

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY



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INTERVIEW

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A SLOW BURN

IRBEA CEO, SEAN FINAN, ON
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IFI

Palmerstown, Kilkenny

JUNE 2026

EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

DEFINING THE UNDEFINABLE

Ask anyone to define a farmer, and you are likely to get any number of definitions. Even within the narrow confines of activity, the list is long and variable. Food producers within the broad confines of crop production are an automatic inclusion, as are livestock owners who produce animals for meat and ancillary products. Forest owners are farmers, producing trees for fuel and fabrication. They are energy producers as well as carbon storage facilitators. As energy producers, should landowners who have solar, biomethane or wind turbines structures on their land be described as farmers? In Ireland, where the equine industry is so important a part of the rural landscape, those engaged in horse and other equine pursuits are reasonably included as members of the farming community. All of this might otherwise be described as an abstract defining process of limited value, except for the fact that the definition of a farmer is about to become a centre-stage debate in the upcoming negotiations around the next iteration of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Even then, it would be a perennial and peripheral discussion except for the very important fact that the budget for Europe's CAP is about to become even leaner. With ever less funding available, there is an inevitability that some previous recipients are about to lose out in the dispersion of scarce funding. There have been as many proposals around the definition of a farmer as there are organisations representing farmers, and that need only apply to Irish farming groups. Cast the net across the European Union and the defining criteria for a farmer become astonishingly complex. A two-acre olive producer in Portugal is readily accepted as a legitimate farmer. In Ireland, a proposal from the ICMSA to define a livestock farmer as a person with a minimum stocking rate of one livestock unit per hectare (LU/ha) has

been criticised by the ICSA who would prefer to include those with a livestock stocking rate of 0.1LU/ha or higher. Another, looser, definition of a farmer that will inevitably require significant refining, has been advocated by the IFA, as being a person who is actively engaged in farming. Basically, any activity requiring a hands-on working relationship with agricultural land. Additional criteria include time commitment, and economic activity or output.

More provocative proposals around whether landowners should qualify for EU payments would exclude those who are in receipt of State pensions. Given the age profile of Irish, and indeed, European farmers, that would exclude a large cohort of people otherwise generally recognised as legitimate farmers under any standard definition. An essential aspect of defining a legitimate farmer is the proportion of income gleaned from farming. Full time farmers, whatever their income, automatically qualify under any definition of a farmer. Even that scenario, however, deserves further scrutiny. A spouse may own a landholding, while earning or producing very little, while the other half brings in a far higher income from outside activities. Now look at the many thousands of part-time farmers who earn far more from their off-farm jobs than they could ever hope to earn from their farming activities. Depending on farm enterprise, efficiency and scale, farming hours worked may be a relatively small proportion of total hours engaged in off-farm economic activity, and if the farm delivers less income than the off-farm activity, that person would not qualify for CAP payments under some farmer definitions being touted. Adding up total household income, often dwarfing the income from the farm, adds another complexity to simplistically defining a farmer under farming income, output, or activity criteria. Ultimately, a 'one-size-fits-all' farmer definition would be neither acceptable nor equitable.

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JURY MEMBER FOR IRELAND

THE SILENT 'S' IN KINISLA

Kerry Dairy Ireland has certainly adopted an intriguing new name on foot of its amicable divorce from Kerry Group – Kinisla, pronounced 'kin-EYE-la', they explain. As happened with Tirlán, formerly

Glanbia Co-op, the divorce settlement included a change of name for the offspring – or should that be the parents, given that both Plc entities originally sprang from their respective co-operative roots? In any case, it has ultimately been a very positive experience for the co-op owners – the farm family members of those southwest and southeast-based co-operatives, both in terms of accumulated financial gain, shares in quite successful international public limited companies, and, most importantly, as processors of their milk output.

Anyway, back to Kinisla, the newly christened Kerry Dairy Ireland. When the Tirlán name was announced a couple of years ago, many of the Irish language purists were in quite a tizzy about the loss of a fada, believing that, translating direct from the Gaelic, the name



Pictured at the launch of Kinisla, the new corporate identity of Kerry Dairy Ireland: Pat Murphy, CEO Kinisla; Norma Foley, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality; Micheál Martin, taoiseach; Martin Heydon, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Mary Buckley, communications director, Kinisla; Catherine Keogh, chief corporate affairs officer at Kerry Group plc; and James Tangney, chair, Kinisla.

should have been Tirlán, with two fadas – a case of one fada too many for ease of use, especially in an international context. Anyway, that bit of nominal controversy died down quickly and Tirlán is now well accepted, instantly recognisable and retains an element of our rich history as dairy producers in Ireland.

Kinisla, while eschewing any Irish language reference, does reflect on the family farm

through the use of 'Kin', as well as the genesis of the Irish as an island nation of food producers. At least that was my interpretation. On first reading the name, as distinct from hearing it, one might have been forgiven for pronouncing the second syllable with a hard S sound. Realising that it refers to island, with the silent S, makes the entire name both comprehensible and appropriate. Clever people, those Kerry natives.



THE FUTURE FOR FIANNA FÁIL

Last month, Fianna Fáil held its Ard Fheis and celebrated its founding in 1926. With the by-elections lost in both Galway and Dublin, Micheál Martin is under pressure. However, timing is everything, and despite saying he will lead the party into the next election, a transition to new leadership is likely in the early days of 2027. So, what has Fianna Fáil achieved over 100 years? As the dominant party for most of the State's existence, it has had a significant impact. The taoiseach recently spoke of the importance of

trade, but it was not until the end of the 1950s, after a decade of economic decay and mass emigration, that Sean Lemass, advised by TK Whitaker, opened Ireland's economic future with the programme for economic expansion driving exports and encouraging inward investment. That was the original template for the Celtic Tiger years. Global financial events and a considerable degree of banking and political hubris brought that to a devastating end, only to be followed by a recovery that has restored full employment and delivered

burgeoning public finances along with all the housing and healthcare challenges of a 50 per cent population increase since 1990. The introduction of free education and joining the European Union in 1973 were calculated moves to develop Ireland and give it access to a consumer market of 450 million Europeans. Whether we fully appreciate it or not, we have one of the best performing economies in Europe, though with an over-reliance on potentially transient corporation taxes. The recent fuel protests were acknowledged by a government with the resources to mitigate the effects of oil price increases. Whether that opens a Pandora's Box of cost-of-living claims in the coming months remains to be seen. Even with all the criticism of the Fianna Fáil/ Fine Gael Government, the Irish electorate seems indisposed towards any lurch to the extremes of political doctrine, unlike our British neighbours. Political stability is as much to be cherished now as it was when Fianna Fáil eventually entered the Dáil almost one hundred years ago, to pursue its aims through the democratic process.

LOWER ELECTRICITY BILLS MAY NOT BE BLOWING IN THE WIND

Sunny and windy seem to be the most beneficial weather forecast when it comes to renewable energy in Ireland, at least in the context of solar and wind energy production. While we await expected growth in biomethane production in the years ahead (turn to page 24 for our interview with Seán Finan, CEO of the Irish Bioenergy Association), wind and solar electrical energy production have been forging ahead. The production figures for April, averaged across the month, showed wind power providing over 37 per cent of our electricity needs. Solar farms, a relatively new contributor to Irish electricity needs at large commercial scale, chipped in with 5.7 per cent of our electrical energy requirements for the month. That figure does not include the ever-increasing amounts of solar energy being produced on the roofs of private dwellings and business premises across the country. We are, without fully realising it, in the midst of an energy-production revolution in Ireland, particularly in

relation to solar energy output. Just 12 months ago, in April 2025, large-scale solar production amounted to a meagre 0.9 per cent of our electricity output. Leaving aside whether it was very cloudy last April or very sunny this April, that is still an astounding increase in output, and with the ongoing adoption at scale of the technology, the contribution to the national grid should at least double over the next couple of years. That takes no account of the astonishing speed of solar panel installation on homes across the country, with wait times now running at a minimum of two months. Eirgrid figures show that total generation from wind and grid scale solar last April was 1,078GWh (gigawatt hours) and 163GWh, respectively, compared with 761GWh and 119GWh in April 2025. While the figures are impressive and likely to increase significantly with more on-shore and, perhaps, off-shore, wind turbines in planning and development, as well as further farm-scale solar energy

installations at various stages of financing, land assembly, planning or development, there is another unfortunate reality that Irish electricity consumers are only too well aware of. Irish electricity costs continue to be among the highest in the European Union. That suggests that while energy self-sufficiency is improving, renewable energy developments are not delivering cheaper electricity. Maybe that was never part of the plan, but it was generally anticipated that significant cost reductions would be accrued by consumers as renewable energy was developed. The fact that wind and solar power require significant back-up capacity in the form of coal, oil, and gas-powered generators on standby for when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine – especially all through the night – means that additional electricity production costs are always there in the background. Anyone holding their breath until renewable, Irish-produced electricity results in lower ESB bills, will need plenty of lung capacity.

TRUMP'S INTEL INVESTMENT PAYS OFF

As of last month, the US Government has achieved a paper profit of €38bn on its €8.9bn investment in Intel. The company is now valued at €620bn, and the US taxpayer owns 9.9 per cent of the company, which is heavily committed to Ireland. The monies invested in August 2025 consisted of €5.7bn in Chips Act grants and €3.2bn for Secure Enclave programmes, providing the US Government with non-voting shares. Intel was in serious financial straits, so President Trump decided to invest in Intel, as many leading technology companies support President Trump's agenda to achieve US technology and manufacturing leadership. This turned out to be quite a successful strategy. The initiative is reckoned to have saved thousands of Intel jobs across the US and in Europe. Intel employs 5,000 people in Ireland

and has invested over €30bn since arriving in 1989, with the Leixlip campus as its European headquarters. The Trump administration viewed the deal as a model for protecting taxpayers in corporate bailouts. Recently, President Trump announced that the US Government investment in Intel and the profit made would pay for the war in Iran, though that's hardly a consolation for the enormous economic and trade disruption caused by the war, not to mention the thousands of lives lost. Despite our dislike for his bombs, bullying, and bombast approach to international diplomacy, we must hope that Trump, or some rational people in his administration, can quickly restore the peace and prosperity we all yearn for. Ultimately, that will be what Trump's presidency will be judged on.



Pictured at the 2025 awards is Ursula Kelly of Cormac Tagging (fifth from left) presenting the Cormac Tagging Discussion/Support Group of the Year award to Dairy Women Ireland.

ENTRIES OPEN FOR NATIONAL DAIRY AWARDS 2026

Entries are now open for the 2026 National Dairy Awards, which will take place on November 5 at the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise. The awards recognise achievement and innovation across Ireland's dairy sector, highlighting the work being carried out by farmers, processors, businesses, and organisations. Categories this year cover areas including sustainability, animal health, dairy processing, technology, artisan production and farm management, with organisers encouraging entries from across the sector. The closing date for entries is September 25, with submissions to be made through the online entry system.

Irish Farmers Monthly is a media partner to the National Dairy Awards, which are now entering their fourth year and continue to grow in both scale and industry support. Further information and entry details are available on National Dairy Awards' website.

UCC TO HOST FOOD AND AGRIBUSINESS WORLD CONFERENCE

The International Food and Agribusiness Management Association (IFAMA) 2026 World Conference, takes place in University College Cork from June 15-19. Themed, 'Rooted in Resilience: Revitalising Agri-Food Systems for an Uncertain Tomorrow', it brings together executives, academics, producers, researchers, policymakers, and students to address resilience in action. And it will explore how farms and food businesses adapt to shifting climates, embrace new technologies, manage global volatility, and attract the next generation of leaders. More than 400 participants from in excess of 40 countries will engage in: lectures and panel discussions, cutting-edge agricultural technologies, workshops on sustainable practices and cooperative models, and tours highlighting Ireland's thriving agribusiness and food innovation sectors.

The conference will be chaired by Professor Thia Hennessy, head of the College of Business and Law at University College Cork. The event symposium will be co-chaired by Dr Tracy Bradfield, lecturer in economics of sustainable business at University College Cork, and Dr Verena Otter, associate professor for supply chain network organisation and innovation, from Wageningen University.

TWO NEW APPOINTMENTS MADE TO THE BOARD OF HSI

Two appointments have been made recently to the board of Horse Sport Ireland (HSI). *Irish Farmers Monthly* publisher, David Markey and Dr Robert Huey, representing Northern Ireland, were recently appointed by Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon.

The appointment was made in consultation with Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport, Patrick O'Donovan, and Minister of State with responsibility for Sport and Postal Policy, Charlie McConalogue. Commenting, Minister Heydon said: "Both appointees will bring a wealth of expertise and experience to the board of Horse Sport Ireland, and I am confident that these

attributes will enhance governance and service delivery to the sport horse industry." David Markey is the founder of IFP Media, one of Ireland's top B2B publishing houses. He first embarked on his magazine-business venture in 1975 with the company's flagship, *Irish Farmers Monthly* title. David was a member of the RDS Industry and Commerce Committee from 2011 to 2018, and is a former president of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists. He is an honorary lifetime member of the Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland and was honoured with a lifetime achievement award at the 2017 Irish Magazine Awards. Dr Robert Huey FRCVS qualified from UCD

as a vet in 1983. Following five years in mixed general practice he joined the State veterinary service rising to the position of chief veterinary officer for Northern Ireland in 2013. In this position he participated in the departmental board chaired by the permanent secretary and led the Veterinary Service Board, a group with responsibility for 750 staff and £57m in budget. Dr Huey retired from this position in 2024. He has significant board experience including as president of the North of Ireland Veterinary Association, the Veterinary Public Health Association in the UK, the Union of European Meat Hygienists, and he was vice president and treasurer of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe.

Tackle lameness with Hoofsure



Provita Hoofsure provides farmers and animal health professionals with a proven, effective, non-toxic and antibiotic-free choice for the management and control of signs of lameness at herd level.

Suitable for use individually or in combination to provide flexible control programmes in sheep and cattle, Hoofsure products contain a proprietary blend of organic acids, essential oils and wetting agents that are biodegradable in the environment.

Regular footbathing with **Hoofsure Endurance** can help get lameness issues under control and maintain long-term improvements.

€10,000 BURSARY ANNOUNCED FOR INAUGURAL PIG-FARMING AWARDS

The inaugural FBD Pig Farming Awards will offer a bursary fund of €10,000 to support and promote ideas, projects, and initiatives that can deliver meaningful and practical benefits to the Irish pig sector. The awards, set to take place this October, will, for the first time, acknowledge excellence, innovation, and leadership across the pig industry, according to organisers. The awards are aimed at recognising goal-orientated producers and industry professionals, while promoting continuous improvement and forward-thinking ideas capable of delivering long-term benefits for the pig industry. The awards will take place in Killashee Hotel on October 14. Further details on award categories, bursary applications, and entry information are expected to be announced in the coming weeks.

PARTNER PROMOTION

€7,200: WHAT SOLAR CAN SAVE A 100-COW ENTERPRISE IN A YEAR

With fuel costs and energy security dominating headlines, the case for generating your own on-farm power has never been stronger. The rising cost of fuel and energy is front and centre in Irish farming right now. When your costs depend on global supply chains you can't control, you're exposed. Solar PV doesn't fix everything, but it hands you back control over one of your biggest ongoing costs.

When margins are tight, every fraction of a cent saved on production costs matters. And when prices recover, those same savings drop straight to the bottom line. Solar is one of the few investments that works in your favour no matter what the market does. In Ireland, dairy cows consume an average of 350 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity, annually. At current electricity prices, factoring in a mix of day and night rates, this works out at approximately €90 per cow per year. The vacuum pump, milk cooling, and water heating account for almost 80 per cent of this. On a 100-cow herd, that is an annual electricity bill of around €9,000. Dairy farmers with solar installed by ProSolar have seen electricity cost reductions averaging 80 per cent, putting €7,200 back in the farmer's pocket each year, or 1.3 cent per litre produced.

In its Outlook 2026 report, Teagasc forecast a net margin of just 11.5c/L for the average dairy farm, down 45 per cent on 2025. And that was based on an assumption that fuel prices would fall this year. Ireland generates a significant share of its electricity from gas, so when fossil fuel prices rise, your ESB bill rises with them. A conservative 1c/L reduction in production costs from solar represents almost 9 per cent of that forecast margin, every year, for 20+ years. And unlike grid electricity, the cost of sunlight is not subject to commodity markets.

But it's not just about today's bills. Battery storage paired with solar dramatically increases self-consumption, meaning more of what you generate stays on your farm rather than being exported at a fraction of what you pay to buy in. On-farm electricity consumption is only going to increase. Farmers generating their own power today are building infrastructure that will only become more valuable tomorrow.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) non-domestic grant offers the most practical route for farmers ready to move. Instant approval comes before works begin, administration is straightforward, and any inspection relates solely to the solar installation. Combined with VAT reclaim and Accelerated Capital Allowances, a sole trader can still achieve effective cost reductions of up to 60 per cent. Being able to generate your own electricity is power, in every sense of the word.

ProSolar is a family business with more than 40 years of engineering heritage through RVR Energy Technology.



Take control of one of your biggest ongoing costs.

Solar PV that cuts bills, builds resilience, and pays back - year after year.



Up to 80%
lower electricity costs



Up to €90
saved per cow per year



20+ years
predictable power

Why more Irish farmers are switching to solar

-  **€9,000/year**
typical electricity spend for a 100-cow dairy herd
-  **€7,200**
potential annual savings when bills are cut by up to 80%
-  **1c/1L**
lower production cost can equal 9% of forecast net margin

☺ Solar hands you back control over one of your biggest costs - for 20+ years ☺





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ProSolar is part of RVR Energy Technology - with 40+ years engineering heritage, built for Irish farms.



Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

The Agri Committee in the European Parliament commissioned a study – *Generational change in agriculture: Comparative analysis of businesses run by young farmers in selected EU countries* – which was presented to committee members last month. As per the title, its authors delved into a comparative analysis of businesses run by young farmers in Finland, Spain, Luxembourg, and Poland.

There is growing concern right across Europe at the dwindling numbers of young people entering farming, hence the commissioning of this study, which sits alongside other national and EU-wide reports on the matter.

Not surprisingly, the report found that the number of young farmers continues to decline – from around 1.1 million in 2016 to 960,000 by the last count in 2023. In 2023, around 11 per cent of European farmers were below the age of 40 with around one in 100 under the age of 25. In an Irish context, around 40 per cent of farmers are aged over 65, which is above the EU average. In response to this, the EU Commission is promising dedicated public expenditure of around €8bn alongside 'starter packs' to include set-up aid, investment support, financial instruments and advisory services, accessible through the single package to support young farmers.

The proposal in the 2028-2034 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) requires Member States to develop national strategies on generational renewal within the controversial new National and Regional Partnership Plans. The report is dense in statistics and graphs, but it makes for sober reading overall: between 2010 and 2023, the total number of farms across Europe declined from around 12 million to 8.4 million.

In a time of geopolitical uncertainty in eastern Europe coupled with rising fertiliser costs and the impact of climate change, these are new barriers to add to the 'old reliables' like price, market volatility, rural depopulation, and unforeseen weather events which hamper the everyday life of a farmer. In a recent letter to EU agriculture commissioner, Christophe Hansen, the secretary general of COPA & COGECA (the umbrella body for European farm and co-operative organisations), Elli Tsiforou rightly emphasised again the point that: "Agriculture is not only an economic sector, it is a strategic asset for Europe. In the current geopolitical context, any weakening of the CAP would not only harm the agricultural sector but also undermine Europe's strategic autonomy and security."

This is the bottom line before any commitment can be made to support young farmers; we cannot forget those who are currently producing the food and working the land. The message the Commission is currently sending out is worrying in terms of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal to completely overhaul and cut the funding of CAP. What young person wants to go farming with such uncertainty about the EU commitment to support the sector?

Ireland takes over the presidency of the EU in a few weeks' time, where the MFF and subsequently the next CAP will be high on the agenda. By fully supporting a robust, structured and fully funded CAP beyond 2028, we might have a chance of attracting more young people to enter one of Europe's most important strategic businesses.



Lessons learned from 2025

Dr. David Lawrence
Head of Nutrition, Agritech.

The spring is a turbulent time on dairy farms as calving, weather and economic factors influence decision making and production outcomes. Now in June, the silage is saved, cows are inseminated and on many farms the bulls are now left to do their job. In the coming weeks the focus will turn to grass, managing the over supplies and deficits that are all too common in the mid-season.

A lesson that was learned on many dairy farms in 2025 was that peak milk yield was sustained for longer because of good grass growth and optimistic feeding rates due to good financial returns. Normally we expect milk production will decline by 2-2.5% per week (10%/month) into late lactation; however, this decline was almost halved on many farms in 2025. With many dairy producers achieving more than 2 kg of milk solids per cow in September. If grass quality deteriorates, we must react by getting cows onto better grass or account for the deterioration with additional concentrate. The more often we account for the dips in forage quality the better chance we have of maintaining our milk solids yield into late lactation.

Grass has the potential to support 22-23 litres in optimal grazing conditions, grass quality and dry matter (DM) allowance. However, in sub-optimal conditions this yield can decline to 17-18 litres or less. Grass is the most economically favourable feed for milk production, but we cannot ignore the potential that exists from managing the energy gaps that often appear during the mid-season.

