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UCD'S DEAN OF AGRICULTURE PROFESSOR FRANK MONAHAN ON THE SCHOOL'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE FARMING COMMUNITY

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The big food picture

Seldom have we recourse to describing events in Biblical terms. On this occasion the comparisons seem reasonable. Just as we emerge, hopefully, from the pestilence of a Covid pandemic we are confronted with a European war that only a month ago would have seemed improbable if not impossible. The global ramifications of Covid in terms of death and economic disruption are now being replicated by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. We should not engage in hyperbole but it is difficult to exaggerate the potential impacts of this warmongering by President Putin.

While famine is a distant, if un-erasable memory in the Irish psyche, it is a more recent experience for many millions of people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In the Western world, even the prospect of food shortages is almost unthinkable, though the Covid-induced trade disruptions did suggest that the global food chain is a lot less robust than many assumed. The potential outcomes from war in Eastern Europe are even more alarming. We had already seen evidence provided by the USDA that the EU's ill thought-out and scantily analysed Farm to Fork and Green Deal strategies will reduce production and damage food security in Europe and beyond. Place the added layer of war between two countries on which the European Union has an unhealthy dependence for its energy requirements - and, to a lesser though still important, extent, its grain needs - and we are in an even more dangerous position.

Russia has several trump cards to play in fending off the impact of sanctions from western democracies. How far, for instance, are European governments prepared to go, knowing that Russia could deprive them of a major source of energy? When the lights go off or the trucks and cars come to a standstill, the stamina to resist Putin through economic embargoes and other sanctions will be tested severely. Add on the fact that Russian gas is equally as important in the production of fertiliser and that stamina will be sapped further. Much of the fertiliser we use to produce food in western Europe is manufactured in Russia. Expensive and scarce fertiliser supplies inevitably means lower food production and higher food prices. We will have enough to feed ourselves but there are millions of people in food-deficit countries dependant of European food exports. We should add in another potential outcome to the Russo-Ukrainian war. Russia and Ukraine together account for a third of the world's wheat exports, a fifth of its maize trade and 80 per cent of sunflower oil production. Only a small surplus of global grain production is traded internationally. Even a small disruption or deficit in globally traded grains from the region will have an immense effect on price and supply. Disruption to production or supply or, in all probability, control of Ukrainian grain supply by a Russian government, gives Putin another critical card to play in his ghoulish poker game with the West. The imposition of economic and financial sanctions does not give the West an unassailable hand of cards against Russia. EU governments need to urgently revisit many of the policy initiatives that have made us so vulnerable to the bellicose whims of the Russian president. Neither is this the time for an Irish government to be considering reducing milk or beef production. Farmers need the higher prices they are getting and millions of people across the world will need our surplus food in the critical time ahead.



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Pippa's part-time producer preference

Last month Junior Minister Pippa Hackett made a statement in the Seanad that part-time farming should be supported and that, with changes in the next CAP, more farmers will become part-time. Given the drift out of full-time farming over the past one hundred years, what the senator said is hardly an earth-shattering revelation. What was disappointing was Pippa Hackett's seeming belief that part-time farming is somehow superior in terms of farming practices to full-time farming, especially in relation to care of the environment. Minister of State Hackett mentioned the phrase 'hobby farming' as being insulting to part-time farmers. She is correct. However, this is not a phrase used by farmers generally in relation to their part-time farmer colleagues, many of whom are as commercially minded as their full-time counterparts. There are thousands of part-time farmers who aspire to making a full time living from their farms. Lack of scale and income, poorer soils and farm fragmentation are often the barriers to a full-time farming career. Many others just like the lifestyle, allied to a dependable income from off-farm employment or business. The Green Party representative might be better off addressing the fact that all farmers, full and part time, are squeezed by low margins because food retailers, and ultimately consumers, are unwilling to pay a realistic price for high quality Irish food. Pippa Hackett gave some clarification to her Seanad remarks on her Facebook page, but it will take more than that to remove the suspicion amongst full-time farmers that her original remarks are indicative of a Green Party philosophy that part-time, lower output farming is good and that full time, higher output farming is inherently bad. The Vice- President of IFA, Brian Rushe, was quickly on Twitter to describe Senator Hackett's remarks as incredible. Even Minister McConalogue was moved to distance himself from his Junior's remarks, reiterating his absolute commitment to all Irish farmers.

Fine Tuning Irish Dairy Conference

Registrations are open for milk producers to attend a major dairy conference which will be held in the Limerick Strand Hotel on March 24th. The conference, now in its fourth year, is supported by AXA, MSD Animal Health and the National Dairy Council, and will address Irish dairy policy, markets, climate action, farm management, energy and staffing on farms. The line-up of speakers is impressive and there is no cost for attendance.

However, prior registration is essential to facilitate seating arrangements and catering. In previous years many attendees used the conference as a post-calving opportunity to grab a short break, socialise with their farming colleagues and recharge the batteries before the breeding season commences. Anyone interested in attending can register their participation by opening the following link:

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/fine-tuning-irish-dairy-tickets-269513982577>

Great European gas gathering

Leaders in renewable gas production from across Europe visited Dublin recently as stakeholders here awaited an announcement on the Government's renewable heat obligation (RHO) scheme – a potential a game changer in developing the biomethane sector in Ireland. Because of the momentum currently behind AD biomethane in Ireland, the European Biogas Association (EBA) for the first time decided to hold a Board meeting here. EBA represents European farmers, academics, and AD operators across Europe. While in Ireland, the EBA Board members met with members of the dairy industry collaboration, Project Clover, as well as Teagasc. Europe now has 1,023 biomethane production plants, a figure described by the EBA as a stepping-stone for the decarbonisation of the whole EU economy. 2021 has seen an exponential development of biomethane plants in Europe. It is the only renewable fuel available and scalable today in Europe, which can enable the cost-competitive use of already existing gas infrastructure. France, Italy, and Denmark saw the largest increase in biomethane plants. Ninety-one new units started operation in France in 2020 and 123 plants started up between January and October 2021. Ireland currently does not have an indigenous biomethane industry – which RGFI (Renewable Gas Forum Ireland) and Project Clover say is a threat to the international competitiveness of the Irish food industry, will impact FDI, and limit Ireland's decarbonisation ambitions under the national Climate Action Plan. Central to the vision of Project Clover is the use of indigenous AD biomethane to decarbonise thermal heat processes, commercialisation of its by-product digestate to produce organic fertiliser and monetisation of the currently unquantified soil carbon sequestration on Irish farms.





ONE DAIRY VOICE

In 2022 Irish dairy needs a central, consolidated voice, one that champions the industry amongst the people on the street – the consumers of dairy products – those who, ultimately, grant us our social licence to produce.

The NDC will be that voice.

CONNECTING THE FARMER AND THE CONSUMER

The NDC re-connects the dairy farmer with the dairy consumer, building greater understanding of what farming is and what the farmer does, building trust in the production system and restoring pride in Irish dairy.

DAIRY SUSTAINABILITY

The NDC raises awareness of Irish dairy's impact against the pillars of sustainability – economy, society, community and environment – developing understanding of what sustainability means for Irish dairy and showcasing the initiatives that are improving the industry's performance.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The NDC promotes the nutritional benefits of dairy products and their place in a healthy, balanced and sustainable diet. It counteracts misinformation and is a source of trusted nutritional information, as well as recipes which celebrate Irish dairy.

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING

The NDC uses qualitative and quantitative research to measure sentiment, behaviours and attitudes, gauging the impact of its activities and adjusting them as necessary.

MADE IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The NDC provides the opportunity to show support for the Irish economy and for Irish jobs – on dairy farms and in the wider dairy sector – and the reassurance of knowing that dairy products carrying the NDC Guarantee are both farmed and processed locally.

CHAMPIONS OF THE FUTURE

The NDC champions the Irish dairy industry's social licence to produce – the public's tacit agreement that dairy produce and dairy farming are central to Irish society and to the health of the nation and that dairy farming and dairy farmers should be assured of their long-term futures.

The NDC is creating a position – for itself and for the industry – from which our voice cannot be ignored, promoting real debate on the issues and the development of an informed dairy narrative.

View the NDC Manifesto 2022 here: www.ndc.ie/manifesto2022

FTMTA Show date is announced

Confirmation of the FTMTA's Farm Machinery Show date has been announced. The event, which is due to take place on July 13th and 14th 2022 will be held in Punchestown Racecourse, Co Kildare.

Speaking at the announcement of the dates, Michael Farrelly, Executive Director of the FTMTA said "We are delighted to announce the dates for the FTMTA Farm Machinery Show. The FTMTA has been organising world class Farm Machinery Shows for over 30 years. This year's show will continue that tradition of a professional show that showcases the latest agricultural machinery, equipment, technology and associated services and brings together the farm machinery trade and their customer base". The FTMTA Farm Machinery Show has now grown to become the flagship event of the Irish farm machinery show calendar. The most recent show in 2019 was the largest ever such event with an attendance of over 20,000, some 170 individual exhibitors across over 200 distinct exhibits, including indoor stands and outdoor display areas. The FTMTA views the provision of a dedicated, professional, machinery exhibition to showcase the products and services of the farm machinery industry as a very valuable service to the members of the Association.



Countrywide reaching more ears

The latest JNLR Listenership figures show that **Countrywide**, presented by Damian O'Reilly, has increased listenership by a staggering thirty-five per cent since 2018. It is now the tenth most listened to radio programme on RTE and the surge in audience over the past three years puts it at No.1 in terms of increased listenership. RTÉ attracts 1.4 million listeners regularly, with 49 per cent of the Irish adult population tuning in every week. RTÉ Radio 1 remains the only station in Ireland with a weekly reach of over one million. **Countrywide**, with its broadly rural agenda, contributes handsomely to those listenership figures. Despite the fact that fewer urbanites than ever can claim country cousins or connections, there is still a refreshing and uniquely Irish interest and curiosity in all things rural.



Alltech ONE is back

The Alltech One Conference will be held in Lexington Kentucky in May. Back in physical form after a two-year virtual existence because of the Covid pandemic, the event is the brainchild of the late Pearse Lyons. It will bring over 1,500 delegates from all over the World together in the Kentucky venue to discuss and inform attendees of the latest research developments in global agriculture and food production, as well as facilitating virtual attendance for those who cannot be there in person. Among the speakers are Mick Ebeling Founder and CEO, Not Impossible Labs and Dr Mark Lyons President of Alltech.



Pig producers on the rack

It is seldom that pig producers ask for a dig-out but the current pig price trough is the deepest in living memory. Despite being at the cutting edge of production performance and productivity, Irish pig producers, alongside their counterparts in Europe, find themselves battling for their very existence. It was somewhat of a relief for pig producers to hear that the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Charlie McConalogue introduced a financial rescue package last month for the beleaguered pig sector. The fund of €7 million will be distributed through a flat rate payment of a maximum of €20,000 per individual commercial pig farmer sending more than 200 pigs per year to slaughter. Needless to say, and though one shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth, the €7 million may not be anywhere near enough to prevent many of our 350 commercial pig producers facing an existential crisis. Unless global pig prices improve quickly in the coming months there will need to be further injections of financial aid. Teagasc figures indicate that a pig producer with 600 sows will have lost €450,000 in the twelve months up to next September unless prices improve dramatically and/or feed prices reduce substantially in the interim. Neither possibility is even on the horizon with the ongoing political instability in Eastern Europe adding further woe from the threat of disruption to the flow of grain from the vast Ukrainian tillage farms in the months ahead. When a business is haemorrhaging upwards of €35,000 per month, a dig-out of €20,000 doesn't look quite so generous.



A few vital weeks for freshly calved cows

Maeve Regan,
 Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

A typical spring calving cow on a grass-based diet will produce approximately 35% of her annual milk solids between the 1st of February and the 1st of May. Taking a cow with a target to produce 500 kg of milk solids within the next lactation, she will produce approximately 175 kg milk solids between the 1st of February and the 1st of May (the onset of the breeding season).

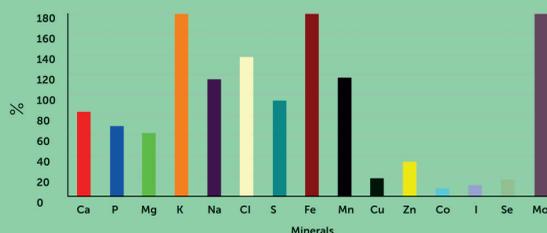
Alongside this level of production, we are also expecting the cow to adapt to changes in the diet (e.g., going to grass, increasing dry matter intake, fluctuating dry matter % in grazed grass), prepare for going back in calf, and hold body condition levels to increase the likelihood of conception to first service. Excellence in breeding management underpins profitability on all Irish dairy farms, with multiple nutritional factors prior to the commencement of the breeding season dictating its success.

For a 100-cow herd, Teagasc equates that moving from a six-week calving rate of 60% to 90% is worth over €24,000 per year.

Post-calving mineral requirements

In general, we are quite good at focusing on mineral provision for the dry cow. However, thereafter we often discount the mineral requirement of the lactating cow, taking for granted that her mineral requirements are being met by grass/grass silage plus concentrates. Irish grass and grass silage is an insufficient source of minerals for a lactating cow. A 2013 study on Irish grazing farms, highlighted in the graph below, indicated that average grasses only supply a fraction of key macro and trace element requirements. With these elements being strongly linked to fertility performance, the correct provision of major minerals and trace elements in early lactation is vital.

Grass/grass silage as a mineral source for dairy cows (100% = daily requirement)



For more information on managing the freshly calved cow, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit www.agritech.ie.



www.agritech.ie

InTouch

Early Lactation

Cathal Bohane, InTouch Nutrition

The last few weeks have been a blur for all, as the calving season got into full swing on many farms throughout the country. Long days of milking, feeding and calving have been tempered somewhat with the presence of good weather allowing early grazing, where land allowed it, and the ability to empty tanks of slurry. The later stages of February, unfortunately, brought a dramatic end to the good spell of weather.

While there are many fresh cows on farms now, we must not forget about the later-calving cows. This can usually be a time where their space, diet and body condition go out the window, leading to a perfect metabolic storm. Maintain the same diet at the same intake if it has worked so far, making sure that cows are not gaining body weight, as fat dry cows are up to nine times more likely to have metabolic issues. If they are gaining bodyweight, you might need to reduce the energy levels in the diet. Make sure to feed good minerals at the required rate and, as the milkers take centre stage, continue to provide adequate space for this group of cows. If we want these cows to be part of a future six-week compact calving system, we need to give them the best possible start.

Fresh cows are also under immense pressure now. Regardless of performance and appearance, these cows are in negative energy balance (NEB) and how we manage this will determine success and failure. We have the perfect ingredients now to create a recipe for disaster:

- Great milk yield and very high solids
- High feed prices
- Weather that allows long days at grass

While you might think this is an ideal scenario, we need to first look after the cow and her dry matter intake (DMI). While the focus of many is paddock clean-out and the percentage of the farm grazed, we cannot forget about the cow in all of this. Cows are hitting six weeks calved soon, and we need to target 18–20 kg DMI by maximising the amount of grazing and knowing the figure that is available, making up the shortfall with concentrate. If this goes beyond a certain level (0.22 kg concentrate per litre of milk out by day), then we will require silage as well.

Around mid-March, milk solid percentages will drop and return to more realistic levels once cows are calved for four to six weeks.

While some of this is normal as the cow begins to rely on her diet as opposed to her own body reserves, the amount of the drop can tell a lot about her diet in the previous six weeks. We need to feed for our general peak milk yield now and keep the diet protein low. Good weather allows us to graze a lot, but we also must ration this as we can also run out before the 'magic day' in early April. We can run into a major feed deficit in late March/April, resulting in large inputs of supplementary feed when we could have prevented this with more reasonable levels of supplementation earlier in March. Having the cow at the centre of your production system is very important for the month ahead if we want her to continue to milk well and go back in calf. If we are not prepared to do this and your cows are struggling to stay in the system, then maybe you have the wrong cow or the wrong system for that cow.



Resumption of Farm Safety Training as part of TAMS

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon T.D. has confirmed the resumption of in-person farm safety training for successful applicants under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II). The completion of this training is part of the requirements to draw down payments for approved works that have been completed under the scheme. To facilitate the submission of Farm Safety Code of Practice (COP) training certificates and in line with the removal of Covid Restrictions, this training will resume in-person from 1 March next.

Minister Heydon commented: "TAMS is an important mechanism to support farmers investing in newer and safer equipment and facilities for their farms. It is also an opportunity to get the message of safety-first onto these farms. We have seen significant uptake under TAMS with over 47,000 approvals issued to date and over 25,000 payment claims processed for payment. Farm safety training has been completed and certificates submitted in respect of over 27,000 payment claims, that's 27,000 farms where safety has been put in sharper focus."

As an interim measure, the facility to carry out the course on an online basis will also remain in place until 1 July 2022 on an exceptional basis for participants who cannot attend for covid reasons. All courses will be carried out in line with the Health and Safety Authority public health guidance available at the time. These arrangements will be reviewed at the end of June.

Minister Heydon added: "The farm safety module of the recently launched Agri-Environment Training Scheme (AETS) is also very important in making farm safety information accessible to farmers. Along with assisting farmers to undertake environmental action, we must ensure their health and well-being are protected also. The AETS scheme is now open for applicants and I would encourage any interested farmer to talk to their advisor about participating."

Progress on Saudi beef market access

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Charlie McConalogue T.D. has announced progress in expanding market access in Saudi Arabia for Irish beef. Minister McConalogue met with the leadership of the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) in Riyadh recently, where agreement in principle was reached to lift the current restriction whereby Irish beef exports to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia must come from cattle slaughtered under 30 months of age. Further technical engagement will now take place to complete the necessary formalities to confirm the expanded access. Minister McConalogue also secured SFDA commitment to further technical engagement on sheepmeat access and raised the possibility of poultry meat access in the future. Speaking following the meeting with the SFDA CEO, Dr Hisham bin Saad Aljadhey, Minister McConalogue welcomed the development. "Following a constructive meeting with the SFDA, I'm pleased to report that the requirement for all beef exported to Saudi Arabia to be from animals under 30 months has now been lifted. While the necessary formal exchanges remain to be completed, it is welcome news and comes following detailed engagement with

the Saudi competent authorities by my Department, with support from the Embassy of Ireland in Riyadh and the agricultural attaché for the Gulf region." "Ireland's food exports to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia amounted to almost €100 million last year, dominated by dairy products. However, I see the market as one with growth potential, especially for Irish beef. I met with retail and food service customers this week in Riyadh and each expressed a strong desire to purchase more Irish products in the time ahead. Some 70 per cent of the Saudi population is under the age of 30 with a demand for quality, and a growing interest in the link between health and good nutritious food.

"Irish beef is synonymous with quality, sustainability and safety in the Gulf Region, and I am confident that the door will soon be open for a wider range of Irish beef access to the Saudi market. Our Food Vision 2030 strategy, and its integrated, food systems approach, was of considerable interest in both Government and business engagements this week; as was the role of Sustainable Food Systems Ireland (SFSI) in sharing Irish agri-food expertise with international partners."



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Glanbia Ireland launches €18m Sustainability Action Payment

Glanbia Ireland has launched an €18 million annual Sustainability Action Payment as part of a three-year programme to assist its 5,000 milk suppliers as they continue to enhance the environmental and economic sustainability of their family farms. The programme is designed to assist dairy suppliers in reducing their carbon footprint, enhancing water quality and biodiversity and improving air quality and soil health in line with Glanbia Ireland's sustainability strategy, Living Proof.

As part of this initiative, dairy suppliers will receive 0.5 cent per litre (cpl) (including VAT) through delivering specific sustainability actions. This will equate to almost €3,000 in 2022 for the average supplier. Across the lifetime of this three-year programme, over €54 million in total will be made available to family farms as they continue to adopt a range of actions. The measures are closely aligned with the climate action measures identified in Teagasc's emissions reduction Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) climate plan.

Glanbia Co-op Chairman John Murphy said: "Irish farmers are renowned for producing high quality dairy products with world leading natural credentials. Our farmers are proud of their family farms and want to protect them for the next generation. We all have a role to play in climate action, water and biodiversity protection and air quality enhancement. It is important that our family farms are assisted as they continue to enhance the environmental and economic sustainability of their farms. This initiative is designed to reward suppliers for adopting a series of measures identified as key to delivering on our comprehensive sustainability strategy, Living Proof. As part of this initiative, there is a strong framework of measures for farmers to implement with verifiable proof-points." As part of Living Proof, Glanbia Ireland, along with our family farms, has pledged to deliver a 30 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with each litre of milk produced by 2030 and has signed up to the internationally-recognised Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi). All of Glanbia Ireland's dairy



Pictured (l to r) were Glanbia Ireland/Teagasc Signpost Living Proof Future Farmer Steven Fitzgerald on his family farm at Aglish, Cappoquin, Waterford; Glanbia Co-op Chairman John Murphy; with Steven's children Donagh (4), Ólan (2) and Aodhán (5). Photo: Patrick Browne

suppliers are accredited to the Bord Bia Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS).

Glanbia Ireland Chief Executive Jim Bergin said: "We believe that by working together, through support and education, we can continue to adopt changes in practices that deliver real environmental impact. As an organisation, we are firmly committed to working with our farmers to implement proven technologies and practices that will benefit the environmental performance of our suppliers' family farms, as set out in our Living Proof strategy. We will continue to actively seek out leading edge technologies to further support our family farms in their endeavours."

Diageo Regenerative Agriculture pilot welcomed

IFA Grain Committee Chair Kieran McEvoy said the launch of the Diageo Regenerative Agriculture Pilot is a positive development.

"The Irish tillage sector has one of the lowest carbon footprints in the Irish agricultural and this programme will assess and examine regenerative agriculture techniques which will further improve the tillage sectors environmental and sustainability credentials," Kieran McEvoy said. "Farm based programmes such as this pilot by Diageo will play an important role in improving knowledge of soil health, biodiversity and the potential for carbon sequestration on the selected tillage farms and IFA look forward to discussing the measures and results with Diageo in due course," he added.

"Cooperation between tillage farmers, grain merchants such as Cooney Furlong, Boortmalt and key end users like Diageo is vital in addressing the sustainability challenges ahead and pilots such as this one further enhances the Irish malting, milling and roasting barley supply chain," the IFA Grain Committee Chair concluded.

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UCD's new Dean of Agriculture and Head of the School of Agriculture and Food Science, Professor Frank Monahan, is dedicated to equipping the next generation of leaders in the Irish agri-food sector with the right skills, while also recognising the school's role in supporting the farming community.

Professor Frank Monahan recently took up the role of Dean of Agriculture at UCD. After 25 years based at the university, Frank has witnessed much change over this period both on campus and within the wider agri-food sector. With Brexit, CAP and a real drive for all practices across the food chain to deliver on climate action, he predicts further evolution over the coming decade. So where do his priorities lie? "The first thing is: we are about education and research. We have over 2,000 students associated with the School and we want to make sure they graduate with the best possible skillset to meet the challenges they face ahead and to have successful careers. This will be key to ensure we can offer solutions to some of the challenges that are very immediate for the agri-food sector. Another area I would like to address is flexibility in our programmes. People want to be able to study at their own pace and to have lots of options; not just our alumni, but also people already out in industry who may want opportunities to upskill and take some modules. We call them micro-credentials, small packets that could build up to a qualification or degree ultimately. We are always evaluating our curricula and seeing how best we can deliver our programmes."

Remaining on the topic of education, Prof Monahan also stresses that he would like to build on the international experience for UCD students: "At the moment, about 30-40 per cent of

Shaping the future

our students have the opportunity to study abroad for a semester, while this is quite high I'd like to grow that to over 50 per cent over the course of the next few years."

Moving on to research, Frank highlights the development of the Lyons farm; building of the AgTech Hub is about to start, which he notes will contribute to the efforts towards innovating and problem-solving to meet the needs of the industry. Colleagues in the School of Veterinary Medicine will also benefit from the Herd Health Hub, which is being constructed soon as well. "In addition, we are just about to go to planning for a new calf facility on the farm and that will complement the most recent development – the dairy facility."

Climate action and mitigating carbon emissions

The future for all of those involved in agriculture – be they farmers, industry players or researchers – will be shaped around Ireland's response to mitigating carbon emissions and addressing climate concerns. Frank believes that the School's role here in supporting the industry, and indeed farmers, is crucial. "Many of our researchers are working at farm production level so that means that the climate action mitigation measures are very important for them. One example would be the long-term grazing platform that we have, looking at multi-species swards and how they can impact on the productivity of animals, how efficiently they can be produced, their emissions etc. It's connected to fertiliser usage as well because clover is part of the multi-species swards so that helps to reduce the requirement for artificial fertiliser, which is a big area of concern around climate action and costs. Our colleagues are also involved in animal breeding, so breeding animals that can produce milk more efficiently and be lower emitters of methane. And there is a lot of work on alternate forages as a means of being able to become more sustainable in our supply of feed stuffs."

With many Irish farmers feeling that the finger is being firmly pointed in their direction regarding environmental concerns compared to others along the food chain or, indeed, other industries, does Frank believe that the School has a responsibility to advocate on behalf of Irish farmers and the efforts being made on-farm towards carbon efficient food production? "I think we must be up front with what the science is telling us. And much of that science supports agriculture and will support its future in Ireland. So, we have to get our science out there and communicate it very well. It's understandable that farmers feel the way they do about being 'scapegoats' if you like, because as we all know agriculture is a massive part of our economy and, therefore, it is going to be a greater contributor to GHG emissions. Our science has to be targeted at solving these problems and making sure that knowledge gets to farmers. In that sense, we are advocates; with our science we are giving the farmer the tools to be able to solve these problems."

A reduction in the national herd

Regarding any proposed reduction or capping of livestock numbers, Frank notes: "All of this is being driven by the

environment, and I think everybody is on the same page here. We need to protect it, we need to maintain biodiversity, we need to reverse soil compaction, we need to clean up our water. Everyone agrees on this: farmers, the public, academics, scientists. Trying to achieve this is the challenge. That does lead to us questioning the driving on of agriculture, having the foot to the floor to keep producing food more intensively. If we are going to do that, then we have to do it in a way that is sustainable. I think the question of the national herd will be very much dictated by the extent to which we can meet these environmental challenges.

"Ultimately, the hope is that we can maintain our level of production as it is. If we can increase productivity and do that in a way that doesn't damage the environment, we should do that. We need to come up with ways of producing more milk, meat, crops and vegetables efficiently and sustainably. Our default position shouldn't be that we reduce our production. There are lots of challenges, but the effort that is going into this now from scientists on all fronts offers real positivity. And there is a huge amount of collaboration."

Farm to Fork

Commenting on the Farm to Fork Strategy and Green Deal, Frank notes: "Europe has to be a leader when it comes to sustainable food production, even though it places a lot of challenges on us. The future of the planet depends on it. It is difficult but it has to be done." One area of real interest for Frank is the marketing of Ireland's grass-fed properties for beef: "I've always been interested in the link between farm production and food quality. We are what we eat, so what the animals eat impacts the quality of our food. The highly grass-fed production system that we have influences the composition of it, so we know it's higher in certain components, like omega 3 fatty acids and unsaturated fats. That makes it different to milk and beef produced in more intensive cereal-based production systems and that does give us an advantage. You would hope that, with education, consumers will see that this grass-fed beef is of high value, and we can get a premium for it. So maybe we will be producing less of it, but we are producing a very high-quality product".

Supporting today's farmer

With the rapid pace of research developments and innovation evident in the sector, and with UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science at the heart of this, does Frank believe today's farmer is adequately supported regarding disseminating this information and putting it into action? "There is a lot expected of farmers today and there's a lot of information being pushed towards them. However, I think it is a lot more accessible now than it was. The use of technology with the likes of podcasts and being able to attend events virtually helps. There is a great weight of responsibility on us as a School to make sure our graduates are at the forefront of agriculture and that our research supports the wider sector."

The business of burgers

Erin McCafferty talks to Ireland's Fast-Food King about farming, climate action and business

He's known as the Fast-Food King of Ireland. But the founder of Supermac's, Pat McDonagh, a teacher-turned-entrepreneur from Galway, has his finger in a number of other pies too. These days, his burgeoning portfolio consists of 116 Supermac's restaurants, The Plaza Group of motorway service stations, of which there are eight, and the Só Hotels Group, which includes six hotels in different parts of the country, as well as four pubs in America.

His multi-million-euro business empire is however closely tied to the Irish agricultural industry, and after 44 years in business it's a relationship he aims to nurture. "We've been with the same meat producers and factories for 30 or 40 years and we've built up strong relationships with them," says Pat. "There's a trust factor there, so we trust them, and they trust us. That's a great position to be in."

Fresh approach

It's not just trust however that's the basis of the relationship. Supermac's prides itself on using fresh, as opposed to frozen, meat products which means the quality is better and these are sourced from Irish producers. "There's an increase in demand for fresh products and the difference in the taste is noticeable," says Pat. "I think that demand will continue to grow."

Fresh products are more expensive than frozen, but this, says Pat, is because of the way they're produced and the fact that in



Ireland, we have controlled traceability. “That’s what makes us unique and that’s why Irish beef is sought after by companies around the world,” he says. He points to his experience of farms the US and South America where cattle are typically grown in-doors and many of them have never seen the light of day. “What’s more, they’re dosed with anti-biotics to keep them disease-free,” he says. “That can’t be good for them, or for the quality of the beef.”

The ‘Irish’ factor

In comparison, Irish farmers, he believes, have a massive advantage over other countries. “The Irishness of a product is a big factor,” he says. “Family farms in Ireland are very quality-conscious in relation to the upkeep and health of the animals. They’re grass-fed which is massively important as far as I can see.” He emphasises that Ireland has a natural ability to produce good meat and believes this should be valued more. “This is down to the quality of the soil, our ability to grow grass and our natural production methods, which mean we far out-weigh probably any other country in producing food products.”

In defence of farmers

He’s sceptical, however, of the fact that dairy farming in Ireland is causing a rise in the level of methane gas. “The same methods have been used for hundreds of years in Ireland and it hasn’t really created a problem until now,” says Pat. “I think Irish farmers are getting the rough end of the stick as they’re being demonised with suggestions that [beef production] is one of the biggest carbon-producing problems. Already, the national herd has dropped by 2 per cent,” he says. “That’s a lot of animals. Irish farmers need to stand up for themselves he believes. “They’ve done a fair bit, but the first objective of a farmer is to produce food products to feed the population,” he says. “They need to be more self-defending.”

Veggie alternatives

Climate change is also one of the reasons behind the rise of vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian (casual vegetarian) diets, a trend that’s affecting all restaurants and food outlets. These days, many of Pat’s customers want plant-based products. “This a trend we certainly need to accommodate because 10 per cent of the population wants a vegetable burger or the equivalent, and it’s important to be cognisant of that,” he says. But he thinks the demand for plant-based food products, as meat substitutes, may change in the future. “If you’re trying to get the taste of meat, say that of a burger, out of plant-based vegetables, then there has to be a lot of additives added to the product,” says Pat. “I think after a while, when more research has been done and it’s investigated fully, we’ll become aware of the additives that may, or may not, be good for us. I would be cautious of going that road until it has been fully analysed,” he adds. “It doesn’t seem natural to me.”

Forecast

Well used to forecasting business outcomes, Pat predicts that the Irish agri industry will change drastically in the next decade. “I believe a lot of people in Ireland are going to try and get out of farming over the next 10 years,” he says. “First of all, the next generation don’t want to work a seven-day week and, as a result, are not interested in inheriting the farms”.

He points to the lack of available labour to work on dairy farms, and the fact that the cost of farming is increasingly economically unviable due to the rising cost of living. “I see it in the hotels,” he says. “The cost of a fillet steak has almost doubled and that’s not all going back to the farmer. In fact, they’re only getting about 15 to 20 per cent of it.” A drop in farming numbers, combined with the fact that a lot of Irish beef is being exported to the UK, could have a negative impact on the availability of food in the future, he believes. “If we’re not careful, not only will food be priced out of the customers’ ability to buy it, but we will have a scarcity of food in Ireland in the next 10 years, which would be a major problem,” he says.

This year alone is likely to see a substantial rise in the cost of eating out. “On the restaurant side of the business, the price of staff is increasing, food costs are going up and insurance and energy costs are going through the roof,” explains Pat.

Despite these issues, and having successfully navigated the Covid lockdowns of the last two years, his business continues to grow. The Plaza Group opened a new plaza in Portlaoise in July 2021. The company also launched a franchise with the McKeown family in Kells in October as part of the Park Rí complex and a new N17 Plaza in Tuam is set to be launched in March. All in all, the group has invested over €30 million in the last two years, with the creation of over 300 jobs throughout the country.

CSR initiatives

The group has a policy of giving back both to both charities and the community. Trocaire, St Vincent de Paul and The Peter Mc Verry Trust are amongst the many charitable organisations that are beneficiaries. With regard to the community, the group is heavily involved in sponsorship of over 100 sports clubs around the country.

“In these times, there’s been a lot of cut-backs in sponsorship deals and not everyone is in a position to contribute,” says Pat. “We will continue to sponsor a wide range of sports clubs, especially where kids are involved,” he adds. “It’s a win-win situation. We support local communities and they support us.”

Despite his admirable contributions to the community and his highly impressive business achievements, Pat remains grounded and refuses to be complacent. “I don’t particularly look at [the business] as a success,” he says matter-of-factly. “There’s always challenges ahead.” He’s in no doubt however of the reasons behind it. “A lot of it is down to hard work, perseverance and having the right people with you along the way,” he says. “I would say 90 per cent is down to the team and the staff. A lot of the gratitude and the credit should be going to them.”

It all starts with the right calf

Farming a stone's throw from the gates of Navan racecourse, Aidan Maguire runs a dairy calf-to-beef enterprise on a total of 62ha, with 48ha devoted to grassland for the cattle and a further 14ha in forestry. Here, he talks to Niall Claffey about his system and recent adjustments to efficiency on the farm.

Working the land - and operating a contracting business - Aidan's system has undergone a revamp in recent years, as he moved from a dairy calf-to-store approach to finishing all stock on the holding. Having been on Aidan's farm numerous times in recent years, it is clear to see that he has taken on board and implemented the advice he has received through being a participant in the Teagasc Green Acres Programme and his local Teagasc Grass10 discussion group.

"I've concentrated on grass and got great help from my discussion group and local Teagasc advisor David Argue; it has turned the place inside out," Aidan says. "The rewards are fantastic. When you have lush green grass for your cattle and they are content tipping away at 0.9-1kg/day, you know you're doing it right."

However, for Aidan, before getting animals thriving at grass, it starts with purchasing the right calf that suits his farming system. Some 120 calves will be purchased directly from local dairy farmers this season; 30 autumn-born calves have already been procured, while a further 90 will arrive this spring.

Not one breed typically dominates in the calf shed, with Friesian bulls and Angus and Hereford bulls and heifers normally featuring prominently. Saying that, a number of Belgian Blue-cross calves became available in autumn '21 and Aidan decided to purchase these and they have "hit the ground running" since arriving onto the farm. "Last autumn, it turns out that there were more beef-bred calves available from the dairy herd. And, when I get the opportunity to buy them, I'll buy them," he

added. “This makes a change from last year when the majority of calves brought in were Holstein Friesian.”

Relationship is the key to success

Purchasing calves direct from dairy farmers can have many benefits for calf-to-beef finishers. Firstly, beef farmers know the health status and cow-type of the dairy herd, and they can be confident that the calf has received an adequate amount of colostrum. They can also be assured that the calf has been managed correctly in terms of milk, nutrition and water in the early days of life, which allow the animal to reach its weight targets in the future months.

One of the major problems on dairy calf-to-beef farms is the purchase of calves that do not reach their growth potential due to disease in the young calf’s life, which results in poor performance in the future. Aidan switched from using an agent a number of years ago and has forged working relationships with his dairy farming neighbours. “I buy off three very local dairy farmers and have built up good relationships which I think are key to the success of the arrangement. We agree a price and that’s maintained over the course of the season. I have limited my sources in the last couple of years. By doing so, I have complete control on the quality of the calves that are bought in at 21 days plus.”

Lowering the number of sources from which calves are bought from, where possible, is one of several practices that Teagasc Green Acres advisor Sean Cummins and the team recommend. In the first year of the second phase of the programme, the total number of herds from which calves were sourced from fell by 44 (125 versus 81) across the participating farms.

Autumn V spring calves

However, farmers operating predominantly autumn calf-to-beef systems tend to buy from more sources due to the lower availability of dairy calves towards the latter half of the year. For Aidan, there are several pros and cons to a full ‘autumn calf’ system.

“In one way, I would prefer the autumn calf for utilisation of grass and because I have more time on my hands during the winter; the contracting is quiet and there’s no field work to be done. So, it would suit me that way.

“In an ideal world, I’d like to switch to 90 autumn and 30 spring-born calves - except for the availability and price of the calf. They’d be there at a price, but the price is too high for my system,” he explained.

Calves arrive on the farm are introduced to their new accommodation which consists of well-ventilated, draft-free pens with plenty of straw for calves to lie in. Electrolytes are not needed due to the short distance the calves travel from the dairy farms, but they are given a preventative medicine to protect against coccidiosis. Vaccination is now also a key pillar of Aidan’s plan, with pneumonia and IBR vaccine administered after a period. “I’m getting slightly better at what I do; the vaccine

protocol is working 100% and my antibiotic usage is practically zero and no vet call outs.”

“The biggest progress is the lack of deaths on the farm. My animals are healthier, staying healthy and are far more consistent,” the Meath man said.



“The biggest progress is the lack of deaths on the farm. My animals are healthier, staying healthy and are far more consistent.”

The calves are built up to 700g of milk replacer/day and to ad-lib calf crunch. Aidan says weaning date is calculated by the age, weight and the condition of the calf – which normally happens around day 70. Milk feeding rates will be dropped 100g/day over a seven-day period followed by the calves turned out to grass, once Aidan is satisfied they are able to make the transition from indoor to outdoor life.

Grass, grass and more grass

There’s no doubt that Aidan is an excellent grassland manager, and this hasn’t gone unnoticed as he is listed as a contender for the Drystock Grassland Farmer of the Year Competition. Both bullocks and heifers are aimed to be slaughtered under 24 months, with heifers off grass at 18-19 months-of-age and as much of this liveweight as possible is gained through grass or top-quality silage. Animal performance at slaughter is very good with the average carcass weight, grade and fat score hitting 300kg plus, O- and 3 respectively.

While Aidan installed a paddock system four years ago, he is currently adjusting it to help carry larger numbers, but also to make them more manageable and manoeuvrable when it comes to spreading slurry with a new dribble-bar applicator and when spreading chemical fertiliser.

“By moving to 1ha paddocks, I can be more accurate with my nutrients and avoid waste and therefore making my farm more efficient. But I will split these with temporary wires during the season,” he added.

Finally, silage quality for this year was excellent; his grass silage came back at 74% DMD, while a red clover mix tested 71 per cent DMD and 17.5 per cent protein. “Having my own baler is an advantage when it comes to grass management. I can take out strong paddocks anytime. And while I could be mowing paddocks at 1,500-1,600kg DM/ha, this makes for top-quality feeding,” he concluded.

Family first

Alice Doyle is the recently elected chairperson of the IFA's Farm Family committee, taking over from Caroline Farrell who completed her term. A Wexford woman, Alice has a deep involvement in farming and agricultural organisations, dating back to her membership of Macra na Feirme both at local and national level where she served as National Secretary of the rural youth group. Here, she talks to **Matt O'Keeffe** about her priorities in the role.

At an historic AGM of IFA held in the Mansion House in Dublin last January, Alice took on the mantle of representative for IFA farming families. Her agenda for her period in office is both extensive and targeted, as she told Matt O'Keeffe: "We have a lot to do. Covid interrupted our efforts for the past two years and there is some catching up to be done on priority issues. Health and wellbeing are very important for us and it is clear that farm families have been under significant pressure due to income problems, Covid and the lack of social interaction as a result. That has put a lot of stress on our members and their families. Our intention is to put various programmes in place and run them out through our organisational network. There are general principles in place already, for example, in the Teagasc On Feirm Ground programme and we will use that template for our members. Succession and inheritance remain key issues for farm families and we will be renewing our efforts to develop policy in that regard. That whole area must be prioritised as a vital discussion topic within farm families because the handover of farms to a new generation can be difficult. There are many different ways in which succession can be managed over a period, either by direct transfer, farm partnerships, leasing, share farming and even partial or complete sale in some instances. Our committee will be examining the options and practicalities in individual farm family situations."

Women in farming

Women in farming is another topic that Alice Doyle intends prioritising: "There must be an effort to increase the numbers of women farming in their own right and we will be highlighting the contribution that women make on so many farms across the country even if and when they are also working off-farm. There are many instances where that off-farm income is so important to the overall family farm income. It is often the main reason that the farm can continue to operate. It is important that due recognition is given to those women. Some of the lack of recognition of the importance of women in farming is historical. In terms of farm women themselves, they are often juggling so many tasks that they are time poor for becoming involved in organisations or actively pursuing better conditions and recognition for their roles on farms. There is a clear need to examine a model that can allow women to become involved in farm organisations and have their voices heard and their

needs addressed. It is not that women want to or have no interest; it is more a case that they feel, legitimately, that they are short of the time to become actively engaged in farm organisations. The time constraints really are huge.”

Fair change to Fair deal

Alice Doyle reflected on the reform of the Fair Deal Scheme and its implications for farms and farm families: “The changes to the Scheme have helped and while it is not a panacea for everyone and it won’t solve all problems, it has eased the financial burden on farms. A three-year cap on payments is huge in situations where the farm was not passed on in the relevant five-year period. Now, the most that will have to be paid will be a three-year cost. I know that can still be a huge amount of money to find from a farm income depending on farm size, enterprises, the number of dependents, other assets and so on. But there is a big difference between having to plan for a three-year capped payment and an open-ended drain on resources that can and has in some instances, resulted in the sale of land or entire farms or the imposition of a life-long debt overhanging the viability of a farm. The reality is that there many more people going into nursing homes earlier than previously

because of early dementia or other health reasons. That can mean that stays in nursing homes are getting longer and we need to be planning for that. I do think that many people will see the changes in the Fair Deal Scheme as positive. They will not solve all difficulties and there are various terms and conditions attached to the changes. My advice to anyone thinking of entering into the Fair Deal Scheme is to get very good advice before signing anything. It is a legal document that puts a lean on your farm or house or business assets. You need to be very aware of those facts and have all the necessary financial and legal advice secured before decisions are made and documents signed.”

IFA AGM issues

Environment, climate change, CAP reform, and income difficulties were all on the IFA AGM agenda and Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Minister McConalogue, as well as Junior

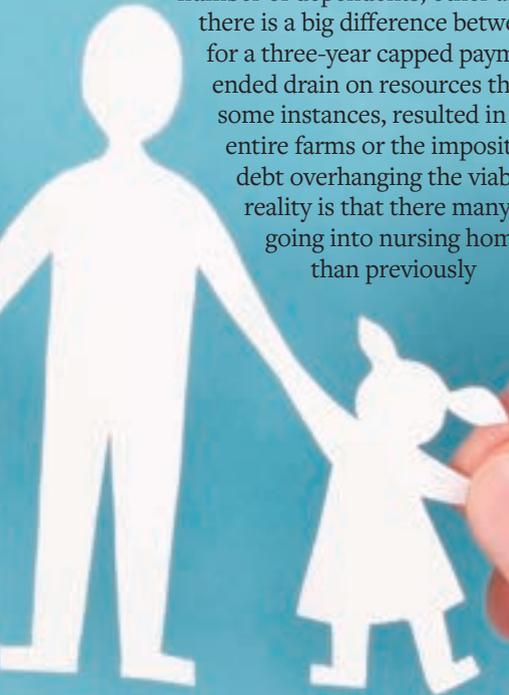
Ministers Hackett and Heydon were all on hand to hear what the farmer representatives had to say, as the IFA Farm family Committee Chairwoman explained: “All the restrictions and regulations around climate change obligations were highlighted by the members. In particular, rising costs of fuel, fertiliser, feed and electricity, as well as the ongoing debate over reductions in cattle numbers were



“In relation to climate change, it was made very clear to the Taoiseach that farmers will act positively in relation to the environment, provided the economic and social impacts of the regulations and expectations are fully recognised and alleviated.”

all brought forward as significant challenges facing Irish farming. In relation to climate change, it was made very clear to the Taoiseach that farmers will act positively in relation to the environment, provided the economic and social impacts of the regulations and expectations are fully recognised and alleviated. There must also be recognition that time is needed to make changes, finance is required to implement many of the necessary changes and that

science and technology are being developed to assist in our common quest. It is unrealistic to move at too fast a pace and there is a significant likelihood that food shortages will appear if regulatory policy undermines the capacity of farmers to produce food.”



A well-run suckler farm

James Skehan farms part-time in Ballynevin, O'Briensbridge, Co. Clare, with his wife Joanne and his father Batt who lends a hand when required. James works full-time off farm. Matt O'Keeffe visited the Skehan family last month to get a first-hand view of a well-run suckler farm.



James Skehan with his wife Joanne, daughter Nellie and son Macartan.

In so many ways the Skehan farm is typical of suckler farms across the country. The herd size is above the national average, though modestly so with twenty-five breeding suckler cows. The farm, based in East Clare, is fragmented, made up of three separate land holdings with some heavy soils included. James manages the farm on a part-time basis, like so many other suckler farmers up and down the country. Where James's suckler enterprise differs considerably is in his management and the adoption of best practices in relation to grass and livestock productivity, in addition to the high level of sustainability of his suckler enterprise. That clearly encompasses economic, social and environmental sustainability practices, which make the farm a perfect candidate for the Future Beef Programme that comes under the umbrella of the Teagasc Signpost Programme.

Farm vital statistics

The farm's vital statistics confirm James's prowess as a beef breeder and why he was chosen as a Signpost Programme participant.

Calving interval for the Skehan herd would not be out of place on the best dairy farms. At 364 days it is exemplary. For the 2021 calving season the calves per cow per year

stood at 1.03, another figure well above the average for Irish suckler farms. The Spring six-week calving rate is a respectable 52 per cent and, unlike the practice on many suckler farms, there is no recycling of cows from year to year in the event they do not go in calf in a season. Cow replacements are sourced using information on maternal indices and, while James's herd is predominantly made up of Limousin cross dams, he is not prescriptive, provided the breeding figures stack up: "Four Saler cows have been added to the herd this year. The important priorities for our herd are milk, fertility and low calving difficulty; good commercial cows, genotyped with good Star ratings."

On the terminal side James runs a five-Star Limousin bull. Aisling Molloy, Future Beef Programme Advisor, was on hand to confirm the bull traits that James seeks: "Again, he puts emphasis on low calving difficulty in choosing a bull. Terminal Index for the current bull is €132, with a low 3.3 per cent calving difficulty on beef cows. Carcase weight delivery is 25.4 kgs so this is an animal with above average beefing qualities including carcase conformation of 2.46, all five-star qualities. These are the figures that buyers want when purchasing cattle from James to bring to finished beef."

Grass performance

James brings precision to his grassland management practices. He took twenty-eight recordings of grass covers last year, measuring regularly throughout the growing season. Total grass dry matter grown on the farm came to 7.8 tonnes per hectare with 145 units of nitrogen spread per hectare. Increasing this tonnage over time is a clear and achievable ambition for James and fits in perfectly with the Signpost Programme to achieve set objectives in productivity and sustainability on the Programme's pilot farms. Last year's grazing season on the Skehan farm extended to 229 days, a satisfactory figure given some of the soil types involved. James Skehan knows the value of high-quality forage and places a lot of emphasis on having both adequate stocks of silage for a long Winter as well as making quality silage to maintain his suckler herd with minimal concentrate inputs. Reflecting the changing weather conditions through the silage making season last year, James's silage dry matter for different samples ran from a DM low of 23.7 per cent to a DM high of 47.5 per cent. For three different samples the all-important DMD figure hovered just above or below 70DMD with crude protein of 13.1 per cent, 11.5 per cent and 13.8 per cent. Grassland improvement has already delivered results, as Thomas Gleeson, James's local Teagasc advisor confirms: "The farm was previously used solely to maintain the suckler herd, bringing offspring to weanling stage. The paddocks and better use of grass have allowed James to bring the offspring to stores. He now has a far shorter grass rotation system and that has improved grass quality as well as increasing grass production and improving animal performance."

Future change

Looking to the future, James is continuing to tweak his management system: I will maintain cow numbers and, instead of selling the offspring as weanlings, I'm now housing them for the first winter and bringing them to forward store stage the following Autumn before selling them in September. The aim is to grow more grass without resorting to spreading more fertiliser." To that end James is working on improving his grassland management skills further, addressing any soil fertility



deficits and making better use of slurry by adopting the trailing shoe spreading technology as far as possible and targeting spreading dates to maximise uptake and grass growth patterns. "We will add more clover to the swards and also do some selective reseeding where necessary."

The Skehan farm participates in the BEEP programme and one of the initiatives James has undertaken is to take faecal egg samples to determine the degree of worm infestation and to ensure that the dosing products he is using are effective.

On-farm investment

None of the productivity and performance on the Skehan farm would be possible without considerable and ongoing investment in infrastructure. New paddocks, water troughs and roadways have been constructed and installed in recent years, all with the aim of improving productivity as well as making the management system on this part-time farm as efficient as possible from monetary, labour input and time-efficiency benchmarks. For instance, James can now move cattle on his own, which was not possible previously. A central focus is to improve performance through getting better average daily gains off grass, a direct influence on increasing profitability.

The 34-hectare farm is stocked currently at 93 Kg/N hectare equivalent and is divided into three separate blocks. One block is mainly used for silage production and the remaining blocks are managed for both silage and grazing. The land type varies from free draining loam valleys to heavy clay soil and might in some cases be described as hillside farming.

All the farms building are relatively new, with excellent handling facilities and plenty of slurry storage. This demonstrates the high capital investment in recent years to deliver long term improvements in productivity and profitability. The investment and management changes have been undertaken under the guidance of James's Teagasc Advisor Thomas Gleeson. It will be of huge interest to thousands of suckler farmers to monitor how the Skehan suckler farm develops in the coming years under the guidance and direction of the Teagasc Signpost Programme mentoring process.

Financing fertiliser this Spring



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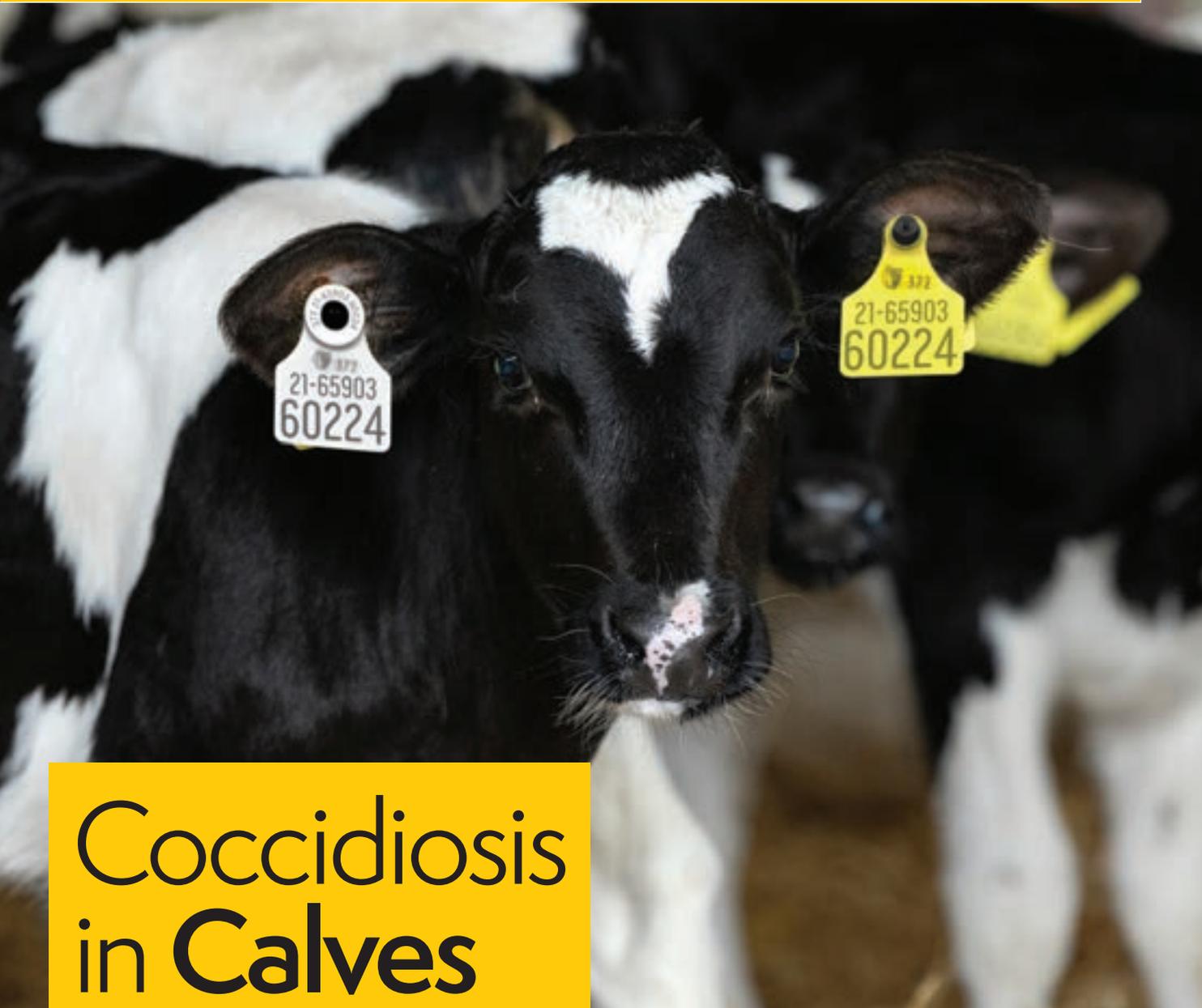
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Coccidiosis in Calves

Sarah Campbell, Veterinary Technical Manager with MSD Animal Health, discusses coccidiosis in calves

March can be one of the most challenging months for calf health in spring-calving dairy systems. Crossing the halfway point of calving results in a mix of calf ages in sheds along with an increasing density of stock numbers indoors. On drier farms with early turnout of calves, small calf paddocks close to sheds are often targeted first for grazing. Both indoor and outdoor factors feed into the risk period for coccidiosis to occur on farms.

What is Coccidiosis?

Coccidiosis is a common disease of the intestine that is caused by a parasite known as *Eimeria*. The *Eimeria* family of parasites has hundreds of different species, but only 13 of them are known to cause significant

illness. Calves from the ages of 3 weeks to 6 months are particularly susceptible as they have little immunity in comparison to older animals. Young calves become infected by ingesting *Eimeria* eggs, known as oocysts, that are in the environment. These tiny oocysts are very robust and can survive from year to year in infected faeces, often being completely unaffected by most disinfectants due to their thick outer wall. Through feeding equipment, water sources or licking, these microscopic oocysts are ingested and invade the gut lining of the calf. Once inside the cells of the gut wall, the parasite undergoes cycles of multiplication resulting in damage to the gut lining as the cells rupture. As the parasite multiplies rapidly, the process results not only in damage to the gut, but

also the release of new oocysts in high numbers into the environment for the next susceptible animal to become infected. A calf can shed more than a million oocysts per gram of faeces during an initial infection demonstrating how quickly calf pens can become highly contaminated.

How Does Coccidiosis Affect Calves?

The outcome of infection with coccidia depends on a number of factors:

- The number of oocysts ingested
- The immune response of the calf
- Stressors (poor weather, transport, regrouping, dehorning, weaning)
- Management practices (nutrition, stocking density, hygiene)
- Other disease pressures, for example: respiratory disease or other causes of diarrhoea

Calves presenting with clinical coccidiosis show signs of watery, sometimes bloody scour accompanied by weakness, dehydration, straining and weight loss. Death can occur in severe cases, but ill thrift is often seen in calves following infection due to permanent damage caused to the gut. The lining of the gut is where a calf absorbs all the nutrients required for growth and it is easy to understand how damage here can impact on productivity. Subclinical infection is of much greater significance as the long-term effects of reduced weight gain, feed intake and poor performance are considerable. Over a 21-day period, research studies have demonstrated a 2-6kg difference in weight gain across a group of calves due to subclinical coccidiosis (Dauguschies et al. 2007 and Romero et al. 2013).

Treatment and Prevention Options

It's important to reach the correct diagnosis on any illness that causes scour in calves as this is key for successful treatment options. Your vet might use a combination of clinical signs along with pooled faecal samples from groups of affected calves to reach a preliminary diagnosis of coccidiosis. In terms of treatment, prevention is the best option, as once clinical signs are seen, gut damage and production losses are already suffered. Prevention needs to be considered as a three-pronged approach combining:

- Calf health and immunity
- Hygiene
- Strategic use of anticoccidial medication (Vecoxan)

Firstly, the basic foundations of good calf health are essential following best practice around colostrum intake, minimising stress and optimising nutrition to ensure that the animal can develop natural immunity when it becomes exposed to coccidial organisms in the environment. Secondly, in order to limit the build-up of oocyst contamination in the environment, hygiene is paramount. This involves avoiding overcrowding, clean feeding equipment, good bedding management as well as looking at the out of season house hygiene in order

to begin the spring with low levels of contamination. It is important to understand that 100% environmental elimination of the parasite is difficult to achieve and explains why we see this issue annually on farms. Finally, in order to develop immunity, some low-level exposure to coccidia is necessary but this needs to be limited in order to prevent disease risk. The ingestion of oocysts allows time to stimulate immunity, but the parasite is removed through strategic dosing with Vecoxan around 2-3 weeks following exposure. It is necessary to treat all calves in the group, over three weeks old, due to the nature of the infection; if one animal is exposed it is safe to assume all are. Vecoxan is not only shown to prevent clinical and subclinical disease by removing parasites within the gut. The metabolites of Vecoxan's active ingredient, diclazuril, is also environmentally friendly in comparison to the metabolites of other active ingredients which have been shown to both persistent in soil and toxic to plants once manure is applied to the soil. Given as a single oral dose, it allows great flexibility to farmers giving the right treatment at the right time. Greater performance benefits based on average daily gain (ADG) have been witnessed following the use of Vecoxan (Philippe, 2014); whereby, ADG was higher for animals treated with Vecoxan in comparison to those treated with a toltrazuril based product over a 78-day study period.

A preventative approach, combining farm management, calf health and Vecoxan, reduces the considerable annual economic losses that occur due to both clinical and subclinical coccidiosis.

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1. Philippe, P., Alzieu, J.P., Taylor, M.A. and Dorchies, P., 2014. Comparative efficacy of diclazuril (Vecoxan[®]) and toltrazuril (Baycox bovis[®]) against natural infections of *Eimeria bovis* and *Eimeria zuernii* in French calves. *Veterinary parasitology*, 206(3-4), pp.129-137.
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3. Van Leemput L. & Louineau., (2007). Diclazuril for coccidiosis in ruminants: safe for the environment? Janseen Animal Health, Beerese, Belgium.

Vecoxan 2.5 mg/ml Oral Suspension for lambs and calves.

In lambs: Prevention of coccidiosis caused by *Eimeria crandallis* and *Eimeria ovinoidalis*.

In calves: Prevention of coccidiosis caused by *Eimeria bovis* and *Eimeria zuernii*.

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TILLAGE FOCUS





Go with the grain

Bobby Miller was sitting in his newly refurbished farm office contemplating the work schedule for the next two months when he spoke to **Matt O’Keeffe** in mid-February.

The winter-sown crops, Bobby said, had come through the winter looking promising: “They benefited from the good weather through much of the autumn and into late January, though some of them may be a little too advanced for the time of year but that’s not necessarily an issue. A few frosty nights would solve that problem. Getting the crops in the ground in good conditions gave them the perfect start so that’s half the battle.”

Bobby had three winter crops over the ground including winter oats, winter barley and winter oilseed rape: “It’s my first time to sow winter OSR. The plan to complete the crop mix is to sow malting barley to make up the total acreage. Previously we have sown oats and beans in springtime but not this year. The emphasis is on winter crops at the moment as they tend to perform well from a yield and margin perspective. The winter oats crop is a gluten free variety sown under contract for Glanbia. My hope is that the Glanbia oats market will expand in the years ahead with more options for growers to become involved. My first crop of oats was sown in 2015 and I have continued to sow it every year since. The input costs are lower and it yields well on this farm.”

Award winner

Bobby was pleased to win a Glanbia grain award recently: “It was appreciated and is an acknowledgement that the work we put in is recognised. It was a winter Cassia barley crop and was grown here on the home farm. It yielded well, touching four tonnes per acre and harvesting conditions were excellent at the end of July so moisture and quality were all you could ask for. The crop got a

good run the whole way through. It doesn’t work out as well every year.”

Seasonal workload

The Stradbally-based tillage farmer contemplated his spring work schedule: “Because the autumn conditions were so good, we have more crops sown than expected. That means a slight easing in the sowing workload this spring. I will be out fertilising the winter barley and OSR by the end of February, all going well weather-wise. It’s important to time the application on the barley so that there is no loss of headcount to deliver yield.”

Fertiliser price is a hot topic and Bobby had this to say: “The price is off the scale and at the same time the crops have to be fertilised properly or we lose both ways, with lower tonnages and poor quality. We are looking at other options because we have to if we want to stay in business. It is hard to see fertiliser prices falling in the short term and most of the fertiliser for winter or spring crops will be spread before there is any likelihood of a reduction. How to cut costs without cutting corners is the challenge. We will be importing more slurry onto the farm from neighbouring livestock farms. That’s something that can reduce fertiliser requirements. We test the slurry, so we know its nutrient value. Catch crops are another opportunity. We grow them on the farm for GLAS and to clean the ground for seed production. They provide valuable P and K and help condition the soil. Those are two main areas where we can reduce chemical fertiliser needs. Some crops and varieties offer potential for reduced fertiliser inputs and we availed

of a good green canopy in the OSR to reduce nitrogen requirements. That technology is well established through the GAI (Green Area Index)."

Incorporating straw

The chairman of the Grain Growers Group is pleased with the Straw Incorporation Scheme: "Personally, it has worked well. I made full use of it while at the same time ensuring that my regular straw customers were looked after. The fact that it is in place until 2028 provides a degree of certainty that is welcome. There is also flexibility built in, if, for instance, if the straw was required to alleviate a fodder shortage.

Price prospects

Bobby is reasonably optimistic on product price: "At the moment, there is reason to be confident on price. The costs are up substantially so, if there are no huge global changes in the grain markets, the price outlook is reasonable for the season. The three positives for tillage are good prices, good yield and good harvest weather. We need all three to deliver. The malting companies have announced a price of €270 per tonne. There is plenty of room for price improvements in other premium crops. That includes the price for gluten-free oats. Price in general needs to move up to match increased costs. In many cases the premium price is above the feed price but does not reflect the food value of the end product. Malting and distilling are an example. The premium is above feed price but bears no comparison to the end use price. We need to be

pushing for more food-grade crops and using the by product for livestock. We import a lot of grain by products for livestock and we need to develop a much bigger food-grade cropping system. If the end products are there and the price is right we can grow the crops."

Forward selling opportunities

Bobby believes forward selling has a role to play on tillage farms: "Definitely,

growers need to consider banking some of the price that is out there right now. Global market grain prices are above average. They could go higher but they could also drop before our harvest. Where possible, growers should be forward selling a percentage of their expected tonnage. Whether that's ten or twenty per cent or higher. The golden rule is not to forward sell more than half the expected tonnage just in case there is a poor

harvest as has happened before. Cash flow is an important aspect of any business including tillage farming and an element of forward selling facilitates cash flow. There are other more complex mechanisms that should be investigated including price insurance and should be made available for tillage farmers in Ireland. It's all about reducing future risk. And securing the wellbeing of the business in the longer term."



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Are micronutrients an integral part of your crop nutrition plan?

Evidence says they should be

With spring nitrogen and sulphur going onto cereals and oilseed rape on most farms at present, don't forget about micronutrients at this time too. Once crops start to go into the stem extension phase of growth they require a lot of nutrients to keep up with their rapid rate of change. This of course means the requirement for major nutrients increases but also the need for micronutrients as well. The term "micro" doesn't mean that these are less important. It means that the plant requires them in smaller quantities; but any deficiency can still cause major problems within the plant. Long term trial data has also taught us the importance of getting these micronutrients on at key timings, before any deficiency starts to appear. A preferable mindset is to think about ensuring sufficiency of supply. This is where the importance of historic farm data comes into its own, enabling proactive decisions to be made. Tissue testing is the only way to see what is in the plant at that moment in time and therefore will show you which micronutrients you will need to apply to keep the crop at optimal levels. If you don't want to carry out a tissue test then you could apply a crop specific multi-nutrient product such as YaraVita Gramitrel on cereals and YaraVita Brassitrel Pro on oilseed rape. These products have the specific nutrients required for those crops and can be used to 'cover all bases' if tissue analysis isn't for you. Long term trials show us that applying these micronutrient mixtures gave an average 0.55t/ha yield benefit for



winter wheat when applied at T1, which is a 6.7:1 return on investment (ROI) with wheat at €220 tonne. A spring application on winter oilseed rape gave an average 0.27t/ha yield benefit across all sites, which is an ROI of 8.6:1 with an oilseed price of €575 tonne. You may ask how do we know what are the key nutrients to include in these two crop specific products? The answer again lies in the data and knowledge collected during research projects conducted to identify them. Yara, through its research facilities in Pocklington, York, runs a screening process through nutrient specific trials to prioritise nutrients according to their impact on crop growth and development. Once these are established, then crop-specific products can be formulated to deliver enough quantities of these specific nutrients. When you choose YaraVita you can be sure that what you apply will be easy and convenient to use, and safe and effective for the crop. For foliar application, foliar sprays ensure precise

application of the right micronutrient/s at the right time, and can be specifically targeted to the leaf to suit immediate crop need. Foliar application provides nutrients for immediate uptake by the leaves and, as a result we can keep the crop on course.

Each YaraVita foliar product is formulated from consistently high quality nutrient compounds. All are based on raw materials with low impurities, and are available as single micronutrient products or as micronutrient combinations for greater ease and convenience. YaraVita products are all manufactured to very high standards - often food and even pharmaceutical grade. Products contain co-formulants such as wetters, stickers and absorption aids to control and enhance the performance of the nutrient raw materials.

YaraVita foliar sprays are widely tank mixable with other agrochemical inputs to make treatment easier and more convenient. At www.tankmix.com you will find the results of over 30,000 tank mix tests available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This database is updated regularly and is searchable by product or active ingredient.

Finally, this year foliar micronutrient applications can play an important role in helping crops offset potential yield loss where nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium rates are being reduced because of high fertiliser prices. Arguably, adding foliar micronutrients into your crop nutrition programme this year with higher grain prices should not be a difficult choice.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.YARA.IE OR SEARCH "YARAVITA"





Soil fertility management

The breadth of Teagasc's tillage-based research was on display again recently when the organisation presented its annual Tillage Conference. Hopefully, Teagasc can return to physical conferences in the near future, though the online presentations did not lack either content or in-depth research findings. **Matt O'Keeffe** reports.

Dr. David Wall's presentation on soil fertility provided practical direction for tillage farmers at a time when the cost of chemical nutrients has become prohibitive. The most important message from the Johnstown based researcher is to find the balance between minimising the cost of fertiliser inputs while at the same time optimising the yield of the crop being nurtured: "Phosphorous prices have increased from €2 to €3.69 per kilo. Likewise, Potassium price have moved up from €0.85 cents per kilo and is now costing €1.33. Lime, an important background fertiliser input, has remained stable in price at around €23 per tonne. Soil analysis results are key to making rational management decisions on fertilising crops."

Different fields, different needs

Dr. Wall gave an outline of the variations in soil fertility on tillage land and confirmed that, for those soils that have high soil fertility status across any or all of the critical pH, P&K criteria, there may be opportunities this year to significantly reduce fertiliser expenditure on these components. Thirty-seven percent of the soils analysed had a high pH, while one third were at optimum levels with the remaining portion at low or very low pH, with no opportunity for savings and a cost demand to spread lime to improve N, P&K take up and lift crop yield potential. P levels were also varied across the spectrum from very low to high – Twenty per cent were in the very low category, a further thirty-three percent were low with just under half of the analysed soils hitting the optimum or high status.

The analysis of K levels in the tillage soils was somewhat more positive. Only ten percent were categorised in the very low region, with a further twenty-eight percent classified as low. Soils with optimum or high K status were evenly split at twenty-nine per cent and thirty-three per cent respectively.

Acid tolerance

Dr. Wall noted that different crop species have different tolerances to soil acidity: "It is not a case of one soil pH level affecting all crops in a similar way. Sugar or fodder beet is the most sensitive to low pH, followed by barley, legumes, wheat and maize. OSR does require a pH of at least 6, while oats can thrive at as low as 5.8. Similarly, potatoes will grow well where there is some level of soil acidity down as far as 5.5. For most crops, maintaining a pH of 6.5 to 7 is an ideal range that will maximise nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium inputs and facilitate the take-up of trace elements."

Examining the crop potential returns from having an adequate pH level in the field, The asserted that the cost of liming adequately is a fraction of the return to be gained in crop yield and return."

There is, as the Teagasc Soil Fertility Research Programme Leader pointed out, a direct correlation between optimum P&K levels and crop yield: "There is no substitute for soil fertility. We can feed the crop the necessary fertiliser to make up a deficit in the season, but there is no substitute for keeping fields at optimum P & K status over the long



Organic Farm Walks 2022

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Kilnaboy, Ennis, Co. Clare

Dairy

Wednesday, 30th March | 12pm

Brigid O'Connor, Gleann na
Gealt, Camp, Tralee, Co. Kerry

Hill Sheep, Agri - Tourism

Wednesday, 20th April | 12pm

Ross & Amy Jackson, Lacka,
Carrig, Birr, Co Tipperary

Cereals, Sheep

Wednesday, 11th May | 12pm

Andrew & Leonie Workman, Dunany
Flour Organic, Drogheda, Co Louth

Cereals, Milling Flour

Wednesday, 25th May | 2pm

Mark & Grainne Duffy,
Clogher, Ballybay, Co. Monaghan

Poultry-eggs, