced in the last 1,000 years. That's a huge pressure on farming. At the same time as facing that challenge, farmers must reduce emissions. "Alongside reducing emissions and producing food, our climate is already changing, and not for the better. We're seeing colder, wetter springs. Unusual weather patterns are becoming normal. Managing through all that is what being climate smart is. Farmers are generational businesses. They look to the

long term. Reducing emissions today will help farms for the future."

## FARMER BENEFITS

Germinal's overarching ambition is not to put any penalty on production. Paul explained the elements of this: "That is fundamental to what we're doing. Production should improve by using our Climate Smart products. There's no penalty. The second thing is we can reduce emissions, protecting our land into the future. Thirdly, on a farm level, it comes down to resilience. A lot of farms have suffered from lack of forage in recent summers due to drought. They've suffered from problems of reseeding in the spring and autumn for the last few years because of a changing climate. If we can prevent or alleviate those problems, that makes a big difference to farmers. You can still get the production. You can still produce the food. You can still maintain your income. That's the advantage of climate smart farming."

## THE CLOVER FIELD

A number of developments are happening in the field of clover, Paul explained: "A few things are happening, which are quite exciting. Let's take resilience first. We have a white clover that is crossed by natural

breeding. There's no genetic modification or gene editing. This is natural breeding. We crossed it with another trifolium, a leguminous clover species, that has rhizomes. These are overground rooting stems. If you can get one species with both stolons and rhizomes, it makes your species more resilient to drought, to cold, to heat. So, we developed a white clover called Double Root that has stolons and rhizomes, for increased resilience. Germinal is also exploring how white clover fixes nitrogen from the atmosphere and the soil. Paul explained: "It does that by associating with rhizobia in the soil. Those two combined will fix anywhere between 100kg to 150kg of nitrogen from the atmosphere, free of charge, every year. What we're looking at is that association between the white clover and the rhizobia. Can we improve it? Can we make them work better together and fix even more nitrogen? We believe we can get them to fix twice as much, up to 300kg of nitrogen per hectare from the rhizobia and white clover by getting the right associations and that could be quite significant in terms of financial saving and in terms of climate saving."

And the third element that Germinal is looking at developing, Paul outlined, is red clover. "We just started our seed production, so it's a few years off market. Most farmers know the benefits of red clover. It's a very good protein source. The protein is easily digested by ruminant animals, so you get a better



## WE BELIEVE WE CAN GET THEM TO FIX TWICE AS MUCH, UP TO 300KG OF NITROGEN PER HECTARE

return when you graze your animals on it. The problem with grazing your animals on a red clover is that it only lasts one or two years and it then disappears. We've developed a red clover that grows like a white clover. It has the stolons that white clover has, and it is as persistent as white clover.

"It fixes as much nitrogen as white clover, but it has this protective protein in it. You get significantly more production from this red clover than you do from the traditional one. It's called Redrunner and has runners that run through the surface of the soil, like stolons. The plant is three, maybe four years away from the commercial market. It's a game changer. I've been in this industry all my life. I'm just getting into my 60s now, so that's about 40 years. I've never seen anything with as much potential as Redrunner."

### NITROGEN PIGGY-BACKING

Paul spoke about the complementary roles of clover and grass in swards: "The nitrogen that clover will fix is around 100kg. It will use about half of that to grow itself. A proportion of the rest is left for the grass to use. The problem you have with white clover and fixing nitrogen is if you apply synthetic nitrogen to a grass-clover sward, the clover just stops fixing nitrogen. It becomes lazy if you like. If you put 200kg of nitrogen on your grass-clover sward, the clover will still be there and you get the nutritional value but you don't get all the nitrogen fixation benefits. It will reduce the amount of nitrogen it fixes.

"Our new products provide solutions across the farm sectors. We have a complete range for dairy, for beef, for sheep, for upland or lowland farms, for organic farms, for conventional farms, for high and low input, for intensive or extensive grazing systems."

### THE PERFECT TIME TO RESEED

Paul pointed to the perfect time to reseed: "Around May, when you can guarantee it's been dry for two weeks and you have perfect soil preparation. After planting it rains that night. But actually, finding that time is the difficult thing. It isn't easy and if clover is really important and becoming more important as we go forward, I'd say up to the middle of August. Clover needs to go in in warmer conditions than grass. Grass is more flexible on establishment than clover."

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# TEAGASC'S VIRTUAL REALITY

TEAGASC HAS A MAJOR ROLE TO PLAY IN ASSISTING THE IRISH AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN REDUCING ITS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND IN ACHIEVING THE VARIOUS CLIMATE TARGETS SET FOR THE SECTOR. HERE, WE REVIEW THE AUTHORITY'S VIRTUAL CLIMATE CENTRE, ESTABLISHED IN DECEMBER 2022 TO COORDINATE ITS AGRICULTURAL CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The central aim of the virtual centre is to speed up the development and implementation of management practices and technologies that can reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, while also improving biodiversity. Teagasc's climate centre's coordinating role should deliver greater efficiencies and synergies across its research and development programmes, primarily to maximise their impact and also reduce and, hopefully, eliminate duplication of activities. This is a cooperatively focussed initiative, with Teagasc working with other organisations at home and internationally to achieve prescribed targets in relation to emissions reductions and improved environmental outcomes.

## KEY OBJECTIVES CONFIRMED

Teagasc is already considered a leader in the space of agricultural research and development and this Climate Centre should help to build on this reputation. Teagasc highlights the key objectives of the centre as including the burnishing of Ireland's reputation as a global leader in sustainability, especially in relation to its agricultural research and innovation. The purpose of the exercise is also made clear. It is for Irish farming and food production to deliver on its commitments to climate change mitigation and environmental welfare. Instead of a dispersed effort, the climate centre offers coordination and collaboration in a single structure of the various aspects of sustainability and environmental improvement. Ultimately, the aim is to utilise, to best effect, all accumulated knowledge and ensure that farmers, and agriculturalists generally, have all of the available and necessary tools to deliver a sustainable farming model. Allied to these aims is the requirement to provide decision makers, politicians and regulators with the means of making informed decisions



The climate centre has eight research pillars surrounding the Signpost Programme focusing on knowledge transfer to increase mitigation-measure adoption at farm level.

based on scientific facts. The adoption of best management practices, especially of technology-led advances, is another key aim of the Climate Centre initiative. Adapting and adopting the best solutions, whether developed in Ireland or globally, presents not just Irish farmers, but farmers everywhere with the best means of feeding the world population sustainably.

## STRONG DEMANDS ON FARMING

There are clear and unambiguous challenges for agriculture to overcome in the time ahead. The Climate Centre virtual space lists them out. Reductions in nitrous oxide, methane and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are highlighted. So too, is the challenge of adopting farming and environmental management systems which facilitate and promote greater carbon sequestration. The need to reverse the deterioration in biodiversity standards is also a clear challenge.

The fact that climate change is already

impacting agriculture and the environment, generally, means that farming must adapt to changing weather conditions and build stronger food production systems that can function efficiently under these new climatic conditions. Farm diversification is listed as an area of importance, and we are constantly witnessing the ability and willingness of farmers to diversify, as needed, to meet changing economic, environmental and social requirements.

Ultimately, research and innovation can only be of value if it is translated into action and adoption on a broad scale across the agricultural system. It must be hoped that the Climate Centre model will act as the single overarching structure to ensure that happens. We have seen what is possible under various programmes. The Signpost Programme is a pre-eminent example in that regard, where selected farms and farmers act as role models and exemplars of best practice, and confirm their experiences to their fellow farmers.



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# THE WOOD AND THE TREES

**WOOD IS A NATURAL PRODUCT THAT HAS BEEN USED SINCE PREHISTORIC TIMES, BUT IS NOW EXPERIENCING A REVOLUTION, WRITES MICHAEL SOMERS, FORESTRY ADVISOR WITH TEAGASC**

**Wood's traditional uses have been in construction, maritime energy, and packaging.** But wood itself is experiencing a revolution and a fresh approach to sustainably using wood in other sectors is now upon us. In an Irish context, the biomass and biomaterials sectors, gasification, and short-rotation fibre are becoming new innovative areas. As a natural resource, wood contributes significantly to reducing reliance on non-renewable materials and helps combat climate change through carbon sequestration. New wood products are increasingly focused on sustainability, innovation, and functionality. Advances in wood-processing technology have led to the creation of engineered wood products such as cross-laminated timber (CLT) and glulam beams, which are being used in modern architecture for their strength, durability, and eco-friendly properties. These new wood products have revolutionised our housing design and construction as a country. They offer an alternative to traditional concrete and steel. Additionally, wood is being incorporated into cutting-edge furniture designs and home décor, with finishes that enhance its natural beauty. With a focus on renewable resources, new wood products are

also supporting a circular economy, reducing waste, and promoting sustainable forestry practices.

## TRANSITION TO CLEAN ENERGY

Wood is part of the transition to clean energy sources. This is important while addressing concerns over climate change. This transition to clean energy technologies supports environmental goals, strengthens economic resilience, creates jobs, and reduces long-term energy costs. Trees are recognised as the primary tool in sequestering and storing carbon. And this plays a role in boosting biodiversity and providing nature-based solutions to support climate resilience. Forests act as carbon sinks, absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> and helping mitigate climate change. Their roots prevent soil erosion and regulate water cycles, promoting resilience against floods and droughts. Tree planting and forest conservation are essential for restoring ecosystems, improving air quality, and protecting wildlife. Through these combined efforts, trees offer a sustainable solution, fostering biodiversity while addressing climate change challenges. In many ways, these innovations are still based in the philosophy that using wood is good.

## Significant damage

Teagasc will be running a series of events to help address issues that landowners are experiencing in the aftermath of Storm Éowyn. Here, Michael provides a short status update on the impact of the storm. "Satellite images and the National Forestry Inventory show that the number of trees blown down by the strong winds of Storm Éowyn was 230 per cent more than all the timber cut from Ireland's forests in 2023. The affected area is very large – 23,652 hectares – which equates to approximately 10,000,000m<sup>3</sup> of trees in Irish forests damaged, especially in spruce plantations over 20 years old.

"The majority of affected forests still have significant timber value, even after storm damage. These damaged trees have a lot of tension that, if released, can cause them to spring suddenly. Safety should be the top priority in these forests, and only professionals who are fully qualified and insured should perform this work.

"The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has verified that windblown trees need a felling license because they still need to be cut, harvested, and removed. Affected forest owners need to apply for a felling licence in accordance with the Forestry Act of 2014. According to Insurance Ireland, claims from Storm Éowyn could total €300m. They said the situation is ongoing, and that their members are still processing claims daily, so these figures are not final."

Government of Ireland initiative

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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
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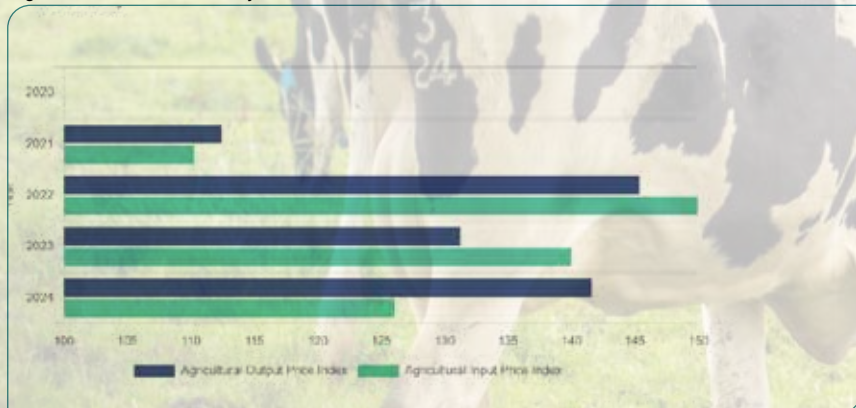
Ciaran Fitzgerald  
Agri-food economist

## THE ONLY REAL CONSTANT IS CHANGE

Recovering costs through better pricing is not always a given, writes Ciaran Fitzgerald

**For farmers and food processors alike, regulatory compliance requiring more measurement and verification and, in many instances, even constraining production efficiency, is the underlying reality of modern food production. Cost recovery through better prices is not always a given.**

Based on last year's figures – as per official Central Statistics Office (CSO) data – 2024 was a very good year when compared to 2021 levels, in terms of input and output prices for example (see graph below). Long may this continue to be the case, if Irish farmers are to regain and maintain viability.



Annual agricultural input and output price indices (base 2020 = 100). Source: CSO.

Given the overarching challenge posed by climate change, environmental compliance and sustainability are very much key criteria in bringing food products to market. And, once there, these products are also subject to increased regulation and measurement of emissions reductions, and ever more verification of regulatory compliance.

But cost-competitive everyday low-price requirement in food retail has not gone away and nor has the challenge of delivering on innovation through research and development investment.

### Central questions

This reality of ever rising standards and regulatory costs raises the question from farmers, in particular, as to why increased compliance costs should not be automatically rewarded or incentivised, particularly when, as in the Mercosur deal, imported product is not subject to the same compliance/regulatory constraints. Even more fundamentally, both the finance and bandwidth to focus on innovation can get lost in this blur of regulatory constraints and higher cost.

We are fortunate, in Ireland, to have a national food authority in Teagasc that has, for example, through the Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) delivered many of the solutions required to deliver continuously improving carbon efficiency in our food-production system. Yet, in terms of the 'green transition' and broad decarbonisation of food production, we continue to see mostly stick and not enough carrot, particularly when it comes to long-term investment in the agricultural sector.

### Competitiveness compass

It is interesting to read the pronouncement by EU president, Ursula von der Leyen, that in a new policy initiative called 'Competitiveness Compass' a key factor intended to close the gap between the EU and the US/China in terms of economic growth drivers is to have a more flexible, financially well supported approach to funding/supporting innovation in the EU.

President von der Leyen also highlighted a more pragmatic, less bureaucratic approach to regulation across the EU Commission as being an additional factor intended to support EU growth and innovation.

Very clearly, the Irish/EU agri-food sector would cheer to the echo if both 'softer regulation' and access to more flexible and competitive finance were to become a reality. But recent history suggests a sceptical wait-and-see approach. In reality, restrictions to financial supports under EU State Aid rules remain a significant obstacle to meeting investment challenges both in R&D and, particularly, in decarbonisation.

### Production restraints

This tightness in funding supports is compounded by the new reality, whereby Irish and EU regulation concerning sectoral emissions targets and the Nitrates Directive have effectively 'quota-ised' the livestock sector, which counts for 85 per cent of the value of agricultural output. The December 2024 livestock census demonstrates a continuing decline in beef-cow numbers, down over 300,000 head in the last eight years, while dairy-cow numbers have also declined for the first time since 2009. How does an enterprise absorb very large decarbonisation costs when its output level is capped?

Moreover, the cost of R&D investment is very high and, at food-processing level, comparable to the pharma sector, while the prospects of recovering costs from the food retail market through higher prices has, so far, been minimal if not zero. This is in direct contrast to innovation investment/R&D in the pharma sector which has systematic cost recovery structures. Drug patent rights and a legal entitlement for manufacturers to set selling prices have ensured a beneficial cycle of investment and cost recovery. New fresh food products or even functional foods do not enjoy such protection, and so costly innovation incurs business risk which is reflected in the cost of finance to the food sector.

### Diverse market strategy

The Irish agri-food sector is well embedded in meaningful, measurable sustainability and production practices deriving not least from a reality that 90 per cent of our food and beverage output is exported to 130 countries worldwide.

Very clearly, increased value to the Irish economy – through agri-export growth from €10.5bn in 2014 to €17bn in 2024, and Irish economy expenditure which has seen a similar rate of increase to €18bn in 2024 (CSO) – has been delivered by a commitment to embracing 'route to market changes' and adapting to evolving consumer and customer demands, and EU regulations and directives. Nevertheless, in response particularly to IPPC accounting, Irish national policy on emissions reductions, and the challenge of the Nitrates Directive, have constrained and re quota-ised Irish agricultural output. This has the potential to hamstring a sector that supports 220,000 jobs across the Irish economy. A 'bespoke' investment vehicle for Irish agriculture, combined with a 21st century approach to aligning sustainable food production with food pricing, are required to assist particularly in meeting the huge costs associated with decarbonisation of the sector.



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# A PERSPECTIVE ON UK FARMING

FROM ONE EDITOR TO ANOTHER: MATT O'KEEFFE  
DISCUSSED THE GOOD AND THE BAD OF  
FARMING - FROM A UK PERSPECTIVE - WITH  
ANDREW MEREDITH OF *FARMERS WEEKLY*

Last year saw UK magazine, *Farmers Weekly*, reach an important milestone of 90 years in production. It is an impressive feat to be proud of. "We reprinted the very first edition in full, which was a trip down memory lane," said Andrew.

"The cover was the only colour photograph and, while a lot of the topics were different to today's, there were familiar themes. Fundamentally, the publication was about being a critical friend to British farming, as it remains today.

"If the first editor, Frank Prewett, came back there'd be a lot that he'd recognise in *Farmers Weekly* now, although he'd be a bit bamboozled by all the technological developments in the past 90 years, of course," said Andrew.

## INHERITANCE TAX ANGER

One hot topic that has made headlines in the farming publication is the inheritance tax introduced by the Labour Government, Andrew explained: "The new inheritance tax is still causing huge controversy. The Government says that the number of farms affected is small, while the farming lobby groups and farmers on the ground who've talked to their accountants, and those who would regard themselves as having a small-to-medium-sized business, say that's not the case and they're going to be caught for large sums." Adding context, Andrew said: "The first £1m of assets is tax free, and then there are other reliefs that remain in place, including relief on your primary dwelling. Labour Party spinners say that some people will be able to transfer up to £3m tax free, but I was speaking to a large rural accountancy firm and they say they've only

*Farmers Weekly* editor, Andrew Meredith, speaking at the Shaping the Future of Dairy conference, recently.



Editor of *Irish Farmers Monthly*, Matt O'Keeffe with editor of *Farmers Weekly*, Andrew Meredith, pictured at the Shaping the Future of Dairy conference.

found one client so far for whom that will be the case. When you think about the value of the land, livestock, crops, machinery, pensions, cash in the bank, it all adds up pretty quickly for a lot of farming businesses. It's causing real concern for people who are thinking about succession and particularly for that older generation who, up until last November, were advised to retain ownership of the land so that it would pass to the next generation seamlessly."

The sudden screeching of a U-turn on that advice means that successors are going to be landed with a big tax bill, said Andrew. He continued: "And that's what's causing a lot of the anger – the change in policy without the time to adapt and to think about what the future now holds. Given the larger scale of British farms, on average, compared to Ireland, upwards of 89,000 farmers could be affected. We can have a debate about what the definition of a farmer is, but there's a big chunk of those people who would be deriving their main income from agriculture and would consider themselves professional farmers."

#### LIVESTOCK PRICES BEEFED UP

The *Farmers Weekly* editor reflected positively on 'record-breaking' cattle prices in the UK: "The very significant £6/kg threshold dead weight was passed a couple of weeks ago (at time of interview) although some of the bigger producers are seeing prices well in advance of that – I'm told up to £6.50/kg. That's an unprecedented, record-breaking price." He acknowledged the air of apprehension that goes in tandem with such price fluctuations. "There's a little bit of fear, as there always is, when you see a spike in prices about how long it can last, what it's going to do to consumption and when it will fall. But the analysts seem to be saying – based on Irish exports, based on the slow ability to grow the national herd here, and the rest of the world being quite short of beef as well – that these high prices could be here to stay for a good time yet."

#### TRADE FEARS

In relation to UK trade deals, Andrew had this to say: "We've signed post-Brexit trade deals with Australia and New Zealand under Boris Johnson's premiership. There was significant concern at that time because the tariff protection was going to reduce year on year. But that is reliant on their ability to send greater amounts of meat to the UK. So far, that doesn't seem to be the case. Worldwide protein

## THERE'S A LITTLE BIT OF FEAR, AS THERE ALWAYS IS, WHEN YOU SEE A SPIKE IN PRICES

supplies are pretty tight at the moment. "Now the big fear, of course, is what happens with China, because those southern hemisphere major exporters are selling most of their produce there. If any trade war erupted between them and China, we could then be the recipient of a great deal more meat." Andrew said he understands that Labour is 'very keen to improve relations with the EU again' and do a deal on dynamic equivalence around animal medicines and veterinary agreements that might help smooth the passage for animal medicines into the EU. "If we could reduce the paperwork for the flow of livestock between the UK and Ireland and the rest of the EU, for those UK farmers who would be sending live animals each way across the border, that would be a real help," he said.

At the same time, there are those within the Labour Government who would like to keep President Donald Trump as a friend by initiating a trade deal with the US, he said, adding: "Our environment secretary, Steve Reid, expressed an aspiration about that, while also saying that he would want to protect farmers and our high food-production standards. There's always a bit of producer nerves when a trade deal is mooted because obviously that's a bone of contention about us keeping their produce out or keeping quite a bit of it out. So, no certainties, but a lot to keep an eye on right now."

#### BREXIT NON-ISSUE

On Brexit, Andrew said it was interesting to note how little the issue was raised over the course of the general election last year.

"Neither of the main political parties wanted to reopen that can of worms. They regard it as a done deal," he said. "But, of course, it isn't. It's an ongoing conversation with pros and cons on both sides. For British farmers, with everything happening in domestic politics, I wouldn't say relations with the EU are in the top-10 of things they are thinking about, unless they happen to be within that small niche that are trading directly or part of a cooperative for whom the EU is a major customer."

#### FARMER SENTIMENT SURVEY

*Farmers Weekly* recently conducted a survey on UK farmer attitudes and Andrew touched on some of the main findings: "The biggest threat identified for farming in 2025 was government policy, with extreme weather as the biggest problem last year. "It's not just inheritance tax. It is the rapid withdrawal of the legacy area payments and a stuttering introduction of the replacement environmental payments," he added. But, putting politics to one side, and looking at the markets, Andrew said: "We have touched on excellent beef and lamb prices. Arable, however, is in the doldrums. That's a bigger proportion of farmers in the UK than in Ireland. The price of feed for livestock production has dropped, but wheat prices are giving a marginal return, at best, and we've seen a 13 per cent drop year on year in tractor sales. That tells a lot. Arable farmers are going to suffer the biggest decline in direct payments. They're going to be capped in England at €7,500 for this year. That will damage cashflow badly and is very worrying for our arable sector."



**Eddie Phelan, ruminant commercial manager, Alltech Ireland.**

# NO RESTRICTIONS

**SEVERAL FACTORS PLAY A ROLE IN FEED EFFICIENCY, BUT RUMEN HEALTH IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT, WRITES EDDIE PHELAN, RUMINANT COMMERCIAL MANAGER, ALLTECH IRELAND**

**Following on from such extreme weather events in January, farmers are feeling great relief with the (slightly) more settled weather of late.** The memories of last summer's slow growth rates, coupled with winter forage shortages are fading as the grazing season gets going. Total farm covers are good but wide-ranging, anywhere from 700kg to 1,300kg of dry matter (DM) per hectare; while 10 per cent to 40 per cent more grass is available compared to other years, and we can capitalise on this.

## STRESS FREE

We are also in the midst of the calving season, and it is worth remembering that up to 80 per cent of all metabolic problems that a dairy cow can experience occur in the

transition period. This is a staggering statistic with knock-on effects for the breeding season. A lot of farmers have easy calvings with minimal intervention or metabolic issues. This gives the dairy cow a fantastic start to her lactation and breeding season. Of course, other cows and farms will struggle. A dairy cow goes through two major stress points in her lifetime: weaning and calving. We must make life for our cows as stress free as possible.

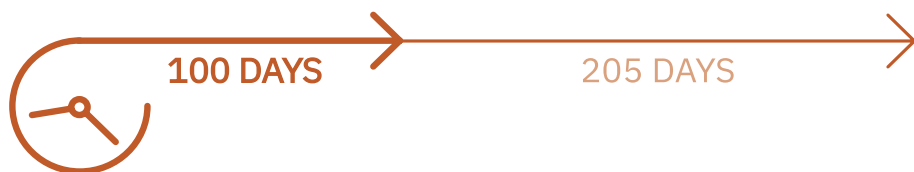
DM intake (DMI) is vital in early lactation. While a cow will not reach peak DMI until eight to 10 weeks post calving, she reaches peak milk yield around six to eight weeks post calving. Cows will lose body condition in early lactation because of this, but it should be minimised to <0.5 of

a body condition unit (4 per cent of body weight). This can be done by pushing DMI and feeding the correct diet in the correct proportions (grass, silage, concentrate) based on your cow and milk yield. Cows can mask issues in the first six weeks or so of calving. They can produce good milk yields with high solids, but they are 'milking off their back' losing body condition score, as they do. Whether the diet is adequately fuelling the cow will become clear in the weeks after this, where loss of condition will really become apparent, and production can suffer. To avoid this, we must make sure the cow is getting the best nutrition from her feed. Several factors play a role in feed efficiency, but rumen health is one of the most important.



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## Research

Research carried out at University College Dublin (UCD) on the Alltech yeast technology, Yea-Sacc, has shown benefits in supporting healthy body condition and subsequent fertility. It promotes a healthier rumen pH and a more stable rumen environment overall, maximising feed efficiency and grass utilisation. The study found a significant increase in available energy coming from the rumen in cows that are fed this product. The trial, which was carried out in a grass-based farm setting, also demonstrated that the cows mobilised less body fat reserves, retaining better body condition.

## GRAZING

The focus of all grazing plans should be on achieving and maintaining high-quality grass all year round. This is done simply by meeting the targeted pre- and post-grazing covers of grass which will vary from farm to farm depending on stocking rate, growth rates and season. The initial target of aiming for 30 per cent of the farm grazed by the end of February is underway on many farms at various levels again depending on the number of cows calved, land type, weather, etc.

We also must not lose sight of the fact that we are feeding cows, who have just calved, and they are trying to double their intake over the next few weeks. We need to support this where we can and maximise it with the available grass, silage and concentrate. Cows will need to work hard over the next few weeks and should be constantly either eating, cud chewing or milking. We need to maximise the amount of grazed grass they can eat, avoiding trying to force cows <4cm, but also not be afraid to supplement the cow when she needs this. In the absence of this body condition, milk solids and fertility will suffer, with milk yield being the last to drop. Depending on silage quality, cows will need approximately 0.33kg of concentrate per kilogramme of milk when in full time or out for a few hours, reducing to 0.22kg once they are out by day remembering that if we run short of grass or weather and conditions are bad, we need to revert to full time allocation again.

## BUFFER FEEDING

The key with supplementary feeding (buffer feeding) is to always be measuring and monitoring. If you know how much grass you have, it is easy to allocate the remaining supplementary feeding necessary. We want to allocate the correct levels and not substitute. For instance, if we offer 12kg of grass DM and 12kg of supplement DM and the cows can only eat 20kg, then this is an issue. While some farms can give many reasons not to budget grass, we need at minimum to be able to measure it and this can be as simple as scoring a cover based on vision. If we can see the cow is entering a hectare paddock of 1,400kg DM and you have 100 cows you are allocating 14kg of grass. Only then can you make an informed decision on your supplementation level.

Paddock/field size should also be a focus as cow numbers/stocking rate has increased over the years since quota abolition.

Having an area large enough to fully feed the cows over a 12-, 24- or 36-hour period is important, especially in large herds, as this can manifest itself as underfeeding.

While this might not be fully noticed, it is restricting cows by 1kg-2kg of DM.

Supplements will come in a few different forms either through a mixer wagon, silage on its own, or via the parlour. Your amounts and when to feed these will be determined by your stocking rate, yield/cow type and weather to name but a few. We always try to eliminate silage as early as possible in the diet as it is a poorer feed compared to grazed grass but if the cow is lacking intake, then always remember that a kilogramme of something is better than a kilogramme of nothing.

The cow and, more importantly, the cow's rumen will go through a lot of change over the early lactation period. Doubling its intake over a few weeks, dealing with acidic silage at 12 per cent crude protein, to lush grass of 20-30 per cent protein varying in DM by 10 per cent daily, to changing concentrate levels to having to deal with the ever-changing weather. This can impact cows through reducing milk and solids yield and sometimes even sickness. While cows can deal with a lot of it, it is important to support her and her rumen in all of this. A live yeast is a well-

known way to stabilise the rumen to help with the peaks and troughs and be able to take the punches when they arrive better. During this time, it should be customary practice when purchasing feed from feed companies or coops to include a live yeast.

It is a busy time of year and hard to keep on top of the many changing events, so it is important to speak to a nutritionist if you feel you have experienced these very solvable issues now or in the past.

## VITAMINS AND CAL-MAG

As the early-lactation cow increases her DMI from grass and receives less from supplementary feeding, we must ensure that the correct levels of minerals and cal-mag are still in the diet. Ideally, the feeding rate of the parlour concentrates should have the correct pro-rata levels of mineral. As the level of concentrates decreases in the parlour, it is worthwhile to manually weigh what is in a 'pull' to ensure correct calibration.

The integral role that minerals play in the resumption of cyclicality, and the successful breeding of the mid-lactation cow cannot be overlooked. Going into breeding, we want a cow that has a healthy immune system and displays a strong heat. Deficiencies in certain trace minerals can be related to infertility. For example, anoestrous behaviour and silent heats in the herd are linked to deficiencies in copper and manganese. Optimal levels of organic selenium have reduced incidences of metritis and reduced services per conception significantly (Agovino, 2011). A proportion of the mineral should be supplied in an organic form, such as that found in Bioplex and Sel-Plex. The mineral is then more bioavailable for absorption by the cow, and there are fewer interactions with antagonists.

## SUMMARY

As the cow settles into lactation, her appetite has fully recovered post calving, and she is on course to hit peak milk yield. To maintain a steady lactation and a successful breeding, it is vital that there are no restrictions in DMI. At regular intervals, it is key to review changes in milk protein, milk yield and BCS, and consider whether there is an energy deficit or a requirement for supplementation at grass.

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Rachel Mallet,  
veterinary advisor, Bimeda.

## WHAT DOES THE VET SAY?

ACCORDING TO THE 2024 EUROPEAN GENERIC AND ADDED-VALUE VETERINARY MEDICINES MARKET STUDY, GENERIC VETERINARY MEDICINES REPRESENT 50 PER CENT OF ALL VETERINARY AUTHORISATIONS IN EUROPE. THIS MONTH, BERNIE COMMINS CAUGHT UP WITH RACHEL MALLET, A VETERINARY ADVISER AT BIMEDA ANIMAL HEALTH, TO FIND OUT A LITTLE MORE ABOUT GENERICS AND THEIR FUNCTION

### BC: We hear about generic and pioneer medicines – what are the differences?

**RM:** A pioneer veterinary medicine is the first drug that contains a specific active ingredient approved by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or the European Medicines Agency (EMA) for its particular use and is often referred to as the 'brand product'.

A generic medicine is developed to be the same as a medicine that has already been authorised, it is called the reference medicine. A generic medicine contains the same active substance or substances as the reference medicine, and it is used at the same dose or doses, same route of administration and for the same indications. However, a generic medicine's inactive ingredients, name, appearance and packaging can be different.

### BC: Is there a difference in quality?

**RM:** There is no distinction between 'generics' and 'non generics' when it comes to the standards applied for quality and approval processes. Generic medicines are manufactured according to the same strict quality standards as all other medicines. In order to become licensed (also known as obtaining a marketing authorisation), generic medicines undergo a rigorous authorisation process to ensure the product is safe,

efficacious and of a high quality. Critically, generic medicines must be proven to be bioequivalent, which means they will be therapeutically indistinguishable and therefore interchangeable in a clinical setting. Both pioneer and generic medicines are subject to the same ongoing requirements when on sale such as on-going stability testing. To operate in Europe, the generic producers have to follow manufacturing standards and quality controls known as good manufacturing practice (GMP).

### BC: If they look the same and they work the same, why should a farmer distinguish between them?

**RM:** The availability of generic medicines increases competition within the market, when generally results in more cost-effective solutions becoming available to farmers. It also means that should one manufacturer experience manufacturing or stock issues, alternative products, suitable for the same treatment, will remain available to ensure the welfare and productivity of our livestock. While generic medicines have the same active ingredient, they may differ in other beneficial ways such as pack sizes, ease of application or use of safer excipients. Essentially, farmers benefit from the same high-quality standards

but may benefit from favourable pricing. It's natural to be loyal to the brands we have always used, but it can be worth asking your veterinarian or advisor if there is a newer, generic version, which might have a lower price or other benefits.

### BC: Are generics readily available everywhere?

**RM:** Yes, generic veterinary medicines are available from all licensed retailers of veterinary medicines. Ask your prescriber for further advice.

### BC: What challenges exist for generic medicine market development?

**RM:** Regulation (EU) 2019/6 is a set of rules that govern the use of veterinary medicines in the European Union. The regulation was introduced with the aim of increasing the availability of veterinary medicinal products and supporting innovation as well as reducing the rate of development of antibiotic resistance. In theory, it should have reduced the administrative burden on companies and stimulated innovation. While it has improved harmonisation, it has also introduced notable financial and administrative burdens, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

# FOCUS



TILLAGE



# 'GRAIN-ING' CHAMPIONS

Pictured at the Tirlán Quality Grain Awards are (centre) award-winning grower Art Murphy, from Killabeg, Ferns, Enniscorthy, Co Wexford, alongside his daughter Margaret and Tirlán chair, John Murphy.

**THE BEST TILLAGE FARMERS IN THE COUNTRY VIE FOR THE PRESTIGIOUS TITLE OF GRAIN FARMER OF THE YEAR AT THE TIRLÁN QUALITY GRAIN AWARDS. COMPETITION WAS TIGHT THIS YEAR ACROSS 14 CATEGORIES, BUT IT WAS THE MURPHY FAMILY FROM WEXFORD WHO EMERGED VICTORIOUS OVERALL. HERE, WE TAKE A LOOK AT THIS YEAR'S SUCCESS STORIES**

**Arthur (Art) and Ann Murphy have run a tillage enterprise in Wexford for the past 50 years.** They grow Cassia winter barley, winter equine oats, spring malting barley, oil seed rape and cover cropping using a plough-based system. Art places a strong emphasis on nurturing his crops and pays close attention to plant nutrition and establishment of a thriving crop to maximise the crop's potential. Organic matter in the form of pig and cattle manures play an important role in maintaining a healthy soil for crops to grow. Art and Ann have one daughter, Margaret, who works in the tillage industry with a crop-protection company. Once the crops are sown in springtime they are regularly checked. Last spring was particularly challenging for Irish grain growers, and it is a credit to growers that, despite huge weather challenges, the quality of grain last harvest was high, as reflected in the grain quality specifications achieved.

## FAMILY FARMING

On the Murphy farm, 700 acres of cereals were sown in eight days, a record-breaking effort that, naturally, they hope they will never again have to achieve. Art was one of the founder members of the Irish Grain Growers Association (IGGA) and is still an active member. This winning crop of Cassia barley had an average specific weight of 679kg per hectare (kg/ha) at 17.2 per cent moisture across almost 400 tonnes, with screenings of 1.9 per cent and protein content of 10.1 per cent. In a normal year, these standards would be impressive. In a year when the elements were adverse, to say the least, the figures are particularly praiseworthy.

## HIGH QUALITY GRAINS

James English farms with his wife, Sinead, and sons, John and James outside Cahir in Co. Tipperary. The winners of the Tirlán Sustainability Award use min-till to establish

crops. James places a strong focus on crop rotation, using beans, oilseed rape and oats as break crops to maximise weed control and reduce soil-borne diseases. Right across the various grain categories, high quality was a standout feature. The Phelans of Kilkenny won the Green Feed Wheat category. The winning crop averaged a specific weight of 78.9kg/ha at a moisture of 17.7 per cent across a large tonnage with a grain protein content of 10.5 per cent. Another example of attention to detail delivering high quality were the winners of the Malting Barley category, Kieran and Denis Fitzgerald who farm at Rathcormac in Co. Cork. The farm is primarily in tillage but there is also a small cattle enterprise which provides farmyard manure for the crops. The Fitzgeralds grow a combination of winter and spring barley with a cover crop sown each year after winter barley to improve soil structure for the following spring malting



barley crop. The winning crop of malting barley was the variety Planet and averaged a specific weight of 67.8kg/ha at a moisture of 19.3 per cent across 220 tonnes with screenings of 1.5 per cent and protein of 9.5 per cent.

The award for Green Feed Barley, the most widely grown cereal crop in Ireland, went to Shane O'Connell, who farms with his wife Imelda and two sons near Ballynoe in east Cork. The main enterprise is tillage, but the family also operates a store-to-beef livestock system on the farm. The rotation on the farm comprises mainly of winter and spring barley with oats and grass acting as break crops. Shane places a strong focus on incorporating cattle and pig slurries or farmyard manure into the seedbed prior to sowing, to boost soil organic matter content and improve soil structure. The O'Connell family's winning crop was a winter barley (variety Tardis) which averaged a specific weight of 68.2kg/ha at a moisture of 17.8 per cent across 135 tonnes, with screenings of 1.4 per cent and protein of almost 9 per cent.

#### STANDOUT CROPS

Premium spring barley was a winner for

the Short family based at Kilmullen near Newtownmountkennedy. Farming in partnership with Dean Kelly, Tom Short grows winter wheat, winter barley, spring malting and feed barley, winter oats, oil seed rape, spring beans and cover crops. He places a strong focus on crop rotation with winter wheat the primary crop. His winning crop of Premium spring barley averaged a specific weight of 69.4kg/ha at a moisture of 20.2 per cent across 325 tonnes with screenings of 1.2 per cent and protein of 9.9 per cent.

Other award winners included John and Lorraine Rodgers from Dublin who achieved excellence in the Dried Feed Barley category. Joe, Helen and Tom Bracken and son Kieran were singled out for their seed barley crop. Interestingly Hemp is also grown and processed on the Bracken farm before being sold to supermarkets and health shops across the midlands. Their winning crop of seed barley was the winter variety, Tardis, and produced an average specific weight of 69.8kg/ha at a moisture of 18.8 per cent across almost 100 tonnes with screenings of 2.5 per cent and protein of 10.3 per cent.



### ON THE MURPHY FARM, 700 ACRES OF CEREALS WERE SOWN IN EIGHT DAYS, A RECORD-BREAKING EFFORT

The father and son team of Fred and Mervyn McCann from Athy won the Dried Feed Wheat award and across the county border at Barrowhouse in Laois, Paul McDonald and his father JJ, carried off the Seed Wheat award. This winning crop was the variety Graham. The crop averaged a specific weight

of 76kg/ha at a moisture of 17 per cent across almost 80 tonnes.

Anne Cooke, with her sons David and Trevor, farm near the Curragh in Kildare. Food grade oats is their speciality, and their winning crop averaged a specific weight of 59.5kg/ha at 15.2 per cent moisture across 106 tonnes, with a grain protein content of 10.1 per cent. The Green Feed Oats award was gleaned by Pat and Olive Keenan of Conlanstown Farm near Rathangan in Kildare. The Keenans operate tillage and beef enterprises on the farm and grow predominantly winter cereals. Crops include winter wheat, barley, oats and oil seed rape and also some spring barley. The winning crop averaged a specific weight of 55.6kg/ha at 15.2 per cent moisture across 100 tonnes.

Niall and Anne Deacon farm at Killanne near Enniscorthy with their son Glen who has recently joined them in a farm partnership. Their Green Feed Beans crop turned out to be the pick of the Tirlán bean crops and is grown on the Deacon farm alongside spring malting barley and winter wheat, along with some forestry. Niall and Anne are no strangers to awards, having won a Farming Conservation Competition for 'Awareness and Conservation of Wildlife Habitats specifically Wetland and Scrub'. In 2022 they won the Gold Medal Award at Bloom for their entry in the Show Garden category. Their winning crop of beans had an average protein content of 27.4 per cent at 19.7 per cent moisture across 73 tonnes.

Patrick Reynolds and his family farm near Navan. Their tillage business includes potatoes, gluten free oats, wheat and barley as well as their award-winning green oilseed rape crop. This was a crop of high erucic acid oilseed rape (HEAR), grown on contract for Tirlán. The crop had an oil content of 56.2 per cent at an average moisture of 7.9 per cent.

# ADDING VALUE TO IRISH GRAIN

MATT O'KEEFFE RECENTLY ATTENDED THE ANNUAL TIRLÁN QUALITY GRAIN AWARDS. WHILE THERE, HE SPOKE TO JOHN KEALY, HEAD OF AGRI-BUSINESS OPERATIONS WITH TIRLÁN, AND KIERAN DUGGAN, HEAD OF SALES FOR EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA FOR DAIRY AND PLANT INGREDIENTS ABOUT BUSINESS AT HOME AND ABROAD

This year's awards were held at the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, and given that Guinness is a huge user of Irish malting barley in their products, the venue was especially appropriate. With 14 separate awards being presented, the occasion also provided an impressive perspective on the range of grains grown in Ireland.

## THE PREMIUM STRATEGY

Tirlán's grain strategy is to develop as many premium markets as possible for its customers' crops, John explains: "We're probably most synonymous with our work recently in terms of developing our oats portfolio. Right across our grain crops, however, we are constantly developing new markets, new applications, and new products. Gluten-free oats is a subset of that. "By far the largest volume premium grain we deal with would be barley. We have several different barley premiums including our Cassia winter barley contract. That's the roasting barley that gives Guinness its lovely dark colour. We also have a premium adjunct barley with a milling specification; it also goes into that whole brewing and distilling market. From our own perspective, we would have a big ambition to expand the acreage by somewhere between 50-60 per cent in terms of malting barley contracts. Tirlán has a significant investment in our joint venture in Cork in the Malting Company of Ireland. That's something that we have a lot of hope for in the future. We have a huge focus on food grains to attract premium prices."

## MILLING WHEAT POTENTIAL?

Asked about the potential to develop a milling wheat sector, John says: "This is something that we would have investigated at a very high level over the last number of years, and we don't see as an immediate opportunity for Tirlán. It's certainly something that we are staying abreast of and keeping up to date with. Consistently producing milling quality wheat, in sufficient quantities to justify the construction of a flour mill in Ireland, is something that we don't see as an immediate opportunity." He continues: "As I say, our focus in Tirlán would be value-adding Irish cereals as much as possible. All the cereals that we use in our Gain Feeds range come from our own growers. So, it's native Irish wheat, barley, oats, and beans. We have 1,100 grain growers who are delivering to us consistently somewhere between 12-15 per cent of the national harvest. Approximately two thirds of that grain comes to us green at harvest and the rest of the time we're buying from a grower's store. The vast majority of those growers are Tirlán shareholders and we're increasingly seeing interest and patronage from cereal growers who want to access those premium grain opportunities, especially those food and drinks industry contracts that we have to offer. Ultimately, that's what allows us to pay out premiums totalling €3m over and above the feed price value of grain supplied to us every harvest."

## GRAIN PRICES

Irish grain price is ultimately dependent on

global grain prices, as John acknowledges: "Our aim is to pay as high a market price as possible to our growers and add to the base price through achieving premium-paying markets for much of that grain. We do offer our growers an ongoing option to fix grain price at any stage throughout the year. We have a pool of about 800 growers that are receiving a dry forward price offer or a green forward price offer on a weekly basis for wheat, for barley, oats or oilseed rape. Ultimately, those offers are for growers to decide on accepting or not."

## TIRLÁN'S OATS JOURNEY

Kieran Duggan is Tirlán's head of sales for Europe, Middle East and Africa for dairy and plant ingredients. In the latter case, much effort is ongoing to further develop market and product opportunities for Tirlán's oats supplies, he explains: "In order to return value in the market, we must be aiming for that high end, niche, specialist customer. We're not going to compete internationally at a commodity level because we don't have the scale of Canada or elsewhere. We have to find our niche opportunities. Primarily our oats journey has evolved from what was a traditional oat flake business out of our mill in Portlaoise into a more diverse portfolio. Listening to our customers internationally, we've seen that oats are now present across a much wider range of applications in both retail stores and wider market channels as well. In response to those developments in brands wanting to incorporate oats, we've been innovating around our raw material to deliver more



diverse choices, which extends to things such as oat flours that are designed for specific applications within those industries. "Most recently, we have developed a range of oat syrups, all building out and innovating from our traditional oat flake business. That's enabling us to achieve premiums from domestic and international customers." Food, rather than feed, offers greater premiumisation opportunities, Kieran says: "You can only make so much margin out of selling feed for livestock. The opportunities are far greater when it comes to food for affluent consumers. That being said, it's still competitive. We have to look for that customer that's prepared to value the proposition that we have. And that in itself takes resources and takes time and takes energy. We're not just flogging a commodity. We're out there with a high-value product that needs a lot of care and attention and the support of agronomists and expertise to deliver a very high-quality raw material. It's incumbent on us as the commercial arm out in the international markets to find and deliver customers. Traceability and provenance are



Champion growers, Art and Ann Murphy, won the coveted Tirlán Grain Grower of the Year title at the Tirlán Quality Grain Awards 2024 and have been singled out for their exceptional attention to detail in producing top quality grains on their family farm at Killabeg, Ferns, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. Pictured at the awards ceremony are: Tirlán CEO, Seán Molloy; chair, John Murphy; Margaret Murphy, alongside her father award-winning grower Art Murphy; Tirlán's chief agri-business officer, Ailish Byrne; and head of grains, John Kealy.

important attributes. The consumer has never as much wanted to know where their product is coming from. They're looking at labels and origins and sustainability credentials. We're in the right place in those terms, but it is competitive and there are other players out there as well competing in that space."

**INVESTING IN INNOVATION**

"We're still relatively new in the value-added

ingredients business. We are winning and there are grounds for optimism in the years ahead. We've invested in a state-of-the-art innovation centre in Ballyragget. I think we've cut our cloth to our needs. We have highly qualified expertise in terms of research and development and that has been showcased by the innovations that we're able to bring to market within the oat category and by extension, to our dairy business."

**The Solitair MR seed drill**

**A new generation.**

Convince yourself of the **perfect quality** of the pneumatic seed drill, which, thanks to the **many equipment options** can be used in **various tilling processes**.



Contact:  
Derek Delahunty, LEMKEN Area Sales Manager  
00353 86 0203886, d.delahunty@lemken.com



# 'TIS THE SEASON

'TIS THE SEASON FOR TILLAGE AND NOEL DUNNE SELECTS SOME KEY PIECES OF KIT FROM LEMKEN, HORSCH, AMAZONE AND VADERSTAD THAT WILL SEE YOU THROUGH



Lemken's Solitair has a 2,400L capacity for seed or fertiliser.

## INNOVATIVE DRILLING

**Lemken's Solitair front hopper is the answer to the growing demand for efficient front-rear seeding combinations, according to the company.** With a generous 2,400-litre capacity for seed and/or fertiliser, this pressure-resistant hopper is ideal for precision seeding or drilling, ensuring maximum utilisation in the field. Seed or fertiliser is delivered to the rear combination units either to the right or optionally underneath the tractor.

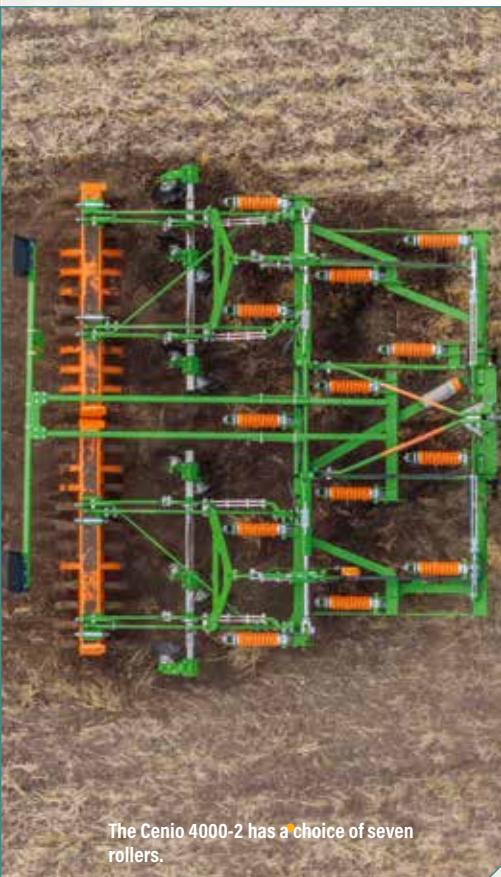
The front hopper is equipped with four modular dosing units with individual electric drives. If the Solitair F is used as a single hopper, it can optionally be combined with four width sections, for example with the Azurit precision seed drill for under-root fertilisation or with the OptiDisc 25 coulter bar. The new optimised OptiDisc coulter bar can now be used for single or double shot drilling, so when used in combination with the Solitair F double hopper, two components can be applied at the same time. Added value Optimum soil contact is one of the basic requirements for high crop yields. To achieve this, the Solitair F is additionally equipped with a front mounting section for attaching a large tyre packer or an external weight of up to 800kg. The optimal weight distribution of the front-rear combination ensures greater safety and a more comfortable ride. The steerable trailed tyre packer can also be mounted on its own as a front tyre packer and be ballasted with suitcase weights of up to 500kg. Lemken says the Solitair F front hopper combines versatility, efficiency and comfort, making it the ideal solution for professional farmers who want to maximise the utilisation of their implements.



The 6m Sprinter 6 SL tine drill was launched at Agritechnica.

## HIGHLY FLEXIBLE SEEDING SYSTEM

**Horsch's family of disc and tine-mounted drills can be combined with its Partner FT front tank to offer 'highly flexible seeding system for all crops and conditions,' the company says.** The 6m Sprinter 6 SL tine drill and 6m Avatar 6.25 SL disc drill, which were launched at Agritechnica, join a wide choice of Horsch mounted drill models to allow farmers to create a versatile seeding system that suits their needs. The Partner FT can be combined with seed drills, used for tillage for deep fertilisation, in hybrid farming or in combination with a Finer SL. Combining the drill with a Partner front tank optimises the weight distribution of the tractor and seeding rig. The Avatar SL is the smallest and most manoeuvrable Avatar seed drill with a mounted three-point configuration designed for precise sowing in mulch seed conditions. The 6m SL mounted model reduces tillage to a minimum yet works well in high amounts of straw residue, and in harder soils. The depth control roller of the SingleDisc coulter ensures a regular depth placement even in uneven conditions. Row spacings of 25cm or 30cm pave the way for mechanical weed control. Hydraulic weight transfer achieves a coulter pressure of up to 240kg per coulter, with the weight of the tractor transferred to the seed coulters. This is useful especially in harder conditions and considerably extends the range of use of the machine. The Avatar SL is available with trash wheels that smoothly manage high amounts of straw. The trailed layout of the trash wheels allows for a perfect soil adaption as each trash wheel can be adapted individually to the desired depth and the soil is only minimally disrupted. The 6m Sprinter 6.25 SL is ideal for working in wetter conditions and on light and medium soils. As it is mounted, it is high manoeuvrable making it easy to operate in small fields. The tines are hydraulically pre-stressed and retractable and are individually depth controlled with press wheel. The three-bar tine section and 25cm tine spacing ensures a straw-free and clod-free sowing horizon. There are different seed coulter options from the Ultra ThinEdge seed coulter, that provides a 12mm wide seed band to ensure minimum of soil movement, the ThinEdge coulter with a 21mm wide seed band (ideal for sowing catch crops directly into the stubble), to the WideEdge tine seed coulter that has a 110mm wide seed band.



## NEW HYDRAULIC FOLDING MODEL COMPLEMENTS EXISTING RANGE

**Amazone's new Cenio 4000-2 is a folding mulch cultivator in a 4m working width, that can be used with tractors ranging from 105hp to 275hp.** This new hydraulic-folding model complements the existing Cenio product range of 3m, 3.5m and 4m rigid machines, according to the company.

The three-point linkage mounted Cenio is a three-row mulch cultivator with interchangeable shares for depths from 5 to 30cm. This enables the cultivator to be used for both shallow stubble cultivation as well as medium-deep and deep-loosening soil tillage. With a tine spacing of 30cm the Cenio can work with large amounts of crop residue, evenly mixing the matter back into the soil without blockages.

The working depth of the Cenio 4000-2 is hydraulically adjusted from the tractor cab. The depth can be tailored to suit the field and soil conditions on the move and an easy-to-read scale is used for orientation.

Fine-serrated, 410mm diameter concave discs are available for levelling the soil behind the tines. With maintenance-free bearings, the discs have a high self-driving effect combined with good crumbling of the soil.

The automatic disc-levelling system means the height of the levelling unit is automatically adjusted via the parallelogram linkage when the working depth of the tines is changed. This ensures the levelling quality always remains the same, even when the working depth is changed, and the operator workload is further reduced.

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



# AMAZONE

## Cayros Ploughs



2 YEAR

Warranty



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✔ **NonStop Stone Safety Release**

✔ **Simple Sliding Headstock Design**

For more info on Amazone Cayros Ploughs Contact Val on +353 87 244 0893

 farmhand



The Fenix III metering system handles the precise delivery of seed and fertiliser.

## NO-TILL SEED DRILL OFFERS GREAT FLEXIBILITY

Väderstad's Seed Hawk 600-900C is a no-till seed drill is available in working widths of 6m, 8m and 9m and, according to the company, it offers farmers flexibility to adapt to different field sizes and soil conditions. Its standout feature, says Väderstad, is the tine coulters system, which creates a clean seed slot, placing both seed and fertiliser in undisturbed soil for optimal germination and growth. This precision is further complemented by its 7,000-litre pressurised hopper, which is divided into three compartments. This innovative design allows for the independent mixing and application of up to three products. At the core of the Seed Hawk's performance lies the Fenix III metering system, which handles the precise delivery of seed and fertiliser. The system's advanced design enables section control to optimise input

use. For example, the six-metre version operates in two sections, while the larger eight- and nine-metre machines are divided into three sections. This feature minimises overlaps, reduces input costs, and maximises field efficiency. Whether dealing with small seeds or larger fertiliser granules, the Fenix III system ensures consistent metering and application across the entire working width. The heart of the Seed Hawk 600-900C lies in its individually mounted dual-knife tine coulters, which are designed to deliver unparalleled accuracy in all soil conditions. With a row spacing of 250mm, each tine coulters is paired with a packer wheel that ensures consistent seed depth and excellent soil-to-seed contact. This precision is enhanced by the hydraulic coulters downforce system, which provides up to 190kg of adjustable pressure. Operators can fine-tune

the downforce directly from the cab using the E-Control system, adapting the machine to varying soil types and conditions with ease. Additionally, the fertiliser is placed 38mm offset from the seed row, creating an ideal environment for early root development and maximising the crop's yield potential. For those requiring additional adaptability, the Seed Hawk offers an optional front disc system. This feature enhances the machine's performance by combining the benefits of a disc coulters with the microclimate created by the dual-knife tine coulters. The front disc ensures a clean and even seed slot, further improving seed placement accuracy. By integrating this system, farmers can achieve the best of both worlds: the precision of a disc coulters and the reliability of a tine coulters. Another critical component is the press wheel, which plays a key role in sealing moisture into the fertiliser row and preventing soil capping over the seed. Positioned directly behind the knife coulters, the press wheel operates in the tilled soil, maintaining consistent seed depth while ensuring smooth and precise operation. This design significantly enhances seed-to-soil contact, which is critical for uniform germination and robust early growth.



Seed Hawk 600-900C

## Introducing the new Väderstad Seed Hawk 600-900C

The Väderstad Seed Hawk is known for its precision, versatility, and ability to maximise the yield potential in no-till conditions.



Full product versatility

Väderstad E-Control

Front disc

Precise metering

Learn more at [vaderstad.com](http://vaderstad.com)



# Feirmeoireacht níos Fearr don Uisce



8 - nGníomhaíocht chun críocha Athrú



Leis an bhfeachtas 'Feirmeoireacht níos

**Fearr don Uisce**' tabharfar tacaíocht do gach feirmeoir

na hualaigh nítrigine, fosfáite, dríodair agus lotnaidicídí atá

ag dul isteach inár ngréasán aibhneacha a laghdú trí scaipeadh nó trí bhealaí poncfhoirse ó fhoinsí talmhaíochta. Bainfear é seo amach trí ghlacadh leis na 8 - nGníomhaíocht chun críocha Athrú ar an bhfeirm.

**Bainfear é seo amach trí ghlacadh leis na 8 - nGníomhaíocht chun críocha Athrú ar an bhfeirm:**

- Farasbarr nítrigine (N) & fosfáite (P) in aghaidh an heicteáir a ceannaíodh a laghdú
- Torthúlacht ithreach atá barmhaith d'aol, fosfar agus potaisiam a chinntiú
- Úsáid leasacháin & aoiligh ag babhtáí agus i gcoinníollacha cuí a chinntiú
- Cumas stórála leordhóthanach le haghaidh fuíolluisce agus sciodair a bheith ann
- Cailteanas cothaitheach ó chlóis feirme agus ó bhóithre a bhainistiú & a íoslaghdú
- Claíocha a chur thart ar shruthchúrsaí mar bhac do bha
- Úsáid spriocdhírthe gníomhaíochtaí maolaitheacha amhail ciumhaiseanna bruachánacha
- Cumhdú glas geimhridh a chothabháil chun láisteadh cothaitheach ó ithreacha curaíochta a laghdú

## MESSAGES

- March grass management is all about reacting to the situation on your farm.
- Nitrogen – all the farm must get some in March.
- Sexed semen and fertility management questions answered.
- As calf Commercial Beef Value (CBV) is the future, choose high CBV AI bulls.
- Bulling heifers are in a key period of management now.



By Matt Ryan

### GRASS MANAGEMENT – REACT TO CIRCUMSTANCES!

- » **March is a crucial grassland-management month! Badly done, it will make for a challenging grazing-management year, resulting in:**
  - April being a very tough month for grass and, consequently, requiring more meals to be fed (three times the cost of grass).
  - Silage ground may be closed up late or smaller first cuts may be taken, resulting in more expensive silage for winter feed.
  - Cows, potentially, having to go back on a diet dominated by silage and meals in April with adverse consequences for breeding and milk.
  - You could end up 'chasing your tail' for the remainder of the year, that means constantly grazing low pre-grazing covers (PGC).
- » **The key targets for dry land, late/wettish land would be 10-14 days later, and include:**
  - Having at least 30 per cent of the milking platform (MP) grazed by March 1 and 60 per cent grazed by March 17.
  - The consequences of not meeting those targets will be:
    - The amount of grass available in the second rotation will be a serious issue because the length of time from first grazing to 'would-be' second grazing will be too short – it needs to be 55-60 days – that's why those two grazing date targets are so critical.
    - For every 1 per cent a farm is below the March 1 target, the farm will have 14kg DM/ha less grass in April over the whole farm.
    - Grazing off old grass stimulates growth; therefore, you grow more grass.
    - The first rotation is likely to end later than usual, thereby reducing the number of grazings in the year. For each extra grazing achieved, the target is 10, will result in an extra 1.3 tonne (t) grass DM/ha being grown.
- » **From now, farmers must be very proactive in achieving target covers on the key dates. The following is standard advice:**
  - Every chance you get, you must graze larger areas of ground than previously planned.
    - Ground conditions may seem poor, but it is only by walking fields yourself that you will really know.
  - The early grazed (February) paddocks need 60 days to recover (this year they will only have less than 50 days).
  - The March paddocks will have 30-35 days before the next grazing, and they need that.
  - Readjust your management if you have zero grazed by the March 1 target:
    - Plan to have 33 per cent grazed by March 17, 66 per cent grazed by April 1, and 100 per cent grazed by April 15-20, from when the second rotation will start.
  - If you have 15-20 per cent grazed by March 1, plan to achieve 50

per cent by March 17 and the remainder by April 10.

- » **If you have not achieved the March 1 grazed percentages, you can rectify this. Some or all of the following options must be considered:**
  - Graze off light covers in early March so that you can graze some areas faster, because it takes longer to graze high covers.
  - Let cows out full-time, if not out already, only feed 1-2kg meal and definitely, no silage for a few weeks in early March so as to graze more area.
  - Keep the meal for feeding in late March or early April because there is a strong possibility that, with most cows calved, grass will be tight in the last two weeks of March.
- » **The first rotation should end on April 1-15 (later date on wet farms or northern farms).**
- » **You will not run out of grass if you follow the spring rotation planner.**
  - This is a fantastic tool to manage grass in springtime.
  - It is available on PastureBase or through your adviser.
- » **As you only give a certain proportion (specific area) of the farm each day regardless of the amount of grass on it, you have to read the signs to make the correct decisions:**
  - If there is a lot of grass on that area and cows are not grazing it out well, let cows out full-time and reduce the meals – don't be afraid to only feed 1kg/day.
  - If they are 'skinning' the area and look empty or discontented, you must increase the meals or feed some high-quality silage as a last resort for a few days.
- » **Cows must be brought in off the field after 2-2.5 hours grazing.**
- » **Cows, when eating more than 8kg DM/hd/day, should be out twice per day.**
  - Plan the day as follows: At 7am, milk and feed 1-2kg meal, let them out for two hours, bring them in at 11.30am to 12 midday, and leave them in cubicle shed with no feed, milk again at 2pm. With 1-2kg meal, leave out on grass from 4pm-6pm, bring into cubicle shed for the remainder of night with a small amount of silage available, must be eaten by midnight.
  - If doing on-off grazing, all cows must be let out at same time (don't let out directly from milking) otherwise some cows, particularly heifers, high yielders and shy feeders will not be able to eat enough.
- » **If we get rain, uncommitted grass-grazing farmers will think grass can't be grazed until April; the rewards are too great to think like that:**
  - Fields with good grass covers dry out fast with a few fine days.
  - Pick the driest field and start now.
  - Alternatively, graze the front of paddocks, off the roadway.
  - Using the spring planner there is a weekly target area to be grazed, this can be achieved by grazing for two hrs every day, if

weather is fine, or it can be grazed by leaving cows out full-time for three to four fine days per week and not letting them out at all when wet.

» **A quick reminder of the important grazing techniques necessary in wet weather.**

- You can't afford serious poaching (you must do everything to avoid) because it results in soil compaction, which results in poor grass yields for the remainder of the year.
- Feed no silage where you have high grass covers.
- Feed grass and meals only – adequate grass on its own will sustain 25-27L/cow/day.
- This adds a 'sharpness' to their appetites when they go to grass in the morning at 11am.
- Grazing from the back of paddocks, either using cow walks or walking over the 'good' grass is vitally important (a practice not used often enough).
- Let cows into paddocks through several entrances.
- Regrowth and grazed ground must be protected at all costs from animals walking back over it.
- Under no circumstances should you leave animals on paddocks when it is raining (most Irish farmers ignore this advice).

» **Some farms have lowish covers. Many farm covers reduced by 200kg DM in January. What can you do now to have adequate grass in April?**

- Because grazing stimulates grass to grow it is essential to achieve the target listed above.
- You will then have to slow down, probably grazing only once per day for two to three hours, feeding 4-5kg meal and quality silage.

» **No question about it, silage ground on MP should be grazed twice on most farms before closing for silage, except on very wet or late grass-growing farms.**

- The silage yield will only be slightly reduced but this can be made up by delaying cutting for two to three days.
- But more grass will have grown on a grazed silage field by early June than on a non-grazed silage field.
- First-cut silage quality will be two to three DMD units higher and will be easier to preserve.
- As silage ground away from MP will give greatest season yield (two-cuts), that ground must be closed off by March 24-25.
- Due to good winter growth, some of these fields have good covers but also a lot of dead material – they should be grazed off by R2s in early March.

» **All this advice is to get you to the second rotation (as early as**

April 5) with 1,200kg cover on the first three to four paddocks to be grazed. You must now be measuring every week and acting promptly. Those paddocks must have (at March 15) at least 800kg DM/ha.

- Based on past growths, growth rate in early April should be 10-20kg DM/day – let's plan on 15kg.
  - If you only have 700kg DM/ha on these paddocks – 100 below target – then you will need to delay the second rotation by six days (100/15).
- If below the 800kg DM, slow down the cows, give them less area per day, to get an extra six days on the remaining first rotation paddocks.

**NITROGEN: ALL THE FARM MUST GET SOME!**

- » It is a waste of money using nitrogen (N) to grow grass on farms that are deficient in lime, potassium (P), or phosphorous (K).
- » Table 1 outlines Teagasc's recommendations for March.

**Table 1: Nitrogen strategy based on April clover content in paddocks.**

Source: Teagasc.

% cover in sward	February Kg N/ha (unit/acre)	March Kg N/ha (unit/acre)
0	28 (23)	32 (26)
5	25 (25)	30 (25)
10	25 (25)	30 (25)
15	25 (25)	30 (25)
20	25 (25)	30 (25)

» **Establish your stocking rate (organic N) and stay within recommended N limits:**

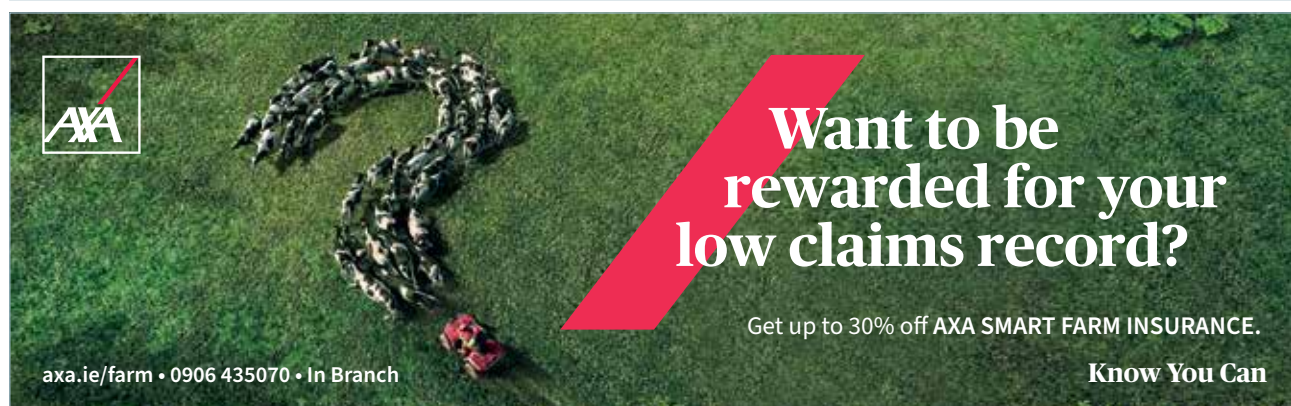
- Many farmers have no N applied in February, so some of the N due in February should be added to the March recommendations.
- It is also worth recording, even if too late now, that the earlier in February that N is applied, the better the N response in March and April.
- Responses could be halved if no N applied in February!

» **Protected urea must be the product of choice all year. Research work in Teagasc, Johnstown Castle (2015-2021), has shown:**

Fields on no N grow 60% less grass.

- Protected urea grew 13% more grass than urea (except 2018 – a drought year).
- CAN grew 9% more grass than urea.

» **Once-per-month spreading must be practised because it is**



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the only way you can apply and justify the lower N application rates. This saves labour and there is no confusion over which paddocks got N the last day you spread.

- » **We must maximise the nutrients in slurry.**
  - Slurry must go on soils that are low in P and K – rarely spread on MP (we will never improve water quality if we keep doing that!):
    - Contractors are now equipped to carry 20,000-30,000 gallons of slurry and spread on out-farms with the umbilical system at small extra cost.
  - Spread 2,000-2,500 gallons/acre post-grazing in March and empty tanks in late March/April onto silage ground.
  - This approach will reduce N requirements.
  - Low-stocked farms need no bagged N on grazing area when 3,000 gallons of slurry per acre is applied in March. This saves money!
- » **Silage fields should get 2,500 gallons of slurry and 70 units of protected urea per acre.**
  - Allow one week between slurry and N applications.
  - Apply extra P and K as required based on soil tests.
- » **If the P and K are low, apply two to three bags of 18:6:12 per acre now on all the grazing area.**
- » **Apply sulphur (S) in late March at a rate of 1:10 ratio of S to N.**

#### SEXED SEMEN & FERTILITY MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS:

- » **Stephen Butler, Teagasc Moorepark, answered some questions on the topics of sexed semen and fertility management during a recent Zoom meeting. I outline the questions and answers below.**
- » **Question: What is the risk of the bull panel becoming very small with the increased use of sexed semen on the best cows? What can the farmer do?**
  - Stephen Butler: This will happen, but the industry is planning to risk-manage the possibility by:
    - Contract mating.
    - In-vitro produced (IVP) embryo transfers.
    - Both of these are being done in other countries at present.
- » **Question: Should I selectively mate my very best cows with best bulls to see if I could get a bull into an AI station?**
  - Stephen Butler: You should do this anyway to improve your herd's genetic merit.
    - Getting a bull to an AI station would be a bonus!
    - But this is not a wise plan on most farms.
- » **Question: What is the maximum lactation cow number you would be willing to use sexed semen on?**
  - Stephen Butler: Focus on the cows' EBI, because most EBI cows that are suitable for sexed semen will be heifers and be on lactations one to four.
- » **Question: On a black and white (B&W) herd, is there a case to be made for using no sexed semen as male B&W calves easily sold this year?**
  - Stephen Butler: If calves are easily sold, maybe! However, it foregoes some advantages:
    - Herd dairy genetic gain.
    - All heifers will be born at the start of the calving season and hence will easily achieve weight targets.
    - Potential for higher CBV beef calves – will be important as export markets dry up.
- » **Question: Can you comment on the importance of minerals**

before and during breeding?

- Stephen Butler: Minerals are important at every stage of a replacement's life, but P, copper (Cu), selenium (Se), and iodine (I) are most critical during that period.
  - Take a grass sample, every day, from the first week grazing of the second rotation – definitely not from first-rotation grass.
- » **Question: To get 80 dairy heifer calves on the ground how many sexed semen straws should I order and how many different bulls?**
  - Stephen Butler: For 80 heifer calves you require 140 sexed straws.
    - That means you must have 400 cows; ICBF recommends 14 bulls.
      - That farmer must use a minimum of 10 sexed bulls. Why?
      - Big genetic risk, because of EBI reliability.
      - Fertility risk associated with the sorting process.
- » **Question: What are the fertility targets (€) that we should aim for in B&W and Jersey X calves?**
  - Stephen Butler: Donagh Berry, confirmed that my targets were ok, even with the present high kg MS/cow being achieved:
    - B&W cows' fertility target: €110+.
    - Jersey x cows' fertility target: €65+.
- » **Question: Could you go through the management care of an R2 from being let out on February 1 to June, when she is pregnant?**
  - Stephen Butler: Good nutrition to meet body weight targets is essential.
    - Minerals, as above.
    - Vaccinations – none in the three to four weeks prior to AI.
    - Be on the third cycle before mating.
    - Use a synchronisation programme, preferably fixed time AI (FTAI).
- » **Question: Is FTAI justified on whole herd or selectively?**
  - Stephen Butler: It is mostly used on targeted cows:
    - Best fertility cows for sexed semen,
    - Late calvers, anoestrous cows to accelerate breeding.
    - And, of course, heifers.
- » **Question: Does the 'why wait' programme cover up for bad fertility management?**
  - Stephen Butler: Even if it does, it has merit.
    - It advances submission rate.
    - Helps to achieve earlier pregnancy.
  - If your MSD (mating start date) is April 25, then you must start recording pre-service heats from April 3 – start making plans!
- » **Stephen complimented farmers on the speedy adoption of sexed AI, now nearly 30% of dairy AI.**
- » **In his summary, Stephen said:**
  - Sexed semen is a key technology for the Irish dairy industry and all should use it. He added:
    - It is a fragile product, requiring very careful handling.
    - We will have fewer dairy male calves.
    - Better EBI replacement heifers.
    - Better DBI non-replacement calves.
    - Improved sustainability metrics.
    - Order sexed semen straws early, so that you have the best choice.
- » **I have compiled my own 'ideal' B&W and Jersey X list of AI bulls – please contact me if you would like details.**



**COMMERCIAL BEEF VALUE - THE FUTURE**

- » **What type of calf does the beef-calf buyer want?**
  - A healthy calf.
  - Well-fed, strong calf.
  - And now, very importantly, with good beef genetics, as defined by CBV.
- » **The third point is achieved by using high Dairy Beef Index (DBI) AI bulls from the active bull list.**
  - There has been great 'buy-in' by dairy farmers to using high DBI bulls and over the last two years the prices achieved has justified their usage.
  - Farmers must use a beef bull that is:
    - At least 3\* (3 Star) on the DBI.
    - At least 3\* on the beef sub-index of DBI.
    - These stars are 'within breed type'.
- » **Siobhan Ring, ICBF, summarises as follows:**
  - Use the DBI to identify suitable beef AI bulls.
  - Easy calving bulls with short gestation and high beef merit are available.
  - New scheme launched to financially incentivise use of superior beef bulls.
  - Trading is now influenced by CBV on mart boards.
  - A catalogue can be generated for the calves being sold.
  - Steps to achieving the best beef bulls for your herd and maximise CBV of calves:
    - Choose from the DBI active bull list.
    - Choose an acceptable calving difficulty range for the right cow, other than first calvers.
    - Maximise the beef sub-index of the DBI.
- » **Discussion groups can now get, from ICBF, the following for members:**
  - The average DBI beef sub-index of bulls; group data ranged from -€40 to €131.
  - Average cow calving difficulty PTA; group data ranged from 2.06 to 5.02.
  - Average gestation length PTA; group data ranged from -3.16 to +0.72 days.
  - The average CBV of the dairy beef calves was €86, ranging from €23 to €117.

