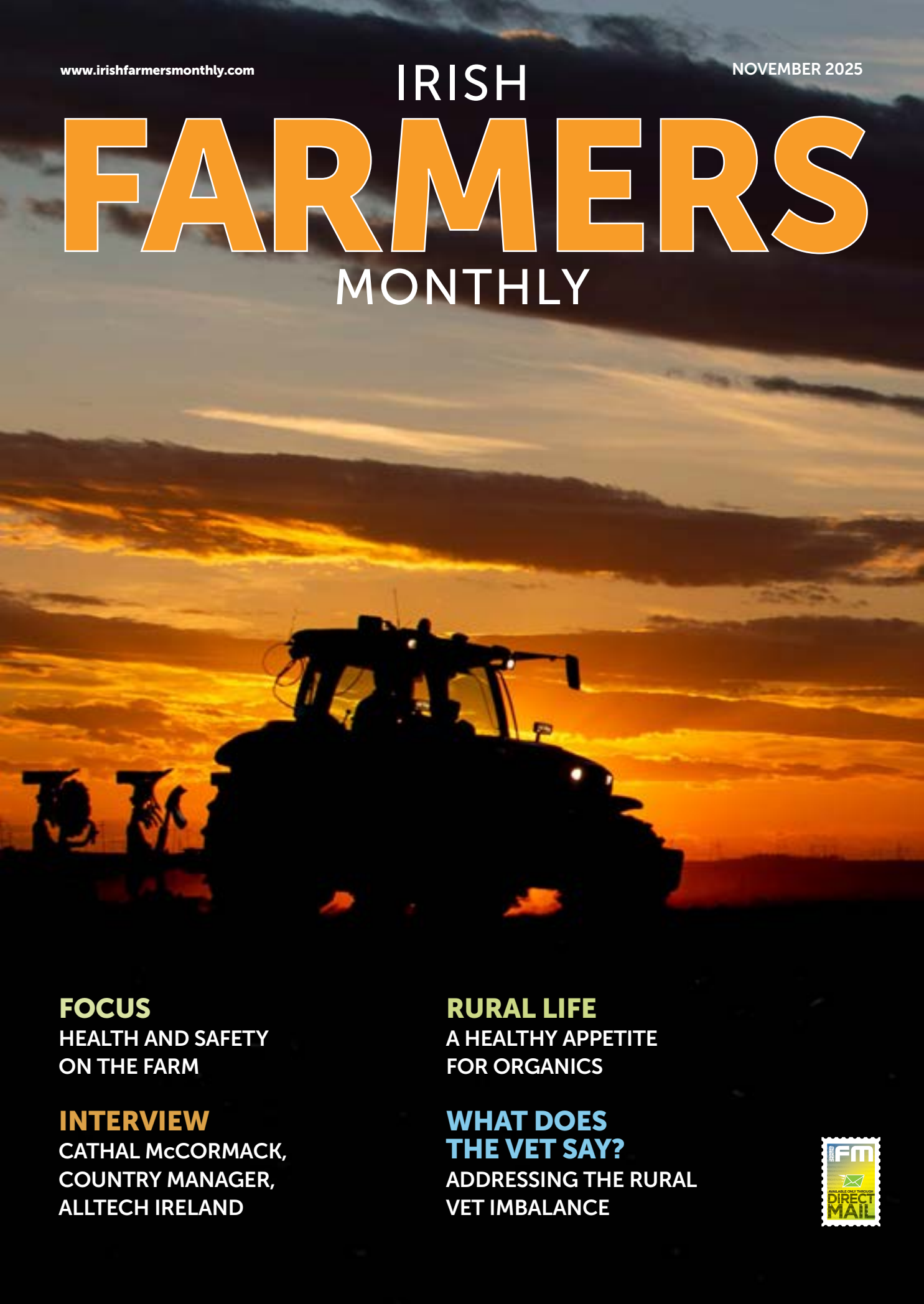


www.irishfarmersmonthly.com

NOVEMBER 2025

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY



FOCUS

HEALTH AND SAFETY
ON THE FARM

INTERVIEW

CATHAL McCORMACK,
COUNTRY MANAGER,
ALLTECH IRELAND

RURAL LIFE

A HEALTHY APPETITE
FOR ORGANICS

WHAT DOES THE VET SAY?

ADDRESSING THE RURAL
VET IMBALANCE



McHale

CENTRE
DELIVERY
RAKE RANGE



CALL TODAY

Finance*
Available

* Offer Available in Ireland Only.
Terms and Conditions Apply. For Full Details Contact McHale.

CR 68-78

Centre Delivery Rake

AS STANDARD



Tine Arm
Cam Adjustment

AS STANDARD



Rotor Height Adjustment
& Indicators

AS STANDARD



Incab Width
Adjustment

Standard Features

- + Pivoting Headstock
- + Heavy Duty Wide Angle Drive Line
- + Steering Axle
- + Transport Height Under 4m
- + Detachable Tine Arms

CALL TODAY

Irish Sales Rep.- James Heanue- 087 247 2399

McHale Superior Forage Solutions



www.mchale.net

NOVEMBER 2025

EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

WHERE TO FOR IRISH GRAIN PRODUCTION?

Irish grain farming stands at a crossroads. The sector has weathered countless storms – literal and financial – but the question now is not just about survival, it's about purpose. What role does tillage have in modern Irish agriculture; and can it remain economically viable in a system increasingly geared toward livestock and globalised feed imports? Even our largest tillage farms struggle to match the scale of international competitors. Land fragmentation and high costs are fundamental constraints. Many growers depend heavily on leased land to spread overheads, with high leasing costs often cancelling any potential efficiency gain. The result is a paradox familiar to many. The more they produce, the more money they lose. The Government's acknowledgement of an income crisis in the sector, and the modest supports announced in the recent Budget, provide a short-term lifeline. However, subsidies alone do not amount to a strategy. They may keep the sector afloat for another year, but they do not answer the long-term question of whether Ireland truly values its grain producers as an integral part of the national food system, or merely as a marginal appendage to livestock farming. Ireland imports a significant proportion of the grain used in animal feed, food, brewing, and distilling. This dependence is at odds with the country's reputation for high-quality, sustainable food production. Our climate and soil can produce excellent yields of barley, oats, and wheat, yet imported grain continues to fill gaps in both quantity and quality. For bread and confectionary production, flour quality consistency is paramount, and precisely where nature limits us. For distilling and brewing, Irish barley plays an important role, but not an exclusive one. Imported grain remains part of the mix, even as these industries market their products as proudly Irish. It is a contradiction that is hard to ignore. Champagne cannot

be made from imported grapes, nor Kerrygold butter from non-Irish milk. Yet Irish whiskey, one of our most globally recognised products, can be produced using imported grain. If authenticity matters in branding, then there is a strong argument for sourcing requirements that better reflect the Irish identity being sold to consumers. Of course, economic realities cannot be ignored. Imported grain is often cheaper and more consistent, and Irish livestock producers also depend on competitively priced feed to stay viable. Expecting our dairy or beef sectors to pay a premium for home-grown grain would simply shift the profitability problem from one sector to another. What's needed is not protectionism, but a coherent, long-term vision that values grain production as a strategic component of Ireland's food security and sustainability goals. That means integrated supply chains, with clear contracts between growers, processors, and end users. It means investment in infrastructure and logistics to help maintain quality and reduce risk. It means developing additional premium markets for traceable, sustainably grown Irish grain: products that can command higher prices and build a distinct identity. And it means recognising tillage farmers for the environmental services they provide including crop rotation, soil health, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity. The future of Irish grain production cannot rest on hope for global weather disasters to raise prices, or on another round of emergency subsidies. It must rest on a clear national policy that treats tillage as essential, not expendable. Without such a vision, the sector will continue to shrink quietly, much like the suckler and sheep sectors before it. But with leadership, investment, and collaboration, Irish grain can be central to a balanced, resilient agricultural system: one that feeds both our livestock and our identity. The choice is ours, and the time to make it is now.

CONTENTS

4 Upfront

8 News

12 Safety

Ciaran Roche, FBD Risk Manager

14 Agri-economics

Ciaran Fitzgerald

16 Agri-business

Highlights from Ifac's 2025 report

20 Forestry

Growing ambitions for the sector

22 Big Interview

Cathal McCormack,
Country manager for Alltech Ireland

24 Milk Awards

Matt O'Keeffe reports on the Oscars
for Irish milk

26 What Does The Vet Say?

Addressing the rural vet imbalance

45 Management Hints

50 Machinery

59 ICMSA

The president's perspective

60 Rural Life – Organic Series

A healthy appetite for Irish organics

62 A Word In Your Ear

The real environmental activists

HEALTH AND SAFETY ON THE FARM



30 Safety First, Last, And Always

34 The Most Vital Asset On Your Farm

38 Protecting Children Must Be A Priority

42 Agri Aware Shines A Spotlight On Farmers' Health



Editor: Matt O'Keeffe Deputy Editor: Bernie Commins Editorial Director: Miriam Atkins Machinery Editor: Noel Dunne
Production: Martin Whelan Advertising Manager: Brian Murphy Commercial and Advertising Manager: Anna Douglas
Accounts: Tricia Murtagh Administration & Subscriptions: Eleanor Connolly
Chief Executive: Rebecca Markey Printing: W&G Baird Publishers: IFP Media Subscription: €46 per annum
Irish Farmers Monthly, Castlecourt, Glengageary, Co. Dublin.
Tel: +353 1 7096900 Email: berniecommins@ifpmedia.com www.irishfarmersmonthly.com
Copyright IFP Media 2025. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form without the express written permission of the publishers.



WWW.IRISHFARMERSMONTHLY.COM



JURY MEMBER FOR IRELAND



DAIRY WOMEN CONFERENCE

Dairy Women Ireland is hosting its national conference later this month.

The event, at the Charleville Park Hotel on November 21, focuses on 'Dairy's Social Licence' in the first of a range of topics pertinent to Irish milk production. 'Juggling Life and Dairy Farming' is another headline discussion that could surely be addressed by people in other parts of our society where busy lives are also the norm. Practical challenges in the dairy sector are also addressed with a session on 'Managing Lameness in your Herd', a problem that is certain to resonate with all livestock producers.

'Turning Breeding Decisions into Business Success' continues the practical focus at the Dairy Women Conference. Along with grassland management decisions, breeding choices are arguably the most important considerations in Irish milk production today. The final session of the Dairy Women conference addresses key aspects of the red tape and regulatory processes that impinge on so many dairy farms and businesses, especially since the scaling up of production over the past 10 years. Barrister Cara Jane Walsh joins Mary Cronin of FDC Group to engage with the audience on the theme

of 'Employment Law and Payroll'. It is a complex and constantly changing area in which many farmers have had to gain expertise in recent years especially. Outside of the formal conference proceedings, the attendees are guaranteed opportunities to engage with like-minded people, whether they are milk producers, farm managers, agricultural professionals – including researchers and educators – or industry supporters. The networking opportunities are accompanied by a drinks reception after the conference, followed by a gala dinner and fashion show.

SUPPORTING FARMERS & THEIR FAMILIES FOR OVER 50 YEARS.

*Talk to us today to find out why 9 out of 10 customers stay with FBD.**

Visit your **local branch**
or call us on **0818 18 18 18**

SUPPORT.

IT'S WHAT WE DO.



*Based on all FBD Insurance direct renewal data from Jun '24 – Dec '24.
FBD Insurance Group Ltd trading as FBD Insurance is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

GOOD AND BAD IN PARTS

"Good and bad in parts" – that was the Curate's description of his egg, and the same description can be applied to Irish river water quality.

Concentrations of nitrates reduced in almost 40 per cent of rivers over the past five years compared to the previous five-year average. The bad news is that nitrate levels are still, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asserts, higher than acceptable in 44 per cent of river sites. While the general trend in nitrates levels in our rivers is going in the right direction, there is obviously a lot of work to be done. Cork is one of the most intensively farmed areas in the country and almost 70 per cent of rivers are described as being of good or high ecological status. Forty per cent of the county's farms operate under the nitrates derogation.

The latest EPA report on water quality reveals that over half the surface waters around the country are in satisfactory ecological health, at the good or high threshold. That still leaves almost half of our river waters



in need of improvement, significantly so in some cases, the EPA says. Nitrates levels in some areas, attributed to agricultural activities, remain stubbornly high despite significant efforts by food producers and their support organisations. While far from all negative impacts on our waterways are caused by agricultural activities, the finger is being firmly pointed at farmers as a leading cause of the problems being identified. An Taisce believes there is no evidence of water quality improvement across the board in our waters, despite all the efforts made to save Ireland's derogation, clearly suggesting that the focus should be elsewhere, rather than campaigning for its retention. That's a damning indictment by An Taisce, which has statutory consultee status on all environmental issues, on everyone from An Taoiseach down, who are prioritising the retention of the derogation while committing vast resources to lower nitrates levels in our waterways.

Make a decision your future self will thank you for

Join thousands in setting up your **Enduring Power of Attorney** and **Advance Healthcare Directive** with help from the Decision Support Service.

DecisionSupportService.ie

My decisions. My rights.



seirbhís tacaíochta
cinnteoireachta

decision support service





Source: Sherry Fitzgerald



A FAREWELL TO ROCKWELL

Rockwell farm, which hosts one of the largest dairy herds in the country, is going under the auctioneer's gavel.

With a price tag of €21 million, would-be purchasers of the entire holding of 805 acres will require very deep pockets or a very understanding bank manager. The farm is being marketed as either one complete lot or as two lots of 268 acres and 537 acres, respectively. Either way it's a saucy outlay, given that the guide price translates into an

average of €26,000 per acre. That's still over €11,000 per acre cheaper than the Magnier family paid for a more modest 65-acre farm over the way near Clonmel in recent times. Rockwell is not just any old farm, of course. It has some of the finest soils in the country, allied to exceptional dairy facilities, roadway networks and general farm infrastructure. The limestone-rich farm might best be described as 'horse quality land,' providing, perhaps, some indication of the potential

purchasers of the farm, located near Cashel and a short distance from the Dublin-Cork motorway. Will the largest landowner in county Tipperary be a potential bidder? A farm of this scale is also likely to attract international interest, though not exclusively for its agricultural or equine potential. Could a data centre be plonked in the middle of it, powered by an 800-acre solar energy installation? Not as far-fetched, perhaps, as we would like to think.

MILK PRICE COLLAPSE SHOCKS PRODUCERS

The recent reductions in producer milk prices have shocked the sector.

Some softening in prices had been anticipated, especially given the surge in US milk production, driven by cheap grain inputs. The extent of the cuts to August and September milk cheques, however, has brought a sudden end to the relatively short period of price stability that delivered reasonable margins to producers. Of even greater concern is the increasing realisation that the bottom, in terms of milk price, has not been reached. Many of the processors are suggesting that, at current international dairy market returns, a sustainable price is well below the 40c/L threshold which is within sight after the September price cuts. Returns from the marketplace for butter and other

commodities in processors product mixes would suggest a price, at best, of 37c/L to primary producers, rather than the 41c/L to 42c/L base price paid out last month for September production. Even those prices may not fully reflect milk price in the coming months. With costs having stabilised at far higher levels after a period of rapid input inflation, there was an expectation that milk production would deliver reasonable returns for some time to come. Such has been the extent of the increased availability of cheap grain for confined dairy herds across the world, all bets are off as to how low milk prices need to fall before the economics of production costs arrest volumes and restore some stability in the market. Milk price volatility over the past five years

has been staggering. The base price rose by 47 per cent from 2021 to 2022, before reducing by 25 per cent the following year. Last year saw a resurgence of 17 per cent, as volume declines across the world saw demand outstrip supply. In just the past two months, however, producer prices have collapsed by almost 15 per cent. Despite the price cuts in August and September, and likely further reductions as the production season closes on Irish farms, the average price for 2025 will still be reasonable. What 2026 brings, however, is the great imponderable. Starting at a low sub 40c/L base will heavily impact profitability next year and, with large tax bills looming for the 2025 tax year, milk producers will be under pressure to return a profit.

SCOUR PROTECTION THAT LASTS

WITH 10 DAY
SHELF LIFE AFTER
FIRST BROACH



FOR DAIRY AND BEEF
PRODUCTION

One-shot protection for the next generation

- Provides protection against Rotavirus, Coronavirus and *E.coli* F5 (K99)
- Reduces the severity¹ and duration² of diarrhoea
- Reduces viral shedding¹
- A wide window of administration (12 to 3 weeks pre-calving) allowing for flexible planning and bulk vaccination
- Available in 5 and 30 dose vials
- Zero-day withdrawal period

1. Bovigen SPC. 2. Géollot, S. et al (2018). Serologic and colostral response and vaccine efficacy in calves following a single injection of Bovigen® Scour in seronegative pregnant cows. 10.13140/RG.2.2.30920.37129.

Bovigen® Scour emulsion for injection for cattle contains inactivated antigens: Bovine rotavirus strain TM-91, serotype G6P1, Bovine coronavirus strain C-197, *Escherichia coli* strain EC/17 (F5 / K99 antigens). [POM]

Further information available from the package leaflet, SPC or from Virbac Ltd. Woolpit Business Park, Windmill Avenue, Woolpit, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP30 9UP.

Tel: +44 (0) 1359 243243 Email: enquiries@virbac.ie Web: <https://www.virbac.ie>

Use medicines responsibly. www.apha.ie

Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone.

Celebrating success:
Dairymaster CEO, John
Harty and Dairymaster
engineering manager,
David Fleming.



DOUBLE WIN FOR DAIRYMASTER

Dairymaster scooped two top honours at the recent Engineering Excellence Awards: Engineering Team of the Year and Mechanical Engineering Project of the Year. The winning project, featuring the DM3X+ and RoboSpray technologies, showcases how advanced engineering can

revolutionise large-scale dairy operations improving efficiency and sustainability on farms worldwide.

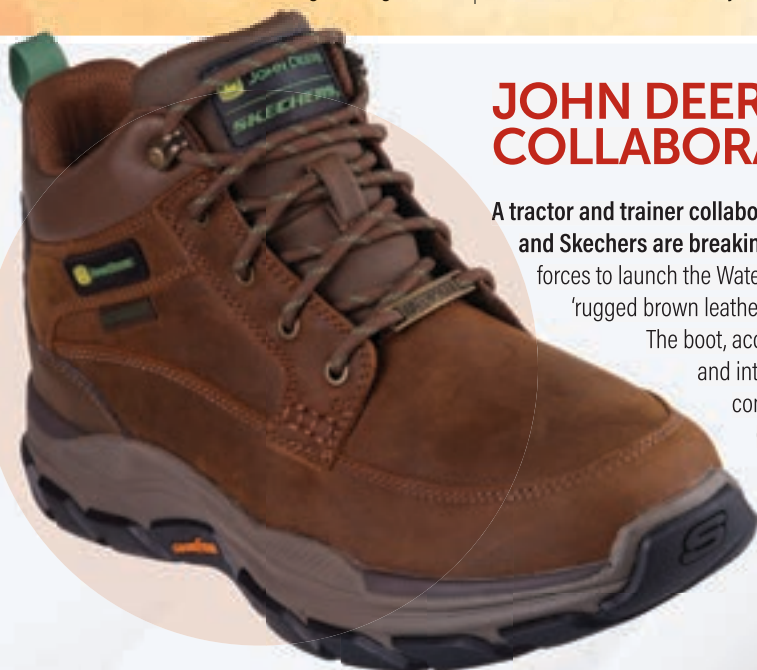
Commenting on the achievement, Dairymaster CEO, John Harty said: "We are incredibly proud of our entire team and the innovation that drives everything we do at

Dairymaster. Winning these two awards is a testament to their hard work, creativity, and commitment to pushing the boundaries of what's possible. These solutions are transforming how farmers operate and helping secure a more efficient and sustainable future for the dairy industry."

JOHN DEERE AND SKECHERS COLLABORATION

A tractor and trainer collaboration is not something you expect to see, but John Deere and Skechers are breaking new ground in this area. The companies have recently joined forces to launch the Waterproof 256003 CDB boot, described by Skechers as having a 'rugged brown leather upper, green detailing, and signature John Deere branding.'

The boot, according to Skechers, is designed for long days in the outdoors and integrates its Hands-Free Slip-ins and Air-Cooled Memory Foam for comfort and lasting support. Beneath it all, a Goodyear Performance Outsole ensures all-terrain traction and resilience across soil, gravel, and yard alike. A spokesperson for Skechers said: "This isn't just a work boot, it's a symbol of pride and practicality, merging farm-ready endurance with all-day wearability. Whether you're tending fields, running machinery, or heading into town, these boots keep pace with every step."





Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

There is growing concern in farming and co-op circles at the impact of the Cross Border Abatement Mechanism (CBAM) regulation, which, in simple terms, is going to result in an increase in fertiliser prices across the board. CBAM is the EU's tool to put a fair price on carbon emitted during the production of carbon-intensive goods that are entering the EU; and to encourage cleaner industrial production in non-EU countries. Ultimately, it is aimed at mitigating carbon leakage and has been in a transitional phase since 2023.

But, from January, 2026, next, CBAM will apply and the fear is it will impact the price of CAN and urea. This EU policy is aimed at supporting decarbonisation as part of its Fit for 55 package and overarching ambition to make the EU carbon neutral by 2050. CBAM will apply in its definitive regime from 2026, with a transitional phase of 2023 to 2025. 'A food tax' is how those in the fertiliser sector are terming this at a time when food inflation is causing angst while there is ongoing concern about the competitiveness of EU agriculture. It has prompted ICOS and the IFA here in Brussels to highlight these concerns at the highest level of the EU Commission, calling for the immediate postponement of CBAM obligations for fertiliser in 2026 due to the complex and unworkable nature of the regulation.

The cost of food production remains at elevated levels due to global economic and geopolitical events, resulting in higher food prices for consumers. The inclusion of fertiliser under CBAM effectively translates into a tax on food production that, if implemented, will add to the cost of production at dairy farm level by over a cent per litre.

ICOS Dairy Committee chairperson, Eamon McEnteggart, along with co-ops and other stakeholders, have written to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, MEPs and key EU Commission officials highlighting the potential impact of this measure considering for Ireland the key strength is our grass-based production, which needs to access reasonable amounts of fertiliser at competitive prices. Consequently, CBAM will have a disproportionate effect on protected urea compared to other sources of nitrogen, which is completely contrary to our climate policy objectives. It would have unintentional negative consequences for climate targets also. Yet another well-intentioned piece of legislation that might solve one problem but creates another. Welcome to EU policymaking!