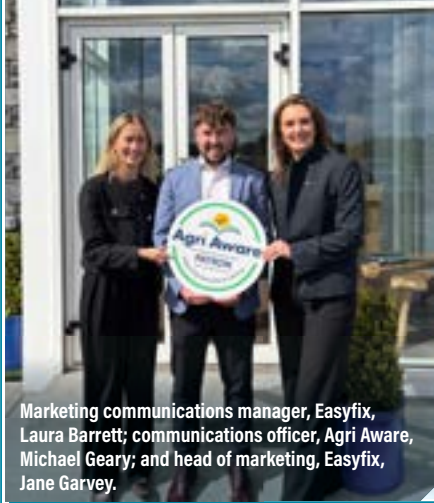
Energy intake is the key to sustaining mid-season milk yield, so we must ensure adequate intake (3.2 - 3.5 % of cow body weight) of high energy feed. Move the dial on grass allowance. Larger framed cows over 600kg weight will eat 21.5 kg of DM in a good system, they will eat 17-18kg DM of grass in ideal conditions leaving room for 4.5 - 3.5 kg DM of concentrate. She will not achieve this total intake if grass allowance is too low, or if the covers are measured incorrectly and are lighter than expected. Grazing residual is the key to understanding how correct your grass measurement and allowance are. Hitting a target grazing residual every day (4-4.5 cm) and seeing cows maintain good milk production is immensely satisfying, and for those of us who are competitive it offers an exciting challenge during the quieter mid-season.

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



www.agritech.ie

EASYFIX BECOMES A PATRON OF AGRI AWARE



Marketing communications manager, Easyfix, Laura Barrett; communications officer, Agri Aware, Michael Geary; and head of marketing, Easyfix, Jane Garvey.

Galway-based company, Easyfix, has recently become a patron of Agri Aware. Established in 1996, Easyfix is a family-owned business that specialises in designing, manufacturing, and supplying innovative livestock housing solutions, including rubber flooring, cubicles, and animal comfort products for farmers worldwide.

Easyfix joins over 65 patrons of Agri Aware, which, according to the agri-educational body, strengthens its ability to enhance agricultural literacy among the general public. The company brings valuable expertise through its work in developing innovative livestock housing and animal welfare solutions, helping to inform consumers about the importance of comfort, health, and wellbeing in modern

farming systems. Agri Aware chair, Shay Galvin said Easyfix's expertise in these areas brings significant value to the organisation. He added: "Easyfix plays an important role in helping consumers understand the importance of animal welfare in modern farming systems, and this insight will be invaluable in supporting the work we do at Agri Aware."

Commenting on becoming a patron, head of marketing at Easyfix, Jane Garvey said: "Everything we do starts with the farmer and the animal. Becoming a patron of Agri Aware is a natural fit for us; bridging the gap between what happens on farm and what the public understands about modern agriculture is something we genuinely care about. We're delighted to be part of it."



Macra National Agricultural Affairs Committee chair, Sean Kelly; Macra national president, Josephine O'Neill; Macra National Rural Youth Committee chair, Emma Kate O'Dwyer at the launch of Macra's pre-budget 2027 document.

MACRA CALLS FOR DEDICATED SUCCESSION SCHEME

Macra recently launched its pre-budget 2027 submission, calling on Government to deliver targeted measures to support young farmers.

Chief among the measures would be a dedicated succession scheme to support the transfer of farm management to the next generation, alongside increased investment in young farmer supports and rural infrastructure. In its submission, Macra noted: 'Generational renewal is no longer just an agricultural concern; it is a national priority.' The organisation stressed that 'fewer than one per cent of agricultural land is sold annually, underlining the importance of effective succession measures, collaborative arrangements and improved access to finance for young farmers.' Macra's submission is built around three key themes: a prosperous rural Ireland; a liveable rural Ireland; and A healthy rural Ireland. Among the organisation's principal asks are:

- ▶ The introduction of a long-awaited succession scheme to support generational renewal.
- ▶ Annual Exchequer funding of €150,000 for the Land Mobility Service.
- ▶ Enhanced grant rates and priority access for young farmers under TAMS.
- ▶ A €500 million Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme offering low-cost finance.
- ▶ Reform of the Vacant and Derelict Property Grant to make rural home ownership more accessible.
- ▶ Greater investment in rural transport, broadband and mobile connectivity.
- ▶ Dedicated funding for rural mental health initiatives, including Make the Moove.
- ▶ Increased supports for farm safety and addiction services
- ▶ Legally binding ring-fenced funding for young farmers in the next CAP, with at least 6 per cent of agricultural spending dedicated to generational renewal.



Pictured at the 14th Nuffield International Triennial 2026 Agri-Summit at Killashee House Hotel recently: Phil Hogan, former EU Commissioner for Trade and for Agriculture and Rural Development; Gráinne Dwyer, chair of Nuffield Ireland; Ksenija Simovic, principal policy advisor at Copa-Cogeca, Brussels; and David McWilliams, economist and author. The event brought together 300 delegates, including Nuffield scholars and leaders from agri-business, policy and economics.



The first 2026 outing of the FTMT Golfing Society took place recently at Portarlinton Golf Club. Congratulations to the overall winner of the ladies' competition, and the Paddy Callan Perpetual Trophy, Jeud Ennis of Sign Works (second from left) and the overall winner of the men's competition, and the *Irish Farmers Journal* Perpetual Trophy, Pat O'Neill of First Citizen Agri Finance (second from right). Also pictured are David Kincaid, *Irish Farmers Journal* (left) and Geoff Daly, FTMT Golfing Society (right). The second outing will take place on Friday, September 11 at Athy Golf Club, Co. Kildare.

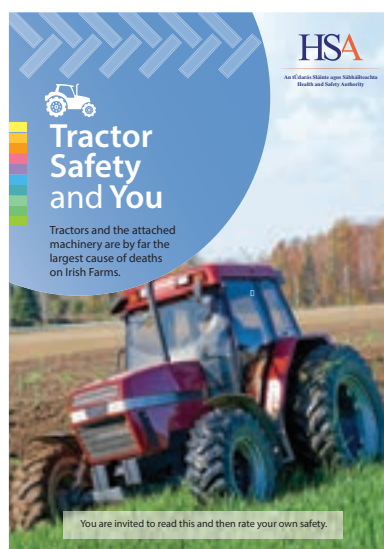
Tractor safety in focus as farming's most persistent risk continues

New 'Tractor Safety Week' campaign underway in advance of busy harvesting season

Farming remains one of the most dangerous occupations in Ireland. In 2025, 25 people lost their lives in farm-related incidents, a stark increase on previous years. Vehicles and machinery, particularly tractors and quad bikes, continue to account for the largest share of these deaths. Despite advances in technology, increased awareness campaigns, strong farm stakeholder engagement from the Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee (FSPAC) and stronger regulation from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), serious incidents involving tractors, quad bikes, vehicles and machinery remain a major concern for Irish farmers. Of the 178 confirmed farm fatalities between 2016 and 2025, 72 were caused by farm vehicles with more than half of those caused by tractors (38).

Modern Irish agriculture is heavily dependent on machinery. Larger tractors, sophisticated harvesting equipment, slurry tankers, telehandlers and loaders have transformed productivity and efficiency. However, these machines also bring immense dangers because of their size, power and weight. Another significant factor to consider also is the age of farmers involved in fatal farm incidents with more than half over the age of 65, and the vast majority being self-employed and male. Many farmers continue working well into later life – often a reflection of both commitment and necessity - but this can increase risk due to factors such as fatigue, reduced mobility or slower reaction times.

Harvesting season consistently emerges as one of the most dangerous periods of the farming calendar with the month of June having the highest number of vehicle fatalities over the 10 year period 2016 - 2025. During harvesting



farms become extremely busy workplaces with multiple tractors, trailers and contractors operating simultaneously. This also generally coincides with school holidays when children are around the farm during the day increasing the risk of a serious incident.

In response to these dangers, the Health and Safety Authority conducts intensified inspection campaigns and awareness initiatives at key points of the farming year. A recent inspection campaign focused on the safe use of tractors, machinery, quad bikes (ATV's) and other work vehicles on farms.

During the campaign, HSA inspectors checked that farmers and contractors had:

- ▶ planned work activities in advance,
- ▶ ensured all drivers and operators are trained and competent,
- ▶ checked that brakes, handbrakes and parking brakes are fully functional,
- ▶ maintained cabs, doors, steps and access points in good condition,
- ▶ clean, undamaged and properly

adjusted mirrors,

- ▶ appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) for all operators, and
- ▶ organised work to prevent children and vulnerable individuals from entering work areas.

Another very important initiative that the Health and Safety Authority is supporting is the Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee 'Tractor Safety Week' campaign which began in late May, a very busy time in the farming calendar.

The campaign focuses on practical steps farmers can take to reduce risks and improve safety when using tractors. Key themes include maintenance, safe operation and visibility, as well as the impact of fatigue. Particular attention is also paid to the risks faced by older farmers and young people.

A central message of Tractor Safety Week is for farmers to download and review the HSA's "**Tractor Safety and You**" publication, which provides practical guidance on the safe use of tractors and farm machinery. The campaign is supported by a programme of media and stakeholder activity, with farm organisations and industry partners encouraged to share the key messages and support the initiative throughout the week.

Farmers and stakeholders are invited to follow and share campaign messages using #TractorSafetyWeek. Farming is unique in that it combines family life with heavy industrial work. That makes safety more complex, but it also makes it more important.

The key message is clear: most farm accidents are preventable. With better planning, awareness of risks, proper training and safe maintenance practices, lives can be saved.

Farmers are encouraged to consult the HSA's guidance, including the "Tractor Safety and You" publication, available at www.hsa.ie, and to take practical steps today to make their farms safer places to live and work.



THEY TRUST US TO KEEP THEM SAFE

SUMMER IS A WONDERFUL TIME OF YEAR, ESPECIALLY ON THE FAMILY FARM. THE DAYS ARE LONGER AND BRIGHTER, SCHOOL IS OUT, AND CHILDREN ARE KEEN TO HELP AND GET INVOLVED. BUT, THE SEASON IS ALSO A DANGEROUS TIME OF YEAR, WITH LOTS OF MACHINERY AT WORK, AND PRESSURE ON TO GET JOBS DONE. IT IS NO PLACE FOR CHILDREN, AND IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE KEEP THEM SAFE, WRITES CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER

Silage season brings pressure, but child safety cannot wait for silage to finish. Yards that are usually quiet fill with tractors, trailers, and other large machinery. Work is fastpaced, visibility is reduced, and decisions are made quickly. For adults, this is familiar territory. For children, it is a place full of risks they don't understand, and they have not developed the skills to assess them.

WHAT THE NUMBERS SHOW

The number of fatal accidents on farms involving children has reduced over the last 10-year period, but the death of one child is one too many. Sadly, between 2016 and 2025, eight children died in farm-related incidents in Ireland, according to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). Detailed analysis of these statistics shows that all these fatalities involved vehicles, while many of the fatal accidents involving children occurred in areas of active work on the farm. These incidents are not rare outliers. Across the sector, 41 per cent of all farm deaths between 2016 and 2025 involved tractors and other vehicles. I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to anyone who has been affected by a serious or fatal farm accident.

WHY SUMMER INCREASES THE RISK

Children do not experience farms as workplaces, they see them as spaces to play in, to explore, where new adventures are to be had. Large tractors and other machinery and the loud noises they make can generate great excitement. But children do not recognise risk and blind spots, and they cannot judge stopping distances, or how quickly a vehicle can reverse. Many serious incidents happen when an adult assumes a child is indoors,

or when everyone thinks someone else is watching them.

WHAT MAKES FARMS SAFER?

Keeping children safe on farms is not about banning them from farm life. It is about removing predictable hazards and setting firm, visible boundaries. They trust us to keep them safe; this is a significant responsibility. A few practical measures can prevent a serious or fatal accident from occurring.

▶ A proper safe-play area

Children need space that is clearly just for them; fenced, secured, and well away from yards, vehicles, machinery and livestock.

▶ Constant, active supervision

There is no safe amount of time for a child to be unsupervised in a working yard. If they are outside, an adult needs to know exactly where they are.

▶ Zero access to active work areas

When harvest work is underway, children should not be in or near the yard. This is non-negotiable. Children should never be allowed near working farm machinery.

▶ Physical barriers, not assumptions

Slurry-storage facilities and chemical stores must be locked or securely fenced. Relying on memory, warning signs, or a child knowing better is not protection.

▶ Clear rules around animals

Livestock can react suddenly, particularly during breeding or calving. Children should never enter pens or fields with animals, even those considered to be quiet.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Child safety is not just the responsibility of parents. Grandparents, other family members, workers, contractors and visitors all influence

what happens on a farm.

Children copy behaviour. If rules are relaxed because it is busy, they learn that safety comes second. If boundaries are applied calmly and consistently, they learn that safety matters all the time.

Vehicle and machine operators play a significant role in promoting and maintaining a culture of safety – checking mirrors, expecting the unexpected, refusing to move machinery until yards are clear. That safety culture is shaped by what people are willing to stop work for.

CALL TO ACTION

Before harvest work reaches full speed, set aside one hour to do the following:

1. Walk the yard slowly. Look from a child's height. Ask hard questions.

- ▶ Where could a child wander?
- ▶ What could move, fall, trap or crush?
- ▶ What relies on habit instead of a barrier?

2. Then, act.

- ▶ Close the gate.
- ▶ Lock the door.
- ▶ Set the rule.
- ▶ Say no, even when it is awkward.

Farming operations are demanding. But no job or delay is worth a child's life. Make child safety part of summer work and remember that safety starts before the tractor moves. Always think safety first.

For more farm safety information, scan the code



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Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

IRISH DAIRY INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

AGRI-FOOD ECONOMIST, CIARAN FITZGERALD CONTINUES HIS ANALYSIS OF THE IRISH DAIRY SECTOR, IN THE FINAL OF A THREE-PART SERIES ON THE SUBJECT

In addition to global market volatility challenges and tariffs, the Irish dairy industry faces major constraints deriving from environmental regulation alongside rising costs associated with energy and national decarbonisation requirements.

Without Government intervention to counterbalance Government-policy-imposed costs, this combination of increased costs – on farm and in processing – will be paid for in ever reducing milk prices. This is because, as I have previously pointed out, dairy companies do not have selling power and cannot pass on some of those costs to customers by increasing their prices – unlike branded drinks companies or energy suppliers.

Without support, this will lead, inevitably, to further output reductions, falling job numbers and exports, and restricted spending on research and development (R&D), over time. Unlike the energy and pharma sectors, for example, all of the price, income, and weather/climate volatility in milk production and marketing are carried exclusively by farmers/dairy processors currently.

A Dairy Industry Ireland report, titled *Economic Contribution of the Dairy Processing Industry to the Irish Economy & Processor Forecasts to 2030*, highlighted the substantial economic contribution, global market potential, and commitment to sustainable practices of the dairy industry. Conducted by EY, it outlined how Ireland's dairy sector has evolved into a remarkable contributor to the nation's economy, with €17.6bn in economic value generated in 2022 alone.

The dairy industry has demonstrated a tremendous capability to market all the additional production delivered since quota abolition without subsidies, increasing the value of dairy exports to more than €7bn (€73bn in 2025). So, to maintain Irish dairy's substantial and unique economic impact – as highlighted by the aforementioned EY report – a blend of targeted policy interventions and financial supports is essential.



THE DAIRY SECTOR CANNOT RECOVER INVESTMENT AND DECARBONISATION COSTS THROUGH INCREASED PRICES, SO GOVERNMENT SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL

REQUIREMENTS

Addressing the current challenges and, thereby, underpinning the social and economic impact of the dairy sector requires a combination of access to long-term investment capital. It also requires support through grant aid from Enterprise Ireland, for example, that must be targeted and specific to Irish dairy-sector needs.

The decarbonisation transition of the energy sector, which is still ongoing, was and is incentivised by huge capital supports and long-term price/tariff guarantees by Government.

Current pricing practices and export market competition mean that the dairy sector cannot recover investment and decarbonisation costs through increased prices, so Government support is essential. The current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provides very little, if any, support for the dairy sector, and there is no discussion regarding crop insurance support to combat price volatility at EU level.

In addition to incentives focused on achieving scale and new product development, the core of a 2026 dairy development programme must address the twin elements of uncompetitive and rising energy and decarbonisation regulation costs on farm, and in the processing sector.

Moreover, given the predicted high cost of green energy in the future in Ireland, in addition to increased support for the huge capital cost of decarbonisation at plant level, a 'contracts for difference' (CfD), or equivalent energy price subsidy, will be required on a medium-to-long-term basis, as is happening across a large number of EU Member States.

IBEC PROPOSAL

Ibec, in a 2024 pre-budget submission, called on Government to introduce a competitive contracts for difference (CfD) scheme to drive major emissions reduction and resilience in Irish industry. In its document, it stated that CfDs are becoming the preferred support mechanism across Europe for industrial decarbonisation and high-cost technologies like hydrogen and carbon capture. These contracts, Ibec stated, would enable large-scale emissions reduction by providing a guaranteed strike price for a 10-15-year period bridging the gap between the fossil fuel option and the market price for the renewable alternative.

COWS AND CARBON

While there is significant current spend on research into enteric fermentation, an accelerator fund is vital to speed up the adoption of any new technology. This is not just to meet national targets, but also to combat the seemingly relentless pursuit of herd depopulation by certain entities through judicial reviews and other legal actions.

Action must also be taken to remove the current planning and financial roadblocks to expanding renewable energy infrastructure into the biomethane sector/anaerobic digesters. In reality, many of the planning and funding/policy constraints on developing the biomethane sector – as I see it – are driven by a disingenuous view that decarbonisation should focus solely on herd depopulation. Oddly, it seems to be lost on people that improved delivery in the biomethane sector will reduce carbon emissions but will not necessarily require herd-number reductions! On the question of R&D funding, it must be available and focussed on the commercialisation of new products or processes because, quite frankly, the industry doesn't have 20 years to see new products or technologies reach a commercial stage!

CONSOLIDATION?

The key proposal of the 2003 Prospectus report, which I mentioned in a previous article, focussed on the need to increase scale and reduce costs to position the sector to withstand international competition and increase our penetration of high value EU consumer markets. It also included a specific recommendation that a merged pan industry drying facility should handle 70 per cent, or more, of total output. It is difficult to see a national dryer/consolidated processing facility emerge not least because of the huge investment by the likes of Tirlán, in particular, and Dairygold, Carbery and Lakeland etc. over the last few years to support dairy expansion, plus the marketing capability of Ornuu.

Clearly, Ireland Inc. does not have the comparative scale in dairy processing of other EU Member States or across the global markets where Irish dairy products compete. But in the hierarchy of constraints and given the politics involved I would be concerned that too much time and effort would be spent on a large scale consolidation move when very real and immediate challenges like managing environmental and energy/ decarbonisation constraints AND meaningfully accessing competitive long-term investment capital might be missed.



'THE LEFT AND RIGHT HANDS OF ON-FARM FEEDING'

IN PART ONE OF A TWO-PART SERIES, **BERNIE COMMINS** SPEAKS TO KEENAN'S GLOBAL COMMERCIAL MANAGER, **JASON BURBIDGE**, ABOUT CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AT KEENAN AS IT MARKED A 10-YEAR MILESTONE RECENTLY

Last month, Keenan and Alltech marked 10 years of the latter acquiring the former, and a special event was hosted at the Borris site in Co. Carlow.

The acquisition-iversary comes at a slightly smoother-sailing time for the company that is synonymous with its diet-feeding machines and technology, but it has weathered a few storms since its founding in 1978.

"Keenan has been through a tough time, navigating some tough market environments," says Jason. "Alltech's culture has given Keenan that stability it needed, and just a little bit of room to breathe so that we could look up and see the horizon. Alltech's done an amazing job of integrating Keenan into it without affecting its culture," he says.

A major restructure in recent years following the announcement in 2023 of redundancies at the plant saw a new and more streamlined business model put in place. Jason explains:

"Alltech reset the brand so there were fewer variations [of machines] on the factory floor, and we focussed more on the solutions-provision side that was really working in the business. We stopped trying to meet everybody's needs. Because by trying to meet everybody's needs, they were making a machine of every different shape and size and variation, and that just had an adverse effect on the company."

NEW START

This restructure coincided with Zimbabwe-native, Jason's appointment as Keenan's global commercial manager, to which he brought with him a wealth of experience from Agco, one of the foremost agricultural machinery and precision agriculture companies in the world, and where Jason spent the bulk of his career. Jason had worked at Keenan for a number of years in the early

2000s – he was responsible for the after-sales and customer services for England, Scotland and Wales – and although he returned to a very different company, he says that the heart of Keenan has always remained true to its origins – manufacturing world class machines and the best mix in the business. "We have been on a solid path of steady but linear growth since then. I think there's something in the DNA in Carlow where they just know how to make machines. Their welding, their turning, their craftsmanship – they have all the pre-requisites needed to build an amazing product. Farmers have a high level of expectation when it comes to quality. They don't want to see bad welds, they don't want to see bad moulded plastic. And so, the Keenans are beautifully, beautifully built machines." But, nonetheless, the company has changed, Jason explains: "It was a B2C business model

and was very successful in its time. In today's industry, it's very difficult to grow and scale that kind of business model. A huge amount of my previous career involved developing dealers, onboarding them, working with them, and because of that, one of the remits I had was to transition Keenan from a B2C company model to B2B. Historically, this is not completely new to Keenan, but where I'm really fitting in now is I am resetting, in some cases, or just renewing the partnerships that we have."

In some geographic locations, these partners are 'dealers' in the traditional machinery sense, and in others, these partners have more of an 'animal-nutrition bias', Jason says. The latter points to the Alltech influence of seeking and embracing symbiotic partnerships, something that plays out in other aspects of the parent company, under the stewardship of Alltech president and CEO, Dr Mark Lyons. But all of it involves the development of exclusive relationships with Keenan, who now rarely sell direct. "So, I work with all the sales teams, and I help to develop these partnerships, onboard them, and generate business through them. That's my primary role." Jason refers to Keenan and Alltech as the left hand and the right hand of on-farm feeding. "Alltech's speciality ingredients with the superior mixing quality from Keenan are the perfect combination for optimal herd-health and performance," he says.

