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DECEMBER 2021



# Sustainable strides: farming for the future

**WILL GLANBIA FARMERS BUY INTO A BUY-  
OUT? JOHN MURPHY ON A NEW ERA FOR  
GLANBIA COOP**

**JOE HEALY EXAMINES THE REALITY OF  
COST CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR THE  
FARMING SECTOR**

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## A new reality for farmers

December usually provides an opportunity to look back at the past twelve months as well as to look forward to the coming year. Focusing only on commodity prices, an end of year report on Irish farming might conclude that the sector is in a relatively good place. Across beef, milk, sheep and grain, prices are well improved on where they were twelve months ago. That fact is both important and positive. It does not tell the entire story of Irish farming, however, because production and other costs have been rising and 2022 will see those cost rises fully impacting on farm profitability. The other costs include environmental compliance demands which are becoming increasingly onerous and will be a significant financial burden on farming in the coming years.

The extended consultative process engaged in by the Minister for Agriculture around the next CAP, as well as an extensive range of ancillary issues including Climate Action, Nitrates Review, Green Deal and Farm to Fork, was welcome. A major criticism of that consultative process is that farmers concerns are not being fully taken into account in the construction of a final agricultural policy. Time will tell as to whether that criticism is justified.

The multi-policy framework for the future of European and Irish farming continues to be constructed with only general indications yet of what the final outcome will look like and how it will impact on farmers. The new CAP, whatever the ultimate make-up, will look nothing like the policy of supporting food production that we were familiar with in the past. The other two policies that, as Joe Healy points out in this issue of IFM, have the potential to be the most influential agri-related programmes seen in our lifetimes, are Farm to Fork and the Green Deal. It may be glib to suggest that we must work with whatever is ultimately imposed on agriculture but that is the reality. When we have expended whatever limited lobbying power farmers still possess, the long-term strategy for every farmer will be to make the best of whatever is imposed on us. Unfortunately, as things stand, many of those impositions look likely to reduce productivity on farms. There is a close relationship between productivity and profitability and the treadmill of constantly improving efficiency factors can only be carried so far, especially when the main drivers of efficiency are being eroded by increased cost and regulation.

As we see across society every day, not everyone is capable of adapting to new realities in life or work and of adopting new life or work skills to allow them to prosper in the novel and often harsh realities in which they find themselves. Farmers are no different and the ongoing transition to a new farming reality will be difficult to manage. Scaremongering can be a useful tool when one is engaged in negotiation and painting the worst possible scenario can often deliver concessions. In the longer term, however, an excessive fear of change and the stress of overthinking what lies ahead can be self-defeating. As has always been the case, farmers will have to adapt in order to preserve their businesses. Farmers have always followed the money and that will continue to be the only viable strategy.

We may not agree with the direction in which farming is being driven, but when the policies are finalised, we will have to make them work to our advantage, as far as that is possible.



- 4 Upfront
- 8 Business News
- 12 Feature: Will Glanbia farmers buy into Buy-Out?
- 14 Interview: Joe Healy on the cost challenges ahead
- 16 Feature: Late lactation management
- 43 Management Hints
- 48 Machinery
- 61 ICMSA
- 62 Farm Safety
- 64 Rural Life
- 66 Very End

### Sustainability Focus

- 22 Minister McConalogue on the Climate Action Plan
- 26 Interview: Pat McCormack, ICMSA
- 28 Green Giants
- 31 Understanding consumer attitudes
- 33 Shaping our future at UCD
- 36 Helping us to reconnect with nature
- 38 Successful performance measures
- 40 Latest research

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## Joe Healy is Cultivate chairman



We carry an interview this month with Joe Healy who was recently appointed as non-executive chairman of Cultivate, the Credit Union loan facility designed specifically for farmers. The appointment was inspired, given Joe's wide experience on various boards including FBD, his previous role as manager of Athenry Mart and his presidencies of both IFA and Macra, not to mention the fact that he is a farmer with a deep understanding of how farm businesses operate. The Credit Union farm loan offering is available in 110 credit union branches around Ireland. With Ulster Bank abandoning the Irish market entirely and the two pillar banks retrenching with branch closures and fewer 'front-of-house' staff, the personalised service from the Irish Credit Unions is welcome. Cultivate offers farmers an alternative means of borrowing money and with loan applications up 50 per cent over the first 6 months of 2021, it is obviously an attractive proposition. Cultivate finance is available for a range of requirements, including stocking loans and working capital, farm building and machinery. The terms and flexibilities of the loan packages as well as the personal service offered are a template for how finance houses should operate. Farmers are recognised as the single most dependable and credit-worthy borrowing cohort in the Irish economy.

## Consumers believe that agriculture is important to the Irish economy

A recent survey by Agri Aware shows that 94 per cent of Irish people are supportive of Irish farming. The Red C Poll also confirmed that 75 per cent of the respondents thought that agriculture is extremely important to the economy. An interesting fact that emerged from the survey was the lack of understanding of farming among schoolchildren with only 11 per cent showing any interest, with the number rising to 16 per cent among young adults.

The data used in the survey was weighted across gender, age, region and social class, to allow for a nationally representative sample based on the latest CSO figures.

Agri Aware is an independent farming and agri-food educational body founded in 1996 by the IFA, Bord Bia, Ornua, FBD and the Irish Farmers Journal. It is chaired by former Macra President Alan Jagoe. According to Alan the survey is regularly commissioned to try and assess attitudes of Irish people towards farming.

While it's good news that Irish consumers, in general, appreciate the value of Irish farming we obviously need to place a lot more emphasis on increasing the understanding of school children, and young people in general, on the important role of farming in food production and protecting the rural environment. The knowledge gap could be bridged by focusing some of the public funding for the Green Schools Environmental Education Programme and Award Scheme on increasing knowledge and appreciation of agriculture and food production in the participating Green Schools. The programme is run by An Taisce. The degree of engagement in the Green Schools Programme is generally far greater in rural rather than urban-based schools.



# Dairy Christmas



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## IFA plans thwarted

As Covid continues to impact heavily on the Irish economy and society in general, the disruption to life and personal liberty is wide-ranging. Cancellations of conferences and limitations on personal interaction have reduced public debate and engagement greatly. We should not underestimate the impact. Teagasc went online with its dairy conference, an understandable and responsible action, even if the alternative is a poor substitute for social engagement. Likewise, the IFA, after girding its loins for a major farm family rally in Dublin, had to rethink its strategy in the knowledge that such an event would be out of step with public health advice to restrict public gatherings and socialising in general. IFA, while it is adamant that there needs to be far greater public awareness of the negative impact of CAP, Climate Action, Green Deal and Farm to Fork on Irish agriculture, recognised that a public demonstration in the Capital was not a viable option at this critical time. Lack of government engagement on critical issues is a particular criticism that IFA is voicing loudly. However, a full Irish breakfast for everyone on Merrion Square might not have delivered the kind of public relations success they desired, given the rampant spread of the covid virus.

The Glanbia Coop proposals are also in the firing line with criticism that there is no opportunity for public debate. In fairness, the Glanbia Coop board has no choice but to engage as far as possible by electronic means. Now that the game is on it is hard to see an indefinite postponement, especially as the €14 million dividend forgone by the Plc would, presumably, be reinstated.

## RDS Recovery & Renewal Appeal

Last year, the RDS wrote to its members asking them to donate monies as the pandemic had reduced the society's income stream, with the cancellation of the Horse Show, Concerts, Exhibitions and Trade fairs. According to the President of the RDS, Professor Owen

Lewis, the Covid-19 Appeal response was overwhelming with members inspired to donate significant funding. This year, the President has once again reached out to RDS members with a Recovery & Renewal Appeal to allow it to continue its philanthropic work programmes. While the sentiment of what the RDS is trying to achieve can be appreciated, surely it's the Irish Government through agencies like Enterprise Ireland or Department of the Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, that should be promoting these initiatives at this time.

The RDS has an incredible history; its role in helping to shape Ireland through the development of the Arts, Agriculture, Equestrian, Enterprise and Science & Technology over nearly 300 years has to be commended. The RDS should continue to promote the core values of the Society. It is noteworthy that the RDS recently headhunted for a Fundraising Executive; the appointee might look to secure fresh funding sources to contribute the organisation's key work.



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Geraldine Ruane, RDS CEO

## FTMTA to hold Farm Machinery show in May



Michael Farrelly, the new Executive Director of the FTMTA, has announced that they plan to hold a two-day event next May 2022. This is good news for the industry, with so many events cancelled this year due to the pandemic. While the actual dates of the show are yet to be finalised, it's encouraging that the FTMTA are planning so well in advance. The show traditionally held in February will be the biggest and best yet, according to the organisers. With covid cases rising throughout Europe, expect to see further cancellations with LAMMA now in doubt. The machinery industry has performed very well throughout the pandemic, with the latest tractor figures for Ireland, showing an 18 per cent increase year-on-year. The show, in May, will allow the industry to showcase the latest in new machinery and innovation across the sector.



## Achieving Replacement Heifer Targets

Maeve Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition

With most spring calving herds, the current focus centres around drying off the main herd and getting set up for the dry period. However, it is important not to forget about the next generation of milking cows – our replacement heifers.

The target for a replacement heifer's first winter period is to achieve a daily liveweight gain of 0.5 - 0.7 kg/heifer/day over the housed period. To achieve this, we must feed heifers accordingly, which will be dependent on the silage quality available to them. With typical silage, a 16% crude protein supplement will be sufficient.

| Silage Quality                               | Poor<br>60% DMD | Average<br>65% DMD | High<br>70% DMD | Very High<br>75% DMD |
|--|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Diet required to achieve 0.5-0.7 kg/head/day | Silage + 3.2 kg | Silage + 2.5 kg    | Silage + 1.4 kg | Silage + 0.7 kg      |

### Underweight Heifers

Ideally, prior to the first winter period, heifers should be weighed to ensure targets are being met to achieve the desired weight at breeding. Thereafter, heifers should be batched according to weight for the housed period.

Underweight heifers are usually harder to get in-calf initially. Heifers that fail to reach target weights before breeding and calving will produce less milk in their first lactation and struggle to go back in-calf.

Lighter heifers below their target weight must be offered a higher rate of concentrate and should be the first group turned out to grass next spring.

| Target Breakdown     | Heifer (kg)  |
|----------------------|--|
| 6 months             | 30% of Mature Weight   |
| 9 months (Housing)   | 40% of Mature Weight<br>(240 kg where mature cow weight is 600 kg) |
| 12 months (Turnout)  | 50% Mature Weight<br>(300 kg where mature cow weight is 600 kg)    |
| 15 months (Breeding) | 60% of Mature Weight<br>(360 kg where mature cow weight is 600 kg) |

### Early Turnout

Research has highlighted that early spring grass can support liveweight gains of up to 1 kg/head/day. Therefore, early turnout is essential with all replacement heifers and prioritising heifers that are behind their target weight is vital. Turning out early has the added benefit of reduced feed costs, particularly in the current volatile market for feed inputs.



## Minister Josepha Madigan launches Agri Aware's Incredible Edibles



Minister Josepha Madigan with the help of (L to R) Monica Tang, Tena Cacic & Vihaan Taneja of Queen of Angels School at the Agri Aware launch of Incredible Edibles 2022 in Airfield Estate Pic: Lorraine O'Sullivan.

Minister for State at the Department of Education Josepha Madigan was on hand at Airfield Estate in Dundrum recently to launch Incredible Edibles 2022. Minister Josepha Madigan commented: "I am delighted to join with Agri Aware to launch the Incredible Edibles healthy eating programme for Primary Schools. It is crucial that we create national awareness about the importance of healthy eating, especially for young people. Nothing trumps the quality of fresh food Irish food. Our standards are second to none. The Incredible Edibles programme empowers students by giving them the knowledge and skills they need to ensure a healthy diet."

The Agri Aware Incredible Edibles programme is a free, healthy eating and growing project that has been running in Irish primary schools since 2008. In that time over 500,000 schoolchildren have taken part in the programme. The initiative has grown to cover 1800 schools nationwide with places available on a first come, first served basis. Participating schools receive free grow packs that contain everything teachers and students need to grow their own fruit and vegetables at school. The project reconnects children with where their food comes from. Incredible Edibles is a hands-on project where the pupils get to grow, cook, and eat the produce themselves.

Alan Jagoe, Chairman of Agri Aware said: "We hope the children who take part in Incredible Edibles will develop a love of locally sourced, quality home grown food. They will also gain an awareness of the importance, the time and effort, and the sense of reward for such endeavours too. This project has grown massively over the last 14 years, that is with great thanks to our 14 sponsors who make that expansion possible."

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## Food Vision 2030 Implementation Meeting

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Charlie McCauley TD, has chaired the first High-Level Implementation Committee meeting of Ireland's new Food Vision 2030 Strategy, which was launched by the Government during the summer.

Food Vision is a landmark strategy for the Irish agri-food sector and has the potential to transform our agriculture, food, forestry and marine sectors in the period to 2030, with sustainability at its core. At the meeting, Minister McCauley said: "Implementation of Food Vision 2030 is under way, with many of its actions already commenced. One immediate priority in the context of our climate ambitions, is to commence work on the important action to determine the sustainable environmental footprint of the dairy and the beef sectors, which must

## ICOS welcomes deferral of new vet prescription rules to 1st June 2022

ICOS has welcomed the deferral of new veterinary rules for prescriptions until the new national online e-prescription system becomes fully operational, following a meeting with the Department of Agriculture. The new measures, requiring that all dosing products and medicated feeds should have a prescription and must be purchased from a trained individual in co-ops, veterinary pharmacies and veterinary practices, will now be deferred until 1st June, 2022.

"This is a reasonable accommodation around our concerns," said Livestock and Environmental Services Executive, Ray Doyle, of ICOS. ICOS had communicated 'alarm' to DAFM regarding the full development and industry integration of the new National Veterinary Prescribing System/database (NVPS) and the fact that the veterinary profession would not be compelled to issue electronic prescriptions on this system on the original proposed date of implementation of 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

"Any transition arrangement where a dual paper/electronic system is in operation would place a significant and unacceptable cost on co-operatives where personnel would require training in two systems. Additionally, co-operatives would not be able to offer farmers alternatives or generic products if paper-based prescriptions were to remain widespread. The absence of an electronic prescription system would have left co-op branches at a competitive disadvantage compared to private veterinary practitioners who may prescribe products unique to their practices," said Ray Doyle. Doyle confirmed his understanding, from the meeting, that the Department of Agriculture and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) would meet over the coming weeks to discuss the offer of generics formulations in addition to alternative products to farmers after a prescription is issued.

be completed by next summer. My Department and agencies will collaborate to bring forward proposals in this regard, including through extensive engagement with stakeholders. It is crucial to recognise that we are starting from a really strong point in terms of our sustainability credentials. Food Vision is upfront about the challenges facing the sector, as well as the opportunities ahead. Crucially, it proposes solutions and charts a pathway to sustainability in all its dimensions – environmental, economic and social. I am determined to fulfil the Food Vision 2030 missions so that we realise the vision of Ireland being a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems, to the benefit of all those in the sector, and particularly our farmers and fishers."

"We are facing into a very exciting decade for our sector, one that is likely to look very different to the one just gone. We are committed to reaching the targets set out in Food Vision 2030 while ensuring we do everything we can to protect and enhance the incomes of our primary producers who are the bedrock of the entire food sector."

## InTouch

### Investing in the future

#### Cathal Bohane, Head of InTouch Nutrition

The autumn back end has been very good on most farms. Mild temperatures and frost being a rarity have allowed continued grass growth as well as manageable under-foot conditions. This has extended the season for many and given a welcome reprieve to a long winter. Of course, it is also important to remember the targets you have set for cows and cattle and maintain them moving forward.

It is an especially important time for youngstock as well as animals such as replacement heifers that need to continue gaining. A 10–20 kg loss of body weight here will have knock-on effects at calving and onto subsequent lactations and fertility. It has been somewhat of a juggling act when housing youngstock over the last while. The mild weather has resulted in warmer temperatures inside, creating a perfect environment for respiratory issues once housed. The arrival of frost now and colder nights should alleviate this and reduce grass covers outside.

Setting targets for these animals is key and working out their starting body weight once housed is the first step. Only very few will be able to estimate the weight, and still, you could be out by that essential 10–20 kg. Some will have access to a weighing scale, which as an investment will more than pay for itself over time with this type of animal alone. More will hire in a third party to weigh, while others might weigh a sample of heifers to train their eye for the others. If we know where we are coming from and where we are going, we can then work out how to get there. For example, if the average heifer is 250 kg and we need this heifer to arrive at 350 kg by May 1, do we have a feeding plan for this?

Start by testing your silage if you have not done so already. Working out the energy and protein level required is vital. InTouch has taken hundreds of silage samples this year, and the average second cut is 69 DMD and 13% protein, which will predominately be used for this stock.

These heifers will need to gain 0.75 kg a day from the beginning of December until turn-out in mid-March, or approximately 100 days. Once outside, they will probably do little for a week or two and, for the month of April, will put on approximately 0.7–0.9 kg per day on grass. This all adds up to approximately 100 kg body weight gain. This will bring the heifer from 250 kg to 350 kg at the point of breeding. Of course, this will depend on the breed, turn-out date, etc. Based on the silage above and for a 0.75 kg weight gain per day, you would be using 2.5 kg of 19–20% protein concentrate with ad-lib silage for this stock. This would be reduced to 1.75–2 kg for a weight gain of 0.5 kg per day.

These animals are the future of the herd and need to be looked after. As outlined, knowing where you are going with them and where you are coming from can go a long way in answering how you are going to get there with them.

## ÓR Real Irish Butter is launched



A new butter brand, ÓR Real Irish Butter has been launched by one of Ireland's leading dairy farming co-operatives, North Cork Creameries. The launch took place on the farm of Mairéad and Morty Lucey, Kanturk, who are milk suppliers to North Cork Creameries. The Luceys also appear on the new ÓR Real Irish Butter website and marketing material, demonstrating the family farming background underpinning the very high quality of the new butter.

