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Editorial

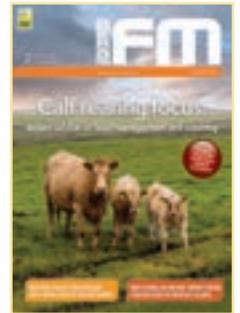
In praise of Irish dairy



Is the writing on the wall for unfettered dairy expansion? After only six years of opportunity to make up for 30 years of virtual stagnation in the Irish dairy production sector, the signs are that we may once again enter an era of restrained production. Given our capacity to continue on a growth curve for the foreseeable future, it is especially regrettable that Ireland's natural ability to grow grass and turn it into high quality dairy products is under assault. In a global context, the scale of our milk production is almost irrelevant.

In a time of great economic uncertainty, Irish dairy exports are contributing significantly to our economic wellbeing. We have few enough indigenous industries. Tourism has been decimated and will take some time to recover fully. Renewable energy production and export may become a significant contributor to our economy in the years ahead. Aside from those, our economy is very reliant on sectors which owe much of their presence here to benign tax regulations that facilitate major corporations domiciling in Ireland. There is nothing illegal or improper about our corporate tax regime. It is, however, envied by many other countries and is unlikely, in the medium term, to continue in its present form. That said, there is still plenty of potential for inward investment. With Britain no longer a member of the European Union, Ireland is a logical staging point for companies contemplating trading with the EU. Returning to Irish dairy, there are two approaches we can take at this time. We can accede to the demands of those who insist that our dairy production practices are environmentally unacceptable and must be suppressed or we can take a more activist approach in dealing with perceived inadequacies in our production methodologies. This activist approach is already identifiable as positive farmer interaction with ASSAP (Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advice Programme) demonstrates. Building on that positive attitude, any deterioration in our, comparatively high, water quality status can and will be reversed. Likewise, the accusation that our dairy sector makes an unreasonable contribution to our national carbon footprint must be vigorously challenged on a range of points. Firstly, the figures are skewed because of our low industrial base compared to most other western economies. Secondly, we await the catch-up phase of environmental science which is edging all too slowly towards recognition of the carbon-retention characteristics of our soils, grasses, hedgerows and grassland management practices. It is inexcusable and unacceptable that we should wait another decade before the full recognition of our carbon storage capacity is recognised, because we were seemingly locked into a carbon reduction regime formulated and adopted before any scientific exploration of the redeeming features of our carbon-capture farming landscape was completed. Thirdly, it is an undisputable fact that our carbon footprint in relation to milk production is far lower, per kilo of production, than most other dairy production models across the globe.

None of these arguments hold sway with those who are utterly opposed to our dairy sector and its continuing growth. Using every means available to stymie and frustrate milk production and processing as well as forestry management could possibly be described as national economic sabotage. Everyone, it seems, is wrong bar the small minority who take it upon themselves to be the self-styled saviours of the world. Unelected and unrepresentative, they scorn all who suggest an alternative point of view. We ignore the dairy critics at our peril but to attempt debate with closed ears risks giving credence to those who will not hear. Far better to promote the positive attributes of high-quality milk production in one of the most natural environments on earth.



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Machinery Pioneer Helmut Claas dies



The world of agriculture recently saw the passing of one of the great giants of the machinery industry. Helmut Claas was born in Germany in 1926. His parents managed a small machinery company, employing around 100 staff. A true entrepreneur, Helmut completed an apprenticeship as a machine fitter after graduating from school. In the early 1960s he took over as managing director of Claas. He owned a farm in East Anglia and, besides farming, hunting was also a real passion for him. For close on 50 years, he oversaw the development of Claas into a global agricultural machinery brand. He focused for many years on the development of innovative farm machinery products, and then mass-produced them for various markets.

The combine market saw the arrival of the Claas Dominator and this was followed by the Lexion, which is today regarded as one of the most efficient combine harvesters in the world. Helmut Claas also developed the Jaguar forage harvester, and the Xerion tractor. All of these machines were products of the engineering brain of Helmut Claas. The Claas group today employ 11,000 personnel across the globe. A true legend and a true gentleman. May he rest in peace.

Malcolm turns on water charges tap



Minister of State Malcolm Noonan's assertion that water charges should be revisited is a politically courageous stance. What Malcolm is saying is accepted wisdom across most developed countries. Even in Ireland, water, at least potable water, is a scarce and expensive resource. From an economic perspective, water is costly to provide. We have an underfunded water treatment and management system. The investment required to improve the infrastructure of our water supply has to be paid for by some means. General taxation is the only alternative to charging for supply. So, someone pays; and not always the people who use most, waste most or can most afford to pay. The original water charges format allowed for a fair usage system as well as allowances for those who could not pay. Reality may begin to dawn in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic. Increased borrowing to fund our Covid crisis management is not a limitless, painless exercise. It postpones the pain until some time in the future. From an environmental perspective, water charges make sense; likewise, from an economic perspective. Many thousands of Irish people and businesses already pay for their water. Extending that reality to the general population is both reasonable and equitable.

M&S may opt for Irish offering

One of the most popular food shopping outlets in Ireland, at least for a certain category of consumer, is Marks & Spencer, or Marks & Sparks as it is popularly referred to in some circles. A notable feature of this food purchasing experience is the lack of indigenous produce on the Irish shelves of the M&S stores. With a few exceptions, most of the well-priced produce is from across the Irish Sea. Many of the offerings on display could be easily sourced locally, but this is all too rarely the case. That policy may be about to undergo a significant if not fundamental change because of the withdrawal of Britain from the European Union. The complex logistics and added costs of shipping ready meals and other value-added foodstuffs from Britain as well as fruit and vegetables may persuade M&S management to source more produce from Irish producers and suppliers. It has always been a pity that the upmarket outlet ignored the many top class Irish food suppliers in favour of giving its customers a British eating experience when most of its customer base would be perfectly happy to buy Irish when the quality is equal or superior to the current offering. The 'just in time' supply delivery system operated by supermarkets generally, may need to change. During the first month of border controls between the UK and Ireland, there were often empty supermarket shelves, especially in Tesco and M&S, which depend to a large degree on UK supply lines.



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Calculating carbon storage



The Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with responsibility for forestry, Senator Pippa Hackett recently launched Teagasc's new Forest Carbon Tool. This online tool is a user-friendly way for existing and potential forest owners to calculate how much carbon can be removed in woodlands and highlights the important role of harvested wood products.

It is extremely versatile and can factor in everything from livestock use on farms in agroforestry systems to modelling conifers and broadleaves on different land types and soils. The model indicates that mean annual sequestration rates can range from 1 to 9 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare and is influenced by the species, age and soil types entered. It also highlights that all types of forestry have a key role to play in mitigating climate change. Conifer species can return high sequestration rates especially when harvested wood products are taken in account while broadleaved forests also cumulatively remove large amounts of CO₂ over their lifetime. The Forest Carbon Tool provides indicative rather than definitive estimates of carbon sequestration.

€1 billion to fund Brexit costs



One billion euro sounds like a lot of money but in the context of a multi-billion annual export sector it is not excessive. How the fund will be used remains to be seen. Will it finance once-off costs associated with Brexit or provide recompense for producer losses associated with the withdrawal of the UK? How will these losses be calculated and are they permanent? In the notoriously volatile dairy, beef and, especially, pig sectors, how much are price fluctuations influenced by market forces generally as distinct from those associated with the increased costs of exporting to the United Kingdom? The previous recompense to beef producers for the adverse effects of the Brexit announcement, before the endgame negotiations were concluded, helped to offset the collapse in the price of beef exported to the UK. Short-term compensatory measures are welcome but the longer-term cost and price implications of Brexit, even with the basic trade deal, will be more difficult to quantify and open-ended compensatory measures will be more difficult to secure from the EU as its economies attempt to recover from Covid.

Tree planting collapse

A quote from an interview with Teagasc Director Gerry Boyle in this issue of IFM highlights the stark reality for the forestry and wider agriculture sectors if the continuing impasse around planting, managing and harvesting forestry continues: "Forestry is critical to meeting our climate change obligations. Planting has collapsed and unless that is reversed quickly, that buffer to offset emissions will not be there in 10 years."

Gerard (Ger) O' Brien. RIP

Last month the Agricultural Science Association lost a long time stalwart member and former president of the Association with the death of Gerard (Ger) O' Brien. Well known to so many fellow Bachelors of Agricultural Science, Ger's obituary condolences frequently described him as 'true gentleman'. Gerard O' Brien's career as a Land Commissioner in Thurles was well regarded and the likeable Tipperary man had a range of extra curricular interests including rugby and horse-racing. A frequent attendee at the annual Cheltenham Festival, Gerard was always good company and an excellent raconteur. Most of all, he had a lifelong dedication to the ASA, where his advice, encouragement and interest in all things agricultural were well recognised. We offer our condolences to his family at this sad time.

Seed famine

The implications of Brexit across a whole range of agriculture and food related enterprises will take some time to sort out. The Irish potato sector has already been highlighted, especially in regard to supplies of seed-potatoes, which are predominantly sourced from Scotland. Phytosanitary regulations will restrict the trade in future years and the alternative of sourcing seed from the Continent is regarded as a non-runner, because of the risk of introducing potato diseases prevalent in many European countries. Grow Your Own would seem the obvious solution and the sector must develop a coordinated approach aimed at ensuring that there is a plentiful supply of native-grown seed potatoes available for next year onwards. This seasons' requirements were mostly met by growers buying in supplies from the UK before Christmas. The silver lining in all this is that it may herald the resurrection of a once-thriving potato-seed growing enterprise on the island of Ireland. There was a time when almost all our seed-potato requirements were sourced at home, in the main from Donegal growers.

The sourcing of cereal seed from the UK may also become problematic in the future. Gene editing is becoming an increasingly popular means of developing benevolent traits in seeds and other organisms. While classified as non-GM, the genetic science is not allowed in the EU. Post Brexit, The UK is likely to adopt the plant breeding technology to



improve the efficiency and productivity of its cereal sector while also potentially reducing the use of protectants such as insecticides and fungicides. If this happens, Irish growers would be banned from using UK-sourced seeds, or at least those developed using gene editing technology.

Buttering up Biden

Let us hope the Covid pandemic will have improved sufficiently by the 17th of March to allow Taoiseach Micháel Martin to visit the White House. The Taoiseach would have a full agenda of critical issues to discuss with the self-proclaimed Irish American president, not least of which is the impact of tariffs on Irish butter exports. Kerrygold Butter is flying high in the US and even the imposition of an additional 25% tariff on foot of the EU-US Airbus-Boeing dispute has not stopped the iconic brand from gaining market share right across the United States. Now the Number One imported butter brand could be facing a doubling of the penal import tax, according to MEP Colm Markey. He has warned that, unless there is a warming in the trade war between the USA and the EU, Irish butter and other Irish and European food and drink products could be forced out of the US market. The European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, of which the Louth-based MEP is a member, has called for a truce in the trade dispute and is encouraging a moratorium on trade sanctions. Could a 'focal i gcluas' Joe Biden by our Taoiseach help bring about a rapprochement in EU-US trade relations?

IFA publishes Dairy Vulnerability Assessment



IFA has published a vulnerability analysis of the dairy sector as part of its submission to the Department of Agriculture's Nitrates Action Programme review. IFA Dairy Chairman Tom Phelan said the review would most impact the dairy sector.

"While dairy may be doing better than other farming sectors at present, our analysis shows that dairy farmers are vulnerable to any cost increases that might arise from further changes to the nitrates derogation," he said.

The report, produced by IFA Director of Policy/Chief Economist Tadhg Buckley and Senior Policy Executive for Dairy Aine O'Connell, addresses expansion in the sector since production quotas were abolished in 2015. In the last five years, production has increased by 50 per cent and exports by 62 per cent (€2bn), but farm incomes have remained static.

The report points out that, on average, 1.3 labour units are provided by farmers and their families. When accounted for, the average wage amounts to €48,049, lower than that of the average industrial wage (€48,946). This wage is before repayments on borrowings and any return on investment.

The report also outlines that while Irish farmers compare favourably to their European counterparts on a net margin basis, they are below the European average when the Return on Asset (RoA) measurement is used. After accounting for labour, Irish farmers RoA is just 1.4 per cent.

Tom Phelan said: "In the past five years, many farmers have had to expand their herd size to remain sustainable. Farmers are running harder to stand still". Family farm systems still dominate dairy production in Ireland with an average dairy herd size of 86 cows. This is compared to an average herd size of 270 in the USA and over 400 in New Zealand.

"Some people refer to 'industrial farming' in Ireland. This is misleading. Our family farm system is worth protecting, and many farmers cannot absorb more costs arising from changes to the nitrates directive. This has to be recognised in this review," he said.

Concluding, Tom Phelan said: "Farmers are acutely aware of their environmental responsibilities, but if policymakers believe that this can be delivered without due regard to the economic viability of dairy farms, then they are misleading both farmers and consumers".

IFA states that Forestry Programme extension will be irrelevant if licensing issues are not resolved

IFA President Tim Cullinan said the announcement by Minister Pippa Hackett that the EU has approved an extension of the forestry programme for 2021 will have no real impact unless the licensing backlog is addressed. "We have a Minister announcing grants to encourage forestry, while at the same time the Department is making it unworkable for people that want to plant," he said.

Currently, there are nearly 5,000 licences awaiting approval. Farmers with forestry cannot thin or harvest their timber, and new entrants cannot get a licence to plant.

"Those who went into forestry with the full encouragement of the Government are being blocked from harvesting their crop. The Department's plan to address the felling licence backlog is not working," he said.

Meanwhile, Minister Pippa Hackett welcomed the extension of state aid for National Forestry Programme and reaffirmed her commitment to developing new strategy and vision for forestry in Ireland. Acknowledging the importance of the extension, the Minister said: "This is good news which will provide assurance to those who wish to apply for grants under the current forestry programme. The extension was necessary as there were delays in issuing new EU guidelines for state aid in the agriculture and forestry sector, but this gives legal certainty for the continuation of the programme. I am pleased to have secured it in time for 2021 and I would like to thank the Commission for agreeing to my request for an extension."

The Minister also spoke about the scope the extension



provides her for delivering a new model for forestry. Commenting, she stated: "This extended period gives us a much needed opportunity to look afresh at forestry in Ireland. We know we need to build and improve on the existing model to provide ecosystem services, income, jobs and recreational opportunities as well as contributing to our challenging environmental goals. I want to oversee the design of that model and am fully committed to the consultation with all stakeholders which will help inform a new Forest Strategy and deliver a sustainable forestry programme."

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InTouch

Fresh Cows:

Focus on a Positive Energy Balance

Cathal Bohane, InTouch Nutrition

As we head into February, the cycle begins again for many spring calving farms. Having had somewhat of a break in January, what follows is a hectic 6–8 weeks of calving. For this reason, it is important to prioritise and, assuming calving is going well, turn attention to the fresh cow.

We will be bombarded with the words “negative energy balance (NEB)” over the next few weeks and for good reason. If we can negate its effect, we will be well on the road to success, if we deem success as good production levels and getting the cow back in calf. All cows will lose some condition and will fall into NEB, regardless of management. But how long we leave them there and the severity of it is what can cause the damage.

While it can be easier said than done, feeding our cow properly will avoid them being negatively impacted. Understanding what type of cow you have and her requirements is the start. Sometimes we feed our cows based on what others are feeding theirs and what we would like to feed them, but this can be far removed from what the cow requires. A simple way to start would be to work out their peak yield from last year, creating a diet based on this and feeding it from calving, not six weeks after calving.

With protein being especially expensive this year, it might be prudent to reduce its overall presence in your diet. While higher protein drives intake and milk yield, lower protein can work in the opposite way, and any excess energy could be partitioned to body condition, milk protein and fertility as a result. Reliance on vegetable protein (soya, rapeseed, etc.) is being reassessed this year, and good results are coming from reliable alternatives, such as Optigen, a controlled-release nitrogen source. There are other steps to reduce the amount of required protein, such as feeding low-protein feeds separately (such as feeding beet now and maize silage later in the season) rather than together, as this will reduce protein demand, assuming it does not significantly compromise the diet. This could reduce protein requirement in the concentrate by 4–5%. Getting to high-protein grazed grass for a few hours, assuming that weather and ground conditions allow and there is grass dry matter available in the paddock, will allow you to reduce silage, which could be 11–12% protein.

In summary, before we balance the cow’s diet, we need to make sure that we are feeding her to her requirements. The requirements and silage quality will determine concentrate usage for the fresh cow, and we need to assume she will peak now, rather than in 6–8 weeks.

Year 5 of the Sheep Welfare Scheme opens in February

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, has announced that the fifth year of the Sheep Welfare Scheme commences on the 1 February 2021.

Existing participants in the scheme will be automatically enrolled in year 5 and will not need to take any action should they wish to remain in the scheme. Applications for participation in the fifth year of the Scheme are also now being accepted from new entrants to sheep farming.

The Minister stated: “The Sheep Welfare Scheme was launched in December 2016 and provides a valuable support to farmers for undertaking actions which make a positive contribution to flock welfare. I was very pleased to be able to secure €17 million in funding in the Budget 2021 process to extend the scheme for a fifth year as we enter the transitional period ahead of the introduction of the new Common Agricultural Policy. My Department is currently issuing information packs to existing participants in the scheme containing the terms and conditions and action record books for year 5 of the scheme.”

The extension of the scheme will require an amendment to Ireland’s Rural Development Programme which will have to be notified to the EU Commission. Minister McConalogue confirmed that his Department would be requesting a change to the reference period in the context of that modification. “I am hopeful that we will receive a positive outcome to this request. Updating the reference year from the current date to the proposed reference year of 2017 is an important step in supporting progressive and expanding sheep farmers. I have listened to farmers in this regard and I am happy to confirm that I have sought this important change to the RDP,” Minister McConalogue said.

Minister McConalogue urged all eligible new entrants to the sheep sector who wish to apply to participate in the scheme to return their forms by 1 February.

Application forms are available by contacting the Sheep Welfare Scheme section of the Department by email at sheepscheme@agriculture.gov.ie or by phone on 076/1064420. For the purposes of the scheme, a new entrant to sheep farming is defined as an applicant who has applied for a new herd number in the period 1 January to the 31 December in the year preceding the scheme year, or an applicant with an existing herd number who has not held or traded in sheep for a two year period up to 31 October preceding the scheme year.

Irish food and drink exports decline by 2 per cent in 2020

New figures released in the annual Bord Bia Export Performance and Prospects report 2020/2021 show that exports of Irish food, drink and horticulture were held to a marginal 2 per cent decline in 2020, valued at €13 billion (v €13.2 billion in 2019), during a period of unprecedented change and challenge that saw the largest disruption to normal market operation, globally, since the end of World War II.

The figures underline the dividend of a decade-long diversification strategy that has seen Ireland achieve a broad global base for its food and drink exports which now reach in excess of 180 countries. Increases have been recorded in the value of Irish dairy, pigmeat and sheepmeat exports, along with very significant increases in the value of exports to Africa and the Middle East as new international markets come to the fore.

Launching the report, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Mr. Charlie McConalogue, T.D., said: "Ireland's food and drink producers faced many challenges on the domestic and international front last year. Despite this, they found a new level of resilience that saw them hold global exports at €13 billion. The marginal dip of 2 per cent is in stark contrast to the towering pandemic challenges they faced including the closure of foodservice, increases in shipping costs, and dramatic consumer behaviour changes as people migrated to working from home. As we look to 2021, my Department, along with Bord Bia, are resolutely focused on supporting our primary producers and manufacturers as they trade through continued uncertainty to support jobs and deliver much needed economic progress."

Meanwhile, the Chief Executive of Bord Bia, Tara McCarthy, added: "Behind the remarkable export performance of our food and drink sector in 2020 are seismic challenges at a strategic, category and channel level. Last year was a pivotal year of learning for us all and 2021 will be even more significant in terms of how we apply these learnings to rebuild and drive growth in new and emerging markets. The success of the industry's transition to doing business virtually – from participation at online trade fairs to the development pioneering virtual trade missions – show that we can, and we will, rise to the challenge of doing business in new and inventive ways. This resourceful approach, coupled with the sectors' focus on geographic and customer diversification over the past decade has now paid dividends and is integral to safeguarding our exports."

In the period since the UK voted to leave the EU in 2016, Ireland's global exports of food and drink grew



Tara McCarthy

by over €1.9 billion, a 16 per cent increase in value. The success of the diversification strategy of the Irish food and drink industry is evidenced by how the geographic spread of exports has shifted in recent years. Exporters have been expanding the value of exports while increasing the proportion of those exports that are destined for high-growth, high-potential priority markets, largely in Asia but also in the Middle East, Africa and North America. The majority of growth since 2016 (€1.9 billion) comes from the EU27 (46 per cent or €871 million) and international markets (43 per cent or €817 million). The UK accounted for just 10 per cent of growth (€195 million) since 2016. Since 2016, the value of Irish food

and drink exports to Asia has increased 14 per cent to €1.4 billion. Exports to Africa over the same period have increased by a significant 86 per cent to €883 million in value, while continental Europe (EU27) grew by 25 per cent to €4.4 billion. In 2020, 33 per cent of Ireland's total food and drink exports were destined for International markets outside the UK and EU, while 34 per cent were destined to the EU27 and 33 per cent to the UK. Commenting on the outlook for 2021, Ms. McCarthy concluded: "For Irish food and drink producers, the global supply demand dynamic for their produce remains positive in 2021 despite global challenges and continued uncertainty as we navigate Brexit and our fragile exit from the pandemic. As we start 2021, exporters are reporting solid order volumes which is a direct result of the strength of trading relationships nurtured over many years. That said, the extra costs and complexities of trade with our largest destination market, as new customs procedures interrupt the smooth flow of produce, will cause significant challenges and should not be underestimated. With a return to global economic growth forecast for 2021, we anticipate continued strong global demand for Irish dairy. We expect the global meat supply balance to favour producers, particularly in Asia which has been at the centre of much Irish export growth. All around the world consumers and customers are increasingly demanding credentials around sustainability that Ireland is well-placed to meet as we seek to differentiate ourselves from competitor exporting nations and to navigate gastro-nationalism in key markets. Our action plans, programmes and priorities for 2021 and beyond are centred on value creation for the full supply chain – from farm to fork. With Bord Bia's insight driven support, we remain focused on partnering with this vibrant and resilient sector to pursue global growth in a very different world."

THE BOYLE LEGACY

Next September Professor Gerry Boyle will step down from his role as Director of Teagasc, leaving a legacy of change. He speaks with **Matt O’Keeffe** about some of the developments over the 14 years of his directorate.

As Director, Gerry believes that listening is key to getting the best performance out of the entire team: “If you try to listen to people, most of the time you should put in a reasonably good performance. That philosophy has guided me over the years. I have tried to improve the capabilities of Teagasc. That reflects the quality of our researchers, educators and advisory staff. They must be encouraged to develop themselves by providing them with facilities and equipment to do their jobs. I think we have been reasonably successful, just looking at what our researchers have achieved and the quality of research allowing them to draw down funding, it is impressive by international standards. On the advisory and education sides, we translate that research knowledge into practical application. In education we constantly seek to develop ability and broaden the desire to embrace the most up-to-date approaches to agriculture and food production. At the core is building ability and putting benchmarks in place to provide objective assessment of performance.”

Dairy expansion

Efficiency before expansion, he explains, has always been Teagasc’s mantra. “Having said that, our responsibility, on foot of national targets, was to assist in the expansion which would have happened in the previous 30 years but for quotas. Where there are economic and market opportunities, farmers will respond. There will be production restrictions in the future. We do not know the form or extent of those restrictions. The signals are there is relation to chemical nitrogen use, for instance. The rate of expansion of the past six years will not continue. Producers will have to assess the pace of future expansion and optimise their existing production model to improve margin and profitability. There is still massive scope for that. The Grass 10 programme has shown the potential for greater grassland utilisation on farms before further expansion is considered.” “I have a philosophy that the three legs of Research, Education and Advisory must be integrated and must be connected to practical farming. The farms attached to our agricultural colleges bear this out. They are involved in research as well as educating and advising. Clonakilty’s work around clover production is a perfect example of an integrated approach.”

Research highlights

Genetics and grass research are key priorities: “This must include work on genetics. For every million euro spent on research there has been a twenty-fold return because the research was soundly based and the EBI was put in place to allow high adoption rates on farms. Grass research is another stand-out. The rate of progress has been phenomenal. The development of Pasture Base Ireland should be singled out. The benefits have been recognised by farmers who have committed to it. The progress needs to continue and intensify.”

“On the food side, we do cutting-edge work in food processing, particularly in the dairy and meat areas. Prepared consumer foods have featured prominently, notably at Ashtown, as has work with Ornuia developing new cheeses. We have a strong record in artisan food production. At the high end of research our work with UCC into the human biome has received international recognition. In our animal biome research we see great potential around feed additives and gaseous emissions. The soil microbiome has also been explored and this is capable of delivering real value over time. A Foresight exercise for different aspects of technology was published five years ago describing technologies we needed to target. Digitisation was recognised as a priority technology, focusing, for instance, on how the tools of precision agriculture can be exploited for dairy production. Vista Milk was an outcome of that research.”

Policy development

“An area of particular interest which I supported is area-based policy. It can be controversial with different opinions on policy development and direction. We completed a large body of work on the current CAP that has influenced national policy formulation and we are previewing options under the next CAP. We have been open in our approach and analysis and have been prepared to defend our stance. Teagasc has a large body of work on the environmental agenda including greenhouse gases, water and biodiversity. Again, we have had an influence on policy direction. All our advice is based on research which we publish and has generally been regarded as objective.”

Sustainability

Gerry Boyle acknowledges that future strategy will revolve centrally around sustainability: “That includes economic and social sustainability as well as environmental. This requires change by everyone, including Teagasc and farmers. Our research has shown the role clover can play in herbage production and farm productivity. That’s why our Roadmap includes much reduced use of chemical nitrogen on our research farms. The big challenge is to replicate that on farms around the country. The writing is on the wall in relation to the use of chemical nitrogen.

The Ag-Climate document sets out a target of reduced nitrogen application. We can respond in two ways. We can say it is impossible and will have a devastating impact on profitability and animal numbers. If nothing else changed a twenty per cent reduction in N use would have a serious effect on production viability. Time must be given to transition to a different production model and if the research is correct, we think it will work. Farmers must be incentivised and supported. I am positive on this. It is our job to work with farmers to implement successful change. It’s not just about clover and chemical nitrogen. It is also about soil fertility and adequate liming. The solutions are there, but I don’t underestimate the challenges of delivering those solutions.”

Niche opportunities

The Teagasc Director does not believe that the ambitions in the Green Deal for organic farming expansion can be realised in an Irish context: “Given the low base we will see expansion but nothing like the scale envisaged. Our specialisation in livestock production is because of our unique ability to grow large quantities of grass. Our tillage sector has been in decline because of generally low profitability. It is heavily dependent on EU supports. There are niches in tillage, horticulture and organics that innovative producers can exploit. These will not, however, transform the wider agricultural sector but they will provide individual opportunities. We will support people involved either at the production or processing stages. Many options are niche by nature and quite demanding,



technically. The idea that we can transform agriculture by moving from livestock to horticultural activity is simplistic. The nature of many regions is that they are useful only for livestock production, mainly suckling. This is the reality of soil type, climate and economic facts. There will be ongoing transition in livestock production but into other mainstream activities rather than niche production opportunities which will be a minority pursuit.”

Carbon science

Teagasc’s Signpost Farm Programme is designed to help farmers achieve the objectives contained in the MACC: “A key component is research which goes beyond the basic carbon sequestration concept. It involves rigorous measurement rather than broad estimates. Real-time soil sequestration will be researched in a range of locations. The hope is that over time the evidential basis for placing a value on our soil, grass, hedges and forestry carbon sequestration potential and value can be recognised and acknowledged. This is the only means by which less intensive farming systems, for instance, could trade carbon credits.”



Balancing

life, work and a love of cattle

Cathal McCormack is Country Manager with Alltech. Originally from Tulsk in county Roscommon, Cathal and his family have recently returned to live on the family farm where, he tells **Matt O’Keeffe**, a herd of pedigree Angus cows are the centrepiece of production.

The herd goes back to the 1950s when Cathal’s grandfather started breeding Angus cattle: “My parents are very involved in managing the farm and over the years we have improved the herd especially on the breeding side. Through looking at the best of the breed across the world we have continuously improved our management practices. We look at what the customer requires and what the Angus is renowned for and work on those priorities including the quality and taste of the meat. The unique characteristics of Angus must be emphasised. Like Alltech, it’s not just about marketing, it’s about having the right product for the customer.”

A career in progress

While his Alltech responsibilities take priority he does regard himself as a farmer, albeit part-time: “Farming keeps me grounded. Overcoming challenges on the farm allows me to understand the challenges facing our farmer customers.” After a stint at Mountbellew Ag College,

Cathal undertook a business degree at Galway-Mayo IT and then worked with Roscommon Leader Partnership and Macra. He regards his four years as a Macra Regional Training Officer as a great experience: “I met so many positive people and gained such experience in managing relationships and working with people. It was a great grounding for my subsequent roles in Alltech, firstly as a Regional Sales Manager, National Sales Manager and now Country Manager. My advice to anyone starting out is to work at something you are passionate about. That makes all the difference between just doing a job and loving the job you do.”

A busy schedule

As Country Manager for Alltech, Cathal McCormack has a busy schedule, all the more so as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Covid pandemic: “I manage a team of 20 people, who have diverse roles in relation to animal nutrition. The people on the nutrition side of the

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business work with feed mills and mineral companies, advising and helping them across a range of issues including dietary and product support. We have really loyal customers across the country that we work with. In addition, we have a team of six InTouch nutritionists who are on the ground supporting up to one hundred farmers each. These nutritionists, in turn, are supported by a group of four nutritionists normally based at the hub in Dunboyne, though that has changed for the time being because of Covid restrictions. Information comes into them from our farmers in relation to milk or meat production, feed requirements and other relevant issues around health and productivity. If an issue arises the nutritionists will contact the farmer and work through any problem on the phone. If that doesn't resolve the problem the locally based nutritionist, Covid allowing, visits the farm. We also have two people working on the monogastric side, the pig and poultry sector. There are also marketing and administration personnel and, in addition to the people directly reporting to me, I am also involved in the overall management team in our European research headquarters in Dunboyne."

Keenan integration

The acquisition of the Keenan feeder manufacturer in Borris some years ago, adds to the personnel numbers: "We have 150 people working in the Keenan section of Alltech. That's fully integrated now so there is a lot of interaction on a day-to-day basis. There are opportunities for me to be involved in the global aspects of Alltech and work on particular issues affecting the company and its customers in different countries."

The ACE philosophy

The core business of Alltech is animal feed additives, as Cathal explains: "We have developed a range of products that improve animal health and performance in a natural way. The ACE principle was developed by our founder, the late Pearse Lyons. It refers to supporting Animal performance, while at the same time benefiting the Consumer and having a positive impact on the Environment. I believe that Alltech's ACE philosophy is now reflected in the general attitude to food production. Examples of these natural products include Yea-Sacc, which improves rumen fermentation, allowing greater feed conversion to milk or meat, for instance. Our bio-available trace minerals deliver increased immunity to a range of health challenges. Actigen binds gut bacteria to improve gut health. There are natural mycotoxin treatments, as well as non-protein nitrogen products, offering an alternative to soya. So that's a flavour of what Alltech is about. I believe Alltech's time has come in relation to many of the strategies in the Farm to Fork and Green Deal proposals for food production, though there are aspects of those policies that I don't agree with."

One bite at a time

Displaying the scientific approach synonymous with Alltech, it acquired a carbon-footprinting company, which

works with many of the leading coops and food retailers across Europe. Cathal explains the rationale for the purchase: "Alltech takes a broadminded view. It's not just about products, it's also about the environment. There is no single silver bullet. It's about improving thirty or forty aspects of food production on our farms. As a part-time farmer, I understand that approach. Feed additives are a part of the solution, improved management is important, dietary improvements, reinforcing immunity in animals and general animal health, vaccinations, grassland management. All these have roles to play. That's exactly what farmers are doing on their farms. The carbon footprint of milk has reduced by 14 per cent over the past eight years. That's real proof of what is happening on farms. Better use of data through the likes of InTouch, for instance, will help bring more improvement."

"The carbon footprint of milk has reduced by 14 per cent over the past eight years. That's real proof of what is happening on farms."

Natural alternatives

One of the big focus points in Alltech research is in developing alternatives to antibiotic use, as Cathal confirms: "At Dunboyne there is a team of scientists researching and developing new approaches, especially in the monogastric animals, but also with relevance to calf health, for instance. We are also focusing on reducing the carbon footprint of animal production by up to 40 per cent. These are very significant developments. Reductions in nitrogen and ammonia emissions in farm animals are game-changing initiatives. European consumers are foremost in demanding food that does not damage the environment and our research priorities reflect that fact, alongside the value of improving productivity and animal health."

Coping with Covid

Alltech's Country Manager has had to re-organise how his personnel have communicated with customers and each other in the wake of the viral outbreak: "Zoom and Team calls were a novelty for a while, but we do miss the personal touch. There are challenges for our people in terms of family and workspace. We have to understand that and provide support wherever possible. We know there are personal as well as business issues to be managed. Trust is important to allow everyone get their work done under very different and very difficult circumstances."



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A virtual view of Irish dairy

Matt O’Keeffe offers an overview of the topics discussed at the recent Irish Grassland Association’s virtual Annual Dairy Conference.

Dairygold’s Chief Executive Jim Woulfe gave a comprehensive presentation on the outlook for dairy to attendees at the Irish Grassland Association’s virtual Annual Dairy Conference last month. While being generally positive, Jim clearly outlined the challenges facing the sector and gave strong advice on what milk producers need to do to reassure consumers and purchasers of our dairy produce on international markets.

Listing Covid as an immediate issue, Jim believes that with vaccinations and restrictions in the coming months, the problems should be behind us by the turn of the year. Brexit poses more permanent challenges, the Dairygold chief confirmed, adding that while the Irish agri sector had prepared for the UK departure as well as possible there will be long term added costs to the supply chain, inevitably impacting on price. No conversation on dairy here or globally could be complete without reference to climate change and Jim Woulfe advised farmers to embrace the issue positively and deal with the relevant aspects including carbon emissions, ammonia, water quality and biodiversity.

The ‘big picture’ global forces impacting on food production were also outlined. These include, in Jim’s estimation, ongoing political uncertainty, the need for economic stability, tariff wars, anti-microbial resistance and the rise of dairy alternatives. Underpinning the continued success of our dairy export industry will be the long-term dairy supply/demand equation. While noting ongoing market volatility, Jim took some reassurance from historical developments in dairy consumption as well as confirming that current trends suggest a reasonable alignment between supply

and demand on global markets. Continuing population growth, increased urbanisation especially in Asian dairy deficit regions, a growing middle class adopting increasingly dairy and meat-based diets and improving income trends should all have positive implications for dairy demand in the years ahead. Jim Woulfe also referenced the greater numbers of older people globally, all requiring the essential nutrients present in dairy products to maintain good health into old age. Jim made his audience fully aware of the need to acknowledge the changing eating trends of global consumers and their expectations around food. He highlighted the need to build the dairy story around those expectations, especially in the sphere of health and wellness.

The Grass-fed production model

Addressing milk producers directly, the Dairygold CEO urged the adoption of grass-fed production standards that the Irish dairy industry can capitalise on to secure increased market share and added value. He insisted that accreditation will be necessary to provide proof to dairy buyers and consumers that our grass-fed dairy production system is valid. Kerrygold Butter's success in the USA is underpinned by an awareness of the unique grass-fed status that Irish butter enjoys, he added. An effective 'licence to produce' in future will include significant reductions in carbon footprint, water quality improvements, identifiable biodiversity planning as well as corrective measures being undertaken in relation to anti-microbial resistance. All of these on top of operating sustainable farming business practices, applying excellence in animal welfare and the previously mentioned certifiable grass-fed production model.

Rebalancing nitrogen input and milk output

Dr. Deirdre Hennessy discussed the challenge of maintaining herbage production with a lower N input. She put forward a number of potential actions to mitigate the drive in European agricultural policy towards lowering inputs and less intensive agricultural production methodologies. Filling potential chemical N deficiencies will necessitate more focus on maximising the value and use of available nitrogen from slurry and clover swards as well as optimising the benefits of allowable applications of chemical nitrogen.

Dr. Hennessy outlined successful research results from Moorepark in reducing N surpluses and losses, increasing nitrogen efficiency, while achieving higher herbage production and milk solids. The Moorepark researcher advised greater management of fertiliser and grazing practices to more closely match inputs with outputs from the farm. She noted significant increases in herbage production from the inclusion of white clover in swards, allied to improved milk solids production. Doing nothing, Dr Hennessy warned, will result in increased feed input costs and/or lower stocking rates. Optimum soil fertility, she concluded, will be an absolute necessity in future grass production strategies.

The 'big picture' global forces impacting on food production were also outlined. These include, in Jim's estimation, ongoing political uncertainty, the need for economic stability, tariff wars, anti-microbial resistance and the rise of dairy alternatives.

The SPRING dairy farming strategy

The farmer experience at this year's IGA Dairy conference was provided by Tom O'Donnell from Cork. Tom highlighted his own experiences in promoting work/life balance on his farm while also being realistic in terms of expectations. He pointed to the value of planning ahead in order to achieve goals and explained the simple routine of using a whiteboard to establish priorities and necessary and immediate tasks to be undertaken on a weekly basis. 'Get your ideas out of your head and onto a whiteboard' is Tom's mantra. his Spring routines, including calving and early grazing, were both practical and immediately adoptable on most dairy farms. His tactics are well worth viewing on the IGA website. The use of a diary to quickly enter calving details is again easily adopted and hugely beneficial for all farms. With high numbers of cows calving in a short period, Tom adopts a once-a-day milking routine until sixty percent of the herd is calved (achieved in three weeks). This has the obvious benefit of reducing labour requirements at a time of maximum labour demand. Calf management, especially in the crucial first few days of life was well described in the Cork dairy farmer's presentation. The emphasis is on ease of management, high welfare standards and efficient use of labour. Good facilities, efficient labour utilisation, clear and simple communication all lead to a relatively stress-free environment, Tom concluded. His mantra is explained in an easily understood SPRING acronym: S=Simple Systems, P=Purchase time (labour, contractors), R=Rest, I=inventory (have all necessary inputs, purchases to hand), N=Necessary work and G=Good communication.

Dealing with Covid on the farm

Matt Ryan warns that many farmers are extremely worried about the possibility of themselves, their family or their staff getting Covid during busy February-March period. Here, he offers some advice on how to best to avoid an outbreak of Covid on the farm.

Farmers carry an additional health risk as up to 80 per cent of farmers are clinically classified as obese. Any overweight condition carries extra risk of serious reaction to Covid-19. What precautions and contingency plans can farmers put in place to manage the situation? The following preventative measures should be enacted.

- Covid signage should be liberally displayed around the whole farmyard and entrance.
- Disposable masks and gloves must be made available and remember that, if badly soiled, they malfunction.
- Several hand sanitisers should be available at all key points on the farmyard.
- Farmers must set good example and wash their hands correctly each time. But farmers must show their staff the correct way.
- All family and staff must be made fully aware of the protocols on the farm and of their responsibility and expectation to operate them.
- Everyone, at all times, should wear a mask, particularly if working in pairs.
- No one should visit the farm without a correctly operated mask.
- Business visitors, contractors, feed and fertiliser deliveries, AI technician, calf buyers, should not make contact with any family members or farm staff on arrival.
- Farmers should talk with their vet to see how he can work with the farmer in these circumstances.
- Unfortunately, staff should eat separately from each other. If not, it should be possible work out some other way to minimise contact.
- Staff should not travel to and from locations in the same car, tractor or quad.
- Where one or more people are working together on a task, such as milking, calving, feeding calves, they must always wear a face mask.
- Where there are many staff working on a farm, including family members, the farmer/manager should



organise them in pods of one to three to control the possibility of contact spreading.

- One person should do all the tractor work, another one, two or three people should do all the milking, and on some farms there may be scope for one individual to do all the daytime or night-time calving.
- In the circumstances, OAD milking should be considered during February. It will reduce staff requirement in a very labour demanding task.
- It can be quite difficult, but farmers and their families should put their heads together to come up with names, friends or family members who could be relied on to step in during a health emergency.
- The farmer needs to sit down and have a chat with the whole farm team so that they are fully aware of the expectations. They may even help with ideas and proposals for a Plan B.
- Someone should take responsibility to oversee the plan that has been put in place.

IFA'S PLAN B RECOMMENDATIONS

The Irish Farmers Association produced a valuable Plan B schedule for farmers last year, to have prepared in the event they have to take time off work for health or other reasons. The Plan B schedule, which can be downloaded from the IFA website, includes contact details for essential service providers, vet, coop, feed merchant, farm relief, ag advisor and repair/maintenance personnel, among others. Operating instructions for tractor, loader, calf and cattle feeders, milking machine and other vital equipment are listed with spare keys itemised. The farm Eircode is provided as is a farm map and location of critical equipment including calving jack, tags and taggers. Plan B, with ample copies, is a critically important document to have prepared and distributed for an eventuality we all hope will not happen.

Living with Covid in rural Ireland

Michael Somers of Teagasc outlines a novel series of webinars developed to support rural people during the viral pandemic.

One of the most innovative projects to come out of Covid-19 was the ‘Tell Me About’ series. This was a collaborative project involving Teagasc Tipperary and The School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin Ireland and the Institute of Technology Carlow. The challenges that farmers and all rural dwellers faced and continue to face for the foreseeable future were presented in a clear, concise manner in a series of online webinars, which will be featured in Irish Farmers Monthly in the coming months. The webinars shed light on many issues affecting rural dwellers. While serious issues were presented, the webinars also included the lighter sides of life, which are often absent in the Covid world.



relevant populations. The effective control of Measles is achieved at 94 per cent vaccination, Mumps at 89 per cent, Rubella – 86 per cent and Polio – 80 per cent.

Heavy and light

In another segment from the first Tell Me About webinar, Teagasc Director Professor Gerry Boyle conducted a heart-warming interview with former GAA President Nicky Brennan. Nicky highlighted the work done by the voluntary sector with organisations working together to help older people, ranging from delivering shopping to assisting with medical needs such as collecting prescriptions. Nicky spoke passionately about his work with Kilkenny Age Friendly: “Kilkenny Age Friendly has a newly developed relationship with ALONE and we are working with them setting up a befriending telephone service where volunteers will call people, including rural isolated people, to see if they are okay. We abide by the relevant protocols including getting permission from the individual’s next of kin in advance for such calls.” Gerry Boyle emphasised how important it is that respect and ensuring that people retain their dignity and character are vital to helping people over the period of the pandemic. Carlow singer Derek Ryan debuted his single ‘Wherever you’re Going’ during the first webinar to provide some levity and entertainment to viewers, giving the series a well-balanced mix of light and heavy content. The ‘Tell Me About’ series is available online – see Teagasc’s YouTube channel.

Covid coverage

Catherine Comiskey, Professor, School of Nursing and Midwifery TCD, crunched the Covid numbers in the first webinar, looking particularly at the time of exposure and the onset of symptoms of Covid. She confirmed that a person can transmit the virus from the moment of infection and quarantine should be 14 days from last exposure. The professor compared findings from 64 studies across the globe where incubation periods averaged 5-6 days from the time of the last contact. Prof. Comiskey emphasised how important it is to keep the reproductive number under 1. She also explained the importance of vaccines and how viruses are effectively controlled at high levels of vaccination across the





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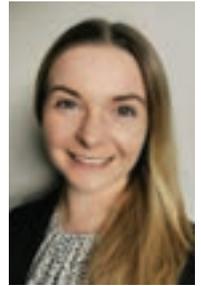
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The future of dairy

Assistant Professor Zoe McKay, a lecturer in dairy production in the School of Agriculture and Food Science UCD, talks to Miriam Atkins about the ongoing work with the UCD Lyons Systems Dairy herd and why farmers should consider a grazing system based on high output per cow.



Zoe McKay joined the UCD staff in August 2020, having previously completed a degree in animal science there and also a PhD in dairy cow nutrition, examining a broad range of topics including supplementation strategies and milk quality. She spent some time with Phileo UK & Ireland as a ruminant technical specialist where she gained invaluable industry experience and witnessed what was happening on the ground, before taking on her current role in the university, where she lectures and coordinates the Dairy Business Programme. “It was great to get insight into what was happening on the ground with Phileo and I spent a lot of time in Wales and in the UK on beef, sheep and dairy farms, but I missed the research. So, when the opportunity arose in UCD I returned to my Alma Mater.”

In her current role, Zoe is teaching across a number of different modules, primarily around dairy production as well as being Programme Director of the Dairy Business Programme coordinating students in UCD and Moorepark. On the research side her focus is on the UCD Systems Herd at Lyons Farm and recently the research team hosted an update information event to highlight the learnings from the Systems herd. The ongoing research is examining the development of a profitable high-output grass-based spring milk production system: “Grass-based systems will continue to be predominant in Ireland and there were some key issues identified at the start of this project (five years ago) that have spurred on the research: expanding

cow numbers and the impact on the environment; limitations of farm expansion for those who don't have land available to them; limited skilled labour; and lack of farm infrastructure. With that idea, we need to focus on maximizing grass utilization and on increasing our milk output: to increase output per cow in a grass-based system.” The question the study asks is: is it possible at a national level to produce the amount of milk/dairy products we need with less cows? And can we do this in a sustainable fashion for both the environment and for the farming community?

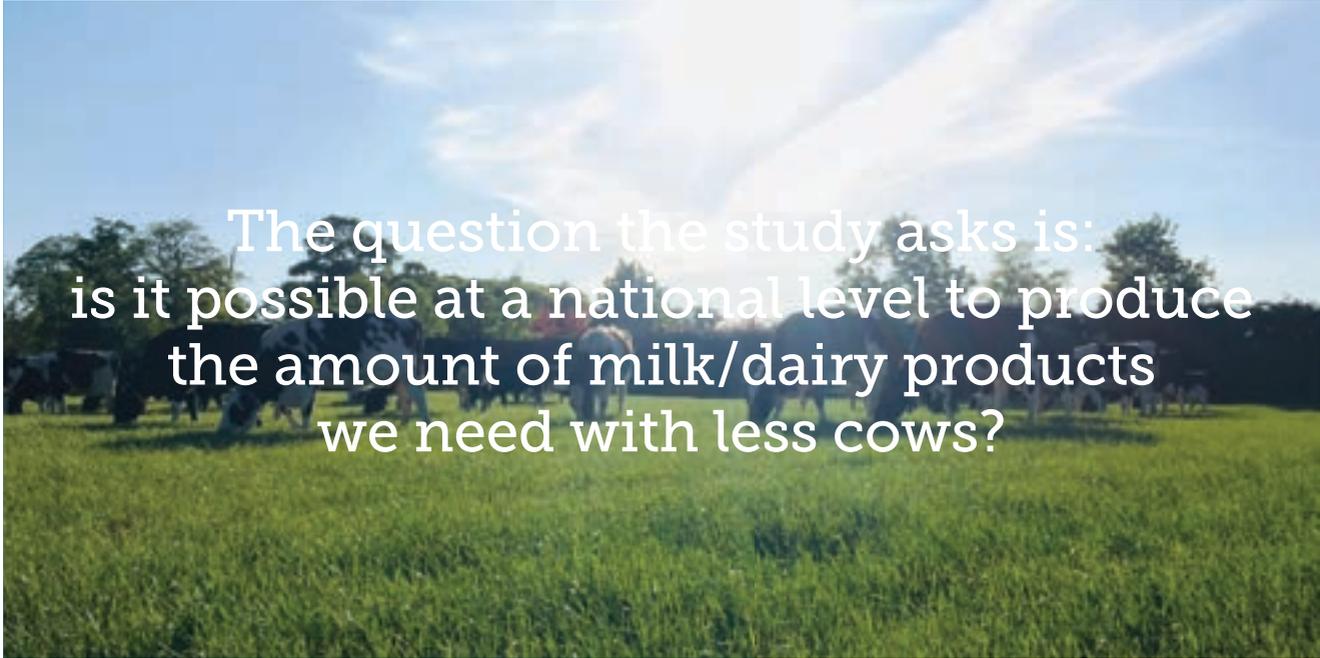
In other years, farmers have been able to visit the UCD Lyons Farm – Zoe explains that approximately 1,000 farmers could come to Lyons in a normal year, but with Covid restrictions it was decided to host an online event in January to outline the research to an audience virtually. Over 300 attendees – a mix of farmers and industry players – listened to the presentations.

Principal investigator Professor Finbar Mulligan, explained that the Systems Research Herd study, is looking to: incorporate the most recent advances in grassland management for dairy farms into a high output system; to use a type of dairy cow that has good genetic indices for both milk production and fertility; to employ the best practices from nutrition research and dairy cow husbandry; and to incorporate advancements which enhance dairy production sustainability.

Associate Professor Alan Fahy spoke about genetics and the EB1 performance of the herd and Professor Michael Wallace reviewed the financial and economic considerations; while Zoe discussed the environmental aspect and ongoing nutritional research.

“There is a huge focus on the environmental side of dairy production and how sustainable it is. In a Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) of the system – that gives you a value in terms of the impact of the system on the environment over the period, taking into account all of the inputs and the resulting CO₂/kg milk solids being produced – and for 2016 and 2017 our research showed a value of 0.94 and 0.88. To put this in context, Teagasc's 2027 Sectoral Road Map for Dairy has a target for the industry of 0.96, so we have achieved below this.

We hope to see further improvement in the LCA for 2018-2020 as we have put in place a lot of new practices and new technology's that we think will improve the sustainability of our systems: using protected urea, low emissions slurry spreading technology; and we are investigating the use of lower protein diets to reduce nitrogen excretion, while



The question the study asks is: is it possible at a national level to produce the amount of milk/dairy products we need with less cows?

also looking at the use of native feed ingredients. This all feeds into the LCA value and shows us what is possible at a systems level. We are currently in the middle of calculating the nitrogen use efficiency, which is a very important metric, and we will have results soon.”

“What we found,” Zoe explains that, “a high-output grass-based spring milk production system can be profitable when built on a foundation of good grassland management and meeting performance targets and has a place in a sustainable Irish dairy industry. These cows are predominantly on a grass-based diet, with 93 per cent (as fed) intake on grass and grass silage, and we have achieved the fertility targets that were set out as well. This system can be profitable – it is not low input, low output – it is higher output and environmental emissions are diluted by the high output.”

The beauty of this system, Zoe continues, is it is simple: “Look at the diet – it is just grazed grass, grass silage and concentrates – the key principles are the same as the systems most farmers already have in place: good management of the cow and the grazing and breeding seasons. It is just being a bit more focused on those management practices and the targets you set yourself.”

In 2019 they did a study looking at supplementation during the grazing season with 18 per cent or 14 per cent crude protein concentrate with an aim to reduce nitrogen excretion. We found that there was no impact on milk or solids production at 14 per cent. So in 2020 we asked, could we go lower? So we reduced the supplementation to 12 per cent. And we also looked at the ingredients – non native and native ingredients and how did they perform. And again we found no difference in performance when supplementing a 12 per cent concentrate composed of native ingredient. So, you could utilise Irish barley, Irish oats and protein coming from beans rather than imported maize and soya. Both lower protein concentration in the feed and the use of native feed ingredients may improve

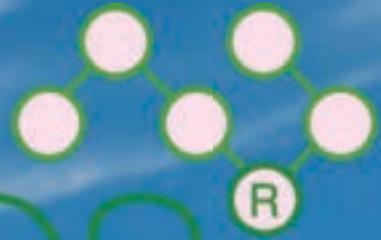
the sustainability of Irish dairy production.”

The team publishes weekly notes of the findings on the UCD website and are active on Twitter @UCD_SystemsHerd – log on to view all the latest updates.





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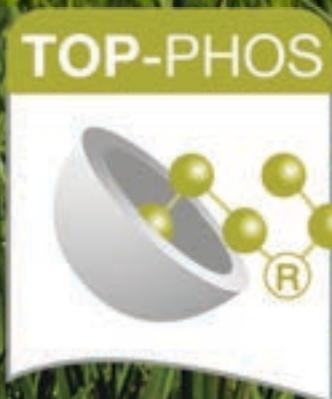
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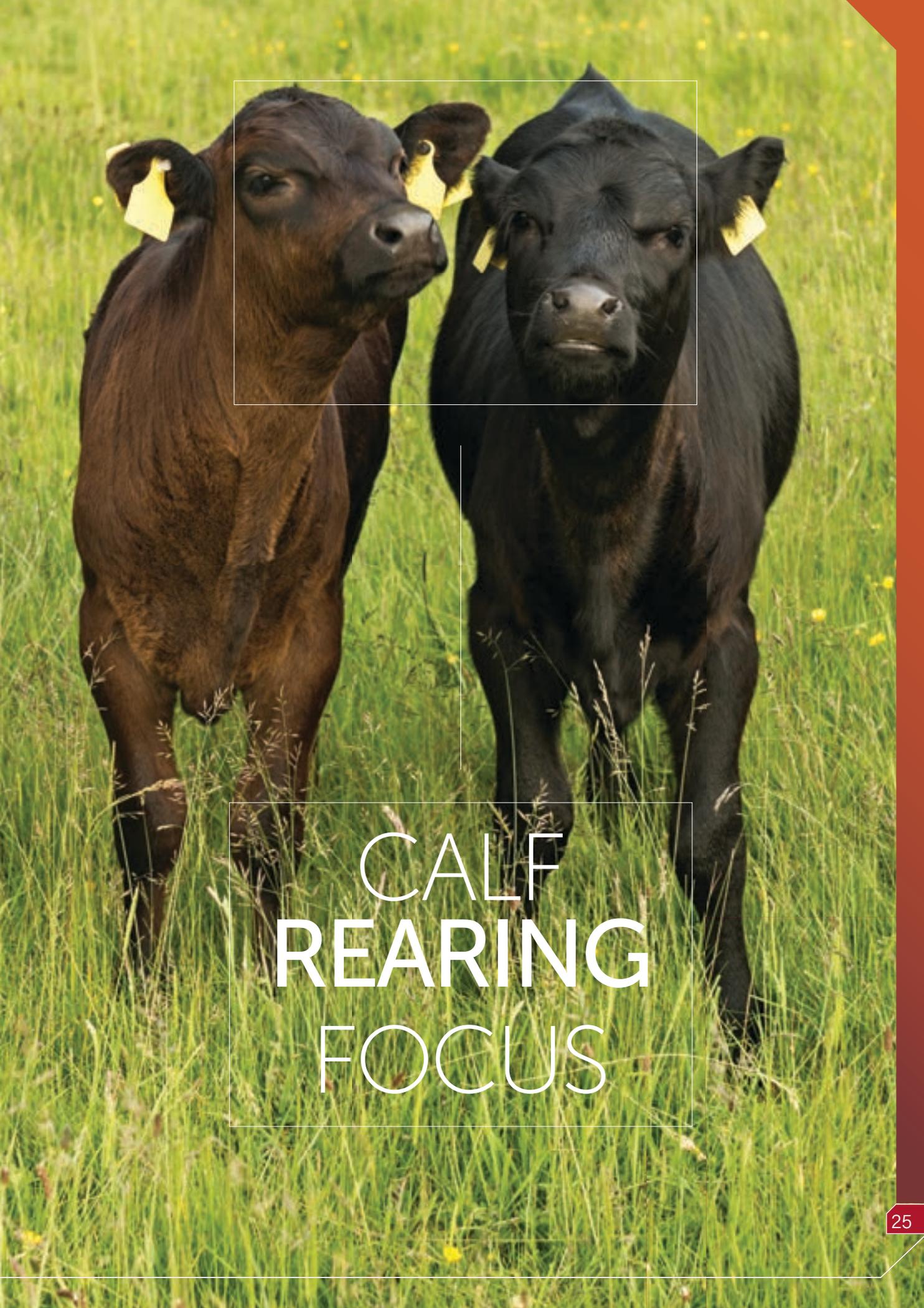
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The feed cycle of the young calf

The Teagasc/AHI joint initiative on calf management last month presented a series of videos spread across Calf Care Virtual Week. They included advice and direction on the importance of early colostrums, successful vaccination programmes, proper housing, bedding and ventilation, and a tour of the various upsets and diseases that calves can succumb to in those critical first weeks of life.

The Calf Care Programme also outlined the general feed management of the calf after it has changed over from colostrum and placed on a regime incorporating milk or milk replacer, concentrates and roughage. Emer Kennedy looked at the first phase of this feed transition process: "Ensuring calves are well fed during the milk feeding period is essential to good health and weight gain. During the first weeks of life the calf is entirely dependent on milk as a source of nutrition. After following the Colostrum 1,2,3 rules and on farms where there are no health risks, such as Johnes' Disease, calves should be fed transition milk. This is milk produced from Day 2 to Day 6 in the cow's lactation. While antibodies in the milk decline with each milking it is still a better feed source than whole milk or good quality milk replacer for calves that have received their colostrum."

Vital transition phase

Emer added that: "While no additional antibodies can be absorbed across the gut wall after the first twenty-four hours of life, there is a local effect from feeding at least four feeds of transition milk. This regime has been shown to reduce the incidence of illness in calves and to result in less runny noses and droopy ears. After this feeding period, the calf can be offered whole milk or good quality calf replacer milk. If feeding whole milk, no 'waste milk' (antibiotic or high SCC milk) should be fed."

Choose high quality replacer

Emer then directed viewers to the AHI website for

information on what to look for when choosing a good quality milk replacer. She emphasised that it is important that calves are fed enough milk to grow and stay healthy: "We recommend that calves are fed 15 per cent of their birth bodyweight. So, for a 40kg calf, that equates to six litres per day, divided into two equal feeds for at least the first four weeks of life."

Emer advised that when feeding calves once a day, the calves must be at least four weeks old before this transition takes place. Calves, she added, must be thoroughly checked a second time in the day and be fed concentrates at this time. As a general guideline, the Teagasc researcher advised that the quantity of milk be gradually increased over the first week of life to ensure that calves reach the six litres per day consumption threshold by the time they are six days old. Her advice on the introduction of concentrates was also noteworthy: "Calves should be eating at least one kilo of concentrate before weaning: "When weaning, milk volume should be gradually reduced, starting about ten days before the weaning date." She warned that, if calves are not weaned properly, their digestive systems are put under stress and they are more likely to be susceptible to pneumonia and subsequent growth checks.

Solid feed intakes

Joe Patton, another well respected Teagasc researcher, had additional information on those all-important formative weeks in the new-born calf's life, particularly in relation to solid feed intakes: "When managing the



AUCTUS powering ahead and strengthening the team



Over the past few years, AUCTUS has grown significantly in both the range of products supplied to the Irish market and sales volumes has increased substantially also. 2020 has been no different albeit a lot more challenging for our farming customers and agricultural retailers alike. We do not see 2021 any different in terms of the support we will be offering to our farming customers. In fact, there may be more demands on a lot of farms and Auctus are here to help in relation to anything in the area of young animal nutrition. With this in mind, we have strengthened our team to make sure demands are met over the forthcoming calving and lambing season. Shane Columby, pictured, has joined Auctus as our Business Development Manager in Munster and South Leinster. Shane has qualified with a degree in Agricultural Science and has most recently worked on a large scale dairy



farm in Saudi Arabia, namely Almarai, where they produce 1 billion litres of milk annually. Shane was responsible for calf rearing and calf management on an extremely large scale, giving him invaluable experience and expertise in this area.

He will be responsible for supporting the agricultural retailers and farmer customers alike to ensure the best results can be achieved for the forthcoming calf rearing and lambing season. Shane can be contacted on e-mail shane.columby@auctus.ie or mobile 087 4000958.

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nutrition of young calves on milk, it is very important that we must develop the rumen as well as grow the calf. No matter what the weight at weaning, if the digestive system is not ready for a forage diet, then calves will suffer setbacks post weaning." Joe emphasised that having good rumen development ensures a much smoother dietary transition at this critical stage of growth. He then outlined the sequence of events in the ongoing development of the calf: "Rumen development begins by getting the calf to eat solid feed. High starch content feed works best because it provides the right type of energy to grow the rumen wall. Starter concentrate should be introduced in the first seven to ten days of the calf's life." While acknowledging that a calf will eat very little ration in the early stages Joe advised on the need for early introduction: "It is important to kick start development. Starter course ration with a high cereal and high protein content should be used and adding molasses can increase palatability." Joe then followed the progression to compound ration: "This can be introduced when calves are settled into eating ration. The change to pelleted ration should be gradual to prevent gorging and bloating." Calf ration he added, should have a crude protein content of at least eighteen percent and an energy value of at least 0.9 UFL per kilo.

The weaning strategy

Moving on the weaning stage, Joe stressed the importance of intake amounts: "At weaning the calf should be averaging at least one kilo of ration intake per day over a period of four to five days." Following on from Emer Kennedy's advice, Joe Patton reiterated the directive on gradual weaning from milk: "The gradual phasing out of milk at this time will encourage increased concentrate intakes. In addition to meal, good quality long forage should be made available to calves." Again, he noted, as with early ration consumption, that early intake of forage will be low, accounting for only ten to twenty percent of solids intake. He emphasised, however, that it does encourage foraging behaviour, a critical aspect of a ruminant's subsequent dietary life. Joe confirmed that a variety of roughages are suitable: "Clean straw, chopped to thirty to forty mm in length is ideal. Excessive intake of long fibre roughage, he suggested, can cause poor digestion and pot-bellied calves: "There is a greater risk of this happening when hay is fed rather than well-chopped straw. The final piece of the calf's dietary jigsaw, as Joe emphasised, is the provision of clean, fresh water at all times from an early age and should be from a piped drinker and not a standing source, to prevent contamination or stagnation.

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Milk fever (hypocalcaemia) in cattle

Maura Langan, Norbrook veterinary advisor, takes this opportunity to examine the risks and impact of milk fever on a dairy herd.

Hypocalcaemia in cattle is commonly known as 'milk fever' and is caused by an acute calcium deficiency in cows at or around calving time. Hypocalcaemia is the most common metabolic disorder affecting cattle. It arises as a result of the failure to activate the release of sufficient calcium reserves (mostly from the bones) to deal with the production of colostrum and the demands of lactation. If the cow does not respond quickly to the sudden increase in calcium requirements, hypocalcaemia develops, and signs of milk fever become apparent. The

majority of cases occur within 24-72hrs of calving. It is therefore vital to manage the dairy cow around this critical transition period to prevent such a drop in normal blood calcium levels and the resulting disease states and potential economic losses. Milk fever control strategies are an essential part of any herd health plan. Hypocalcaemia has been linked to impaired immune function and reduced milk yield. Research shows a cow that develops milk fever is eight times more likely to get mastitis in the subsequent lactation. Milk fever also





increases the risk of other clinical disease around the calving period such as dystocia, retained placenta, left displaced abomasum, mastitis, ketosis and impaired reproductive performance. If a herd is affected by milk fever, the cost to the farmer can be substantial. Total costs associated with the average case of milk fever are estimated to be €312 (Ryan, O'Grady 2004).

The early signs of clinical milk fever, which include loss of appetite, low body temperature, constipation, muscle tremors, recumbency and slow heart rate, are easily missed. Hypocalcaemia affects muscle contraction, and this results in an inability to stand or to get back up again if she goes down. If untreated, most cows with clinical milk fever will die within 12-24 hours. It is estimated that 5 to 10 per cent of cows are affected by this disease, with some herds having a prevalence as high as 25 to 30 per cent.

Those cows that develop clinical milk fever (downer cows) require intravenous to provide an immediately available source of calcium. Oral products such as boluses and liquids can then be used as a follow up to provide a longer lasting supply of calcium. Transition cows also commonly suffer from low phosphorus levels (hypophosphataemia) and this can complicate their recovery from milk fever. If a cow is slow to respond to treatment, consider giving additional phosphorus, either as a bolus or in a liquid.

It is thought that sub-clinical milk fever is more common than the clinical manifestation of the disease, with incidences ranging from 23 per cent to 29 per cent. Simply put, for every clinical case, another 3-6 cows in the herd are likely to be suffering from sub-clinical milk fever. Sub-clinical

milk fever, where the outward signs of illness are less obvious, can also have severe consequences for dairy herds. Cows with a high body condition score (BCS), low BCS, older cows, high producing dairy cows, those with a history of milk fever and the Jersey breed are all predisposed to the

condition. These 'at-risk' groups will benefit from the use of an oral calcium supplement around the time of calving. This results in a safe, sustained release of calcium, helping to maintain adequate calcium levels and support normal physiology during the demanding calving period.

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ensure that calves have enough energy and proteins to optimise their growth potential. Our high levels of milk proteins along with a balanced amino acid profile ensure that our milk replacers are highly digestible to young calves thus improving rumen development and skeletal growth.

The first 12 weeks of a young calves life is vitally important. Although a good quality concentrate and fresh straw should be readily available to a calf from as early as week 1, milk replacer is the main driving force for this development and growth. Especially in young heifers, studies have demonstrated that increased energy and protein intake associated with higher levels of milk replacer feeding increases growth of mammary glands in heifer calves from 2 to 8 weeks of age. The extent of development of mammary glands in heifers is important, because the number of mammary cells is a major factor limiting milk production so increased feeding of quality milk replacers at a young age in heifer calves should result in a higher milk yield when mature.

With calf disease and scour being a challenge on many farms, we add in some extra ingredients to make sure that the calves have adequate protection with the addition of digestive aids and immunity support to help protect calves from digestive upsets and scours within their early stages of life. All of this combined with high levels of vitamins and minerals in all our milks means that the young calf is sure of the best possible start to life.

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 ERINGOLD MILK REPLACERS



Focus on a healthy herd

Joris Somers, a veterinary surgeon working with Glanbia, has timely tips for calf health as the calving season progresses.

With the 2021 spring calving season now underway, the focus over the next weeks and months will be on maintaining a healthy herd. A cow's transition from the dry period to the new lactation is marked by significant changes in metabolism and nutritional requirements that need to be met daily in order to prevent diseases such as milk fever, ketosis or displaced abomasum. After the calving event, changes for the calves should be less abrupt with a gradual transition from the first colostrum feed to a few days of transition milk and eventually a diet of whole milk or milk replacer, supplemented with calf starter and a source of fibre.

Limiting disease outbreaks

However, getting the calves off on a good start is only half the work and, throughout the calving season, attention to detail is required to limit the risk of disease outbreaks. Calf scour and pneumonia are the two biggest concerns during the rearing period and prevention of either of these is much more beneficial from both a labour and financial point of view than treating sick calves. It is probably not possible to adapt the calf housing drastically in the middle of the calving season to improve ventilation or limit shared airspace between different age groups of cattle. Using vaccines, some of which are available for calves only one week old, will be your best tool in preventing respiratory disease. As the calving season progresses and more and more calves are present on farm the levels of diarrhoea causing viruses, bacteria and parasites tend to increase. Improving the ability of the calves to cope with these infectious causes of diarrhoea is down to feeding calves top quality colostrum soon after birth and providing calves with adequate nutrition for growth and development. Stress caused by tagging, disbudding or castration will lower the capability of the calves' immune system to fight off infections as will consistently underfeeding calves and housing calves in humid or draughty sheds. Calves spend 80 per cent of their time lying down, so the type and depth of bedding used is important. Clear the bedding from individual calf pens between calves to prevent a build-up of contaminated bedding. Ideally, group pens are freshly bedded multiple times per week with pens cleared out weekly, or as frequently as possible, and cleaned and disinfected between batches of calves. To prevent transmission of microbes from older stock to new-born calves, try to maintain a dedicated person who looks after the calves or use a separate set of wellies and waterproofs when handling calves and provide a disinfectant boot dip at the calf shed entrance. Clean all the milk feeding



equipment daily to avoid rapid disease transmission between calves.

Treating scour

When a calf does develop diarrhoea, remember that antibiotics do not work against the parasites and viruses that are the most common causes of calf scour. Key actions to consider are: 1) to remove the scouring calf from the group to prevent further contamination of the environment and disease spreading to other calves in the pen; 2) to provide the calf with additional feeds of an electrolyte solution by bottle or through a stomach tube to replace lost fluids and minerals; and 3) to continue to feed milk or milk replacer which contain the energy and nutrients needed to recover from the episode of scour. Keeping calves on milk while they are scouring will not worsen or prolong diarrhoea and can aid in recovery. Milk withdrawal can lead to loss of condition, therefore, maintain the normal feeding regime. When a calf is down, not able to drink independently or their eyeballs are sunken, additional veterinary treatments will be required to help the calf recover. Taking all this into account, a dedicated 'hospital pen', away from the healthy calves not only limits the spread of disease, it also facilitates control, handling and management of the sick calf. Avoid having to create this space in a rush by setting up this area before problems arise, as this will allow you to continue operating normal calf husbandry in the main calf house.

Livestock Intelligence

Monitoring cow health and identifying when cows are in heat, data for improved decision making and overall better control over cow health and wellbeing (24/7) has now gone to a new level

with SenseHub livestock intelligence. Mullingar based Agri Tech company, Efficient Farm Systems tell us what farmers should look for when looking to purchase a heat detection and animal

health monitoring system this month; How does the product work, how accurate is the information, is the information real-time and what are the results under Irish grazing conditions? Is

the product tried and trusted over 15 years of experience? Is it strong and robust to withstand the physical abuse? How does the system alert you of the information on a cow that needs attention?

- ✓ Recurring costs – are there any annual subscription fees?
- ✓ Warranty - is it flat or scaled, how long is the warranty ?
- ✓ What is the lifetime value (and costs) of the product?
- ✓ Is there Support in the market if things go wrong – how hands on are the Suppliers, is there aftermarket support?
- ✓ What are the future development opportunities for the system? Do upgrades cost additional money?
- ✓ How easy is the system to use? Is it user friendly? Can it work on multiple devices amongst other family members?
- ✓ Does the system have a reliable Drafting System to save labour ? How easy is it to install? Does it catch all the cows that need to be drafted?
- ✓ Is it compatible with a milking Robot or milking parlour ?

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Automating the calf rearing process

An investment in a computerised (automatic) calf feeding machine can bring greater control and consistency to the rearing period; they can also reduce the time and labour required to rear calves. However, to be effective, good hygiene standards and sound overall management are the critical success factors.

According to Una Hickey Volac's National Sales Manager, Ireland, the technology available from automatic feeders is advancing all the time, but the key to getting the most out of these innovative machines is attention to detail. "Rearing calves on an automatic feeder can definitely make calf milk feeding easier and more time-efficient, but it is not an alternative to spending time with the calves. It is essential that feeders are maintained well and that you still observe calves regularly for signs of any problems, such as disease. "Essentially, we advise farmers that when you make the switch from manual to automatic feeding you will still be spending a similar amount of time with your calves, but what you will not be doing is spending this time moving the milk around in buckets. View an automatic feeder as a way of smoothing out the potential variables in the rearing process (such as inconsistent calf formula mixing rates and milk feeding temperatures), not a short cut to better animal husbandry," she says.

Siting the feeder

Farmers buying a new automatic feeder typically tend to install them into existing sheds rather than into new, bespoke calf rearing housing. "First and foremost, make sure you have the right number of feed stations for the number of calves you want to feed. Regardless if the building has been used for rearing calves before, it is important to spend some time making sure ventilation and drainage are up to scratch. Ideally, pen floors need to slope from the back to a drain at the front (a 1 in 20 fall is ideal) to ensure the calves are always kept in a clean, dry environment." Una points out that most automatic calf feeding machines will do two hot washes a day, which means about 10 litres of water will be used. "When sorting out your drainage, this needs to be considered too."

Starting calves on the feeder

Volac recommends that calves can be moved onto an automatic feeder when they are one week of age, by which stage the calf should be able to take easily to the feeder and cope well with the move.

"As with all calf feeding systems, we advise our farmers to ensure calves are fed sufficient high-quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth. This means giving them three litres within two hours after birth, followed by another similar sized feed within six to 12 hours after birth. After this they should be introduced to a good quality milk replacer before moving onto the feeder at seven days of age."

Efficiency gains from computerised feeding

Initially, the calf should be able to access a total of six litres of performance-formulated milk powder 'little and often' – for example, three two litre feeds during a 24-hour period.

"You can programme the feeding curve on the machine, which makes life a lot easier. What's more, maintained well, automatic machines such as those supplied by Forster Technik and Urban, will always mix calf milk replacer accurately with water and also ensure that the milk is always delivered to the calf at the correct temperature.

"Heifer calves that you want to calve down at 23-25 months of age need to be gaining 0.7-0.8kg per day, which means you need to be feeding a minimum of 750-900g per day of good quality milk formula, such as Volac's Lifeguard range, to hit this target. This will continue until the calf has been on the feeder for 35 days and then the weaning process should begin," Una says. Computerised systems linked to EIDs can collect individual calf data on milk intakes and drink speeds. "If you have weigh cells, which are available when installing

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MSD Animal Health has a wide range of calf health solutions for farmers this calving season

With new antibiotic legislation in the pipeline, veterinary practitioners have an opportunity to work with farmers on improving nutrition, management practices and the use of preventive medicine to reduce the levels of disease on farm

As each farm is different, it is best to talk to your vet to discuss a suitable calf health protocol for your farm

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- Single shot pre-calving vaccine
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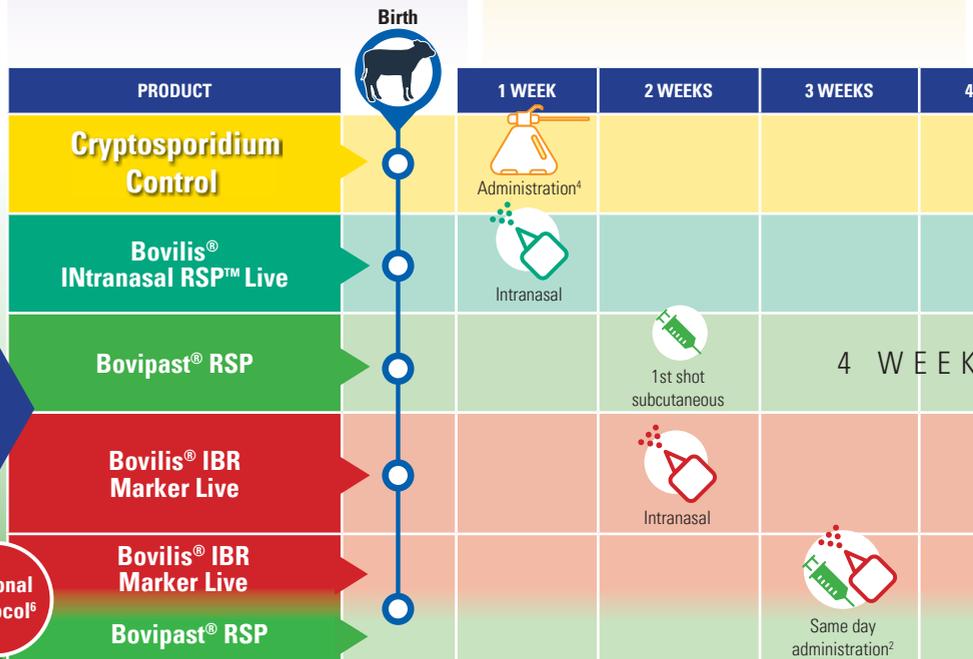
2ml per 10kg of Body Weight



Oral administration after feeding



Commence treatment 24-48hr after birth for 7 consecutive days



Optional Protocol⁶

1. Due to diagnosed *Cryptosporidium parvum*, in farms with history of cryptosporidiosis.
 2. Bovilis Bovipast[®] RSP and Bovilis[®] IBR Marker Live can be administered the same day but not mixed. Can be given from three weeks of age.
 3. *Mannheimia haemolytica* A1 & A6.
 4. Commence oral treatment in the first 24-48hr after birth for 7 consecutive days.

Bovilis Bovipast[®] RSP contains inact. BRS Virus strain EV908, Pi-3 Virus strain SF-4 Reisinger and *Mannheimia haemolytica* A1 strain M4/1. Withdrawal periods: zero days. Legal Category: RC
 Bovilis[®] INtranasal RSPTM Live: contains live, bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV), strain Jencine-2013, live bovine parainfluenza virus type 3 (PI3), strain INT2-2013. Withdrawal periods: 2
 Bovilis[®] IBR Marker Live contains live, attenuated IBR marker vaccine BHV-1 strain GK/D (gE₋). For the active immunisation against infectious bovine rhinotracheitis virus. Withdrawal periods:

Use medicines responsibly.

For further information contact: MSD Animal Health, Red Oak North, South County Business Park, Leopardstown, Dublin 18, Ireland. Tel: +353 (0)1 2970220. Fax:

Products



Bovilis® INtranasal RSP™ Live

- Reduces clinical signs of BRD and viral shedding*
- Provides the earliest vaccination against viral pneumonia* (from 7 days old) and the fastest protection against RSV (5 days)
- Efficacious in the presence of MDAs⁵

*Caused by BRSV and PI3



Bovipast® RSP

- Only Bovipast RSP contains IRP technology
- Efficacious in the presence of MDAs
- Protects against both RSV and PI3 viruses
- Provides broadest protection against *Mannheimia (Pasteurella) haemolytica*³



Bovilis® IBR Marker Live

- The ONLY single dose IBR Marker vaccine for use either intramuscularly or intranasally in animals > 3 months old
- Farms with low prevalence of IBR can be moved onto an annual vaccination programme. Two doses into the muscle six months apart required before annual booster protocol can be used



	5 WEEKS	6 WEEKS	7 WEEKS	8 WEEKS	9 WEEKS	10 WEEKS	11 WEEKS	12 WEEKS
6 WEEKS APART								
4 WEEKS APART								

5. Nuijten P, Rooij MV, Verfentem G. A new intranasal BRD vaccine induces protection in the presence of maternally derived antibodies. European Bovine Congress; 2019. 11 - 13 September 2019; 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands. Note: The efficacy against BRSV may be reduced by the presence of MDA.

6. Vaccination protocol for farmers who intend to vaccinate calves with Bovipast® RSP and with Bovilis® IBR Marker Live.

01 [POM(E)] NI [POM-V]

Zero days. Legal Categories: ROI [POM(E)] NI [POM-V]

Zero days. Legal Category: ROI [POM(E)] NI [POM-V]





feeding stations, you can also record a weight every time the calf feeds. This also makes life easier because you will not be handling calves separately to weigh them.”

Weaning

Volac advises gradually reducing the amount of milk offered to calves, over a three-week period between days 35 and 56 (see table 1). This encourages starter intake, helps rumen development and improves the ability of the calf to digest nutrients after weaning. “For the high milk fed calf we now recommend a three-week weaning period between days 35 and 56 where milk replacer is fed at $\leq 750\text{g}$ milk solids per day to ensure calves eat enough starter to allow for sufficient rumen development,” says Volac calf rearing specialist, Liam Gannon. Calves that are fed more milk over the first five weeks of life will be bigger and more vigorous. These calves will subsequently eat more starter when milk is gradually reduced from day 35 to 56. What’s more, calves fed more milk, coupled with good starter intakes, will be more likely to achieve their early growth targets and lifetime milk production potential.

Week	Age (days)	Twice daily feeding rates (litres)*	
		AM	PM
1	0-3	Feed colostrum	
	4-7	2.5	2.5
2-5	8-35	3	3
6	36-42	2.5	2.5
7	43-49	2.5	2.5
8	50-56	2.5	0
9	57+	0	0

*Volac Lifeguard milk formula mixed at either 12.5% or 15%

GETTING THE BEST OUT OF YOUR COMPUTERISED CALF FEEDER

Ten top calibration and hygiene tips

Computerised calf feeding can transform your dairy or beef youngstock rearing operation. Installing a new computerised machine will certainly be a worthwhile, labour-saving investment and will release time to focus on calf health and management.

However, attention to detail in a few key areas will be crucial if you are to maximise calf performance:

- Spend time familiarising yourself with your computerised calf feeding machine and make the most of all its various functions. Purchase only precision-formulated milk powder for your machine, such as a product from the Volac Lifeguard range.
- Issues with calibration may mean calves are under or overfed and variations in the concentration of milk being dispensed can have a negative effect on the health and performance of your calves. Consequently, calibrate your machine to ensure accurate mixing of milk formula and check this calibration every four weeks, or when a new batch of milk powder is started.
- Always keep the dispenser areas clean and wiped daily.
- Dry sweep areas around calves. Refrain from using a hose, especially a pressure hose, as this will damage the machine and create a wet environment around the feed station, which will encourage bacterial growth.
- Check your machine daily to make sure it is performing at an optimal level. React to any warning alerts. Be mindful of the weather: for example, pipes may freeze if very cold conditions, so make sure you have a contingency plan for these eventualities.
- Good teat hygiene is crucial. Clean and change teats regularly. Damaged or worn teats should be replaced immediately as they can disrupt milk flow and harbour bacteria. Teats can be soaked in a solution of disinfectant and replaced in the morning and afternoon. It is good practice to alternate the station teats daily.
- Run the in-built cleaning cycle programme regularly. Full circuit cleaning should be performed at least once a week. Clean the machine thoroughly between each batch of calves.
- If you identify any repeated issue with a machine (e.g. not cleaning or calibrating properly), contact the equipment supplier or your service engineer.
- Ensure you always follow manufacturer cleaning and maintenance instructions.
- Make sure your machine is serviced annually.

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**FEED FOR
GROWTH**



Optigen: a reliable alternative protein source

Sarah Maher, Regional Manager Southeast, Alltech Ireland, discusses how tightening soya supplies gives us the opportunity to look at alternative protein replacements.



InTouch nutritionist Cathal Cassidy, pictured with dairy farmer John Gill.

Over the last number of months, we have seen many supply chain issues affecting the availability of raw materials – protein sources in particular. Soybean meal remains the go-to protein source in ruminant diets and one that many farmers, both beef and dairy, heavily rely on. While the supply of soybean meal has come under challenge in recent times, which is reflected in its price, there also remains a growing global concern around the environmental impact associated with its use in ruminant diets. This leaves us with the question: Is there a more environmentally friendly and cost-effective solution to replacing soybean meal in ruminant diets?

A protein source you can count on

Alltech's protein supplement Optigen® is proven to be a reliable, consistent protein alternative. Optigen is a controlled-release nitrogen source that provides a steady supply of nitrogen to the rumen microbes. Essentially, what we do when we feed ruminant animals is feed the bacteria in the rumen; the healthier the bacterial population, the greater the breakdown of feedstuffs and energy release for milk production – or in the case of beef animals, meat. Because the nitrogen in Optigen is released in a similar way to soya protein in the rumen,

Optigen can be used to replace part of the soya – or some other protein concentrates like rapeseed meal – in the diet of dairy, beef and youngstock to ensure the animals meet their protein requirement.

Reliable, effective protein

Optigen is a concentrated protein source, leaving more room to add extra energy to the diet – the main driver of milk yield or meat production. Generally, 100 grams of Optigen could replace 0.5 kilograms of soya, affording more room for more cost-effective forages and concentrates currently available on-farm. Figure 1 shows a diet before and after Optigen inclusion. The animal's protein requirements can be met more efficiently using Optigen, allowing you to reduce the total crude protein of the diet by around 0.5–1 per cent.

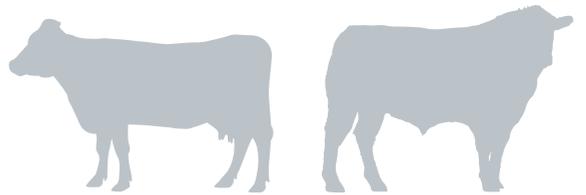
Alltech nutritionists have seen the results of Optigen on-farm, and many farmers include it in their TMR diets, increasing milk from homegrown forage while reducing reliance on ever-more costly soya and rapeseed meal. At current prices, soya is 30 per cent more expensive per unit of protein than Optigen, meaning using Optigen reduces the total cost of the diet.

Another advantage is that the Carbon Trust has validated



OPTIGEN[®]

RELIABLE, EFFECTIVE PROTEIN



With protein availability a concern around the country, meeting animal requirements while maintaining profitability means relying on effective alternative protein sources.

OPTIGEN[®] is a concentrated, slow-release protein source, proven to improve feed digestion and performance in both beef and dairy herds.

Discuss your protein options for this spring with your local feed supplier or Alltech nutritionist on **059 910 1320**.

Optigen, a protein source you can count on.



Reformulation: TMR Diet

Global Warming Potential (GWP)
22% reduction
17c/cow reduction in feed cost



Ingredient / Parameter	Before	After
Grass Silage	26	27
Maize Silage	20	22
Straw	0,5	0,5
Barley	3	3
Soya	3	2
Beet Pulp	1	1
Maize Meal	1	1
Minerals	0,15	0,15
Optigen	-	0,10
UFL	1,00	1,00
CP	16,6	15,8
Sol CP	8,6	9,6
PDIN	10,6	9,9
PDIE	10,5	10,4
Sugar & Starch	25	25
GWP	1,52	1,18
Feed Cost (/cow/day)	€4,40	€4,23

Figure 1: Before and after Optigen inclusion

that the replacement of high-carbon ingredients (such as soya) with Optigen significantly reduces the risk of a high carbon footprint, without affecting (and in some cases positively affecting) animal performance. The benefits of Optigen include less undigested feed, increased feed efficiency, increased milk yield (1.3–3.4 litres of extra milk) in dairy cows and increased average daily gain (100 grams/day) in cattle.

Management

John Gill runs a dairy cow herd in Kilcormac, County Offaly: “The cows are Holstein Friesians; I run a split calving system winter and spring milking, 108 cows overall, with 40 calving in the autumn and 68 in the spring,” John describes. “The cows are doing about 8,000 litres on average over the lactation, and in 2020 we had 600 kilograms MS per cow from about two tonnes of meal a year.”

Nutritional support

John works closely with his InTouch nutritionists and places a major focus on the nutrition of his herd. In 2020, Kevin Graham, regional manager for Alltech, carried out a digestive analysis by manure sieving on the farm. This shows how well the cows’ feed is being utilised while helping to identify the amount of undigested feed passing through the animal. Figure 3 shows the initial result of this analysis; 70 per cent of the sample remained in the top sieve, while the aim is less than 10%. Kevin Graham recommended John add Optigen into his diet.

“Optigen did exactly as promised. That is, when the manure sieving was done first, there was 70% in the first or top sieve and 30 per cent in the last, which was the wrong way around,” John explains. “Then, 10 days later, when the second manure sieve was completed, we had an increase in milk production, and the results had completely changed around (Figure 4)! Exactly as I was told they should; and I am seeing them continue to improve.”

Feed represents up to 70 per cent of beef and dairy production costs. If feed is not being utilised efficiently by the animal, it can not only be a considerable cost but can also lead to less milk produced in dairy cows.

To find out more, speak with your local feed supplier or Alltech nutritionist to see if Optigen can be incorporated into your feed or as a farm pack in your TMR.



Figure 3: Manure sieving results (from left to right: bottom, middle and top manure sieve)



Figure 4: After 10 days (from left to right: bottom, middle and top manure sieve)

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Messages:

- ▶ Plan and manage the spring workload
- ▶ Take care of yourself
- ▶ Spread 24 units Protected Urea on two-thirds of the farm in early February
- ▶ Use LESS spread slurry to replace N on 2/3 area to 1st April
- ▶ February cow feeding and care will result in a good breeding season
- ▶ Good calf and heifer care a prerequisite for 6-week calving targets

By Matt Ryan

SPRING WORK-LOAD; HELPFUL HINTS

- ▶ Dairy farmers will nearly do half their yearly work-load during February to April.
 - ▶ How they plan and manage this critical, stressful time will manifest itself in this year's profits and more importantly their health.
 - ▶ Most farmers have expanded in cow numbers but building requirements, labour availability and organisation have not kept pace with numbers.
- ▶ "Get your ideas out of your head and onto a Whiteboard" – IGA Conference (Tom O'Connell) – has a few benefits when done at the Monday weekly meeting:
 - ▶ Helps on-farm communication,
 - ▶ Staff are helping you plan and 'buying-in' to planning.
 - ▶ Identifies tasks that 'need to be done' and 'would be nice to get done', (the latter, which if not done can be done tomorrow or next week)
 - ▶ Staff volunteer for tasks – work shared out by agreement with no duplication or confusion.
- ▶ So, with availability of "help" tight, we have to think and act smarter - even at this late stage of calving to get through the spring.
 - ▶ Some or all of the following suggestions should be acted on:

1. Milking parlour

- ▶ Auto drafting, one of the best investments one can make, allows colostrum/sick cows/mastitis/slow milkers etc be kept with main herd, then drafter out and milked separately at the end.
- ▶ Cheap backing gate can reduce the number of people required in and around milking.
- ▶ Have all detergents etc forward purchase, diluted and ready to "go" on 1st Feb.
- ▶ Anyone who hasn't the milking machine serviced and ready to "go" now is asking for trouble.
- ▶ Younger staff, with good training, should be able to do the milking, freeing yourself up for more demanding tasks, supervision and management.
- ▶ A good milking rota helps, particularly, if milkers are spending a long-time milking.
- ▶ The following is the cow milking protocol practiced by some farmers:
 - » Fresh cows milked first, colostrum-rich milk stored separately,
 - » Identification straps (colour based on day of week) are applied to fresh calver,
 - » Main cow mob, whose milk is eligible for bulk tank, having removed straps on appropriate day.
- ▶ All staff must know and understand why it is necessary to be gently and careful around cows at calving and in the milking parlour.

2. OAD milking

- ▶ Many farmers now do once-a-day (OAD) milking for the first 3-4 weeks, not for longer, of the calving season to free-up time for other tasks.
 - » Until 60-70% calved.
 - » It has no adverse effects on cow's milk solids yield.
- ▶ NZ research indicates that the quality of the diet is even more important when on OAD as you can get a compounding negative effect if switching to OAD and offering poor quality feed.
- ▶ You should seriously consider, if very short of "help" this spring.



3. Managing calving:

- ▶ This task should be done on a rota of available labour (written down) on the farm so that someone has the responsibility for a set time span during the day or night. All calving protocols (SOP's) should be written down and understood by all.
 - » Calving pens should be labelled, A, B, C, etc.
 - » There should be a diary in the shed to record cow number, calf's gender, and his number plus pen born in.
 - » Group cows for calving periods based on scans. And move to calving pen last task in evening.
 - » Have the place set-up so that one person can draft on his own.
- ▶ Some large dairy herds are now using a night time watchman to supervise calving and he does the following tasks:
 - » Works from 10.00pm to 6/7am, overseeing calving, feeding and tagging new born calves.
 - » Scrapes and limes cubicles and feed out/ push in silage.
 - » It is relatively cheap, €70-100 per night, for large herds but 2-3 discussion group farmers could share such a watchman so that he rotates between the farms each night.
 - » Clear communication between night and day people is essential; specifically the calves who have got colostrum etc.
- ▶ Camera app on phone to see calving cow is great technology to minimise supervision time but be careful not to rush in too soon to "help".
- ▶ To avoid damaging the cow, give her time to calve; leave cows and heifers 3 and 2 hours respectively before moving in to "help".
- ▶ Infra-Red heat lamp (have it ready) – reduces the need to wait for calves to be licked clean.
- ▶ Colostrum (have the SOP's on the wall) within 2 hours is an absolute must and whoever is supervising calving must be given adequate time to be able to do this task correctly because sick calves add enormously to spring workload. Some farmers, to be



Successful Calf Rearing Getting the basics right

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

Dairy heifer calves, as the milking herd of the future, are a priority group of animals. Over the next number of weeks, by adopting best practice management on farm, optimal performance can be achieved, ultimately leading to having a heifer that calves down at 24 months at 90% of her mature body weight.

The management of these heifer calves in the first weeks and months of life will have a significant impact on both lifetime production and long-term profitability of the dairy herd. The cost of rearing a heifer to calve at 24 months is approximately €1,500, with heifer rearing representing up to 20% of a dairy farm's expenses. Therefore, the typical 100 cow herd with a 20% replacement rate is about to start a long-term investment process of approx. €30,000 over the next few weeks.

To reach such targets, replacement heifers must achieve a steady gain of approximately 0.75 kg/day from birth. Interruptions to performance over the calf rearing period may offset target weights being achieved. In the short-term, the aim should be to double the calf's birthweight by weaning at 8 weeks of age.

In order to do so, it is essential the following key calf rearing practises are managed well on farm over the next vital few weeks:

1. Provide the calf with sufficient levels of high quality, clean colostrum within the first few hours of life.
2. Introduce starter concentrates from at least three days of age to kick start rumen development.
3. Offer clean water ad lib to calves. Milk should be considered a feed, not a drink.
4. Offer a clean long-fibre forage (ideally straw), above ground level, to increase rumen function and entice greater dry matter intake.
5. Provide calves with a high quality, high dairy content milk replacer consistently (accurately weighed and mixed, using sterile utensils).
6. Facilities must be clean, well ventilated, draught free and well bedded. A calf spends approximately 80% of its time lying down – provide a deep, warm, dry bed.
7. Weaning calves on a weight basis will result in having a more uniform group – only wean once calves are consistently consuming 1.5 kg of concentrates per day.



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certain calves get the required quantity in the first 2 hours, stomach tube all new born calves.

- ▶ Night time feeding of silage can reduce night time calving but you must lock cows away from feed during the day and you need to do it for 3 weeks before calving and have at least 1.5 ft. per cow feeding space.
- ▶ Once you have things set up well, trust people, even students, to do their jobs well - don't waste time going around checking (also it drives people 'mad' and they develop a "he doesn't trust me" syndrome - it will be obvious to you if he not up to task).
- ▶ Get surplus calves off the farm as soon as possible as they add to the workload and risk of disease spread.
 - » Don't let anyone walk through heifer calf house - only access is to the rearer, therefore, have a separate house for males.
 - » Have disinfectant foot baths at each calf house entrance.
 - » Some farmers let the student sell the calves - price is agreed anyway so he just does the talking with the dealer.
- ▶ Calves should get fresh meal every day to encourage intake.
- ▶ Use pumps to pump milk from the parlour to calf houses. Mark the quantity levels on tanks so as to make measuring out the required quantity easier for calves.
- ▶ Three to six individual pens for sick calves have merit but group penning is an essential labour-saving requirement. If short of calf housing, home-made outdoor hutches or purchased at €300 each have merit.

4. Contract rearing

- ▶ This should be seriously considered by dairy farmers who, are short of "help" or haven't enough work for a full-time person, are stocked to a max on milking platform and more importantly if they are bad rearer of replacements - admit it if you are!
- ▶ The going rate is €1.00 to 1.40, maybe with bonuses added on.
- ▶ If this venture is to be a success it must be constructed as a "win-win" situation for both parties.
- ▶ If you are having difficulty selling male calves consider contract rearing them at the same price as females. In some cases they are sold as weanlings off the rearers farm. Tom Coll, Teagasc, Sligo has many clients rearing males on contract.

5. Use your contractor:

- ▶ Use contractors to feed silage 2-3 times per week to stock. They will even scrape cubicles and yards as well.
- ▶ From 15 January on, get him to blanket spread all your farm with nitrogen, P and K.
- ▶ Spread slurry with the umbilical system as there will be no damage to roadways, no contamination of grass and no soil compaction of fields - a major

issue!

- ▶ Dehorning calves should also be done on contract.

6. Use the spring grass planner:

- ▶ Everyone should use the spring grass rotation planner to manage their daily allocation of grass from 1st Feb to 15th April - if not using, you shouldn't be reading these suggestions!
- ▶ Using it, a child could grass-manage your cows in Feb-March.
 - ▶ The principles are:
 - » 30% of milking platform (MP) must be grazed in February. These paddocks will be:
 - Drier, closer to the yard, have multiple access points, sheltered, new grasses, quickest growers and have covers of 800 - 1200 kgs DM.
 - Some silage ground should be grazed in this period if you wish to graze again (recommended) before closing in mid-April.
 - » 30% from 1st March to 17th March with covers of 1200+
 - » And, last 40% by 5th April.
 - » Heavy farm targets and late growth areas should be 7-10 days later than these dates.
 - ▶ It is a little more labour demanding but it will


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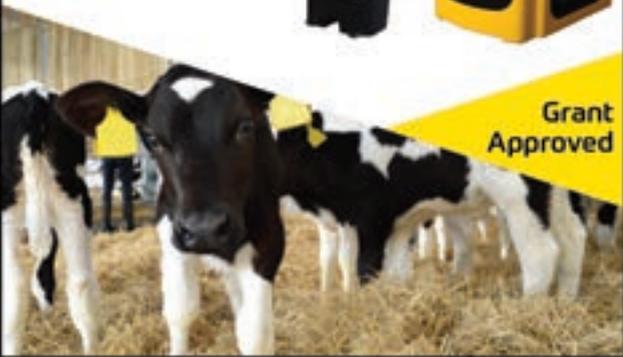


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guarantee that you grow/use at least 0.5 tons more grass per hectare up to 1st April – increases farm profit by €90/ha.

- ▶ Because now you know what your daily allocation of grass will be for every day to 1st April, it is possible to put up the stakes now before you get very busy.
 - » I suggest you set up 10 -12 days of allocation, having blanket spread fertiliser first.
 - » All the remaining area should be mapped out on the farm map with specific yardage indicated so that any staff member can quickly and accurately do it on his own later in February.
 - » When doing this, take into account paddock entrances/

exits, roadway availability, paddock shapes/sizes, water troughs, wet areas of paddocks etc. All that information can be ‘minded’ for next year so that you don’t have to go through the same procedure next year.

- » From this you can see it is a major management task, requiring all staff’s full mental attention to operationalising the plan; but worth it! But you are making better use of your time than sitting on a tractor spreading slurry, fertiliser or feeding cattle.
- ▶ A Batch Latch is a great idea to automatically open the paddock gate to allow cows leave the paddock when grass is eaten and

walk at their ‘own pace’ to the parlour.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

- ▶ As you are the most important ‘cog’ in the wheel, it is so obvious that you “must look after yourself”.
- ▶ Have a structure to your day with a defined finish time, say 7pm. You may have to go back out to check cows before bed but still get off farm for those three hours – you need a defined start and end to the day. If it is longer than 14 – 17 hours you are heading for serious health problems.
- ▶ You also need to take time out – you are the driver of the business, the manager, and so need head space to make key management decisions as well as keeping on top of the physical workload.
 - » Track your hours worked and know when you are being overstretched - put a plan in place to avoid this e.g.
 - » ‘I won’t do night time checks as I need a good night’s sleep’.
 - » ‘I will get more help’.
 - » Be self-aware and know when you are getting tired/stressed or feeling short tempered – if this is the case reduce your workload.
 - » Don’t lose all touch with normality – try and structure-in off farm/ hobby events – hard this year with Covid.
 - » Minimise alcohol and keeping physically fit is key.
- ▶ Eat correctly – this year is a challenge. It might be worth buying a dinner daily (quality pre-packed dinners from Country Crest are excellent) if you don’t have time to cook proper meals.
- ▶ Set your farm up with some labour ‘slack’ in spring – if your set up to be flat out to keep on top of things and something goes wrong then you’re stretched and probably losing money – get help in whatever form possible over the spring to ensure the business is performing the way you want it.

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- ▶ Cow and calf deaths, letters from the Bank manager and Department of Agriculture, generally have a fierce upsetting effect on farmers. I don't have the answers as to how you overcome such challenges when you are tired. But what I do know is that excessive worry does not sort things out. Rationally address the issue and get help.
- ▶ I like Tom O'Connell's principles for spring, given at the IGA Conference – "The 'Switched on for Spring' Guide":
 - S – Simple systems,
 - P – Purchase in time,
 - R – Rest,
 - I – Inventory – do a 'stock-taking' of your needs
 - N – Necessary work, only,
 - G – Good communication.
- ▶ Finally, surround yourself with and meet people who are positive about themselves and the future. Continue to participate with your Discussion Group through Zoom sessions. Farmers tell me that these are "great for them" to see and chat to fellow farmers.

NITROGEN, P & K - A MUST DO EARLY

- ▶ All this talk about too much nitrogen and losses doesn't mean you must stop using it but you must use it differently and more efficiently.
- ▶ Nitrogen is the cheapest feed input you will buy.
- ▶ Use at least half bag of protected urea (24 units/acre) on the farm on the same day.
 - ▶ You must put it on immediately if you have not done so – as early as you can on wet farms.
 - ▶ Even on fields with heavy covers.
 - ▶ Saves labour and confusion.
 - ▶ Maximise yield of grass per unit spread.
- ▶ One third of the farm should NOW get its Nitrogen from 2500-3000 gallons of slurry per acre – covers with less than 700kgs DM, using the LESS systems.
 - ▶ When one-third of the farm has been grazed spread 2500-3000 gallons of slurry on that area.
- ▶ Contrary to popular belief all paddocks, even ones with 1,500 Kgs DM grass cover, should get N, except paddocks that got slurry.
- ▶ On farms that applied Urea in mid-January, the next application of at least 40 units Urea/acre falls due in mid to late February (4 weeks after the first application).
- ▶ Use the weather forecast:

- ▶ So that no heavy rain comes within 24-48 hours of spreading the fertiliser,
 - ▶ Rain within 24 hours will ensure slurry works better.
- ▶ There should be no argument on which Nitrogen to use as Urea as it is cheaper than CAN, and is equally as good but care must be taken where soil pH is high. Farmers in Derogation have to use protected Urea.
- ▶ The advice above is for farms who have already applied P or K, having done so in Sept. However, the following advice should be followed where P and K are required: Apply 2.5 bags 10:10:20 per acre as an annual maintenance dressing to farms with a Soil Index 3. More is required later for lower Index farms. This is critical advice.

FEB STEPS TO IMPROVING 6 WEEK CALVING

February mismanagement of cow and heifer will seriously adversely affect next year's six-week calving rate:

- ▶ A case of milk fever increases days from calving to conception by 13 days: Caused by insufficient calcium (too much in the diet before calving).
- ▶ An ovarian cyst increases it by over 70 days. Caused by; metabolic diseases, negative energy balance, high production, retained placenta, dystocia, stress and genetics. If a problem, talk to your Vet early.
- ▶ A sick cow's conception is delayed by 80 days,
- ▶ A lame cow's conception is delayed by at least 14 days. Knowing this means you must cure the lameness fast,
- ▶ A herd losing more than 0.5 BCS has its conception rate reduced by 20%.
- ▶ A cow with a BCS of less than 2.75 will have 16% lower pregnancy rate: At calving, identify cows in this category and 'look after them',
- ▶ A difficult/hard calving will delay the onset of heat; while womb infection will have the same effect. Hence, the need to manage calving carefully; don't rush the cow and particularly heifers. And if you have to handle cows, do so hygienically.
- ▶ Vaccinations: Another time critical exercise, actually it should be done in January to reduce Feb workload, but it must be done in Feb so as not to get caught near the breeding season:
 - ▶ BVD, IBR and Lepto are the ones to do for.
 - ▶ If late scour or pneumonia or coccidiosis have been a



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problem take veterinary advice.

- ▶ Make sure parasites and fluke are not a problem.
- ▶ Talk, even if a bit late, to your Vet in order to prevent these occurrences.
- ▶ It will pay to let small yearling (animals 200kgs now) heifers out to grass now, feeding them 2 kgs meal so as to achieve target bulling weights.
- ▶ The target weights on 1st Feb are 260 - 300kgs for bulling heifers, depending on breed or 50% of the cows' mature weight.

CARING FOR COWS

- ▶ Make sure all dry cows are getting 2-3 oz per head of a good dry cow mineral.
- ▶ Make sure cows and heifers, within 2-3 weeks of calving, are kept on very clean cubicles – their immune system is very low and there is now more infectious bugs around.
- ▶ Lameness or cows tender on the feet should be looked after now. Get the FRS to do this job because you are too busy and don't know the job well enough.
- ▶ Feed a little meal (0.5 to 1 Kg) for 2 weeks before calving:
 - ▶ Allows you move on to full meal feed within days of calving.
 - ▶ Slowly (14 days) build up concentrates after calving because the cow's intake is low and a lot of meal relative to roughage will result in acidosis and other

problems.

- ▶ Fat cows (condition score 3.7+) and not calving for 4-6 weeks should be put on restricted diet otherwise, they will have calving and health problems, as well as milking poorly after calving.
- ▶ Post calving feed 2-4 kgs meal (16%P) with grass and minimum silage.
 - ▶ If weather is wet increase by 1-3 kgs for a few days.
 - ▶ From most of the grass budgets I have done it seems as if farmers should only feed 1- 3 kgs meal during February so as to graze more than 30% of the milking platform by 1st March.
 - ▶ In March the meal feeding level will be 3 – 4 kgs as more cows are calved.
- ▶ Feed adequate magnesium, either in meal, in the water or dust the pastures.
- ▶ You must only allow cows graze for 3 hrs per day and or night if out full time, unless weather is exceptionally dry.

CARING FOR THE YOUNG HEIFER CALF

- ▶ This is a “must do well calf rearing period” – badly reared under-perform for life.
- ▶ Biestings (colostrum) early is the most important way to prevent calf rearing problems associated with scours and pneumonia. Follow the 1,2,3 rule:

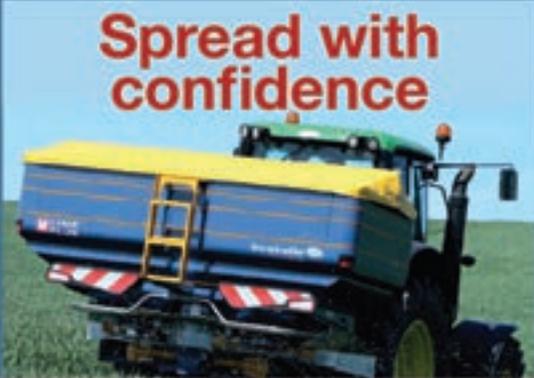
Use colostrum from the first milking for the first calf feed
Give colostrum within 2 hours of the calf's birth,
Give at least 3 litres.

- ▶ Give another 2 litres within the next 6 hours.
 - ▶ A stomach tube (done correctly) alleviates some of the feeding problems. Most farmers now use it as a time saver and guarantees consumption of 2-3 litres in that first feed.
- ▶ Disinfect the naval with tincture of iodine (15-20 mls) after birth.
 - ▶ Mother may lick this off, so do it again before calf enters calf pen.
- ▶ Avoid virus pneumonia by having plenty of ventilation (0.8 sq. ft. per calf both inlet and outlet), no draughts, a dry bed, hay and fresh meal ever day.
- ▶ Make plans to have calves at grass in March or at least have some access to it.
- ▶ To prevent the spread of Johne's Disease:
 - ▶ Feed milk replacer to replacement heifer calves,
 - ▶ Ensure no test positive or inconclusive cows calve in the same area as negative cows,
 - ▶ Operate 'snatch calving' by removing the calf from the dam ASAP after calving to minimise contact with adult dung.
 - ▶ Frequently clean calving area, being generous with straw,
 - ▶ Don't keep replacements from positive cows,
 - ▶ Ensure cows for calving have clean udders and flanks as they enter the calving pen.
 - ▶ Join the AHI scheme to eradicate it – contact your Vet.

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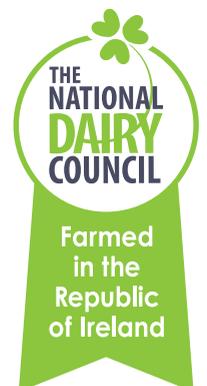


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Claas Arion 400 range



The six-model CLAAS ARION 400 range offers a wide range of cab, transmission and specification options, including CIS and the latest CIS+ versions and various cab options including the unique award winning PANORAMIC cab, which sets a completely new standard for cab visibility.

The PANORAMIC cab features a one-piece windscreen, that is joined to roof pane without a crossbeam. This gives the operator an unrestricted 90 degree field of vision over a front loader and gives the cab a large feeling of space that is unprecedented.

The design for the ARION 400 maintains the even weight distribution that is a common feature on CLAAS tractors.

PROACTIV front axle suspension is available as an option for models over 90hp. This has a steering lock of 55 degrees and when activated provides independent suspension with automatic height control. In addition, two-point cab suspension is also available on the ARION 430 to 460 models, which when combined with the front-axle suspension provides a smooth ride in the most demanding of conditions.

The ARION 400 range, is powered by a powerful and fuel-efficient 4-cylinder, 4.5 litre FPT turbocharged and charge-air cooled engine with power outputs from 90hp up to 140hp. The engines use a combination of SCR technology and a diesel oxidation catalytic converter (DOC/Oxicat) to meet TIER 4 emissions regulations, and all the components are housed under the bonnet so they don't restrict driver visibility.

The engines have no boost, so provide full power is always available at all times, and are governed using a CLAAS engine management system designed to provide optimised engine performance curves.

The transmission and other main operating functions are controlled using the multifunction control lever. This is designed so that all the gearbox functions can be controlled using a thumb-operated rocker switch. With DYNAMIC STEERING, using the CIS colour display the driver has the option of either two automatic modes or a manual mode. Using the Steering Angle Dependent mode, which will be applicable to about 90 per cent of work done by a tractor this size, the steering speed increases the more the steering wheel is turned, making this especially ideal for loader work. In the Speed Dependent mode, the steering ratio is proportionally reduced as forward speed increases, so will allow for quick and easy headland turning, but stiffens up when in a straight line down the field for a smoother ride. In manual mode, four fixed steering ratios (2.5 / 2 / 1.5 / 1) can be selected depending on the operation.

The range of hydraulic options available for the ARION 400 again reflect the varied uses that these tractors will be used for, with three different hydraulic circuits available for each model in the range. For general work, a 60 litres/minute (l/m) open circuit hydraulic system is available. Where a higher flow rate is required for more demanding work, a 98l/m open centre hydraulic system can be specified which combines two pumps, one with a flow rate of 57l/m for the control systems and a second of 41l/m for the rear linkage, which can be merged if required. A 110l/m load-sensing hydraulic circuit is also available with optional Power Beyond as an option or as standard on CIS+ models, which is a first for this size of tractor.

In addition to the new PANORAMIC cab, the ARION 400 is also available with a conventional cab built on a 6-pillar design, with the option of either a high or

low profile roof with or without a transparent sunroof. This low profile roof has an overall height to the top of the cab of about 2.5m on 34 inch tyres. This is one of the lowest on the market for this size of tractor, making it ideal for situations where height is restricted. The length and angle of the steering column, which incorporates the instrument panel, is fully adjustable and can be swung up to make access easier. All the main operating controls are conveniently grouped to the right of the driver's seat, with the secondary controls located on the 'B' pillar. Previously only available on larger tractors with CEBIS, CSM is available for the ARION 400 controlled using the CIS colour display. As on the CEBIS version, using CIS the operator can record and save a total of four headland sequences with up to 200 steps, which are then activated using either the CIS control panel or the Multifunction Control lever.

Using CSM, operating sequences involving the electronic spool vales and linkages, engine speed and PTO or 4-wheel drive and gear selection can all be recorded.

Originally introduced on the CLAAS LEXION combine, TELEMATICS is now widely available across a wide range of CLAAS machines, including the ARION 400.

TELEMATICS automatically records the tractor's operating data, in addition to its position, and automatically uploads this data to the dedicated server. This information can then be viewed remotely and also allows for remote diagnostics if necessary. A further major benefit of CLAAS TELEMATICS is that tractor and compatible implement data can optionally be automatically recorded and allocated to individual field files, ensuring accurate record keeping of operations, application rates, etc, which can then be quickly and easily viewed, compared and analysed.

The ARION 400 can also be used with the full range of CLAAS EASY electronics systems, including TELEMATICS. CLAAS GPS PILOT, S7, S10 and other control terminals can all be easily mounted on a frame above the control console, and the tractor is fitted with cab and rear ISOBUS connections.



Spring has sprung

Well readers, I hope you are all staying safe and well and managing to keep the new year resolutions rolling in to February. Spring has sprung and the calving season is coming in fast. Slurry spreading is in full swing and spreaders and tillage equipment now need a check over pre season. So, we are up and running once again for a farming year: let's hope the weather is kind as it sets the pace for all things farming.

As the billions are set aside for the Brexit, adjustment fund farm organisations will have to work closely with the relevant government departments to secure adequate funding to protect farm incomes going forward. No doubt there will be checks and balances needed to access this money we will watch with interest to see how this will pan out; there is no such thing as free money.

On the good news front, the next TAMS tranche was opened up on Saturday the 16th of January and will remain open until 16th of April. This comes with two very welcome additions at least two key ones are the inclusion of once off calf investment scheme and the inclusion of GPS fertiliser spreaders to all farmers now: previously it was only available to tillage farmers.

Staying on the tillage sector, it's reported that one million straw bales are for the chop this year under the new government scheme. The plan is to pay farmers €250 per hectare to chop and plough down straw. The target is to take 40,000 hectares out of straw production this year. This is bad news for livestock farmers and mushroom producers who rely heavily on straw and peat. Now Bord na Mona have called time on peat harvesting, alternative sources of bedding will have to be explored and found sooner rather than later. Supplies of straw were scarce in 2020 owing to weather conditions and if you have the same problem this harvest, coupled with chopping, there will be a shortage of straw this winter driving prices up: bad news for the livestock farmer good news for the tillage farmer.

On the machinery front, well known Massey Ferguson dealers Gordon Hegarty & Sons are set to open their third branch at the old J.R. PERRY premises in Athy: it will open in early March. WBD Farm Machinery Ltd, another Massey dealer based in Lusk Co Dublin, have just moved in to their new premises. Kellys of Kilkenny will now be called Kilkenny Agri Machinery and will still operate out of the Hebron Road premises. They will continue to be Valtra main dealers along with being McHale, Redrock and Smyth trailer dealers and much more besides.

Pottinger Ireland have expanded their dealer network by appointing Kelvale Agri Machinery Ltd, Glenmore, Co Kilkenny, as a full line dealer serving the southeast of the country. Clarkill Farming, well known farmers and contractors from Borrisokane Co Tipperary are now main dealers for Dammann sprayers; the German-built sprayer would be known to anyone who visited the Agritechnica shows over the years.

From a Irish show point of view, plans are still in place to hold the World Ploughing Championships in September; Tullamore have plans in place to go in August with their annual livestock show; and the FTMTA still have the door open on a mechanised show in July/August. Let's hope we see something in 2021.

Until next month, farm wisely and farm safely.

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LEMKEN fertiliser spreaders in UK and Ireland

The product range of fertiliser spreaders from LEMKEN have been well received in the first season in the UK and Ireland. With 3 ranges to offer, Spica, Tauri and Polaris come with tank volumes from 900 to 4,000 litres and a broad range of control options, from a basic version through to 100% ISOBUS. The new fertiliser spreaders meet the most stringent requirements regarding precision of application and economy. Comfortable setting options guarantee that fertiliser is applied precisely and economically comments LEMKEN UK's General Manager Paul Creasy. The LEMKEN fertiliser spreaders are therefore high-quality products which optimally complement the company's existing product portfolio in tillage, sowing and crop care. The entry level model Spica with tank volumes from 900 to 2,100 litres and working widths of up to 24 metres, makes the Spica ideal for smaller growers, The Mid-range Tauri offers a



large loading volume of up to 3,000 litres. This implement delivers higher fertilising efficacy through large working widths of up to 36 metres. Equipment such as the weighing system, width section control and ISOBUS preparation make the Tauri 12 not only highly precise but also very

comfortable to operate. The range topping Polaris machines offer working widths of up to 50 metres and tank volumes of up to 4,000 litres as well as sophisticated technology such as the EPSILON spreader vane system or the GPS-supported ECONOV section control system.



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TAMS Grant FOR GPS Spreaders extended to all farmers

The Minister for Agriculture has confirmed the changes to TAMS 2021 meaning that GPS spreaders will now be available for all categories of applicants. Dairy or livestock farmers looking to upgrade their fertiliser spreaders can now invest in a precision spreader with up to 60 per cent financial support. But what can a GPS spreader do for you?

Brian Powell, a dairy farmer in Co. Tipperary explains some of the features you can expect on this class of fertiliser spreader. After choosing to buy an Amazone ZA-V Profis in 2018 Brian explained: "We are dairy farmers so we're trying to grow as much grass as possible. Fertiliser and fertiliser accuracy is one of the most important factors for this. If you want to change the speed you're travelling at, the ZA-V controls the amount of fertiliser going out at the time so you can speed up and slow down and the same amount of fertiliser per hectare is going out" Brian explains "With the weigh cells on this machine and the control panel inside the tractor, we're able to measure how much fertiliser each individual paddock gets and, at the end of the year, we're able to tell what paddocks got what fertiliser." The Z-AV he says, takes a lot of the guesswork out of spreading. The speed reading from the tractor combined with the weigh cells constantly calibrating means you can put out exactly the volume of fertiliser required, saving money and time as you



won't be running out with acres left to spread. Unique to the Z-AV, it features online calibration which means the weigh cell is constantly working to feed the live weight into the control box. Furthermore, on the ZA-V Profis, any possible influences due to a change in the centre of gravity are taken into account by the on-the-move signal from the tilt sensor. The two-dimensional tilt sensor, which detects angles to the front and back or side to side, corrects any errors in the measuring procedure which might occur when driving up and down hills or when driving across a slope.

TAMS GRANTS ON GPS SPREADERS APPLICABLE FOR ALL FARMERS

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- ✓ Wheels as standard.

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McHale Pro Glide Mower Range



McHale offer farmers and contractors a combination mower, the Pro Glide B9000, which has a cutting width of 6 metres. For the 2021 season, the McHale Pro Glide B9000 Combination Mower comes with an optional Hydraulic Width Adjustment. The operator can hydraulically adjust the width position of the rear mowers to eliminate striping on slopes and curves. The hydraulic rams integrated into the mower beams shift the cutter bars sideways either together or independently to allow for up to 400mm overlap on each mower. James Heanue, Irish Sales Manager for McHale, explains: "To maximise the feed value of forage it is important that grass crops are cut when the sugar content is

highest, and that the mower leaves clean crop stubble and produces quality forage free from impurities. Our design team combined their specialist knowledge of crop harvesting, energy and know-how to develop the McHale Pro Glide range of mowers. I feel these products offer a number of unique features which will deliver better ground following ability and better cut quality."

All Mowers are fitted with 3 metre cutter bars with tine conditioners and benefit from a number of novel features which result in better ground following ability and quicker reaction times to changes in ground conditions. The McHale Pro Glide combination mower is equipped with a number of common features as standard such as unique patented ground following technology, break-back protection, hydraulic ground pressure control and heavy duty bed design which make the Pro Glide a smart choice for farmers and contractors alike. For transportation, the McHale Pro Glide B9000 folds vertically to position itself behind the centre point of the tractor for

safe transport. The transport height of the machine is reduced thanks to the vertical positioning of the mower bed in transport to measure at a height of 4 metres. This position allows for the centre of gravity to be close to the tractor which ensures even weight distribution and stability during transport at high speeds on the road or in uneven fields while also providing the driver with a clear view from his rear-view mirrors. The 3 metre Pro Glide cutter bar is powered by a heavy duty right angle gearbox which is positioned behind the inner top hat. The mowing discs are specifically designed to maximise crop flow. Each mowing disc has its own individual protective safety mechanism, if a collision occurs, the mechanism will shear in order to protect the drive. The McHale Pro Glide comes standard with a steel tine conditioner to help cut and condition the grass as efficiently as possible. The conditioner is driven by a mechanical gearbox. Conditioning speeds can be adjusted between 700 rpm and 1000rpm with the simple pull of a lever.

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New Tractor Registrations Resilient in 2020



The latest figures issued by the Farm Tractor & Machinery Trade Association in relation to registrations of tractors and other types of self-propelled machinery cover the December registrations, giving a view of the full year picture for 2020. The registration of new tractors during December rose substantially in comparison to the same

month of 2019 with 26 units registered, more than double the figure of 12 units registered a year earlier. The December registrations bring the total for the year to 1,910 units, a drop of only 3 per cent on 2019. Given the year that was in it, this was a very credible performance by any measure.

Five counties reached triple digit levels of new tractor registrations during 2020; Cork with 262 units, Tipperary and Wexford with 130 units each, Meath with 109 units and Galway with 100 units. Monaghan saw the lowest level of registrations with 13 units. The 101 to 120hp range was the horse power band with the highest level of registrations in 2020 with 603 units or nearly 32% of all registrations. During the year 87% of all tractors registered had over 100hp, 56 per cent over 120hp and 29 per cent over 150hp.

Based on the figures prepared by FTMTA, registrations of used imported tractors continued the strong performance seen in previous months with 387 units registered during December. This was one of the highest monthly figures seen all year, second only to November, and was the highest such December in at least six years and probably longer. It seems likely that the

exceptional level of December activity may have been driven by concerns around the post Brexit scenario in terms of sourcing used machines in the UK. A total of 3,010 used imported tractors were registered during 2020 which was only marginally behind the 3,045 units registered in 2019. On competition grounds, FTMTA is not allowed to release tractor market share information for a given year until a full year later. On that basis, the Association can now release the market share breakdown for 2019 when a total of 1,968 new tractors were registered. The top five brands in terms of registration were: John Deere - 21 per cent; Massey Ferguson - 20 per cent; New Holland - 17 per cent; Case IH - 11 per cent; CLAAS - 8 per cent.

There were 5 telehandler registrations during December, in comparison to 2 units a year earlier. The December registrations brought the total of such machines registered during 2020 to 389 units, a year on year decrease of slightly more than 18% on the 476 such machines registered during 2019. Wheeled loader registrations continued the good performance seen throughout 2020 with 8 units registered in December, up from 5 units in 2019. The total number of wheeled loaders registered during 2020 was 135 units, up 20 units on the previous year. There was one registration of a backhoe loader in December; there had not been a registration of such a machine in December in the previous three years. The December unit brought the total for the year to 32, down sharply from 66 machines in 2019.



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Planning for a Future



Tom Murphy
Professional
Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland



With a bit more time on their hands due to Covid-19 restrictions, I wonder if many agricultural contractors will sit down and taken stock of their businesses. Why not review the last three years and see if the decisions you made were right and more importantly have bad decisions cost you money?

Is there too much machinery sitting in your yard and could you have put the money tied up in it to better use? Does all your machinery pay for itself? In terms of profitability, whilst you were making machinery repayments and running an overdraft, did you charge enough to cover all of your overheads taking into account payment terms, discounts given, length of time taken to receive payment for work done? Very importantly did you work a reasonable profit into your "costings" so that you can reinvest when machinery needs to be replaced? If you can honestly say that you have taken the time to review the past three years then you probably also have a forward looking three year plan in place.

Any business with the level of investment required by the agricultural contracting sector should have a three year plan in place with specific targets. Not least that the prices charged reflect any increased costs such as parts, fuel, labour, repayments, insurance etc. and always a fair profit to ensure the future of the business.

Take some time now to talk to your clients about a work plan for the coming year. Look at enhancing the services you provide by exploring all that is available in the smart machinery arena, which can save both you and the farmer money. I know some people will have a skit at my advice but I guarantee those who follow it will be there into the future to support farmers in profitable production. To farmers I say treat your agricultural contractor as a valuable part of your team, if you work closely with him it will save you money.

Farm Safety Partnership

PAC Ireland is delighted to have been

reappointed to the Health and Safety Authority, Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee, which is a statutory body reporting to the Board of the HSA. It is a much slimmed down committee, to which a number of Working Groups looking at various aspects of farm health and safety report. PAC is also serving on the Tractor and High Risk Machinery Safety Group. All people who subscribe

to the *Irish Farmers Monthly* have a keen interest in farming and I would ask you to let me know what you think would improve safety in the farming sector. This is your opportunity to have a direct input; email me at tom@pacireland.com I appeal to every single one you to keep safety to the front of your mind at all times, it only takes a split second to become a victim.

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150 years of success with Pöttinger

2021 heralds a big anniversary for Pöttinger, the Austrian family-owned agricultural technology company: "Honour the past - be the future" is the headline for celebrating their 150-year success story. What started as a small workshop in Grieskirchen (AT), developed into an internationally successful agricultural machinery manufacturer. It all started at a festival: Franz Pöttinger was a resourceful master clockmaker who in the 19th century was already highly innovative and looking towards the future. From his point of view, the precision of a timepiece could also be applied to machines for making farmers' hard work easier. This meant that the forage chopping machine's time had come. And for it, he was awarded the Silver Prize Medal at the Linz Festival (AT) in 1871. That was 150 years ago, the same year the company was founded. Pöttinger has been serving the agricultural technology industry ever since. In addition to the forage chopping machine, the company also produced



Founder Franz Pöttinger with his wife Juliane

fruit mills and presses, harvesters for silage and forage, brushwood chippers and potato harvesters. In the 1950s, one of the best-selling machines was a loader for hay, straw, grass and beet leaves. A few years later, the conveyor rake

revolutionised mountain farming. This paved the way for the "Green product range". Following continuous ongoing development, the hay loader soon became the forerunner for the loader wagon. Pöttinger has been the world market leader in this segment ever since. Acquiring the Bavarian Plough Factory (DE) opened the door for the grassland specialist to enter the tillage market in 1975. Power harrows, stubble cultivators and ploughs were then added to the product range. The third key area of competence was seed drill technology. The company successfully entered this market in 2001 by taking over the Rabe plant in Bernburg (DE). Following the first exhibitions at trade fairs in Austria and neighbouring countries, international success started in 1999 with the foundation of the first sales subsidiary in France. Another 14 subsidiaries in Europe, USA and Asia followed, the most recent achievement being the opening of the subsidiary in Poland in 2020.