MACHINERY MARKETS

Keenan has prevailed as a market leader in diet feeders and mixer wagons, and it still holds patents on its mixing technology, and the specific ration structure which is produced from a Keenan machine. Unsurprisingly, Ireland and the UK are its main markets, with France coming in next: "We have had great success in France, although France is a very difficult and saturated market," says Jason. Then, there are several priority markets, he explains, including Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Austria and Poland.

AFRICA PROJECT

Further afield, Africa is on the Keenan map, and a very exciting project is in the mix that will involve the installation of static



Keenan's global commercial manager, Jason Burbidge.



I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE DNA IN CARLOW WHERE THEY JUST KNOW HOW TO MAKE MACHINES

Keenan mixers as part of 'community feeding initiatives.' Jason explains: "It will see Keenans [mixers] located in strategic locations to help boost the herd health and the herd performance in the small-scale feeding sectors on both the dairy and the beef sides." The commencement of one such project in Kenya is imminent, and Jason explains how it works: "Farmers there will bring their milk to collection centres [where the Keenan mixer is located] and then they'll take home the partial mixed ration (PMR) with them to start lifting the herd health and performance." A standard, uncustomised machine will be operational to begin with, powered by an electric motor rather than a tractor. The mix will comprise local fodder with Alltech products and the project will be rolled out into other African countries over time, it is hoped. Jason says: "We look forward to supporting it, because it'll be the first of its

kind from our side where we will be remotely monitoring and supporting these community-based initiatives. We are using the InTouch 4G systems, so we can have eyes on the ground almost to see that the mixing is being done correctly, and the right rations are being produced. It is an amazing project."

The project has several purposes but one of those takes into consideration the challenges of growing fodder, and preserving fodder, in a country like Kenya.

"Most of these farmers have three or maybe four cattle each. These are very small-scale farmers. But combined, there are probably several hundred cattle that could all benefit from eating the right meal that is condition-matched to that area, and we have partners on the ground that will help us to achieve that." The hope is to replicate this further south, in Zimbabwe, next.

WORLD WITHOUT COWS

Discussion about dairying in Africa, climate issues, and herd performance links the conversation to the independently produced documentary film, 'World Without Cows' which was commissioned by Alltech's Dr Mark Lyons.

It really resonated with Jason, who lived in Kenya and spent much of his time in the Maasai Mara. He says: "What really moved me, in particular, was something that I don't think resonated with many other people and it's that the Maasai farmers have to consistently move their herds of cattle around in order to keep feeding them grass but cattle are not designed to move long distances on a daily or weekly basis.

"Cattle are at their best being fed and watered and having a little bit of a walk-around, but not being nomadically migrated across vast areas of the Maasai region in order to keep them alive. Therefore, this community project has a really strong link for me personally because I think if we are successful in creating feed centres in strategically placed areas, we could greatly reduce the enforced migration of these cattle, which, with climate change, is only going to get worse and worse. "So, when I see that movie, personally, I'm more excited about being able to establish a Keenan somewhere strategic to eliminate the need for these farmers to have to shift their cattle down the road all day long. I think there's a real opportunity for us to be a part of that solution."

Calf-feeding time for Carina and her daughter, CJ. Photo: Sophie Fullam.

CARINA ROSEINGRAVE OF BURREN VIEW FARM IN CO. CLARE IS THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE'S (DAFM) AMBASSADOR FOR INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE WOMAN FARMER 2026. BERNIE COMMINS CHATTED TO CARINA RECENTLY ABOUT WHAT THE ROLE MEANS TO HER, AND HOW SHE WAS INSPIRED AND SHAPED BY STRONG WOMEN IN HER OWN LIFE



A CRACKING ROLE MODEL

Carina, like any farmer, wears many caps both inside and outside the farmgate. She is in partnership with her brother, Gerry, on their dairy and beef farm in Crusheen in the Burren; she heads up her own successful free-range egg enterprise, she is mother to two young daughters, CJ and Arlie; and she is the current – and inaugural – Irish ambassador for International Year of the Woman Farmer.

One of the more unexpected caps that Carina donned recently, was that of a documentary-film star. Carina featured in 'Irish Farmers: A Love Story' – alongside her peers Ailbhe Gerrard from Co. Tipperary and Sophie Bell from Co. Cavan – produced by Food Tank, in association with Bord Bia, and Kinisla (formerly Kerry Dairy Ireland). The documentary explores what it means to be a modern-day farmer incorporating sustainable, regenerative agricultural practices, as well as being stewards of the Irish landscape, with all stories shared through a woman-farmer perspective and narrative.

Hot on the heels of winning the DAFM's ambassador award, Carina flew out to Texas to a special screening of the documentary at the South by Southwest Festival, where she was booked to engage in a post-screening Q&A. It was a surreal experience but

incredibly empowering: "If I ever had doubt in myself, it just instilled in me that I am in the right place, and I am doing the right work. And then chatting with all those people [in Texas], all the Americans, they treated you as an equal, that you were a farmer and you had the right to be there. I think the documentary will be very good for Irish agriculture, too." Carina is a hugely warm and personable character and as she shares this story with me, it becomes clear why this ambassadorial title has been bestowed on her. She is a cracking role model.

IRISH PREMIERE

The Irish premiere of 'Irish Farmers: A Love Story' takes place on June 22 in The Light House Cinema in Dublin. Tickets are free but booking is essential through Eventmaster.

EARLY DAYS

From a multi-generation suckler-farming family, Carina had never set foot inside a milking parlour until she and her brother, Gerry, built their own just nine years ago. That is certainly one way to do it. While Gerry had travelled to New Zealand and experienced dairying there, Carina had no such exposure – or intentions of doing it. Suckler farming was really all she knew.

Sadly, when Carina was just 12, her father died and her mother took on the sole parenting role of five children while juggling her day job in Clare Marts in Ennis, and running the family farm. It was all hands on deck back then, but Carina remembers that she and Gerry always enjoyed working on the farm a little bit more than the others.

Much later, the opportunity to purchase a block of land adjacent to the home farm presented itself, and Gerry and Carina decided to go for it. That created a much



Carina pictured with Martin Heydon, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, receiving her ambassador award.

bigger land parcel but also a 'what do we do now?' moment. Cue dairy farming and a whole new adventure for Carina and Gerry.

THE FEMALE FACTOR

According to the results of a 2023 Central Statistics Office (CSO) Farm Structure Survey, 87 per cent of farm holders were male while 13 per cent were female. Smaller farms were more likely to have a female holder; 17 per cent of farms sized fewer than 10 hectares (ha) had a female holder compared with 13 per cent for all farm sizes. These are the most recent statistics available, and they confirm that Carina works in a male dominated industry – that is a simple fact. So, she truly recognises the importance of the ambassador role for International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026, but she also acknowledges the equality she experiences, and has experienced, among her male peers. She grew up with both male and female role models in farming and this balance, in some ways, is what makes her the perfect ambassador.

Carina says: "When my Dad passed away in 2002, I was young. And we had neighbours around us who helped Mam on the farm, and that enabled her to keep the farm going. It would have been mainly men that were in the area but there were always women in the background too, feeding calves, looking after cows, looking after the paperwork. "In recent years, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has really put women more to the fore, especially regarding schemes, and they're focussed more on gender equality. And while my experience is that we've always worked hand in hand as farmers together, male and female, we do need to make it more equal for women, generally, so that they get the recognition for the work that they do. And, then, it is also up to us as women to change our mindset and say, 'yes, we can do it.'"

Carina's discussion group is male dominated, but that fact is inconsequential; the support she has received from her male counterparts has been incredible, she says. "Yes, it may be a bit daunting to walk into a discussion group, and it is just all men, but if you have the skillset and if you have the love and the passion for agriculture, you'll find your feet in that group and you will see that the men are there to encourage you as much as women because the goal at the end of the day, is that you're there for Irish farming and the future of

The United Nations declared 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026) to spotlight the essential roles that women play across agrifood systems, from production to trade, while often going unrecognised. Women farmers are central to food security, nutrition and economic resilience. IYWF 2026 raises awareness and promotes actions to close the gender gaps and improve women's livelihoods worldwide.

Irish agriculture."

One way to bolster the future of Irish farming, as a woman, is to put yourself into a position where you can meaningfully help other women, and that is what Carina did when she applied to the DAFM to be considered as ambassador for International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026. She credits ACORNS creator and director, Paula Fitzsimons for giving her the nudge – Carina is a former ACORNS scholar herself, which led to the establishment of her egg business – but she had to complete the application process



Carina and her brother, Gerry.

herself, and the questionnaire struck a chord, she recalls: "They were looking for experience of what you had done on the farm. They were looking at what you want to do to progress. They wanted to know about your drive, your ambition for women in farming, and for the future. Really and truly, answering those questions made me slow down and realise that I really do want to help women to be involved in farming."

Carina is the third generation of women in her family to farm, and her girls, CJ and Arlie, are the fourth generation in the making. She explains: "I got to see my granny farm her vegetable garden, and look after her hens. I got to see my mother carry on the family farm until we were old enough to do it ourselves. And, I have two young daughters who farm with me every single day. And I want them to have a family farm that they too will be able to put their own stamp on it in years to come. "It really made me realise that I do want to be able to help Irish women that may lack the confidence in putting themselves forward for jobs in the agricultural sector, because they mightn't think they should be there, but they should be. I want that for my daughters, and I want that for any young girl out there, to be able to pass on my knowledge of farming, my experience, and how to overcome obstacles that may be coming their way."

STRONG FEMALE LINE

The DAFM ambassador role is a great honour, Carina says: "I will do my best for every Irish female farmer out there so that they will feel that there is a voice there to speak up for them, to take on the challenges, to let them know that they're not alone. When you're in a male dominated sector, sometimes you think your question is silly or stupid; you want to say something, but you can't. Well, contact me. I'll ask a question on your behalf. I want to let women farmers know that they will have somewhere to turn to," she says. She continues: "You just don't wake up one morning and you're 'born' a farmer. You learn it. Everyone has to learn from someone at

What is ACORNS?

Funded under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund through the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM), ACORNS is designed to support early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland and runs part-time over six months. The next ACORNS cycle runs from October 2026 to April 2027. The acronym stands for: Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-ups.



Some of Carina's happy hens.

some point. And even if you're 20 or 30 or 40, it doesn't matter what age you are, if you want to be in it, there are different organisations to reach out to that can help you," she adds.

HATCHED A PLAN

Carina, has firsthand experience of reaching out for help herself having joined the ACORNS programme in November 2023 to help her with a business idea that she really wasn't too sure about at the time, she admits. A sudden downpour at The Ploughing one year saw her and her sister take shelter in a stand – it was an ACORNS stand, and her sister hinted that it was the sign she needed to explore if she could develop a viable egg business. Carina was reluctant, she explains: "Eggs are not a big thing in Clare; you don't really have free-range eggs here." But she had seen her granny tend to her 12 hens when she was younger, and she recalls the eggs being shared around to neighbours and family. Carina wondered what if she added more hens? Could she build on what her Granny started? So she increased the flock size to 50 hens, with a small chicken coop and sold their delicious free-range eggs via an honesty box at the farm gate. Word of mouth, TikTok and Instagram all fed into the demand, which seemed to grow and grow. "I brought my egg idea to the table [at ACORNS] and they helped with the marketing, they helped me with the business strategy, but they also helped me to understand that the farm is a business and that it had to be run like a business. It made me slow down, look at my financials for the farm. That programme really was beneficial."

It resulted in the construction of a purpose-built, DAFM-registered, hen shed, an increased flock which enjoys a free-range, green-pasture life at Burren View Farm. And she supplies these delicious eggs to local shops, cafés and restaurants – but the honesty box stays at the gate for her regulars. Thinking back on the rainy day at The Ploughing, standing in the ACORNS tent, Carina says: "My granny was only just after passing away at that time, and she always had the backyard hens, so it all intertwined together to keep her memory alive." Carina also helps to keep her memory alive by regularly telling her girls – who refer to her as Gran Gran – about her, her strong work ethic, and the eggs that she shared with the neighbours. Carina says: "Without her showing us the way when we were younger, we wouldn't be here today. We got our work ethic – for hard work – from her, and also her care for the land and her care for nature was passed on to us."

A huge impact

Carina paid tribute to the O'Halleran family, particularly Rebecca and Shirley, who run a free-range egg enterprise in Co. Longford. They were extremely helpful to Carina in the early days of her egg business. She comments: "We have a connection now through the hens. I would have really looked up to them, and without ACORNS, I might not have had the confidence to reach out to them."

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Carina and her brother are among a growing number of individuals entering into a registered farm partnership in Ireland – currently there are around 4,700 – and so, I ask her about that process. "It just happened organically on our farm because we were farming together anyway; we had progressed the farm ourselves by purchasing land in our own right, and we farm it together because you're stronger in numbers, and we work together as a team." Together on the home farm, they have a 100-cow dairy herd and 50 sucklers, alongside their pedigree Charolais and Limousin herd. In more recent years, they have delved into breeding top quality pedigree bulls that they bring to pedigree sales and

THE BEST OF FARMERS, MEN OR WOMEN, CAN COME FROM PEOPLE THAT DON'T HAVE A FARM BUT JUST HAVE THE INTEREST AND ARE WILLING TO LEARN.

to agricultural shows. "The best place to get your information from is the farmers themselves to see what they are looking for when they're buying a replacement bull," Carina says. This, again is all new territory for Carina but breeding is something she has become extremely interested in, so much so that this summer, she will show – for the very first time – a pedigree Charolais heifer named Burrenview Farm Arlie, who is the offspring of the very special Twinkle (our cover star this month, alongside Carina). In addition, Carina and Gerry also manage a plot of native woodland on the farm that is classified as a special area of conservation and is registered in ACRES.

Carina acknowledges that their route to farm partnership is not so straightforward for others and her piece of advice – for man or woman – is to chat it out. "With regards to succession planning, both sides, the person that wants to continue farming and the person that has their time worked, need to sit down at the kitchen table and have an open discussion about the future," she says. That is only the start, and it can be a difficult conversation, especially for the older parties, but nothing can develop without that start, she says.

CARRYING ON THE LEGACY

There is no better farmer than Carina to take on the role of ambassador for International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026, and she does so on the shoulders of the strong women – and men – who helped her along the way. "Granny would have been 100 this year if she lived," says Carina. "And I think getting the ambassador role is like her way of saying, 'now it's your turn to carry on what I started', and you do that with honour for the people that have gone before us, for the generation of farmers that are here today, and for the next generation"

FOCUS



ENERGY



ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT LEASING LAND FOR A SOLAR PROJECT? IN THIS ARTICLE, TEAGASC'S ENERGY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST, BARRY CASLIN, TAKES US THROUGH THE KEY CONSIDERATIONS AROUND DOING JUST THAT

LEASING YOUR LAND FOR SOLAR PROJECTS

Solar farms are popping up all over Ireland, and developers are eager to lease farmland for this green energy boom. If you are thinking about letting your land for a solar project, it is a smart move to understand what's involved, especially the tax side, which can catch many farmers off guard. In this article, I will try to break it down in simple terms so you can make an informed decision that works for both you and your farm's future.

THE OPTION AGREEMENT

Usually, a developer will first offer you an option agreement lasting three to five years. Think of this as a 'hold' on your land while they sort out planning permission, grid connections, surveys, and secure funding through Government Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auctions.

During this option period, you will get paid for your cooperation; often a five-figure sum. If they decide to go ahead, they will exercise the option and lease your land for 25 years or more. That lease can bring in rental income ranging roughly from €900 to €1,400 per acre annually, sometimes with an extra payment linked to the solar farm's revenue.

IS YOUR LAND A GOOD FIT?

Solar farms need land that's mostly flat or slopes gently south. Bigger projects usually require at least 40 hectares (about 100 acres). Your land should be close to a power line or substation, ideally a 33kV distribution line. Smaller lines usually cannot handle the load, and big transmission lines on pylons are too large to connect into. Grid capacity is limited in many areas, so if your location has room to connect, that is a big advantage, and you will want to move fast to secure it.

WHO'S THE DEVELOPER?

Not all developers are created equally. You might deal with:

► Site finders

They find land and get initial approvals, then sell the project to another company.

► Funded developers

Backed by investors, they build projects and may sell them later.

► Long-term operators

They plan, build, and run the solar farm for decades.

Ask about their experience, financial backing, and reputation. Do not sign exclusivity agreements until you are fully sure about the terms.

EASEMENTS AND CABLES

Solar farms need to connect to the grid with underground cables. Digging up public roads is costly, so developers prefer crossing farmland. If your land is on the cable route, you will likely grant an easement, which is a permanent right for the cable. This easement can be very valuable. If you are the only landowner who can grant access, you hold real negotiating power. You should get paid not only for the easement but also a fair share of the money the developer saves by avoiding costly roadworks. For example, if running cables along the road costs €1 million and across your fields costs €100,000, you could reasonably expect at least half the €900,000 in savings. Make sure agreements cover how the cable is built, compensation for any crop loss during construction, and rights if the cable is extended in the future.

CONSTRUCTION AND LIVING WITH A SOLAR FARM

Construction can disrupt your farm. Your agreement should clearly state how long construction will take, when it happens, access routes, impact on drainage and soil, and how the site will be cleaned up afterward. Once up and running, solar farms are low maintenance and can operate for over 40 years. Grazing sheep under the panels is common, letting you earn from both farming and solar rent. Maintenance includes panel cleaning and grass cutting, which developers or farmers can handle depending on the deal.

TAXES YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND

This is where many farmers get caught out.



LEASING LAND FOR SOLAR FARMS IS NOT LIKE A TYPICAL FARM LEASE WHEN IT COMES TO TAXES.

Leasing land for solar farms is not like a typical farm lease when it comes to taxes. It is vitally important that prior to signing up to any agreements with a solar developer that the full tax implications are understood.

► **Income tax**

The rent you get from solar leases is fully taxable. Unlike regular farmland leases, you do not get tax relief on the lease payments received. That means you pay income tax plus PRSI and Universal Social Charge (USC) on all the income, with no chance to offset expenses.

► **Option payment**

Any money you receive during the option period is also taxable.

► **Capital taxes on the eventual disposal of the land**

Installing solar panels changes how your land is classified for tax when the time comes to dispose of the land by either gift or sale. If less than half your farm is covered by panels, you might keep the lands agricultural land status, which can influence the tax reliefs available on disposal and if applicable on inheritance by your successor.

► **Long-term impact**

These leases last decades, so tax effects can hit your heirs when they inherit the land. It is wise to get financial advice and consider insurance to protect your family.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE SIGNING ANYTHING

- Who exactly is the developer?
- What's their track record?
- Who's funding the project, and will they run it or sell it later?
- What happens at the end of the lease? How will the site be decommissioned?
- Will they cover your legal and survey fees even if the project falls through?
- Exactly how much land are you leasing? (Sometimes fencing cuts off narrow strips you can't farm.)
- Will they install battery storage, and how does that affect payments?

BENEFITS BEYOND THE FARM

Solar farms generate clean energy and can bring benefits to local communities. Developers often consult with locals during planning and sometimes offer community benefit schemes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Leasing land for solar projects can boost your income and support



THAT LEASE CAN BRING IN RENTAL INCOME RANGING ROUGHLY FROM €900 TO €1,400 PER ACRE ANNUALLY, SOMETIMES WITH AN EXTRA PAYMENT LINKED TO THE SOLAR FARM'S REVENUE

Ireland's clean energy future. But it's a long-term commitment with some tricky tax rules and practical issues. Take your time. Get solid tax and legal advice before signing. Know your land's value and rights, and negotiate smartly. With the right info and approach, solar leasing can be a win for your farm and your family.



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MATT O'KEEFFE SPOKE TO SEÁN FINAN, CEO OF THE IRISH BIOENERGY ASSOCIATION (IRBEA) ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SECTOR SINCE THE IRISH GOVERNMENT PUBLISHED THE NATIONAL BIOMETHANE STRATEGY IN 2024

BIOPOWERING THE ECONOMY: A SLOW BURN

Two years ago, *Irish Farmers Monthly* interviewed Seán on the then recently launched national bioenergy strategy. The IrBEA leader outlined progress in the interim, which, it must be said, is off to a slow start: "The strategy set out a target of 200 large plants across the country to be constructed by 2030. We have 15 biogas plants at the moment," says Seán. "The rollout of the sector was provisional on the Government putting in place the necessary mechanisms to grow the market for biomethane or biogas. The two mechanisms they set in place for that to happen included a capital grant support scheme and a renewable heat obligation scheme. They rolled out the capital grant support scheme last year. That resulted in a couple of facilities being built and they're rolling out the next round of capital support grants, amounting to €190 million, this year. The renewable heat obligation was supposed to be introduced last year and the legislation is still being finalised. Progress has been slow, but we hope that things will move forward from here."

Bioenergy is a renewable energy source accounting for 60 per cent of all renewable energy sources, both European and worldwide. Bioenergy production covers woody biomass, liquid biofuels – including biodiesel and ethanol – as well as biogases. Seán elaborates further: "Bioenergy is anything produced from biomass, which is material that was once grown from a biological source. It could be grass, slurries, woody material, animal fats and oilseeds, grease."

FARMER INVOLVEMENT

So far, Seán says, any progress has been driven by several large developers. He gives some context: "We estimate there are around 30 projects in either pre-planning, in the planning process, or under appeal. There's another handful of projects, which have planning permission and have started construction. The focus, so far, of those 30 projects has been on large developers who

are backed by quite significant investment (Irish and global funding). It was probably always going to happen that there would be a certain level of projects on a large scale, driven by the developer community. I envisage that as we move forward, there may be more involvement from communities, from farmers, from co-operatives. A lot of these



Seán Finan, CEO of the Irish Bioenergy Association.