Why prevention trumps cure

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

Prevention of metabolic issues in Spring 2026 will depend on management decisions which will be made over the coming weeks. Taking clinical case costs as well as time and labour into account, prevention remains better than cure.

Cost of Metabolic Disorders (clinical cases)

Metabolic Disease	Estimated Cost/Case
Milk Fever	€312
Clinical Ketosis	€190
Retained Afterbirth	€392
Displaced Abomasum	€515
Mastitis	€262
Acute Lameness	€312

Best practice recommends drying off cows at (or close to) the same condition that they should calve down in (Target BCS 3.0-3.25). Nutrition over the dry period targeting maintenance typically equates to 68-70% DMD silage in an adlib silage feeding scenario.

Should a herd feature over-conditioned cows with potential metabolic issues, batch accordingly or use dilution.

Dry Cow Mineral Provision: Feeding a dry cow mineral during the dry period builds up mineral reserves and allows for comfortable calving down. High Potassium (K) levels in silages requires dilution of K levels in the diet and/or a high level of soluble Magnesium (Mg) to counter the increased risk. High levels of K limits locks Mg absorption, delays the release of Calcium (Ca) and increases the incidence of milk fever. Grass silage with greater than 1.8% K can cause issues.

Sub-clinical cases of milk fever are estimated to cost over €100 with approximately six undetected sub-clinical cases for every single clinical case seen. This typically presents through slow calving and/or retained afterbirths.

When this arises, a silage mineral analysis establishes K% in the dry cow silage being offered - a preventative plan can prevent reoccurrences.

Feed facilities: Minerals can be provided via diet feeder or where top-dressing minerals at the barrier and space is limited. Offer mineral twice daily (half rate AM/half rate PM) to ensure all cows receive the correct amount.

For more information contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit www.agritech.ie



www.agritech.ie

InTouch

WHAT YOUR SILAGE IS TELLING YOU

CATHAL BOHANE,
TECHNICAL MANAGER

As October brought milder weather, grass growth has had a seasonal boost across the country. Data from Pasturebase indicates that this year's growth is set to exceed both last year's figures and the five-year average. However, it's important to recognise that growth rates can vary significantly due to local micro-climates, meaning that farms only a short distance apart may experience very different conditions. Many farms are now approaching their autumn closing targets, with heavier farms closing by mid-November with drier farms able to extend grazing until the end of November, depending on local conditions.

With silage soon becoming a major component of livestock diets, it is crucial to have it analysed before feeding. While it's often said that cows are the best 'laboratories' for testing silage quality, relying solely on animal performance can be risky, especially in block-calving systems. In these systems, issues may only become apparent after they have already impacted herd health or productivity, making it difficult to correct problems in time. This is particularly true for spring calving herds, where catching up after a nutritional setback can be challenging.



Many silage analyses use a traffic-light system to indicate mineral levels, but it's vital to understand that these colours simply show whether a result is high or low compared to other samples analysed by the laboratory and they do not indicate whether a result is inherently good or bad. Major minerals can highlight risks of metabolic issues around calving, while trace elements play a key role in fertility, immunity, health and overall productivity. For example, high potassium (K) in this sample (ideally <1.8 per cent) and elevated cation-anion balance (CAB) increase the risk of milk fever. To mitigate this, dilute the silage and supplement with extra magnesium. Low levels of copper, zinc and selenium can negatively affect animal health, fertility, immunity, and productivity. High concentrations of 'antagonist' minerals like molybdenum can worsen copper deficiencies. Therefore, it's important to supplement with high-quality protected minerals, such as Bioplex or Selplex, and to seek mineral advice tailored to your specific silage from your supplier.

KEENAN
an Alltech company

Alltech

SMEs URGED TO REGISTER INTEREST IN NEW EXPORTING INITIATIVE

A new Get Exporting programme, designed to help non-exporting and early-stage companies begin their export journey, has been launched. The programme supports businesses in developing market-entry capabilities, overcoming barriers, and achieving export success. Delivered in partnership with Enterprise Ireland, InterTradeIreland, Local Enterprise Offices, and Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Get Exporting programme represents a national, cross-agency collaboration focused on supporting Irish SMEs to become first-time exporters and strengthening Ireland's export performance. The programme will begin in January 2026 and is open to Irish manufacturing and internationally traded services companies with less than €10,000 in annual exports sales, looking to succeed in international markets. As part of the programme, businesses will be provided with one-to-one advice, market insights and practical workshops supporting the development of an actionable export plan. Businesses will also benefit from practical skills in market research, lead generation and market testing to enable export success. Launching the new programme of supports, Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment Peter Burke said: "Exporting is a vital growth driver for SMEs and essential to Ireland's competitiveness, innovation and economic resilience. Our ambition is to expand the current exporter base through supporting Irish businesses to scale and become more competitive internationally, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Irish economy."

"The Get Exporting programme will enable and support all of our SMEs from the smallest micro companies upwards, to internationalise, ensuring they are fully equipped to grow by capitalising on export opportunities. I am encouraging as many companies as possible to engage with the programme, which will reap benefits in your business performance and also in your region in terms of employment and the local economy."

Jenny Melia, CEO, Enterprise Ireland said: "As part of Enterprise Ireland's five-year strategy to Accelerate Sustainable Irish Business, we have committed to supporting 1,700 additional Irish-owned exporters by 2029. Our key objective is to increase the volume and quality of exporters, maximising the potential success for Irish businesses in world markets. To support this, the Get Exporting programme, a national initiative, offers expert led strategic advice, workshops, and in-market insights to support Irish businesses to develop actionable export plans, supporting them to win business and succeed internationally."

Oisín Geoghegan, Local Enterprise Offices, said: "For a small business, exporting can be an extremely daunting prospect. There can be concerns about the language barrier, ways of working, rules and regulations – there is a huge amount to consider when you look to break into a new market. It is important that small businesses are aware that the expertise and the contacts for these markets already exist and that's the core of what Get Exporting is all about." Further information is available from the Enterprise Ireland website.



JUST 18% OF QUAD USERS SURVEYED WEAR A HELMET

Results of a survey carried out by Agri Aware as part of its 'Sowing Wellbeing in Every Field' campaign, reveal that a worryingly low number of quad bike users wear a helmet while operating the vehicle. The survey, conducted at the National Ploughing Championships, disclosed that just 18 per cent of those questioned said they wear a helmet at all times while operating a quad. The remaining 72 per cent answered they would 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' wear a helmet while operating one.

Of those surveyed who own or use a quad, just over 57 per cent own a helmet, while just over 50 per cent have completed a quad-training course – both of which, under new legislation introduced in 2023, are required by all quad users.

The final survey question related to the legal age permitted to drive a quad – 16 years' and over. Of those surveyed, 41 per cent either answered incorrectly or didn't know what the legal age limit is.

Agri Aware chair, Shay Galvin said that these statistics highlight the need for further awareness on the legislation that is in place since 2023, and around the dangers posed by a quad. He added: "We are seeing more and more accidents involving quads on farms, some of which are fatal. Furthermore, there is no doubt that there are many who are involved in accidents with quads that aren't reported also. The results of the surveys completed at the National Ploughing Championships show the work we need to do to in this space to ensure users of quads are aware of the legislative requirements that allow users to be safe whilst driving a quad." Turn to pages 42 and 43 to read more about Agri Aware's 'Sowing Wellbeing in Every Field' campaign.

HEALTH CHECKS INITIATIVE SURPASSES TARGET

The Irish Farmers' Association's (IFA's) Free Health Checks programme for 2025 has concluded its successful run, with the target of 2,000 checks across 30 different locations surpassed, the IFA has said. This was the second year of the initiative, which saw the IFA partner with CROÍ, and receive support from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. IFA president, Francie Gorman said the nationwide rollout of the health checks in recent months has built on the success of the pilot programme last year. "Apart from the benefit to the participants, the programme has generated a greater level of awareness among the farming community about the importance of keeping on top of any health issues that may arise. The most valuable asset on any farm is the

farmer, so anything that reinforces the importance of minding their health is essential," he said.

IFA Farm Family & Social Affairs chair, Teresa Roche acknowledged the efforts of CROÍ personnel in delivering the checks around the country. "Understandably, some people might be reluctant to put themselves forward for a check-up. But the familiar surroundings of the local mart and the professional approach from CROÍ made it a very smooth process. I also want to thank the members of the IFA Farm Family Committee who provided support and back up at the various locations." The IFA will prepare a report on this year's programme, which will contain the outcomes and recommendations.

ICMMSA
THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION
 John Feely House, Dublin Road, Limerick.
 Tel: 061 314677 Fax: 061 315737 Email: cathalmaccarthy@icmsa.ie Web: www.icmsa.ie



OLDER FARMERS – STAYING SAFE WHILE STAYING ACTIVE

AS WITH ANY PHYSICALLY DEMANDING OCCUPATION, FARMING PRESENTS RISKS THAT CAN INCREASE WITH AGE. RECOGNISING AND MITIGATING THEM ARE HUGE IMPORTANT, WRITES CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER

Farming is a fulfilling way of life that often spans generations. Older farmers continue to contribute valuable experience, skills, and knowledge to the land and their families but it is so important to take practical steps to ensure their safety is prioritised.

So far, in 2025 (at the time of print), there have been 16 tragic fatalities on Irish farms, 15 of which involved individuals over the age of 60. Agriculture continues to account for half of all workplace fatalities this year. These figures are a stark reminder of the unique safety challenges facing senior members of the farming community.

OLDER FARMERS – GREATER RISK

According to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), between 2015 and 2024, 171 people lost their lives in farm accidents. Of these, 91 (53 per cent) were aged 65 or older, and a further 34 (20 per cent) were between 55 and 65 years of age. Most fatal accidents among farmers aged 65 and over were linked to:

- ▶ Vehicles (36 per cent);
- ▶ Livestock (24 per cent);
- ▶ Falls (17 per cent);
- ▶ Falling objects or loads (8 per cent); and
- ▶ Drowning (8 per cent).

As we get older, we also tend to recover more slowly from injuries. Even minor incidents can have more serious consequences, making injury prevention all the more important.

AGE-RELATED FACTORS

Age affects everyone differently. While many farmers remain fit and capable well beyond retirement age, it's essential to be realistic about the natural changes that come with ageing. Recognising these changes is not a weakness, rather it's a wise and proactive approach to staying safe.

Here are some common age-related factors to be aware of:

▶ Strength

Muscle mass and strength naturally decline with age, which may increase the risk of strains, sprains, or falls. It is important not to compensate for decreased strength by adopting unsafe work practices or taking shortcuts.

▶ Mobility

Reduced mobility can limit your ability to react quickly in dangerous situations, such as moving out of the path of an oncoming vehicle or animal.

▶ Vision

Sight can deteriorate gradually, especially in low light or at distance. This can pose risks when working at dusk, in dimly lit sheds, or when reading controls or warning signs.

▶ Hearing

Hearing loss is common with age and can be worsened by long-term exposure to loud farm machinery/equipment or confirmed animals. This may make it harder to detect danger signals.

▶ Health conditions

Chronic illnesses like arthritis, high blood pressure, or diabetes can affect reaction times or stamina. Some medications may also cause drowsiness or reduce concentration.

PRACTICAL SAFETY TIPS

Remaining active on the farm is not only possible but beneficial, provided you take the right precautions. Here are key steps older farmers should consider:

- ▶ Risk assessment: Before beginning any task, particularly those involving machinery, livestock, or heights, ask yourself:
 - ▶ Can I do this job safely?
 - ▶ Do I need help?
 - ▶ Should I hire a specialist (e.g. for work at height or building repairs)?
 - ▶ Do I have the right equipment?
- ▶ Machinery and vehicles: Keep all machinery and vehicles well-maintained. Avoid using outdated or unsafe equipment.
- ▶ Livestock handling: Invest in secure, well-designed handling facilities such as calving gates.
- ▶ Farm system review: Consider adapting your farming system to reduce physical strain. For example, switching from calving to dry stock farming can help reduce risks associated with handling animals.

- ▶ Stay connected: Let someone know where you are going when you are on the farm and carry a fully charged mobile phone.
- ▶ Health monitoring: Schedule regular check-ups with your GP; get your hearing tested annually. Have your eyes examined at least every two years.

ESSENTIAL ROLE

Ageing does not mean stepping away from farming altogether: far from it. Older farmers continue to play an essential role, not only in farm work but also in guiding and educating younger generations with the skills required and about the importance of farm safety. The key is adapting to change and recognising that a lifetime of experience is most valuable when paired with a willingness to modify practices to stay safe. Take time to assess your own safety on the farm. Talk with family, make practical changes where needed, and never hesitate to seek help or advice.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

FBD continues to work closely with the Health and Safety Authority and the wider farming community to promote safer farming practices. Safety on farms is everyone's responsibility; from farmers themselves to family members, neighbours, and the organisations that support them. Together, we can help ensure that experience and wisdom remain active on Irish farms for many years to come.

Sources:

Health and Safety Authority (HSA) fatal accident data, 2015-2024. Fatality statistics correct as of October 8, 2025.

For more farm safety information, scan the code





CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS & FINALISTS IN THE TEAGASC FBD ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS

**Don Somers is the Teagasc FBD Environmentally
Sustainable Farmer of the Year 2025**

Category Winners:

Patrick & Margaret Dollard, Kilkenny – Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Tom Tierney, Kildare – Enhancing Biodiversity

Don Somers, Wexford – Improving Water Quality

Conor & Vincent O'Brien, Galway – Improving Soil Health

Kay O'Sullivan, Cork – Organic Production

Emer O'Keefe, Cork - Diversification

SUPPORT.

IT'S WHAT WE DO.





Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

LONG-TERM DECLINE IN THE NATIONAL HERD

‘Will rising beef prices reverse the long-term decline in Irish cattle numbers?’, asks agri-food economist, Ciaran FitzGerald

Ireland’s beef cow numbers have been on a sustained downward trajectory for more than a decade. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) livestock census in June 2025, the total cattle population fell by 278,300 head (3.9 per cent) to 6.9 million, marking a 12-year low. The decline is most acute in the suckler sector, where numbers fell by 46,800 (-5.7 per cent) between June 2024 and June 2025 alone, continuing a long-term trend. Over the past 10 years, the suckler herd has contracted by around 270,000 cows, and by over 400,000 since its 2012 peak. Official explanations highlight low profitability, income volatility, and an ageing farmer demographic. However, many within the sector also point to the pressure of carbon reduction targets and increasingly complex environmental verification rules, which have made life more difficult for smaller, traditionally run beef herds.

Fragmented and complex

Unlike dairy, Ireland’s beef industry is not an integrated production model, with the calf-to-beef integrated system accounting for less than 20 per cent of cattle sold for slaughter each year. Instead, the sector comprises a patchwork of systems from autumn- and spring-born steer production to dairy-beef runners, continental weanling systems and bull beef operations. This fragmentation makes it difficult to assess how increases in finished cattle prices translate back to suckler cow margins. Each system responds differently to market signals. When finished cattle prices rise, the benefits often dissipate along the chain. A stronger weanling price might boost suckler margins, but it simultaneously increases input costs for finishers. As a result, price increases rarely trigger uniform incentives across the sector, and that complicates any simple cause-and-effect link between higher beef prices and herd expansion.

Table 1: Total number of cattle. Source: CSO, June Census 2025.

	June 2023	June 2024	June 2025	Change 2024 - 2025	%
	'000		'000		
Total cattle	7,341.8	7,183.1	6,964.8	-278.3	-3.9
Dairy cows ¹	1,848.8	1,824.8	1,587.9	-26.1	-2.2
Other cows	872.1	825.3	778.5	-48.8	-5.7
Bulls ²	48.5	49.1	49.0	-0.1	-0.2
Cattle male: 2 years and over	410.7	410.0	355.2	-54.8	-13.4
Cattle female: 2 years and over	379.8	402.0	388.8	-16.2	-4.0
Cattle male: 1-2 years	847.8	804.9	778.5	-28.4	-3.5
Cattle female: 1-2 years	1,062.9	1,041.4	1,009.5	-31.9	-3.1
Cattle male: under 1 year	953.4	930.2	902.7	-27.4	-3.0
Cattle female: under 1 year	1,120.8	1,098.2	1,059.7	-38.5	-3.3
Total cattle male	2,263.3	2,196.1	2,083.9	-119.7	-5.5
Total cattle female	5,878.1	4,989.0	4,881.4	-167.6	-3.4

¹ Dairy cows are those kept principally to produce milk for human consumption.
² Bulls used for breeding purposes only.

Price versus policy

Over the last half-century, the main drivers of Irish beef cow numbers have been policy supports rather than market prices. After the price collapse of 1974, the beef cow herd fell from about 800,000 head to 400,000 in the 1980s. Recovery only came with the 1992 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms and the introduction of the suckler cow premium, which pushed the herd above one million by the mid-1990s. The removal of coupled payments and the erosion of direct support levels in more recent CAP reforms have contributed significantly to the ongoing decline.

Turning a corner?

Despite historically low incomes, 2024 marked a turning point. According to Teagasc data, most beef systems recorded positive net margins for the first time in years. Single suckling enterprises moved from a negative €20/ha margin in 2023 to a positive €108/ha margin last year, with a margin of €133/ha or higher predicted for 2025. The drivers of these higher margins include higher cattle prices, along with reduced fixed and variable costs. Cattle finishing enterprises, too, have seen margin improvements, with this year’s margin expected to hit

€191/ha, up 8 per cent on 2024. Meanwhile, dairy-beef systems have come from a 2023 average margin of €162/ha (with the top third achieving €649/ha), to an average margin last year of €402/ha, driven by higher gross output and lower costs. However, performance varied widely, with the top-performing farms reaching €811/ha, while the bottom third averaged €66/ha. However, as mentioned above, despite better margins than other systems, the calf-to-beef integrated model is a minority pursuit on Irish cattle farms.

For general context, Teagasc's 2022 data showed average family farm incomes of just €9,400 for cattle rearing farms, compared to €18,800 for finishers. That year, higher weanling prices failed to offset rising input costs, underlining how fragile profitability has been.

The recent margin improvements, driven by record beef price, may finally offer some relief. But they raise two crucial questions: will current price levels last and where does suckler beef sit in the environmental and policy agenda? While producer margins are up, sustainability depends on how long today's exceptional beef prices persist. History suggests that price spikes alone rarely sustain herd rebuilding, especially without policy incentives. Future support will hinge on how suckler systems are valued politically amid climate commitments. Without targeted payments recognising their environmental and rural contribution, price improvements may only slow, not reverse, the decline in numbers.

Table 2: Average annual R3 steer prices with three-year rolling average. Source: European Commission.



Resilience

Despite record prices and reduced supply across Ireland, the UK, and the EU, beef demand has held up surprisingly well. Predicted price elasticity effects, where consumers would switch to cheaper proteins like chicken or pork, have been weaker than expected. This suggests a growing consumer appreciation for grass-fed, low-carbon Irish beef, even amid strong calls for plant-based alternatives.

Profitability picture

Despite ongoing structural decline, 2024 and 2025 have brought the most encouraging financial outlook for beef producers in many years.

According to Teagasc, net margins across nearly all beef systems have improved dramatically, driven by higher cattle prices, reduced input costs, and improved efficiency. The recent turnaround is therefore significant. All major beef systems are forecast to post positive net margins this year, a psychological as well as financial boost for a sector long accustomed to surviving on direct payments rather than market returns.

The Irish beef sector stands at a crossroads. Current prices and margins are the most encouraging in many years and may well apply the brakes to the long-term fall in suckler numbers. However, unless profitability becomes structurally sustainable, supported by coherent policy measures and a stable environmental framework, a full-scale recovery in herd size remains unlikely. The current upswing may mark not a reversal, but a pause in decline and the beginning of a more cautious, sustainability-focused beef era in Ireland.

Conclusion

Ireland's beef sector has proven its resilience many times before. It has survived price collapses, CAP reforms and shifting consumer preferences. Today, it faces a new challenge: balancing environmental responsibility with economic survival. Rising prices have offered a glimmer of hope but they are unlikely to trigger a dramatic turnaround on their own. More likely, they will apply the handbrake to the long-term decline, providing breathing space for policymakers, processors, and farmers to rethink how Ireland sustains one of its most iconic agricultural enterprises.

The next few years will reveal whether this moment of profitability marks the start of renewal, or simply a pause in a longer process of structural change.



A REPORT PUBLISHED BY IFAC, WHICH PROVIDES SPECIALIST ADVICE TO THE FARMING, FOOD AND AGRI-BUSINESS COMMUNITY, REVEALS THAT WHILE RECORD NUMBERS OF IRISH FOOD AND AGRI-BUSINESS LEADERS ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD, ALMOST HALF HAVE DELAYED INVESTMENT BECAUSE OF UNCERTAINTY. **IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY** BRINGS YOU THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS RECENTLY PUBLISHED REPORT WHICH SHOWS THAT SUCCESS AND CAUTION ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN RIGHT NOW

BALANCING SUCCESS WITH CAUTION

The 2025 Food and Agribusiness Report, now in its eighth year, is based on the views of food and agri-business leaders in Ireland.

The report revealed that optimism levels have returned to their highest levels, with 80 per cent of business owners feeling optimistic about business performance over the next 12 months. While this is positive news, it is not the whole story.

David Leydon, head of growth and agri-food consulting at Ifac told *Irish Farmers Monthly*: "Eight out of 10 businesses have reported an increase in costs again this year. These cost increases have consistently impacted margin every year since the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, 80 per cent of business leaders are optimistic about their company performance over the next 12 months."

On some of the other report findings, he said: "We found that 77 per cent of agri-food businesses surveyed do not have a clear succession, or leadership transition plan in place. Food and agri-business companies need to do more in the AI space to identify where it can make a material difference to business margins."

"Two in five businesses have no formal marketing strategy or rely on a reactive approach. That's on the low side and needs to be improved. We also see that one in five businesses are not focusing on market research as much as they should be and are

missing out on valuable data and growth opportunities."

CHALLENGES AND TARIFFS

Returning to some of the challenges facing businesses, the report found that two of the top three challenges remain the same as in 2024 – input costs and staffing. Sixty per cent of businesses cited the cost of inputs as a challenge to growth. This was followed by trade tariffs (48 per cent), while staffing shortages were the third most common concern (40 per cent).

Karol Kissane, who is head of public sector services and economics at Ifac, dealt with the topic of tariffs in the report. He highlighted that the standardised 15 per cent tariff rate that has been introduced on a broad range of goods imported to the US from the EU – while many goods going in the opposite direction have had tariffs lowered – marks a major turning point in transatlantic trade relations. "One-third of survey respondents consider tariffs as one of the most concerning macroeconomic factors, with 38 per cent saying uncertainty around trading tariffs is one of their biggest challenges to sales outside Ireland," he said. Sixty-six per cent of respondents exporting to the US said uncertainty around trading tariffs is one of their biggest challenges to sales outside Ireland. Karol continued: "While the new 15

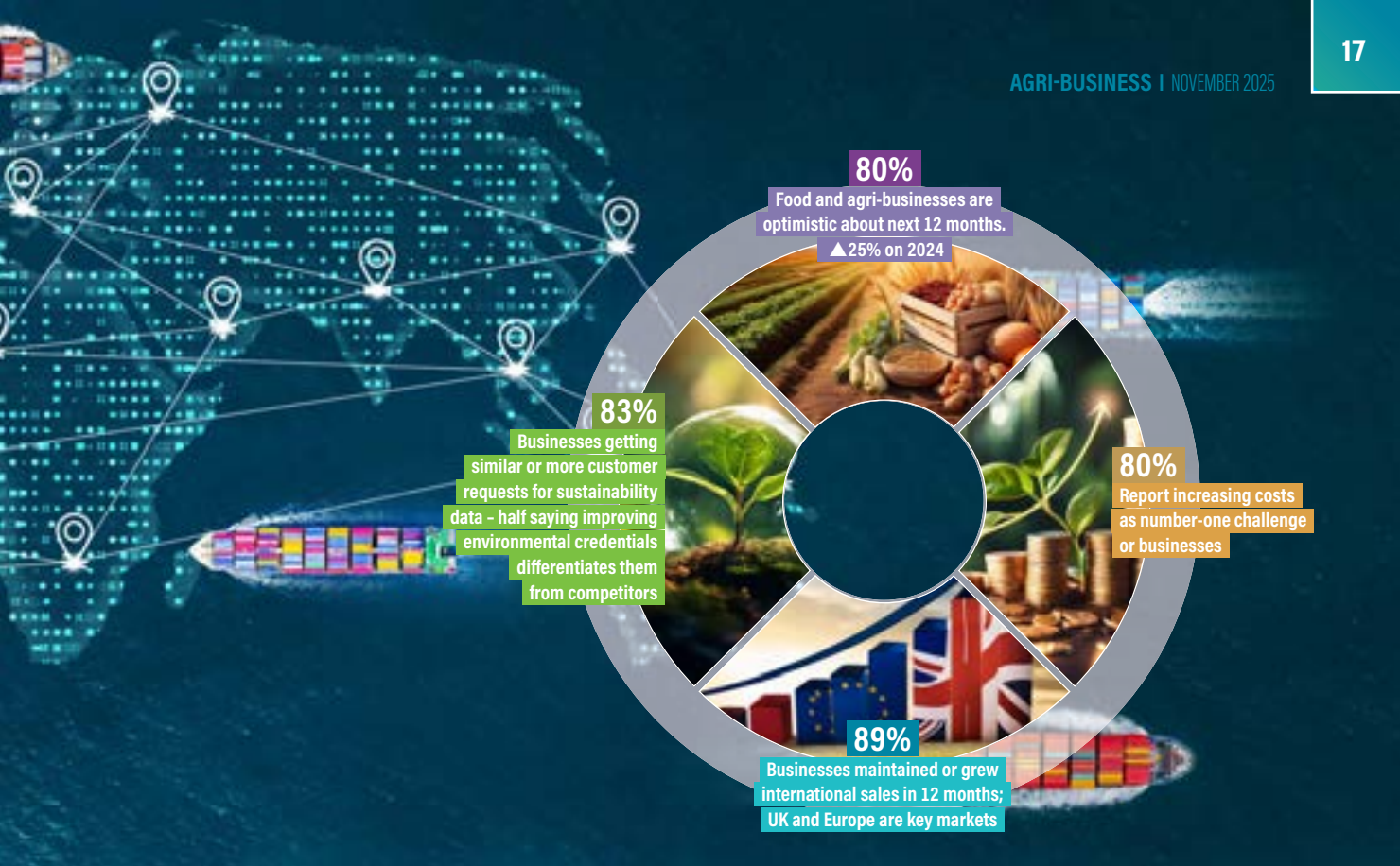
OLD AND NEW

The new agreement will see a rate of 15 per cent applied to exports that previously had a rate of less than 15 per cent, while any exports which had a rate of greater than 15 per cent before Donal Trump's announcement in April will now revert to the previous rate which was greater than 15 per cent. For goods which are subject to a fixed duty, such as dollars per kilogramme of product, the equivalent percentage rate of duty will be calculated by dividing the duty payable by the customs value of the goods.

per cent ceiling on many goods simplifies the regime, it still represents a cost increase for many companies previously trading under the Most Favoured Nation rate, which averaged circa 4.8 per cent on exports to the US. For Irish exporters in sectors such as agri-food, drinks, food-processing equipment, dairy technology and machinery, the new tariffs introduce pressure on margins and pricing, he wrote.

UK ADVANTAGE?

While the UK secured a lower tariff deal with the US of 10 per cent – versus the EU's 15 per



cent – this does not mean they are paying less across the board, as Karol explained in the report: “The EU’s new 15 per cent tariff agreement with the US is an all-inclusive ceiling, covering existing Most Favoured Nation (MFN) duties, unlike the UK’s 10 per cent rate which adds on top of MFN tariffs. In practice, this means the EU often faces a lower effective tariff than the UK. For example, EU cheese exports face a flat 15 per cent tariff while UK cheese exports face 10 per cent plus the existing 14.9 per cent MFN rate, totalling nearly 25 per cent. While some UK products may see marginal advantages, the EU deal secures broader, more predictable market access across many key goods.”

IMPLICATIONS

Commenting on the implications for Ireland, Karol wrote: “Irish-US trade topped €72.6bn in 2024, with Irish agri-food and drinks and high-value agri machinery and components playing a significant role. Agri-food and drinks alone accounted for over €1.9bn of exports to the US in 2024. The 15 per cent tariff may dent some subsectors but could also enhance stability and prevent future trade wars. For businesses, the real challenge is adapting quickly. Those who embed trade resilience into their models through cost control, contract discipline, digital tracking, and proactive pricing will come out stronger.”

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Many of the food and agri-businesses surveyed for the report look beyond the domestic market for sales. For 24 per cent of respondents, more than half of their turnover is generated from exports with 56 per cent of respondents saying they saw a growth in international sales in the past 12 months. While 34 per cent of respondents identified exporting to new markets as one of the biggest opportunities for growth, challenges were also highlighted. Topping the list are market entry and distribution (44 per cent), uncertainty around trading tariffs (38 per cent) and generating sufficient margin from international sales (33 per cent). Eighty-nine per cent of respondents said their international sales have stayed the same or increased in the

past 12 months.

The UK (52 per cent) and the rest of Europe (41 per cent) are respondents’ primary export markets, followed by the US (26 per cent). Ireland has a strong reputation and established customer relationships in these markets, the report states and despite Brexit, the UK has remained the largest single export market for Irish food, drink and horticulture. Exports were worth €5.9 billion in 2024, a 7 per cent increase from 2023. Reasons for this include proximity, language and similar legal, corporate and tax systems. It is also an affluent market. If a company is considering exporting for the first time, the importance of these factors should not be forgotten.

EXPORTS

On the exports side, the report revealed that 89 per cent of businesses are maintaining or growing international sales. In 2024, the value of Irish agri-food exports increased by 5 per cent to €17bn according to Bord Bia, maintaining the upward trajectory seen in previous years. This is reflected in the survey with 56 per cent of respondents seeing a growth in their international sales in the past

12 months. Half of the respondents export to the UK, and one in four to the US. However, 66 per cent of those exporting to the US cite tariffs as a top challenge.

BURNS FARM MEATS - CASE STUDY

The Ifac report included case studies of agri-businesses that handled export pressures well. For example, Burns Farm Meats, an eighth-generation family business based in

north Sligo, emphasised stringent internal cost discipline, yield optimisation, and margin focus. Their experience shows that when export margins tighten, internal efficiency becomes your first buffer.

According to the report, Burns Farm Meats produces a range of meat products for wholesale foodservice and retail. Cathal Burns and his brother Diarmaid have been running the business since 2022, when they took over from their father Gerald. In Ifac's report, Cathal discussed how the business has been handling price increases, which he said have been hugely impactful over the last few months as the price of beef and lamb have increased.

The increases have given them cause to look at the efficiency of their whole operation, from the procurement and slaughtering side of the business through to chilling, deboning, packing, and logistics, he said. Commenting on the company's loyal customer base, Cathal said that the company tries to pass on savings made to them wherever possible. "Every cost-saving measure can be used to reduce the burden on the end consumer.



Launching Ifac's Food and Agribusiness Report are David Leydon, head of growth and agri-food consulting at Ifac and Jenny Melia, Enterprise Ireland CEO and keynote interviewee within the report.

We have a very loyal customer base; we try to pass on savings wherever possible. We analysed the way we were breaking down beef and lamb carcasses and tried to maximise each part to generate as much as possible from each animal," he explained. He added that the company has started to build a database of each animal it debones, looking at the breed, age, weight (pre and post slaughter), the farm the animal has come from and the meat yield. "This information helps us to make better informed decisions when buying cattle and lambs for the business."

Over the last 12 months the company has had to raise the prices of all its products, said Cathal. "We had to re-negotiate a number of government contracts at the start of the year because of how fast the price of beef increased from January to April. Increasing prices to wholesale and food service businesses was not an easy subject to broach with our customers." He said they have put a huge emphasis on costing and pricing because they had to raise prices to stay profitable. "We have a limited number of products so we cannot operate a margin mix strategy to keep our price to the customer low in that way, so keeping in constant contact with our customers is vital," he said. At the time of interview for the Ifac report, Cathal said they were carrying out an operational and financial review of the whole business with Ifac. They had stopped slaughtering pigs and processing wild game to concentrate on beef and lamb, which had them to increase the volume getting to the plant. "A change to carcass deboning also enables them to slaughter double the amount they could do 12 months ago, in half the time.

 An advertisement for Skechers featuring a farmer in the background and a large John Deere boot in the foreground. The farmer is wearing a red cap, safety glasses, and a grey t-shirt, sitting in the driver's seat of a tractor. The boot is tan with green laces and a John Deere logo on the side. The background is a blurred green field. The Skechers and John Deere logos are in the top right corner. At the bottom, a yellow banner reads "AVAILABLE AT SKECHERS STORES".

John Deere's green and yellow color scheme, the leaping deer symbol, and JOHN DEERE are trademarks of Deere & Company.

AVAILABLE AT SKECHERS STORES



NEOMILK®

PROVIDING THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CALF, FARM AND A BETTER FUTURE

To give your farm a healthy tomorrow, your calves need the right start today.

The NeoMilk® range uses precision nutrition: a balanced formulation designed for sustainable cost effective rearing and a resilient, productive herd.



© 2022, Cargill, Incorporated. All Rights Reserved - www.cargill.com



Contact your Cargill
Animal Nutrition
expert for more
information

Cargill Animal Nutrition Ireland
00353 45 975726
www.provimi.com
[@CargillAnimalNutritionIreland](https://www.facebook.com/CargillAnimalNutritionIreland)

NeoMilk®
FOLLOW-ON MILK

GROWING AMBITIONS FOR THE FORESTRY SECTOR

THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORESTRY ASSOCIATION (SEEFA) ORGANISED A SERIES OF PANEL DISCUSSIONS AT ITS FORESTRY HUB DURING THE RECENT NATIONAL PLOUGHING CHAMPIONSHIPS. MATT O'KEEFE HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE MAIN ITEMS DEBATED DURING ONE OF THE PANELS TITLED, 'IMPROVING FORESTRY: IRELAND'S PATH FORWARD'

SEEFA's forestry hub hosted six panel discussions, all discussing the state of the country's forestry sector with a focus on planting strategies, financial supports, sustainability, biodiversity, land use and the critical role of the sector in securing Ireland's emissions reductions targets.

All panel discussions were chaired by former Offaly hurler, Michael Duignan, but for the purpose of this article we concentrate on the panel that featured: Professor Cathal O'Donoghue, chair of Social and Public Policy at the University of Galway; Conor Daly, managing director of The Forestry Company and treasurer of SEEFA; Pádraig Stapleton, Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) Forestry Committee chair; and Michael Healy-Rae, Minister of State with special responsibility for Forestry, Farm Safety and Horticulture at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

Setting out the parameters for discussion, the chair said: "On the economic front, we'll ask our panel to make clear how forestry supports farm income, rural jobs and the wider community, and to highlight near-term steps that improve returns and reduce risk. We will examine how timber production cuts emissions compared with imports and that higher planting is needed."

THE CARBON GAP

The panel discussion and subsequent audience participation heard differing opinions on how best to promote increased planting. Calls for a dedicated forestry development agency were met with a firm rebuttal from the minister, while he assured forest owners of his total commitment to the sector.

Professor Cathal O' Donoghue provided background to current afforestation statistics. "At the foundation of the State, only 1 per cent of the land area was covered in forestry. That is now 11 per cent. We often focus on the present, forgetting that forestry is a huge success story. It's the biggest land use change since Irish independence." But, he added, the current target of 8,000 hectares per annum is not enough for us to achieve carbon neutrality from agricultural and forestry land use by 2050 under the Climate Action Plan. He stated: "Twelve years ago, the department set a target to reach 18 per cent of our land area covered by forestry by 2050. We have done land-use modelling at Galway university and delivering on that target would have required planting 14,000 hectares every year." He continued: "We found that about half of all farmers in the long-run would be better off planting forestry than their existing land

use. There are good returns. They're tax free, with a premium initially, and free of income tax at harvesting.

"We have a carbon tax on fossil fuels. The State places a cost on the carbon that we emit and, by implication, there's a value on the carbon that's stored in trees. If you were to pay for that carbon, you'd find that 85 per cent of farmers would be better off planting forestry at €100/tonne, which would be the carbon price in 2030. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform more than doubled their carbon pricing values last December. A cost/benefit analysis for any State investment in carbon storage would show a positive return for investing in sequestering carbon in forestry. We don't currently price it. The existing scheme is worth €40 per tonne between the premium, the establishment grant, and the value of the tax allowance. There's a big gap between that and what a carbon value payment would deliver."

LAND USE COMPETITION

IFA Forestry Committee chair, Pádraig Stapleton highlighted land use options competing with forestry: "Currently, you can rent your land out for 10 years tax free, after which you can use the land as you wish. The



current forestry programme commits the landowner to permanent afforestation. The disappearance of Ash as a planting choice means that there is no commercial broadleaf planting option. Most other broadleaf species take hundreds of years to mature. With the broadleaf requirement, after the premiums end, there is no commercial return for several generations, unlike Sitka, which can mature in 35 to 40 years. That model has to change, otherwise farmers won't sign up to it."

SEEFA treasurer, Conor Daly, had a strong view on Sitka planting: "The days of planting one 100 per cent Sitka are gone. I believe there will be payments for biodiversity in the future. Forestry would benefit from that. So, planting with 15 per cent open space and 20 per cent broadleaves, should deliver a financial benefit in the years ahead.

"I think there's a great opportunity in the voluntary carbon market for farmers to get paid for planting their land and getting a carbon payment benefit. Forestry owners can get their carbon measured, validated and certified and put on the voluntary carbon market."

LAND ELIGIBILITY

Joining in on the debate, Minister Healy-Rae had this to say: "Sometimes people who think they know a lot, actually know very

little about what they're talking about. They say that it's an absolute no-no to plant on bogland. I am not for one second suggesting, and never did, that we should be planting on deep peat ground. What I propose is allowing planting on peaty-type soils that you couldn't cut a sod of turf from if you tried for a hundred years. Peaty soils are not turf bogs, neither are they mineral soils. They are grass-covered marginal soils, perfectly suitable for planting. I have put €2.7m into researching proof that there is nothing wrong with planting those peaty-type sites on marginal agricultural lands." He went on to highlight the absolute necessity for house building, and the role of timber in that.

He said: "What I don't want is for us to be importing timber from Scotland or Brazil. I want us to have our own timber. I want us to be harvesting timber from Irish land, cutting it up in our own sawmills and used to build houses in this country. That's the most environmentally sensible thing you could be doing."

FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY - YAY OR NAY?

Professor O'Donoghue proposed that a forestry development agency would drive on the sector, and is necessary. Reaching this conclusion, he said: "I split increased afforestation delivery into three requirements. One is financial. Another is eliminating bureaucratic challenges, as outlined in the McKinnon report. Nevertheless, the replanting obligation is a big psychological impediment. If you're committing your land out of agriculture forever, it's very hard to make that choice, even if the likelihood is that in 40 years' time, people would replant anyway. If the incentives and returns are there, you're likely to stay in forestry. The final big challenge is the way we organise ourselves. I believe we need a development agency to promote and drive forestry forward." The IFA has a similar mindset, and Pdraig added: "I would love to see such a



MY AMBITION FOR 2026 IS TO PLANT 4,000 HECTARES, WHICH HASN'T BEEN REACHED FOR A VERY LONG TIME. THAT IS STILL ONLY HALF OF WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING

development agency. Forestry is the only natural resource that doesn't have one." SEEFA's representative, Conor, said that such an agency would be a legacy initiative for the current minister, who duly responded: "I don't agree on the need for a development agency. I am the forestry development agency and it's my responsibility and I don't need any other group to hold my hand. I will work with all the organisations. I will work with everybody in the department, but I don't need what I would consider an additional layer, a bureaucracy, to tell me or anybody else what to do. It won't happen while I'm in charge. My ambition for 2026 is to plant 4,000 hectares, which hasn't been reached for a very long time. That is still only half of what we should be doing." He added that he is liaising with councils to identify surplus lands that would be suitable for afforestation. He said: "The local authorities have a lot of surplus land that could be devoted to forestry. Much of it can't be used for housing. It can't be used for any type of critical infrastructure and could be planted. I'm not saying it would all be suitable for forestry but a lot of it might be suitable for forestry of some type and we are working very closely with the councils on utilising surplus land they have for some form of afforestation."

INNOVATION, PARTNERSHIP, AND PROGRESS

BERNIE COMMINS CHATS TO COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ALLTECH IRELAND, CATHAL McCORMACK ABOUT THE COMPANY'S CUSTOMER-FOCUSED APPROACH, ITS EMPHASIS ON INNOVATION AND STRONG PARTNERSHIPS, AND HOW THE KEENAN RESTRUCTURE HAS REVITALISED THIS CARLOW-BASED COMPANY

As country manager for Alltech Ireland, Cathal plays a pivotal role in connecting farmers, feed mills, and industry partners with products and technologies that improve animal health, productivity, and sustainability. He joined Alltech back in 2007 when the company's footprint in Ireland was small. In the years since, Alltech's presence here has grown considerably, driven by innovation, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to working hand in hand with its customers. "My role sees me manage a team of people who work with farmers and industry, namely feed mills and pre-mix companies," Cathal explains. "We work with farmers in terms of the issues they might have with animal health and overcoming those problems. And we would work with feed companies to help make feed more efficient to meet the needs of their farmer customers."

STAYING GROUNDED

As Cathal's role evolved into a more managerial position over the years, he doesn't spend as much time on farms as he used to, he admits, but his own farming background remains integral to how he approaches his work. "I am a farmer myself. We run a suckler farm at home. I think that is good as it helps me to understand the day-to-day issues. It kind of brings you down off your pedestal, instead of talking about how things should be done, you know how things are done." And that understanding lends itself to having a practical perspective. "The reality is that farmers are busy, and it is not always possible to do everything right all the time. Not everything works in perfect

harmony, and I find that farming myself keeps me in touch with what farmers are facing."

Innovation

The late Dr Pearse Lyons' pioneering research into natural alternatives to antibiotics in the 1980s placed Alltech decades ahead of its time, says Cathal. It formed the foundations of today's company and some of its most successful animal-health products. Cathal comments: "Dr Lyons was a real innovator; he was the first person to look at natural alternatives for antibiotics in the '80s. That innovation was different-level thinking for its time and that is what really helped to springboard the company forward. Most of the core products that we produce are derived from the yeast cell wall, a natural product, not a pharmaceutical or chemical." It's this foundation of science-led innovation that continues to drive the company's growth and influence, particularly in areas of animal nutrition and sustainability. Cathal adds: "Alltech's additive products help the rumen of the animal to work more effectively so that the animal is more efficient at converting feed into milk or meat. Additionally, we have products that are very popular in monogastrics – pig and poultry – that bind to bacteria in the gut and then are excreted from the animal harmlessly. So again, these products are being used in place of antibiotics and antimicrobials."

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PURPOSE

Alltech's commitment to supporting farmers in sustainable production extends beyond its own nutritional innovations. Alongside developing cutting-edge feed technologies, the company has strengthened its portfolio through strategic acquisitions and partnerships. For example, just over two years ago, it took a majority stake in Swiss feed-additive specialist Agolin, a producer of plant-based essential oil blends designed to optimise feed intake and animal performance.

Another interesting partnership sees Alltech join forces with German company Alzchem. This collaboration facilitates the German company's methane-reducing slurry management/storage product reaching farmers. Research carried out by Alltech shows that significant methane emissions can be eliminated from slurry storage with the right additive. These are exciting developments, Cathal explains: "Agolin, for example, is an essential oil-based product that has been shown to improve milk production and feed efficiency, while helping farmers achieve their sustainability goals."

THE KEENAN RESTRUCTURE

Carlow-based diet-feeder manufacturer, Keenan, which Alltech acquired in 2016, underwent a significant restructuring following the announcement in 2023 of redundancies at the plant. At the time, Alltech stated that Keenan had not been 'integrated deeply enough into the Alltech family'. Integration has since been achieved with a new business model and structure in place, Cathal explains: "Keenan traditionally



Country manager for Alltech Ireland, Cathal McCormack.

sold diet feeders direct to farms; however, we have changed that model and now, globally, Keenan sells to a distribution agent. In Ireland, that distribution agent is Alltech Ireland, for example. Alltech has offices in more than 100 countries, globally, so by using the Alltech network, the local market will know the local industry better than someone working out of Ireland, and it brings Alltech closer to the Keenan business."

This shift has allowed Keenan to focus exclusively on manufacturing and innovation, while distribution and servicing of parts are managed locally. In Ireland, overseeing this operation falls under Cathal's remit. A new service and parts warehouse in Borris operates independently of Keenan, ensuring farmers receive faster and more efficient service. "If a farmer needs a part and they ring in today, they will have it tomorrow, and they will have a service agent with them the day after," says Cathal. These changes, which involved scaling back to basics and slowly re-building, have revitalised Keenan, he says. And the company has become more scalable as a result. "Previously Keenan's business was in

three main markets – Ireland, the UK, France – but now the Keenan business will have more of a global outlook because of the way it is structured."

LOOKING AHEAD

Cathal explains that Keenan has partnered with different manufacturing firms in different parts of the world. Logistically, this is hugely beneficial: "If you are supplying machines into Asia, for example, that is very costly. But if you can get a manufacturing partner in Asia that makes sense. We have one partner that has been supplying a particular model into a particular region for 18 months now. We have our engineers based in this partner manufacturing facility to make sure that the model is up to standard." The seasonal demand for Keenan machines can be problematic when demand is very high for a few short months and not so high at other times. So, these manufacturing partners will help balance supply and demand.

As the agricultural landscape continues to evolve, so does Keenan's focus, says Cathal. "We see the future for Keenan is very much in automation and robotics – the way

farms are going," Cathal says. And specialist areas such as anaerobic digestion also hold promise, he says. He notes that there has been an increased demand for static mixers on certain farms: "We are seeing across the world a bigger demand for the ProMix machine. Farms are getting bigger so the demand for this type of machinery is growing," he says.

FUTURE

From a small Irish base in 2007 to a global leader in agri-innovation today, Alltech's journey is one of evolution rooted in purpose. Whether it's developing natural feed solutions, pioneering methane reduction, or reshaping its manufacturing models, the company's ethos remains clear: do right by the customer and build for the long term. As Cathal says: "Our business is built on helping our customers to achieve their goals first and foremost. If something doesn't work for our customer then it won't work for Alltech long term, so we must be razor sharp on making sure that we really help our customers on their journey to what they want to achieve, that's what drives everything we do"

MILK OSCARS



THE OSCARS FOR IRISH MILK PRODUCERS, AS THE NDC & KERRYGOLD QUALITY MILK AWARDS HAVE BEEN CHRISTENED, CERTAINLY LIVED UP TO EXPECTATIONS, WRITES MATT O'KEEFFE

The event, held last month, confirmed the dedication of Irish family farms to the production of milk to the highest global standards. This does not happen by accident, according to Emma Wall, CEO of the National Dairy Council. Emma referenced the expertise and commitment of the award-winners to continuous improvement and their ability to overcome additional challenges and responsibilities, including ever higher environmental standards, water quality, emissions, and the deployment of new technologies that transform the way they farm. She also highlighted the varied entry paths to dairying now available, including leasing and partnerships, which provide options to encourage generational renewal in the sector, and allow new entrants to access milk production opportunities. Emma did not understate the challenges facing Irish milk producers when addressing the Quality Milk Awards winners: "Irish dairy gets knocked regularly, with often very negative commentary. While others may criticise from the outside, our producers, as seen here today, are positive and committed. They support their local economies as well as the national economy and sustain our international reputation for producing high quality milk products. What is stunning is to

see the level of optimism, commitment and resilience in the face of multiple challenges, including weather, labour and land shortages, geopolitical uncertainties, tariffs and shifting consumer sentiment, changing regulations, and all the increased costs associated with milk production, as well as falling milk prices now. Yet, our farmers just get on with it."

ANOTHER WIN FOR TIPP

The Ryan family from Thurles were worthy winners of the overall Quality Milk Awards accolade. Tom, Mary and their son Michael produce milk for Centenary Thurles Co-op on the Maryland Farm, milking a herd of 150 cows in a spring-calving production model. A three-way partnership was formed when Michael returned home to farm after completing a degree in agriculture. The groundwork for the present-day herd had already been well laid down by Michael's parents, with a cow breeding model based on productivity, longevity and high health traits. Annual average milk solids (MS) are 523kg/cow and the emphasis is on producing as much as possible from grazed grass. The Ryan herd is at grass for 300 days annually, with buffering of concentrates at critical stages including early lactation, low grass growth periods and late lactation.

The Pure Friesian-Holstein cross herd has an increasing EBI, currently at €245, with the Ryans incorporating sexed semen into their breeding regime. Notably, the breeding policy includes the use of TB-resistant bulls, from the locally based Dovea Centre and other AI services including Progressive Genetics and Eurogene. It is a closed herd since 2003. Having endured a wipe-out in the 1990s from brucellosis, the Ryans take every possible precaution to ensure their herd health status is safeguarded. The herd is vaccinated against blackleg, salmonella, leptospirosis and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis. Lameness is carefully managed with regular foot bathing and hoof paring as required. Additional health support protocols include pre-calving and breeding season mineral supplementation. It hardly requires mention that milk quality standards on the Ryan farm are exemplary. TBC averages 9,000 while herd SCC is 71,000. The latest protocols to counter antimicrobial resistance have been well adopted with almost one third of the cows now receiving teat seal treatment at drying off.

A FAMILY TEAM EFFORT

Michael Ryan explained the close cooperation on the farm that delivers excellence in milk production: "All family members help out



The Ryan family from Thurles were worthy winners of the overall Quality Milk Awards accolade.

when they can, with my parents fully involved in the running of the farm." Tom's tentative plans to retire are dismissed as 'unlikely to happen anytime soon'.

The importance of a long grazing season is emphasised by Michael: "We are grazing for 300 days and it's the main focus for the farm. Every day at grass reduces costs. That's our big natural advantage in Ireland and must be utilised to the greatest extent possible. We have moved to one hundred percent Protected Urea for our nitrogen inputs and it's working well. Last year, no matter what fertiliser was used, grass growth just didn't happen because of weather conditions. This year has been a complete turnaround with an almost perfect grazing season. The cost saving for using protected urea compared to CAN makes it a no-brainer. We have no problems with it. We make use of red clover on a large proportion of the farm, with white clover incorporated across the remainder, apart from some peaty soils where it's not as prevalent. Clover puts money in your pocket as well as protecting the environment, so it's a complete positive."

Michael attributes high milk solids and volume production to specific drivers: "The fact that we are able to graze so much and have concentrated on breeding means we are filling good genetics with good quality feed at the lowest possible production cost. Breed a



WHAT IS STUNNING IS TO SEE THE LEVEL OF OPTIMISM, COMMITMENT AND RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

good cow and feed her well and the milk solids will follow."

Adoption of best environmental practices on the Ryan farm runs hand-in-hand with productivity. Slurry is spread using LESS technology. Fencing back from drains is evident, safeguarding biodiversity of both flora and fauna. Roof-based solar panels supply one-third of the farm energy requirements. With a carbon footprint 0.86kg CO₂ per kilo of milk produced, the Thurles-based dairy farm is up there with the best in the world in terms of low emissions milk production.

THE GENESIS OF KERRYGOLD BUTTER

Conor Galvin, CEO of Ornu, was unequivocal in his praise for Irish milk producers: "The

fact that we can bring international dairy buyers onto any number of Irish dairy farms to show the quality of production, is a huge advantage for Ornu. You are wonderful ambassadors for Irish dairy. It is not an overnight development, but rather the culmination of many years of hard work and dedication to excellence. The finalists represent their co-ops and also the Irish dairy sector generally. The judges, Professor Karina Pierce, Professor Paddy Wall and Dr David Gleeson have confirmed that milk quality, production standards and adopting environmental practices that allow milk production in harmony with nature on Irish dairy farms have consistently improved over the sixteen years the Awards have been supported by Ornu and NDC. People all over the world can enjoy our dairy produce because of the Irish farm families that produce the milk.

"Our job in Ornu has been made much easier and possible by the work of our producers, processors and everyone involved in delivering Kerrygold butter and cheese products to a global consumer market. Kerrygold now has a special place in the hearts and minds of consumers all over the world. Its unparalleled quality comes from the grass-fed cows our family farms manage and nurture every day of the year. Grass-based milk production is our unique selling point and the envy of our international competitors."



ADDRESSING THE IMBALANCE

DR SHANE MCCARVILL RECENTLY OPENED A NEW FARM-ANIMAL VETERINARY PRACTICE IN BALLA, CO. MAYO, TO HELP TACKLE RURAL VET SHORTAGES. BERNIE COMMINS CAUGHT UP WITH HIM TO FIND OUT A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE PRACTICE, FARM VETS BALLA; HOW HE IS STREAMLINING OPERATIONS BY GEOGRAPHICALLY GROUPING WORK; AND THEY DISCUSS SOME OF THE COMMON FARM CALLS HE IS RESPONDING TO AT THE MOMENT AND HIS RECOMMENDED MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Independently owned Farm Vets Balla is the first-ever veterinary practice to be set up in this rural area between Claremorris and Castlebar. It is a one-vet operation at present, and dedicated exclusively to farm animals such as cattle, sheep, horses, and donkeys, as well as offering herd health planning and TB testing. The farm-animal focus allows them to give full attention to the specific challenges and needs of farmers, says Shane. Its opening has been welcomed by locals.

"Our clients are primarily drystock, suckler

and sheep farmers, and we also have a number of dairy farms on our books too," he says, giving a flavour of the surrounding farming enterprises. "But, by and large, it's a strong drystock and sheep area. We are in a central location, so we can provide a reliable service to farmers within a 50km radius of the practice. A number of our clients also undertake some embryo transfer work to produce commercial calves for the show calf market, so we definitely see a mixture of everything in the practice."

Since commencing his studies and

WORKFORCE REPORT

Farm Vets Balla's launch comes in the wake of the Veterinary Council of Ireland's Veterinary Workforce Report, released in May 2025, which highlights growing pressures across the sector. The report found that although the veterinary register has grown by 30 per cent since 2004, rural areas face shortages of large-animal practitioners, essential for Ireland's agricultural sector. The report also found that an increasing demand for companion-animal care is leading to a shortage of large animal care practitioners, and demand for veterinary services is expected to grow by an average of 3.37 per cent each year to 2033.

subsequently moving on to become a veterinary practitioner, Shane notes that he has witnessed great change in agriculture. He explains: "I have observed significant shifts in farming systems. There has been a marked decline in overall cattle numbers, particularly among suckler cow herds, which is a major concern. At the same time, there has been a noticeable increase in interest in alternative production models, such as calf-rearing enterprises and calf-to-beef systems. "There is also a growing number of part-time

BY FARMERS FOR FARMERS

Originally from Smithboro, Co. Monaghan, Shane trained as a vet overseas in the University of Veterinary Medicine, Budapest, Hungary. During his time as a veterinary medicine student, he work-shadowed vets in various practices across Monaghan, Donegal and Mayo, where he says he gained a lot of knowledge that has stood to him in his career as a large-animal vet and where he had many mentors. Now, Shane lives in Co. Mayo and as well as being a self-employed large-animal vet, he runs a suckler enterprise comprising commercial cattle, pedigree Angus and pedigree Charolais herds. Shane comments: "After graduating in 2020, I began my career in Co. Fermanagh, where I worked in a large-animal practice, focusing on dairy, beef, and sheep farms. I wanted to gain further experience elsewhere returning to practice locally in Monaghan after my stint in Co. Fermanagh. That was the initial plan, but life had other ideas. I met a Mayo woman, who, like me, is both a farmer and works in the agricultural sector, which brought me to the west of Ireland." In September 2022, Shane relocated to Mayo and after three years' working in the county, he decided to establish his own veterinary practice, officially opening the doors to Farm Vets Balla in August this year. He comments: "Our motto is simple: by farmers, for farmers."

Farm Vets Balla has recently received official accreditation and approval from the Veterinary Council of Ireland, the statutory body responsible for the regulation and management of the practice of veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing. This approval followed a comprehensive inspection, confirming that the practice meets all required professional, ethical, and operational standards. The premises is leased from Balla's local agricultural co-op, Western Farming Co-op, which is also located on the grounds here.

farmers, which has brought changes to my work as a farm vet in rural Ireland. In many cases, my busiest hours are now between 5pm and 11pm when farmers return home from their day jobs," he says.

IMBALANCE

Shane also explains that there is an imbalance between farmer demand and vet availability: "As more farmers balance full-time jobs with part-time farming, the need for flexible, responsive veterinary care grows, yet the number of large-animal vets has not kept pace. This imbalance exacerbates the shortage and highlights why improving working conditions, through shared on-call systems, better support staff, and financial incentives, is just as important as training more graduates."

REVISITING SELECTION PROCESS

This leads us to the recent announcement that there are two new veterinary schools due to open in Ireland in the coming years. As someone who pursued his dream to study veterinary medicine abroad, Shane welcomes the additions but adds that, perhaps, now is also the time to revisit veterinary candidate selection. "We should aim to attract the right kind of people, those who are truly suited to the demands of the work," he says. "I think we could learn from the UK model, which includes a personal statement, interviews, and a work placement diary as part of the application process. We need to ensure the correct type of people are going into veterinary," he adds.

"Like many others, I had to study veterinary medicine abroad because I didn't secure a

place in Ireland's only veterinary medicine programme at the time. I welcome the addition of the new veterinary medicine education providers in the country. But I would also say, it isn't a case of more graduates and recruiting more vets, it's about providing the conditions, guidance, and support that allow them to thrive over the long term." It is Shane's view that if working conditions stay the same, vets will continue to leave. "By improving conditions first, Ireland can retain vets long-term, making the profession sustainable," he adds.

RURAL ISSUES

Unless the conditions of rural practice improve, with fairer pay, better work-life balance, and stronger supports for young professionals, many will continue to leave for other countries or different sectors, including industry, according to Shane. This will have a knock-on effect in many ways, he explains: "If we want to protect animal welfare, safeguard Ireland's food exports, and sustain rural communities, then investment in both people and conditions is essential. More vets are needed, but only in an environment where they can thrive." He says that the real issue and one that he is addressing in opening his rural practice, is the shortage of vets willing to work in farm-animal practice.

He explains: "Each year, around 300 new vets join the VCI register. Recent figures show there are now just under 3,700 vets on the register, a record high, from what I understand. So, based on these figures, I would say there's not a shortage of vets, in general. But there is a shortage of vets who want to do large-animal work."

He continues: "The small pool of existing large-animal vets faces long hours, on-call stress, and geographic isolation, leading to burnout and higher turnover, worsening the shortage. Seasonal pressures, especially the spring calving and lambing season, place huge strain on the small pool of vets, increasing exhaustion and pushing more out of the profession. If you're someone who expects to clock in at 9am and out at 5pm on the dot and you're not prepared to answer the phone and work outside of those hours, then farm-animal practice simply isn't for you, in my opinion." Shane has embarked on his large-animal career with an informed mind: "I find one thing that has stood to me is that I saw placement with various practices

in various parts of the country throughout secondary school and also when I was in vet school. I knew exactly what I was getting myself in for going to C-sections and sick calls after hours."

The growing imbalance is leading to more small-animal vets in urban areas, leaving rural mixed/large-animal practices understaffed. But, with challenge comes opportunity and Shane says this shortage presents a chance to reform the profession by improving conditions, modernising practices, and ensuring rural areas are better supported. "Younger vets entering the profession could bring fresh ideas, energy, and new skills to help modernise veterinary practices."

A BIG TRANSITION

Shane gives a realistic appraisal of the large-animal-vet role: "It can take time to find your feet as a new graduate vet, especially in large-animal practice, where the workload, responsibility, and on-call demands can be overwhelming. Many new vets struggle with the long hours, unpredictable schedules and the emotional toll of dealing with sick or injured animals, all while trying to build professional confidence, and many suffer from imposter syndrome too, where they often underestimate their own vetting abilities. "We need to explore ways to make large animal veterinary practice a more appealing career option and I believe that begins with better practice management. Too often, essential support systems are lacking, leading to disorganised practices with inefficient workflows. A veterinary practice, and the service that it provides, is only as good as the people behind it." Unfortunately, he says, when a vet leaves, it can take up to a year, minimum, to replace them, if a replacement is found at all. He comments: "This adds enormous pressure on those who remain, with many forced to work a one-in-two rota just to keep things going. It is up to veterinary practice owners to retain the staff, when you have a good vet to find a way to hold onto them, with a salary that rewards them for their work, sufficient time off in lieu or paid overtime (give vets an option) and possibly the likes of performance bonuses – the same as what you would expect in every other job." Shane also says that veterinary technicians – similar to those in the UK – would be a great support in large-animal practice. "By no means am I suggesting that we should

replace vets, but positions like these could provide vital supports, especially during peak periods like spring, when workloads in farm-animal practice increase significantly."

STREAMLINING OPERATIONS

Farm Vets Balla arises from a very real and growing need for accessible, independent veterinary support for farmers, says Shane. But he has had to think outside the box to meet that need. He explains: "To streamline operations while still doing our best to accommodate farmers, we've implemented a system of grouping work by geographical area where possible. Given how spread out a practice's area is, this allows us to allocate specific days to certain locations, for example, scheduling TB testing in particular areas on set days. However, this system does not apply to emergency-care calls, which are always prioritised. I also ensure that there is adequate time between TB tests to respond to urgent calls.

"We've also introduced a pre-booking system for routine procedures such as dehorning, castration, and similar work. This allows us to structure our schedule more effectively and plan our days with greater efficiency. For instance, we typically carry out these services on Wednesdays and Saturdays, which helps keep Sundays free for emergency care only." The ultimate goal for Farm Vets Balla is to grow the team of vets and make it an attractive place to work.

RISE IN CALF-RELATED PNEUMONIA CASES

Irish Farmers Monthly asked Shane about some of the large-animal-health-related calls he is responding to. He outlines some of the key issues and management options below. "In recent weeks, I have seen a rise in pneumonia cases in calves and yearlings on farms, which is common for this time of year as calves are weaned and exposed to environmental stresses. I strongly advocate for farm-specific vaccination programmes as a cornerstone of protecting animal health. Preventative approaches are at the core of our service, and herd-health planning plays a central role in helping farmers maintain productivity and reduce disease risk.

"We have stocked a range of vaccines for both cattle and sheep, which I often refer to as an 'insurance policy' for your herd. While no product is 100 per cent, vaccines decrease the likelihood of disease breakdown and

even if a vaccinated animal becomes ill, they are generally a lot easier to treat. Tailored herd health programmes are designed to address the unique challenges of each farm, protecting animals against common diseases and improving overall productivity. Vaccines are a very small price to pay in the grand scheme of things, given the current price of cattle."

Below, Shane outlines the key areas for cattle farmers to focus on.

1. DOSING

We recommend taking faecal (dung) samples to identify which parasites are present before dosing animals. This targeted approach avoids unnecessary treatments, reduces costs for farmers, prevents resistance and ensures better overall effectiveness. Ideally, a dung sample should be taken both before and after dosing to check the efficacy of the product used. Many veterinary practices, including Farm Vets Balla, offer an in-house, on-site dung sampling service, where you can test for fluke and/or worms.

2. VACCINATIONS

Vaccination programmes should be tailored to the specific risks on your farm, including respiratory diseases such as pneumonia and IBR, as well as clostridial diseases. Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines carefully, noting the method of administration (intramuscular or subcutaneous) and whether a booster shot is required.

3. MINERAL SUPPLEMENTATION

Even after a good grazing season, mineral supplementation should not be overlooked. In areas like Co. Mayo, high molybdenum levels can limit the availability of copper, leading to ill-thrift and poor growth in animals. Regular monitoring and supplementation, where necessary, can prevent deficiencies and improve herd performance. Consider

AUTUMN CALVERS

For autumn-calving cows, consider vaccinating against scour. These vaccines are given three weeks to three months before calving and protect unborn calves from rotavirus, coronavirus, and *Escherichia coli* (K99 and F41). Proper timing and adherence to guidelines are critical to ensure the vaccines are effective.



consulting your vet about blood testing to identify any shortfalls in animal diets.

4. GRASS TETANY IN COWS

Farmers should remain vigilant for signs of grass tetany, especially in recently weaned cows, cows suckling stronger calves, or those grazing lush pastures. Again, I have seen cases of this in recent weeks. Magnesium supplementation can be provided through dairy meal, boluses, lick buckets, or even flake magnesium added to water. Early detection and prevention are key to reducing losses. I would recommend every farmer having at least one bottle of magnesium in their medicine cabinet and also a bottle of calcium.

5. ULTRASOUND SCANNING OF COWS

Ultrasound scanning allows farmers to identify empty cows and make informed management decisions. Some modern scanners can detect pregnancy as early as 28 days. This year, I have noticed that, with current cattle prices, some farmers are less likely to cull late-calving cows if they are among the best in their herd, given the higher replacement cows. In previous years, when replacement cattle were less expensive, farmers often culled cows that didn't calve within their preferred window. There also appears to be a growing interest in synchronisation programmes especially for these late calvers.

FOCUS FOCUS



HEALTH & SAFETY
ON THE FARM



Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon; James Claffey, Irish Rural Link; Alma Jordan, Agrikids and Minister of State for Forestry, Farm Safety and Horticulture, Michael Healy-Rae at the awarding of the tenders for children's farm safety awareness initiatives at the National Ploughing Championships 2025.

SAFETY FIRST, LAST, AND ALWAYS

MICHAEL HEALY-RAE HAS HELD THE POSITION OF MINISTER OF STATE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR FORESTRY, FARM SAFETY AND HORTICULTURE, FOR ABOUT NINE MONTHS. IN THAT TIME, IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT HE HAS PRIORITISED THE FORESTRY AND FARM SAFETY REMITS OF HIS PORTFOLIO. MATT O'KEEFFE HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE RECENT FARM-SAFETY MESSAGES AND INITIATIVES INVOLVING THE KERRY TD

Minister-Rae participated in a panel discussion at the Social, Economic Environmental Forestry Association of Ireland's (SEEFA's) Forestry Hub at the National Ploughing Championships. In a departure from talking about forestry alone at the SEEFA-hosted discussion, the minister broadened the theme to include farm safety. He spoke of the example that the forestry sector has set when it comes to upping the safety stakes and seeing the rewards. "I applaud the forestry companies in their operations. The contractors out on the ground organise their operations in a safe manner. In other areas, we have not had the same high safety record. As of the end of September, there have been 16 confirmed farm fatalities this year. The horror of what happens in a farm accident cannot be overstated. The same as in forestry, everyone taking on a task on a farm needs to ensure that they have the capabilities, training, proper equipment and correct safety protocols in place before they begin."

CHAINSAWS

The minister homed in on a particular example – the chainsaw – which is a staple on most farms and is a piece of equipment that deserves respect when choosing it and using it. In the forestry sector, this is already understood where using the correct standard of equipment is a given. In the farming sector,

perhaps not as much. "Buying a cheap chainsaw is a false economy. I can't give the name of where you can buy a chainsaw for €120 but what I will say is that you should fire it into the nearest hole because it's rubbish." Minister Healy-Rae also referenced the incidence of non-fatal accidents on farms, citing an example of a farmer who suffered

CORRECT USE OF CHAINSAW – HSA

If you intend to operate a chainsaw at work, you must ensure that:

- ▶ A risk assessment on the task to be undertaken is carried out before commencing the work.
- ▶ You are not working on your own (you should have someone working with you or near you checking in on you at regular intervals).
- ▶ You are competent and have successfully completed a chainsaw

training course including an assessment suitable for the type of chainsaw work planned.

- ▶ You wear the personal protective equipment necessary for chainsaw work activities.
- ▶ Any person working for you in connection with chainsaw use and tree-felling work activities are also competent and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.
- ▶ The chainsaw is suitable for the work involved and properly maintained.

severe hand injuries while operating a hydraulic tractor top-link: "No matter how much you know about farm machinery, no matter how experienced you are, whether it is in handling animals or machinery, always be very safety conscious in everything you are doing on a farm. Sometimes the best job you ever did, is the job you never did at all. It can be better for everyone if you either get a professional to do the job or wait until you have help and the proper equipment to carry out the job safely."

Data from the Teagasc National Farm Survey has shown that about 4,500 farm accidents occur on farms each year, with 44 per cent putting the victim out of work for at least four days. Furthermore, some 80 per cent of these farm accidents required medical treatment, with 46 per cent of victims attending hospital, a further 18 per cent a doctor and 16 per cent requiring first aid.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In Budget 2026, Minister Healy-Rae confirmed that funding of €3m had been secured for farm safety, health and wellbeing initiatives: "It will enable my department to continue existing programmes and to develop new evidence-led initiatives to improve farm safety and support the health and wellbeing of our farming community. It will also enable my department to work with stakeholders to deliver initiatives which make a real difference to the lives of farmers and the wider farming community." The budget allocation towards farm safety comes as all-island statistics from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and its northern counterpart, the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSE NI) show that in one specific area alone, that of working at heights, the number of fatalities on farms is unacceptably high.

Across the 32 counties of Ireland over the last 10 years, the latest statistics show there were 37 fatalities on farms as a result of falling from a height. Common hazards include falls from ladders, unprotected roof edges, falling from or with stacked bales, and falling through fragile roof materials, particularly on farms where aging structures are still in use. There is to be renewed emphasis by safety inspectors on this specific area of farm safety with inspectors in the agriculture sector focusing on compliance with the legal requirements for working at height, according to the HSA.

These include safe systems of work for any height-related activity, the use of proper equipment such as mobile elevated work platforms, or secured platforms, ensuring safe stacking and handling of bales, encouraging farmers to engage competent contractors for high-risk tasks, and promoting awareness around fragile roofs and proper construction appointments.

Last month, the HSA and the HSE NI jointly conducted a month-long safety campaign targeting falls from height in the construction and farming sectors. On the island of Ireland in the last 10 years, in addition to the 37 farming-related fatalities, there were 70 fatalities in the construction industry as a result of falling from height. Commenting, Adrienne Duff, assistant chief executive, HSA, said: "Falls are entirely preventable, and everyone deserves to return home from work safely and unharmed. This campaign aims to raise awareness and drive home the message that taking shortcuts or carrying out work without due regard to the risks involved is not an option. Work must be planned and controls put in place to prevent a fall from height."



SOMETIMES THE BEST JOB YOU EVER DID, IS THE JOB YOU NEVER DID AT ALL

DOING IT FOR THE KIDS

Recently, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon and Minister Michael Healy-Rae announced the awarding of tenders for the provision of farm safety awareness initiatives for children. Two projects were selected for total funding of €152,041. Irish Rural Link's AgriKids – Farm Safety Ambassador Programme was selected to promote farm safety awareness among primary school pupils, while FRS Training Society Ltd's Farm Safety Awareness Training Programme was selected to promote farm safety awareness among second-level students. Minister Healy-Rae said the initiatives will help address children's and young person's safety on Irish farms by assisting teachers in educating their students about the potential dangers associated with farming and agriculture. "Parents and grandparents also play an important role in influencing children's attitudes to farm safety. I am urging them to support these projects and to become farm safety role models for our young people. It is by observing adults implementing best practice when it comes to farm safety, that our young people will also adopt a safety conscious approach to farming."

BOVILIS[®]
Cryptium[®]

THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

The **first** and **only** vaccine
to protect calves against
cryptosporidiosis



FOR MORE INFORMATION,

Bovilis[®] Cryptium[®] contains inactivated *Cryptosporidium parvum* Gp40 antigen. Legal Categories: ROI POM NI POM-V

Bovilis[®] Rotavec[®] Corona contains inactivated Rotavirus and Coronavirus and *E. coli* K99 F5 and F41 antigens. Legal Categories: ROI POM NI POM-VPS

Withdrawal periods: Zero days.

BOVILIS[®] Cryptium[®]



 Dose: 2ml

 Route: Subcutaneous

 Primary Course: 2 doses administered 4-5 weeks apart in the 12-3 week window before calving

 Booster: Single dose administered 12-3 weeks before next calving

BOVILIS[®] Rotavec[®] Corona



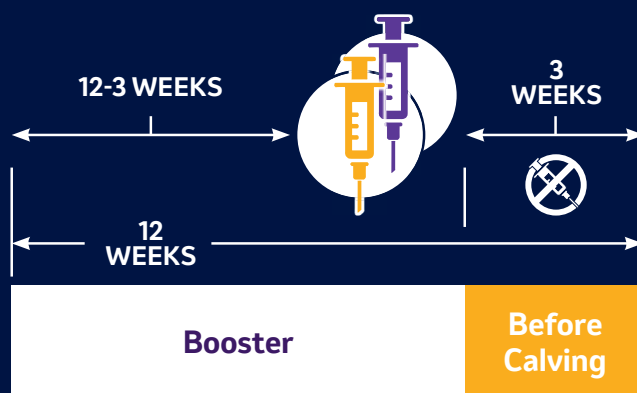
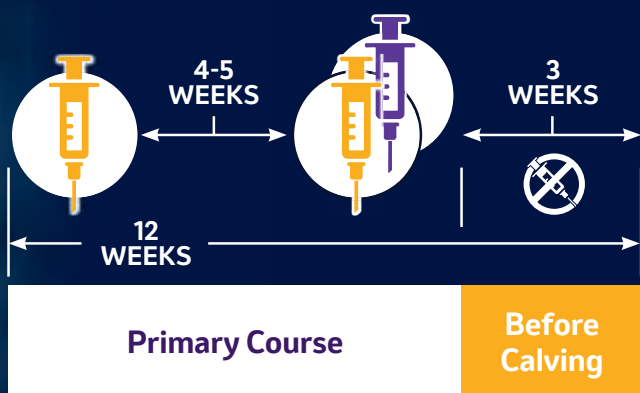
 Dose: 2ml

 Route: Intramuscular or subcutaneous

 Primary Course: Single dose administered 12-3 weeks before calving

 Booster: Single dose administered 12-3 weeks before next calving

VACCINATION PROTOCOL



Bovilis[®] Cryptium[®] and Bovilis[®] Rotavec[®] Corona
can be given at the same time, at different injection sites

COLOSTRUM MANAGEMENT



FEED 5 DAYS
of colostrum and
transition milk from
a vaccinated dam



SPEAK TO YOUR VET TODAY

Use medicines responsibly.

Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone.

Please refer to the product SPC and packaging leaflets for information about side effects, precautions, warnings and contraindications. For further information contact: MSD Animal Health, Red Oak North, South County Business Park, Leopardstown, Dublin 18, Ireland.

Tel: +353 (0)1 2970220. Email: vet-support.ie@msd.com Web: www.msd-animal-health.ie

 MSD Animal Health Ireland - Livestock
  MSD Animal Health Ireland  @msd_ah

For more information visit
bovillis.ie 

 **MSD**
Animal Health



THE MOST VITAL ASSET ON YOUR FARM

IN THIS ARTICLE, DR JOHN McNAMARA, TEAGASC HEALTH AND SAFETY SPECIALIST, EXPLORES THE KEY ELEMENTS OF FARM SAFETY FROM PRACTICAL RISK ASSESSMENT AND WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT TO INTER-GENERATIONAL SAFETY AWARENESS. HE ALSO HIGHLIGHTS THE TOOLS AND SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO HELP FARMERS MAKE THEIR FARMS SAFER PLACES TO LIVE AND WORK

Health and safety are essential farm management functions. Injury and ill health have the potential to cause tragedy, pain, suffering, ongoing disability, and disruption to the capacity to farm effectively, leading to both on-farm and off-farm income loss. To date in 2025, 16 farm deaths have occurred, with nine victims aged over 65 years. Farm vehicle – particularly tractors – livestock, and working at heights are the biggest fatal risk factors on farms. The current 2025 number of fatalities is higher than in 2024, when 12 fatalities occurred.

INJURY-CAUSING ACCIDENTS

About 4,500 farm accidents occur each year, based on National Farm Survey estimates. The major causes include livestock (47 per cent), trips, falls, blows, and buildings-related incidents (31 per cent), farm vehicles or machinery (11 per cent), and 'other' (11 per cent). Most accidents (80 per cent) require medical treatment. Of these, 46 per cent of victims attend hospital, 18 per cent visit a doctor, and 16 per cent require first aid. Thirty-two per cent of those injured are unable to work for between one and three days. A further 23 per cent report being unable

to work for between four and 30 days, and some for between 31 and 60 days. Eighty-four per cent of farm accidents occur on farms operated by farmers aged over 50 years.

SAFETY AS PART OF FARM MANAGEMENT

Farming hazards and associated risks are always present, so health and safety must be constant, ongoing components of farm management. There is continuous movement on farms involving machinery, loads, livestock, and people, so the potential for an accident is always present. An accident occurs when a source of force strikes the body or when a vital bodily function is impaired (e.g., breathing or blood circulation). The key to dynamic risk assessment is to remain alert for emerging dangers and take immediate preventive action. Farm accidents can have multiple causes, but managing farm health and safety principally involves two areas: the physical workplace, and work behaviour.

PHYSICAL WORKPLACE

Keeping the workplace free of physical risks is essential to preventing accidents. This reduces risk and supports the implementation of safe behaviours. Heavy workload, long hours, tiredness, and rushing are all

associated with increased accident risk. Managing your farm and farmyard to reduce workload and allow a balance between work, leisure, and rest is crucial for sustainable farming.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), through TAMS 3 and other schemes, provides grants and aids of up to 60 per cent for farm infrastructure. Now is the time to be winter-ready: examine building structures to ensure they can withstand storms that may come our way.

WORK BEHAVIOUR

Given the dynamic nature of farm work, physical controls alone will not prevent accidents. Supporting safe behaviour is essential. The behaviour of people while working is a factor in over 90 per cent of accidents generally. In agriculture, because of the wide range of tasks involving risk, farmer behaviour is particularly critical to preventing injury. Most Irish farms are operated by self-employed workers (more than 90 per cent) who make their own work-related decisions. Therefore, behavioural safety is vital for both

SUPPORTING FARMERS & THEIR FAMILIES FOR OVER 50 YEARS.

For over 50 years FBD has been invested in agriculture, farming and rural life in Ireland. With our local network of 34 branches across the country we are uniquely placed to support Irish farmers and their communities.

Talk to us today to find out why 9 out of 10 customers stay with FBD.*

Visit your local FBD branch or call us on **0818 181818**.



SUPPORT.

IT'S WHAT WE DO.



FBD
INSURANCE

*Based on all FBD Insurance direct renewal data from Jan '25 - May '25.
FBD Insurance Group Ltd trading as FBD Insurance is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.



self-employed and family workers.

An Irish study found that only 26 per cent of farmers take safe actions on an ongoing basis. A further 57 per cent compromise safety by taking unnecessary risks, while 17 per cent fall into a neutral category. Safety practices are learned, enacted, and passed to the next generation, so improving behavioural aspects of farm safety is vital for future progress.

COMPLETING A RISK ASSESSMENT

Accidents can be prevented through planning and completing a risk assessment is a way to consider all aspects of health and safety on your farm. It is also a legal requirement under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Two risk assessment formats are available to assist farmers: the risk assessment document (available online at hsa.ie) and the BeSMART online tool.

1. Risk assessment document

This green-covered document is available from the Health and Safety Authority and Teagasc. It is designed for smaller-scale farms with three or fewer employees. The document includes hazard control sheets covering all aspects of farming. Each sheet has key questions related to both the physical workplace and behavioural requirements. All aspects of the farm should be considered when completing the risk assessment. Where controls are missing, a farm safety action page is provided to plan and implement the necessary measures. Irish research indicates that farmers who complete the actions listed on their risk assessment action page achieve acceptable safety standards. The key message is that managing safety requires continuous action.

2. BeSMART online tool

The BeSMART tool is aimed at farms with four or more employees but can be used on farms of any size. BeSMART tools are available for agriculture and agri-business enterprises, including dairy and beef farms. The BeSMART tool can be accessed at www.besmart.ie. Once registered, a user can complete and save risk assessment



The BeSMART tool is aimed at farms with four or more employees.

sheets for all hazard categories relevant to the farm. Consultation arrangements with employees are required to be specified. When the document is complete, it can be saved or downloaded.

INTER-GENERATIONAL FAMILY FARMING

Family farming is the predominant model of agriculture in Ireland. All individuals working or living on a farm are at risk, as are those who may be present on the farm or in proximity to farm activities. Farm risk applies particularly to both children and youth, as well as older members of the family. Special attention must also be given to the risks faced by female members of the farm family. The following sections outline key considerations for each group.

• Farm operator

The farm operator, or the person primarily responsible for operating the farm, has a legal and moral duty to manage the farm from a safety perspective. This individual must lead and motivate other family members and workers to maintain acceptable safety standards and practices. Because workload is closely associated with farm safety, the operator should strive to streamline activities in order to allow a satisfactory work-life balance for everyone involved.

• Children and youth

Children and youth typically acquire their safety values from adult family members. However, Irish research has found that young people influenced by their families, friends, or neighboring farmers are more likely to underestimate farm injury risk and are therefore considered 'risk optimistic.' A significant proportion of young people

working or living on farms have experienced a work-related injury, a near miss, or have knowledge of a farm-related death or injury. These individuals reported significantly greater farm injury risk perception and were more likely to adopt 'risk averse' behaviour, meaning they exercise more caution. This research suggests that greater efforts should be made to instil positive safety values in children and young people from an early age.

• Older family members

The majority of fatal farm accidents in Ireland involve older family members. All work performed by older farmers should be risk assessed. Encouraging older farmers to 'step back' from hazardous tasks can be challenging. Identifying who holds influence within the family structure can help establish positive communication channels to improve farm safety.

• Female family members

Specific risks should be assessed for female members of farm families in addition to general farm hazards. For example, guidelines related to musculoskeletal injury indicate that, on average, a woman may lift about two-thirds of what a man can lift. The TILE principle – task, individual, load, and environment – should be applied when assessing lifting activities.

Another critical area of concern is the risk of infection from animals during pregnancy, such as toxoplasmosis. In addition, the use of farm chemicals requires careful attention to hazard warning symbols and information related to reproductive toxicity. Appropriate safety measures must be taken to mitigate these risks.



NETWORKS

WHEN YOU'RE FARMING AROUND ELECTRICITY...

STAY SAFE | STAY CLEAR

Electricity is all around us, and at ESB Networks, we want to provide a safe and secure electricity infrastructure for everyone who farms or works near electricity poles and wires.

To help protect you, your family, your fellow workers and your livestock from injury or death from electrocution, always remember:

- **Watch out above you** for overhead electricity wires
- **Steer clear** of electricity poles
- Always assume electricity wires **are live**
- **Never touch** fallen wires
- **Never handle** livestock that may be in contact with electricity wires
- In an emergency, phone our 24/7 emergency number on **1800 372 999**

For emergencies call
1800 372 999

Supply interruption updates
PowerCheck.ie

Follow us on
f i t x

[esbnetworks.ie](https://www.esbnetworks.ie)



PROTECTING CHILDREN MUST BE A PRIORITY

CHILDREN ARE NATURALLY CURIOUS AND A FARM IS A VERY TEMPTING PLACE FOR THEM. BUT A FARM IS A PLACE OF WORK THAT CAN SOMETIMES BE DANGEROUS, LEADING TO SERIOUS ACCIDENTS AND EVEN DEATH, WRITES JACINTA O'NEILL FROM TEAGASC

Most children like to be outside helping on the farm. Mending fences and walls, hanging gates, tidying the farmyard, picking an odd stone, checking animals – there is always a job to be done. It is, however, important for everyone to remember that farms are not playgrounds and that when children are out on the farm they must be closely supervised and only take part in age-appropriate tasks.

CHILDHOOD FATALITIES

Health and Safety Authority (HSA) figures tell us that 17 children lost their lives due to farm related accidents during the 10-year period 2014-2023. Over 90 per cent of childhood deaths on farms had a farm vehicle or a machine involved. We must do better and protect children at all times on our farms. We must think about how we manage our farms and how we can safely involve children and young adults in farming activities.

HSA GUIDANCE

A safe and secure play area for young children should be provided, away from all work activities, in full view of the dwelling house. Where children are not in a secure play area, a high level of adult supervision must be provided. For farmers who only have children visiting, it is important that adults make arrangements to ensure children are supervised in these situations. Children should not be allowed access to dangerous areas and actions should be taken to keep children away from these areas (e.g. slurry pits, silage pits, grain/chemical stores, working machinery, high areas).

To eliminate the risk of drowning, all open water tanks, wells and slurry tanks should be fenced off. Children should not be allowed near dangerous animals such as bulls, stallions, rams, stags and female animals with new-born young. Young children should not be allowed unsupervised access to the farmyard and discuss farm safety with visitors and agricultural contractors and make contractors aware of the possible presence of children.

TIPS FOR TRACTOR AND MACHINE OPERATORS

- ▶ It is important to talk to children about the dangers of machinery and set the rules, but a child cannot be expected to keep themselves safe – this is an adult's responsibility.
- ▶ Always check blind spots for the presence of people especially children before moving off.
- ▶ Take note of the possible presence of children along roads, around schools, villages and towns and always travel at an appropriate speed that provides time for a safe controlled stop.
- ▶ Children can pose a danger to themselves and those around them even when they are in a modern tractor cab. They are naturally keen to help but a misplaced push of a button or a push of a lever in a cab can have devastating consequences (don't put children in that situation)
- ▶ Never allow children to travel on trailers, transport boxes or machines. The risk of falling off is very high and the consequences of this can be devastating. Machinery is not a playground.
- ▶ Never allow children to help with tasks like tying down loads or climbing. Bales on a trailer or hitching a big bag of fertiliser are



TURN YOUR ROOF INTO A SOURCE OF POWER

Solar is one of the most efficient ways to help cut energy costs and reduce carbon emissions. We offer quality and reliable solar solutions for Irish farmers. With our combined expertise, we'll assess the options for your farm business, provide end-to-end support and real-time data.

Get a quote today
call **0818 989 498**
or visit ifa.ie/solar

 **IFA**
Member Services

 **Bord Gáis
Energy**



examples where materials on loads can move suddenly and a child may not notice the danger until it is too late.

SAFE DRIVING FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Children under 14 can be very interested in tractors and self-propelled machines but they are not permitted to drive them. When they turn 14, they may be permitted to drive a tractor or self-propelled machine on the farm but their safety and the safety of people around them is of paramount importance. The HSA states that children aged 14 and over may be permitted to drive a tractor or self-propelled machine on the farm if:

1. They have attended a formal training course run by a competent training provider.
2. They are closely supervised by a responsible adult.
3. They have the ability to operate the

controls with ease.

4. All the controls are conveniently accessible for safe operation by the operator when seated in the driver's seat.
5. The controls which operate the power take off (PTO) devices, hydraulic devices and engine cut-off are clearly marked to show the effect of their operation.
6. The tractor is maintained so that it is safe for them to operate.
7. The ground over which the tractor is driven is free from hazards such as steep slopes or excavations, river banks, lake or pond edges, deep ditches and similar areas.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Every farmer with three or fewer employees must have a farm safety risk assessment document completed for their farm. One of the first sections of this document details measures

that farmers should implement to help keep children safe. To find out more information on the completion of this document, please contact your local Teagasc office. You may also decide to register to attend a half day farm safety course which will help you develop a plan focused on managing safety on your farm.

SAFETY INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN

The Teagasc website has a wide range of interesting farm safety themed information and resources for children which can help children explore the world of farm safety in the comfort of their own homes. Additional farm safety resources available:

- Health and Safety Authority: www.hsa.ie/
- Agrikids: www.agrikids.ie/

FRS Training scales up farm safety awareness programmes

FRS Training is continuing to expand its range of farm safety awareness programmes and training modules in a bid to reduce the number of on-farm accidents and fatalities each year

There have been 16 confirmed deaths relating to farm accidents this year (at the time of print), a figure that tragically surpasses 2024's total. But many farm deaths can be avoided.

Most accidents on farms are attributed to machinery, animal handling, or working from heights. The team at FRS Training have been working tirelessly to reverse this trend and help foster a culture of safety and wellbeing on all Irish farms, providing training, advice and support to farm families across Ireland. Over recent months, FRS Training, a division of the Irish multi-sector organisation FRS Co-Op, has rolled out a number of new farm safety awareness initiatives that it believes will make a practical difference to improving health and safety on Irish farms.

Ben Fearn, head of sales and operations at FRS Training, said: "Farms consistently rank as the most dangerous workplaces in Ireland. And because the majority of farms in Ireland are family operated, many of us grow up on farms and become desensitised to the multiple everyday risks they present. At FRS Training, we believe continuous education and training is critical to reducing the number of farm accidents each year, and to foster a safety-conscious culture among farmers."

Young people and families

FRS Training believes that education is crucial to develop a culture of farm safety awareness among the next generation of Irish farmers and ultimately reduce the number of farm accidents. With that in mind, FRS Training has taken the proactive approach, with the aid of funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to design a bespoke farm safety awareness programme, which is being rolled out in second level schools this year. The initiative has offered face-to-face and webinar-led farm safety training modules to over 700 second-level schools across the country.



Ben Fearn, head of sales and operations at FRS Training (second from right) speaking at a farm safety panel discussion at the 2025 National Ploughing Championships. Also pictured are (from left): Brian Rohan from Embrace Farm; Philip Stewart, AKA Farmer Phil; and JulieAnn McCann from FRS Co-op.

These modules cover all major farm safety risks and how to mitigate them, including livestock, machinery, slurry, working at heights, tractors and more. The strength of this initiative was built on the back of the success of FRS Training's Farm Family CPD (continuous professional development) programme, which offered free farm safety training to 300 families this year. This programme, which was funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine included five online courses designed to reduce the number of fatal and non-fatal farm accidents by shifting behaviours, building awareness, and upskilling families. "While striving to reduce the number of farm-related accidents and deaths, it is vital to focus on young people – our future farmers. What they learn at a young age, they can carry with them for the rest of their long careers, and this will help to build a strong culture of safe farming amongst the next generation," Ben said.

Training and education

Farming remains the most dangerous occupation in Ireland, consistently accounting for the highest number of workplace fatalities and injuries each

year. To challenge this trend, FRS Training continues to deliver a number of farm safety awareness training programmes nationwide. The team at FRS Training provide advice and training on tractors, quad/ATVs, pesticide spraying, chainsaw use, first aid, working from heights, and more. These thorough and interactive training programmes are delivered at marts, FRS office locations, and directly on farms (where appropriate). Meanwhile, FRS Training also offers a comprehensive TAMS Farm Safety Course online, which fulfils the mandatory safety training requirements. This is essential to receive the 40 per cent to 60 per cent grant aid for a variety of farm upgrades and projects. Ben added: "These courses are practical, inclusive, and designed to meet the real risks faced on Irish farms today. As we enter the colder and darker months of the year, we are urging farmers across the country to rethink and reassess health and safety on their farms."



An Rann Talúnachas,
Bliainne Móra
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



David Kelly from Co. Kildare is one of the ambassadors for Agri Aware's campaign, Sowing Wellbeing in Every Field.



AGRI AWARE'S LATEST CAMPAIGN - SOWING WELLBEING IN EVERY FIELD - FOCUSES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIORITISING FARMERS' HEALTH. HERE, WE CHAT TO ONE OF THE CAMPAIGN'S AMBASSADORS, DAVID KELLY, ABOUT WHY HE GOT INVOLVED AND HOW FARMERS CAN STAY ON TOP OF THEIR PHYSICAL WELLBEING

"Farmers lead a very busy lifestyle, including those part-time farmers who are also holding down a separate job. There is a tendency to 'keep going' and not take care of your health, but yearly check-ups and blood tests are so important to catch things early," says David Kelly from Co. Kildare, who balances farm work with a nine-to-five job in research. "The work will always be there; your health is what lets you do it." David is one of the ambassadors for Agri Aware's 'Sowing Wellbeing in Every Field' campaign, which aims to raise awareness around key topics focused on Irish farmers, with a goal of identifying areas of improvement in the areas of farm safety and physical health of farmers.

CAMPAIGN AIMS

Commenting on the campaign in 2025 and the aims for 2026, Michael Geary, communications and education officer at

Agri Aware states: "We know and understand the many responsibilities farmers juggle, from farm safety to maintaining their own physical and mental wellbeing. Balancing each of these 'fields' is essential to success and wellbeing. The campaign aims to cultivate a strong network of care and support within farming communities, with the support of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine." To do this, Agri Aware sought the help of farmers whose stories have left a lasting impression on those who have heard them with the hope of initiating a conversation among farm families and people individually on these topics. Key areas of focus around the campaign centred on quad and livestock safety and the physical wellbeing of farmers. Michael continues: "As part of the campaign, dairy farmer Padraic Joyce from Co. Meath shared his story of being involved in a quad accident; beef and tillage farmer Shane

Purcell from Co. Kildare told the story of how a daily check on his cattle in the shed left him knocked to the floor; and Kildare farmer David Kelly spoke about the physical health battle he endured. The purpose of these stories is to reiterate, firstly, the dangers of working with machinery and livestock with regards to farm safety; and also the importance of looking after your own health first and foremost."

A survey* being carried out by Agri Aware as part of the campaign aims to identify knowledge gaps and people's attitudes towards farm safety and their physical health in an effort to help reduce farm accidents and fatalities and to ensure farmers prioritise their own health. Michael explains that the learnings of this year's campaign aim to be put into motion in 2026 to help farmers understand the importance of looking after themselves regarding their physical and being safe while working on the farm.



HEART HEALTH

Improving heart health is crucial for everyone, especially for farmers in Ireland. According to the Central Statistics Office, cardiovascular disease (CVD), which includes heart disease and stroke, is a major health concern, claiming almost 10,000 lives annually in Ireland. This accounts for almost 30 per cent of all deaths. The Irish Heart Foundation's 'Farmers Have Hearts' programme provides free heart health checks in marts across the country, highlighted a startling statistic:

- ***74 per cent of the farmers in Ireland in a study had four or more risk factors for CVD, putting them at an increased risk of developing CVD at some point in their lives.***

One of the risk factors is high blood pressure. The good news is that 80 per cent of premature deaths from CVD are preventable through healthier lifestyle choices. While farming is a physically demanding job, farmers tend to be less likely to prioritise their own health, often putting it at the bottom of a lengthy list of daily tasks. However, by making simple changes, farmers can significantly improve their long-term heart health and keep blood pressure under control. **Source: Agri Aware**



THE WORK WILL ALWAYS BE THERE; YOUR HEALTH IS WHAT LETS YOU DO IT

A PERSONAL STORY

David is based between Kildare town and Athy on a drystock and tillage farm. He balances his farm work with a full-time role as a genetics research project coordinator, working on projects for Teagasc and universities in Ireland. "We have a mixed farm – we have weanlings and stores that we finish off; as well as a tillage enterprise.

I live here with my wife and seven-month-old daughter. The farm was originally my paternal grandfather's; my mother also came from a farming background in Mullingar, Offaly." Commenting on why he got involved in the campaign, David says: "I became aware of the campaign last year through the media coverage. Then a neighbour of mine, who works with Agri Aware, asked me if I would be interested in getting involved and I put my name forward. I think it is so important to get the message out there to farmers to keep on top of your health checks and be aware of your physical wellbeing. I was diagnosed with high blood pressure late last year and I also have a heart condition, as a result of having heart surgery when I was a baby. I was already monitoring myself for the heart condition, which I was aware of, but my wife – who is a GP – encouraged me to go and get a general check-up. I am so glad that I did. I already led a healthy lifestyle, in terms of my fitness and diet, so I was constantly putting off a visit to the doctor. But, as it turns out, my blood pressure was creeping up for years and I needed medication to address it. "Many who believe they are fit and healthy – particularly young farmers – think that there

is no need to go to the doctor regularly. But there might be something underlying and you can only catch these things if you get them checked out. Farming is such a hectic, busy lifestyle, but if you simply book in a yearly appointment you can catch things early and it might make a big difference to your life. My father had a health scare 10 years ago – he had to get a liver abscess removed – and he didn't realise it was an issue until he got his bloods done."

So, what three tips would David recommend to his peers when it comes to keeping on top of their health? "Firstly, go to your GP for a yearly check-up – no excuses! Secondly, don't shy away from any symptom that crops up – get it checked straight away. Thirdly, maintain a healthy lifestyle you're your diet and exercise regularly: creating good habits here will stand to you in the future."

***To take the survey, scan the QR code:**





Agri Aware



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Éia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



Padraic Joyce
Quad Safety



Shane Purcell
Livestock Safety



David Kelly
Physical Health

Sowing wellbeing in every field

Learn more:



MESSAGES

- Dairy farmers, take a bow! We are making good progress on water quality.
- Adopt the lessons learned by a farmer on clover management.
- House cows when target grass covers are reached.
- Mastitis prevention: avoid the financial losses.
- November is a big month for health and parasite control.
- Replacement heifer management must be high priority now.
- Apply lime, P and K this month (November).



By Matt Ryan

DAIRY FARMERS - TAKE A BOW

- ▶ The EPA has issued a positive report on water quality from 2019 to 2024. I quote from the recent Dairy Sustainability Ireland Newsletter, which is positive. The highlights are as follows:
- ▶ Overall status:
 - ▶ Over half (52%) of all surface waters (rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters) are in satisfactory ecological health.
 - ▶ Over 82% of all surface waters are in good chemical status as per their definition.
 - ▶ Best status by water body type:
 - ▶ Coastal waters show the best ecological health, with the highest percentage, 82%, of water in the high or good ecological status.
 - ▶ Lakes are also performing well, with 68% in high or good ecological status.
- ▶ Groundwater status: The quality of groundwater is very good and stable.
 - ▶ High compliance: 92% of all groundwater bodies met both their good chemical and quantitative (amount of water present) status objectives, accounting for 95% of the country by area.
 - ▶ Chemical status: 93% of groundwater bodies met their good chemical status objective.
 - ▶ Quantitative status: 99% of groundwater bodies met this target objective.

Areas of improvement and positive trends

- ▶ Rivers (nutrient concentrations)
 - ▶ Phosphorous concentration improvement: River sites in the high or good quality condition stood at 72.5%. This was an improvement of:
 - ▶ 2.5% compared with the period 2019-2021; and
 - ▶ Almost 10% since the 2016-2018 period.
 - ▶ Nitrogen reduction (reversal of trends):
 - ▶ 39% of monitored river sites showed reductions in nitrogen concentrations during the 2019-2024 period.
 - ▶ This was a reversal of the trends which were increasing during 2016-2021.
 - ▶ Stable nitrogen levels: An additional 55% of river sites showed stable nitrogen concentrations.
 - ▶ Geographic improvement: The reduction in river nitrogen concentrations were mostly in the south, south east and east of the country.
- ▶ Lakes
 - ▶ Stable phosphorous levels: Out of 223 monitored lakes, 215 (94%) had a stable trend, with total phosphorous concentrations remaining relatively unchanged.
 - ▶ Specific lake improvement: Farnham Lough, Co. Cavan showed a strong decreasing trend in phosphorous concentration.

- ▶ Effectiveness of measures and action areas
 - ▶ Groundwater body improvement: Nine groundwater bodies improved to good status since the last assessment.
 - ▶ Targeted action areas: While overall ecological status in priority areas for action has not yet improved, there is evidence that phosphorous concentrations have improved in these areas. This is welcomed as a first step.
 - ▶ High improvement by pasture type: Water bodies categorised as being 'at risk' showed notable improvement, 15.5%, in ecological status when the significant pressure was urban wastewater.
 - ▶ Historic recovery success: The report highlights the Blackwater catchment in Co. Cork as an example of successful past efforts, where substantial reductions in nutrient losses led to a significant ecological improvement in the downstream estuary in the mid-2010s. This demonstrates that ecological recovery in Ireland's river system is achievable within a decade.
 - ▶ I quote this report, because I want you to remember this information so that you can share these facts with people who say that dairy farmers are polluters. Facts don't lie.
- ▶ I quote directly from the aforementioned newsletter, because I want you to remember this information, so that you can debate strongly with people who accuse farmers of polluting the country and making no effort to improve things.
 - ▶ Most farmers are unable to quote facts when featured in the media.
 - ▶ They talk in generalities... "we are doing our best"; "others are to blame"; "we don't get enough grants"; "we are better than most countries in the EU", etc.
- ▶ Research has enabled farmers to take action in a number of ways:
 1. Reduce CO₂ emissions by:
 - ▶ Participating in the BEEP scheme.
 - ▶ Low emission slurry spreading.
 - ▶ Maximising dairy EBL.
 - ▶ Using all protected urea.
 2. Increase carbon sequestration on farms by:
 - ▶ Agro-forestry.
 - ▶ Growing more grass with lower nitrogen input.
 - ▶ Improving soil fertility.
 - ▶ Improved hedgerow management by sowing more hedges/trees and trimming hedges as per Teagasc's recommendations.
- ▶ Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorous, are the major issues associated with water quality:
 - ▶ Efficient recover of nitrogen so that we lose less of it to the atmosphere and groundwater.

- ▶ Farmers are now well aware of limitations to the quantities of N advised, the timing restrictions and the restrictions associated with adjacent water source,
- ▶ Clover and multi-species must now be an integral part of every farmers grassland management plan.
- ▶ Phosphorous losses are reduced by adhering to soil test results and spreading on advised dates.
- ▶ Slurry application restrictions must be adhered to. Unfortunately, some abuse this rule.
- ▶ A lot done but more to do.
 - ▶ This report is all about making progress and indicates that the 'new' practices applied by farmers are beginning to show positive results.
 - ▶ Most farmers are making huge efforts, but, unfortunately, some few 'cowboys' are spoiling the reputation of most and putting the selling of our dairy products at risk. The solution – call them out!

CLOVER LESSONS WE HAVE LEARNED

After my October Management Hints, I got this correspondence from Denis O'Donovan, west Cork – there is no substitute for a farmer's experience who has adopted a new practice. Denis tells us:

- ▶ Grass clover paddocks that got no bag nitrogen have given the same grass yields here as paddocks next to them getting 300kg of bag N per hectare.
- ▶ You can't carry a cover greater than 600kg DM/ha on paddocks you want to protect clover on through the winter.
- ▶ Clover pastures are more vulnerable to poaching, and we have seriously reduced the yield of pasture in a damaged paddock the following year if we ever poach in late autumn or early spring.
- ▶ Early slurry in January or February works well.
- ▶ We use 2kg of red clover and 2kg of white clover per acre when reseeding. The red clover won't last too long with tight grazing, but it will give an extra 50 units of N in the first year.
- ▶ Choose the clover varieties from the Department recommended list.
- ▶ We have gotten away with using just 0.7:30 at reseeding.
- ▶ Burning off with glyphosate four days after grazing the paddock (just as it is greening up) has worked well for us. We let the spray work for seven to eight days, then two to three runs of a disc harrow and then sowed with a one pass, and rolled twice after sowing. This has worked well for us.
- ▶ We use a post emergence spray (DB plus) early, then the seedling dock leaves are no bigger than a €2 coin.
- ▶ We graze the new reseed early when covers are less than 800kg DM, once you can't pull up the seedlings easily.
- ▶ Clover loves plenty of slurry.
- ▶ Clover needs sulphur, we give it a half bag of SOP in early May each year.
- ▶ DO NOT apply bag nitrogen to it, even when it looks yellow and hungry.
- ▶ Don't use grass colour as the criteria for the paddock growth, use the growth rate figures, it is usually growing as badly or as well as the high nitrogen paddock next to it.
- ▶ Hybrid grass and clover mixtures are working really well here but they must be near the yard where they will be seen nearly every day as they grow so fast. We have grazed them every 14-16 days.
- ▶ Bloat: Cows need access to straw before and after milking from August onwards and vegetable oil in the water at a rate of 60ml per

cow per day. We include yeast in the ration year-round, and I think this may help with getting fewer bloat cases.

- ▶ Farmers should now plan to sow at least 10% of the farm with clover next year.

HOUSE COWS WHEN AT TARGET GRASS COVERS

Because grass will be invaluable next spring to minimise meal feeding levels, you must now stop grazing when the farm cover is 600-850kg DM/ha. The former for 2.5 cows/ha and latter for 3.5 cows/ha with a range in between.

- ▶ Every day you delay closing in the autumn reduces spring available grass by 12kg DM.
 - ▶ Whereas every day you delay grazing in spring only increases yield by 8kg DM.
 - ▶ This is the most important decision and action you will take in November, so try to get it correct.
- ▶ As grass grows less than 1-3kg DM/ha/day over the winter, and if you need an opening cover of 900-1,100 (last year proved we can deal with covers of up to 1,100). Therefore, you must close up, as per Table 1.
 - ▶ To close at these covers you may have to leave one or two paddocks with covers of 1,500-1,600.
 - ▶ If you don't know what I am talking about, contact your adviser immediately or your discussion group. A grass training workshop can help.
- ▶ Farm covers over 2,000 lose quality very fast, therefore, where that has arisen get extra stock in to eat off.
- ▶ Over 60-70% of the grazing area must be grazed off and closed by November 1.
 - ▶ For heavy soils it should be 80-95%.
 - ▶ The paddocks being grazed in November will not be grazed until March 20 to early April.
 - ▶ If that has not been achieved and a higher proportion remains you must get in extra stock to get that proportion eaten off as soon as possible.
- ▶ Keep grass in the diet for as long as possible because of the extra €2.20 per cow per day profit.
- ▶ Clover swards must be closed with not more than 500kg DM on them.
- ▶ Every farmer should be using the autumn rotation planner to guide grass allocation per day, but grass measurement must also be done so as to STOP grazing when target closing covers are arrived at.

Table 1: Target November and closing grass covers per cow and average farm cover (AFC).

	2.5 Cows/ha	3.0 Cows/ha	3.5 Cows/ha	Heavy land
Date	% closed & AFC	% closed & AFC	% closed & AFC	% closed & AFC
Nov. 1	60%+ closed	65-70% closed	70-80% closed	80-95% closed
Fully housed Nov. 15-25	650kg DM/ha	750-800kg DM/ha	800+ kg DM/ha	550kg DM/ha
AFC Dec. 1	700kg DM/ha	800kg DM/ha	900kg DM/ha	600kg DM/ha

MASTITIS PREVENTION – AVOID THE FINANCIAL LOSSES

- ▶ With milk price in 2026 predicted to be a lot lower than in 2025 we should not entertain any preventable loss of income. Table 2 highlights the possible financial losses per 100-cow herd.
- ▶ Prevention is the motto as the cure rate during lactation is very low.

TABLE 2: Effect of SCC on milk yield and losses per 100 cows.

SCC (per 1,000)	Litres lost per lactation	Losses per 100 cows/year
< 100	0	Not detectable
101-200	-174	€6,690
201-300	-309	€12,360
301-400	-367	€14,680
400+	-422	€16,880

- ▶ As the cure rate of mastitis/SCC is 50-70% with dry cow treatment, this is one cost that cannot be avoided.
- ▶ The big difference from the past to now is that your vet will be heavily involved in assessing the appropriate drying off drug/procedure for your herd.
 - ▶ This is because society wants farmers to be more careful/considerate when using antibiotics and anthelmintics so that their overuse is minimised. This, it is hoped, will ensure that there will be no human or animal bugs resistant to antibiotics.
- ▶ Therefore, there will be more teat sealers used on cows with low levels of mastitis, and you will need a prescription from your vet to use the usual dry cow antibiotic.
 - ▶ Vet advice will ensure you use the best teat sealer and appropriate dry cow antibiotic – talk to him/her early in the month.
 - ▶ It would be advisable to do a milk recording in early November to identify cows with low SCC who are suitable for teat sealing, but cow history will play a bigger role.
- ▶ Dry off cows:
 - ▶ That are within 56 days of calving.
 - ▶ That have a daily milk yield of 7L (0.7kg MS) or less per day.
 - ▶ That have SCC levels of over 300,000.
 - ▶ That are first calvers that have milked for 270 days.
 - ▶ That are thin – be particularly concerned about high yielders, who 'milk off their backs'.
- ▶ Drying off cows is not an easy task and much care, time and planning must be set aside for the job.
- ▶ The following suggestions should be taken on board:
 - ▶ Treat all quarters of each cow the same.
 - ▶ California Mastitis Test (CMT) cows prior to drying off to identify problem quarters. In problem quarters, administer one lactating cow tube every 12 hours for three milkings prior to drying off. All milk should be discarded during this procedure.
 - ▶ Dry cow antibiotic tubes and/or teat sealant should be administered after the final milking.
 - ▶ Milk out the quarter fully before infusing the dry cow antibiotic/sealant.
 - ▶ Disinfect the teat end – vigorously, rub the teat end for 10-15 seconds with cotton wool soaked in methylated spirits.
 - ▶ Do not contaminate the nozzle of the antibiotic tube before insertion into the teat canal.
 - ▶ Infuse the contents of the antibiotic tube into the quarter – hold teat-end firmly between thumb and forefinger and with other hand, gently massage the antibiotic upwards into the teat.
 - ▶ Teat spray (post milking teat disinfectant) treated quarters immediately after infusion at a rate of 20cc/cow.
 - ▶ Record cow number, date and product details of all dry cow treatments.
 - ▶ Mark the cow (leg band or spray paint on udder) so that cows that have received dry cow antibiotic therapy can be readily recognised.

- ▶ Do not leave cows in yards or soiled areas in the period immediately after dry cow therapy application.
- ▶ Maintain dry cows separate from the milking herd and put dry cows in clean, dry paddocks (particularly for the first two weeks after drying off) to reduce teat exposure to environmental mastitis bacteria.
- ▶ The cow is at a greater risk of new infection for the first three weeks after drying off.
- ▶ Keep a close eye on cows to identify new infections.
- ▶ Some farmers are teat sealing heifers now. If this is being done because you have heifers calving down with mastitis, then it must be done extremely carefully and is a tough job.
 - ▶ A roll-over crate makes the job easier.
 - ▶ Teat sealing cows or heifers is a job that must be done with extreme hygiene care – if not, animal deaths will result within a week.
- ▶ You should cull cows that:
 - ▶ Had three or more clinical cases this year and had two to three high SCC readings during the year. It is a waste of money treating these cows as they will continue to spread infection to other cows next year.
 - ▶ Have just two or three teat – these have no part to play in profitable farming.
- ▶ Because of the high price for cull cows, this is a great year to cull cows.

HEALTH AND PARASITE CONTROL

- ▶ Because parasites reduce animal performance, we must deal with them.
 - ▶ Weanlings must be dosed at housing for type II ostertagia (stomach worms).
- ▶ You never know when fluke hits, so if in doubt get a dung sample tested through your vet.
 - ▶ Remember, all fluke doses have a milk withholding period, so it is best not done until drying off.
- ▶ All animals will need to be treated for lice at housing.
- ▶ Lameness must be addressed and prevented by:
 - ▶ Having good and adequate facilities, but overcrowding, poor ventilation, with bad surfaces and poor nutrition management are real issues.
 - ▶ Getting Farm Relief Services to examine the whole herd and deal with lame cows. This has real merit – experts know what they are doing!
 - ▶ Providing a footbath for three consecutive days every month.
- ▶ Consult your vet on dosing/vaccination management now to alleviate these tasks in spring.