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CLAAS

Tractor of the year 2021



TRACTOR OF THE YEAR – MASSEY FERGUSON 8S.265

After a long and indepth analysis of all the technical parameters, the jury elected Massey Ferguson 8S.265 as Tractor of the Year 2021. This is a full new tractor, new style, new and innovative transmission, new cooling system, new hydraulic system, new and silent cab. Last but not least, it offers a full new package of technology.

BEST UTILITY – VALTRA G 135 VERSU

The jury had to evaluate the full package of technical parameters, considering also that utility tractors must be easy to maneuver and versatile. Based on these elements – and thanks to attention to all the details, to the versatility of the technology offered on board, the very efficient hydraulic assistant and many other features – Valtra G 135 Versu has been elected Best Utility 2021.



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Tractor of the year 2021



BEST OF SPECIALISED – FENDT V VARIO 211

The jury elected Fendt V Vario 211 Best of Specialized 2021. With a full new cab, it has improved the working environment for the driver. The Dynamic Performance extends the power range; the extra power (10 hp) is controlled and released automatically according to the working needs. This is a high quality and reliable tractor with a very efficient transmission.

SUSTAINABLE TOTY – AXION 960 CEMOS

The winner of Sustainable TOTY was chosen among all the finalists tractors of all the Toty's categories. With Claas 960 Axion, thanks to Cemos system, a big step towards a more sustainable farming has been achieved. All the technology available on this tractor is easy to use as never before. The optimization of all the technology and the electronics – and last, but not least, the optimization of tires pressure, allows this tractor offer remarkable fuel saving and a much more efficient performance on field and in any working condition.



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In the field and on the field

25-year-old Stephen Coen - Gaelic footballer for the Mayo senior team, sheep and beef farmer, and PhD student - is setting his sights on a career in the agri-food sector. But, he tells Miriam Atkins, his love of farming and football will ensure he is never far from home.



Stephen Coen's farming life is more of a hobby, he admits, than a job, but it is a lifestyle that he is committed to and shares with his father Liam and older brother David: "All three of us work part-time on the farm and full-time off it: my father works for Bord Bia doing farm audits and my brother works for Sheep Ireland." The family farm is situated in Hollymount, Co Mayo, where they have 150 ewes - pedigree Texel sheep - and 20 breeding female

cattle - Limousins, using an AI Charolais bull this year. Stephen followed in his brother's footsteps to do a degree in animal science in UCD and now he is currently working on his PhD at Teagasc Grange in the area of nutrition and reproduction in Friesian bulls, looking at how early life nutrition affects their reproductive development at puberty and maturity. "I am looking at genetics and genomics and getting an insight into key genes that may

help us understand more about fertility in high EBI bulls, working closely with AI centres.” The research has kept him busy during lockdown and he credits his supervisor David Kenny for keeping him motivated and supported throughout.

Fitness first

Lockdown has also had an impact on his sporting life, and Stephen is ensuring that he trains each day at home to keep his fitness levels up during this quieter period. “Hollymount-Carramore is my local GAA club – my father and his two brothers played there and my cousins also. We were all hugely invested in it growing up. I also swam for Ireland when I was 14 and played soccer for Mayo in my teenage years but Gaelic football took over when I was 16 and when I was 18 I was called to the Senior Panel where I have been for the past seven years. Football is a big part of my life and it is something that my family is very proud of because they are very into GAA.” Having moved back home last year from Dublin, he says life is simpler now with the farm up the road and training only 20 minutes away.

“I do a lot of running up the back garden and get to the local GAA pitch when I can. There has been a lot of uncertainty around when the GAA will return, but there is lots of uncertainty for others working in construction, retail, schools, etc, so I am not feeling sorry for myself. We know we have a responsibility to be in tip-top shape coming back, we can’t afford to slip in terms of nutrition and fitness. My focus will be my club and my country – that is my priority. Last year was a strange time but the season was enjoyable as the games came in quick and fast. Now I don’t think too far ahead or behind... I am in regular contact with my teammates and we just try to keep spirits up while we are away from the game.”

Farm life

They are currently lambing down their pedigree sheep flock on the farm, with a lot of assistance needed at birth. “The majority or Texels have lambed at this stage and we are getting things up and running now. “We have a farm that we really enjoy and is mostly a hobby for us – most of the money that it generates goes back into improving the farm. It will never be big enough for myself or my brother to take on full time, but we both have such a good working relationship with our father that it works really well. We have 40 acres at home and have leased another 30 acres nearby. And we have a few different fields located sporadically around the Claremorris area: it is very like other West of Ireland farms... sporadic fields, no room for intensive dairying and we have land also exposed to some flooding. I like to think we have maximized the land as much as is possible. We grass measure every week and we are fairly forward-thinking in our practices. Sheep handling units, top quality fencing, etc – these things make it easier for one person to run the farm on their own but between the three of us, anyone can do any job on any day. For me, it is an escape from my work and sporting life.” Looking to the year ahead, Stephen explains that he



doesn’t see Brexit affecting the sheep trade too much: “The sheep trade is really good and when I say that I mean that it is back to where it should be.

Brexit does not seem to have much impact at the minute. We produce high quality breeding rams for local farmers so when prices are good demand is high. We recently increased our flock up 40 ewes and we are looking to intensify that and maximize the use of our land. For our cattle we run a suckler-to-wean system and sell at 7/8 months old: they are just paying their own way at the moment and like a lot of farmers we rely on the Single Farm Payment and everything else we can avail of.... sheep welfare, BDGP, BEEP, GLAS etc.”

Stephen and his family are also keen to put environmental measure to the fore going forward: “We have unofficially signed up to a carbon neutral programme and that is something we would really love to focus on down the line – soil sampling, grass measuring, spreading fertiliser based on soil sample tests, forestry, etc. Our father is very progressive and he puts a lot of trust in us and is open to our ideas for the future.”

The future

Looking to the future, Stephen has his sights on his career ahead; he finishes his PhD in April 2022 and has already reached out to prospective employers in the agri-food sector. “I wanted to do a PhD so I could have a few options open to me and my career: I would like to either lecture, continue in the research field, or move into the agri-food industry. I have been in touch with some companies already and I will wait to see what the future holds when I complete my PhD.” One thing he is sure about, however, is that he won’t be straying too far from the farm. “Being located in near my home is important for me and now that working from home is more common it might be possible. I am not going to play football forever – hopefully I will get another 10 years – but football will not always be my life...family and farming would be the big draw.”

Safety When Handling Slurry

Ciaran Roche discusses the importance of being safe when handling slurry.



Over the next few weeks many farmers and contractors will be busy emptying slurry tanks and spreading slurry. Slurry is a valuable source of organic N, P & K fertiliser, but it is important to remember that storage, handling and spreading of slurry can be particularly hazardous activities if not managed safely. Drowning in slurry and water, and gas poisoning was the cause of 19 farm deaths between 2010 and 2019¹.

Slurry Gases

Many hazardous gases are released during the bacterial decomposition of slurry in tanks. Inhaling these gases which include hydrogen sulphide, ammonia, methane and carbon dioxide can be lethal. All these gases are heavier than air, so they displace oxygen. This can lead to suffocation when a person enters a tank. In particular hydrogen sulphide is extremely poisonous both to people and livestock; it affects the nervous system and small concentrations can cause death. Smell is no indicator of the absence of gas, as many gases are odourless. Hydrogen sulphide has a 'rotten egg' smell at low levels, but cannot be smelt at higher levels. High levels can be released when slurry is agitated and one lung-full at this level can kill you.

The release of this gas is greatest during agitation;

- in first 30 minutes of agitation
- when slurry has been stored for several months
- when slurry is agitated in deep tanks
- after silage effluent has been added

The following guidelines should be adhered to when agitating slurry. (Note: At least two people should be present at all times and always keep children away when handling slurry.)

- Choose a windy day, as this will help disburse gases which are released during agitation
- Open all doors and outlets
- Evacuate
- All persons and livestock from the building
- Agitate

- Do not stand on or near slats or the agitation point
- Agitate from outside the shed if at all possible - replace indoor slurry agitation points with external agitation points
- Do not attempt to enter the shed until at least 30 minutes after agitation has finished; remember toxic gases are being released even if you cannot smell them
- Avoid smoking or the use of naked flames as slurry gases are highly flammable

Slurry Tank Openings

In the case of open slurry tanks, a substantial unclimbable safety wall or fence at least 1.8 meters in height with locked access gates of the same standard should be in place. For all other tanks, the first step is to provide safety manhole access covers and grid underneath. Some older slatted units may not have safety manhole access covers and the farmer or contractor may have to lift heavy slats. When slats are removed for access, temporary covers or guardrails must be used to protect the opening and warning signs should be put in place. However, this is not an ideal situation and these slats should be replaced with safety access covers. The design lifespan of most shed components designed to grant specification is about 20 years. Slats and manhole covers need to be replaced before they fail, therefore it is essential that they are checked each year. Tanks should only be accessed by competent specialist companies who have appropriate equipment and who have competent operators.

Slurry Tanker & PTO

It is essential that the PTO shaft & PTO stub are fully guarded. According to the Health and Safety Authority, a high proportion of serious and fatal PTO related accidents occur when using slurry tankers.

Always Think Safety First!

¹ HSA report on Main causes of deaths in Agriculture and Forestry over the last 10 years 2010-2019



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New Markets But Same Old Problem

The first thing to say about the final EU-UK Trade Deal is that it probably was the best we could have hoped for and it stands as a testament to the efforts of Michel Barnier and his team and the solidarity of the wider Commission and Member States. There were many occasions during the four and a half years since June 2016 when it looked as if the inherent contradictions of the UK's position and ambitions would make a final agreement impossible. Achieving the final agreement was a momentous project and the flagship aspects – no tariffs or quotas – were always the most to which we could aspire.

The second thing to say about the final EU-UK Trade Deal is that the long-term threat to our UK markets remains and will emerge more clearly as the initial logistical 'teething' problems of the new arrangements recede. It is highly likely that the UK will try to arrange Free Trade Agreements with other third countries and it is even more likely that these will be aimed at putting cheaper food in front of British consumers in an attempt to both justify Brexit in the first place and to facilitate UK exports going the other way.

It seems very likely that we'll see a much more concentrated effort by, for instance, New Zealand to grow its UK dairy market share, and it's also very probable that Mercosur, or individual States within that group, will attempt to make increased beef exports into the UK the foundation of any future trade agreement with the UK. Both of these extremely probable developments will threaten the British markets that Irish beef and dairy have held for generations and will necessitate a twofold-strategy that, effectively and incrementally, moves our export strategy away from our traditional British markets while also working to 'smooth out' and make as frictionless as possible our continuing exports to that destination.

ICMSA has never subscribed to the idea that it was possible to somehow replace the volumes and market-knowledge gained over decades (if not centuries) that we possess about British markets and consumers, with more distant and unfamiliar markets in, for instance, the Middle or Far East. There is a very considerable 'lead-in' time involved in getting access to a market and working out the local aspects and angles. It is not as simple as just opening up an agency or board office in some far-flung location and waiting for the local buyers to come hammering at your door.

That's not to say that we're pessimistic about our prospects: on anything resembling a level playing pitch we will always back the innate excellence and grass-



Pat McCormack
President, ICMSA

based production systems of our dairy and beef. Irish food will always be able to rely on the work ethic and technical skill of Irish farmers. Neither are we worried about the marketing skill of our agencies; they have demonstrated that time and again and they know, surely, that if their performance falls below the level required then they will be called out on that. No better people than the farmers!

What does concern us, however, is the established trend that has entry to new markets based on USPs and branding that depends on the farmers – and only the farmers – carrying out extra work or meeting some new standard or adhering to yet another higher level of 'Green' primary production. Even before Brexit, farmers had become very weary indeed of this strategy whereby all the burdens of entering and exporting into new markets seemed to be loaded back onto them. What really incensed them was that while the costs or work involved in opening up new markets always went back to the farmer – even as the volumes sold into the new markets rose – farmer milk or beef price never seemed to rise accordingly.

One of the reasons why ICMSA and farmers generally were so alarmed by the prospect of losing our traditional British markets was that reality. Ireland seems to have added new market after new market in the last 20 years, but the price paid to the farmers for their milk and beef is either unchanged or has actually fallen. There's no point in opening up new markets if the position of the farmers producing the food for those new markets remains either unchanged or is even declining. This is the fundamental contradiction that is becoming more and more difficult to ignore. More markets, more exports, higher volumes but lower margins, lower incomes, lower entry into farming.

That contradiction has to be resolved and until it is ICMSA will exercise caution on these announcements of new market opportunities and openings. Sustainability as a concept is meaningless unless it means sustainability for the farmer primary-producer.



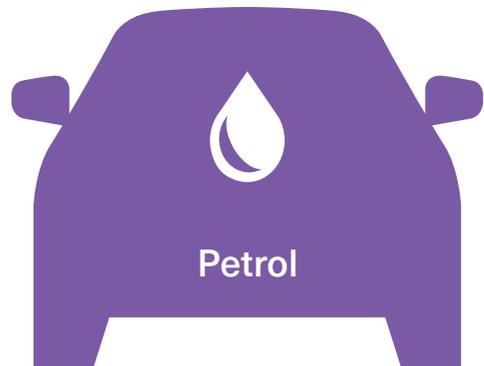
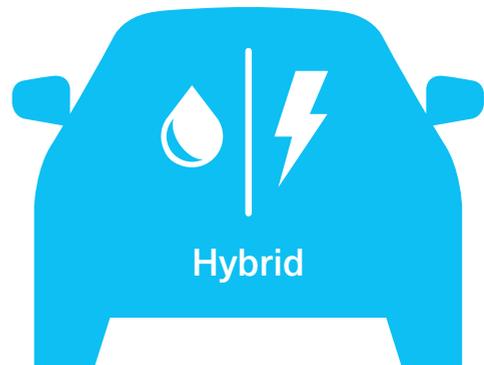
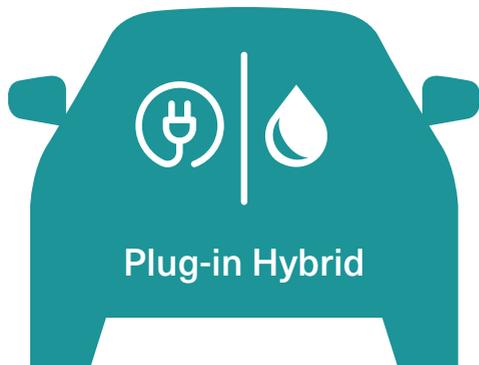
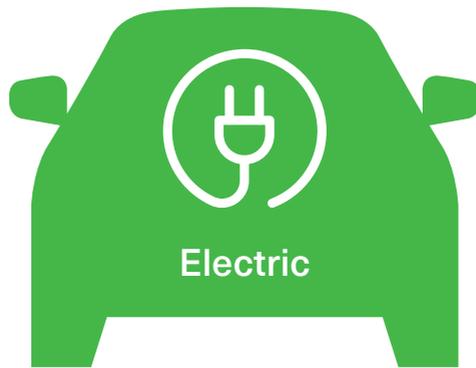
How will the world remember Trump?

Impeached twice, Donald Trump's presidency will be remembered for his handling (or mishandling) of Covid, his incessant tweeting and, many will argue, his misuse of power. And yet, 49 per cent of Americans voted in favour of him serving a second term of office. His vote increased by 10 million to 73 million. Meanwhile, Joe Biden increased Hillary Clinton's share of the popular vote by 13 million votes to secure 79 million votes and reversed the Electoral College margin obtained by Trump in 2016. While Clinton won the popular vote last time out by three million votes, she got too many votes in too few States; such are the vagaries of the American electoral system. President Biden did not make the same mistake. He spread his canvas wider, even securing the normally republican Georgia to win 306 Electoral votes compared to Trump's 232. Trump must have been doing something right to secure such a massive popular vote. All his supporters can hardly be as 'deplorable' as Hillary Clinton described them prior to the 2016 election. It is a truly a 'love or hate' attitude with Donald Trump. Depending on your perspective, he incited riots or encouraged people to stand up for themselves. He supported gun laws leading to mass killings or he defended the Second Amendment allowing people to bear arms. He had a loose association with the truth or he told it as HE saw it. Despite his perceived lack of respect for women and his prejudicial statements against any number of groups including the black community, Mexicans and Muslims, Donald Trump secured millions of votes among these cohorts.

What Trump haters must find most galling is that, bar the impact of Covid-19, he would most likely have been re-elected as president. While Hillary Clinton may

have been seen as aloof, elitist and too casual in her electoral approach, Joe Biden could hardly be regarded as messianic. He seems a decent, honourable public servant. Having served 46 years as senator and two terms as vice-president, he has the credentials and experience. Trump had no record of public service, with property development and reality television as his main career features. So, why was he elected and why did millions of Americans believe he was the right person for the job? His followers are not all redneck, gun-toting, trailer-trash. Far from it. Trump's record in office was badly marred by his bombastic twitterings. He showed himself to be lewd, crude and rude. However, Bill Clinton once said: "It's the economy, stupid." Under President Trump, the US economy powered ahead with higher employment, bigger GDP and more money in some people's pockets. As a self-proclaimed 'outsider', Trump set out to drain the Washington swamp, stem mass illegal immigration, make peace with Asian despots and give the voiceless a voice in the corridors of power. Trump lovers believe he was thwarted at every turn, even if several of his aims were non-existent fictions in the first place. There is an underlying fact that, for many millions of Americans, the American Dream is just that – a dream with a very small 'd'. Low wages, high health costs and little ambition or hope of a better future. That is the reality for millions of Americans.

Meanwhile, the reality for Ireland of Joe Biden's election may not be as benign as we anticipate. He will work for America and if that means competing with the EU and Ireland for US financial, tax and trading preferences, then his Irish ancestry will not get in the way.



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