ÓR Real Irish Butter is now available for shoppers in SuperValu stores nationwide. It is made using the finest quality, naturally produced milk originating from certified grass-fed cows living on local family farms. ÓR Real Irish Butter uses fresh cream in a gradual churning process to deliver a deliciously creamy, rich, smooth and textured butter for spreading and which also melts perfectly for cooking and baking. "Launching ÓR Real Irish Butter is a natural evolution for our great tasting butter which is truly special because it's produced with fresh milk provided locally from certified grass-fed herds and made in a process that has been perfected by our farmer owned co-operative, across over 90 years of skill and excellence in butter making," said Pat Sheahan, CEO of North Cork Creameries. "North Cork Creameries worked closely with Bord Bia to research, design and develop the new ÓR Real Irish Butter brand, based on consumer insight and the latest market trends where nationally, more shoppers have been switching to butter for its clearly defined natural qualities and particularly so during the pandemic, where consumers have been enjoying more butter for home cooking, bakery and daily use on the family table. Bord Bia's support has been excellent along every step of the way and we're very pleased to recognise that. They saw the potential for our butter to become even more popular and we're confident consumers nationwide will enjoy the taste and quality of this delicious new brand and product."

## Pig Farmers Expect Retailers to Use Bord Bia QA Pigmeat

IFA President Tim Cullinan is calling on all retailers to ensure they are selling Bord Bia Quality Assured Irish pigmeat. "Farmers are concerned about increased costs of production over the past 12 months, and the volume of imported pigmeat on shelves across the country," he said.

He said: "In the lead up to Christmas, it's essential that Quality Assured hams are available. Retailers cannot be discounting ham at the time of year when the demand is highest among consumers." Tim added that a substantial price increase from retailers needs to be passed back through processors to farmers immediately to cover the massive increase in feed costs. IFA Pig Committee Chairman Roy Gallie said: "Pig farmers have had a very challenging year, with rising feed costs and reductions in pig prices. Some farmers are reporting a net loss of €45/kg per pig, which is completely unsustainable". Pig farmers who are home millers of feed and exposed to current markets are reporting cost increases of over €90/t on this month last year. This is a feed cost increase of 30c/Kg Deadweight alone, but all other major costs are increasing considerably too – electricity, gas and oil, labour and transport. Huge losses are being taken on farms, with little respite in sight for producers. Farming is a business activity, and pig farmers will not stay in operation unless they can make a profit. We are calling on consumers to buy Bord Bia Irish produce in your weekly shop and support Irish farmers."

## E-learning with the SEAI Energy Academy

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has launched a free e-learning module for the agriculture sector on the SEAI Energy Academy. Developed in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine, this tailored module 'Energy Efficiency in Agriculture' is aimed at helping farms reduce energy related costs. Energy Efficiency in Agriculture introduces learners to energy use on the farm, highlighting key areas where energy efficiency can be implemented, and the activities you can adopt today to reduce your energy use. Advice is provided for beef, sheep, tillage, horticulture, dairying, pigs and poultry sectors of farming. Once registered you can also access 23 additional e-learning modules which include topics on; Gas and Oil Bill Analysis, Energy Audits, Electric Vehicles, and Solar PV. To join the SEAI Energy Academy visit [www.seai.ie/energyacademy](http://www.seai.ie/energyacademy). Understanding energy use on your farm and implementing energy efficient practices is the first step. Once you start seeing savings you can consider reinvesting those savings in energy upgrades and new technologies. SEAI has financial support available for energy upgrades through the SEAI Community Grant scheme. This grant supports a number of energy saving upgrades including insulation, heat pumps, and solar PV. The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) supports the installation of heat pumps and biomass boilers and may be of particular interest to the pig, poultry, and horticulture sectors.



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New Glanbia Co-op Chief Executive Jim Bergin pictured with Glanbia Co-op Chairman John Murphy



**Matt O’Keeffe** talks to Glanbia Coop Chairman John Murphy about the proposed transaction to buy out Glanbia Plc’s holding in GII, which will transform the Coop’s brand.

Describing the proposal to purchase the 40 per cent holding in GII currently held by Glanbia Plc as “a milestone in the history of Glanbia Coop”, Its chairman John Murphy told Matt O’Keeffe: “The organisation has come full circle. “We started this buy-back of Glanbia’s Irish assets in 2012 and continued through to 2017 with the completion of a 60 per cent ownership share of assets relating to milk processing and agri-business. It was almost inevitable that this final purchase of the remaining assets would happen at some stage and the Coop board has decided to proceed now with that purchase.”

#### Equity and debt

The proposed purchase will involve selling down part of the Coop’s Plc shareholding as well as taking on debt to complete the purchase price as the Coop chairman explains: “The proposal is to have a part equity sale of Plc assets as well as borrowings to make up the price. The exact amount of equity release involved will depend

on share value at the time. We are confident that this equity/debt financing is a prudent approach and the best mix for the Coop. There is a spin-out of 12 million Plc shares to our shareholders proposed as part of the overall package. That will amount to just under €170 million, again depending on the share price on a given day. It is a significant spin-out and, in fairness, farmer shareholders have invested heavily in the business and it makes sense from time to time to distribute some of that value back to those who created the value in the first place.”

#### A dual ambition

John Murphy is adamant that the proposed debt element of the asset purchase will not impact negatively on milk price: “Absolutely not. The proposal reflects ambition for our family farms as well as ambition for Glanbia Ireland. We want to return the highest and strongest milk and grain prices possible and we are conscious of the need to have a very strong Coop in order to achieve

those goals. GII is a €2.3 billion revenue business with €135 million EBITA this year. We have made provision for a €170 million investment fund and we will still own a substantial shareholding worth €1 billion in Glanbia Plc. We can invest that fund in non-dairy as well as dairy assets, depending on the likely returns and benefits to our shareholders. It is modelled on the Plc investment strategy in the US where there is a strong dairy business, as well as taking advantage of investment opportunities in other high margin areas. We are doing this because we feel it is the best path to maximise returns for family farms.”



**“The proposal reflects ambition for our family farms as well as ambition for Glanbia Ireland. We want to return the highest and strongest milk and grain prices possible.”**

### Coop will decide margin

The contentious 3.2 per cent net margin will no longer be required, as John Murphy confirmed: “The 3.2 per cent margin will not be a factor in the future. What will be a factor is strong financial discipline. In general terms we will have flexibility around margins that hasn’t been there in recent years.

So, how was the proposed €307 million purchase price reached? “We retained KPMG to examine all aspects of this including the valuation of the businesses involved. There was a lot of interaction with our Coop board in terms of getting the best value outcome possible. At this stage we are satisfied with the price and the board is fully committed to the project. It is a fair and reasonable price for the assets involved. This is a great opportunity for our shareholders and suppliers given the price involved. The Coop will own one hundred percent of a valuable business with EBITA of €137 million per annum for €478 million. The time is right and the price is right.”

### A rebranding opportunity

The Glanbia Coop chairman reflects on the agreement to replace the Glanbia brand name: “It was agreed in the previous transaction in 2017 when we bought the majority shareholding, that, in the event of a future buy-out, Glanbia Plc would own and retain the brand name. It is a global business and the name was too important for the Plc to relinquish. It will require a new Coop and business name and will probably take up to a year to rebrand. It’s also an opportunity for us. The Plc is contributing up to €4 million to assist in a rebrand for the Coop.”

### Plc concessions

The Plc is foregoing its 2021 dividend from GII as well as any dividend due up to next April when it is expected the entire transaction will be completed, with the permission

of Glanbia Coop shareholders, says John Murphy: “That’s an important financial concession worth in excess of €14 million for this year alone. There is another €4 million contribution towards transaction costs and rebranding. So, in real terms we are at €286 million after these financial contributions have been made by the Plc. I don’t want to understate the cost of rebranding. It will be substantial across the business, taking in everything from letterheads to vehicle signage to the name over the doors of our intake and sales premises. There will then be the challenge of building name recognition across the country and the world among our customers. It is a cost and also an opportunity for us.”

### Game-changing investment fund

“Ultimately, if we spin out 12 million Plc shares to Coop shareholders, provide 12 million shares for an investment fund and sell about three percent of our shareholding in the Plc for the fifty percent equity purchase of assets, we will still retain over twenty percent of Glanbia Plc shares with a dividend worth €18 million currently. We hope, in the coming years, to be a leading European dairy/food business. We will look at adjacent investments to dairy, higher margin investments with routes to market. They could be in the food or plant sectors and they could be outside dairy completely. We will be prudent in our approach whether it is investing inside or outside of dairy businesses. This provides an exciting prospect. Owning the business is not the endgame. We think this fund can be a game-changer for us.”

### Growth potential

Despite the fact that climate action suggests a finite Irish dairy production model, John Murphy sees growth potential for the new organisation: “The focus has been on expansion since quota abolition. Big expansion is behind us, no question. However, over the coming decade we will add value to production and our new R&D centre will provide support in that regard. Even with expected cow number restrictions, we expect to grow output by three to four percent yearly from the existing herd.”

### A critical vote

With a two thirds majority required from general shareholders and milk supplier shareholders John Murphy realises that there is critical time ahead explaining the merits of the proposed deal to Coop shareholders: “Because of Covid-19 it will be a different strategy for informing members. It will involve webinars and other kinds of virtual meetings and we are planning for a virtual voting mechanism. That should take place before Christmas. We believe we have a strong proposal for our members and that they should support it. Ultimately, the objective is to deliver strong milk and grain prices to our suppliers with a robust and progressive dividend policy to benefit our family farms across the region.”

# Cost challenges ahead

Joe Healy, former president of both IFA and Macra na Feirme, is acutely aware of the challenges facing Irish farmers and doesn't underestimate the impact of potential production restrictions in the coming years, as he tells Matt O'Keeffe.

“Within the farm gate it has been quite a good year. Grass growth was good, weather was good and commodity prices were pretty good and have remained strong. It's the bigger issues outside the farm gate that are of most concern. You would be forgiven for thinking for the last few months that Brexit has gone away completely. Climate change is another very real issue and we all appreciate that there's a huge amount of work that can and will be done by farmers to reduce our impact. There are two areas we need to manage closely. We need to manage efficiency in relation to emissions and we also need to be efficient inside our farm gates in relation to reducing costs, because we're heading into a year of high input costs, including high energy costs, high fertiliser prices and high feed costs. I see various figures that they might cost dairy farms, for instance, as much as five cents extra per litre, halving the profit on dairy farms. Beef farm profits could be reduced by 60 per cent. That's a huge challenge for farmers to improve efficiency by cutting our input costs, while maintaining output and profitability.”

## Unbalanced sustainability

Joe Healy is critical of lop-sided sustainability: “I spent four years as IFA President arguing with people who seemed to be concerned only about environmental and social sustainability. As far as I am concerned, it is a three-legged stool and economic sustainability has to be the third leg on that stool. It is hard to expect farmers to be green when they are in the red. I do also acknowledge that there has been a huge change in farmers mindsets in relation to acknowledging the whole issue of climate change. If I go back to farmer meetings in 2015, climate change wasn't really discussed.

A few years later all the discussion is about climate change issues. It's also worth pointing out that we are embracing new technologies and that's what has allowed us, since 1990, to increase our production by up to 40 per cent without increasing our emissions by more than one and a half per cent. The Teagasc MACC (Marginal Abatement



Cost Curve) has a huge role to play over the next decade in helping farmers achieve the targets set out for us. We need to be realistic because there's nothing more deflating than setting targets that cannot be achieved. That deflates morale and people become discouraged and lose sight of what can be achieved. Whereas, if you're achieving targets, then success breeds success. Just take, for instance, the biodiversity and Farm to Fork strategies, two incredible strategies that have the potential to have the largest impact on EU and Irish agriculture in our lifetimes. It absolutely beggars belief that two strategies of their importance were introduced without an impact assessment. I heard Commissioner Timmermans speak at a meeting in Brussels in June. His attitude towards a question that was asked about a USDA report, which highlighted the drop in production in Europe and the consequent reduction in farmers incomes, was to dismiss the USDA report. We have a very strong Commission Vice-President in Frans Timmermans, who has responsibility for implementing the Green Deal and he's been very forceful about it. Unfortunately, I believe the view around Europe is that the Agricultural Commissioner isn't strong enough to defend farmers needs and livelihoods."

### An uphill struggle to be heard

Joe discussed his role on the EU's Economic and Social Committee: "It is not easy. At Irish meetings there is some understanding of the importance of agriculture to the economy and particularly the rural economy. But you go to meetings in Europe and it's a lot more difficult to get across the importance of agriculture. European agricultural output has increased by 25 per cent in the past 3 years and emissions have reduced by 20 per cent over that time. All European farmers have been playing their part and there's more that can be done. In Ireland, we need to push the importance of soil sampling, and feeding the soil accordingly. If there's any good to come out of the year ahead with high fertiliser prices it will be that more farmers will engage in soil sampling and act accordingly." Food outlook

"The general population and the political decision-makers should recognise that there's not that big a food surplus in Europe, or globally. All it would take is the likes of another pandemic or a series of extreme weather events and you would see people get very anxious when gaps appear on supermarket shelves. There should be a real worry there. Unfortunately, our policymakers seem to take food availability for granted and I think that's a dangerous road to go down. US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack tweeted recently encouraging like-minded countries to fill the

production gap in Europe being created by the Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategies."

"Some climate actions will cause carbon leakage and the problem with national targets is if you cut production in the likes of Ireland or New Zealand, where we're probably the best in the world when it comes to carbon-efficient food production, that gap will be filled by countries that are not nearly as carbon efficient. Similarly with beef. There is talk of reducing suckler cow numbers. Then you look at reports of Brazil likely to increase their cattle production by 24 million head over the next ten years. Farmers legitimately ask about the deal that was done with Mercosur and it's good that a recent report from Brussels questions the importation of food from countries where deforested land is used to produce that food. That's a good start. But it's incredible how it has taken until 2021. We highlighted in 2018 the fact that the area of a football pitch was being destroyed every minute in the Amazon rainforest. Last June alone, an area the size of county Longford was deforested."



**"I spent four years as IFA President arguing with people who seemed to be concerned only about environmental and social sustainability. As far as I am concerned, it is a three-legged stool and economic sustainability has to be the third leg on that stool."**

### The other Food Pyramid

Joe Healy is adamant that we need to produce more food in the years ahead: "If you go back to 1915 there were 1.8 billion people on the planet. In 2015 the figure was 7.3 billion and world population will peak in excess of 9 billion by 2050. It's estimated that food demand will increase by between 58 per cent and 98 per cent between now and 2050. There will be some alternative foods and we hear about the meatless burger. But they will only feed a very small percentage regardless of their rates of growth over the coming years. Diet is about choice and people buy what they like. Despite all the talk, meat and dairy products will still be in demand. When you talk about increased food demand over the next 25 to 30 years of between 60 and 100 per cent, that's a lot of extra food. Where is it going to be produced? The policy makers might revise their strategies if they saw a severe shortage of food, and that could be sooner rather than later."



# Late Lactation Management

**Emma Swan at Alltech addresses the issue of planning ahead for calving season**

Winter is upon us. Many dairy farms are thinking about drying cows off and planning for the calving season ahead. With variable forage quality being fed, body condition of cows is proving to be inconsistent across the country. The key to performance in any herd is managing body condition score (BCS). Monitoring and controlling BCS is key to a trouble-free calving and a more productive subsequent lactation. Ideally, the BCS of cows should be assessed four to six weeks pre-drying off to allow sufficient time to ensure these cows reach the ideal BCS 3–3.25 at drying off and, in turn, at calving. Late lactation cows use dietary energy to replace body reserves more efficiently than dry cows. Therefore, it is recommended that cows put on condition when needed during late lactation to achieve the desired calving BCS rather than during the dry period.

Planning ahead by analysing silage to provide a balanced diet based on the silage quality and condition of cows is instrumental to ensuring cows are dried off at the correct BCS. The example of a typical dairy diet, showing how an excess of 23 MJ in the diet per day will lead to a condition score increase of 0.35 units in the space of six weeks in late lactation. Another method, where cows are under-conditioned, switching to once-a-day (OAD) milking — where cell count permits — or drying off a couple of weeks early, may provide the animal with an opportunity to build sufficient body reserves. By milking the cow OAD, the energy requirement for milk production drops significantly, allowing the cow to put on condition rather than produce milk. It is essential that these cows are fed at the same rate as cows on twice-a-day milking for this to happen.



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Table 1 - Typical Dairy Diet – 15 L In Full Time

| Column1    | Column2         |
|------------|-----------------|
| Silage     | 50kg (0.75 UFL) |
| Straw      | 0.5 kg          |
| Conc.      | 5 kg            |
| Energy In  | 13.5UFL         |
| Energy Out | 11.8UFL         |
| Excess     | +1.7 UFL        |

Table 2 - Dairy Diet Effect on Increase in BCS

| Column1                 | Column2    |
|-------------------------|------------|
| + 1Kg BW                | 4.5 UFL    |
| Excess Energy (6 weeks) | +71 UFL    |
| Body Weight             | 16 kg      |
| BCS                     | 0.35 units |

Once the cows are set up with a good body condition score in late lactation, the next stage is to prepare for the dry cow period. While the main focus over the coming weeks is managing cow condition, we sometimes forget that the mineral status of the cow in late lactation to drying off, which will play a crucial role in the overall health and well-being of cow and the calf growing inside her.

In Ireland, many of our grass silages are deficient in trace minerals. It is important to note that the mineral status of our soils and forages varies tremendously from farm to farm and year to year. The simplest and most accurate way of knowing the mineral status is testing the forages being fed to cows, whether they be grass, grass silage, maize or whole crop silage. Once known, informed decisions can be made on the most effective way of supplementation. Results from testing over 150 silage samples in Alltech Ireland this winter show deficits in trace minerals such as copper, zinc and selenium. Trace minerals support the cow's immune system and

response during times of stress, thereby improving cow performance. On many farms throughout the country, inorganic trace minerals, such as sodium selenite and copper sulphate, are included in mineral packs and feeds. However, this form of mineral supplementation is not what the animal is designed to use and absorb. As a result, much of this is wasted through excretion.

The Alltech® Mineral Management programme focuses on feeding organic trace minerals, including Bioplex® Copper or Zinc and Sel-Plex® (selenium). These are better absorbed, stored and utilised by the animal and can be fed at significantly lower levels while still improving animal performance. This approach allows for better management of the animal's mineral requirements while reducing the impact on the environment.

With compound feeds, mineral labels can often be difficult to interpret, and you may not be aware of what mineral you are supplying. To ensure the cow gets what she needs, talk to your supplier about the mineral supply and form (organic or inorganic). For the dry period, in particular, it is critical for the immunity of the cow and calf that she has a regular supply of organic minerals that can be used and absorbed easily.

Housing can be stressful for cows, and now is a time to assess and rectify any issues in the housing facility. Lack of feed barrier space increases the risk of lameness — as cows are pushing for feed — while also increasing diet variation — as some cows will be waiting for feed. It is important to ensure cubicles are set up to promote cow comfort, as this will lead to less lameness, improved production and better overall health. A good foot bathing programme should also be in place to help control and prevent the spread of digital dermatitis, reducing incidences of lameness on your farm over the winter period and spring months.

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# CAP 2023-2027

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is currently preparing the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy for Ireland 2023-2027.

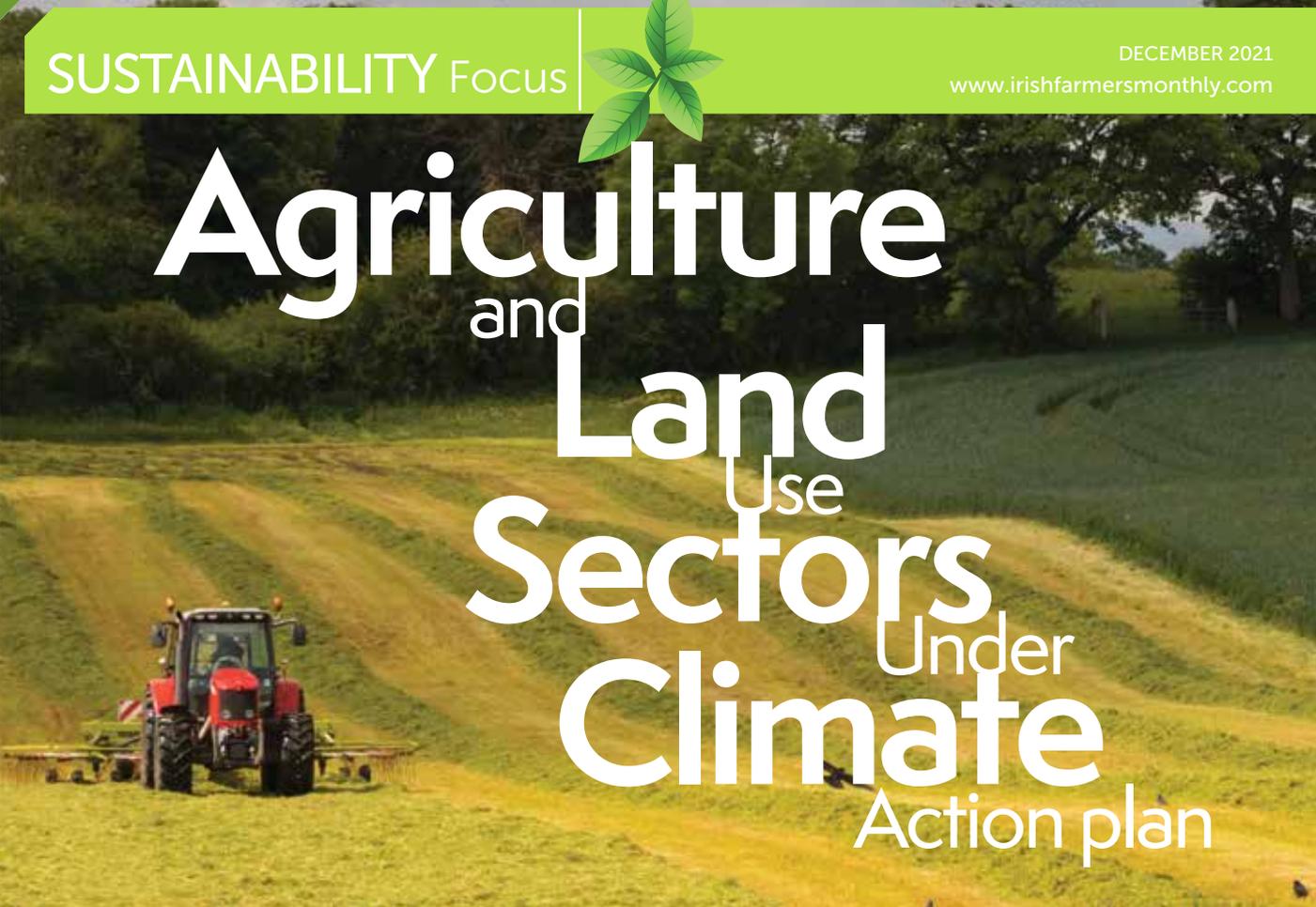
Find out more at [gov.ie/CAP](https://gov.ie/CAP)



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
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Department of Agriculture,  
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# SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS





# Agriculture and Land Use Sectors Under Climate Action plan

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine **Charlie McConalogue**, discusses the challenges and opportunities for the Irish agriculture sector under the Climate Action Plan.

In my opinion, Ireland is the sustainable food capital of the world and our farmers are the pioneers who will lead out in Ireland meeting out climate ambitions. The sustainability of Ireland's food production system is well recognised internationally and acts as a key competitive driver in international markets. This is due to the efforts of all actors across the supply chain, starting of course with our primary producers. Without our farmers, foresters, and fishers, we simply wouldn't have the wider agri-food industry that we are all so proud of today.

We do need to acknowledge the challenges ahead for food production systems globally and no more so in Ireland where 37 per cent of all national greenhouse gas emissions come from the agri-food sector. Whilst farmers have delivered much by way of efficiency gains in recent years, it must also be recognised that overall emissions have been on an increasing trend. The publication of the Climate Action Plan, outlining a 22 per cent - 30 per cent reduction target for our sector, means that we need to get our emissions profile on a declining trend over the remainder of the decade. There are specific actions that we can take on our farms to set us on the right trajectory, starting from today, and I will touch on these later. Existing and known measures can get the sector most of the way there in terms of meeting our target range, and I am confident that research and innovation will provide solutions to enable the sector to take the final few steps.

It is important that I set out the way I want our industry to

evolve over the coming years.

It is fair to say that our great sector is facing into a very different decade to the one we just experience. The last decade was one of volume growth, the next decade will be one of sustainable value growth. This is a central tenet of the Food Vision 2030 strategy I launched earlier this year. We are a sector that touches off every rural parish in the country, that generates over €14bn in exports and a sector that supports hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country.

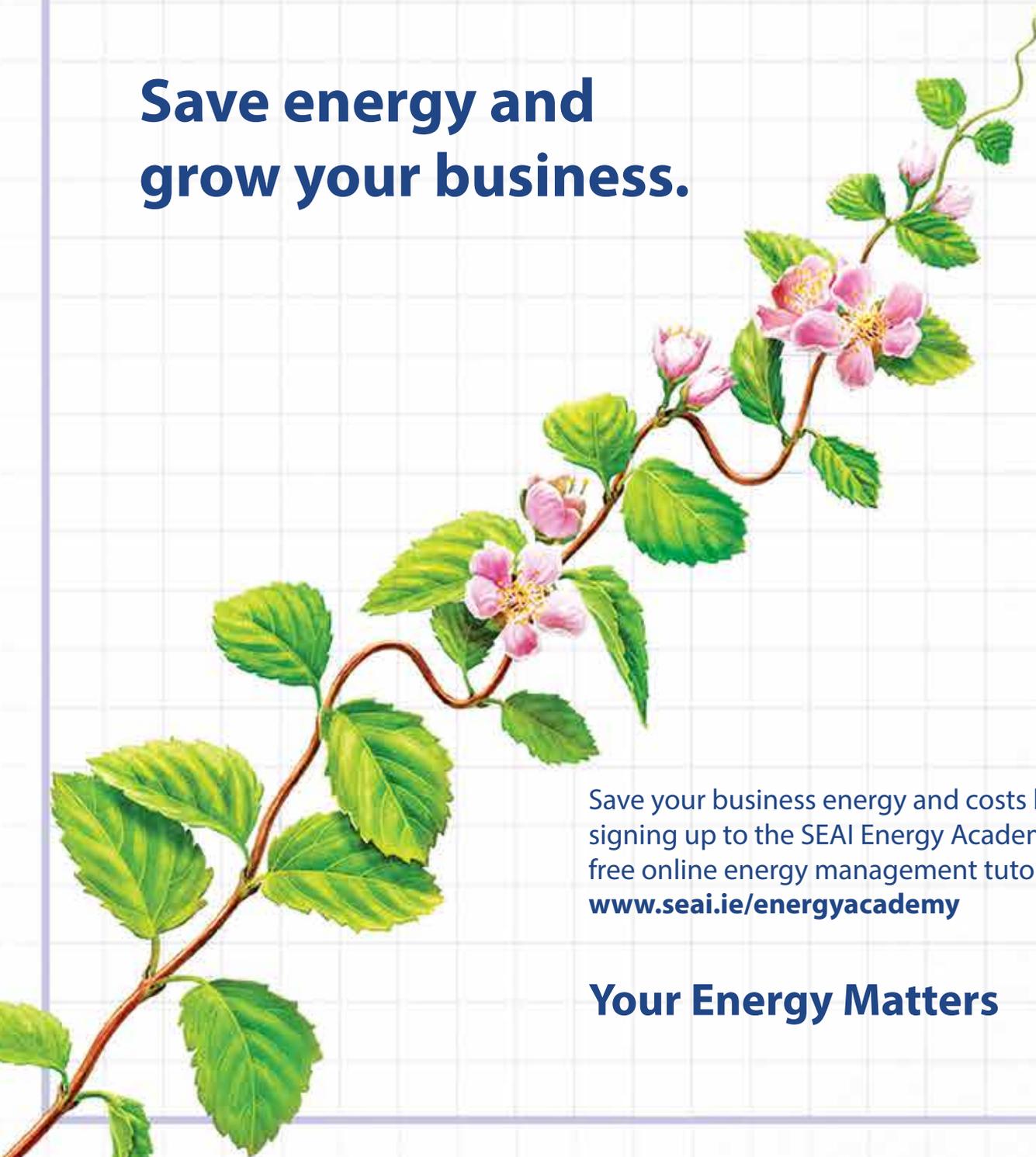
Food Vision is a landmark, because it charts a course for how Ireland can become a world leader in sustainable food systems. This means the sector being profitable throughout, having broad societal benefits and having a positive or neutral impact on the environment. It is worth noting that the Strategy identifies being able to demonstrate sustainability in all its forms as the source of competitive advantage for agri-food but it makes clear that if this is to be realised, the sector, along with Government and society, have to make significant changes.

Food Vision takes a systematic approach to addressing the challenge of ensuring that Ireland can continue to produce high quality food in a manner that protects the environment and mitigates climate change.

Mission 1 of the Strategy focuses solely on this with seven goals across climate, biodiversity, water quality, forests, seafood, the circular bioeconomy and Origin Green. Within these, solutions are proposed in the form of over sixty



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specific actions, with ten of these on climate alone. Food Vision commits us to producing detailed plans to manage the sustainable environmental footprint of the dairy and beef sectors. It will roll out carbon farming, dramatically increasing our research into mitigation technologies appropriate for our grassland livestock systems, playing a leading role in how emissions from livestock are understood and accounted, promoting regenerative agriculture, scaling up renewable energy and focusing on energy efficiency, and more besides. Ultimately, this is where Food Vision 2030 and the Climate Action Plan closely align.

While our Ag-Climatise roadmap will be updated, reprioritising some actions with new numbers to reflect the increased climate ambition under the Climate Action Plan, it contains many of the actions necessary to achieve our climate objectives. Ireland's competitive advantage comes from the production of grazed grass, and the high-quality meat and milk protein that are produced from these grazed pastures.

With continuing global demand for high quality animal-based proteins, it would make no sense for Ireland to move away from this system of agricultural production. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has acknowledged the important role that carbon efficient livestock can make to the global food system. Ireland must ensure that it occupies this space, and the good news is that we are already a long way towards achieving this objective.

Over the next 8 years, we must reduce fertiliser use by 20% from its peak usage of 408,000 tonnes in 2018. This is a positive thing to do from an environmental perspective and we can achieve this objective without any impact on farm profitability.

We can do this by prioritising the incorporation of clover and multispecies swards into our grasslands. I will support farmers who make this transition and have already made €1 million available for next year to support the sector in this regard. We must also protect the valuable nutrients our organic manures contain, applying these manures back to the land using Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) technology.

Supported by my Department, farmers have invested over €80 million in this technology and we will

continue to support farmers in this transition. For our beef farmers, we must find ways of getting our animals to the target finishing weights in a more efficient manner.

Reducing the finishing date of our prime beef cattle to an average of 24 months is one of the most obvious way of reducing absolute methane emissions. We need to find ways to increase tree planting on our farms, this can be done in conjunction with livestock production as agro-forestry, with many associated biodiversity benefits.

I will work with Minister of State Pippa Hackett to ensure our forestry policy and licensing system is modernised and can support this transition.

Despite the pressures on our public finances, I have secured exchequer funding of €2.3bn for our new CAP Strategic Plan (2023-2027). This will include funding for a new Agri-environment scheme, targeting funding at 50,000 farmers over the period.

Importantly, and in line with the EU Farm to Fork policy direction, there will be an increased focus on results-based payments - the higher the environmental delivery by our farmers, the higher the payment they receive.

This results-based approach will work and has proved popular with farmers with initiatives such as the Hen

Harrier project, which not only has resulted in increased farmer payments, but also improved protection for this iconic bird. The results-based REAP pilot which I launched this year was also significantly oversubscribed, showing farmers are very much up for this new approach.

While this will be a decade of change, I want to ensure everyone that the economic viability of Irish farms will remain an absolute priority of this Government. We need to find new financial models to support our most vulnerable sectors. I am committed to the concept of carbon farming

and I believe this is one way we can

achieve this.

While the CAP Strategic Plan will undoubtedly play a key role, we must look to target additional sourcing of funding, whether it be from the agri industry or even companies outside of the agriculture sphere who may look to our sector from a corporate social responsibility perspective.

I have supported our primary producers, I am supporting our primary producers and I will continue to support our primary producers. Without them, we will have no future and I want to ensure that this a sector that people are genuinely excited and enthused about.



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# ICMSA leader on farming sustainably

Pat McCormack discusses COP 26 and the realities of a what a truly sustainable food system will look like for both the farmer and the consumer.

"A lot of great talk and backslapping," was Pat McCormack's summation of the outcome of COP 26, the international conference on Climate Change held last month in Glasgow. "There was very little practical detail for any sector of society and, in particular, for the agriculture industry. The anxiety will continue as to what the various agreements and announcements mean in practice for farmers, not only in Ireland but in Europe and beyond. It was positive that all of the strategies being developed in Ireland in recent years were highlighted, including the Teagasc MACC (Marginal Abatement Cost Curve), and the benefits accruing from the implementation of that strategy. It is still a case of wait and see as far as the long-term impacts on farming are concerned."

## Focus on agriculture in the COP discussions

Would the ICMSA president agree that some sanity has prevailed in terms of what can be practically achieved by farmers in the coming years? "There can be no food production without carbon expenditure. There is an acknowledgement by our own government that we have a very carbon-efficient food production system, one of the most carbon efficient on the planet, especially in relation to milk and beef production. Nonetheless, everything that is proposed, such as low emission slurry spreading, protected urea, a fertiliser register, reductions in the use of chemical fertiliser, they are going to have a significant impact on our ability to produce grass and that is, ultimately, the core of Irish livestock-based production.

## The unspoken reality

"We are in a period of change that is challenging for farmers but the one thing that is not being said is that we are entering a period when food prices will have to increase to reflect the increasing costs of production. Food price inflation will affect every household and people need to be made aware of that fact."

Pat is himself aware that there is not a great appetite for the prospect of increased food prices either from politicians not admitting that fact or consumers not embracing the prospect: "It is the best kept secret out there when it comes to what is required in terms of managing the global environment. They can discuss the various means of reducing carbon and greenhouse gas production and methane from animals but all of those come at a cost, specifically in terms of increased costs associated with the production of food. Those costs will have to be passed on to the consumer, otherwise food cannot be produced. That is the bottom line. The greatest and most vocal environmentalists out there do not seem to see this as a necessary consequence of engaging in climate change mitigation actions in relation to agriculture. Up to the middle of 2021, beef and dairy prices were the same as they were twenty-five years ago. That is unsustainable. The critical element of all this is that if food production is to continue in the European Union, food prices must increase to fully reflect increased costs of production. At the same time, while all of this debate is going on we also have MERCOSUR countries, many of whom have significantly lower climate action ambition, or even no ambition compared to what we in Ireland and Europe have, continuing to increase production based on the destruction of forest lands. We cannot contemplate trade agreements with those countries on that basis. If we continue to engage, that amounts to unfair competition between the EU and Mercosur, because we are producing with the additional environmental costs associated with climate change mitigation and they are not."

## Age before cull

"Every month of reduction in slaughter age is the equivalent of reducing the national herd by 100,000 cows." That was the summation of Pat McCormack in relation to the prospect of bringing the average slaughter age down to 24



months. "Those figures are significant. There is potential for a virtual cow number reduction of up to 400,000 by a reduction in slaughter age. Our organisation has been studying the efficiency of calf to beef production in regard to slaughter age and the benefits of keeping the calf performing efficiently throughout its life cycle means that a reduced slaughter age is both practical and efficient.

### Advancing relevant remedies

On the introduction of novel technologies to reduce methane production, Pat remarked that there should be gains from the use of feed additives, if they are shown in trials to be effective: "Again that comes at a cost. The research also has a cost and it needs to be driven quickly without being delayed by any lack of funding."

Pat is somewhat sanguine in relation to the indicative 22 to 30 per cent reduction in methane emissions proposed for agriculture over the coming eight years: "Fourteen or fifteen percent of the carbon reduction demand is achievable through the Teagasc MAC Curve strategies. All of the initiatives are well proven scientifically and backed by practical research. EBI has a lot to offer in breeding more efficient animals in the dairy herd. Likewise, the DBI, the dairy beef index, can deliver animals that perform more efficiently, finish earlier with good carcass weights and kill-out percentages. It is the final five or six percent of carbon reduction demand that will be the most difficult and costly

to achieve. That is where the biggest challenge will be and where we must look to future scientific developments. There are companies that are engaged in deep research to deliver significant methane reductions through the use of feed additives. The hope must be that the percentage reductions demanded can be delivered with a stable herd. My interpretation of a stable herd is the herd we have on the ground today. Time is of the essence. The reality is that the delivery of food in an environmentally sustainable manner cannot be achieved more effectively than in the manner we do it in Ireland."