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are probably waiting to see what exactly materialises in terms of the renewable heat obligation scheme.

ECONOMICALLY VIABLE?

To the question of whether biomethane is viable, Seán says: "We have seen some larger developers negotiating off-take agreements with large energy users including pharmaceutical plants and shippers of fuels who require a certain percentage of renewable fuel under the obligation scheme. Ultimately, to make a project viable, it needs some sort of an off-take agreement."

What is an offtake agreement?

According to financial services franchise, StoneX, in offtake agreements, the buyer agrees to purchase a defined volume of a producer's future output. Offtake agreements are often used to secure loans and obtain project financing on energy projects, manufacturing plants, large infrastructure projects and mining construction projects, and often before the project begins production.

Seán continues: "In order for projects to be financed and to progress, they need planning permission and feedstock agreements in place, and they need to have an off-take agreement for their gas. It is still difficult to make these projects economically viable, but they can be if off-takers sign up long-term contractual agreements."

WHERE IS IRELAND AT?

Across the spectrum of renewables – heat, transport, electricity – is Ireland performing, I ask? "In heat, we're the lowest in Europe accounting for about 8 per cent of overall renewables," says Seán. He continues: "Bioenergy is about 70-80 per cent currently, and there's significant scope to increase. We have a large forest resource with a lot of thinning material/biomass available. There's opportunity, for instance, to decarbonise heating systems in leisure centres, nursing homes, schools."

In the liquid fuels area, Seán says, there are potential feedstocks currently not used that would increase the percentage of biofuels in our fuelling mix. He adds: "The whole biomethane sector is contingent on the Government getting the support schemes in place. The 200 plants are not going to be

achieved by 2030. It might be well into the mid 2030s. Overall, our renewable energy percentage requirement is increasing dramatically based on European targets. We're a laggard in terms of the overall renewable mix. We have made significant strides in terms of renewable electricity, and bioenergy is contributing to that in the form of biomass. Edenderry Power and the biogas plants are prime examples.

"Our overall percentage of renewable energy by 2030 needs to be well over 40 per cent. Unless heat and transport increase dramatically, that's not going to be achieved. We have the risk of large fines as a result of that shortfall."

COMMUNITY KICKBACK

There has been kickback from communities to proposed developments, but it is variable, depending on geography, Seán says. "We don't directly get involved in community engagement, that's the job of the energy project developer but we encourage our members to engage with affected communities and that has been happening to a very significant extent with public meetings and publicising relevant information around the projects. It's a two-way system where the community must understand what these projects involve, and our members must engage meaningfully. In parts of the country there's been very few, if any, objections to projects. In other places we've seen significant amounts of objections." Objections are not unique to biomethane projects, he points out, with solar and wind also on the firing line at times. Seán continues: "Community acceptance is very important because we do, as a country, need to reduce our reliance on imported fossil fuels. These renewable energy projects, and particularly biomethane projects, can result in millions of euros of investment in a local community. We often see that there's a silent majority in favour of these facilities, but they're never the ones that write the submission or observation to the local authority when the planning application is progressing."

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Communities can benefit from renewable energy projects – wind and solar – under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), which currently means that for every Megawatt hour of electricity generated by a project successful in an RESS auction, €2 is contributed to a community benefit

fund. Seán explains: "Wind and solar have a contract for difference with the State. It's an auction-based system where they bid in a price that their electricity will cost them to produce. If the market price of electricity goes below that, then the State will intervene and make up the difference. As a result of that mechanism, they've legislated that a certain percentage of those revenues would be put into a community fund.

"The biomethane sector is very different because we don't have a support scheme for the electricity system, so there's no legally mandated community support mechanism for biogas facilities to provide a fund to the local community. But I do understand that some developers are going to contribute, both in terms of the direct economic return to the community, and also potentially assisting communities with other projects. Just to make the distinction, there's no legally mandated requirement for biogas projects to do that because the support system is completely different."

FARMER INVOLVEMENT

The farmer's role in the biomethane sector is in the supply of feedstocks and several members of IrBEA have letters of engagement with farmers for this purpose. Farmers, Seán says, must be paid adequately for this service. He adds: "I know in some parts of the country, those arrangements are now being formalised because the plants are under construction and they will soon be needing feedstocks such as slurry, grass, potentially other crops and waste streams from the agricultural system, generally, including co-ops and meat-processing facilities. It depends on the individual project as to what feedstocks they're using. The role of the farmer, in the initial phase anyway, will be to supply feedstocks.

"There's a significant opportunity with the movement towards Renure, which is 'recovered nitrogen from manure,' being promoted at European level, where farmers, if legislated for in Ireland, will be able to use organic manures to displace chemical fertiliser. We're in an evolving policy landscape but there will be significant opportunities because unless farmers are involved in supplying feedstocks, these facilities won't be able to operate. Biomethane is an opportunity, absolutely. It has been talked about for many years, but now we're at a point where things are about to move forward."



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An Irish landscape featuring a wind farm.

10 WAYS TO ACHIEVE ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

Ten years ago, I founded Local Power Ltd with the ambition to help farmers and businesses reduce their energy costs and carbon emissions. Little did I, or anyone else, know at the time the scale of the climate pressures and energy shocks the world would face; the most recent of which has shaken the very foundations of our democratic system through protests and blockades at ports and on highways.

Everyone I speak to has a view on what can be done to help all stakeholders work together to reduce our reliance on imported gas and fossil fuels. Many are critical of the Government and public sector leaders, arguing that not enough has been done to address these issues and ensure Ireland becomes as energy self-sufficient as possible. But I'm not going to follow the crowd on this one.

PROGRESS MADE

Over the last decade, the Government has done a great deal to help Ireland become more energy independent through the adoption of renewable and other energy technologies. Despite significant and often unjustified objections, Ireland has become a leader in onshore wind energy generation, with wind providing up to 50 per cent of our electricity needs at certain times of the year. However, barriers to offshore wind development must now be addressed urgently, or we risk losing this opportunity for a generation. Government support for microgeneration and solar PV deployment has also made a real impact, with almost 200,000 homes and nearly 7,500 farms and businesses installing solar PV systems with the help of grants and tax incentives. ESB Networks has also played an important role by facilitating the grid connection of these generators. However, much more now needs to be done, and

PAT SMITH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, LOCAL POWER, OUTLINES 10 ACTIONS THAT WOULD HELP IRELAND ACHIEVE AN INDEPENDENT ENERGY FUTURE

done with far greater urgency, in light of the developing energy crisis. Here are 10 actions that, in my view, could take us a long way towards a truly independent energy future.

10 WAYS TO ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

1: The Government needs to demand urgency and focus

Those responsible for day-to-day policy development, grid connections, planning and delivery must accelerate decision-making and, critically, be held accountable for delays and failures in implementing policy and delivering projects.

2: Find the right solutions

Heat pumps are not the right solutions for every older home or business when it comes to improving energy efficiency and reducing costs. Alternative technologies also need to be supported. Why, for example, are efficient, intelligently managed electric radiator systems not encouraged and grant-supported for older properties?

3: Policy review

Grants for solar PV and VAT relief have been a major success, with more than 170,000 homes adopting the technology. However, the policy now needs urgent review. Homeowners should be eligible for support for systems up to 6kWp, or for a minimum grant of €2,800.

4: Battery storage for homeowners

In addition, a grant of €200/kWh for up to 10kWh of battery storage should be introduced immediately to help homeowners maximise the use of renewable energy generated within the home. Battery storage would also allow households to store electricity on low-cost night rates and use it during peak pricing periods, reducing energy bills while also helping to balance the grid by using surplus energy more efficiently.

5: Improved SEAI grant access

The Government must amend the rules preventing homeowners and businesses connected to the grid since 2021 from accessing SEAI grants. This policy unfairly discriminates against young families with limited resources who have bought homes in the last five years. At a minimum, all grid connections up to the end of 2025 should qualify for microgeneration grants.

6: Credible alternatives

Thousands of farmers interested in adopting renewable energy to reduce

BARRIERS TO OFFSHORE WIND DEVELOPMENT MUST NOW BE ADDRESSED URGENTLY, OR WE RISK LOSING THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR A GENERATION

rising energy costs and carbon emissions were recently dealt a devastating blow when the agriculture minister announced that only 10 per cent of tranche 10 applications for solar PV under TAMS will be approved. The Government must now act immediately to provide a credible alternative to the TAMS grant scheme for solar PV and battery deployment on farms. This could easily be achieved by increasing SEAI non-domestic solar PV grants to a minimum of €300-400/kWp for installations under the mini-generation grid connection process.

7: Battery storage for farms and businesses

There should also be a battery storage grant of €200/kWh for systems up to 75kWh, and €100/kWh for systems above that threshold, for farms and businesses. Increasing SEAI non-domestic solar PV grants and introducing battery storage supports would go a long way towards filling the vacuum created by the loss of TAMS support for farmers. It would also represent a meaningful improvement for SMEs, many of which are under severe pressure from rising costs.

8: Reduce fixed charges

Fixed charges on ESB bills need to be significantly reduced. They have increased by more than 60 per cent since 2020, yet there appears to be insufficient scrutiny by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) of annual network charge increases. Where are the efficiencies from providers, particularly when thousands of new homes and businesses are connecting to the grid every year? The Government needs to challenge the CRU, and these costs must be reduced.

9: Long-term biomethane RHO

To help meet our heat and transport decarbonisation targets, the Government

must deliver a sustainable, long-term biomethane renewable heat obligation (RHO) policy and grant support framework within weeks. It is clear there are differing views both within Government and among officials, but the Minister for Energy must end the delays and provide certainty and clarity to developers and farmers. Either the Government wants a biomethane industry, or it doesn't. If it does, then certainty around policy and support structures must be delivered now.

10: Road infrastructure upgrades

Before the last economic crash, huge progress was made in Ireland's road infrastructure, with motorways connecting all major cities. However, progress over the last decade has been far too slow.

DESPITE SIGNIFICANT AND OFTEN UNJUSTIFIED OBJECTIONS, IRELAND HAS BECOME A LEADER IN ONSHORE WIND ENERGY GENERATION

The M50, for example, has effectively become a daily car park for hours at a time, costing millions annually in wasted fuel and lost productivity; an economic and environmental problem that also undermines our carbon reduction targets. The reality is that the number of vehicles on our roads will continue to grow for the foreseeable future, regardless of policy initiatives. Both rural and urban Ireland need major road upgrades and additional outer ring road infrastructure to improve connectivity between Drogheda, Navan, Mullingar and Portlaoise, taking more traffic off the M50 each day. In addition, why not make the M50 toll-free between 10pm and 6am to encourage heavy goods traffic to travel during off-peak hours?

LEADERSHIP

We live in a great part of the world, with great people and, in the main, good political leadership. Now we need to bring greater urgency to the task of becoming increasingly energy independent in the years ahead. It's a win for everyone. What is required now is leadership that delivers.

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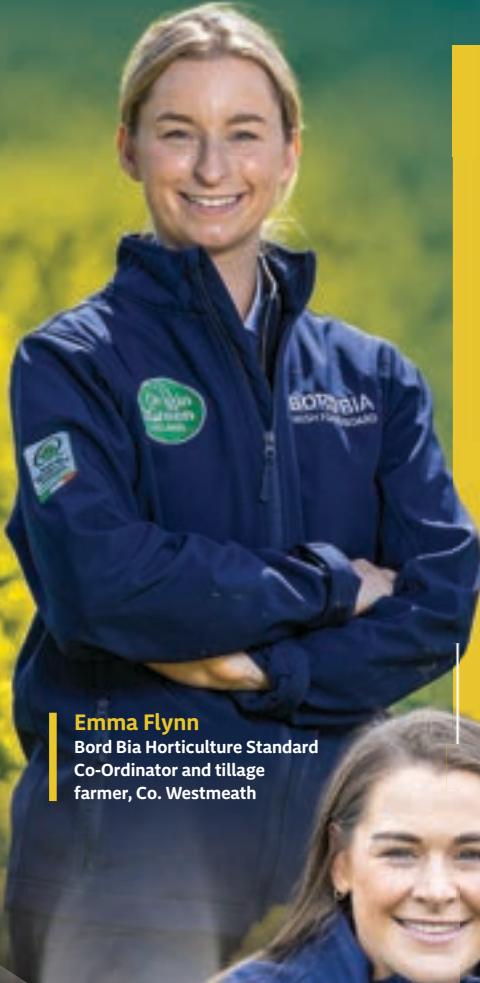
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Emma Flynn

Bord Bia Horticulture Standard
Co-Ordinator and tillage
farmer, Co. Westmeath



Rebecca O'Halleran

Origin Green Farm Schemes
Executive, poultry and dairy
farmer, Co. Longford



Niamh Bambrick

Bord Bia Farmer Forum Manager,
beef and dairy farmer,
Co. Kilkenny



Shauna Jager

Bord Bia Pig and Poultry Manager,
and involved in a poultry and dairy
enterprise in Co. Cavan

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Shauna Jager, Bord Bia Pig and Poultry manager, explains the importance of the poultry and pig sectors to Irish agriculture.

8 Grass-fed

Protecting the reputation of Irish grass-fed dairy using audit data.



Organic farmer, Kay O'Sullivan with Germain Milet, Bord Bia Market Specialist France, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

Chefs visit Cork farms

Bord Bia recently hosted 18 leading chefs from Belgium and France to Cork for a tour of Irish farms and food producers, as part of their membership of the exclusive Chefs' Irish Beef Club.

The trip included visits to standout beef farms, further supporting the chefs work as ambassadors for Irish beef. Hereford Prime beef farmer John Appelbe showcased his pedigree herd and grassland management with a strong emphasis on rotational grazing, reseeding and clover. Organic beef and sheep farmer Kay O'Sullivan spoke about her preference for multi-species swards and her fully grass-based system, finishing angus cattle at 19 months without meal feeding. The visits left a strong impression on the chefs, reinforcing the quality and sustainability of Irish beef.



Ross Crowe

Bord Bia supports annual SunSmart campaign

Bord Bia has again partnered with the HSE and Healthy Ireland to raise awareness among Irish farmers of the importance of protecting their skin from the sun. All summer, Bord Bia auditors will distribute a SunSmart for Farmers leaflets to all beef, dairy, and sheep farmers during their Bord Bia audit. The leaflet was developed especially for Irish farmers by the HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) and contains advice on staying safe in the sun and how to spot signs of skin cancer.

Ross Crowe (pictured), SunSmart ambassador commented "As farmers, we're exposed to up to three times more UV rays compared with people who work indoors, putting us at greater risk of developing skin cancer. I'm glad to support this campaign and encourage other farmers to protect themselves from the sun every day, whether out in the field, inside the tractor cab, or even on a cloudy day."

Farmer Forum meets this June

The Bord Bia Farmer Forum Assembly is a new initiative, bringing 100 quality assured farmers and growers together for a full-day event aimed at increasing two-way dialogue and engagement. The Assembly has been designed to reflect the diversity of Irish farming, with representation across all enterprise types, regions, gender, age groups, and farm size. A strong emphasis has been placed on including a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

Due to the very high level of interest received, not all farmers and growers could be accommodated for this initial Assembly. However, Bord Bia is committed to ongoing engagement with all Quality Assured farmers and growers who expressed an interest. Bord Bia will ensure that these voices are captured and reflected in discussions and initiatives over the coming months.

Our Food Roots: supporting the story of Irish food and farming

Our Food Roots (Formerly Our Food Connects) has continued to grow its work across Ireland's agri-food sector, helping to reconnect people in Ireland with where their food comes from, how it is produced, and why that matters today.

As fewer people today have a direct connection to farming, there is a growing need to communicate clearly, openly and confidently about the realities of modern food production - including the progress being made, the challenges being faced, and the care, standards and responsibility involved in producing Irish food.

Working alongside farmers, producers and industry stakeholders, Our Food Roots is focused on helping ensure the realities of modern Irish food production are better understood by the public.

Over recent months, the organisation has expanded its engagement across the sector through collaborations, events and communications initiatives. This has included work with organisations such as Certified Irish Angus and Alltech, alongside industry workshops with member organisations focused on helping the sector communicate clearly on increasingly complex issues.

Alongside this work, Our Food Roots continues to develop research and insight resources exploring issues shaping public understanding of food and farming - including food origin, trust in food, water quality and consumer perceptions of the sector. These insights are helping inform clearer public communications and engagement around key issues affecting Irish agriculture and food production.



OUR
FOOD
ROOTS

At the heart of the work is a simple belief: the Irish agri-food sector has a strong story to tell - and the people within it deserve support in telling it.

To learn more about Our Food Roots, visit www.ourfoodroots.ie or follow Our Food Roots on LinkedIn and Instagram.

Coming Soon: The Disconnected Consumer Campaign

Launching later this summer, Our Food Roots will begin a new public-facing campaign focused on younger audiences who feel increasingly disconnected from farming and food production.

The campaign is intended to support the sector by reaching audiences that traditional farming communications often do not. Using accessible and relatable content, it aims to build greater understanding of Irish food and farming over time - helping future consumers feel more connected to the people, standards and care behind Irish food production.

Getting ready for your Bord Bia audit

Advice and tips on preparing for your Bord Bia audit, including what to expect and the most common non-compliances found.

Set the date

A key step in preparing for your renewal audit is to schedule a date and time with the auditor as soon as you are contacted. This ensures that certification remains active while the renewal process is ongoing. Check when you are due a renewal audit by calling the Bord Bia Helpdesk on **01 5240410** or online at qas.bordbia.ie/livestock/Verify

What to expect on the day?

When the auditor arrives, they will first explain the process during the opening meeting and answer any questions you may have.

They will then walk around the farm with you, looking at stock, housing, equipment and the farmyard. Most aspects of the audit are completed through observation of good farm practices and conversations with you about your typical farm practices.

Following the farm walk, the auditor will carry out some paperwork and record checks to confirm that the information gathered during the walk matches the records on file.

During the audit, the auditor will discuss any findings with you as they arise and will go through everything again with you before leaving the farm (the closing meeting).

The audit lasts, on average, 90 minutes, but the better prepared you are, the shorter the audit will be.

What happens after the audit?

At the end of the audit, the auditor will explain if any issues are identified as non-conformances. You will not fail the audit on the day if any issues arise. Instead, you will be given up to 28 days to address the issue (or issues) and provide evidence that corrective action has been taken. For example, if an auditor identifies that a lagoon is unsafe, they may request a photo within 28 days showing that the lagoon has been made safe.

Evidence can be sent by text message to the Bord Bia Helpdesk or if preferred by email or post. You can also upload evidence by logging onto farm.bordbia.ie. You can nominate an individual, such as a relative or neighbour, to do this on your behalf.

This 'close-out' process does not apply if no issues are found during the audit.

Key areas to watch out for

Most non-compliances identified during audits relate to record keeping, particularly the recording of animal remedies, including both usage and purchases.

For **animal remedy** usage, you must record the following:

- Date of administration.
- Name of medicine.
- Quantity given.
- Identification of animal.
- Name of person giving the medicine/remedy or the name of the prescribing vet.
- Date of the end of the withdrawal period. A common mistake is to insert the number of withdrawal days instead of date-of-end of withdrawal period.

Where an individual animal is treated, the identity of the animal must be clearly documented, for example using the tag number or freeze brand. Where the remedy is administered to a group of animals, it must be possible to clearly identify each animal in the group (e.g. all calves born 1st January to 31st March only).

Animal remedy purchase

records can be kept in a variety of ways, e.g using computer-based records, by using a manual such the Bord Bia Farm Book, or by retaining vet's prescriptions back to the date of last audit.

The following details must be included:

- Date of purchase.
- Medicine name.
- Quantity purchased.
- Name and address of the supplier.

How to keep records

Farmers can keep records in the way that suits them best. This may include keeping invoices or statements, using farm software, or any other system that captures the required information. Records only need to be kept in one location.

Note: keeping accurate and up-to-date animal medicine usage and purchase records is a legal requirement under Conditionality (previously known as cross-compliance).

TOP TIP:
Before your audit, ensure that you have a full and complete record of all medicines purchased and all medicines administered at least back to the last audit date.

Did you know?
Over 87% of farmers successfully pass their Bord Bia audit on the day and go forward for certification.

TOP TIP:
most veterinary practices can print an account statement that will show all medicine purchases over any given time period.

Documents and records required

- ✓ Herd register (either online on Ag food or in the blue book).
- ✓ Animal remedy purchase and usage records.
- ✓ Animal movement records.
- ✓ Passports / Blue cards.
- ✓ Knackery receipts (if applicable).
- ✓ Animal health plan.
- ✓ A record of any animal mortality and significant health issues.
- ✓ Feed purchase records and feed delivery docketts.
- ✓ Pesticide usage (if used on the farm).
- ✓ Farm Safety Risk Assessment.
- ✓ Waste plastic collection receipts (if any).
- ✓ Sustainability Survey.
- ✓ Farmyard sketch of bait points (if bait points used).
- ✓ Name of veterinary services providers, veterinary product suppliers, hauliers and any persons applying pesticides. Note: these will be visible on records/receipts retained from these suppliers.

Sustainability Survey

A Sustainability Survey also needs to be completed before the audit. The questions cover topics including housing dates and concentrates fed and takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. All data provided must be from the previous calendar year, for example if your audit takes place in July 2026, you report from the previous January to December 2025.

The survey can be done online at farm.bordbia.ie. Alternatively, farmers can contact the Helpdesk on **01 524 0410** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm) to complete over the phone.

Bord Bia Helpdesk

The Helpdesk can help you to prepare for the audit and answer any queries about the process.

01 5240410 Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.



Protecting Ireland's reputation in global markets

In a competitive global market, Bord Bia Quality Assurance, under the Origin Green programme, plays a vital role in protecting Ireland's reputation for high-quality, sustainably produced meat and dairy. Your participation in Bord Bia audits is the cornerstone of this reputation.

Audit satisfaction

A recent survey conducted with farmers after their audit found:

91%

considered the audit process to be straightforward.

97%

believed that the audit took a reasonable amount of time.

99%

found the auditors themselves to be professional.

80%

found uploading information easy to do.

Cattle supplies tighten

Total cattle throughput for the year to date 584,589 head. This is a decline of just under 13%, or 85,349 head when compared to the strong numbers recorded in the same period in 2025. All categories of cattle have recorded a decline in throughput, with the strongest decline in cows processed - down 19%. These tighter supplies have helped give some stability to the Irish price. Meanwhile after several months of relative stability, cattle prices are back in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This has contributed to a narrowing in the price differential between the Irish and UK prices. As of the week ending 9th May, the average UK R3 steer price was €0.46/kg ahead of the Irish R3 steer price.

Demand for beef in key export markets has come under increasing pressure in recent weeks. Inflation continues to affect consumer spending, while greater availability of non-European beef in some export markets has intensified competition. At the same time, more competitively priced pork and poultry products is impacting demand for beef across some key export markets.



Calf trade continues to drive live exports

The live cattle trade has picked up in recent weeks with almost 13,000 cattle leaving the country in the week ending 10th May. Improved weather conditions and a steady demand for cattle in key export markets have supported exports. The short-term outlook remains firm with exporters still very active in the market sourcing a range of suitable cattle to fulfil export contracts. For the year-to-date, 189,879 cattle have been traded. While this is 16% lower than the exceptionally high levels recorded in early 2025, it remains broadly in line with the corresponding period in both 2023 and 2024.

Calves continue to dominate the live trade, as is typical for the time of the year. The Netherlands, Spain and Italy continue to be the key destinations for Irish calves although there are some growing opportunities emerging in some other markets.

The latest forecasts point to tighter cattle supplies across mainland Europe, as the long-term decline in the European cattle herd is expected to continue. This reduced availability is likely to support steady demand for Irish cattle in the short to medium term.

Northern Irish sheep imports back significantly

Total sheep throughput to date is 714,540 head, down 7% or 52,000 head on the same period last year. Contributing to this fall in numbers, is a significant reduction in the number of lambs and hoggets being imported from Northern Ireland for direct slaughter. Northern Ireland imports were back by 37,319 head (37%) during the early months of 2026. The challenging production conditions this spring have also had an impact with spring lambs slower to appear in any significant numbers, with throughput back 3,000 head/20% on 2025 numbers.

While Irish sheep prices have fallen in recent weeks the trade remains ahead of the corresponding period in 2025 when prices were in the region of €8.70/kg. The downward pressure on the trade is in line with normal seasonal trends, with reports indicating the high price points is impacting demand for lamb in our key export markets.



Meet Bord Bia

Shauna Jager, Bord Bia Pig and Poultry Manager

What does a typical day promoting pig meat and poultry involve?

There is no such thing as a typical day, that is what makes the job so interesting. One day might involve working with farmers, another engaging with processors, retailers, or international customers. A good amount of time is spent analysing data and preparing briefings and presentations, translating market insights, trends and performance data into clear updates that help inform decision making across the sector. At the heart of my role is ensuring the work we do delivers value for everyone involved in the pig and poultry Quality Assurance schemes.

Where does pigmeat and poultry fit into the Irish agri-food industry?

Pigmeat is a really important part of the Irish agri-food sector and is one of our largest indigenous livestock sectors. Pig production in Ireland is highly efficient, technology driven and focused on both domestic and export markets. There are just under 400 commercial pig producers in the Republic of Ireland and these support several thousand jobs, along the supply chain in processing and support services, by providing the raw material.

Poultry is also a more concentrated sector and is very focused on the domestic market, particularly as Ireland is not self-sufficient. Exports are largely limited to offal and by products - about 800 producers in domestic poultry production, including egg producers, rearers and poultry meat growers. Poultry, and pigmeat to some extent, are also key in growing meat protein consumption, particularly across the EU, largely due to their value for money, availability and versatility.

What does Bord Bia do to promote pigmeat?

Bord Bia works right across the supply chain. This includes supporting Ireland's reputation through the Bord Bia Quality Mark, providing market insight to help processors make informed commercial decisions, and running promotional campaigns in the Irish market, as well as in key export markets. We also place a strong focus on engaging directly with customers and communicating Ireland's sustainability, animal welfare and traceability strengths.

Where are the main export markets for pigmeat and poultry?

The domestic market is the largest and most valuable outlet for Irish pigmeat and, as a result, remains a key area of focus for the sector. Beyond this, Irish pigmeat has been exported to over 60 markets worldwide, with the UK representing our largest export

market. Total exports were valued €462 million last year. Lower-value parts of the carcass are primarily exported to Asian markets, particularly China. Interestingly, pigmeat is also the only meat product exported from Ireland to Australia. The majority of Irish poultry exports go to the UK (€104 million from a total of €159 million), with EU markets accounting for just under €34 million last year. Africa is an important market for other parts of the carcass such as chicken feet, chicken backs, and offal.

What makes the sector stand out?

Irish pigmeat stands out because of its full traceability and strong sustainability credentials, which are leveraged through Bord Bia Quality Assurance. This gives customers confidence right back to farm level and supports how we communicate Ireland's overall food story in international markets.



Protecting Irish grass fed dairy

Today's consumers want proof that the dairy they consume is both nutritious and responsibly produced with care for the environment and animal welfare. Grass-fed dairy gives them that reassurance and is a crucial part of Irish dairy's competitive edge, particularly in premium markets where customers have high expectations around naturalness, nutrition, animal welfare, and food safety.

Market demand

Grass fed dairy satisfies market demand across four main areas:

Health benefits

Grass-fed dairy has higher levels of beneficial nutrients compared to indoor based dairy, supporting healthy lifestyles.

Improved animal welfare

Irish dairy cows can lead more 'natural' lives out on pasture.

Improved environmental sustainability

Ireland has one of the lowest dairy carbon footprints in the EU, largely due to our pasture-based production systems, which typically have lower carbon footprints than mixed or indoor systems.

Consumers will pay a premium for grass fed dairy

Half of consumers globally said that grass-fed would influence their choice of dairy. Over 60% of consumers in key markets claim that they would pay more for grass fed.

The most recent audit data shows that SDAS dairy herds achieved an average of 250 grazing days per year, while cows were fed a diet of almost 95% grass on a fresh-weight basis.



Promoting grass-fed Irish dairy.

Bord Bia Grass Fed Standard

To support Irish dairy's grass-fed claims, Bord Bia developed the grass-fed standard six years ago. Milk processors that wish to use the grass-fed logo are audited against the standard every 12 months and must comply with these requirements:

- Sourced from farms that are members of the Bord Bia Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS).
- The combined milk pool must achieve a weighted average of at least 94.5% grass-fed.
- Cows must graze outdoors for at least the national average grazing days, with allowances made for challenging grass growth conditions.
- Each individual herd must achieve at least 90% grass-fed diet over a three-year period.



FOCUS

FOCUS



PIG HEALTH



A VISION FOR HIGHER WELFARE PRODUCTION SYSTEM

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT THAT INVESTIGATED HIGH-WELFARE PIG PRODUCTION SYSTEMS, ALSO CONDUCTED THE FIRST STUDY ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND INTO PASTURE-BASED AND AGROFORESTRY PRODUCTION SYSTEMS. A PROJECT REPORT WAS RECENTLY PUBLISHED, AND **BERNIE COMMINS** SHARES ITS MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards One Welfare: Roadmap for Higher Welfare Irish Pig Farming 2026-2046 is the result of a four-year collaborative project, OneWelPig, which recently showcased its key findings. The project evaluated alternative systems for producing pigs indoors and is the first on the island of Ireland to study pasture-based and agroforestry production systems. In all cases, the research was approached from social, animal, and environmental perspectives. The most significant result of the project is the publication of a plan for transitioning parts of the industry towards higher-welfare systems in the Republic of Ireland. *The Roadmap for Higher Welfare Pig Farming* presents a three-pronged vision of an enlarged outdoor/free range pig-production sector, a new higher-welfare indoor sector, and standard good-welfare pig production. In addition, it presents five-year and 20-year aims along with recommendations on how to achieve them.

STATE OF PLAY

According to the report, the Irish pig sector employs around 8,000 people with over 60 per cent of pork to a value of ~€900m exported. Over the last 10 years the Irish pig herd has become more concentrated in fewer, larger farms. In 2022, there were 263 farms with 1,000 or more pigs, accounting for 96 per cent of the national herd. Bord Bia certifies these pig farms who sell to large processors for home or export markets. There is a very small commercial outdoor/free range pig sector (fewer than 100 farms),

typically small, non-farm-assured farms selling to local, private markets. Ireland's Animal Welfare Strategy 2021-2025 included a commitment to support the development of high-welfare outdoor pig production systems.

ENHANCING PIG WELFARE

The report states that, over the last 80 years, European pig production systems have developed to maximise efficiency and productivity, providing cheaper food for people. Over time, as scientific understanding of pigs' needs developed, it became clear that the current indoor systems could be enhanced to promote pig welfare. Recently, a panel of scientists for the European Food Safety Authority summarised a large body of evidence of the changes that would benefit pig welfare. They include:

- ▶ Provision of manipulable material to enable rooting and other foraging activities from birth.
- ▶ Sufficient space with distinct functional zones to allow for a range of physical movements, play behaviour, synchronous resting and social harmony.
- ▶ Comfortable bedded resting areas.
- ▶ Opportunities for positive experiences such as pleasurable foods and an enriched environment.
- ▶ Keeping stable social groups to promote harmony.
- ▶ Provision of accessible nesting material for sows.
- ▶ Sufficient space to allow free movement of sows during farrowing and lactation.

CONSUMER DEMAND

The report reveals that the lack of a differentiated pork market – a higher welfare product – is a challenge for Irish consumers 'with no specific higher welfare label such as RSPCA Assured in the UK, and minimal organic or outdoor production. Irish consumers therefore have limited awareness of, and options for, purchasing higher welfare pork.'

However, one retailer – Mark & Spencer (M&S) – now stocks higher price point, higher welfare pork products from the island of Ireland. The Origin Green-accredited supermarket chain has 16 owned stores across Ireland alongside 34 M&S Food shops at Applegreen service stations. One hundred per cent of its fresh continental, and ingredient pork is produced to a higher-welfare and freedom-farrow standard. It sells six higher welfare products all year round and five additional higher welfare products at Christmas, as well as higher welfare ham into their Irish-sourced sandwiches.

DID YOU KNOW?

There is an export market to China for higher welfare pork.

CAN'T MEET CURRENT DEMAND

In another example highlighting consumer demand for a differentiated product, the report shares the story of a small Irish farm that has been breeding and rearing pigs for generations. The sows and growing pigs

TIMEFRAME

The report outlines the five-year and 20-year aims as follows:

Five-year aims

- ▶ **Outdoor/free range pig production to:**
- ▶ Have at least one dedicated certification scheme in addition to organic certification.
- ▶ Skilled advisory support available for all existing and new entrant outdoor/ free range pig farmers.
- ▶ Increase in production to 50 farms with more than 10 sows or 100 finishers/ year.

Higher welfare indoor pig production to:

- ▶ Have at least one dedicated certification scheme accrediting the provision of bedding, suitable and effective manipulable material, free farrowing, increased space allowance and intact tails.
- ▶ Achieve 40 finishing farms undertaking some aspect of higher welfare indoor pig production.

20-year aims

- ▶ **Outdoor/free range pig production to:** Account for at least 5 per cent of production.
- ▶ **Higher welfare indoor pig production to:** Account for at least 25 per cent of production.

are outside during the summer, and in large straw barns in the winter. The farm makes its own-brand charcuterie and other products sold nationally, and processes around 25 pigs/week. But, that farm cannot meet current demand for their products from pigs reared on their own farm. They would like to source 'exclusively higher welfare/outdoor pigs from nearby farms to enable welfare provenance to be a feature of their products,' according to the report and they are offering a significant premium (around 50 per cent above standard market price) for higher welfare pigs.

ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM PRODUCERS

A number of challenges and opportunities were shared via the report by alternative system producers. Things like lack of knowledge, information and technical guidance/advisory support; lack of knowledge about rules and regulations; difficulty achieving compliance; finding a market; and finding somewhere to slaughter their pig and/or to process them were deemed challenges.

Being able to sell value-added products such as hog roasts, cured meats or establishing a pop-up restaurant, as well as the availability of woodland to keep pigs, and support from family and local community were cited as opportunities.

As referenced at the start of this article, the roadmap presents a vision for three types of pig-production systems that can be supported by:

- ▶ Certification schemes.
- ▶ Specific, tailored advisory and veterinary support.
- ▶ Expanding the existing successful advisory services for standard production to higher welfare indoor and outdoor/ free range farmers.
- ▶ Home and export markets available for all three systems.
- ▶ Economic support for current indoor standard pig production when transitioning to high welfare production.
- ▶ Reducing the financial risk of transition.
- ▶ Targeted support for new entrants to take up higher welfare indoor or outdoor/ free range pig production.
- ▶ Availability of higher welfare indoor pork in major Irish retailers.
- ▶ Availability of outdoor/ free range pork in local markets and at least one national retailer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of ways these aims can be achieved, according to the report, which recommends:

- ▶ Development of at least one dedicated higher welfare indoor production standard and one non-organic outdoor/free range standard.
- ▶ Strengthening of existing advisory networks to provide up-to-date best practice support for higher welfare indoor and outdoor/free range pig farmers.
- ▶ Teagasc to develop demonstration farms to showcase higher welfare indoor and outdoor/ free range systems.
- ▶ Government support for farmers achieving welfare standards above the legislative requirement.
- ▶ Facilitation of farmers or advisors to support new initiatives to develop higher welfare systems - for example start-up funding and networking by government.
- ▶ Processors, retailers and food businesses commit to supporting higher welfare pig farming through offering long term contracts with sufficiently attractive premiums to encourage higher welfare pig farming.
- ▶ Government should review the existing network of slaughterhouses, large and small, and develop a strategic plan and implement policies to retain smaller, local slaughterhouses.

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PRRS – A MOST COSTLY DISEASE

THE IRISH PIG HEALTH SOCIETY (IPHS) HOSTED ITS ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM RECENTLY, BRINGING TOGETHER FARMERS, VETERINARIANS, RESEARCHERS, AND INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF PIG HEALTH AND PRODUCTION. THERE, EMMA O'CONNOR, INNOVATION BROKER, ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND, AND DR VIOLET WYLIE ON BEHALF OF PIG REGEN, PRESENTED A PAPER ON PORCINE REPRODUCTIVE AND RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (PRRS) VIRUS, AND WE SHARE THAT PAPER HERE

PRRS is one of the costliest diseases in pig production, adding an estimated 4-7c/kg deadweight for affected farms. Infections leave pigs more vulnerable to other diseases, driving up medicine use and mortality while slowing growth.

PILOT PROGRAMME

Between November 2020 and June 2023, a pilot programme to control PRRS at a local

level was carried out in Northern Ireland. This was led by Pig Regen, with financial support from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development through the European Innovation Partnership. The overall aim of the project was to reduce the PRRS viral load within a 5km radius of Cookstown, Co. Tyrone. If PRRS could be controlled in this pig-dense

All producers were reminded to vaccinate their sows for PRRS every three months. The use of piglet vaccination was at the discretion of each producer, in consultation with their veterinarian, and tailored to the needs of individual units. PRRS viral status and biosecurity for each breeding unit were checked annually, meaning monitoring was carried out three times during the project.

RESULTS

By the end of the project, the number of units positive for wild-type virus had reduced by one third, and the overall viral load decreased by 20 per cent (figure 2). In addition, there was a 70 per cent reduction in pleurisy and a 40 per cent reduction in pericarditis recorded in pigs at slaughter (figure 3). The success of the project was recognised when it won the Innovation Prize at the National Pig Awards 2023.

FUTURE ROLLOUT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Following the success of the Cookstown pilot, the Northern Ireland pig industry moved to a national scheme. In spring 2024, finishing pigs from herds that were not vaccinating pigs were sampled at the abattoir to check for

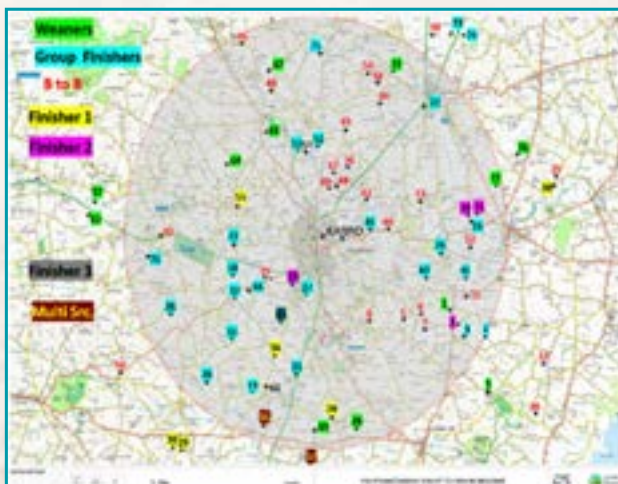


Figure 1: Map showing the location of breeding and finishing units in the Cookstown area.

area (figure 1), the intention was to expand the programme across all of Northern Ireland. There were 29 breeding herds in the Cookstown region. Baseline blood sampling at the start of the programme found that 17 herds had wild-type PRRS virus. In addition, a baseline biosecurity audit was carried out by each producer's veterinarian, with advice provided on how biosecurity could be improved.

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*PCV2d subunit antigen with demonstrated protection against PCV2a, PCV2b and PCV2d. (Ceva registration dossier - ECG-167-2021 for PCV2a, ECG-063-2021 for PCV2b and ref ECG-042-2021 for PCV2d).
*Mycoplasma hyopneumoniae strain 2949 (Ceva's proprietary strain) as used in Hyogen.
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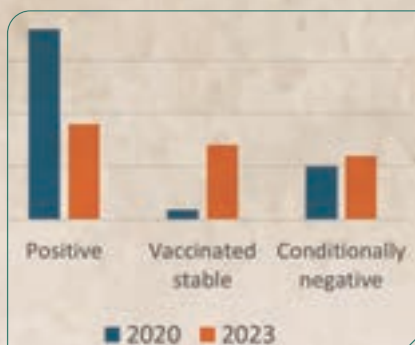


Figure 2: PRRS status at beginning and end of project for 29 breeding herds.

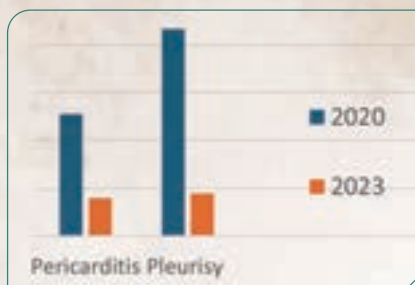


Figure 3: Percentage of pigs with pericarditis and pleurisy at beginning and end of project

PRRS antibodies using ELISA testing. Initial results showed that 66 breeding herds were clear of PRRS, while 19 herds tested positive. In autumn 2024, these 19 positive herds, along with all remaining herds vaccinating piglets, had blood samples taken from pigs at 10 weeks of age. Of these herds:

- ▶ 51 per cent were clear of PRRS virus;
- ▶ 3 per cent were inconclusive;
- ▶ 12 per cent had vaccine strain; and
- ▶ 34 per cent had wild-type PRRS virus.

Currently, this process is being repeated (round 2), with blood being collected at the factory to test for antibodies from herds that were clear of PRRS in 2024/2025. On-farm blood sampling will commence in the summer to identify circulating virus strains in herds categorised as positive. Focussed external and internal biosecurity scoring is also being carried out on each farm during sampling, with results compared year-on-year.

PRRS INITIATIVE ROI 2025-2027

An initiative in the Republic of Ireland (RoI), running from 2025 to 2027, builds on the success of the Northern Ireland programme delivered by Pig Regen and DAERA. This reflects a coordinated, cross-border approach to tackling PRRS. The project aims to:

- ▶ Improve herd health and animal welfare;
- ▶ Reduce medicine use and associated

costs; and

- ▶ Increase productivity and profitability.
- Teagasc, in partnership with Animal Health Ireland (AHI), is rolling out the programme across Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal through EIP funding (TAILWARDS CSP2001), with plans to expand further across Ireland.

UNDERSTANDING PRRS PREVALENCE

As part of the early stages, all pig farms in the ROI were invited to complete a confidential PRRS survey to establish national prevalence. Mapping data from 92 farms in border regions showed:

- ▶ 66.3% confirmed or suspected PRRS positive;
- ▶ 28.3% confirmed negative;
- ▶ 5.4% unsure of their status.

These findings highlight the widespread nature of PRRS and the need for a coordinated, industry-wide response.

HOW THE PROJECT WORKS

Building on the success of the project in Northern Ireland, the RoI PRRS project is structured around four key pillars: testing, mapping, synchronisation of vaccination, and enhanced biosecurity.

1. **Testing and sampling:** A structured testing regime ensures accurate identification and monitoring of PRRS status:

Positive farms: Blood samples are taken to differentiate between vaccine and wild strains and monitor progress over time.

Negative farms: Blood/oral fluid samples taken to confirm the status.

Unknown farms: Samples are taken on-farm or at slaughter to determine PRRS status before assigning the appropriate protocol.

2. **Mapping:** A detailed map was developed that shows status of farms over time.

3 and 4. Synchronisation and Biosecurity:

A Coordinated Defence: A key element of the programme is the synchronisation of vaccination strategies across participating farms, aligned with Northern Ireland. Vaccination protocols, whether blanket vaccination or '6-and-60 schedules' remain unchanged, but their effectiveness is enhanced through coordination.

All farms completed the BioCheck biosecurity assessment as part of their TASA, and the project team is looking at PRRS-related biosecurity priority areas. Small practical changes, such as more frequent needle changes, limiting animal mixing or using of colour-coded equipment, can have a significant impact on disease spread.

HEALTH MONITORING

Veterinary assessments at slaughter include monitoring for pneumonia, pleurisy, pericarditis, and milk spots, providing a broader picture of overall herd health. Rope samples are collected on-farm to test for influenza A and influenza B. All participating farms are retested annually. If a farm's PRRS status changes, it is moved to the appropriate protocol to ensure the correct measures are applied.

LOOKING AHEAD

By combining coordinated vaccination, structured testing, and targeted biosecurity improvements, the PRRS project represents a comprehensive approach to disease control. As the programme progresses, it has the potential to improve herd health, enhance farm profitability, and strengthen the resilience of the Irish pig sector. If successful, the project could be expanded across the rest of the RoI, enabling a coordinated, all-island approach to PRRS control.

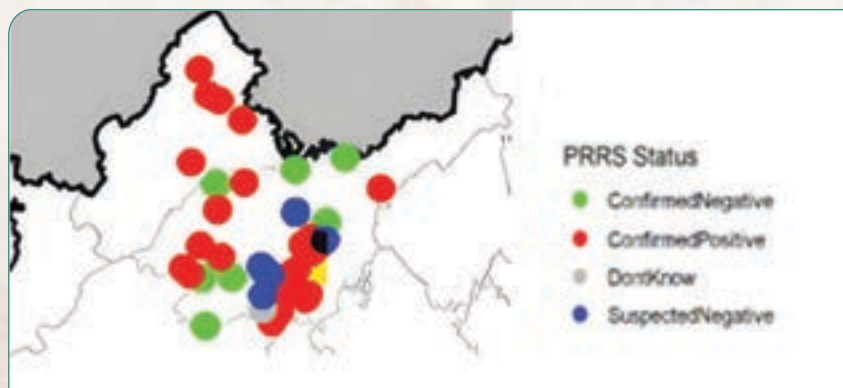


Figure 4: PRRS prevalence in the border counties.

SALMONELLA IN IRISH PIG PRODUCTION WAS THE FOCUS OF A RECENT ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND (AHI) WEBINAR, WHICH FEATURED A PANEL DISCUSSION MODERATED BY DR CARLA GOMES, AHI'S PIG HEALTHCHECK PROGRAMME MANAGER. HERE, SHE SHARES THE TOPICS COVERED AND THE MAIN TAKEAWAYS

MANAGING SALMONELLA IN IRISH PIG PRODUCTION

Salmonella organisms are a group of bacteria that cause salmonellosis, a disease that can affect both animals and humans. Salmonella organisms can live in the digestive tract of a wide range of mammals (including people), birds and reptiles, and are present worldwide. Pigs are a significant source of these organisms.

Salmonella organisms are shed in the faeces of infected pigs. Pigs can get infected from direct exposure to the faeces of infected pigs or indirectly by consumption of feed or water contaminated with the organism. The organism survives drying for months, and infection can arise from dust containing dried organisms. It can be spread by:

1. Movement of infected pigs;
2. Contaminated boots and clothing;
3. Contaminated equipment, including transport vehicles;
4. Contaminated water and feed; and
5. Rodents, birds and insects.

IS SALMONELLA AN ISSUE IN IRISH PIG PRODUCTION?

This question led to an interesting discussion among panellists and the summarised view was that Salmonella is present on most of the pig farms in Ireland, but that it causes only a small number of clinical disease cases. Therefore, most farmers are not aware that Salmonella is present. Salmonella is quite an opportunistic pathogen meaning that when a pig's immune system is depressed, due to other diseases or stress, Salmonella can cause a lot of damage.

The financial penalties imposed by some factories when the Salmonella serology score is over 70 per cent was also highlighted with panel member, Paul Corrigan, stating that this was the reason he started addressing the Salmonella issue on the farm he manages.

ARE ALL SALMONELLA EQUAL?

The panellists raised awareness of the

AHI webinar panellists included:

Prof. Nola Leonard, a professor of vet microbiology, just recently semi-retired from UCD, with over 20 years' experience in salmonella research in pigs. Nola is leading the Salmonella research project.

Dr Edgar Garcia Manzanilla, the head of pig and poultry department at Teagasc.

Dr Aonghus Lane, a poultry vet working at St Davis poultry team with experience in Salmonella outbreak investigation, depopulation, control and preventive strategies.

Dr Paul Lawlor, a pig vet practitioner working at Agrihealth for the last seven years.

Sean McGlynn, the managing director at Kiernan Milling with more than 20 years' experience in nutrition for pigs and poultry.

Paul Corrigan, the farm manager of one of the farms that is doing interventions for Salmonella.

public health side; Salmonella affects humans and causes severe disease in immunocompromised people. The ability to trace back to the origin of the outbreak can lead to bad publicity for the pig industry, also. The webinar addressed the many strains (serotypes) of Salmonella that can affect human health, but the serious serotypes, *Salmonella typhimurium* (ST) and monophasic *Salmonella typhimurium* (mST) are the two most associated with the consumption of pigmeat. They can also be transmitted to humans by contact with pigs or the pig farm environment. A further issue is that most ST and mST strains isolated from pigs and pork products display multiple drug resistance (they are resistant to at least three and usually more antibiotics) and are very difficult to treat. Furthermore, there are cases of people who get exposed to Salmonella through contact with the pig farmers and their pig workers. So, if there are resistant strains on farms, a plan must be put in place to control Salmonella.

SEROLOGY VERSUS BACTERIOLOGY

Panelists clarified that serology involves looking for antibodies in the animal – serum taken from blood from the pigs or meat juice from the factory. It is a retrospective test to see if the pigs have been exposed to any kind of Salmonella. A positive serology in the factory tells you that in previous months – maybe three to four – pigs were exposed to Salmonella.

If your issue with Salmonella is at weaning, you could easily have pigs that have a positive serology into second stage and early finisher, but by the time they get to the factory they can be negative. If you're experiencing issues early on and then your pigs are re-exposed in the finisher unit to Salmonella, then the factory can get very high readings on serology.

SEROLOGY SPIKES

When looking at spikes in the serology score, you must look retrospectively and see if you can identify changes that could have led to those spikes. Such changes do not just relate to management, type of feed, or other farm changes, but can also include changes in weather that can cause respiratory disease, for example. A pig with a low immune response due to other diseases or stress factors is easier to be colonised by Salmonella and develop antibodies to it.

BACTERIOLOGY

Bacteriology includes taking samples post-mortem, or from dung, and trying to grow the Salmonella itself, which can then be identified. This is very important for mapping out vaccination strategies or determining treatments. The other very important information coming from bacteriology and culture is the ability to test different antibiotics against the Salmonella present on the farm. This is hugely important due to antibiotic resistance already mentioned, especially if there are clinical cases on the farm.

From a clinical and public health perspective, it is important to find out what strain of Salmonella is present, and bacteriological testing is acknowledged as the more accurate way to confirm this.

CONTROL OPTIONS FOR SALMONELLA

An update was provided on an ongoing Salmonella research project involving farms that are positive to ST and farms that are positive to other Salmonellas. Interventions – designed by the farmers with their advisory team (vet, nutritionist, Teagasc advisor, etc.) – are happening on half of the farms in the project. The research team facilitates the discussion, and all agree a plan for controlling Salmonella on that farm and interventions are unique to these farms.

The project started second-year sampling recently and has seen improvements in some farms. The farm managed by Paul Corrigan is part of the research project.

He explained what they are doing:

- ▶ Improving hygiene from the farrowing area to the fattening unit, which is a challenge during wintertime.
- ▶ Implementing a one-way pig flow including keeping staff in their own areas.
- ▶ Water quality – testing water in each quarter and using ultraviolet (UV) lighting and chlorine for treating water.
- ▶ Enhancing communication with staff – explaining to staff why, how, and the results.

Paul explained that the interventions on his farm were cost effective; over the past two years, growth rates have improved dramatically, he said.

WATER QUALITY

Improved water quality was also discussed, and several methods were shared about how to improve water quality from a microbiological point of view – chlorine, UV

lights, hydrogen peroxide, chlorine dioxide, filtration, reverse osmosis, etc. Water quality is critical to control Salmonella, along with *Escherichia coli* and other bacteria and viruses. UV light is a fundamental part of water treatment on farms. However, its effect is not persistent. It treats the water at the point where the UV light is but, for example, if there is presence of biofilm or contamination, be it in a storage tank or even through the actual drinking system, then that UV light won't have any persistent effect further down the line. It will reduce the contamination at the point of introduction of the water on farm, but afterwards there's no persistent effect of it. Therefore, you need to complement it with a treatment such as chlorine, hydrogen peroxide, or chlorine dioxide to have a residual effect.

ORGANIC ACIDS AND FEED

During the webinar, it was pointed out that poultry feed, under the Bord Bia quality scheme, must be heat-treated to 80 degrees for four minutes for food-safety purposes. This does not apply for pig feed. On the pig side, the focus tends to be on gut health. Wet feed is better than dry feed in terms of salmonella. With wet feed, you are feeding a meal that is coarser and, therefore, has a slower passage through the pig's gut, and there is a better chance of the Salmonella being exposed to the low pH of the stomach for longer. Using organic acids in the feed has become extremely popular over the last couple of years. Organic acids also decrease the pH at stomach level and, therefore, increase the chances of Salmonella being killed in the stomach.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

The webinar highlighted the need for a higher standard in cleaning and disinfection as we move away from antibiotics usage. It heard that poor standards can be observed on farm walks. Typically, new staff members are expected to know how to clean and disinfect properly, and employing people who have worked on other farms does not mean they have good standards. There should be a very big focus on making sure you are using the right product at the right concentration for the right conditions and the right disease. And allowing for adequate drying time is a must.

VACCINES

There are two vaccine options available for

Salmonella: dead or live vaccine. They work well on farms with clinical cases to the point where antibiotics can be removed. Both breeding animals and the piglets can be vaccinated.

If the live oral vaccine is used, then no antibiotics can be given for five days before and after the administration of the vaccine, otherwise you kill the vaccine. The strategy for vaccinating breeding animals aims for the sow/gilt to shed less salmonella in the farrowing house, which is where the piglets will pick it up. With the stress of farrowing and producing the milk, sows infected with Salmonella start shedding substantially more salmonella than before farrowing. If we can reduce all this shedding, we'll reduce the number of bacteria that piglets will be exposed to. Vaccination of sows will also increase the levels of antibodies in sow's colostrum for the piglets.

However, a vaccine alone is not going to fix the Salmonella problem on your farm. If your hygiene isn't right, if your sow is in bad

condition, if there is a lot of stress at weaning, the vaccine won't achieve the desirable results.

SOLID FLOORS AND SALMONELLA

Older types of solid floors used in some piggeries are difficult to clean, and they accumulate more manure. Pigs raised on these floors are at greater risk of developing salmonella. The solid floor that is in place at the new pig facility at Teagasc Moorpark, the webinar heard, is a modern solid floor with scrapers and designed in a very different way to improve the cleanliness of the pigs.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Human behavioural change can make a big impact on pig farms, the webinar heard. Aonghus Lane advised using a three-pronged approach: knowledge, skill, and motivation. You need to inform people about why they're doing it (knowledge), show them how to do the task (skill), and then actually watch them to make sure that it's been done properly, or

that the Salmonella results are showing an improvement (motivation).

KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Do the basics right: change footwear, have good handwashing facilities, limit the movement of people and equipment within the farm, improve water quality, enhance vermin control, promote good cleaning and disinfection protocols.
- ▶ Vaccination can be part of the control strategy but is not a silver bullet.
- ▶ Having good communication with your staff is essential.
- ▶ Speak with your vets and advisors about developing a tailored programme for your farm.
- ▶ Control measures will have a positive impact on the overall herd performance.

You can watch the recording and learn more about Salmonella at: <https://animalhealthireland.ie/programmes/pig-healthcheck/salmonella-tasah/>

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A HEALTHY GUT IS A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR A PIG'S LIFETIME PERFORMANCE. HERE EMMA SARGENT, SWINE VETERINARY TECHNICAL MANAGER, MSD ANIMAL HEALTH DISCUSSES THE IMPACT THAT ILEITIS HAS ON PIG DEVELOPMENT, ITS CAUSES, AND IMPORTANTLY, WAYS TO STAVE OFF THIS DIGESTIVE DISEASE

BUILDING LIFETIME PERFORMANCE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

During the first weeks of life, piglets' digestive and immune systems are still developing. Challenges such as stress, dietary and environmental changes at weaning time can affect appetite, damage the gut lining, and disrupt the microbiome, making it a high-risk period for digestive disease.

Promoting gut health during this window is therefore, crucial to ensure nutrient uptake, build immune resilience, and prevent long-term production losses. If gut health is compromised at any stage, feed efficiency suffers – meaning the pig won't achieve expected growth rates and days to finish will be increased.

POST-WEANING ILEITIS

Ileitis means inflammation of the ileum, which is the lower portion of the small intestine, responsible for nutrient absorption. It is one of the most common digestive diseases in growing pigs and is caused by the *Lawsonia intracellularis* bacteria. Clinical signs commonly occur in weaned pigs from six to 20 weeks of age, appearing as diarrhoea

or faecal looseness, often grey or pasty in appearance. Some pigs may have subclinical infection, meaning they display few external signs but are affected internally. Most pigs will recover from the visible signs of infection; however, they continue to eat and absorb less from their diet. This affects development and contributes to lower-than-expected average daily weight gain (ADWG).

Given that feed accounts for over 70 per cent of the cost of pig production, the economic cost of ileitis to farmers is significant. The reduced nutrient absorption caused by ileitis can compromise performance by reducing ADWG, impacting feed conversion ratio (FCR), and causing wastage of expensive additives like amino acids. US research has estimated losses roughly equivalent to €5 to €15 per pig, depending on the age of pigs when infected and the severity of the disease.

LONG-TERM DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS

Although ileitis is commonly associated with scour in weaned piglets, the long-term damage to gut integrity persists for the rest of the pig's life, affecting ADWG and FCR

right up until slaughter. These lasting effects can be seen on post-mortem exam, where thickening of gut folds and ridges can easily be seen and felt in diseased ileums. Within groups of finished pigs, it's common to see a wide range of severity, and this may explain why batch unevenness is a common feature of subclinical ileitis.

Affected pigs are also more susceptible to secondary infections like *Brachyspira* and *Salmonella*, due to immune suppression and disruption of the gut microbiome. This is a growing area of research, with recent publications suggesting that effective vaccination against ileitis may support a better balance of gut bacteria, making it harder for other pathogens to multiply.

CONTROL MEASURES AND VACCINATION

Farmers can improve general gut health across the herd in conjunction with both their vet and their nutritionist. Particular attention should be paid to weaning management and water quality. Hygiene across the unit is essential, as most digestive diseases are transmitted via infected faecal matter.



GIVEN THAT FEED ACCOUNTS FOR OVER 70% OF THE COST OF PIG PRODUCTION, THE ECONOMIC COST OF ILEITIS TO FARMERS IS SIGNIFICANT

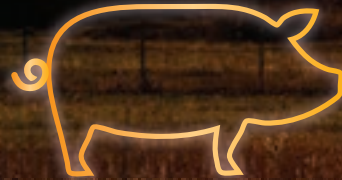
Your vet can test for specific pathogens and recommend treatment methods or vaccination accordingly. While there is much still to learn about pig gut health, we do know that protection against ileitis gives substantial, long-lasting benefits. Field trials have demonstrated increases in ADWG by an average of 57g and reductions in FCR from 2.47 to 2.21 in pigs vaccinated with Porcilis Lawsonia compared to unvaccinated pigs. A recent study in a British indoor farrow-to-finish unit without obvious clinical signs of ileitis showed that the vaccine reduced bacterial shedding, improved carcass quality and growth, and led to a lower prevalence of tail biting. The vaccine can be given by intramuscular injection or intradermally using the IDAL vaccination device. A single dose can be given from three weeks of age and gives 21 weeks of immunity to protect growing pigs through the fattening stage. Vaccination with Porcilis Lawsonia has been proven to reduce diarrhoea, reduce intestinal lesions and reduce loss of daily weight gain caused by *Lawsonia intracellularis* infection.

It is possible to administer this vaccine at the same time as other vaccines against porcine circovirus, *Mycoplasma hyopneumoniae* and Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) to provide convenient four-way protection against the most significant diseases affecting young pigs.

MORE INFORMATION

Farmers should discuss their vaccination regime with their vet who can also advise on infection control and on-farm biosecurity.

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MESSAGES

- Milk sales down €230 per cow up to May 1. What can you do?
- Targets for May will help.
- Good grass management in June will help.
- Complete the breeding season in June – be very alert to heat detection.
- Make adequate quantities of quality silage.
- Practice good grazing management to minimise calf dosing.
- Prevent skin cancer by adhering to the Five S's protocol.
- Be aware of the June scheme deadlines.



By Matt Ryan

MILK SALES DOWN €230/COW!

- ▶ As if you didn't know, costs are up and milk price is down significantly in 2026 compared with 2025.
- ▶ Milk price for April was down 13-16c/L from 2025 – a massive decrease!
 - ▶ That means that most farmers' milk cheques in April were down over €90 to €110 per cow from 2025.
- ▶ Based on a survey, I find that up to the end of March, milk price, on average, was down from 63.14c/L to 46.9c/L, a drop of 16.24c/L from 2025 to 2026.
 - ▶ As most farmers will sell 800L/cow during the first three months of the year, that means their milk receipts will be down over €130 per cow.
 - ▶ Believe it or not, some farmers got 8-9c/L less than others for their April milk.
- ▶ That means that dairy farmers' milk sales are down over €230/cow by the end of April.
- ▶ I bring this to your attention so that you can make a plan now to manage your finances to year end.

TARGETS FOR JUNE

You are underperforming if you are not achieving the following standards in June:

- ▶ A milk drop of less than 2% to 2.5% from week to week. This is achieved by having adequate, quality, grazing grass.
- ▶ A post-grazing height of 4cm to 4.25cm (use plate metre to confirm).
- ▶ Grazing quality grass (80+% DMD) by grazing covers of 1,300kg to 1,600kg DM/ha.
- ▶ 55% of your annual nitrogen (N) used by the second week of June.
- ▶ Less than 20% of the paddocks have tall grass (dung pads).
- ▶ 80% of your silage made by late June.
- ▶ All slurry tanks empty by late June.
- ▶ Your somatic cell count (SCC) is less than 120,000.
- ▶ Your total bacteria count (TBC) is less than 15,000.
- ▶ 90% of your cows are confirmed in calf by scanning before July 1.
- ▶ All heifers must be in calf.

- ▶ On target to have less than 10% of cows calving in April next year.
- ▶ Use high EBI bulls or short gestation bulls.
- ▶ Cows should be on 1kg to 1.5kg meals; if feeding 2kg, you will be feeding over 900kg in the full year.
- ▶ Calves on weight target, on no meals.
- ▶ In calf heifers must weigh 350kg to 380kg.

GRASS MANAGEMENT IN JUNE

- ▶ The targets for quality grazing grass in June are:
 - ▶ Pre-grazing cover (PGC) 1,300kg to 1,500 kg DM/ha but it depends on stocking rate as per Table 1.
 - ▶ Overall average farm cover (AFC) should be 160kg to 180kg DM/ha
 - ▶ Rotation length should be 20-21 days.
 - ▶ Graze out to 4cm.
 - ▶ Less than 20% tall grass area in paddock.
 - ▶ Allow for grass intakes of 18kg to 19kg DM/cow/day.
- ▶ Based on past PPI yearly data, over 70% of farmers have had too much grass available for grazing in early June, having both high PGCs and AFCs. Options to be considered should be:
 - ▶ Remove paddocks for baled silage or,
 - ▶ If badly grazed out, paddocks must be topped low to 2.5 inches so as to set up quality grass for next rotation or,
 - ▶ Defer some paddocks for later cutting for silage or,
 - ▶ Reduce meal feeding levels or.
- ▶ Table 1 gives the target covers to aim at on the grazing area.

Table 1: Pre-grazing covers and average farm covers for various stocking rates.