**BITS AND PIECES:**

- » Prevent tiredness, irritability/impatience, farm accidents by getting adequate sleep, rest and social outings.
- » Prevent tetany, because magnesium deficiency results in cow deaths, sub-clinical situations results in milk yield being reduced by over 20% for whole herd:
  - Feed the equivalent of 2oz/cow/day in meal (very convenient

system) where meal is being fed. Co-ops should provide this level in 1.5-2kg meal.

- Feed it through the water either, automatic system or 5-gallon drum with a special dispenser.
- Dust the pastures with magnesium at the rate of 5-6 oz/cow/day. This works well and can be done while you are assessing farm cover in the paddock.
- » **As calves at grass will thrive as well as those indoors and will have a lot fewer health problems while being easier to manage, let them out:**
  - Why farmers don't adopt this practice I'll never understand.
  - Try to have fresh grass for them every three to five days by rotating them round small blocks of grass.
  - Feed hay or straw while at grass, as they need fibre (essential).
  - If the weather is wet and cold, farmer's favour letting calves run back into a house but this can be dangerous unless it is well ventilated like a hay barn.
  - All they need outdoors is a dry lie and ground shelter because they spend a lot of time lying down.
  - There are several, cheap outdoor type shelter systems available.
  - Because calves are remaining longer on farms this year and health risks are greater this practice should be adopted.
- » **Lameness: It must be addressed now because it will adversely affect:**
  - Milk yield and peak determines the annual yield.
  - Body condition – cows will loose weight.
  - Submission rates and conception rates – a disaster!
  - The cow's longevity in the herd.
  - Get the Farm Relief Service to examine your herd.
- » **Bulling heifers (R2s):**
  - Weigh them. They must NOW be 53% of your mature cows' weight.
  - Let them out to grass soon, feed some meal if under target.
- » **Mastitis/high SCC:**
  - Chronic cows should be culled – they will infect the whole herd.
  - Make sure your milking machine and milking routine are up to scratch.
  - Record on ICBF all cases of clinical mastitis.
  - Mastitis adversely affects fertility.
  - Get your vet involved early to sort things out.
- » **Milk recording is an essential management tool – no excuses, do it:**
  - You will know your high SCC cows.
  - You will be able to identify your best cows for breeding to dairy, others for beef AI, and others for culling (should be done now).



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# MARKING A DECADE OF INNOVATION

M7004 marks a decade of innovation in the flagship M7 tractor lineup.

**KUBOTA CLOSED OUT 2024 WITH THE LAUNCH OF THE M7004 TRACTOR SERIES, MARKING A DECADE OF INNOVATION IN THE FLAGSHIP M7 TRACTOR LINEUP. THIS MONTH, WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THIS NEW ADDITION TO THE M7 FAMILY**

**The first M7 series tractor was launched in 2014, and it sealed the deal for Kubota in terms of its place in the agricultural sector.**

The M7004 is the latest evolution, featuring key updates designed to enhance operator experience, functionality, and performance, according to the company. It is powered by a 6.1L, four-cylinder Kubota engine producing 130-175hp, and comprises three-models. Like its predecessors, the M7004 offers a

choice of two transmissions; powershift or KVT (Kubota Variable Transmission), with the latter gaining updated pre-set droop settings for customisable transmission sensitivity and optimum fuel efficiency.

Key updates are geared around operator convenience, with a newly repositioned cooling pack at the front of the engine creating much better access to key components, while simplifying maintenance.

The M7004 is powered by the 6.1L four-cylinder Kubota engine.

Operator convenience is further improved with repositioned fuel and DEF tanks, along with cab steps that create easier access and egress from the tractor. A new automatic assisted parking brake is integrated within the tractor shuttle in order to stop and park safely. In addition, the K-Monitor benefits from a new quad-core processor that delivers expanded functionality and faster processing speeds. The launch of the new M7004 series also



Key updates are geared around operator comfort and convenience



coincides with Kubota celebrating its 50th anniversary in Europe. To mark the occasion, 50 anniversary edition M7004 tractors will be produced, each featuring a striking orange and black wrap.

The M7004 series integrates seamlessly with Kubota's existing packages, including extended warranty up to five years/5,000-hours, plus Kubota Connect – the very latest in tractor telematics that enables users to remotely access tractor location and key operating functions, to improve asset management.



**NOEL DUNNE**  
Machinery Editor

## A SPRING IN OUR STEP

**Spring has sprung, so out with the dung slurry or whatever you can get onto the fields. It's now showtime as spring planting is about to begin.**

Lambs are jumping among the emerging daffodils, calving is in full flight, and we are in the middle of setting ourselves up for the start of a new year in farming activities as the winter draws to a close. An old saying comes to mind as I pen this month's column, 'March of many weathers'. We are farming among storms and showers and all sorts of weather. What's new, eh?

Now, down to business. I see farmland prices were up by €590 per acre to an average of €12,515 per acre in 2024. A survey carried out over 24,800 acres of farmland sold in 2024 showed that the price per acre increased by 5 per cent, on average, when compared to 2023.

I was intrigued to read recently that an ancient wheat variety similar to that grown in the Céide fields in Mayo 5,000 years ago could be harvested again by local farmers for bakers in the region. The Céide fields are considered to be one of the oldest and largest Stone Age farming sites in the world, dating back to c. 3700 BC. These fields cover what was once hundreds of farms, sectioned into parallel walls marking rectangular plots that would have contained dwelling houses, sheds for sheep and cattle, and where wheat was grown. As the climate changed, certain practices stopped and wheat crops were grown no more. But it seems that tillage may well be returning to the northwest region, if this ancient wheat variety is grown again. Machinery dealers in that neck of the woods, keep an eye on this! Will combines be rolling into that region? We will wait and see. The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) is calling for stronger laws around dog attacks on livestock, and correctly so. I have experienced individuals out and about with their dogs, and not in control of them. Some people are genuinely getting some exercise with their family pets and they mean well – probably just not thinking about the consequences

of what might happen if that dog that is clearly not on a lead decides to bolt! Others are out in the countryside with their dogs at a more unsocial hour for 'other' reasons. Sometimes these are not the nicest to meet and they certainly don't know how to close a gate. The IFA has highlighted the lack of robust enforcement of the legal obligations on dog owners, which has allowed horrendous attacks to persist and increase across the country. The IFA president says they are demanding stronger regulations and stricter enforcement. A court appearance and a scaled fine measured by the amount of damage caused by the offending dog or dogs would be a good start.

On the tillage front I hear that there will be no new support schemes introduced this year for the tillage sector. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has stated that the €100/ha payment will be part of the 2025 budget but no further schemes will be in place for this year with a review due in 2026. It has been announced that Paraic Dwyer Agri is now a Krone and Amazone dealer for Co. Mayo he kicked off his appointment at the start of February. On the tractor front, the Farm Tractor and Machinery Trade Association (FTMTA) has revealed some stats for 2023, showing the top-three brands in the Republic of Ireland. These were: John Deere at 29.3 per cent; Massey Ferguson at 18.7 per cent; and New Holland at 15.9 per cent. On the combine front, Claas combines have topped the Irish combine market once again for the 13th year in a row. On the forage harvester front, sales are down by 14 per cent year on year. There were 34 foragers sold in the Republic of Ireland last year and the top-three were Claas at 67.6 per cent; John Deere at 17.6 per cent; and New Holland at 2.9 per cent.

Well, that's it for this month! Keep an eye out in your newsagents over the next few weeks as the *Irish Farm Machinery & Equipment Yearbook 2025* will be hitting the shelves. This is one not to be missed! Farm wisely and farm safely, my friends.



The Arion 570 Cmatic is a powerful four-cylinder machine with 180hp and a wide range of unique assistance functions.



## CLAAS ADDS ARION 570 CMATIC TO RANGE

Claas has extended the Arion 500 series with the recent launch of the Arion 570 Cmatic with a powerful four-cylinder engine and a continuously variable, split-power Claas Cmatic transmission is also available in the Night Edition. The 4.5L Stage V engine delivers a maximum output of 180hp without boost. The maximum torque of 730Nm is available at 1,400rpm. The Arion 570 Cmatic has a reinforced Dana front axle to match its higher output. In addition, the compact, manoeuvrable four-cylinder is available with Trelleborg VF 710/60R38 tyres on the rear axle and VF 600/60 R28 on the front, a combination which

effectively converts engine power to tractive power while protecting the soil. The Arion 570 Cmatic also benefits from a 50:50 kerb weight distribution.

It also works with the latest configuration of the Cmatic continuously variable transmission developed and manufactured by Claas Industrietechnik, which boasts two automatically selected drive modes, active powered zero and a top speed of 40km/hr or 50km/hr. Furthermore, the transmission software developed in-house maintains a perfect balance between engine speed and transmission ratio at all times.

Wheel-loader mode is another stand-out

feature of this Cmatic transmission, according to the company. When this mode is activated for front loader work, the transmission software uses intelligent torque and engine speed sensor monitoring to prevent the wheels spinning in push mode, for example in the silage clamp or when loading soil or solid manure.

The company says that the Arion 570 Cmatic impresses with its quiet cab with four-point suspension and optimally balanced Proactiv front axle suspension. A Premium operator package with leather steering wheel, air conditioning, Premium seat and electrically adjustable and heated rear view mirrors is available as an option. The advantageous 50:50 kerb weight distribution – despite a 2.56 m wheelbase designed with maximum manoeuvrability in mind – ensures a high degree of suspension comfort without the need for additional ballast as well as ensuring the safe transport of heavy implements and safe and trouble-free use of heavy trailers with a high drawbar load. The front axle is equipped with dry disc brakes as standard to ensure effective, jerk-free deceleration and braking.



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## CLAAS UNVEILS NEW AXOS 3 FOR DIVERSE FARMING APPLICATIONS

Claas has extended its range of agricultural tractors with the addition of the Axos 3 series. With a maximum height to the upper edge of the roof of just 2.5m, these compact tractors are positioned between the Arion 400 and the Axos 200. Compact tractors in the under-120hp performance class spend a good 40 per cent of their operating hours handling materials and working around the yard. But they must also be capable of mastering field and grassland work. According to Claas, the new Axos 3 from Claas can do this. With four models, it is positioned between the Arion 400 and Axos 200; as well as bearing the same DNA as the earlier Axos 300 and Celtis 300.

The Axos 3 is powered by the fuel-efficient yet lively 3.6L four-cylinder Fiat Powertrain (FPT) engine with modern Stage V exhaust gas aftertreatment. The four Axos 3 models have outputs of 92hp, 103hp, 112hp and 120hp with maximum torques from 366Nm to 466Nm at a low 1,500rpm. The engine block and radiator panels – highly rated for their performance and reliability – are familiar from the Nexos 200 and

The Axos 3 series incorporates four models from 92hp to 120 hp and is positioned between the Arion 400 and Axos 200.



Axos 200. Their widespread use in the Claas tractor programme means that spare parts availability and service capabilities are a given. The fuel tank holds 160L – enough for long, hard working days. Furthermore, these tractors are approved to run on hydrotreated vegetable oils (HVOs), enabling their carbon footprint to be significantly reduced. Two engine speeds can be saved by the operator and applied at

the press of a button as required.

To transfer power to the ground effectively while protecting the soil, the Axos 3 can be fitted with large rear tyres with an external diameter of up to 1.6m (420/85 R38 or 540/65 R38). Large front wheels guarantee maximum efficiency in four-wheel drive mode and precise manoeuvrability even on difficult terrain and when using heavy implements.



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## NEW HOLLAND CELEBRATES TRIPLE WIN

New Holland Agriculture has won three prestigious AE50 Awards from the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE). These awards recognise the most innovative designs in engineering products or systems for the food and agriculture industries. New Holland's IntelliSense Bale Automation, CropSpeed Monitoring System, and UltraFeed Pickup were all acknowledged for their contributions to agricultural technology. Carlo Lambro, brand president at New Holland, said the winning technology was designed to enhance the productivity and profitability of hay and forage operations. The IntelliSense Bale Automation system – already a winner of a Silver Medal Award at Agritechnica 2022 – offers the

**New Holland's IntelliSense Bale Automation, CropSpeed Monitoring System, and UltraFeed Pickup were all winners.**

potential for greater productivity, bale quality, fuel efficiency and operator comfort by automating key baler and tractor functions. The CropSpeed Monitoring System featured on the FR Forage Cruiser self-propelled forage harvesters is the first system of its kind in the industry, and it's based around a spout-mounted radar sensor that monitors the crop flow leaving the machine, detecting any change in its rate in relation to the forage harvester's forward speed. Operators using the system have the potential to reduce blockage likelihood and make dense blockage far less likely to occur in the machine, with the cleanout and work resumption being far faster. The UltraFeed Pickup head is designed to enhance the performance of New Holland's FR Forage Cruiser self-propelled forage harvesters. Presented in 3m, 3.5m and 4m working widths (10ft, 11.5ft and 13ft), the UltraFeed Pickup efficiently handles larger windrows and improves crop flow through the harvester. Its robust belt-driven driveline and innovative auger design ensure increased capacity, uptime, and service life.