### Adoption tardiness

Is Pat worried by the historically low and slow adoption of new management practices on Irish farms?: "It will be a challenge to get the type of practices required introduced across most farms in a short space of time. All of our agricultural industry needs to come on board. There was less protected urea used in the past twelve months than in the previous year. The issue was not with farmer reluctance, it was with availability of product. It must be readily available and at an affordable price. Knowledge transfer and implementation on farms will be critical to success. There is a generation of farmers willing to embrace new ideas, new practices and new challenges. They have a strong commercial focus and have a long terms commitment to their farm enterprises."

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# Green giants

Sustainability is now a central tenet of many Irish food and drink businesses, and here we review some recent innovations from industry.

The Irish food and drink industry is making significant strides towards greater sustainability, through innovative initiatives and ambitious targets and goals. Here, we profile two companies that are setting the standard.

## **Sustainable packaging solutions at Ornu Group**

In 2020, Ornu Foods UK launched Megablock, an innovative cheese packaging that delivers a saving of over 40% of plastic per pack, with a projected reduction of 83 tonnes of plastic annually. Ornu Foods UK, part of

Ornu Group, produces and purchases cheese and butter products from the Ornu Group and a range of cheese suppliers in the UK, and is the largest supplier of British and Irish cheese in the UK market. The organisation's Pilgrims Choice brand, the UK's No. 2 branded cheddar, migrated to the newer pack format and its optimum-sized shelf-ready packaging contains more packs per case, achieving packaging savings of 110 tonnes, a reduction of 1,321 road miles and 1.75 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Commenting on the development of the Megablock, Mike



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Harper, Ornuu Foods UK's marketing director said: "We set ourselves the challenge of creating a format that enabled us to pack the same amount of cheese, using less plastic, whilst improving the experience of consumers." The pack format is available to all Ornuu Foods UK customers, with Tesco adopting it for its own-label cheddar ranges supplied by Ornuu Foods. This move will save a further 95 tonnes of plastic as a part of Tesco's 4R packaging programme - Remove, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

At the launch of the Megablock, James Bull, head of packaging at Tesco said: "It's great to see Ornuu cut down on the amount of plastic being used in our stores and we encourage other brands to do the same."

Aiming for circularity across its packaging solutions, Ornuu partnered with TerraCycle to support the recycling of plastic film used in cheese packaging and the Pilgrims Choice Recycling Programme was set to go live in late 2020. TerraCycle is committed to 'Eliminating the Idea of Waste' by recycling the 'non-recyclable' and diverting millions of pounds of waste from landfills and incinerators each month.

Learnings from this innovation will be implemented across the organisation, explained head of sustainability, Yvonne Cooney: "As Ornuu moves to develop more ambitious climate and packaging targets into the future, collaboration with our customers, partners, and stakeholders will be crucial to understanding the challenges and identifying solutions. If we can identify a solution which is transferrable, we will aim to utilise this solution as much as possible. As we have learned from this packaging innovation for Pilgrims Choice, understanding what works for the consumer and customer is half the battle. Naturally, a reduction in packaging or an improvement in material will have a knock-on effect when it comes to reduction of associated emissions, and this is a real positive."

### How it works

Changing the depth of the cheese block from 26mm (90/140) to 40mm (60/140) enables the delivery of the same weight of cheese, but the smaller surface area combined with the flow-wrap format results in 40% less plastic packaging; the equivalent weight of 11 African elephants. The range comes in optimum-sized shelf-ready packaging containing more packs per case, resulting in 27 tonnes less cardboard packaging used. The plastic and cardboard reduction will see 110 tonnes less packaging used and 1,187 less reels of film delivered.

### Accelerated targets at Kerry Group

In October, global taste and nutrition company, Kerry Group, announced details of its accelerated sustainability targets to align with the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature increases by 1.5°C. The company has increased its targets for Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions reduction from 33% to 55% by 2030.

This ambitious goal strengthens Kerry's Beyond the Horizon sustainability strategy and commitments and includes a target to halve its food waste and reach over

two billion people with sustainable nutrition solutions by 2030. The company has also revised its social sustainability targets with the aim of achieving the highest levels of inclusion, belonging and engagement, with equal gender representation at senior management by 2030.

The revised targets will require the introduction and acceleration of several initiatives across the organisation including:

- Moving to 100% renewable electricity within 12 months.
- Implementing energy efficiency programmes reducing on-site fuel consumption.
- By 2030, emission intensity will be reduced by 30% across the supply chain.
- 100% of priority raw materials will be responsibly sourced by 2030. The company's packaging commitments will ensure that by 2025, 100% of all plastic used will be reusable, recyclable or compostable and that virgin plastic use will be reduced by 25%.

Kerry's increased commitments are in line with the findings of the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which reinforced the urgency of achieving emissions reductions in line with limiting global average temperature increase to 1.5°C before 2050 to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Commenting on the announcement, Edmond Scanlon, chief executive officer of Kerry, said: "Kerry is committed to not only working to reduce its impact on the environment but also to collaborating with its suppliers and food and beverage companies globally to help support them achieve their sustainability targets. Through the creation of technology solutions, the expertise of our people and innovative ways of creating tasty and nutritious food and beverage products, we are working with our customers to help them move along the sustainable nutrition spectrum so they too can reduce their carbon emissions, food waste or water usage. The range and complexity of challenges our industry is facing right now is unprecedented with every product requiring its own specific Kerry solution."

### Sustainability in action

When local legislation changed to allow for the use of hybrid sweeteners, a beverage customer engaged with Kerry to enable them to significantly reduce added sugar in their soda while maintaining the same taste profile. Kerry partnered on the creation of a new beverage formulation, which used TasteSense, a taste modulator. The selected recipe reduced added sugars by over 40% while delivering the same taste and mouthfeel as the original product. The new formulation improved sustainability and production cost. These changes came from the significant reduction in sugar usage, which reduced expenditures on raw materials and transportation as well as the carbon footprint of the product. The customer gained market share by launching a healthier version of its proven product while also reducing carbon footprint and cost.

# Understanding attitudes

Insights from the Origin Green Global Sustainability Survey can help Irish food and drink producers stand apart

Almost a quarter of beef consumers globally are willing to pay a premium for grass-fed beef, and when it comes to improving food sustainability, the consumer is looking to the food producer above anyone else. These are just some of the findings of the Origin Green Global Sustainability Survey, an extensive examination of attitudes to sustainability, undertaken in 13 countries, including Ireland. Thought leaders, trade buyers, and sustainability leads from a selection of the largest food and drink companies, and consumers were surveyed, to understand attitudes and emerging trends in sustainability amongst agenda setters, customers and consumers.

## Who's who

**Agenda setters:** Advocacy groups, policy makers, industry leaders. Interviews were conducted with sustainability thought leaders from policy groups, NGOs and sustainability leads from some of the biggest food and drink companies.

**Customers:** Trade buyers, sustainability leads, and operations leads. Over 175 interviews were conducted with food and beverage buyers and/or those responsible for sustainability and CSR policies in relation to food and beverage within organisations with annual turnover in excess of €50m in 9 markets.

**Consumers:** 11,000 online consumer surveys were conducted across 13 markets.

For beef and dairy consumers, high animal welfare standards and grass-fed were cited as some of the most important sustainability attributes globally that can command a premium: 23 per cent of beef consumers

globally said they are willing to pay extra for grass-fed beef. In fact, globally, grass-fed is the biggest premium driver when it comes to the sustainability attributes of beef.

## Sustainability pillars

Emissions were a key topic for agenda setters and customers across the markets. These groups, particularly larger retailers, are setting science-based or net-zero targets that put pressure on suppliers to reduce emissions. This does, however, present sustainable suppliers with an opportunity to stand out. Two thirds of trade buyers globally said that: 'having the lowest possible greenhouse gas emissions/carbon footprint' is important when choosing a supplier, and sustainability is becoming a key purchasing criteria for trade buyers, along with quality, price and supply. Consumers, however, were less focused on emissions, as it is currently more difficult to link the carbon footprint to the product on-shelf. Similarly, while agenda setters are very heavily focused on biodiversity – 68 per cent of trade buyers globally said: 'protecting and preserving biodiversity in nature' is important when choosing a supplier – this issue is not yet on the radar for consumers when making purchasing decisions. However, as the sustainability agenda develops and becomes more important, the carbon and biodiversity impact of products will become more important to consumers, and earlier this year, Bord Bia funded a dedicated Biodiversity Officer at the National Biodiversity Data Centre to provide guidance on Origin Green member companies' biodiversity plans and advice on initiatives related to pollinator-biodiversity. For buyers, high quality and safely produced food are cited as core buying decisions, and 60 per cent of trade buyers globally said that Ireland is a source of sustainably produced food and drink. In a similar vein, consumers consider Quality Assurance and high food safety standards as appealing attributes.



According to Origin Green's Progress Update Report 2021, sustainable beef and lamb assurance scheme (SBLAS) members recorded a 6.3 per cent average reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> per unit of beef, and sustainable dairy assurance scheme (SDAS) members recorded a 6 per cent average reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> per unit of milk.

Food waste and packaging were deemed the most important sustainability issues for consumers, with 77 per cent indicating that they have made an effort to buy products with less packaging, and 87 per cent indicating that they have made an attempt to reduce food waste in the last 12 months.

### From insights to action

According to Bord Bia CEO Tara McCarthy, the survey will help the sector to better understand how customers and consumers view sustainability, how they can communicate their activity on the issue, and where they need to improve. "In many areas of sustainability, Ireland already has a strong competitive advantage, for example grass-fed production of beef and dairy. In others, such as food waste, this research gives us the opportunity to highlight to our members how that is a key touchstone for consumers in certain key markets and the value of meeting these expectations.

The best way of encouraging action is to demonstrate how it contributes to the long-term sustainability of the business. This research makes the clear case for businesses to engage in measurable action across a range of sustainability issues."

The research found that while the sustainability agenda is accelerating, it is happening at a different pace in different countries and each market is focussing on different aspects of the sustainability conversation. In Western European markets, there is a greater focus on local food, and animal welfare is closely associated with sustainability. Meanwhile, in Asian markets, where there is more of a concern over consistent, nutritious food supply, the focus is on quality and safety assurance. Sustainability is nearly as important to buyers as the long-standing priorities of quality, supply and price. The survey identified clear benefits to companies who could demonstrate positive action and leadership on key sustainability issues, and it revealed that consumers want to make more sustainable choices, and they expect food producers to help them do that.

Bord Bia believes there is an opportunity for Irish brands to stand out if they can communicate in a clear way. Food waste is a very definite example of this, both in terms of how food waste is avoided in production but also how consumers can do more to avoid wasting food. It also highlighted that consumers are looking for both

information and leadership from food producers. The Origin Green programme and its members are well placed to benefit from this consumer need for leadership. According to McCarthy traceability and data will be vital: "The importance of traceability and proof is likely to emerge in the coming years. While certification is important now, in the years ahead, there will be need for more transparent data and Irish companies can take a lead on this. Origin Green has already instilled a process of auditing and increasingly, our members are working towards measurable targets, across a range of metrics. The commitments made by the Irish agri-food sector will very much be to our advantage in the years ahead."

The Origin Green Global Sustainability Survey is available to Origin Green Members at <https://www.bordbia.ie/global-sustainability-insights/>

### Ones to watch?

Carbon numbers and Eco scores

The Nutri-Score is a nutrition label that converts the nutritional value of products into a code of five letters, each with its own colour.

The Eco-Score classes food products from A (low) to E (high) according to their impact on the environment. Earlier this year, Carrefour trialled the labelling by displaying the Eco-Score on all food products sold under national and private labels, with customer feedback due to be published.

### KEY FINDINGS FROM THE Origin Green Global Sustainability Survey

**75%** of trade buyers globally say sustainability is important to their business

**40%** of customers said sustainability was one of the most important factors when choosing a supplier

**48%** of dairy buyers and 47% of meat buyers said the Origin Green programme would encourage them to do business

**73%** of grocery shoppers globally say they are willing to make changes to their lifestyle to be more sustainable

**61%** of grocery shoppers globally say it will become more important to them to buy more sustainably produced products in the next three years

**75%** of consumers globally have made efforts to buy more sustainably produced food and drink in the last 12 months.



# Shaping our future

Ongoing research within UCD's School of Agriculture and Food Science is changing the shape of Irish farming and offers some insight in to what the future fields of Ireland will look like in 20 years. We talk to Tommy Boland about how biological processes rather than chemical solutions will determine progress towards more sustainable solutions in agriculture.

Tommy Boland grew up on a mixed farm in Co Wexford. His interest in the practice of farming and managing cattle and sheep saw him take on a degree in Agricultural Science in 1997 and move on complete a PhD at UCD Lyons Farm with Professor Frank Crosby. Today, Tommy is Associate Dean for Research Innovation and Impact at UCD as well as being Vice President of the ASA.

Commenting on the pace of change in the agricultural sector at the moment, as someone who is to the fore of innovation and research, Tommy is optimistic for the future: "It is a really exciting time to be involved in agriculture: we have huge challenges – you only have to open the newspaper or see on social media the pressure that the industry is under – but there is also great opportunity in how we can change the face of agricultural food systems in the future."

"There have always been pressures throughout the history of agriculture in Ireland. For the future, sustainability is key. In the past, in the Western world, there has been a reliance on chemical innovations – fertilizers, pesticides, etc. At many levels, the chemical focus has now been replaced with a focus on biology in regards to how we can better manage our production systems. This is due to a variety of reasons, including environmental challenges, costs, retail desires, consumer preferences etc. We need to develop a pathway which strategically utilizes our inputs while (re)developing a better understanding of biological processes, using a combined approach to help address the many challenges we are facing."

Tommy believes that farmers have always tackled challenges by being adaptable and is very confident in Irish farmers' ability to seize the opportunities that lie ahead. "We need to be careful that we don't believe that the negative press or social media content disparaging farming in Ireland is the general consensus of the populace. This is not the case. Farmers are definitely feeling the pressure at the moment, with a narrative of negativity towards farming evident in certain media. But at the end of the day, there is a high demand for the high quality food we produce and that will remain. We just need to ensure that meeting that demand does not come at the expense of our own environment, and farmers understand this better than most."



**"It will be a 'Back to the Future' scenario where will return to a focus on biological processes, making better use of our natural resources, encouraging biodiversity and promoting best practice in animal health along with the strategic use of external inputs."**

## Wide-ranging remit

Commenting on the work he is involved in and the wide-ranging research that the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science undertakes, Tommy notes: "Within the school, we work right across the spectrum of the food system from soil to society, from farm to fork. Research at UCD Lyons farm focuses on livestock and crop production encompassing digital agriculture, soil health, biodiversity product quality and many more areas.

The nature of our research tends to be project focused but there is a lot of synergy and overlap between the different teams so it is a fantastic resource not only for the university but also for the industry. Our focus on most projects is to look at the biological processes and really harness the power of biology to support food production. For example, our research is looking into alternatives to chemical fertilizers; managing soil in such a way as to increase earthworm activity and deal with the challenge of soil compaction; alternative pasture based systems for cows and cattle to reduce methane emissions; as well as understanding the biological processes that drive animal performance. It really is a broad sweep of what is happening and the research is driving our decision-making on farm and also informing our students at UCD, who represent the future for the industry. They are being directly educated by the people who are at the cutting edge of this research."

No.1 Scour Vaccine

# Scour problems?



Choose the vaccine with the highest antibody production against specific calf scour agents<sup>1</sup>



## VACCINATION PROTOCOL

12 weeks before calving



3 weeks before calving

Administer a single shot of the Bovilis calf scour vaccine during this time window

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Weeks

\*After broaching and first use, store upright and refrigerated (2-8°C). A broached vial can be used once more during the next 28 days after the first vaccination event and then discarded. Use of excellent aseptic technique and a multi-dose syringe to minimise vaccine contamination and excessive broaching is recommended.

1. Gonzalez, R., Elvira, L., Carbonell, C., Vertenten, G. and Fraile, L., 2021. The Specific Immune Response after Vaccination against Neonatal Calf Diarrhoea Differs between Apparent Similar Vaccines in a Case Study. *Animals*, 11(5), p.1238.

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Alongside this, research into digital innovation is also an important area for the School. "For example, we are looking at how we can use new technology, sensors and big data to better target the application of fertilizer. Digital solutions are also allowing us to track and monitor, and offer improved traceability within the system; and our work even goes so far as to address the business intelligence side of agriculture production to offer a more efficient and sustainable farming operation. That is a space that is moving very quickly at the moment and even the smart phone has become a very important tool for farmers, with basic analytics allowing informed decisions to be made in real time on the farm."

### Looking into a crystal ball

Looking ahead, what does Tommy believe an Irish farm will look like in 20 years? "I think ruminant agriculture will continue to play a really important role. Even though it may be the focus of much pressure at the moment, it offers real value to global food production and this won't change. The fact is, it takes a product – cellulose – present in grass, which is completely unavailable for human consumption, and converts it into meat or milk, which both offer real nutritional value. So I don't see this disappearing or reducing in Irish farming.

"We will see real changes, however, in how we feed those animals and how we produce that feed. Farmers will continue to improve in the area of reliance on chemical applications and fertilizer – it will be a 'Back to the Future' scenario where will return to a focus on biological processes, making better use of our natural resources, encouraging biodiversity and promoting best practice in animal health along with the strategic use of external inputs. The animals we will be using will be more efficient through breeding and genomics and will be bred to better suit their environment, with less methane emissions. Alongside this, we will have crops that will offer a more diverse range of food for animals and also crops that are better suited to Irish production systems. Digital solutions will allow for better decision-making on farms and there will be a renewed value placed on wider ecosystems such as supporting pollinators. The hope would be that the family farm will also be at the centre of all of this progress as well."

# Forests helping to re-connect with nature

Now more than ever individuals and society are questioning "the meaning of life" and seeking answers. A new native woodland in Roscommon offers a re-connection with nature. **Noel Kennedy, Teagasc, reports.**

*"The forest keeps different time; slow hours as long as your life, so you feel human." Forest © Carol Ann Duffy 2019*

In the quiet, gently rolling limestone fields of south Roscommon, Hillside Holistic Farm offers a helping hand to people looking for those answers and guidance towards wellbeing and fulfilment. Since 2004 the farm has been run by Sean and Helen Butler as an organic beef farm and holistic centre with wellbeing and empowerment at the heart of everything they do. Describing it as "a unique family farm with a holistic approach to farming and life" the synergy between the farm and recently planted native woodland, and the holistic healing and life mentoring is palpable.