Stocking rate (SR)	Pre-grazing cover	Average farm
cover (cows/ha)	(SR x 18 x 21 + 100)*	(SR x 180)**
2.5	1,045	450
3.0	1,234	540
3.5	1,423	630
4.0	1,612	720

* Stocking rate x daily allowance x rotation length + post-grazing height

** Stocking rate x recommended cover per livestock unit.

- ▶ If stocking rate is greater than 3.5 cows/ha and assuming growth rate of 65kg DM/ha/day, and a 21-day rotation, then 1kg to 1.5kg meal/cow/day will have to be fed.
 - ▶ If stocked at four cows/ha (grossly over stocked), then you need to feed 3.5kg meal/cow/day to match a growth rate of 65kg/day.
- ▶ If pre-grazing covers (PGC) and average farm covers (AFC) are greater than specified above, then take out the strong paddock for baled silage.
- ▶ If PGC are greater than specified but AFC is below target (some farmers at present), be careful before you take out the strong paddock.
- ▶ The big message is to graze covers appropriate to your stocking rate but never above 1,600kg.
- ▶ Measuring grass, even twice per week, is the most important task in ensuring adequate quality grass availability.
- ▶ As topping is effectively wasting grass or utilising less of the grass grown, we must avoid topping as an option. How?
 - ▶ Many farmers are now using a disc-mower (instead of toppers) to manage their grazing to very high-quality levels by cutting out 'strong paddocks' for baled silage.
- ▶ When the PGC is higher than your target, then that paddock must be cut for baled silage within two to three days of its due grazing date.
 - ▶ This material should be cut, very low at 3.5cm, tedded or left in small rows for wilting, then bagged.
- ▶ This silage will be very good quality:
 - ▶ It will be 80%+ DMD and should be labelled and fed to milking cows when grazed grass is tight and in February after calving.
 - ▶ Aim to have two bales/cow of this material for dry farms and four bales/cow in wet land/long winter situations so as to reduce your autumn-spring meal bill – this has been achieved in May this year by most farmers.
 - ▶ Apply 1,000 gallon` s of slurry for every four bales of silage removed.
 - ▶ This material will be nearly as good as meal and will only cost half as much.
- ▶ The following are the nitrogen (protected urea) recommendations for June (two rotations) grass, based on clover content:

	Urea + S (kg N/ha)	Units/acre	Urea (kg N/ha/year)
No clover	28	23	212*
5% clover	20	16	175
10% clover	15	12	150
15% clover	10	8	130
20% clover	Soiled water		105

***Note: Chemical N can be increased to 230kg N/ha/year in paddocks with no clover as long as the whole farm N does not exceed 212kgN/ha/year.**

- ▶ Because of outside parcels of land being understocked, more N than specified here should be applied on the milking platform (MP); but stay within the overall farm N limit of 212kg N/ha.
- ▶ On sulphur-deficient farms, you will get a response of 10% to 50% more grass by spreading 5-10 units/acre of sulphur in June.

FINISH BREEDING IN JUNE

- ▶ You must be on the ball with heat detection in June as a missed heat will cost you €250.
 - ▶ It could be much greater (€800 to €1,000) if it results in the cow not in-calf.
- ▶ This period of reproductive management is all about using the records to guide heat expectations and subsequent actions.
- ▶ If you are having a lot of repeats, the possible causes of the problem may be some or all the following:
 - ▶ Cows are being underfired due to tight grazing, shortage of grass, stemmy grass, letting cows out directly after milking onto 12-hour grazing block or very wet conditions.
 - ▶ Cows are too thin or losing weight.
 - ▶ Bad semen (infertile bull – check in your discussion group if any particular bull is causing more repeats).
 - ▶ Cows under stress due to lameness, mastitis, lack of water, stray electricity (don't underestimate), health issues (IBR, BVD, neospora, leptospirosis, fluke).
 - ▶ Cows are under stress on service day or when the heat was due.
 - ▶ Service procedure was poor (never presume you or your technician are perfect AI men). Over 70 % of repeat service must be between day 18 and 24.
 - ▶ Herd is infertile for the yields expected is a major issue,
 - ▶ Minerals may be a problem (could be iodine, copper, selenium or cobalt).
- ▶ Cows being served in June will calve from March 11 to April 10 next year.
- ▶ Do everything within your power to have all cows in calf in June.
 - ▶ Use short gestation Friesian bulls in June.
 - ▶ Use short gestation Angus or Hereford beef AI bulls.
- ▶ Scan all cows 30 days after mating start date (MSD)
 - ▶ Why? You will identify non-pregnant cows and weak pregnancies. Then, with records you can resynchronise them and they will be bred 10 days later.
 - ▶ This scanning takes place once/week for three week, as follows for an MSD of May 1:
 - ▶ June 6: (37days post MSD) all cows served week one of AI.
 - ▶ June 13: (44 days post MSD) all cows served week two of AI.
 - ▶ June 20: (51 days post MSD) all cows served week three of AI.
 - ▶ Records will help you with this beneficial task, but you need a highly competent scanner.

- ▶ Managing stock bull – I don't recommend them as they are an excuse for opting out of heat detection and carry a huge risk of more cows calving in late April/May (the target for April calving = 10%).
 - ▶ You need one young bull for every 10 empty cows or one mature bull for every 25 empty cows (very expensive).
 - ▶ Rotate bulls every 24 hours.
 - ▶ He must: have had all the necessary vaccines; not be lame; have a footbath on arrival; and be fertility tested.
 - ▶ To avoid the 'lull' in calving after the introduction of the bulls continue AI-ing for 10-14 days after introducing the bull until fewer than two cows/day need to be served by the bull.
- ▶ Vasectomised bulls are very useful, but it is too late now to get one but if you have one he should not be used when more than two cows/100-cow herd/day are on heat.
 - ▶ You must use a chin-ball on him – top up the paint regularly.
 - ▶ Reduce injuries by training him with the heifers.
 - ▶ Remove him when the synchronised group of females are due to repeat.
 - ▶ Young bulls court cows 24 hours before standing heat, marking them on the side – the marking must be on the top of the back.

MAKE ENOUGH SILAGE

- ▶ Because of the long winter, silage pits on most intensively farmed farms were empty going into this year's silage-making season.
- ▶ A lot of high-quality silage was made in May this year but the yield per acre was low. This put pressure on to get heavier second cuts.
 - ▶ We usually get 15-16 tonnes (t)/acre of silage from two cuts of silage. Usually, the first cut is 9t to 10t followed by a light second cut, but it will be reversed this year.
 - ▶ Therefore, it is important to have adequate fertiliser on for the second cut; two to three bags of 0:7:30 and 70-80 units of N. Top up in early June if necessary.
- ▶ The second cut must take place six to eight weeks after the first cut.
 - ▶ Cut it in dry weather; a few days' delay doesn't make much of a difference.
 - ▶ Use an additive if sugars are low. Get a refractometer to confirm sugar levels – co-ops also do same, as does Teagasc.
- ▶ You must have 80% of your silage (first cut) in the pit before the end of June.
 - ▶ In a year of high silage making costs, refrain from making too much baled silage as it is very expensive.

SCHEME DEADLINE DATES

- ▶ **Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) scheme**
 - ▶ **June 6:** application deadline (with a penalty) for BISS.
 - ▶ **June 23:** Preliminary checks response deadline for BISS.
 - ▶ **June 26:** Area monitoring check notifications commence for BISS.
 - ▶ **Nitrates derogation**
 - ▶ **June 15:** At least 50% of the slurry on the holding must be spread before this date.
 - ▶ **Dairy Beef Weighing Scheme**
 - ▶ **June 30:** In order to be eligible for the scheme, calves must be born before this date.
-
- ▶ Over the last few years, we have had fewer fish kills due to silage effluent, let's keep it that way by collecting all effluent. The consequences of being responsible for a fish kill are great.
 - ▶ Bare silage fields provides an ideal opportunity to empty all slurry tanks:
 - ▶ Last real chance to spread large quantities of slurry.
 - ▶ Spread 2,000-3,000 gallons per acre immediately after silage has been cut and apply the nitrogen (65units/acre) six to seven days later (never, ever apply the nitrogen before slurry because N losses will be great)
 - ▶ Dilute slurry in tanks with water to minimise loss of ammonia to the atmosphere and increase the efficiency of nitrogen to grow more grass.
 - ▶ No one should be using a splashplate to spread slurry in this era.
 - ▶ Slurry gas kills without giving you any warning, so be extremely careful when agitating by keeping children, other adults, animals and yourself out of the house during agitation.
-
- ### PREVENT HOOSE/STOMACH WORMS
- ▶ I am not a believer of the 'kill all parasites' solution to parasite control; my approach is to let the animal build up some immunity.
 - ▶ For hoose, you should not dose calves until a few of the strong calves start to cough. Then dose all calves with a white or yellow dose.
 - ▶ This bestows immunity to the calf, and he/she will not usually get hoose again in its lifetime.
 - ▶ For stomach worms, dose all calves in late June/early July with a white or yellow dose, leave them in same field for a few days and then move to aftergrass.

- ▶ As stomach worm infection is predictable, they could get re-infected if they are not kept on clean pastures; that is, fields that didn't have calves grazing yet this year.
- ▶ Rotate them round the aftergrass as long as possible, and no dose will be necessary during this period.
- ▶ If you then practice the leader-follower system with the R2s, there will be no need for a further dose until housing. Having the older heifers in the system will increase growth over the summer 0.2kg/day because the calves will be getting the best of the grass (top of leaf) where no parasites live.
- ▶ If bulling heifers or first calvers show symptoms of hoose (coughing) or stomach worms (sticky dung around tail head) they will have to be dosed.
- ▶ Late or small calves: use the 'buddy-buddy' system to rear them.
 - ▶ Pair two calves together in several cow paddocks and leave them there for the remainder of the summer (10 calves require five paddocks)
 - ▶ They will get a fantastic thrive because they will be eating

fantastic quality grass all the time with no exposure to parasites. Therefore, no dosing or meal required.

FIVE S RULE TO STAY SUN SAFE

- ▶ Skin cancer is a major problem among farmers and the wider Irish community, and so I list the Health Service Executive's (HSE's) SunSmart 5S rule to prevent skin cancer:
 - ▶ SLIP on clothing that covers your skin, such as long sleeves, and collared t-shirts.
 - ▶ SLOP on broad spectrum sunscreen on exposed areas, using factor 30+ for adults and 50+ for children. No sunscreen can provide 100% protection; it should be used alongside other protective methods, such as clothing and shade.
 - ▶ SLAP on a wide-rimmed hat to protect your face, ears, and neck.
 - ▶ SEEK shade, especially if outdoors between 11am and 3pm, and always use a sun shade on a child's buggy.
 - ▶ SLIDE on sunglasses to protect your eyes.

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- 1 Use drift reducing nozzles
- 2 Avoid intersecting watercourses
- 3 Maintain strict buffer zones



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- ▶ Visit www.cancer.ie for information on causes, signs and symptoms of skin cancer.

BITS AND PIECES

- ▶ Water: Cows require 95-200L/cow/day, depending on the moisture content of the feed, the quality of the water, sunshine, and milk yield per cow.
 - ▶ The flow rate should be 14L/cow/hour.
 - ▶ 100 cows require 1,400L/hour (100x14) or 25L/minute.
- ▶ Drought may be affecting some very 'light' soil farmers. What are the options?
 - ▶ Use weather forecasts and draw on your own previous experiences with drought.
 - ▶ Graze down to 400kg DM of an AFC before introducing silage.
 - ▶ Keep the rotation length at 30 days depending on the deficit of grass in the diet from that allocation, introduce more meal and silage.
 - ▶ PKE has been successfully fed in mobile troughs in such situations in the past.
 - ▶ Make sure to graze out to 4cm.
 - ▶ If little or no growth occurred from last grazing, do not apply any N; but wait until rain is forecast.
- ▶ Target weights (kg) on June 1 for replacements must drive your management.

	Cow weight	Holstein Fr	Jersey X
Bulling heifers (R2s)	63%	370	345
Calves (R1s)	23%	135	127

- ▶ Any animal under these weights must be separated out and get priority grass or be fed 1-2kg meal.
- ▶ Dose for worms and move to aftergrass.
- ▶ The IBR annual vaccine may be due in June/July.
- ▶ Consider one of the forage crops listed in table 2 – particularly important for farmers with low levels of winterfeed.

Table 2: Summary of forage crop management

Trait	Kale	Redstart	Swedes	Stubble turnips
Sowing date	May-June	Mid-June/Mid-Aug	Mid-May/June	June, July, Aug
Grazing date	Aug- Feb	Sept-Feb	Oct-Feb	Oct-Feb
Yield (t DM/ha)	6-9	6-8	6-9	3-4
Seeding rate (kg/ac)	1.6-2.0 4.5 if broadcast	3.5-4	0.3-0.4 2.0 if broadcast	2.0 If broadcast
General	Easy to manage Good feed value Weed may be an issue	Ready to graze 90-110 days post sowing Good regrowth	If feeding cattle best to store & feed through diet feeder	Introduce gradually Not winter hardy Roughage + minerals required

- ▶ Change milk liners at 2,000 milkings.
 - ▶ If you have eight rows being milked twice per day, then each liner does 16 milkings per day. Therefore, you will need to change liners after 125 days (2,000 divided by 16) or 4.25 months.
- ▶ Milk recording.
 - ▶ You should now have at least two recordings done.
 - ▶ Make full use of the information to cull chronically infected cows because of the damage they are doing, by spreading infection, to your herd – you need to be clinical on this decision!
- ▶ Clover (the less nitrogen you apply on clover fields (or none at all) the more clover will grow.
 - ▶ It is vital and really important that farmers sow and manage clover so that it is a major part of our grassland farming in Ireland,
 - ▶ Graze out paddocks really well,
 - ▶ In clover-rich fields, to avoid bloat, allow the cows a small area of the paddock when they go out so that they do not 'gorge' themselves with a clover feed, because they will eat all the clover first. Then, allow them the remainder of the paddock.
 - ▶ Let all the cows into the paddock together.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, and the second-best time is now."



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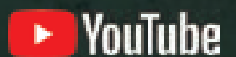


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PRESTIGIOUS DESIGN AWARD FOR NEW HOLLAND TRACTOR

NEW HOLLAND HAS RECEIVED THE RED DOT DESIGN AWARD FOR ITS T7 STANDARD WHEELBASE TRACTOR. THIS IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST RESPECTED INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITIONS FOR PRODUCT DESIGN AND THIS MONTH, IT GETS OUR 'FROM THE CAB' FOCUS

Established in 1955, the Red Dot Design Award is internationally recognised as a benchmark for outstanding design quality. Each year, an independent jury of global design experts evaluates thousands of products based on criteria including innovation, functionality, ergonomics, durability and aesthetic appeal.

'HOLISTIC REDESIGN'

Last month, that jury praised the T7 Standard Wheelbase tractor's 'holistic redesign', combining style, functionality and advanced technology in the highly competitive 180-225hp segment. According to CNH, the T7 Standard Wheelbase stood out for its compact proportions, more dynamic stance and carefully integrated functional elements. These deliver improved visibility,

manoeuvrability and operator comfort, while reinforcing a strong and modern visual identity, the company said.

This tractor also featured New Holland's new dynamic blue colour, which will be progressively introduced across its product portfolio underlining the brand's 'commitment to a distinctive and consistent design language'. Styling details such as the new hood shape, integrated cab access, LED lighting and refined rear design blend aesthetics with practical benefits for everyday farming operations, according to New Holland.

DESIGN LANGUAGE

Commenting on the win, industrial designer at CNH, Alessio Cadorla said: "When designing the T7 Standard Wheelbase, our goal was to give the tractor a strong,

instantly recognisable presence that reflects both strength and precision. We built on the 'connective flow' design language first introduced on our combine harvesters, translating fluid, sinuous lines into the tractor's volumes and surfaces. As the design moves toward the front, those flowing forms become sharper and more assertive, expressing energy, control and technological confidence. The result is a bold, modern design that looks purposeful and precise, and remains unmistakably New Holland."

BEYOND APPEARANCES

Beyond its appearance, the T7 Standard Wheelbase integrates design with performance-enhancing solutions: a new front axle improving ride comfort and reducing the turning circle, a redesigned Horizon cab with SideWinder armrest for intuitive control, and transmissions that deliver class-leading efficiency – including the T7225 Dynamic Command, which set a best-in-class DLG PowerMix fuel efficiency benchmark.



WINNING A RED DOT SIGNIFIES EXCELLENCE NOT ONLY IN FORM, BUT ALSO IN PURPOSE-DRIVEN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

RED DOT DESIGN AWARDS WERE GIVEN TO TWO OTHER CNH TRACTORS:

What: Case IH Puma series.

Why? Significantly enhanced cab environment designed to support long working days. Improvements include easier access, revised interior styling, increased storage and upgraded in-cab displays, all developed to enhance operator comfort, and everyday ease of use. Externally, a redesigned hood and lighting package improve forward visibility, while new LED fender taillights integrate safety with a distinctive visual signature.

What: The Steyr Cervus CVT, the brand's first 400+ horsepower tractor.

Why: Distinctive new styling that incorporates practical features such as easy service access and an advanced lighting concept, including high intensity hood and taillights. The Steyr logo is seamlessly integrated into the rear lights, while daytime running lights complete the modern, unmistakable design.



NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

TRACTOR RUNS DESERVE OUR SUPPORT

Well readers, here we are, halfway through 2026 already. They say time flies when you are having fun. That's an interesting statement! There hasn't been much fun in the farming and contracting sectors in the first six months; they have been punctuated by sit-ins, pickets, protests, blockades, interventions, meetings, no meetings... and on it goes. Things seem to have calmed down for the moment and as I pen this article, silage mowers and wagons fly by the gate, sprayers are in the field, dealers' counters are busy. Is it a calm before another storm? Or maybe it's the realisation that there is no money to be made on a picket line. Tractors make money when they are in the field, not parked up in the yard - or on O'Connell Street!

And speaking of tractors, June is the month we commence our search for the Tractor of the Year. The preliminary rounds start with manufacturers presenting their tractors, over three days, to a panel of 25 jury members from around Europe. I am the sole Irish jury member and I am really looking forward to joining fellow machinery editors on the panel this year! Stay tuned for updates over the summer. Another important function of tractors is their place within rural communities' tractor runs. Far from these being a catwalk of sorts for local machinery enthusiasts, these events are crucial fundraisers for crucial services and charities. I am looking forward to our own Fisherstown Tractor Run taking place in Co. Laois on July 5, where I will, once again, be the resident auctioneer. The gavel won't know what hit it, my friends! While many runs are going strong, I hear anecdotally that some are not, while others are postponed - environmental considerations and the price of fuel are just some of the things that are taking a toll. I recently chatted to Fisherstown Tractor Run's Willie Walsh about this. When they started out, tractor numbers were in single digits; now, however, north of 300 tractors and trucks take part! What are the interest levels like this year, I ask. He says they may be down 10 per cent, or so, on tractor and truck numbers but it's an important fundraising event as it all goes to cancer charities in the area. Tractor runs are so much more than a fun day out for all the family. I have heard suggestions in various camps for runs to adapt and become a tractor display instead - the tractors come out on the day as usual but they park up somewhere. For the Fisherstown organisers, however, it is a full run or nothing.

My good friend, Jim O'Mahony is a well-known machinery rep in Cork, and is chair of the long-running Kilbrittain Tractor Run which raises money for autism support services. This is the single biggest tractor-only run in Ireland, I believe; more than 500 tractors (no trucks or cars) travel to Cork from all over the country in the middle of winter to support. Jim was not behind the door when it came to the importance of these runs. They provide badly needed funds for projects - some of which are awaiting Government backing and approvals, and we know what that means.

These events are also part of the wider fabric of the rural community. They provide a place for people to meet and socialise. There are young men and women that don't lift a hurl or kick a ball but they do lift a bonnet, they build an engine, restore a gearbox, and refurbish their tractors with pride. The tractor run is their version of a county final, and they deserve their day, too. It would be a sad day should these events ever stop - for whatever reason. We must strive to hold onto our traditions and pastimes and ways of life but we must adapt, too; that is the secret to our success. Until next month, farm safely,



John Deere's 500R sprayer.

A SHOW DEBUT FOR JOHN DEERE'S 500R

John Deere's 500R sprayer makes its first appearance at Cereals this month.

The self-propelled machine, unveiled in 2025, travels to Diddly Squat in June to take part in Sprays and Sprayers Arena demonstrations, as well as lining up alongside the 300M and R975i on the John Deere stand. Ireland, and the UK's, largest arable farmers and contractors are expected

to extract the most value from the 500R, which has been developed to meet the needs of those looking for the ultimate in cab comfort, spray accuracy, droplet quality and precision telematics, said John Deere. The 550R and the 540R have tank capacities of 5,000L or 4,000L respectively. Both have the option of a 30m or 36m steel boom – capacity and boom span are the only key

differences in what is otherwise two almost identical standard specifications. Chris Wiltshire, John Deere's tactical marketing manager for the UK and Ireland, said the sprayer won't be the only new piece of equipment this year. Over the past 18 months, John Deere has launched a huge array of new products, including, most recently, its 8R high-horsepower machines. The flagship X9 combine, which delivers an average of 45 per cent more capacity across all crop types with no sacrifice in grain quality – all while using 20 per cent less fuel – leads the harvesting line-up on the stand, alongside the 6M and 6R Series tractors. Attendees can learn about John Deere's See & Spray technology, as well as the subscription-based Precision Essentials package, which allows operators to see the benefit of precision technologies without having to purchase the equipment outright, unlocking a simple, scalable way to introduce guidance and automation onto farms.

The fertiliser spreader Polaris

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LEMKEN the precision connection



Tom Murphy
Professional Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland

AT LONG LAST

Alleluia! After many years of lobbying and campaigning, at long last the Government has acknowledged agricultural contractors and recognises it is in their interest and that of the agri-food sector, to ensure Ireland has a viable contracting sector.

One of the outcomes of persistent and professional campaigning is that eventually you can wear down your target and open the door to meaningful engagement. I am happy to say this is the situation that PAC Ireland finds itself in; after years of lobbying, the Government has, at last, recognised the importance of agricultural contractors. Firstly, this recognition came during the fuel crisis by inviting representatives to attend negotiations, alongside other stakeholders. As I reported in the May issue of *Irish farmers Monthly* PAC Ireland made a very clear case for contractors to be included in any fuel subsidy,

WORKING GROUP

Secondly, the initiation of a farm contracting working group is part of the Programme for Government, with briefing meetings already underway. I cannot stress enough the importance of establishing a forum that can respond to the many issues facing contractors on an ongoing basis, without being passed from pillar to post with no department wanting to take responsibility. The working group has top civil servants attending from various Government departments including agriculture and finance along with representatives from Teagasc. The first meeting took place towards the end of April where the terms of reference acknowledged the pivotal role that agricultural contractors play in supporting the agri-food and forestry sectors. It was acknowledged that contractors are essential to many farming operations and their use also achieves economies of scale, delivering practical efficiencies, allowing the use of modern equipment in a viable way to support sustainable and cost-effective farming.