## GOOD DESIGN AWARD FOR COMPACT WHEEL LOADER

**New Holland's compact wheel loader, the W40X Electric Power, has won a Good Design award.** Aimed at users operating in indoor or urban areas, the W40X Electric Power, which is just 1,650mm wide, produces zero emissions and low noise levels from an all-electric drive system powered by a 23kWh battery that is supported by a three-year warranty. This provides 39kW rated power, with a three- to six-hour work time depending on application. To match its advanced propulsion technology, the W40X Electric Power was styled in a special edition created exclusively for Agritechnica 2023 by CNH's Industrial design team. With that characteristic New Holland blue colour, the styling also incorporates the New Holland leaf symbol on the rear hood. Imitating the loader bucket shape, an interlocking geometric triangular motif is carried through the length of the machine from the engine hood at the rear to the see-through driver's door glass and on to the loader boom, unifying the machine's design language. Total operating weight is 3.9t and bucket payload 1t with a standard 0.5m<sup>3</sup> bucket size. An innovative attachment linkage has been designed specifically for battery electric vehicles, offering the same strength and durability as a standard design, but with reduced weight and a 5% advantage in required working energy. Automated functions, including return-to-dig, return-to-travel and return-to-height, ease boom and bucket control for the operator. Electro-proportional controls can be independently customised to suit job type and preference, and load-sensing hydraulics permit precise simultaneous movement for full safety and efficiency.

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## MAXIMISING OUTPUT WITH THE KVERNELAND U-DRILL

For farmers like Thomas Sex from Newbridge, Co. Kildare, the Kverneland 6m U-Drill has proven to be a crucial upgrade for tillage farming, addressing the challenges of Ireland's unpredictable weather and the need for efficiency on large acreages. With its 6m working width and high-speed capability, the U-Drill offers a comprehensive solution for seedbed preparation, levelling, reconsolidation, and seeding, all in a single pass.

"For us, the U-Drill has been a huge plus on our farm," Thomas explains. "We're very, very impressed with it, and I would probably imagine with the current weather conditions, maybe it is the drill for more farmers to get through work." The U-Drill's design, which supports high-speed operations between 10-18km/hr, enables Thomas to cover more ground daily, a necessity when working within narrow weather windows.

In recent years, Thomas's farm faced increasing pressure to complete seeding



Thomas Sex from Newbridge, Co. Kildare

within short timeframes due to changing weather patterns. The transition from a 4m to a 6m U-Drill brought a significant boost in productivity. "We've upgraded from a 4m U-Drill to a 6m U-Drill, and the main reason

was weather," he notes. "With the one pass, we could only get so much done, but with the U-Drill, we're able to get a lot more work done."

A significant factor in the U-Drill's efficiency



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## PARTNER PROMOTION

is its modular frame concept, which provides stability even at high speeds, ensuring that seed placement remains consistent. The U-Drill's CD-coulters system provides the flexibility of two different row widths (12.5cm and 16.7cm), making it adaptable to various crops while maintaining consistent seed depth. The U-Drill is designed with ease of use in mind, featuring full Isobus compatibility that puts the operator in control from the tractor cab. "The ease of use for the U-Drill is very simple," Thomas explains. "You can set your sequence the way you want to go in the field, and the calibration process is very user-friendly." Calibration can be initiated directly from the cab or the metering unit, saving valuable time by allowing the operator to switch between crops seamlessly. With its large hopper capacity of 4,350L, the U-Drill further supports time efficiency by reducing the need for frequent refills. Precision through technology  
The U-Drill's headland management system is a standout feature, allowing Thomas to complete

headlands more quickly and accurately while minimizing waste. "A standout feature in the U-Drill is the headland management system," he says. "It's very user-friendly and can be used with just one touch of a button or one pull of a spool valve." As Thomas operates the headland management system, the U-Drill lifts the discs and the coulters in timed sequences, which stops seed flow to avoid over-seeding at the headland. This efficiency can save up to 5 per cent of seed annually by preventing double seeding and gaps at headlands.

Another timesaving feature is the ability to adjust coulters depth, cultivation discs, and seeding rates from the cab. The flexibility allows Thomas to tailor settings on the move. "We can adjust the seeding rate on the move, maybe on the headlands if running low or just wanting to save seed." This remote adjustment capability contributes to better field management, especially when facing changing field conditions throughout the day. Reliable seed placement

Seed placement is crucial to achieving good crop emergence and the U-Drill's unique coulters and press wheel system helps ensure consistent results. Additionally, the U-Drill's front and rear packers assist with soil consolidation and ensure that seed-to-soil contact is consistent. The front packer, with an 800mm diameter, helps level the soil, while the staggered rear packers allow for effective reconsolidation, making it easier to work in wet conditions when necessary. "The wide wheels on the front of the U-Drill and the staggered packers at the back are very useful, especially for working in wetter conditions," Thomas explains. "It's not ideal, but sometimes we just have to work in those conditions to get finished."

For Thomas, the Kverneland U-Drill has been more than just an upgrade — it has become a critical part of his farm's seeding operations. Reflecting on his experience, he shares, "Based on our experience with the Kverneland tillage equipment, we would have no problem recommending the U-Drill to any other farmers."

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## A COMPACT OPTION

**As farmers plan to carry out much needed reseeding and rejuvenation this coming spring following another difficult year for grassland, the choice of machinery is a key consideration, according to Danish farm machinery company, HeVa.**

Its Compact Grass Rejuvenator enables reseeding or overseeding into cultivated land or direct into existing pastures. In

addition to the reseeding process, it is also a multifunctional tool. Levelling and freshening up of cultivated ground, aerating and dethatching of existing grassland thus improving nutrient uptake. With fewer passes required than conventional establishment methods, savings on time and fuel costs soon become apparent. A 2.9m grassland improvement tool which consists of an aggressive shattaboard with

slicing plates, two rows of heavy-duty harrow tines, Stocks AG Rotor Jet 130 seeder and a 450/500mm Star Ring Roller, the Compact Grass Rejuvenator is the ideal tool for the job, according to the company. Based on the larger Grass Rejuvenator but 400mm shorter, the compact offers all the benefits of the larger model, simply in a more compact design, requiring

tractors of 80-120hp. The aggressive slicerboard is ideal for levelling poached areas, molehills and manure and two rows of spring tines rip out dead grass, thatch and stimulate grass growth. The Star rings, roll and consolidate and the Stocks Ag Rotor Jet seeder with a 130L hopper positioned at the centre of the roller provide optimum weight distribution.



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## PRECISION IN CHALLENGING CONDITIONS

**Achieving precision in application demands exceptional boom stability and performance, even in the most challenging field conditions.** IAM

Agricultural Machinery, importers and distributors in Ireland for Hardi, says the Hardi Mega sprayer is the right tool for the job. Featuring innovative Pro Force vertically folding booms, and available in sizes from 15-30m, the Pro Force boom incorporates a pendulum suspension centre section, allowing it to adapt effortlessly to varying terrain.

Whether navigating slopes or uneven ground, the boom adjusts seamlessly to maintain peak performance. On flat surfaces, it delivers precise responsiveness. For added control, optional hydraulic AntiYaw dampers can be included, complementing the built-in mechanical damper for superior performance on rugged terrain and during sharp turns.~ The Mega Pro Force integrates cutting-



edge application techniques such as the PulseSystem and the rapid-reacting ActiveAir, setting a new benchmark for lift-mounted sprayers. Its centre-section suspension is engineered to deliver a smooth boom ride, even at higher speeds. With the capacity to spray at increased speeds while carrying up to 2,200L, the Mega offers the productivity of trailed sprayers with the added advantage of unmatched operational simplicity and performance, according to IAM.

The Pro Force boom features a modular wing design that shields its fluid system while

seamlessly incorporating advanced precision technologies like the Hardi PulseSystem. This state-of-the-art technology enhances accuracy and minimises drift, even at higher speeds. The AutoSlant system automatically regulates boom height and slant functions, ensuring optimal stability. Using ultrasonic sensors, it continuously adjusts the boom's position to maintain the correct nozzle-to-target distance. This precise positioning enhances the effectiveness of crop protection products, safeguarding against diseases and pests.

## KUHN'S VENTA 330 – WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?

Kuhn expanded its Venta 100 range of pneumatic seed drills some time ago to include the Venta 330 seed drill. This particular drill is equipped with a coulter bar featuring Seedflex 100 seeding units with double discs, offset by 41mm, for perfect furrow opening. The double discs are mounted on a parallelogram and come with press wheels that control seeding depth with precision and optimize seed-soil contact. Fifteen-centimetre (cm) spacing between two rows makes it easier to work in plant residues. The coulter pressure of each seeding unit can be adjusted up to 40kg to maintain sufficient pressure and ensure good tamping in dry conditions or when deep seeding at high speeds.

With the Venta 100 range, Kuhn offers



numerous electronic solutions for adaptation to any type of tractor, the company says. Seeding can be controlled with an Isobus VTI 60, CCI 800, or CCI 1200 terminal, or any other Isobus terminal available on the farm. The Kuhn VT 30 terminal is the ideal solution for non-Isobus tractors. It takes just one power cable to change from one to the other. This is an important development in relation to

existing versions of the Venta 100 range which are equipped with the Quantron S-2 (non-Isobus). In addition, the range offers quick and easy coupling, compatible with HRB 302, HRB 303, HR 304 and HR 3004 power harrows, which can work with high-power tractors up to 250hp; a light and compact design; a precise and reliable metering system; and easy and intuitive operations.

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**Tom Murphy**  
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### PLANNING

At this time of the year, agricultural contractors will have reviewed their business model, looked back over 2024 and made decisions on how to improve their operations. They will have prepared spreadsheets of estimated costs of fuel and oil, labour, machinery, insurance, spare parts, utilities, office costs and professional fees, bank and finance house repayments, charges, interest and tax liabilities and a contingency fund for any unexpected emergencies.

Having done this, they will arrive at what they need to charge for their services. They will meet with their farmer clients to discuss what work is required and agree schedules, prices and payment terms. My congratulations to contractors who have followed this process. However, I'm afraid, I see pigs flying over most of the country! My long-held wish has been that all agricultural contractors see themselves as professionals and a vital part of the agricultural production chain.

### HEAVY INVESTMENT

Contractors face many difficulties, especially their prices undermined by black economy operators, many of whom are farmers sons, who by tradition earn extra money by utilising the family farm machinery, a practice that cannot continue. While accepting that many contracting businesses started this way, we now live in a different era where farmers need reliable professional contracting services, with the latest machinery and smart technology, leading contractors to invest heavily.

Low emission slurry spreading (LESS) is the latest practice that requires contractors' investment. Many farmers cannot afford the cost of the machinery needed to comply with this new LESS legislation, even with the

60 per cent grant (yet again this grant is not available to contractors). Those who can find the additional 40 per cent to buy the machinery, will need to use it outside their own farms to make it viable and this is another example of undermining the professional contracting sector.

Farmers and farmers' children operating in the black economy across a wide spectrum of work, seriously affect the survival of contractors. Farmers and their advisors should realise that saving a few euro today will be a costly mistake if in the future there are no contractors.

It astonishes me that ministers and civil servants responsible for the agricultural sector do not understand the importance of having a strong viable professional agricultural contracting sector to support cost effective production, which is the cornerstone of our valuable export market. Or maybe they do understand but are not prepared to take measures to ensure their survival.

When farmers are affected by weather, etc., financial help is often given, which I fully agree with, but there is nothing for the contractor who must still meet his repayments and outgoings.

### FUTURE OF CONTRACTING IS IN YOUR HANDS

We have a new agriculture minister with a good track record in health and safety in farming. I urge him to instruct his department to establish a register of agricultural contractors, carry out a full review on the viability of the agricultural contracting sector and, in doing so, justify the following: why the sector is not under the remit of Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; and why machinery grants and other emergency help are not available to contractors. Together with the Department of Finance, it should report on the loss of tax revenue created by the black economy operating in the agricultural contracting sector.

Many in farming might disagree with my views but I would ask them to reflect. Yes, I do want agricultural contractors to have a fair deal, but their survival is also vital to cost effective production and without them many farms will not survive.

Farming needs a strong, reliable agricultural contracting sector, but trying to save a few euro could herald their demise. Farmers, the future of contracting is in your hand.





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## INNOVATIVE SEED-DRILL DESIGN

Bednar's Omega 00\_FL seed drill was given a huge boost in 2024, winning a prestigious innovation award at the Libramont Fair in Belgium. We review its winning features here.

The multi-purpose seed drill impressed judges with the easy adjustment of the metering unit, the hydraulic drawbar and the innovative system for emptying the hoppers from the rear. "This allows easy and safe calibration of the seed rate and the possibility to conveniently empty both chambers of the hopper into the Big Bag," says Jean-Hughes Henrot, sales director at DistriTECH (exclusive importer of Bednar products for Belgium). They explain that the jury also praised the hydraulic drawbar design, which offers excellent adherence to the set working depth, easy adjustment and independent ground contouring. "The seed drill works at a standstill and the hydraulic drawbar absorbs the shock of the work," says Jean-Hughes.



"The award confirms the efforts we put into modernising and developing our seed drills every year. Since we launched Omega seed drills, they have won over many customers looking for certain equipment features that competitors simply don't offer. Easy calibration and the ability to quickly empty the chambers are just two of these benefits,"

adds Ondřej Adamčík, product marketing manager at Bednar FMT.

Other features of the Omega 00\_FL seed drill include: light design, a disc working section, and a wide range of optional equipment, including two inter-row spacing options of 12.5cm or 16.7cm. Two hoppers are divided in the ratio of 60:40, or 50:50.

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## ROW CROP CULTIVATOR CONFIGURATION MADE EASY

Pöttinger's recently introduced online application, Row Crop Assist, gives interactive support to get the optimum configuration of Flexcare row crop cultivators, the company says.

First, it requests information on the planting process and the tractor that will be used for the crop-care work. The application then shows the optimum row crop cultivator configuration in a way that is clear and accessible to everyone.

Pöttinger has already implemented the Tramline Assist application for an optimum tramline system in arable farming. For harvesting grassland, Haytool Assist makes it quick and easy to find the right tedder to match different mowers. Building on this success, Pöttinger's Row Crop Assist optimises the set-up of mechanical crop-care machines.

The objective of all the Pöttinger Assist



applications is to optimise farming processes using intuitive on-screen visualisation and outputting notification messages with recommendations. That's how complex knowledge is tailored to specific-use cases and displayed in a way that makes it easy to use. The hoe elements and weeding tools can be adapted to different processing scenarios in just a few steps.

Because climatic, social and political conditions are continuously changing, there is increasing demand to rethink existing arable farming strategies, according to Pöttinger. The Flexcare row crop cultivator optimally

prepares farmers and contractors for the future. The unbeatable flexibility of the row crop cultivator allows the farm to try out new crops and new planting systems without cost-intensive new purchases. This significantly lowers the barrier to start hoeing oil seed rape, field beans and cereals. In addition, it can be used for contract work and by machinery rings to increase machine utilisation. The Row Crop Assist applications provides support before and after buying a row crop cultivator to configure the machine in the best way possible depending on the seed drill and crop care technology used.

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## IXTRACK T4 UPGRADES

**Kverneland's latest upgrade to the iXtrack T4 trailed sprayer boasts a new larger tank capacity of up to 5,300L.** This increase in capacity improves efficiency by reducing the frequency of refilling and extends operational periods, making it ideal for large-scale applications and remote fields.

The iXtrack T4 has been developed in close cooperation with farmers, according to New Holland, ensuring that its design and functionality cater to the real-world needs of today's agriculture. The sprayer combines a compact and low profile with smart liquid management systems, advanced electronics,

and ease of use. Available in tank capacities of 3,800L, 4,500L, and 5,300L, the T4 continues to offer the same excellent boom options, making it a flexible and efficient choice for both small and large farms. As farm operations grow and fields become more distant from the farmyard, the need for bigger tank volumes and efficient road transport increases. The iXtrack T4's new higher-volume tanks reduce the need for frequent filling, keeping farmers in the field for longer without compromising on performance. According to Conor Vaughan, of Kverneland Group Ireland: "This upgrade is the result of continuous development

by Kverneland and is designed to address feedback from farmers, enhancing efficiency and productivity."

The iXtrack T4 is engineered with stability in mind, both in the field and on the road. By positioning the centre of gravity as low as possible and incorporating a steering axle, the sprayer offers excellent stability, even in challenging field conditions. With tank capacities of 3,800L and 4,500L, the track width can be adjusted from 1.50m to 2.25m. For the 5,300L model, the track width can be set from 1.80m to 2.25m, ensuring a tight turning radius for better manoeuvrability, even in narrow spaces.

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Denis Drennan  
President, ICMSA

## WHERE'S THE 'DEEP DIVE' INTO TRANSPORT EMISSIONS?

**I know I wasn't the only farmer fascinated by the recent announcement that the Central Statistics Office (CSO) is launching a new online agri-environment indicator (AEI) resource.** This will be aimed at

'understanding the dynamic relationship between agriculture and the environment' and updating the CSO's data under various agricultural headings including land use, biodiversity and ecosystems services, climate and environmental impact, soil health and other areas.

On behalf of all the members of the ICMSA, may I say how much we are looking forward to the CSO announcing a similar 'deep dive' into the data of other sectors identified as requiring action on environmental grounds – you know, things like urban wastewater treatment, data centres, and the impact of the Dublin Airport cap.

We are perplexed that the CSO seems to be singling out farming and agriculture, yet again, for special attention under a variety of headings with the specific aim, it seems, of assembling 'a comprehensive list of agri-environmental indicators across various themes monitored and reported by the CSO in one central space'. We feel compelled to ask, where is the announcement of, say, a transport indicator resource? Given that the Government's own figures show that agri-emissions fell last year by around 4.5 per cent, while transport emissions actually increased, shouldn't that sector be treated to the same level of attention?

### SADDLED

There's a nagging feeling among farmers, and it's one based on bitter experience, that despite the Government's repeated and vehement assurances that every sector will have to play its role in reducing emissions, that some sectors – specifically farming – are

going to be saddled with a disproportionate share of the burden while others would be allowed to plead special exemptions and 'vital national interest'.

It is difficult to imagine a more 'vital national interest' than producing the food that powers a €16bn export-orientated sector. But the CSO announcement only serves to reinforce farmers' suspicions that data is constantly being assembled to use in a regulatory way against farming and the wider agri-sector while other sectors like data centres and air travel are allowed 'mark their own homework'.



**WE ABSOLUTELY WILL NOT ALLOW A SITUATION WHERE FARMERS ARE ASKED TO CARRY OTHER SECTORS' BURDENS**

### A WORD OF CAUTION

I know that this is a relatively new Government and there are huge issues crowding in for their attention, but I do caution the Government against even the perception of sectoral favouritism on what is going to be a fraught and difficult drive to hit the national targets on emissions reductions. The ICMSA has always said that farmers will play our part. But equally we have always said – and I'll repeat it again – that we absolutely will not allow a situation where farmers or the farming sector is asked to carry other sectors' burdens through to the new lower-emissions society and economy. Agri emissions are going down while transport emissions are actually still rising. But the CSO announces a 'deep-dive' into the data from farming under several

sub-headings? If there is a deep dive into agriculture, the same should apply to other sectors and the Government must understand that we will not allow ourselves to be anyone's whipping boy here.

### ENCOURAGING SIGNALS

While we're on the subject of launches, a quick word on the EU Commission's launch of *Vision for Agriculture and Food*. There seems to be a long-overdue acknowledgment of what has been obvious to farmers for years: that the agriculture sector is suffering; and that that sector is of huge strategic significance for the EU. We also detect encouraging signals on the failure of the 'one-size-fits-all' policy; the realisation that imports will have to meet EU standards; that below-cost selling is a problem; that generational renewal is critical with positive comments on a farm retirement scheme. These are all issues that the ICMSA, in common with others, have identified for years as requiring answers. This 'vision' shows the Commission finally conceding that they do need to be addressed, and we now need to see real actions that build on the positive sentiments the vision contains.

On simplification and the 'rolling-back' of regulations, I would point out that we are just barely nine weeks into 2025, and farmers in Ireland have already seen new rules in relation to veterinary medicines, new rules on nitrates, and new rules on peatlands to name but three. So there's no sign of a simplification of farm-related rules. The next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget – on which work has begun already – will signal the sincerity of today's vision and we will need to see a significantly expanded CAP budget and the end of the 'robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul' practices that had rendered CAP almost irrelevant.



# A WORLD WITHOUT COWS

A NEW DOCUMENTARY EXPLORING WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF ALL THE COWS IN THE WORLD SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED IS SHINING A LIGHT ON SOME THOUGHT-PROVOKING SUBJECTS AROUND CLIMATE ACTION, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY, AND THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE DAIRY INDUSTRY. WE CAUGHT UP WITH THE JOURNALISTS AND FILMMAKERS TO FIND OUR MORE

**'World Without Cows' is a new documentary, commissioned by Alltech, to explore the cultural and economic significance of cows, their role in nourishing the world, and their impact on climate.** Filmed in 40 global locations – from the American heartland to Kenya, India, Brazil, and beyond – by experienced journalists Michelle Michael and Brandon Whitworth, the film looks at the impact of cattle on economies, ecosystems, cultures and human nutrition, and it asks the question: 'are we better off in a world without cows?' "The real purpose of this from the beginning was to start a meaningful conversation," explains Brandon. "There is such a broken narrative around agriculture and cows; we wanted to go out and find the truth and offer a balanced narrative." They did so with full editorial control, they emphasised. "At no point did the team at Alltech look at us and say, 'this is the story you are going to tell,'" Brandon said. Alltech vice president of Europe, Patrick Charlton added: "Alltech sponsored this programme because we passionately felt this story needed to be told. We are not looking to dictate what people eat; we just want to give people the opportunity to make an informed decision around a complicated subject. Many conversations around this are not always science-based. And, clearly this conversation needs to exist outside of the industry; often the consumer is so far removed from the farm. Farming is one of the oldest professions in the world and the idea of 'land guardianship' is nothing new."

## IMPACT AND EFFICIENCIES

Brandon explains that, when it comes to cows and their impact, one in 10 people rely on cattle for their livelihoods: that's 800 million people. "In Kenya, for instance, we saw first-hand what that means. In Africa, a cow is a lifeline. It allows children to go to school and women to open a bank account. We talked to a university professor there and he noted

that if you move a cow from a family, it kills the family." But what of the more intense farming production systems in other countries? Patrick said: "In large feedlots in Kansas, for instance, you get efficiencies of production. A cow providing eight litres in Africa produces the same methane as a cow producing 30 litres in Europe." Michelle highlighted a comment in the documentary from Frank Mitloehner, a professor and air-quality specialist who leads The CLEAR Center at the University of California, Davis. "Frank says that a large farm is not a bad farm simply because it is large; a farm that is badly run is a bad farm." Regarding global land availability, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the impact of cattle on climate, Frank also adds, in the film: "I'm not a person telling you livestock has no impact, or that





## A LARGE FARM IS NOT A BAD FARM SIMPLY BECAUSE IT IS LARGE; A FARM THAT IS BADLY RUN IS A BAD FARM

it's a tiny impact. Like every part of society, animal agriculture needs to do its part and help reduce the impact on climate. We can and we should do that. But we should not make up stories of these animals being responsible for the majority of emissions. They're not responsible for the majority of emissions."

### FEEDING A GROWING POPULATION

Feeding a growing population is a theme that runs throughout the documentary. "By 2050 there will be 10 billion people on the planet," said Michelle. "What does that mean? Well, Jack Bobo, a food futurist and director of the Food Systems Institute at the University of Nottingham, notes that in the next 30 to 40 years we need produce as much food as we produced in last 10,000 years of human history. That is an incredible statistic. And that brings us into a popular narrative: can we look at replacing the space cows take up with crops? We visited Rothamsted Research institute in England where they are running this experiment, taking grassland and converting it into arable land for crops, while



examining environmental impacts, soil run-off and the effects of water supply. After years of trials they have managed to grow a wheat crop, but it shows it is not as simple as getting rid of cows and replacing them with crops." On the issue of land availability, Brandon said: "It is physically impossible to grow enough crops to sustain us."

### CLIMATE ACTION

"Climate change is the story of our time," said Michelle. She added: "And people might be surprised to learn that, not even the farmers we met deny that cows pollute. But it must be recognised, 78 per cent of all GHG emissions come from fossil fuels; five to seven per cent come from cows. And what is not talked about often enough is the impact of cows in helping us capture carbon – there is so much potential there and we witnessed this in places like California where farmers were working alongside ecologists and it was amazing to see the successes they were having in capturing more carbon than they were producing." Patrick also



stressed that the industry, nonetheless, is facing up to its responsibility here: "It is not about making an argument for why we don't need to do anything. Five to seven per cent is still too much. I haven't spoken to anyone in the industry who doesn't say we have more to do, and we need to bring the numbers down [on GHG emissions]. But we also have to judge the real numbers as they truly are."

### BUILDING AWARENESS

The documentary is currently doing the film-festival circuit, with hopes that a major network will pick it up. Michelle said: "We want to build awareness with a broader audience. If it lives only within the world of agriculture it will be a failure. This film, we hope, will be a conversation starter: as one of the experts in the documentary says, we can give you the science, but the social and political conversation has not started yet. We want to start this dialogue." Patrick added: "We are also trying to engage with the regulators, particularly across Europe where a lot of government decisions are being made on livestock and farming right now." Concluding, Michelle and Brandon addressed their own question: what would a world without cows look like? "At the end of day there are so many unintended consequences, I believe it would be nearly impossible to live in a world without cows," said Michelle. Brandon offered a different view: "I always come back to a quote from the documentary, where one of the interviewees who is a nutritionist says that 'yes, we could survive in a world without cows, but I'm not interested in surviving, I am interested in optimising human health'."

Visit [worldwithoutcows.com](http://worldwithoutcows.com) to view the official trailer, sign up for updates about the film and learn more about cattle and our lives, livelihood and planet.



MATT O'KEEFFE  
EDITOR



## HOW MANY FARMERS DO WE NEED?

**Ageing farm populations are a worldwide phenomenon.** It has been the case for generations that fewer people are engaging in farming and food production. The average age of an Irish milk producer is 54, while that of the cattle farmer is almost 60. The sheep farmer is in between at 56 years of age, on average, while the tillage farmer averages at 58. The dairy farmer age profile, when studied more closely, hints at a somewhat healthier status than the headline figure suggests. Nineteen per cent of milk producers are aged over 60, with no household members below 45. By comparison, 40 per cent of cattle and sheep farmers are aged over 60 with no family members on the farm aged under 45 years. The tillage household age profile, while not quite as positive as milk production farms, is reasonably positive with one quarter aged more than 60 and having no household member under 45. We can look at the statistics and bemoan the ageing and aged structure. On the other hand, while more young people are welcome and needed, the situation cannot be described as surprising or disastrous. When Ireland joined the Common Market over 50 years ago, there were 250,000 self-described farmers in the country. Eighty thousand had dairy cows on their farms. In the interim, more than 60,000 farms have ceased milk production. The headline farm population as we enter the second part of the 2020's

“  
**ONLY NOW ARE WE SEEING THE REALITY OF POTENTIAL FARM HEIRS REALISING THAT THEY WOULD BE BETTER OFF IN OTHER OCCUPATIONS**

decade registers just over 120,000 farms. The reality is that there are well fewer than 100,000 active farmers in Ireland today. From afar, one might expect that such a large contraction in numbers, not just in dairy but across the farm population, would have impacted adversely on food production. The opposite is the case. Not only has the value of food production increased exponentially, output also increased enormously, despite the acreage turned over to forestry, housing, roads and other infrastructure in the past half century. We may have reached peak output, but a statistician would still conclude that Irish agriculture is in a very successful and positive place.

### **FEWER AND FEWER**

Is there an inevitability around the contraction in farmer numbers and an increasingly aged farmer profile? It is difficult to suggest otherwise, despite the alarm bells ringing

around the need for generational renewal. Mechanisation, scale, breeding and agronomic advances as well as novel production technologies have allowed food producers to feed a continuously increasing global population with fewer resources and fewer producers. Lifestyle is perceived as a key issue distracting young people from farming. More importantly, lower average incomes, often the result of small-scale and low productivity, are equally important in determining the career paths of a young population that is more highly educated, with more diverse career opportunities than ever before and, in many cases, with better income prospects and more positive lifestyle possibilities that many farm-based careers can offer. Does anyone really believe that in previous generations, all farmers and aspiring farmers, stayed on the farm because they loved the opportunities offered, or because they could aspire to more positive social and economic outcomes than those who left? In too many cases it was a lack of off-farm opportunities that kept them on farms. Familial and parental pressures, too, contributed to many answering the farming call, rather than taking a different road that might have been in their better economic and social interests. Only now are we seeing the reality of potential farm heirs realising that they would be better off in other occupations.

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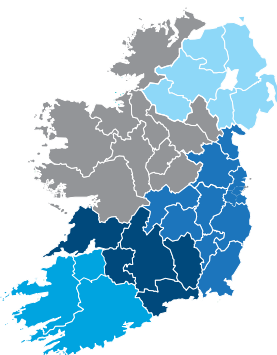
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