### Choosing a different path

Describing himself as an energy healer and organic farmer with a mission "to help people to find peace with themselves", Sean is the 5<sup>th</sup> generation of the Butler family to work the land. Helen on the other hand is not from a farming background and says "she brings a different type of thinking". Concerned by increasing animal health issues and dependence on medicines in conventional intensive farming, the Butlers looked for a different, more natural approach and in 2001 began a two-year conversion to an organic system that created a less stressful environment for the animals and produced healthier meat. Unexpectedly the move to organics also brought welcome health and lifestyle benefits for Sean and Helen. Wishing to share these positive health and lifestyle benefits with others, during this time they also developed their interests in alternative therapies. They have never looked back. Today, Hillside Holistic Farm is a working organic farm and a recognised hub for holistic healing, youth and project mentoring and social farming. With a dedicated therapy room which can be used by groups and therapists the farm itself provides a calming backdrop and unique opportunity to re-connect with nature.



Sean Butler, Hillside Holistic Farm, Brideswell in his newly planted native woodland with Noel Kennedy, Teagasc Forestry Development Officer



## Native woodland

Sean has long harboured a desire to plant a broadleaf forest to complement the farm environment and offer additional therapeutic benefits. I had met him several years ago to look into this in more detail.

In Sean's mind planting trees "would allow him to work with the land and not against it". In addition to the many positives for biodiversity and water quality, he and Helen also noted the growing evidence showing the wider wellbeing benefits of spending time with trees.

In 2019 the Butler's decided to dedicate 11 hectares, approximately a third of the farm to planting a new native woodland that reflected in their eyes a natural, positive and practical change. To accommodate the new trees they made the difficult decision to get out of sheep and concentrate on the suckler herd.

Liaising with a registered forester from Western Forestry Co-Op, a Native Woodland Establishment (NWS) grant application was submitted in Autumn 2019. Following a lengthy process of operational and environmental assessment and public consultation, a grant approval was issued by DAFM in early 2021 with planting completed in March – an ideal time for tree planting – and appropriately during National Tree Week!

NWS supports the planting of native trees with the selection of species guided by soil type and vegetation indicator species. Pre-planting preparation follows close-to-nature principles resulting in minimal soil and environmental disturbance. The Butler's new native woodland has three main species – Pedunculate oak, Downy birch and Hazel – all supporting a rich biodiversity as they grow. Other minor species include Wild Cherry, Hawthorn, Holly and Scots pine – an iconic native conifer.

The woodland was planted and will be maintained by the Western Forestry Co-Op until the trees are established, normally after four to five years, in return for the Afforestation grant. The annual forestry premium will yield €7,500 for 15 years which will, according to Sean,

more than compensate for the loss of sheep income factoring in the income tax exemption available for the forestry premiums. The young trees have got off to a good start with healthy new growth – but so also has the grass. Sean has been already working with his forestry company to carry out grasscleaning and ensure the grass does not hold back the trees. All grass control is manual and no herbicides will be used to establish the trees which for the Butlers is a really positive feature of the native woodland scheme.

## Forest bathing

Already an integral part of the farm, the Butlers see many opportunities for the new woodland in the years ahead, not least the therapeutic potential for energy healing and facilitating social farming

initiatives with vulnerable groups.

Of particular interest is the Japanese concept of Shinrin-yoku or "forest bathing" which allows people to take time out, slow down and connect with nature. The Japanese have long recognised the benefits of interacting with trees with research now supporting the many physiological and psychological benefits.

Hillside Holistic Farm also facilitates social farming which says Sean "has given us the opportunity to share the benefits of farm life with others." He is excited that the growing woodland will add to the social farming experience providing opportunities to work or just get a feel for the outdoors bringing a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing.

## The future

As we slowly, and with some trepidation, recover from the impacts of the pandemic, the unique skills, services and facilities offered by Hillside Holistic Farm maybe sought after as never before – and the native woodland will play its part in the years, decades and centuries ahead. As they grow older, the Oak, Birch, Hazel, Cherry and other assorted native trees will provide new homes for many flowers, insects and animals, bring a riot of autumnal colour, store away carbon in the timber while giving shade and shelter to stock grazing in neighbouring fields. But maybe their greatest contribution will be fostering the human connection with the natural world for those who choose to "bathe" in the forest and experience peace, tranquillity and self-fulfilment. Trees truly are amazing.

For more information on Hillside Holistic Farm is available at <https://hillsideholisticfarm.ie/>  
To learn more about planting Native Woodlands and other forestry planting options go to [www.teagasc.ie/forestry](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry)



# Successful performance measures

In his first address to a Teagac Dairy Conference as Head of Dairy Knowledge Transfer, **Joe Patton** outlined a range of performance measures through which Irish dairy farmers can benchmark their success.

In a virtual presentation Joe confirmed the progress made over the past decade: "The Irish dairy industry has changed significantly in terms of its output and efficiency, delivering an increase of over 70% in milk output from a 43 per cent increase in dairy cow numbers in 2020 relative to 2007-2010. Growth and technological progress have added €3bn to the value of food exports from the country and sustain 60,000 careers across the economy. Despite some commentary regarding the 'industrialisation' of dairy farms, the supplier base in Ireland has largely retained its family farm profile. The average farm is now milking 82 cows at a stocking rate of 2.1 livestock units per ha, with a spring calving, pasture-fed model as the overwhelmingly predominant milk production structure."

## Great expectations

Joe outlined what is expected of milk producers: "As with all industries and sectors of society, agriculture is

being increasingly challenged to play its part in improving climate and environmental sustainability. Issues such as greenhouse gas (GHG) and ammonia emissions, water quality and biodiversity are now foremost. There is legitimate concern among many dairy farmers as to the implications for economic sustainability of potential changes to their production system." Nonetheless, Joe insisted: "there are a range of practices and technologies that can improve economic and environmental outcomes in tandem."

## Keeping the basics right

The Head of Dairy Knowledge Transfer highlighted stocking rate: "It is an important driver of the overall system due to its effect on sward utilisation, feed budget inputs, milk yield per cow and farm infrastructure requirements. Stocking rate as a stand-alone measure has a positive effect



on profit per hectare and accounts for 25-30 per cent of the variation between farms, as confirmed by the eProfit Monitor.”

He went on to outline limitations in that conclusion: “An obvious limitation is that it takes no account of feed supply per hectare. This is dictated by annual pasture growth which can vary from 9-15 tonnes of DM per ha across proximate farms within a given year. Assuming that a dairy cow requires 5.5 tonnes of dry matter per hectare of pasture grown to meet forage demand, the true stock-carrying capacity of a farm may range from 1.6-2.7 LU per hectare depending on annual pasture growth rate.”

Measure and utilise

Dr. Patton warned producers of the need for accurate on-farm annual grass production data: “In its absence, optimal stocking rate cannot be defined. Grass utilised, on the other hand, incorporates purchased feeds, stocking rate and herd nutrient demand per cow, to calculate a figure for forage utilised per hectare. The current industry average is eight tonnes of DM grass utilised per hectare with a research target of 12 tonnes of DM per ha. The grass utilised metric explains 55-60 per cent of the herd-to-herd variation in profit, so farms with more grass utilised per hectare can be reliably expected to have higher profit margins.”

Milk yield per cow, Joe continued, explains less than 10 per cent of farm profit variation in comparison. Importantly, he said, when grass utilised and stocking rate are analysed together, the stocking rate relationship to profit tends to become negative. This indicates that while stocking rate, as a metric, is linked to farm profit, it is through its effect on grass utilised that the effect is realised, and that increasing stocking rate beyond the point at which grass utilised is maximised may result in lower profit per hectare.

**“N remains a critical nutrient in the production of forage quality and quantity for dairy production systems. A potential outcome from lowering N use at farm level is reduced DM production, leading to forage shortages and an increase in the level of supplementary feed required. Improvements in the efficiency of N use and maximising the contribution of N fixed from legume swards, will be key targets.”**

### Stocking rates and profitability

“The annual cost of purchased forage and concentrate to sustain stocking rates beyond grass growth capacity of the farm is estimated at €1100-1300 per cow at 2020 input costs, depending on farm circumstances.” The Teagasc Head added: “Overheads, accommodation and other capital costs must also be accounted for, making it vital that farms complete a cost budget relative to herd milk solids output before adding marginal cows to a system.” Lower CO<sub>2</sub> from grazed pasture.

“In terms of environmental impact, previous life-cycle analysis of the carbon intensity of the dairy system has shown that a system based on grazed pasture can achieve lower CO<sub>2</sub> output per kg of saleable product than systems reliant on conserved forages and imported concentrate sources,” Joe Patton concluded. The Teagasc Conference virtual attendees heard that the current estimate for an optimised grass-based system in Ireland is 0.86kg CO<sub>2</sub> per kg of milk, with potential for a reduction to under 0.75kg CO<sub>2</sub> per kg of milk with the implementation of new technologies. Furthermore, a key measure of abatement of ammonia emissions is maximising days at grass to reduce losses associated with slurry handling. Maintaining a focus on grass utilised and avoiding a gradual drift into more intensive hybrid indoor/grazing systems, Joe Patton emphasised, is an important objective that can deliver economic as well as environmental benefits. “It is well understood at research and advisory level that issues of scale and fragmentation must be accounted for at farm level, therefore careful case-by-case analysis should be conducted around optimal stocking rate for individual farms.”

**“Better herd fertility increases annual milk yield relative to genetic potential, by maximising days at peak lactation and increasing the proportion of more productive mature animals in the herd. It also leads to lower involuntary culling and replacement heifer inventory costs.”**

### Income and the environment

The issues faced by dairy farmers to maintain family farm income while meeting environmental targets are numerous, Joe warned. “Much can be achieved by optimising stocking rate and feed system and improving herd fertility and genetics. Altering fertiliser N type and rate will also contribute. The development of methane abatement feed technologies has great potential but requires tailoring for grass-based systems; this work continues in Teagasc and elsewhere. As regards N use efficiency, implementation of proven technologies such as LESS, soil fertility management, grass measurement and clover swards, offer excellent options. Uptake and implementation of these practices is not simple, but the economic and environmental benefits are clear.”

**“Age at first calving can be a very important factor in determining carbon intensity of milk production – calving at an older age generates additional CO<sub>2</sub> from a mature animal for zero additional saleable product. Older heifers will also contribute to higher organic N loads on a whole-farm basis. A similar effect occurs with older age at slaughter for beef animals.”**



Pictured from left: Anne Randles, Director of Corporate Affairs, Ornua, Karen Brosnan, Chair Nuffield Ireland and Tom Arnold, Chair, EU Commission's high level expert group which will assess the need for an International Platform for Food Systems Science

# Research is key to climate-smart future

At the recent Nuffield Ireland Conference, the need for private funding and research in order to achieve a climate-smart, environmentally sustainable agri-food sector was highlighted.

Nuffield Ireland's recent annual conference event featured an expert panel discussion which explored the theme 'Future trends in agri-food policy – how does the sector need to respond?'. The discussion set out the challenges currently facing the industry and the practicalities of fulfilling Food Vision 2030. The panel agreed that in order to achieve a climate-smart, environmentally sustainable agri-food sector, private funding for research and innovation is required. The panel also discussed the 'unfair way' in which the agri-food sector is being viewed publicly. Declan Kelleher, former Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Union (2013-2020) and Ambassador to China from 2004-2013 said: "There is an unbalanced narrative at play involving the demonisation of Irish agriculture which is wrong and very unfortunate – that debate needs to be evened up, we need to colonise the airwaves and set out the position, not in a defensive way, but in a proactive way."

Tom Arnold, Chair, EU Commission's high level expert group which will assess the need for an International Platform for Food Systems Science, added, "I think there has been an excessive polarisation of opinion between the agricultural world and the environmental world that is unproductive. We need to get to the point where we have a much clearer sense of a common ground and to work to a programme to achieve that. I believe that what we have set down in Food Vision 2030 can be a basis for that but it is going to require a lot more discussion and willingness to compromise to go down that road." Karina Pierce, Associate Professor of Dairy Production in UCD and Nuffield Scholar discussed her recent Nuffield Ireland report which recommended the need for a National Agri-Food Research & Innovation Policy to address the challenges facing the industry in order to give direction to strategy and investment. "If we are going to realise the potential that research and innovation offers we are



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going to need greater cohesion, greater collaboration and better communication to allow science to be translated into strong business, strong policy and strong management decisions. Because of the scale of investment required, private sector funding is going to need to be involved. However this involvement can threaten the perceived independence of the research so this must be addressed."

### 2020 Nuffield Scholar Reports

The conference also heard the findings of the reports of the five returning 2020 Nuffield Scholars. The key recommendations from each of these reports were:

Kate Dempsey, founder of the Irish Mussel Seed Company (IMSC), the first fully licensed offshore mussel seed provider on the east coast recommended better inclusion and fairer planning from Marine Spatial Planning policy makers. This includes a bottom-up approach, integrating local perspectives with science and economic knowledge in order to vastly increase the overall success of a spatial plan. Dairy Farmer, Bruce Thompson from outside Portlaoise in County Laois recommended using dung beetles as an alternative to anthelmintics in order to provide a solution to anthelmintic resistance and their negative environmental impacts. Gareth Lamberton, a dairy farmer from Fahan in Donegal recommends that farmers must re-engage in their communities, and this can be encouraged by providing training for farm advisors to provide support and mental health advice along with financial assistance in the areas of training, health and safety and knowledge transfer. Linda O'Neill, a Dungarvan-based Dairy Farmer, originally from Castletownbere in West Cork has recommended that in order to attract younger entrants to the industry, we must enhance the promotion of farming as a career in schools and colleges; improve the role third level agricultural education plays in preparing students for farming as a career; and encourage young people to travel to gain experience.

Robbie Byrne, a farmer and soil nutrition expert from Irishtown in County Louth recommended that regenerative agriculture is the way forward to ensure sustainability in Irish agriculture and that more focused research to support this must be carried out by relevant stakeholders.

## THE ROLE OF THE DUNG BEETLE



Bruce Thompson on his farm in Ballyfin.

Nuffield scholar Bruce Thompson milks 250 cows in Ballyfin, Co. Laois, with his wife Laura and two children. His report focused on Bruce's interest in the humble dung beetle, after he realised the importance of a dung beetle's role on the farm. Dung beetles are able to increase soil fertility by aeration and their ability to make cow pats disappear into the soil allows the nutrients to be recycled for plants to grow. They can also dehydrate the cow pat, which prevents parasites from hatching, therefore helping to eliminate farmers' need to dose cattle with costly quantities of anthelmintics. Bruce has not had to dose any of his cattle since 2017.

Highlighting the key findings in his report, Bruce stresses: "The big thing is the relationship between farmers and vets and the need to work closer together to reduce the amount of anthelmintics or wormers being used on farms. We know that these have negative effect on the environment and parasites also become resistant to them. Vets should slow down and spend time with farmers on a proactive approach to parasite control and farmers need to be willing to pay vets for their time – employ your vet to keep animals healthy rather than to treat sick animals."

Discussing the benefits of dung beetles on the farm, Bruce says: "Dung beetle have attributes to assist in parasite control. Animal health comes from grass health and grass health comes from soil health. And dung beetles contribute greatly to soil health. And, beyond that, the beetles contribute to biodiversity on the farm. They can fly but are terrible at it, so they act as a very available food source for wild birds and bats, and badgers and foxes eat the beetle larvae as well. There is work, for example, ongoing on the Isle of Islay to re-introduce dung beetles to the environment and reverse the decline of biodiversity in the area. And there is also evidence that the introduction of dung beetles to an environment can reduce run off into water ways."

Bruce also says that he has been surprised by the level of interest that the topic has generated: "It is something I wasn't expecting but it shows that there is a real appetite out there among various stakeholders – farmers, ecologists, vets, conservationists, entomologists, etc – to come together and produce solutions. There is an appetite for collaboration and change." With this in mind, Bruce and a team of like-minded people across various sectors, have set up the website [www.dungbeetlesforfarmers.ie](http://www.dungbeetlesforfarmers.ie) with the aim of increasing the awareness of how important dung beetles are and creating an accessible and pragmatic, evidence-based resource relating to how management decisions impact dung beetles.

## MESSAGES:

- ▶ Will you have any family regrets in 15-20 years' time?
- ▶ If not expanding or building, take steps to make dairy farming less boring
- ▶ "Real world" farm planning starts now,
- ▶ Do your Dairy Profit Monitor now
- ▶ BCS cows again now and act
- ▶ 95% of lameness is caused by humans – take preventative action now
- ▶ The milking machine must be serviced now
- ▶ Feed dry cow minerals from 20 December to early February calvers
- ▶ Move spring labour tasks to December, including vaccinations
- ▶ Look after your health before the busy spring

## REGRETS

- ▶ "My biggest regret is not going to see my children play their games when they were young" – recent comment by a 70-year-old dairy farmer. "I regret terribly not having gone on holidays with my wife more often" – comment by a farmer on the recent death of his wife.
- ▶ If someone told you that you had 6 months to live, what would you spend that time doing? Therefore, take a serious look at how you organise and manage your time.