REPLACEMENT HEIFER CARE

- ▶ Weigh your weanling (called R1s) and your in-calf heifers (R2s) now to see how they compare with the targets, based on breed type (Table 3).

Table 3: The target weights for replacements – November 1.

Breed	Mature weight	R1s (40% mature weight)	R2s (80% mature weight)
Holstein	580kg	224kg	448kg
British Fr/NZ Fr	550kg	220kg	440kg
Jersey x HF	545kg	218kg	436kg

- ▶ Animals under target should get extra meal.
- ▶ With good silage, for every 10kg R1s are under target, they need 40kg of extra meal. For every 10kg R2s are under target, they need an extra 60kg meal over a period to bring them to target.
- ▶ Heifers suffer on most farms at this time of year.
 - ▶ They are left to run around, cleaning up bad pastures, either at home or particularly on out-farm blocks.
 - ▶ There are only 90-120 days to calving.
 - ▶ At an expected weight gain of 0.75kg per day, you need 100 days to put on 75kg.
 - ▶ Remember the last three to four weeks before calving does not count for weight gain as the animal's intake is very low and she diverts most feed into calf growth.
 - ▶ Mix the in-calf heifers with the first calvers at housing to minimise stress now and particularly after calving when stress can have a detrimental effect on her subsequent weight gain and conception rates.
- ▶ Use Tables 2 and 3 to plan your meal-feeding strategy for your weanlings.
 - ▶ Meals will give the following weight gains:
 - ▶ 1kg and 2kg of meal will give 0.25kg and 0.4kg gain per day, respectively.
 - ▶ R1s should be fed to gain at least 0.5kg per head per day. Some will have to gain more to catch up.
- ▶ At grass next spring they should gain 0.75kg (60 days of March and April $\times 0.75 = 45\text{kg}$). From this information you can decide what management treatment animals of various weights require.

Table 4: Meal requirements for weanling heifers on silage.

Weanling	Silage DM		
	65	70	75
Gain on silage only (kg/day)	0.24	0.41	0.58
Light weanlings (meal to give 0.7kg/day)	2.0	1.4	0.5
Heavy weanlings (meal required to give 0.5kg/day)	1.0	0.4	0

It is obvious from above that:

1. Silage must be analysed (contract readers must also). Table 5 lists the % P required in meal for the various silages.
 2. A weighing scales is essential to manage heifer target weights. Discussion groups should buy one together.
- ▶ With good management, weanlings that are 20% under target would achieve target mating weights; therefore, feed extra.
 - ▶ All this information is essential to bring to the attention of contract calf rearer's so that subsequent hassle doesn't arise.
 - ▶ We have had cases where the owner of the animals has been very trusting of the rearer's ability, based on past history, and hasn't monitored silage quality and animal target weights. There is only one loser in that situation!

Table 5: Protein levels (%) in meal required to supplement silage of different % proteins.

Meal (kg)	% Protein in silage			
	8%	10%	12%	14%
2kg	20%	18%	16%	14%
3kg	18%	16%	14%	12%

- ▶ Manage replacement health care as above.
 - ▶ Many farmers give the leptospirosis vaccine now or earlier to R1s to minimise spring work.
 - ▶ Teat seal R2s if there is any risk/history of mastitis in R2s calving down.

IMPORTANT BRIEF MESSAGES

- ▶ Soil test now to save on excess P application but use lime and potash to improve efficiency of applied nitrogen and phosphorous and grass growth next year.
 - ▶ Apply 2t lime per acre when in doubt.
 - ▶ Remember: increasing pH from 5.9 to 6.3 will increase grass yield by nearly 0.5t DM/ha, while increasing from 5.9 to 6.8 will increase yield by over 1t DM/ha.
 - ▶ It supports better clover establishment, fewer weeds and weed grasses.
- ▶ Do silage analysis now for feeding value and mineral status. This will enable you to supplement with meal if necessary and feed the correct minerals.
- ▶ Meal feeding (Table 6) will depend on silage quality and the condition of the animals being addressed:
 - ▶ Milking cows (2-4kg, 16-17% P), if grass is tight and silage is poor.
 - ▶ Small weanlings (1-2kg 14% P ration).
 - ▶ Small in-calf heifers (1-2kg 14% P ration).
 - ▶ Autumn calvers; feed 3-8kg, depending on grass supply.

Table 6: Recommendations for dry cow feeding (10-12 weeks dry period).

Silage DM	Body condition score at drying off			
	< 2.5	2.5	2.75	>3.0
>72	Silage + 1kg	Silage ad-lib	Silage restrict	Restrict
68-72	Silage + 2kg	Silage + 1kg	Silage ad-lib	Restrict
64-68	Silage + 3kg	Silage + 2kg	Silage + 1kg	Ad-lib
60-64	Silage + 4kg	Silage + 3kg	Silage + 2kg	Silage + 1kg

- ▶ Cows must be condition scored (BCS) now so as to have them in BCS of 3-3.5 at calving.

QUOTATION FOR THE MONTH

Kerryman, John Roche, recently appointed chief science adviser to the New Zealand prime minister, gave the following quotation in relation to his personal experience developing a dairy farm business just before the global financial crisis: **"The school of life has very hefty tuition charges."**



Want to be rewarded for your low claims record?

Get up to 30% off AXA SMART FARM INSURANCE.

axa.ie/farm • 0906 435070 • In Branch

Know You Can

MYCOSORB® A+
EVO



Your challenges **evolve.** Your solutions should too.

The next-generation mycotoxin solution

Mycosorb® A+ Evo is designed for higher-risk mycotoxin challenges, combining yeast cell wall extract and algae with a novel bacterial ingredient for enhanced mitigation and broader protection. Proven in extensive lab and field studies across species and feed types, this patent-pending technology delivers advanced protection against toxins such as **DON**, **fusaric acid**, **Penicillium** toxins and more.

Maintaining the proven features of the Mycosorb range, Mycosorb® A+ Evo is the optimal choice for managing higher-risk mycotoxin challenges or when feeding sensitive animals, including breeders and ruminants.

As mycotoxin contamination remains a persistent threat across feed ingredients, a highly efficient mitigant such as Mycosorb® A+ Evo is an essential part of a proactive risk management strategy.

Key benefits of Mycosorb® A+ Evo include:



Advanced binding
efficacy



Broad-spectrum
mycotoxin protection



Evolved mycotoxin
control



Backed by extensive
scientific research



Tackles higher-
risk challenges

Contact your local Alltech representative or call InTouch
on +353 (0)59 910 1320

<https://www.alltech.com/evolution>

Alltech®

Key updates include a higher power offering, new transmission features, and enhanced steering.



HARDER, BETTER, FASTER, STRONGER— THE NEW T5S

THE NEW GENERATION OF NEW HOLLAND T5S TRACTORS BOAST FEATURES AND UPDATES THAT OFFER SHARPER HANDLING, MANOEUVRABILITY, PRODUCTIVITY, AND CONTROL FEATURES, THE COMPANY SAYS, SO IT GETS THE 'FROM THE CAB' TREATMENT THIS MONTH

The new T5s series packs 'more power, performance and style into the range' according to New Holland with key updates including a higher power offering, new transmission features, enhanced steering and better visibility, to help operators do more in a day.

For farmers seeking a well-matched tractor and loader package for handling work, T5S models can be paired with a new 635LU New Holland front loader. Available in 90hp, 101hp and new 110hp versions, the robust and versatile T5S tractors incorporate new features focused on performance and productivity.

Key innovations include a front axle that delivers faster steering response for exceptional handling, especially when working with a loader. New Holland's renowned SuperSteer front axle is an option, providing operators with increased manoeuvrability from a reduced turning radius.

SMARTER FEATURES

Productivity in every operation – particularly loader work – is boosted by a brake-to-clutch feature (Dynamic StopStart) that enables single-foot control for effortless stop-and-go movement. The advanced 12F/12R Electronic Power Shuttle ensures seamless, clutch-free direction changes and features low-mid-high aggressiveness control to match the particular requirements of different tasks. Implement handling capabilities are elevated by an optional high-flow 82L/min hydraulic pump. A new front PTO design with a wet clutch ensures

improved efficiency, less noise and longer maintenance intervals.

New generation T5S tractors put operator comfort first, according to New Holland, with intuitive, ergonomic controls, including a new rocker switch shuttle for simultaneous loader operation and direction changes to minimise cycle times. A new easy-to-read digital instrument cluster automatically adjusts to ambient light for optimal visibility. It provides information on fuel consumption, area worked, distance travelled and key engine and transmission data.

From 2026, T5S tractors will be available with electronic Lift-O-Matic rear hitch control, boosting efficiency and ease of use. Forward visibility is also upgraded, thanks to the newly designed U-shaped exhaust, improving the operator's view to the front-right. A 130L diesel tank means operators benefit from longer refueling intervals, while its ergonomic design aids front-left visibility and provides plenty of ground clearance to tackle tough terrain. Powerful new LED lighting options, along with an optional LED beacon, contribute to high levels of productivity and safety.

ADVANCED CONNECTIVITY

The latest T5S models have a suite of advanced connectivity and technology features, according to New Holland. The tractors are now available with optional factory-installed telematics and lifetime connectivity, allowing effortless monitoring of key machine parameters, location and performance, maximising uptime and operational

The new T5S models can be paired with a new 635LU New Holland front loader.



An optional Isobus Class II connection enables tractor-implement information exchange.



AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Front axle upgrade for faster steering response; SuperSteer option available for enhanced maneuverability;
- ▶ New transmission features including brake-to-clutch for easier handling; and
- ▶ Fresh New Holland hood style, ergonomic controls and improved visibility.

efficiency. The intuitive FieldOps portal enables real-time data transfer, giving users full visibility and control over both machine and agronomic data. An optional Isobus Class II connection enables tractor-implement information exchange. Starting in 2026, T5S tractors can be equipped with a factory-fitted electric autoguidance system, fully compatible with the IntelliVie IV Plus display and DirecSteer, for parallel pass precision. The new T5S models made their debut at Sommet de l'Élevage in Clermont-Ferrand, France, last month and will be available from dealers by the first half of 2026.



THE INDIAN KALEIDOSCOPE

NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

Well readers, since my last column, which I penned from St Valentin in Austria at the Case IH headquarters in Europe, I visited Chennai on the east coast of India for seven days. There, I was joined by a group of nine journalists from across Europe.

Our trip was called The Indian Kaleidoscope, and it certainly lived up to its name: the sights, the smells, the culture, the friendliness of the people, the vastness of the country, and its hunger for development and growth were remarkable.

As older buildings came down, towering glass structures were rising up all around. New rail systems were being built both underground and above the city. Chennai was a hive of commercial activity and construction. India, overall, is considered the fastest-growing economy in the world, driven by domestic consumption, government initiatives, and a large skilled workforce.

So why were we there? We were guests for the week on a fact-finding mission with TAFE Tractors India, one of the largest tractor manufacturers in the world and the second largest in India. To put this into context, the Indian tractor market is the largest in the world, accounting for 40 per cent of global new tractor sales. The market is currently between 880,095 and 900,000 units per year, and by 2025 it is expected to exceed one million units. The average tractor horsepower in India is between 31hp-40hp, but there is growing demand in the 51hp-80hp range. This shift is being driven by increasing farm sizes, new cultivation practices, advances in technology, and the ever-growing demand for food.

India's population stands at approximately 1.451 billion and continues to grow. For comparison, China has 1.409 billion people, the US has 340.1 million, the Republic of Ireland has 5.1 million, and Northern Ireland has 1.9 million.

Our hosts, TAFE, officially entered the European market at Agritechnica 2023. Since then, it has expanded its presence across Europe through a network of more than 200 dealers and partners in over 20 countries. Its European range currently runs from 18hp to 100hp and is still growing.

TAFE has also opened a centre of excellence and import business in Low Southwick, Sunderland, to serve the UK and Irish markets. Its strategy in Europe is to build a strong network for sales, service, and repair, offering tractors that provide value, reliability, and quality to the end user.

As I write this, the first TAFE tractors are already on their way to Ireland. From their small electric tractor, which has been shortlisted for the 2026 Tractor of the Year Awards, to their expanding higher horsepower range, we may soon see them in farmyards across the country. A full report will be in our December issue.

Until next month, farm safely and farm wisely.

The Amazone ZA-TS 01's AutoSpread feature monitors the actual spread pattern of the fertiliser.



A NEW SOLUTION FOR FERTILISER DISTRIBUTION

After years of development and over 100,000 hectares of successful field trials, Amazone has developed a fertiliser spreader that can adjust settings in real time to ensure optimum distribution. The Amazone ZA-TS 01's AutoSpread feature monitors the actual spread pattern of the fertiliser and automatically adjusts settings. Combined with the intelligent online connection to the Amazone Spreader Application Centre, the actual spread pattern is permanently validated, meaning that the operator no longer has to make any setting adjustments. The main challenge of precise fertilisation has always been getting the settings correct, according to Amazone. Incorrect spreader settings can lead to uneven distribution of the fertiliser that, in turn, results in reduced yields and loss of quality. This not only results in economic losses but also damages sustainability and efficiency in agriculture, according to Amazone. Existing systems such as ArgusTwin already enable the direction of throw to be measured, but the actual throwing distance of the fertiliser remains unknown because,

until now, the throwing distance of the fertiliser could only be determined under stationary laboratory conditions. Additional AutoSpread sensors make it possible for the first time to determine not only the throwing direction but also the throwing distance and consequently the actual spread pattern in the field. Where the innovative solutions for the various individual situations such as HeadlandControl, WindControl or Section Control used to be individual solutions, they are now optimally integrated via AutoSpread for the first time. For example, in the case of Section Control, AutoSpread automatically determines the actual switch-on and switch-off points or adjusts the control process for the current fertiliser via the WindControl wind sensor. In combination with the new border-spreading system, distribution is also optimised along field boundaries. With AutoSpread, all systems are more accurate than ever before, and all areas of the field are fertilised in the best way possible. Thanks to the online connection to the Amazone spreading hall (SAC) via the AmaConnect Unit, the fertiliser's digital twin

is automatically transferred to the spreader in the field. The actual collected data is now compared with the known spread patterns of its digital twin using an AI-supported algorithm and is permanently validated in real time. Incorrect fertiliser settings are reliably detected and the spread pattern is perfectly adjusted.

AutoSpread can also reliably detect worn or defective spreading vanes before the spread pattern deviates. The quality of the lateral distribution is always in view via a display on the terminal. If anomalies occur or the measured spread pattern does not match the reference of its digital twin, AutoSpread specifically prompts you to check with the EasyCheck digital test kit and ensures that any errors are quickly rectified where necessary. The system therefore provides the spreading process with a high degree of reliability through continuous validation of the autonomously set parameters. The use of spreader testing to check the distribution is significantly reduced and unnecessary spreader tests are a thing of the past. This saves time and ensures maximum convenience.

Merlo showcases 14 machines at Agritechnica in Hannover that, the company says, highlights innovation, sustainability, and the strength of its product offering. This includes the debut

of its HyperCompact telehandler concept developed for confined-space operations. Below is a snapshot:

- **Cingo:** Compact, powerful machines with modern, ergonomic design, delivering efficiency, precision, and high productivity even in dense vegetation and challenging conditions.
- **e-Worker:** The first fully electric telehandlers, designed and built entirely in-house, embodying Merlo's commitment to sustainable technology while ensuring manoeuvrability, comfort, and versatility.
- **Multifarmer:** Unique models that combine the capabilities of a traditional agricultural telehandler with those of a tractor, offering an all-in-one solution for farm operations.
- **Turbofarmer:** Compact telehandlers designed for demanding agricultural applications, with load capacities of up to 6.5t.
- **HyperCompact Concept:** A major highlight will be the debut of the HyperCompact telehandler concept, developed by Merlo for operations in confined spaces such as



traditional farm buildings, poultry and pig units or equestrian yards. Compact, agile, and highly functional, it can be transported on a road trailer. Despite its reduced dimensions, it offers the same comfort and performance

associated with Merlo telehandlers, the company says. The model on display features a load capacity of 1,500kg and a maximum lifting height of 5 meters. Its compact size ensures exceptional manoeuvrability in areas with limited access, while compatibility with a wide range of attachments makes it a truly multifunctional machine.

ATTACHMENTS, RESTYLING AND DETECTION

Merlo has also launched a new range of attachments that enhance machine versatility, including buckets, and clamps each engineered to meet the evolving needs of today's farmers. The company has extensively restyled the medium-capacity Turbofarmer models, with the TF42 and TF 38. Key upgrades include: a new fender design; a redesigned cab silent-block system; improved cab access; significantly enhanced operating visibility, setting new standards; and a new telescopic boom concept, engineered to maximise performance.

And, among its latest innovations, Merlo has also unveiled a new intelligent camera system. This cutting-edge safety solution detects pedestrians around the machine and can automatically intervene to help prevent accidents.

A LONG WAY TOGETHER



AGRIMAX RT 657

AGRIMAX RT 657 is the ideal tyre for both soil tillage and road usage; certain sizes are suitable for harvesting. This tyre provides excellent ride comfort and remarkable fuel economy. It also comes with high load capacity at high speeds. AGRIMAX RT 657 is the best choice if you are looking for a versatile and reliable tyre without compromising performance.



Discover the BKT Range



GROWING TOGETHER

[in](#) [f](#) [X](#) [v](#) [i](#) [d](#) [b](#) [t](#)-tires.com

VISIT US AT

**AGRI
TECHNICA**
THE WORLD'S NO. 1

Hanover

November 9th-15th, 2025

Hall 7 - Booth A36

IMPORTER FOR IRELAND

agrigear
Tyre and Wheel Specialists

Kells Road, Baileborough,
Co. Cavan, IRELAND
Phone +353 42 9666444
sales@agrigear.ie
www.agrigear.ie



Ovlac is set to showcase a representation of its entire tillage range at Agritechnica.



OVLAC TO UNVEIL NEW SHALLOW CULTIVATOR AT AGRITECHNICA

Spanish tillage equipment manufacturer, Ovlac, is taking part in Agritechnica 2025, taking place in Hanover, Germany, from November 9-15. There, it is set to unveil the new

ATLander, a shallow cultivator designed under the concept 'All Terrains, All Tasks, All Times'. According to the company, this 'versatile, robust and efficient' machine is capable of adapting to all types of soils, tasks and working conditions. With it, Ovlac says it offers farmers a multi-purpose solution that combines innovation and high performance in a single pass.

Alongside the ATLander, the company will showcase a representation of its entire tillage range: the mouldboard plough, the Eco Mini plough, the VersaTill cultivator, the short disc harrow and vineyard-specific solutions.



Tom Murphy
Professional Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland

UNDERVALUED

I believe that the work of agricultural contractors is not valued or appreciated and, as a sector, it is not treated with the respect it deserves, certainly by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and policymakers.

I hope that farmers appreciate the services provided by agricultural contractors – I think they do – as there is no doubt that it is not economically viable for them to purchase the types of machinery and kit needed for food production on the farm today.

Agricultural exports and food production for the Irish market could not be achieved



"The drill to get through work"
- Thomas Sex, Newbridge Co. Kildare



KVERNELAND U-DRILL

BUILT FOR HIGH OUTPUT

2 Year Warranty

- CO DISC COULTERS
- ELDOS METERING SYSTEM WITH ISOBUS FUNCTIONALITY
- GRAIN & FERTILISER SEEDING CAPABILITY IN ONE PASS
- HIGH SPEED OPERATION (10 - 18KM/H) & 3-6M WORKING WIDTH
- FULLY ISOBUS COMPATIBLE
- AUTOMATICALLY CONTROLLED HEAD-LAND-MANAGEMENT

**0%*
FINANCE
AVAILABLE**

LEONARD HOVENDEN: 087 147 5137 | GREG TENNYSON: 087 700 9689 | ALLAN HETHERINGTON: 0044 7826544630

WHEN FARMING MEANS BUSINESS

www.kverneland.ie

without agricultural contractors. Indeed, the service they provide to farmers is a vital block on which the food chain is built. Yet, how often is this acknowledged? The DAFM does not even recognise their existence and has no specific data on this sector. Does the DAFM know how many professional agricultural contractors there are, what the state of their businesses are, and what succession plans do they have in place? All this is crucial information for short- and long-term planning in the farming sector, but the agricultural contracting sector is not being taken into account at all. Are agricultural contractors just expected to magically be there in the long-term to provide the most high-tech, high-investment machinery needed to achieve the required output? All without any acknowledgement or recognition? Unlike the UK and other European countries, most Irish agricultural contractors do not have a contract with their farmer clients. Therefore, there is no goodwill in their

business to sell on when they want to retire after a lifetime of service to agriculture. While I am happy to hear the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon, announce more financial help for farmers, he needs to look at the long-term viability of the agricultural contracting sector and bring them under the umbrella of his department because, as it stands at the moment, no one in Government has a clue about them.

FOOD PRICES GONE MAD

It is a mystery to me why we are seeing such savage price increases in basic everyday food. Recently published figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) show that, in the past year, food prices have risen at more than double the general rate of inflation. These figures also show that food inflation rose to 5.1 per cent in August – its highest level since December 2023 when it stood at 5.6 per cent. In addition, according to the CSO, the price of several foods rose last

month, including butter (up 18.3 per cent), milk (12.4 per cent), bread (3.3 per cent), and beef and veal (22.7 per cent). Farmers are certainly not benefiting from the massive increases shoppers face, and despite some help from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), farmers still do not get a fair farmgate price. Unlike most other industries, who take their total input costs plus a profit margin, farmers must take what they can get from the multinationals, who dictate the price. To me, there is something seriously wrong with a system where we, taxpayers, subsidise the production of food though the CAP, then those in the supply chain set the price, then sting the taxpayer to pay extortionate prices to buy the food we have already subsidised. You wouldn't believe it if you saw it in a movie. We did have a European commissioner who put together a working group to investigate how to get a fairer farmgate price but he was removed by the unacceptable face of politics. Come back, Phil Hogan, we need you now!



AMAZONE

CENTAYA DRILLS




2 YEAR
Warranty

0% FINANCE
T&C APPLY



**Selection of
Coulter Options**



**Quickly
Attach**



**Short Conveyor
Sections**



**Fast & Easy
Calibration**

Find your local Amazone Dealer at Farmhand.ie
or call Val on +353 87 244 0893


farmhand



E-Connect has been designed to help farmers monitor and manage their machinery operations more efficiently in real time.

TURNING DATA INTO DECISIONS

VÄDERSTAD RECENTLY LAUNCHED A NUMBER OF NEW MACHINES AND PIECES OF KIT. HERE, NOEL DUNNE SELECTS HIS TOP THREE, ALL OF WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE TO IRISH CUSTOMERS FROM SPRING 2026

First up is a new telematics tool, E-Connect, which has been designed to help farmers monitor and manage their machinery operations more efficiently in real time. E-Connect allows operators to track fieldwork progress, analyse operational efficiency, and make informed decisions based on accurate, up-to-date data, the company says. It is designed to connect with Väderstad's major farm management systems (FMS), ensuring that machine data can be integrated as a valuable part of the broader farm planning and analysis ecosystem. "E-Connect turns machine data into decisions," says Väderstad UK managing director, Andy Gamble. "This will help farmers optimise performance, reduce downtime, and maximise

field efficiency. We have designed E-Connect with an intuitive and easy-to-use interface, allowing quick access to, and interpretation of, data. It features an intuitive interface, giving farmers the flexibility to manage their operations on the go."

E-Connect will be available for Väderstad seed drills, planters and tillage equipment machines fitted with a connected gateway. It premieres at Agritechnica and it will start to roll-out in early 2026.

NEW SEED DRILLS

Väderstad's next generation of its seed drills, the Spirit 400-900C/S and Inspire 1200C/S, are now fitted with a new seed couler, extended couler pressure, a new following harrow option, as

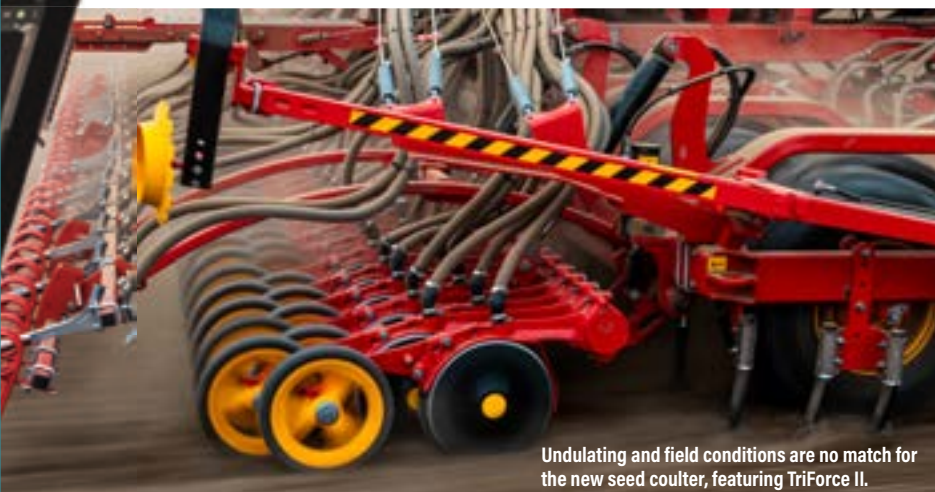
well as a hydraulic depth setting which can be controlled from the cab as an option.

At the heart of the new Spirit and Inspire, says Väderstad, is the new seed couler, featuring TriForce II, which is a patented suspension technology that enables every seed couler to follow the field's contours with even greater precision. This new tech, the company notes, gives them an unmatched ability to maintain a set couler pressure even in undulating and stressed field situations and at high working speeds. The new seed couler is able to apply 120kg couler pressure, instead of 80kg as the previous model.

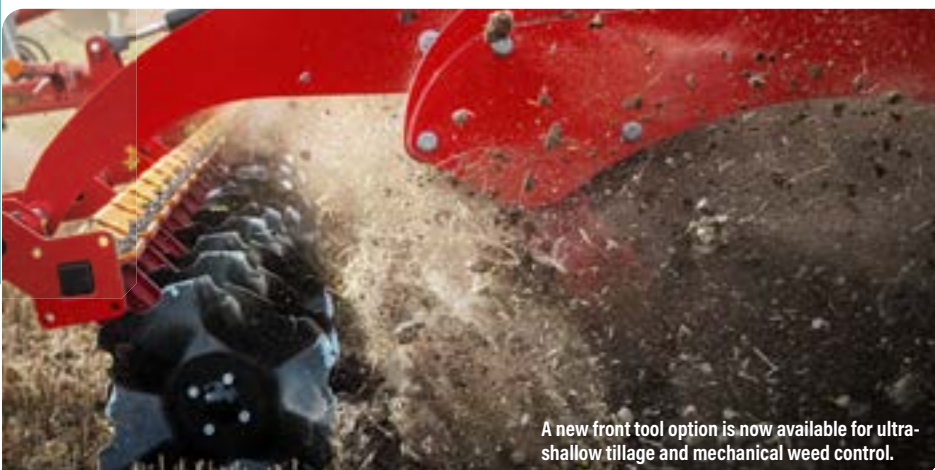
Andy comments: "TriForce II seed couler rubber suspension with a unique triangular beam helps it handle the movements in field,



TriForce II is a new patented suspension technology that enables every seed coulters to follow the field's contours with even greater precision.



Undulating and field conditions are no match for the new seed coulters, featuring TriForce II.



A new front tool option is now available for ultra-shallow tillage and mechanical weed control.



Field tests have shown that the new front tool is able to create a stronger stale seedbed and promote weed germination.

while maintaining its set pressure to the ground. This is a step forward regarding seed depth precision, compared to conventional methods in the double-disc seed drill segment." He adds that the increased coulter pressure makes it possible for the machines to perform at peak level in a slightly higher range of soil conditions, but also with higher suspension capacity. Like the E-Connect, the Spirit 400-900C/S and Inspire 1200C/S premiere at Agritechnica 2025. The machines are already available to order (from October 2025), with deliveries starting later in the year.

ULTRA-SHALLOW TILLAGE

And, finally, Väderstad has launched a new front tool option for the disc cultivators Carrier XT 425-625 and Carrier XL 425-725 for ultra-shallow tillage and mechanical weed control. The new third disc axle configuration increases disc density from two rows to three, reducing the disc spacing to just 8.3cm. This results in 50 per cent more tools in the ground, delivering highly intensive mixing, crumbling, and residue management, the company says. Andy explains that the three rows of CrossCutter Discs improve cultivation performance and significantly improve the versatility of shallow tillage systems. He adds: "Key benefits include high weed-killing rates, preserve soil moisture, and reduce fuel consumption, making them a good option for both conventional and organic farming systems." Field tests have shown that the new front tool is able to create a stronger stale seedbed, promote weed germination and more effective weed knockdown in a second pass. According to Andy, this approach supports sustainable farming practices by reducing the need for chemical herbicides, such as glyphosate. "We have designed the third disc axle front tool to deliver higher intensity and better mixing, which in turn encourages stronger emergence of weeds and leftover seeds," he says. The third disc axle holds the standard Carrier disc arms, and can be fitted with either the CrossCutter Disc, CrossCutter Disc Aggressive, 450mm disc or 470 TrueCut discs. This significantly improves cultivation versatility and operation in a wide range of farming conditions. The new third disc axle is already available as a front tool for Carrier XT 425-625 and Carrier XL 425-725, with deliveries starting in the spring 2026. The machines premiere at Agritechnica 2025.

The CLAAS logo is positioned in the top right corner, featuring the brand name in a bold, red, sans-serif font within a white rectangular box with a slight drop shadow.

More comfort with added value?

Challenge accepted.
With the ARION 400 COMFORT.

An orange circular callout is located in the middle-left area of the image. It contains white text that reads: 'Save up to €7,850 on the list price'.

Save up to
€7,850
on the list
price



High-spec equipment and
a discounted price:
arion400promo.claas.com



Denis Drennan
President ICMSA

CONCERNS GROWING ON MILK PRICE

At the time of writing, concern is growing rapidly about the speed with which milk price is falling. Farmers in several co-ops have lost 5c/L to 6c/L and more in just their last two months' milk cheques.

Pessimism about where milk price is going to land and how long it will languish 'down there' is widespread and many of us will recall that this could be the third time in a decade where our milk price has hovered at or around the costs of production.

That 39-41c/L is both an economic and psychological mental barrier; falling below that is a disaster and just cannot happen. But it's equally important to remember that we cannot become hypnotised by price and miss the more important element of margin. Too many in our sector fixate on price and fail to notice that it doesn't matter what dizzying heights that reaches if inputs are following close on its heels.

PRICE FALLS

In light of the recent media furore on so-called 'food inflation' and the quite breathtakingly ignorant commentary from certain sources, it will be interesting to see if any of the journalists want to monitor the fall in farmer milk price and see how long that takes to work its way through to the checkout till? Our suspicion will be that the falls in farmer milk price will take their sweet time to be reflected in the price the retailers charge, if they are reflected at all. Every time this has happened before – even when the price paid to farmers for milk fell below the costs of production – the price paid by consumers never fell by a cent and the retailers just 'ate up' our margin and added it to their already generous share. It's still possibly too early to 'call' the market,

but our milk suppliers have already lost several thousand from their annual income and even the most detached co-op board must realise that there isn't any more to cut.

PROBLEM

On the topic of co-ops, ICMSA never bashes co-ops for going with an irresistible market trend. We don't expect the co-op to 'stand in the gap' of a falling dairy market; we are at this a long time and we know where the powers and autonomy of an individual co-op begin and end. But we do have a problem with the fashion in which 'forward contracts' are bandied about to slow down price rises to farmers in a market going up but are strangely absent when the market is falling. When the GDT (Global Dairy Trade) and other indices all point to a surging market, we are told that our co-ops had 'sold forward' at lower prices than those currently applicable and so we farmers will have to wait another month or two for the current prices to work their way through. Bizarrely enough, it never works the other way: when the market is falling and our co-ops would have 'sold forward' at higher prices than currently applicable in a falling market, we are never insulated or buffered by that 'forward' deal. Heads we win, tails you lose.

Not the least most irritating aspect of this kind of Q3 serious drop in milk price is that we have a remedy for the 'late in the day' chaos it causes. We can't fix the market, obviously, but we can fix the destructive volatility it has on the farmer's income. In Budget 2026, ICMSA once again placed a fully regulated and supervised deposit scheme in front of the Irish Government that would deal with exactly this kind of sudden

price and income drop that can catch the best of us out in terms of cashflow.

OBSTACLES

For the best part of a decade now, we have been urging the Government to accept that it is no longer possible to pretend that the kind of ruinous income volatility that we experienced several times over that period is not affecting the decisions of so many young people not to go into farming. We have repeatedly pointed out the results of our own young farmers groups and surveys that all identified that financial uncertainty and income volatility as the single biggest obstacle to the really critical problems we are now experiencing in convincing the next generation of farmers to commit to the sector. I, myself, pointed out to ministers – Donohoe and Chambers – that farming is in competition with the tech and pharma industries for those young people and those employers can tell 'our' young people what they'll be earning next year to within €10. Back on their home farms, we can't even tell them to within €10,000 what they'll be earning next year.

The Irish Government can't do anything about falling milk price. Actually, they probably could, but that would involve them granting the powers requested by the Agri-Food Regulator and we are working hard to convince them to do just that. But they could do something on the broader question of income stability and they could do it very easily by adopting the ICMSA measures. That they choose not to is nearly as alarming as the fall in milk price that's going to reinforce the reluctance to 'go farming' of so many of those young people who we so desperately need.

A HEALTHY APPETITE FOR IRISH ORGANICS

BERNIE COMMINS CHATS TO BORD BIA'S RECENTLY APPOINTED ORGANIC SECTOR MANAGER, TARA BANE, ABOUT HER NEW ROLE AND DRIVING GROWTH FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTION HERE AND ABROAD

Joining Bord Bia in July was a natural 'next step' for Tara in a career spanning almost two decades in the Irish food and drink industry.

"I've been working in that industry for nearly 20 years now," Tara says. "I was actually based in the US for 10 years. I worked with Ornuu on the Kerrygold brand for the first part of that, and then I also worked with ABP on the beef side. I would have worked closely with Bord Bia at the time in helping to launch Irish beef into the US and subsequently, did some consulting with them. For the past six years I've been working with Glanbia Nutritionals on the ingredients and marketing side in the European region."

Her long-standing experience in promoting Irish food is paired with personal conviction. She explains: "I'm hugely passionate about Irish food and drink, hence I have immersed myself in it throughout my career. But as a consumer, organic is a huge passion of mine, so both personally and professionally this role was a very good fit," she says. Today, her

focus at Bord Bia is to 'work on the key pillars within Ireland's National Organic Strategy' and to drive growth in both domestic and international organic markets.

A STRONG HOME BASE

Ireland's National Organic Strategy 2024-2030 has six key priorities with the overall aim of growing the output value of the sector to €750m by 2030. This represents a four-fold increase on 2022 levels. Among the priorities is a national target to have 10 per cent of land farmed organically by 2030 – approximately 450,000 hectares. We may be starting from a low base, but things are moving in the right direction. In 2021, 1.6 per cent of agricultural land was organic, while this year that percentage has more than tripled to 5.5 per cent. In terms of farmer numbers, they are also positive. In 2023, there were 2,000 organic farmers in Ireland, and this year that number has almost tripled to 5,700.

Central to growing organic consumption

at home has been Bord Bia's More-organic campaign, says Tara. Launched in 2023 with the tagline 'make your meals a little more-organic', it brings together radio, social media and outdoor advertising to highlight the benefits of organic produce, including beef and lamb.

"Research around that campaign revealed that 84 per cent of shoppers would pay more for organic food and that 63 per cent were actively looking for organic food after seeing the campaign," Tara says. "We also found that four out of 10 shoppers claimed that they had bought more Irish organic food after seeing the campaign." This campaign, she adds, runs up to and including 2027, with targeted marketing bursts each spring and autumn. Additionally, she says, Bord Bia collaborates with retailers and key stakeholders from farmers to processors, and all the various Government organisations, with organic growth front and centre.



TARGETING KEY EXPORT MARKETS

The organic livestock sector in Ireland is the largest and fastest-growing part of organic farming here, with cattle and sheep producers making up over 80 per cent of new entrants in the last three years. Trade shows and, indeed, roadshows recently supported by Bord Bia, Teagasc, the Organic Strategy Forum, farming organisations and processors are helping farmers to understand the market opportunities that exist. This understanding is aided by research and insights, Tara explains. "Everything that Bord Bia does is really driven by insights. We do a lot of research to ensure that we are targeting the right people in the right way, and that we are evaluating the success of these before we go to the next wave," she says. Pan-European research carried out across the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria and Belgium has also guided Bord Bia's focus, and the findings were striking: seven out of 10 consumers said they would choose Irish organic products over any other country. "There is a real positive association with Irish organic across EU countries. And if we look at why that is, among other things, it is about our pasture-based system, it's about quality, and it's about taste," Tara states. The UK remains Ireland's number-one export market for organic meat products,

with Germany in second place. For beef specifically, Germany leads the way, while lamb goes primarily to Belgium, followed by Germany and the UK.

BUILDING AWARENESS AND DEMAND

Trade events, as mentioned, are an essential part of Bord Bia's strategy. "We participate in Biofach [the world's leading trade fair for organic food and agriculture]; we have a large stand at that, and a number of our client companies would attend too, including those specialising in beef and lamb," Tara says. Bord Bia's network of overseas offices also plays a vital role in gathering market intelligence and helping Irish companies respond quickly to trends and opportunities.

This is all bolstered by a €2.7m, three-year, EU co-funded information and education campaign for beef and lamb in Germany, Belgium, Sweden and Austria. The co-funding is broken down into €2.2m from the EU and €0.5m from Bord Bia, with the aim of increasing awareness of the positive environmental, sustainability and animal welfare attributes of pasture-fed organic beef and sheepmeat. "This is very much a B2B campaign but it involves things like meat academies, trade shows, inward visits where media and potential customers are brought back to Ireland, shown the farms and shown the processes, educating them and strengthening those relationships," she explains. Additional PR and trade promotion work reinforces the message, she says.

"A clear organic roadmap has been established over the last couple of years and, from a Bord Bia perspective, it is about continuing to focus on making sure that farmers stick with it [organic] and that we have outlets for them. There is a job to be done in ensuring that there are additional processors coming on stream to make it a little easier for farmers."

UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANIC CONSUMER

As the More-organic campaign continues, Bord Bia is deepening its understanding of organic consumers, categorised as 'dabblers' and 'seekers', says Tara. "The dabblers buy organic every now and then but it's not really that important, whereas the seekers look for organic products but will change [consumer habits] due to costs," Tara explains. "Within the seekers, you have convenience seekers who look for organic mostly but they don't always have the time or the energy to search for them, and then you have the proactive seeker where

organic is a lifestyle choice. These are people who will seek out organic regardless. It is our job to make sure that we are targeting our message to the right people at the right time."

BOTH MARKETS MATTER

On the importance of the domestic versus the export market for Irish organic meat, Tara says: "A majority of organic beef or lamb is exported so the export market is critical for growth but, with that said, the domestic market is also extremely important. You really need both and both are important in different ways." But research has shown that outside of Ireland, 85 per cent of UK and Belgian shoppers would buy Irish organic beef, 80 per cent of Swedish shoppers would buy organic lamb, and 79 per cent of Dutch shoppers would buy Irish organic beef. The appetite is healthy for Irish organic products. "These are the stats we share with our clients as they try to find new markets and help them refine their strategies. This information, which is data driven, is key for them. This data is also important for when we apply for EU funding, so we can show that we have done our research, and we know where our core markets are. It is all about connecting the dots but continually reassessing and re-evaluating," she says.

A GROWING SECTOR

Starting from a low base, the sector's growth trajectory is positive. "All indications show that we are on track, and there is an appetite for organic in terms of the growth in farmer numbers," Tara says. "Farmers are willing and investing in this and we have seen farmers who have been conventional farming for decades switching over."

BUDGET BLOW

In the recent Budget, funding for organic farming was cut from €67m in 2025 to €58.6m in 2026. Responding to a question on how much of a setback this is, Tara said: "While this topic is outside Bord Bia's remit and is more relevant to farmers, our role centres on promotional activity, building consumer demand and supporting sustainable growth for the organic sector. We continue to receive ongoing funding to deliver on these objectives, ensuring that our work to raise awareness and develop markets for organic food remains well-supported."

Bord Bia organic sector manager, Tara Bane.



MATT O'KEEFFE
EDITOR



THE REAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

Who are the real environmental activists? Are they the ones who constantly blow hot air about what must be done to save the planet from imminent disaster? Do they include those who hypocritically criticise the actions and activities of others while living contradictory personal lives based on over-consumption and indulgence? Are they the ones willing to sacrifice the livelihoods of others for their own definitions of the greater good, while suffering no personal lifestyle inconvenience? The list of self-defined environmental activists certainly includes many who demand a change in the worldview of others while cossetting themselves in a warm cloak of high moral certainty.

Meanwhile, the real environmental activists actually engage with the challenges facing the planet to produce practical solutions. The finalists in last month's Teagasc FBD Environmental Sustainability Award 2025 are among them. They live the reality of adopting, oftentimes difficult, practices that have a positive impact on their surrounding environments. They do so with quiet determination to make a difference. At the same time, they have to suffer the slings and arrows of unwarranted criticism from those who seem to believe that the only good bath is a waterless and baby-less one. There are better, more constructive ways of delivering on environmental change than destroying whole industries, ways of life, and economic productivity. Sustaining food production in the face of climate and weather challenges,



THE PSEUDO-ENVIRONMENTALISTS PONTIFICATE ABOUT THE WORLD NEEDING TO CHANGE ITS WAYS; FOOD PRODUCERS CHANGE IT BY THEIR ACTIONS

burdensome over-regulation, and constant criticism is not easy. Yet, the 13 finalists in the sustainability awards are not only doing just that, they are also publicly showing their fellow food producers that the role of an Irish food producer is one that should be appreciated and encouraged. The ability and willingness of Irish food producers to adopt novel, often expensive, and always challenging changes in their farming practices confirm that the real environmental activists are those who practice instead of preaching.

HYPOCRISY IS REAL

Many of those who preach down to the rest of us are among the tens of thousands who take multiple flights annually. Many of those who talk down to the real environmental activists are among the unthinking consumers who buy fast fashion and contribute to the vast landfills of clothing, which we export for imaginary recycling. Are the real environmentalists the ones who

produce food sustainably or the ones who incessantly fly across the globe to engage in echo-chamber babble? The pseudo-environmentalists pontificate about the world needing to change its ways. Food producers change it by their actions. Those world-changing actions were highlighted at the sustainability awards ceremony last month.

WINNING WAYS

Don Somers, a tillage farmer from Oylgate, Co. Wexford, won the overall Teagasc FBD Environmental Sustainability Award 2025. He is a true environmental activist using precision soil samples for greater accuracy. Careful planning means his crops get what they need – no more and no less – protecting both the soil and the environment. Soil health is at the heart of Don's system. He believes that the future of farming depends on keeping soils healthy, so crop rotation and soil care are always at the centre of what he does. Don's cover crops are another key part of preventing leaching as well as improving soil structure and helping the land absorb water more effectively, reducing the risk to water quality. Precision technology on his farm includes nitrogen (N) sensors to increase efficiency and reduce N inputs. Yield maps and GPS add further efficiency and environmental care. Riparian zones, hedgerow management, and integrated pest management (IPM) all encourage flora and fauna biodiversity on Don's farm. He is a real example of environmental activism.

DO CRASH TEST DUMMIES WORRY ABOUT THE REPAIRS?



ACCIDENTS HAPPEN – BUT YOU'RE NO DUMMY!



**Look for the Certified Steel Standard (CSS) mark
for assurance in vehicle body repairs in Ireland**

CSS Certifies:

- ✓ Staff Qualifications
- ✓ Repair Systems & Specifications
- ✓ Equipment and Parts
- ✓ Repairer's Insurance Cover
- ✓ SIMI Complaints Coverage

Visit: www.cssrepair.ie



✓ CSS Standard created by the Society of the Irish Motor Industry

National **DAIRY CONFERENCE** 2025

'PATHWAYS TO PROGRESS'

*Scan to
register*



Wednesday
26 Nov

Talbot Hotel
Clonmel

Thursday
27 Nov

Kilmore Hotel
Cavan

Topics will include:

Dairy Costs & Markets in 2026
Farm Succession Options
Policy Updates
Latest Research

www.teagasc.ie/dairycon25