The terms also referred to the relationship and engagement between contractors and farmers as fundamental in ensuring adherence to best agriculture practice and critical in ensuring the long-term economic,

environmental and social sustainability of the agriculture and forestry sectors.

CHALLENGES

Also taken into account are the many challenges facing contractors, including generational renewal, high cost of machinery, rising fuel costs, unpredictability of weather, and difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled machinery operators.

Finally, the working group will facilitate discussion between relevant stakeholders to consider training, support, and taxation measures to help support agricultural contractors address the issues they currently face in these and other areas.

At the first meeting, PAC Ireland stressed the need for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to establish a contact list of agricultural contractors and carry out a survey of the strengths and weaknesses within the sector. We also asked for access to all machinery grants that farmers can avail of and asked the Department of Finance to crack down on down the black economy, which can do irreparable harm to legitimate contracting businesses.

At long last, through the new working group, we have a direct point of contact within the DAFM, and other Government departments for important issues facing our sector.



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AMAZONE AND CULTIWISE ENTER STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Amazone and CultiWise have entered into a strategic partnership to make smart farming simpler, more precise and more cost-effective for farmers.

CultiWise specialises in AI-driven satellite and drone-based application maps, along with plant recognition technology, making it a strong fit with the Amazone product range, according to a Farmhand spokesperson. The partnership will give farmers easier access to practical digital tools and help them use machinery more accurately and efficiently in day-to-day operations. Both companies will continue to operate independently and develop their own solutions, ensuring flexibility and future-proof compatibility across different machinery brands. CultiWise offers a global online platform that maps agronomic processes using advanced AI models and training data. The company has also been at the forefront of developments such as automated drone flight planning, onboard image processing and automated drone docking systems.

The CultiWise portal.

Through the partnership, job data can be created, transferred and carried out using Amazone technology, reducing preparation time and simplifying workflows for farmers. A key advantage is the integration with AmaConnect, Amazone's cloud-based data platform, which links planning, machine operation and documentation. CultiWise connects directly with AmaConnect for fertilising, sowing and spraying tasks, helping farmers get more from their

machinery with greater precision.

The collaboration also strengthens practical field applications. In crop protection, systems such as AmaSelect and AmaXact benefit from accurate application maps, making precision spraying easier and more efficient. For drilling, variable-rate sowing maps and EasyTram tramline control can now be transferred directly to the AmaTron 4 terminal using the AmaTron Share app, making setup faster and more straightforward.



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FARM PLASTICS BRING-CENTRES UNDERWAY



IFFPG's farm plastics bring-centre programme, which started in late April, is now in full swing. Early results indicate that Irish farmers are on course to exceed the 40,000 tonnes collected last year, which was the equivalent to plastic from 20 million bales recycled. IFFPG will operate approximately 200 bring-centres this year during the period April to November, as well as providing a year-round farmyard collection service

- ▶ Bulk fertiliser & feed bag waste: Remove liners from bulk fertiliser bags and bag separately in an old half tonne fertiliser bag (or similar bag).
- ▶ Small fertiliser & feed bags: Bag separately in an old bulk fertiliser bag (or similar bag). Bulk fertiliser bag liners should be included with small fertiliser & feed bags.
- ▶ Agri-chemical drums: triple rinse and bag separately in an old bulk fertiliser bag (or similar bag).

Farmers should also ensure that farm plastics wastes are securely loaded on trailers before leaving their farmyards so that that no littering is caused on route to bring-centres.

Charges at your local bring-centres

Charges that apply at bring-centres in 2025 are as follows:

Waste Stream	Charge (€)
Wrap & sheeting	€60 per half tonne with the label code
Netting & twine	€10 per half tonne sized bag
Bulk fertiliser & feed bags	€10 per half tonne sized bag
Small fertiliser & feed bags	€10 per half tonne sized bag
Agri-chemical drums	€10 per half tonne sized bag

The label code is provided by retailers to farmers to prove that they purchased levied product. IFFPG will again be implementing strictly its label code traceability system at all bring-centres, with farmers who do not present valid codes on proof of purchase running the risk of being double charged. While IFFPG accepts both cash and cheques at bring-centres, credit/debit card payments are preferred in the interests of increased efficiencies at collections.

What happens to farm plastics waste?

IFFPG has a policy of recycling all farm plastics waste collected from Irish farmers. Last year, 64% of plastics were recycled at Irish facilities and in doing so IFFPG met their intake requirements in full. The remainder was exported to facilities located elsewhere in Europe.

Locating your local bring-centre

Farmers can locate their local bring-centre by visiting www.farmplastics.ie and clicking on the bring-centre link, which shows all bring-centres available on a per county basis. Farmers are also free to use bring-centres in nearby counties if this is more convenient. IFFPG also text messages all farmers on its database in advance of their local bring-centre. Any farmer who currently do not receive a text message, should contact IFFPG at Tel. 01 408996 or email info@farmplastics.ie to provide their contact details.

Preparing to use your local bring-centre

Farmers can recycle the full range of farm plastics waste at IFFPG bring-centres. Advice for preparation of farm plastics waste in advance of delivering them to bring-centres is as follows:

- ▶ Wrap & sheeting waste: Place loose on a trailer free of any noticeable contamination,
- ▶ Netting & twine waste: Bag separately in an old half tonne fertiliser bag (or similar bag.)

FARM PLASTICS RECYCLING BRING CENTRES



RECYCLE YOUR FARM PLASTICS FROM €60 PER HALF TONNE WITH A VALID LABEL CODE ON PROOF OF PURCHASE.

What else can you recycle? (A-D: Only €10 per ½ Tonne Bag)

Categories A-D can be recycled in used Bulk Fertiliser Bags (1/2 Tonne Bags) with liners removed.

A

NETTING & TWINE

B

BULK FERTILISER/ MEAL BAGS (Remove Liners)

C

SMALL FERTILISER/ MEAL BAGS (Incl. Bulk Liners)

D

DRUMS (Must Be Triple Rinsed)

CATEGORIES B-D SUPPORTED BY **REPAK** Business funding recycling

- ! To help curb the illegal trade, farmers will be charged double unless they present a valid label code on proof of purchase.
- Obtain a valid label codes on proof of purchase from your local retailer (Coop, merchant or contractor).

BRING-CENTRE JUNE DATES

OPENING TIMES: 9AM-5PM (UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED)

FARMERS SHOULD PROPERLY SECURE LOADS WHILE TRANSPORTING PLASTIC TO PREVENT LITTERING.

CLARE	GALWAY	LOUTH	WATERFORD
Caher, Anthony McNamara's (V94PF74), Sat 27th June	Gort Mart, Tues 2nd June	Townrath, Drummonds Ltd, Tues 2nd June	Newtown, Walsh's Yard (Beside Newtown Ballydurn GAA), Wed 10th June
Ogonnelloe GAA, Mon 29th June (Hrs 9-4pm)	Athenry Mart, Fri 5th June	Knockbridge, Drummonds Ltd, Tues 9th June	Dungarvan Mart, Fri 12th June
CORK	Loughrea Mart, Tues 9th June	Ardee, Drummonds Ltd, Thur 11th June	Gaultier Tirlan, Mon 15th June (Hrs 9am-1pm & 2pm-4.30pm)
Castletownroche Car Boot Sale Yard, Tues/Wed 2nd & 3rd June	Portumna Mart, Thur 11th June	MEATH	Kinsalebeg, James Leahy Quarry, Glistinane, Tues 16th June
Castleyons Tirlan, Thur/Fri 4th & 5th June	Ballinasloe Mart, Tues 16th June	RAROSMART	Tooraneena, Pat Ahearne's Timber Yard (E91X090), Wed 17th June
Killeagh, Walshs Sand & Gravel, Finisk (P36YX31), Mon 8th June	Mountbellew Mart, Thur 18th June	ROSCOMMON	Lismore, James Leahy Quarry, Kilahalla (P51KH9C), Fri 19th June
	KERRY	Ballyleague GAA, Thur 25th June	
	Listowel Mart, Mon/Tues 29th & 30th June	Castlereagh Mart, Tues/Wed 30th June & 1st July	
	LIMERICK		
	Kilfinny, Lynch's Quarry, Adare, Fri/Sat 26th & 27th June		

All dates/sites on www.farmplastics.ie or Call 01 408 9966

IFFPG uses your data only for the plastic recycling process. Email info@farmplastics.ie or call us at 01 408 9966 for information on the protection of your data.

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A TRACTOR THAT TICKS ALL THE BOXES

THIS MONTH, NOEL DUNNE VISITED LAOIS FARMER, JAMES DUFFY, WHO OPERATES STORES-TO-BEEF, AND SHEEP ENTERPRISES ON AN 80-ACRE FARM IN BALLYADDEN. JAMES ALSO WORKS OFF FARM WITH HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, PAUL O'CONNELL, A LARGE-SCALE TILLAGE FARMER. THE STAR ATTRACTION OF THIS MONTH'S FARM VISIT IS JAMES'S DEUTZ FAHR 5125, A VERSATILE 120HP MIDSIZE TRACTOR THAT IS FAVOURED BY LIVESTOCK FARMERS. JAMES IS A FAN OF UNCOMPLICATED BUT SOLID WORKHORSE MACHINES, WITH A GOOD LOADER, AND THIS DEUTZ FAHR TICKS ALL THE TRACTOR BOXES. JAMES AND HIS FATHER, FRANK, ALWAYS HAD A GOOD LOADER TRACTOR IN THE YARD, STARTING OUT WITH ZETOR AND THEN MOVING ONTO URSUS, BEFORE DEUTZ WAS THE TRACTOR OF CHOICE, A DECISION HE CAME TO WITH THE HELP OF FRANCIS YOUNG, FROM YOUNGS GARAGE IN PORTARLINGTON

▼ James Duffy pictured at his farm in Co. Laois.



▲ James is a big fan of loader tractors, and all his previous tractors came complete with loaders, also. The tractor mostly does yard work, so this suits the system on James's farm. He started out with the Zetor 5 Series in the late eighties, then changed to Polish tractor manufacturer, Ursus, in 2014.



▲ The spacious cab and easy access to controls are a big plus for James, as is the excellent visibility both when working in tight spaces, and when using the loader. As a compact tractor, James says everything is at his fingertips.

▲ James says there is a vast difference between some of his older tractors and the Deutz 5. It is an uncomplicated tractor ideal for working with livestock. He says: "I looked at other brands when I was changing but I wasn't mad about the cab layouts and controls."



◀ Deutz makes daily or weekly checks easy to complete - again, 'uncomplicated' has real appeal for James. He says: "It has a great engine and transmission. We have gone from a 90hp Ursus to a 120hp Deutz, which is a big jump in the power, but it was the right decision."



▶ The back end of the tractor comes with ample spool valves for James's requirements, which primarily revolve around mowing, and spreading slurry, dung and fertiliser. James comments: "I work off farm myself and I am often under pressure, so I just want to hook up and go and get my own jobs done."



▶ As with the all-round cab visibility, James finds the rear view great for quick attachments of trailers and tankers, etc. He says: "Having a clear view out the back when mowing is great."



▶ The Deutz is an impressive 'pocket rocket' of a tractor - compact, non-complicated and versatile - and although it was a step jump in price, James says it was totally worth it. He will have a good trade in when he goes again, he adds

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Denis Drennan
President ICMSA

CAP: WHO AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

Very recently, the ICMSA advanced our definition of what should constitute an 'active farmer'. We think that the most practical way of defining that must be via stocking rates, and we have deliberately advanced a definition that has an active farmer as someone with a stocking rate of at least one livestock unit (LU) per hectare (ha). It's fair to say that our definition has not been met with universal welcome, and we are always interested in hearing countering arguments – some will be valid, some will not. But we will listen respectfully and then respond. The only precondition we would ask people to note before they make a judgement on our definition is that they go back and see who and what Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was set up for.

THE JOURNEY

If everything is a journey – and CAP certainly is – then it's vital to know from what point the journey began and for what purposes. CAP was designed to bridge the gap between what the populations of the great European cities wanted to pay for their food and what the producers of that food the farmers, required in order to continue producing that food. In the decades after 1945, there was massive migration to the ruined cities that needed to be rebuilt and there was a recognition on the part of individual governments and the early EEC that getting adequate amounts of food into those cities at affordable prices was the indispensable element. CAP was invented to establish food security and to bridge the gap between the 'cheap food' policy at retail level and the real costs of producing that food and keeping sufficient

farmers on the land to keep the food going into the cities. That's not a matter of opinion or interpretation; it's a matter of historical record.



THE IRONY IS THAT THE 'GREEN' LOBBY WOULD ARGUE THAT IT ISN'T WORKING FOR THEM EITHER AND THEY, TOO, SEE THAT CAP IS FALLING BETWEEN TWO STOOLS

STUMBLING BLOCKS

For just so long as that original purpose and understanding was accepted and acted on, CAP functioned. The problems began – and again, this is a matter of record – when the EU decided that the handiest way of introducing environmental, biodiversity and sustainability targets and restrictions was via CAP. What followed – and is still ongoing – was clumsy policy 'bolt-ons' and 'retrofitting' that effectively cancelled out the original purpose and mechanism and has left the EU floundering on affordable and sustainable indigenous food production and attaining emissions-lowering targets. CAP was a special purpose vehicle designed to support food producers and 'top up' their income through direct supports in order for high quality food to be made available to urban and suburban populations at affordable prices. As the environmental 'bolt-on'

requirements were added, its effectiveness in meeting that original aim has declined and become degraded to the point of non-existence. The irony here is that the 'green' lobby would argue that it isn't working for them either and they, too, see that CAP is falling between two stools: support for food production and attaining environmental targets. It isn't fulfilling either function and is falling short on both.

DIRECTION

The ICMSA's response to that dilemma is very simple. We were here first! The CAP was designed for the farmers producing the food that fed those original urban and suburban populations. That was its original purpose, and that is still the purpose for which it is most suitable. In fact, and considering the highly combusive and uncertain international political situation, we might need to 'double-down' on our own internal EU capacity to feed ourselves. The time for dancing around these issues is gone. The ICMSA does not intend to waste time trying to square a circle that can never be achieved. CAP must revert to being a fund that supports food producers through meaningful direct payments and if the EU wants to support people to achieve environmental aims and ambitions then they should introduce a CEP – a Common Environmental Policy – and fund that separately.

The idea that someone with a few beehives and a herd of goats is a 'farmer' in the same sense that someone milking a herd of cows twice daily and back-boning a hugely valuable food resource and export is a fiction and it's a fiction that ICMSA doesn't think we should be peddling anymore.



I WANT TO EAT HEALTHIER, BUT...

MOST OF US WANT TO EAT HEALTHIER AND WOULD LIKE TO LIVE MORE SUSTAINABLY BUT A RECENT EUROPEAN STUDY HAS FOUND THAT THERE ARE OBSTACLES PREVENTING US FROM ACHIEVING THESE THINGS. THIS MONTH'S RURAL LIFE REPORTS ON THIS STUDY

Europe wants to eat better, so why isn't it happening? is the title of a recently published report on how Europeans eat. Published by EIT Food, it provides the most comprehensive picture to date of what food habits Europeans want to change, and why progress to healthier, more sustainable diets remains slow.

The report, which is based on responses from 19,954 consumers across 18 European countries, shows that interest in sustainable eating is steadily declining, falling from 76 per cent in 2021 to 69 per cent in 2025. Today, sustainability ranks behind both health and affordability as a factor influencing food choices.

In practice, fewer than half of Europeans (48 per cent) believe they eat a sustainable diet, and engagement in high-impact sustainable behaviours – such as reducing animal-based products – has fallen. However, generational differences suggest potential for future change. Younger consumers are more open to sustainable food innovation and regenerative

Stats say...

- ▶ 51 per cent of Europeans want to eat healthier, but say lack of affordability and difficulties in breaking old habits is blocking them.
- ▶ Interest in sustainable living continues to decline across Europe, falling from 76 per cent in 2021 to 69 per cent in 2025.
- ▶ The intention-behaviour gap remains, with only 48 per cent of people actually eating a sustainable diet.
- ▶ Europeans are choosing to prioritise health and cost before sustainability when making decisions about food.



TODAY, SUSTAINABILITY RANKS BEHIND BOTH HEALTH AND AFFORDABILITY AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING FOOD CHOICES

motivation exists. These challenges are particularly acute among younger consumers, who, despite higher dissatisfaction, feel they have minimal control over changing their diets. The data suggests that dietary change in Europe is constrained less by awareness and more by structural and financial pressures.

INDUSTRY AND POLICYMAKERS – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The report indicates that accelerating dietary change in Europe will require a more diversified and pragmatic approach from industry and policymakers. For industry and policymakers, this includes:

- ▶ Designing accessible and convenient healthy products;
- ▶ Encouraging policymakers to support affordability through fiscal and structural measures;
- ▶ Connecting sustainability to personal health benefits to drive uptake; and
- ▶ Anticipating that consumers, particularly younger generations, struggle to translate intention into sustained behaviour.

Europe wants to eat better, so why isn't it happening? is the first of four chapters to be published as part of the Trust Report 2026, which focuses on current diets, generational differences, and the structural barriers shaping food choices across Europe.

What is EIT Food?

This report is the first issue of the EIT Food Consumer Observatory's Trust Report 2026. EIT Food is supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union.

agriculture, and are more likely to purchase organic or ethically sourced products. While sustainability may be weakening overall, younger Europeans appear more aligned with long-term environmental values, though they face the most barriers to enacting lasting change.

HEALTH – DOMINANT DRIVER

Across Europe, health remains the dominant driver of dietary change, as more than half of consumers (51 per cent) say they want to eat more healthily, surpassing concerns over affordability or sustainability. Yet, despite this prioritisation, improvements in diet quality remain limited. Europeans recognise the negative health effects of salty, fatty, sugary or processed foods, yet only approximately a third of consumers avoid them. Many Europeans also continue to under-consume

key healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables and fibre, suggesting that intention alone is insufficient to transform eating habits.

INTENTION-BEHAVIOUR GAP

The research highlights a continued gap between what consumers aspire to do and what they can implement in practice. Although many Europeans express a desire to eat more healthily and sustainably – with 51 per cent wanting to eat more healthily and 69 per cent wanting to live sustainably – only a third avoid typically unhealthy foods, and only 48 per cent believe they eat sustainably. The study cites affordability and entrenched habits as the two most significant barriers preventing change and contributing to the intention-behaviour gap. Consumers report difficulty affording healthier options and breaking established routines, even where

A compulsory energy-production programme might involve installing solar panels on every house, farmyard, business premises, shop, and office.



MATT O'KEEFE
EDITOR

DO WE NEED A COMPULSORY RENEWABLE ENERGY PROGRAMME?

It's been 80 years since a compulsory tillage programme was introduced during

The Emergency, otherwise known as World War II. It was introduced to save the country from starvation, or at least from even greater food, especially bread, rationing. Are we in the middle of another emergency, requiring equally drastic measures to safeguard the country? Do we need a compulsory renewable energy programme to provide a dependable, indigenous source of energy in the coming years? It would certainly make sense at some level. While there is encouragement of the development of renewable, indigenous energy resources, there is no compulsion, apart from the much-criticised carbon tax, which inflicts hardship equally on those who can change their energy source and those for whom that is not yet as practical, or viable, a proposition.

WHAT MIGHT THAT LOOK LIKE?

A compulsory energy-production programme might involve installing solar panels on every house, farmyard, business premises, shop, office – in fact, every suitable building in the country. An 80 per cent grant aid would soften the cost imposition, while hugely ramping up our production of renewable energy. A payback to the exchequer to offset the cost might be part of the equation with all excess electricity and/or a certain percentage of production sent free gratis to the national grid for the first five years



A WORD IN YOUR EAR

post installation. The value of that could then be used to pay back the capital and interest on the upfront cost to Government. That's a fair trade off, with building owners having first dibs on the electricity produced and the benefit of a regular payback for surplus production from five years down the line. A daft pipedream or a drastic, radical and realistic response to the developing scenario of permanently higher energy prices and increasingly uncertain supply? Would it be too big a step for our cautious political leadership? They keep saying we are in a time of crisis but show little enough inclination to develop crisis-management initiatives, whether that is in encouraging housebuilding or the construction of an affordable, dependable and indigenous renewable energy supply.

FUNDING MECHANISM

An alternative funding mechanism to fast-forward renewable energy production through a compulsory adoption programme could involve the construction of a dedicated fund sourced from all those personal savings lying around in low or no-interest savings accounts. The lure of a three per cent interest rate might be enough to entice conservative savers to invest in a 'sure thing' with minimal risk and a guaranteed return. An extension of the existing government bank guarantee to cover investments in a renewables fund would be an additional sweetener and provide the ultimate financial solace for risk averse savers. Far better to encourage savers to invest in the country's future prosperity rather than encouraging them to engage in share dealing, where the Government has no remit.

► Rule number one

Government should not tell people what they should do with their own money.

► Rule number two


If Government is going to tell people what they should do with their own money, direct it to good use for the benefit of the country. In the meantime, our finance minister should be far too busy managing the country's finances to have time to spare in advising people to speculate with their savings. He should stop trying to do favours for people who didn't even realise they needed a favour done for them.



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1. Herds with high prevalence of IBR may need to vaccinate calves from 2 weeks of age intranasally.
A second vaccination should be given at 3-4 months of age either intranasally or intramuscularly.
2. Intramuscular vaccination.
3. Cowley DJB et al, Aspects of bovine herpesvirus infection in dairy and beef herds in the Republic of Ireland. Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica 2011, 53:40.
4. Kynotec data February 2025.

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