## "REAL WORLD" FARM PLANNING FOR 2022

- ▶ Most farmers do not "actively manage" their farms; which involves making long-term plans compatible with personal and farm goals; making short-term plans for managing: grassland, breeding, and all components of animal welfare. Instead, farmers tend to manage things "on the hoof" – as they do tasks. This is not efficient nor effective management. The result is profit is always below that which is possible and it also frustrates staff. Let's spell out what you must do and put time lines on the tasks.
- ▶ Farm Financial Planning:
  - ▶ December: complete the 2021 Dairy Profit Monitor (DPM)
  - ▶ December: Review the 2021 DPM with your Group or Adviser.
  - ▶ December: Farm Physical Plan with targets for 2022.
  - ▶ December: Farm, 5-year, Financial Plan
  - ▶ December: Annual Cost Control Plan for 2022.
  - ▶ Last day of every month, review all bills, pay them and update your Cost Control Plan
  - ▶ Decide what items/commodities need to be purchased and order,
  - ▶ In October, for the following year, calculate your fertiliser, meal, milking parlour needs etc. and get 3 quotations from merchants before purchase.
- ▶ Farm Grassland Planning for year 2022:
  - ▶ January: Spring Rotation Plan (on PastureBase/

Agrinet)

- ▶ January: Spring Grass Feed budget (on PastureBase/ Agrinet)
- ▶ January: Farm Grassland Plan for whole year (programme available).
- ▶ January: Do Your Annual Fertiliser Plan based on soil results,
- ▶ February 1st, and every Monday for whole year, walk the farm and measure grass.
- ▶ April – November: Use Grass Wedge to manage grazing quality,
- ▶ August: Do Winter Fodder Budget (on PastureBase/ Agrinet)
- ▶ August: Do Autumn Rotation Plan (on PastureBase/ Agrinet)
- ▶ August: Do Autumn Feed Budget (on PastureBase/ Agrinet)
- ▶ Farm Breeding and Fertility Plan for year:
  - ▶ January: Cow and Heifer breeding Plan,
  - ▶ April 1st: Sire Advice planner to choose AI bulls,
- ▶ Farm Mastitis Management Plan for year:
  - ▶ January: Make spring/summer mastitis Plan,
  - ▶ September: Make dry cow mastitis plan,
- ▶ Farm Body Condition Scoring (BCS) Plan for year:
  - ▶ Six times per year as follows:

**IF COWS COULD CHOOSE,**

**THE CHOICE WOULD BE NEOMILK**

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FOLLOW-ON MILK

- ▶ Early Oct; Mid-December; Mid- March; Mid-April; Mid- May; Mid-June.
- ▶ Farm Vaccination/Dosing Plan for year:
  - ▶ With veterinary help make a Herd Health Plan for all stock
- ▶ Farm Work and Holiday Rote Plan for year:
  - ▶ Do weekly rota for all staff every Friday, including family.
  - ▶ Stitch in holiday 2-week break for all staff, including yourself.
- ▶ Staff requirements:
  - ▶ December: Do you have adequate cover for the year?
- ▶ Do we have to do any building this year?
  - ▶ If so, set the plans in motion to do so early in year, getting a contractor to do it if at all possible.
- ▶ Make similar plans for other tasks that need to be planned.
- ▶ All of these specific dates MUST be written up on an Annual Wall Planner for 2022. You now must ask; “HOW can I do these Plans” if you do know or haven’t the wherewithal to do them get your Discussion Group involved or talk to your Adviser.

## DO YOUR PROFIT MONITOR NOW

- ▶ From the above timeline you will see that December is all about Financial Management, that is, looking back at

2021 and doing a financial plan for 2022.

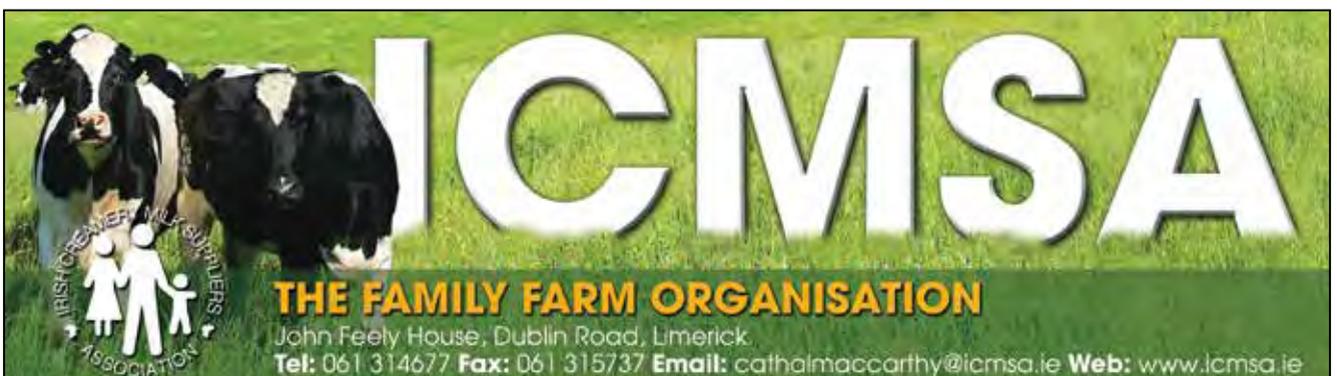
- ▶ The Dairy Profit Monitor (DPM) must be completed early in Dec, reviewed and then the Cost Control Planner must be done for 2022. It is possible to do the DPM now as all the costs for 2022 have been accrued (stitch in possible meal and other purchases and outstanding bills yet to be paid) and it is easy to estimate the December milk cheque.
- ▶ This task requires commitment and time to assemble the data and pass onto your Teagasc Adviser before he goes on holidays.

## BODY CONDITION SCORE COWS AGAIN NOW

- ▶ Check cow BCS now, it is the second most important scoring of the year, to check if she made progress since the October check. In-calf heifers and weanlings need the same visual attention,
- ▶ As we are now 60 to 70 days away to start of calving it is vital to carefully examine cow body condition so that you don’t have too many thin or fat cows at calving.
  - ▶ It is essential to get the most of our assets and ‘the cow’ is the most important asset a dairy farmer owns.
  - ▶ Such an examination now verifies the quality of your silage and feeding programme, and if not up to scratch you can now do something about it, which you must!
- ▶ Thin cows; the target calving down BCS is 3.25 – need your attention- why?



- ▶ They will calve down thin.
  - ▶ They will milk less, over 450 litres for every 1 BCS below target and have lower constituents.
  - ▶ They will be thinner at bulling time and consequently 17-20% more of them will not go incalf.
  - ▶ If you are 0.5 BCS under target now it means they are 20 -30 kgs underweight. To the 15 Feb there are 75 days, but the last 14 days must be 'written off' as the cow herself will not put on weight. Therefore, she has 50 days of 'feeding' ahead of her. To put on 25 kgs weight she will have to get 110 kgs meal (12.5 me) or 2.25kgs per day with 70% DMD silage.
  - ▶ Fat cows are a liability, and Vets are preparing for a difficult spring as most cows up to recently have been in very good BCS due to all the meal feeding – why?
    - ▶ A fat cow has a body score of 3.5 or more.
    - ▶ They will get fatter from now to calving,
    - ▶ They will suffer more calving problems.
    - ▶ At or after calving they will suffer from more health problems such as milk fever (cost=€300/case), tetany (cost=€600/clinical case), and ketosis (cost=€190/clinical case) and acidosis (cost=€270/case).
    - ▶ Feed intakes post calving will be reduced by 2kgDM/day resulting milk yield being reduced by 450 litres or more and also lower fat and protein %.
    - ▶ Fertility will be poorer because they will lose too much weight between calving and bulling – 0.5 BCS loss results in submission rates being reduced by up to 49% and 6week pregnancy rates reduced by up to 20%.
    - ▶ By feeding normal levels of silage to them you will be wasting valuable (very expensive) food on them.
    - ▶ What must you do? You must separate them from other cows, restrict their feed to 5-6 Kgs dry matter per day (20-30 kgs of 20% DM of fresh silage daily) plus 1-2 kgs DM straw. But cows must have 2ft of feeding face each.
- LAMENESS: MOST COSTLY!**
- ▶ Over 95% of lameness is caused by humans; pushing them too fast on roadways, over use of backing gates, etc.
    - ▶ Lameness, always a problem, adds huge financial losses to a farm business:
    - ▶ Digital lameness: €106 per case.
    - ▶ Inter – digital lameness: €98 per case.
    - ▶ Sole – ulcers: €144 per case.
  - ▶ These are the direct cost of lameness but the cost of thin cows not milking to potential; not going back in calf and wasting feed are not included.
  - ▶ Therefore, lameness must be prevented and controlled. Go to any training session you can.
  - ▶ What are the causes of lameness?
    - ▶ Poor roadway maintenance and design,
    - ▶ Impatience while moving cows along the roadway and in the yard,
    - ▶ Long periods of time spent on concrete or cows twisting and turning in the milking parlour yard or other yards,
    - ▶ Excessive moisture on roadways and yards,,
    - ▶ Nutritional effects, and the effect of trace elements and minerals on hoof production,
    - ▶ Specific infectious agents,
    - ▶ Genetic factors
    - ▶ Dirty yards and passage ways.
    - ▶ Poor concrete surfaces and slats.
    - ▶ Overcrowding.
    - ▶ Poor ventilation.
    - ▶ Poor preventative care.
  - ▶ Treatment of lame cows is a waster of money if any of these conditions exist on your farm.
    - ▶ They must be rectified immediately – a really important maintenance task for this winter/ spring.
    - ▶ Include some pulp in the ration and never feed more than 3.5 Kgs of meal at any one feeding. High yielders should get a mid day feed.
    - ▶ Run scrapers often to keep passageways clean and have, at least, one cubicle for every cow.
  - ▶ Good ventilation entails having 1 sq. ft. per cow inlet and 2 sq. ft outlet per cow all the time and not just opening doors when you think the atmosphere in the cubicle house is stuffy. Go and check this sooner rather than later as it a major problem on farms.
  - ▶ Routine hoof pairing must be part of the prevention plan:
    - ▶ Experiments have shown that not all cows that had sole ulcers were lame and that first calving heifers were likely to be severely affected by lameness.
    - ▶ It is suggested that farmers should use an expert



**ICMMSA**

**THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION**

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– The Farm Relief Service- for this purpose during December.

- ▶ It will help to reduce the number of expensive “fire brigade” calls and ensure low culling rates due to lameness.
- ▶ Mortellaro has become more common recently.
  - ▶ It is a virus condition around the feet resulting in the foot being badly swollen (not hot) between the claws with a bad smell.
  - ▶ An Alamyacin spray every day for a few days will clear it up, using the following procedure – wash, dry, spray and dry.
  - ▶ In more severe cases footbath of Lyncomycin, Tetracycline, or Opticide will cure the problem, but do not overuse antibiotics and alternate these products to prevent resistance developing.
- ▶ An ordinary footbath (4 litres Formalin or 4-5 Kgs bluestone or Zinc Sulphate in 200 litres of water) on three consecutive days, morning and evening every month is recommended where lameness is an ongoing problem.
  - ▶ Walk through all cattle/cow pens twice per week to identify animals with tender feet or who are off colour,
  - ▶ Remember if an animal is lame in the two back feet she won't show obvious symptoms, except being stiff,
  - ▶ This enables you to act in time which is the biggest problem with farmers during winter.

## SERVICE MILKING MACHINE NOW

- ▶ Your milking machine works on average 1200+ hours per year (=53 full days/year). Your car does half that work and how many times is it serviced?
- ▶ The consequences of not servicing your milking machine annually (should be done twice per year) are very serious.
  - ▶ Slower milking.
  - ▶ Huge increase in clinical mastitis.
  - ▶ Huge increase in SCC levels.
  - ▶ More cull cows.
  - ▶ Reduced milk yield (6-10%).
- ▶ The month of December or January is the ideal time to do it.

## 40-DAYS BEFORE CALVING: DRY COW MINERALS

- ▶ Farmers starting to calve cows from the 1st February will need to start feeding dry cow minerals from 20th December (40 days before calving).
  - ▶ It will cost €2.50 - €3.00 per cow for the season,
  - ▶ Late calving cows don't need minerals for another 6-8 weeks (save money).
- ▶ Dry cow minerals are necessary to prevent:
  - ▶ Retained placenta (cost= €400/case), due to Selenium, Vitamin E, or Iodine deficiency.
  - ▶ Calf deaths (cost =€450+/calf), due to copper/iodine

deficiency.

- ▶ Milk fever (cost=€300/case) due to too much calcium and too fat.
- ▶ Urine drinking due to sodium (salt) deficiency.
- ▶ Reduced appetite due to several minerals and vitamins.
- ▶ Poor thrive due to several minerals and vitamins.
- ▶ Feed 100 grams per cow of pre-calving mineral.
  - ▶ Follow the supplier's instruction on the quantity to feed,
  - ▶ Spread half in morning and half in evening on top of the silage.
- ▶ Make sure your mineral mix meets your deficiency requirements on the farm by having a mineral analysis done on the silage. Buy from a reputable source.
  - ▶ Most silages are deficient in Iodine, Copper, Sodium, Selenium, Cobalt, Phosphorous, and Magnesium.
  - ▶ More recently the major elements, particularly phosphorous, are deficient in silage.

## MOVE SPRING TASKS TO DECEMBER

- ▶ Veterinary work, vaccinations, dosing etc., normally done in February - March should be moved to December:
  - ▶ The benefits for the farmer are:
    - ▶ It is a quieter time of year,
    - ▶ All animals are vaccinated at same time; lower risk of missing animals
  - ▶ The benefits for the Vet are:
    - ▶ Opportunity to rebalance his busy spring workload,
    - ▶ Time to be proactive on preventative animal care and better use of medicine.
    - ▶ Discuss with your Vet now and he will share the animal benefits with you.
- ▶ Have you adequate “help” employed for calving period?
  - ▶ If your herd is large, do you need a night time calver or could you share one with a neighbouring farmer?
  - ▶ Do you need to do a “training session” with your family and staff to ensure all are “up to speed” on calving and calf care management? Almost certain the answer is ‘yes’.
- ▶ Have you the Calving house ready with all the required equipment in place? Restraining gate, straw, calving jack, necessary disinfectant/water etc.
- ▶ Have you the calf house ready? Make a list of requirements and get a staff member to get things ready now.
- ▶ Now is the time to decide if you need to Contract Rear your calves;
  - ▶ I or your Adviser can be some help to you in making contact.
  - ▶ You must operate it to a tight legal contract so that everyone is happy at the end.
- ▶ Buy in and have in yard your first round of protected Urea, as the 15 January date arrives very quickly after

Christmas.

- ▶ Most of your forward buying/pricing can and should be done now.

### CHECKOUT: GRAZING INFRASTRUCTURES?

- ▶ Your grazing infrastructures are the key to utilising the grass you grow and the health of your animals' feet. Address now:
  - ▶ Not enough roadways?
  - ▶ Paddocks too long and narrow?
  - ▶ Mucky roadways?
  - ▶ Mucky gaps?
  - ▶ Not enough entrances to paddocks?
  - ▶ Poorly maintained roadways?
  - ▶ The camber on the road must now be away from streams and rivers.

No water in paddocks. Water troughs very poorly sited?

- ▶ Big silage fields with no water trough in middle?
- ▶ Fences poorly maintained?
- ▶ Paddocks too small because of extra cows?
- ▶ Without having these facilities optimised (near perfect) farmers will not be able to optimise grass utilisation in February, March, April or autumn
  - ▶ The return on money spent on these facilities will be 15-20%.
  - ▶ Go out to your paddocks today and make a list of what you need to do.
  - ▶ The Farm Relief Service can do most of your maintenance work.
- ▶ Get a 25-inch map of your farm.
  - ▶ Work out with your Adviser or mapping specialist where to put a roadway, the number of paddocks you need, two or more entrances to paddock, etc.
  - ▶ Put an identification number on each paddock.
- ▶ Poor road surfaces slow down the movement of cows to and from paddocks. Astroturf is now being used extensively to improve poor mobility farmroads.
- ▶ To get the most from silage fields, cow walks 1-2 meters wide should be strategically placed through big silage fields. As silage fields must be grazed early and late in the year, cow walks are essential.

### LOOK AFTER YOUR HEALTH

- ▶ "Our health is our wealth"
  - ▶ You need very good health to farm well.
  - ▶ There is evidence out there that farmers aren't as healthy as they should be.
  - ▶ It is time for you to get an "MOT" done on yourself. A visit to your doctor will be worth its weight in gold.
  - ▶ Anything that is less than perfect can be further investigated and corrected.
  - ▶ If you are perfectly healthy, then that's great as you can get on with your life with fewer worries.
- ▶ A flu and pneumonia vaccination at the beginning of winter has obvious merits for farmers from middle-age

onwards. Covid vaccination is now a necessity also.

- ▶ A visit to an Optician is also necessary for farmers over 40 years of age. Farmers are doing a lot more computer work now.
- ▶ Musty hay or baled silage will cause Farmers Lung. Use a protective mask. Musty feed will cause abortion in pregnant animals.
- ▶ Many farmers end up with "bad chests" due to wettings. It is worth buying good protective rain gear – you will need two sets, at least.
- ▶ Many farmers are "half deaf" because of excessive noise levels while using tractor, chainsaws, milking machines, etc. Always use ear muffs. A breather line (costs very little) will reduce the noise levels caused by relays in milking parlours.
- ▶ Rest as much as you can because spring is coming.
- ▶ Get fit by joining a local gym. Some farmers pay gym fees for staff; a small 'treat' for them, but the whole farm team benefits by being aerobically fit.
- ▶ Farmers bring a lot of clay and muck on to the road at this time of year. You must clean it off; a resultant accident is your responsibility.

### BITS AND PIECES

- ▶ It is very disappointing the progress we are making on the status of P, K and lime in our soils.
  - ▶ With N restrictions we need to move fast,
  - ▶ It takes over €250/ha extra to raise P by one Index, and that will grow an extra 0.75 tons grass per ha, worth €90/year more profit.
  - ▶ But lime is the cheapest fertiliser you can buy and is available.
- ▶ Mix in-calf heifers with thin cows and 2nd calvers so that the get used to being with the main herd – means they will be under less stress from calving to mating.
- ▶ If you have reason to teat seal, do it very, very carefully 4-6 weeks before calving. Don't do if you never had a mastitis problem with first calvers.

### QUOTATION TO STIMULATE:

"Have no regrets. The elderly usually do not have regrets for what we did, but rather for things we did not do."

### SEASONAL GREETINGS:

To all my readers,  
I wish you a very Happy Christmas.





# The new Deutz-Fahr 6 Series TTV

Developed and produced in DEUTZ-FAHR LAND in Lauingen, Germany, the new generation of 6 Series TTV offers more operator comfort, better fuel efficiency and lower maintenance costs. The engine oil replacement increased to 1000 hours and the transmission and hydraulic to 2000 hrs, thanks to the new TTV transmission and the CleanOil hydraulic system.

The new 6 Series TTV are powered by the latest generation of 6-cylinder Deutz engines, ranging from 192 hp on the 6190 TTV and up to 230 hp on the 6230 TTV. Optimised engine characteristics provide a maximum torque of up to 970 Nm. With the new TTV transmissions, the 6 Series TTV offers impressive performance while reaching 60 kph max speed - unique in this class. 60 kph is reached by keeping the engine rpm at less than 1800 (40 kph @ less than 1200 engine rpm) which considerably improves fuel efficiency and reduces road noise.

### Impressive capacity and performance

The new 6 Series offers a choice of outstanding hydraulic configurations. The CleanOil hydraulic circuit is independent from the transmission lubrication circuit for maximum service life. Load Sensing systems are available with different flow rates of up to 210 l/min (6230 TTV HD model). Up to 90 litres of removable oil capacity for the most demanding tasks. The front lift with a capacity of 5,450 kg can be coupled with the DualSpeed front PTO, which allows the operator to change speeds from 1000 to 1000 ECO in the InfoCentrePro. The rear lift has a capacity of up to 10,000 kg, hydraulic or automatic lower stabilisers can be mounted. Always in base equipment is the transport position of the lower links, which minimizes

interference with drawbars while cornering. Understanding market requirements, the new 6 Series can be offered with 3 factory 'loader ready' options to offer a true all round tractor capable of all farming and contractor applications. Together with the ProfiLine FZ80.1 front loader, the new 6 TTV series becomes a real loader tractor with a lifting height of more than 4.5 meters and a breakout force of 3770 daN.

### New levels of Comfort

The MaxiVision 2 Cab that also features on the new 7 and 8 Series is now available with new features including an extremely versatile mounting system for additional monitors, and a new pneumatic suspension seat capable of swivelling up to 23 degrees with an active climate system.

### SFS Smart Farming Solutions

The most advanced and sophisticated auto guidance and telemetry systems maximise productivity, saving time and reduce consumption. 6 Series TTV tractors are TIM ready, providing two-way communication between the tractor and implement, enabling it to automatically manage certain tractor functions to further improve efficiency and quality of work. The unique Auto-Turn function enables the tractor to turn at headlands automatically, without the need for operator intervention. The iMonitor3 allows the driver to manage all the functions of the machine. Its new interface is more intuitive and has new convenient functions. Via XTEND, the iMonitor allows the screen to be transferred wirelessly to external tablets, that allows the operator to have a better overview as well as



the facility to make adjustments to implements from outside the cab while using ISOBUS UT on the tablet. The new 6 series TTV offers as standard a data management package and SDF Fleet Management free of charge for the first year. This allows remote diagnostics to improve the communication flow between dealer and driver.

### 6 TTV, the overall package

The new 6 Series TTV has leading safety features. Thanks to the intelligent “Dual Mode” hydraulic trailer braking system, the tractor can be connected to both trailers certified Mother Regulation compliant and earlier spec trailers. The pneumatic braking system features a TBM (advanced trailer brake management), which optimizes the braking performance significantly. The 6210 TTV/6230 TTV/6230 TTV HD can be equipped with the well-known dry-disc brakes on front axle. In addition the engine brakePLUS is available. This feature activates the E-Visco fan for an increase in wear-free brake energy absorption. A package with 23x LED work lights turns night into day and the Coming Home function lets every operator know that everything has been thought of. Lastly, the gross vehicle weight capability has increased to 14.5 t respectively and 15.5 t with the 6230 HD version.

## The year of the Cs

Here we are again at the end of another farming year and what a year it was! In Chinese tradition this is the year of the Ox; for 2021 I think you might say we are celebrating, or lamenting in some cases, the year of the ‘Cs’ – Covid, CAP, COP, Carbon, Cows and Convergence.



For almost two years now Covid has controlled the world, in our personal and in our professional lives. It has introduced us to new phrases that are here to stay, such as ‘The new normal’, ‘WFH’, ‘key workers’, ‘lockdown’ and ‘cocooning’.

CAP – now, where do you start? Echo schemes are a major part of CAP and this will control the major part of farmers’ direct payments going forward. There are five measurable schemes proposed and all eligible farmers will have to participate in two schemes. These schemes are, as follows: Non-productive landscape features; Extensive livestock production; Limiting chemical nitrogen use; Planting of native trees; Use of GPS controlled fertiliser spreaders to apply chemical fertiliser; and, the real sore point, Convergence. Simply put, this is about taking from one group of farmers and giving to another group of farmers – it is all about making the industry fair and square and balanced. It is going to be mandatory by 2026 and from an Irish point of view it will see more money going west. This will run and run as a serious debate between all representative bodies in agriculture, the Department of Agriculture and beyond.

At COP26 Alok Sharma President of COP26 stated: “This is our chance to forge a cleaner, healthier more prosperous world”. Well, it is simple really, change starts with everyone not any particular group. And, yes, it will cost money. Existing systems and technologies like wind power, solar power etc, are fine but how will the transition from fossil fuels be funded, managed and broken down in the short term?

Regarding carbon and cows, there has already been much written this past year about methane emissions, the increase – or reduction – of the national herd etc. The debate continues to rumble on.

So, how does the industry stand heading into 2022? Milk processors are following on from what was the trend in 2021: holding or increasing milk prices on the back of a strong market. Beef factories are scrambling for supplies with demand coming from the UK and the Christmas market. This was a strong year for the beef market and all through 2021 mart trade was good. The sheep trade in 2021 was one of the best in years and, as we close, prices are running higher than 2022 and demand is high. And, finally, the tillage industry had one of its best years in quite a while, with yields and prices up along with a strong demand for straw. Looking at 2022, the future forecasted trade figures for dairy, beef, sheep and tillage are showing strong demand and trade.

Meanwhile, the Irish farm machinery industry enjoyed a good year in 2021 with tractor sales the highest since the Celtic Tiger era, with in excess of 2,186 tractors sold up to the end of September. As we go to press I am awaiting updated figures, but we are heading for an excellent year in both new and second hand sales. The general machinery industry is experiencing one of its best years ever even against a backdrop of Covid restrictions and no shows. We can’t wait for 2022 when the shows hopefully kick off again. On a European note, all major manufacturers have shown an increase in profits, which is good news for all as this will, no doubt, lead to further investment in R&D, driving forward the next generation of farm machinery to make farming and contracting operations more efficient.

On that note, I leave you all for 2021. Please enjoy the festive season safely and a Happy New Year to all of our readers.

Until next year, farm wisely and farm safely.

P.S. Don’t forget our January issue will feature our 2022 Tractor Buyers Guide.

## Agri-Spec Komatsu, Merlo Upgrades Announces

With silage saved and livestock soon to be brought indoors, farmers will be focusing their attention on feeding, silage handling and yard-keeping duties. Two machines that have featured prominently in recent years are the Komatsu WA compact wheel loader range, with front bucket and interchangeable fork attachments, and the farm-specified Merlo TurboFarmer telescopic forklifts, both of which have undergone recent upgrades. Distributed by Birdhill and Rathcoole-based McHale Plant Sales, latest 'Dash 8' versions of the Komatsu WA 70, 80 and 100 wheel loaders come specified for agricultural use with high payload and tipping capacity, equipping them to handle silage and other loose feed products. Merlo TurboFarmer units come with hydraulically-powered stabilisers for increased stability when high-stacking bales, wrapped silage and bagged feed products. According to General Manager, Denis McGrath, "both units, fully adapted and specified for agricultural use, were originally bred for the demanding conditions of the construction sector".



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# Kverneland – ready for the future



## Kverneland Qualidisc Next Generation

Kverneland has improved the performance of Qualidisc Farmer and Qualidisc Pro models and increased the field of application. Shallow or deeper cultivation, seedbed preparation or cover crop seeding, all require excellent penetration, cutting, levelling and consolidation performance. This is guaranteed with the new generation of Kverneland Qualidisc models.

“We have adjusted the disc section arrangement to improve the penetration and ensure complete cutting of the soil surface especially in dry conditions. We also enhanced the levelling effect on each side”, says Florian Herbreteau, Product Manager. “The conical disc itself remained the same, as it is proven successful in the market. The Kverneland disc is one of the hardest in the market. An additional change is that we are offering two frame versions on the trailed models. The longer version can now also be equipped with the Actipress Twin or Double Cage rear rollers.”

Kverneland is offering a wide choice of rear rollers for all

soil conditions. The soil consolidation is very important to ensure a good seed to soil contact for a fast germination of volunteer seeds in all conditions. The Actipress Twin roller for example is made to carry the heaviest machine weights on all soil types, but especially from light to medium soils where the rolling effect is enhanced by the friction between the roller and the soil. The U-ring profile gets filled with soil that promotes the rotation by the soil to soil effect. In winter, the soil profile needs to be weatherproof and often a more corrugated profile is needed to avoid erosion. Therefore, with the ingenious pivoting system, the Actipress Twin can be locked in front position and the rings work every 250mm instead of 125mm in standard position to leave a ridged profile. At any time, the working mode can be changed by removing the bolt again to come back to the standard position, where the weight of the machine is spread equally on all rings. Further rear rollers such as the Cage, Double Cage rollers, Actiring, the Actipack, or the Actiflex are well-known, proven, and maintenance-free. All rollers are available for both models, Kverneland Qualidisc Farmer and Qualidisc Pro.

For an improved soil flow, Kverneland has re-designed the side deflectors to prevent any ridges, especially in conditions with high amounts of residues such as maize straw. To ensure a good cutting and mixing effect, the soil-residue mixture should be in the working area as long as possible. This is achieved with a wide inter-row distance of 900mm to prevent any blockages and ensure perfect levelling. An optional pair of star discs instead of two standard discs, one mounted on the front right and one at the rear left side improves the levelling effect in light and fluffy soils and provides additional guidance of the soil flow.

All Qualidisc models are homologated for up to 40km/h in Europe. High visibility on the road is important. A new lighting system with a stable mounting can be fitted on the front and rear of all Qualidisc models. There is no need to fold the lighting plates, they are always visible and thus ensure safe road transport at all times. Every Kverneland Qualidisc model can be combined with the well-known a-drill, available with 200 and 500 litre hopper capacities. This extra hopper with separate metering device allows seeds to be applied like cover crops in one pass.

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## Maximise Precision and User Friendliness with GEOSPREAD

The Kverneland GEOSPREAD spreader range with the updated design and new features will be presented on the Agritechnica 2022 in Hanover (DE). The GEOSPREAD spreader fits different types of farms. From smaller dairy farms with grass land with a lot of boundaries, to big arable farms with different crop types. Kverneland focused on the development on clean-ability and durability to maximise precision and user friendliness.

"We have been listening to customers' input for years, so we understand their needs when taking care of their crops and their business," explains Linda Segers, Marketing Manager. "Spreading is all about precision. You want to be sure that the product which is applied is perfectly dispersed, giving value from every granule, even at high driving speed. The Kverneland GEOSPREAD spreader allows users to quickly and easily optimise the spreader settings after measuring the actual properties of each batch of fertiliser, instead of the generic fertiliser properties that other spreader use. This results in a more precise configuration of the GEOSPREAD spreader and leads to a much more precise spreading pattern." Kverneland has put focus on durability



and quality to provide a disc spreader that takes care of customers' businesses: it optimises revenue, decreases costs and improves the land over the long-term. To improve the clean-ability of the large machines in the GEOSPREAD range, it is now possible to open the rear bumper for easier and quicker cleaning and maintenance.

The CL GEOSPREAD now comes as standard with 2.5 tonne weigh cells to increase accuracy in weighing and the spreading pattern even more. Another benefit is the reliability and safety during spreading or transport in heavy conditions in combination with maximum weight and driving speed. For user convenience there is also an ExactLine border spreading system available for border spreading on the left hand side. It makes it also possible to use the CL GEOSPREAD as a front mounted spreader. From mid 2022 there will be a completely new user interface available for the GEOSPREAD spreader range which is easy to use. This modern interface has an easy navigation structure with an intuitive and

logical layout and guarantees maximum user friendliness. New features include: pre-sets to save different fertiliser types, easy filling mode including limit warning, easier service and diagnostics, and support of a digital electronic spirit level to be able to level the spreader with the hydraulic top link from the tractor cab. With this new interface, operators will be fully prepared for the future of spreading.



## Super-efficient JCB hydrogen engine gets £100 million injection

Super-efficient JCB hydrogen engine gets £100 million injection

JCB is investing £100 million on a project to produce super-efficient hydrogen engines. A team of 100 engineers is already working on the exciting development with the recruitment of up to 50 more engineers under way as JCB targets the end of 2022 for the first machines to be available for sale to customers.

The wraps have come off a prototype hydrogen powered JCB backhoe loader and a second JCB machine - a Loadall telescopic handler - was recently unveiled at a central London event attended by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who commented: "Great British manufacturers like JCB are developing innovative solutions to slash greenhouse emissions and advance the UK's green industrial revolution. It was fantastic to see JCB's super-efficient hydrogen engines, which could overhaul UK manufacturing, help us to rapidly reach our climate targets and ramp up the

UK's hydrogen economy - an exciting area that will be essential to tackling climate change, creating new jobs and attracting investment."

JCB Chairman Lord Bamford said: "Our sort of machinery will need to be powered by something other than fossil fuels. We make machines which are powered by diesel so we have to find a solution and we are doing something about it now. We are investing in hydrogen as we don't see electric being the all-round solution, particularly not for our industry because it can only be used to power smaller machines. It does mean we will carry on making engines, but they will be super-efficient, affordable, high-tech hydrogen motors with zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which can be brought to market quickly using our existing supply base."

JCB has manufactured engines since 2004, producing them at plants in Derbyshire and in Delhi, India. This year JCB will celebrate a major milestone: the production of its 750,000th engine.





## “A good all-round tractor.”

“From a power point of view, it has plenty of grunt for the majority of our tasks that we need it to do, and will tackle most of our implements with relative ease.

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Anson MacAuslan, Estate Manager, Welbeck Estates, Caithness, ARION 420 Stage V, September 2021



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## Abbey Machinery Diet Feeders & Applicators Improving Systems

Abbey's Diet Feeder Range will support all farmer needs from compact introductory machines to larger, industrial size machines all to better improve feed management systems, herd health and the bottom line. The Abbey Machinery Diet Feeder range consists of 17 vertical auger diet feeders from 8 to 33.5 cubic metre capacity. Abbey Machinery's feeders provide a unique low auger profile, an elevated top knife for improved bale processing and mixing. In addition, there is a wider base for improved support, strength and working life. Abbey's long counter knife comes further up the feeder from the floor aiding a faster breakdown process of material. The doors in the feeder have a large opening for an even discharge of material. The gear box is mounted high up into the auger for guaranteed stability and working life. Abbey is now offering a cable control change over for 2 speed gearboxes on vertical diet feeders. Diet feeding is a part of a sustainable, profitable, environmentally friendly way of farming. Abbey Diet Feeders unique chopping and mixing action helps the animal to digest the maximum amount of nutrients from the feed they have eaten, to drive performance, allow inputs to be managed and even to reduce environmental emissions – from both nitrogen and methane. This raises feed efficiency improving milk and meat yield per kg dry matter intake.

Now standard on all Abbey Diet Feeders is the new 2810 Digi-Star Weighing System, an intuitive management tool to access and analyze feed data instantly. The new Digi-Star System helps optimize TMR inputs through precision loading, improving profitability. The system includes a free mobile app for in-cab control improving efficiency and eliminating manual feed sheets. Abbey Diet Feeders successfully contribute to the overall health, sustainability, and profitability of the farm program.



## The future of agriculture



**Tom Murphy**  
Professional  
Agricultural  
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What has Brexit got to do with climate change? In my view, everything. When they voted to come out of the European Union, one of the major issues that

tipped the balance with the British public was "Sovereignty". At that time many misunderstood the interpretation of the word Sovereignty believing its loss would lead to the removal of Queen Elizabeth as Head of State and her image from currency, stamps etc. However, the real issue is that all member states of the EU lose their sovereignty by being unable to take their own decisions and the absolute requirement to accept the dictates of Brussels without question.

I can hear the roar: what on earth is he talking about? Let me tell you, I am talking about the future of agriculture in Ireland as we know it. The EU President Ursula Von der Leyden is on record welcoming the decisions of COP26 as a step in the right direction which should be implemented as rapidly as possible and should aim higher. Accepting this as EU policy going forward will have serious repercussions for Irish agriculture not only over the long-term but most definitely in the short-term.

The Taoiseach cited the KPMG report as scaremongering, but he did not refute its findings nor did he put forward any counter proposals on behalf of the Government. Is this because in reality Ireland will bow to Brussels' dictate to reduce its emissions by up to 30% by 2030 by reducing our

national herd and in doing so wipe out 260,000 jobs in the agri and affiliated sectors.

Tim Cullinan is absolutely right to demand that the Government carry out an in-depth study of the economic and social impact that implementing these targets would have on the agricultural sector. I would add that such a study must also include the adverse effects on those who support the farming sector including Agricultural Contractors and indeed what compensation will be offered to them.

It's mind boggling trying to follow the decisions of Brussels, particularly the decision to buy beef and other produce from countries who have lower standards than those imposed on member states and with no regard for climate change as they continue to destroy vast areas of forest. Is this done to reduce payments to EU farmers and shift the EU's emissions problem to other countries?

Concrete production is deemed to be the world's third largest producer of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. According to Valerie Masson-Delmotte (UN Panel on Climate Change) if concrete were a country it would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases on earth behind only China and USA; that's more than all the emissions from the EU or India, and with the ever growing urbanization in Africa and Asia and a growing demand for housing and roads in western countries, demand for this elementary building product will only increase.

Having said that would the EU dare pull the plug on concrete production or considerably reduce its production? I don't think so. Why does it seem agriculture always has to bear the brunt of policies to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions? Once again, I ask the Government "What is your Plan B?" but I won't be holding my breath for an answer!

Finally, on behalf of PAC Ireland, let me wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a safe and profitable 2022.

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# Atkins Open Day

Last month we visited Atkins in Birr, Co Offaly. On display was the Fendt 5255 combine, which was on demo this year for the first time in Ireland and attracted a lot of interest from farmers and contractors. Also on display also was Bogballe and Bredal Spreaders along with a extensive showing of Pottinger equipment, including the new Pottinger Jumbo Wagon for the 2022 season. There was also an extensive range of mowers, rakes and tedders on show. In addition, Atkins has introduced a Fendt refurbishing service, which is in high demand.



Atkins of Birr have entered the combine market in 2021 with a keen eye on the smaller end of the market with this 5 walker machine with 247hp and a 20ft power flow header aroused good interest this harvest.



Atkins MD Mark Wolfe & Atkins Birr Branch Manager Trevor Richardson at the recent Open Day in Birr.



New to the Irish market is this 5.0m Pottinger Aerosem Combination drill.



Atkins in Birr had a number of exceptionally tidy second-hand Fendt tractors on display at their recent open day.



The first of the new Hydraulic drive Bredal K series machines in Ireland shown here on a K65 Isobus machine with fully independent hydraulic drive with oil cooler.



A Bogballe M35, one of the many Bogballe machines distributed nationwide from the Birr facility.



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## Minister Harris's comments on synthetic meats "mind-boggling"

One of the lessons that we would do very well to learn and which has been thrown into sharp relief by the intense interaction between our farming and food production sectors and the Environmental and Climate Change movement is that we must not assume that people talking about farming will actually know anything about it. It can be a mistake to assume that the person representing the 'Green' side of the debate will actually know anything at all about the practice of farming with which they will be expounding with such confidence. I have lost count of the number of times I have debated on radio or in person with individuals whose confidence about what is wrong with farming will be in directly inverse proportion to what they actually know about farming. They are very confident about what they know but they know very, very, little. That's why I was disappointed but not completely surprised by the comments made by Minister Simon Harris to a Sunday newspaper in which he called for Ireland to pursue research and "be part of the conversation" around lab-grown meats. Citing the fact that this kind of 'beef' is low-carbon, the Minister for Further Education and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science told the Business Post's Daniel Murray that Ireland should get more involved in the area.

Two things will occur to those of us who try and follow these matters. The first is that Ireland is already a producer of low carbon beef: we already produce what is amongst the lowest carbon emitting beef on the planet. And that's not a sales pitch; that is a scientific fact and well attested to by many agencies, not least Teagasc. The fact that Minister Harris seems unaware of that is a little concerning – to put it mildly – and brings us to the second element that we must look at. Is it not a downright odd that we have an Irish Minister calling for Ireland to help develop a synthetic and highly controversial product that is designed to 'take out' and replace one of Ireland's most important export sectors? Do all our Ministers around the cabinet table actually understand the extent and economic importance of our business? Is it unreasonable of us to expect them to

appreciate the facts around a multi-billion Euro export business? Has anyone pointed out to them that the idea that we should replace our completely natural and scientifically proven sustainable system of producing beef with the synthetic product of some corporate lab is very questionable? And the idea that Ireland – with a global reputation for producing environmentally sustainable and natural food – should cheerlead and help in that dubious process is bizarre and mind-boggling. I'd be fairly certain that given the choice most consumers would prefer to entrust the provenance of their food to local family farms that to the faceless corporations who seemed to be the element most eager to drive a move to synthetic 'meats'. The whole area of synthetic meats and the various juices that try and masquerade as milk represent a very unlikely alliance between the most extreme elements of the environmental movement and the most aggressive and powerful food corporations who have nothing in common except their joint desire to see the end of family farming. To hear an Irish Government Minister seeming to endorse that ambition is as disappointing as it is alarming.

We keep hearing that our Government understands the importance of our farming and agri-food sector to our economy, in general, and to our rural economy, specifically. But right across a range of issues whether out-of-control fertiliser prices or the even more baffling continued inaction on an Eco-scheme that will reach out to commercial family farms, we find ourselves having to draw attention to quite obvious problems that are not getting the attention they need if we are to move forward in the direction and at the pace that the Government itself seems most set on. Time is moving on and we all, Government included, have to move past the vague pronouncements and into action on these issues.

A peaceful Christmas to you all and health and happiness for 2022.



Pat McCormack  
President, ICMSA



# Is your farm winter ready?

Now that the day light hours are getting shorter, it is time to ensure your farm is winter ready. Good planning and preparedness will help ensure your safety and the safety of others on the farm. Here FBD's risk manager, Ciaran Roche, takes a look at some of the areas that need to be considered to ensure your safety on the farm this winter.



## Lighting

Adequate lighting is invaluable, especially during the winter months when most activities are carried out during the dark evenings. You should only replace lights around the farm if you have a safe way of doing so. If not, it's always best to call in a certified electrician. When checking lights, make sure that all the fittings are at least splash-proof, IP44 and the protection level for fittings in milking parlours and dairies should be IP45. Check that all lights are working and that they provide adequate light.

## Electrical Safety

It's always a good idea to check how electrically safe your farmyard is. Electrical fittings can become damaged due to wear and tear and some electrical fittings are not suitable for the outdoors. Now is the time to have them repaired or replaced with fittings which have the correct IP ratings. Always use an electrical contractor. Check that your RCD (Residual Current Device) is working correctly, both mechanically and electrically.

This test button should be pressed at regular intervals, approximately once a month. Remember to reset the switch after testing. Using portable electrical tools and equipment such as a power washer can cause electrocution. Always visually check that leads are not damaged. Never handle electrical equipment with wet hands or near water.

## Farm Building Maintenance

Farm buildings and facilities should be inspected regularly, especially before and after extreme weather conditions. On foot of building inspections, maintenance and repair work should be carried out as appropriate. Remember building maintenance work can be very dangerous, especially work at height and because of this, it is essential that all work is properly planned, organised, supervised and carried out in a safe manner. Appropriate equipment for work at

height should be carefully selected. Scaffolding and Mobile Elevated Work Platforms should be used as required. Never take chances and where necessary employ a specialist contractor.

## Keeping the yard tidy

Keeping the farm tidy and free from clutter makes a huge difference in terms of safety. By making sure that the yard is tidy, you are ultimately reducing the likelihood of slips, trips and falls. Clear drains regularly, particularly in anticipation for stormy weather.

## Snow and freezing conditions

Farmers should be prepared for potential freezing and snowy conditions that the winter often brings. Ensure water supplies are protected by insulating exposed water pipes. During freezing conditions milking equipment must be fully drained down after milking and frost protection heaters should be provided to ensure that milking equipment and other critical plant does not freeze up. Ensure anti-freeze levels are adequate in farm vehicles and de-ice all windscreens and mirrors before operation. Remember to grit pathways and yard surfaces during icy spells.

## Manual Handling

Farming, by its very nature, is a physically demanding occupation. This can especially be the case during the winter months, when the housing of livestock can lead to increased workload around the farm, whether it be carrying meal bags, forking silage or rolling bales. Always plan work activities in order to avoid and reduce manual handling activities.

Ask yourself if it can be done differently in order to eliminate the manual handling, or to minimize the distance travelled, or the weight of the load, or the twisting movements required. Where manual handling cannot be avoided use manual handling aids where possible, get help if required and always use a safe lifting technique. Always Think Safety First!

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## A delicious, nutritious meal in minutes? Leave it to Neven!

Neven Maguire is arguably Ireland's busiest chef so if anyone understands fast and flavourful family food, it's him. Here are three comforting recipes from Midweek Meals to get you through the cold days ahead.

# Winterwarmers



### Celeriac and Potato Soup with Smoked Bacon

**Serves 4–6**

Preparation time 20 minutes

Cooking time 25 minutes



Loads of veg  Freezer friendly

Celeriac is the unsung hero of the vegetable world. It's available year-round but is at its best from September to April.

#### Ingredients

2 litres (3½ pints) chicken stock (from a cube is fine)  
5 garlic cloves (3 peeled and 2 thinly sliced)  
1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves  
500g (1lb 2oz) potatoes, peeled and chopped  
1 celeriac, peeled and chopped  
100g (4oz) smoked bacon lardons  
300ml (½ pint) cream  
100ml (3½ fl oz) unsweetened apple juice  
2 tbsp rapeseed oil  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

#### Method

Place the stock, peeled garlic and half of the thyme in a large pan over a high heat. Add the potatoes, celeriac and half of the bacon and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 15–20 minutes, until all the vegetables are tender. Stir in most of the cream, reserving a little to garnish, along with all of the apple juice and use a hand-held blender to blitz until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper. When almost ready to serve, heat the oil in a small frying pan and sauté the rest of the bacon lardons for a few minutes, until crisp and lightly golden. Stir in the sliced garlic with the rest of the thyme and cook for 30–60 seconds, until crisp. Reheat the soup until warmed through, then ladle into warmed bowls and swirl in the remaining cream, then top with the smoked bacon and garlic mixture. Serve with buttered slices of brown soda bread, if liked.

### Neven's Slow Cooker Cassoulet

**Serves 4–6**

Preparation time 15 minutes + soaking overnight

Cooking time 7 hours 15 minutes



Freezer friendly

The Dunnes Stores Simply Better range includes incredible cooked duck confits, as does Silver Hill, making this easy enough to cook for a busy weeknight.

#### Ingredients

225g (8oz) dried haricot beans  
1 large onion, chopped  
2 large carrots, sliced  
2 celery sticks, chopped  
2 ripe tomatoes, cut into wedges  
6 garlic cloves, peeled  
100g (4oz) smoked bacon lardons  
1.2 litres (2 pints) chicken stock (from a cube is fine)  
4 confit duck legs  
100g (4oz) piece of saucisson or any dry-cured Continental sausage, cut into bite-sized chunks  
1 bouquet garni (bay leaf, thyme, rosemary, sage)  
75g (3oz) fresh ciabatta breadcrumbs  
2 tbsp chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
Fresh thyme leaves

#### Method

Soak the beans in plenty of cold water overnight, then drain. Put the beans, onion, carrots, celery, tomatoes, garlic and bacon in a slow cooker and stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper and pour in the stock. Tuck in the duck confit legs, saucisson and the bouquet garni. Cover and cook on a low heat for 7 hours, until the duck confit are meltingly tender and the beans are soft and creamy. Switch off the slow cooker and carefully lift out the inner bowl. Mix the breadcrumbs with the parsley and season with salt and pepper. Scatter over the cassoulet and flash under the grill until bubbling and golden brown. Garnish with fresh thyme leaves and serve straight to the table to allow everyone to help themselves.

## Super Loaded Mac 'n' Cheese

Serves 4–6

Preparation time 30 minutes

Cooking time 1 hour 15 minutes



Loads of veg



Freezer friendly

A brilliant recipe for getting lots of nutritional goodness into an unsuspecting crowd! It can easily be scaled up to feed large numbers very economically and would be delicious served with a green salad or roasted cherry tomatoes on the vine.

### Ingredients

1 large butternut squash (or small pumpkin) or cauliflower or 500g (1lb 2oz) frozen spinach  
rapeseed oil, optional (if roasting the veg)  
100g (4oz) butter  
1 onion, finely chopped  
2 celery sticks, finely chopped  
100g (4oz) plain flour  
1 litre (1¾ pints) milk  
1 tbsp prepared English mustard  
200g (7oz) Cheddar cheese, grated  
500g (1lb 2oz) macaroni pasta  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

### Method

If using butternut squash or pumpkin, peel it and remove the seeds, then cut into even-sized pieces. If using cauliflower, break it into florets. Steam for 10–12 minutes, until tender. (Alternatively, you could cut the squash or pumpkin into large wedges, leave the cauliflower as florets and drizzle with a little rapeseed oil and roast in the oven at 200°C (400°F/gas mark 6) for about 40 minutes, until tender.) If using spinach, cook it according to the packet instructions. Tip your veg into a food processor and blend to a smooth purée (or mash to a rough purée with a potato masher). Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/gas mark 4). Melt the butter in a pan over a medium to low heat. Add the onion and celery and sauté for 2–3 minutes, until softened but not coloured. Stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute, stirring with a wooden spoon. Gradually pour in the milk, whisking until smooth after each addition. Season with salt and pepper. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer gently for 2–3 minutes, stirring occasionally, until smooth and thickened. Blitz with a hand-held blender until smooth, then stir in the mustard and most of the cheese. Remove from the heat. Bring the macaroni to the boil in a large pan of boiling water with a pinch of salt, then reduce the heat and cook for 7 minutes – it should not be completely cooked at this point. Drain in a colander and return to the pan. Fold in the cheese sauce along with the vegetable purée.

Transfer to a large ovenproof dish and scatter over the remaining cheese, then bake in the preheated oven for 30 minutes, until bubbling and lightly golden.

Serve straight to the table with roasted cherry tomatoes on the vine, if liked.

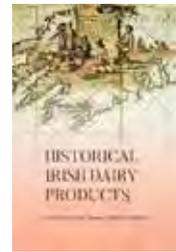


Neven Maguire's Midweek Meals by Neven Maguire is published by Gill Books, price €22.99 and is available in all bookshops now.

## Books to read this Christmas

Books are still the classic Christmas gift. They reflect well on the thought and attention of the giver and provide hours of pleasure for the receiver.

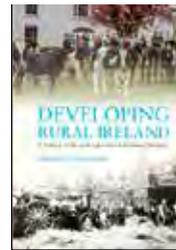
### Historical Irish Dairy Products



For farmers and those with a general interest in agricultural matters there are several books published in recent times that would make perfect gifts. These include Historical Irish Dairy Products, by Dara Downey, Liam Downey and Derry O'Donovan. This book provides a chronological perspective of the evolution of dairy products in Ireland, from prehistory, through medieval

times and into recent centuries, highlighting the intrinsic connection between Irish farming and milk over a timespan of 3,500 years. Who would have known that the history of milk production in Ireland could be so a compelling a read?

### Developing Rural Ireland: A History of the Irish Agricultural Advisory Services



Another impressive book published this year is Michael O'Fathartaigh's History of the Irish Agricultural Advisory Services. The book looks back on one hundred years of Irish agricultural development from the perspective of how Irish farming has developed under the guidance and direction of various advisory services from their development under British

rule to the Teagasc we know today. It is difficult to over praise this book. It is immensely readable, informative, full of facts and photos and relevant to anyone with even a passing interest in Irish agriculture.

### From Farm Relief Services to FRS Network



Peter Byrne retires this year after forty years as CEO of Farm Relief Networks. The umbrella FRS body was established by Peter, with support from various entities, in 1980. He has written a comprehensive history outlining the journey from small beginnings to the multi million business FRS Network is today. Full of photographs and personal reminiscences from a

host of pioneering founders and leaders of Relief Services across the country, Peter Byrne's book charts the successful journey of an exceptional organisation over 40 years.

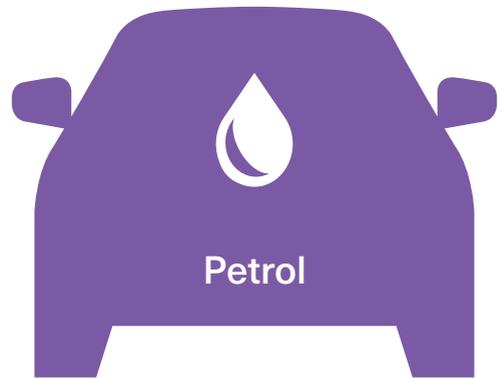
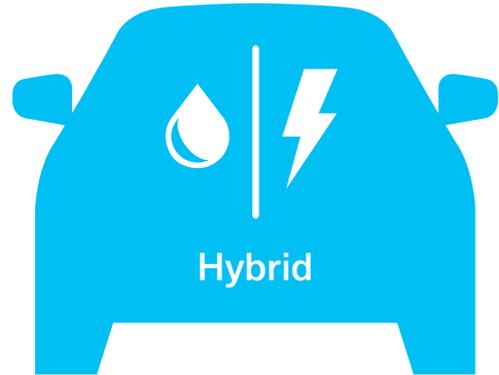
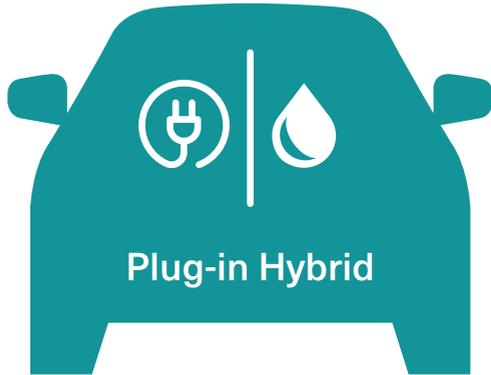
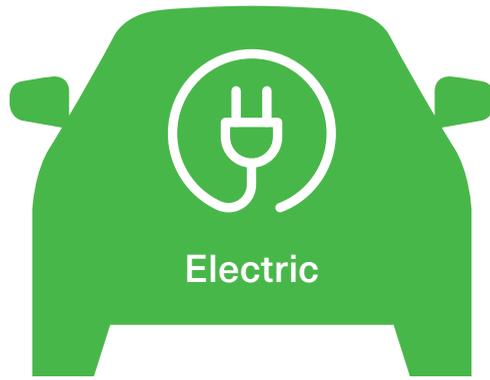


## Glanbia Catch 22

One of the biggest debates in relation to the proposed buy-out of Glanbia Plc's 40 per cent share in the organisation's Irish dairy processing assets is around the contentious 3.2 per cent minimum margin as agreed back in 2017. A lot has changed since then. Most notably, the growth in output and revenues from GII has been exponential. Increased milk supplies have driven stainless steel processing facilities and the profitability and value of GII have increased accordingly. If the 3.2 per cent net margin mandate had not been in place would GII be worth less today and, consequently, would Glanbia Coop be paying less than €307 million for the remaining 40 per cent owned by the Plc? The Coop Board and management have assured shareholders that there is no inflated value being placed on GII as a consequence of the guaranteed margin and that their advisors, KPMG, took any inflated valuation into account when reaching a conclusion on true value. Some shareholders remain to be convinced. Nevertheless, there is not a groundswell against the buy-out, simply because milk producers see it as the only mechanism to throw off what they believe is a depressant on milk price. Would Glanbia milk prices have been higher over the past few years if there had been a lower margin in place? Not so, says the Coop Board, but convincing some sceptical milk suppliers has not been a simple task. While the two-thirds voting margin for two separate groups, general Coop shareholders and milk supplier shareholders, is a tall order, the spin-out sweetener should help. That's worth about €11,000 to the average shareholder. Also helping to get the buy-out proposition over the line will be the knowledge that, if passed, the burden of a set net margin will be removed, providing some hope that milk prices may match or exceed the best payers across the country

in the years ahead. Apart from buying out the remaining 40 per cent share of the Irish processing assets and giving shareholders back some of the locked-up value in their Coop shares through a spin-out, Glanbia Coop also intends to make provision for a €170 million Investment Fund. This is, perhaps, the most interesting aspect of the package the Coop Board is putting before their shareholders. The other provisions – the buy-out and spin-out – have been predicted, even if the use of debt to part fund the purchase adds some variation to the buy-out mechanism. The Investment Fund should be scrutinised closely as it is unrelated to the current internal investment programme to cope with organic growth within GII.

It will be a large war chest and while there is merit in investing outside of the core business this initiative could potentially take the organisation into different territory entirely. The proposed Investment Fund is not dedicated to improving the quality or value of the 'dairy eggs in the basket' or even, necessarily, adding dairy eggs to the basket. It is a wild-card fund to be used to pursue global investment opportunities either within or outside the dairy sector. That is a broad investment strategy based on identifying potential acquisitions with higher margins than are available in most dairy related businesses. The strategy has merit, though many of these businesses carry additional risk commensurate with higher returns. They also carry higher price tags. Identifying the 'sweet spot' in terms of an acquisition that delivers high margins and at the same time does not command an inflated purchase price is difficult and even more difficult to acquire. That doesn't make the strategy unviable or dangerous but the Latin dictum does apply: Caveat Emptor.



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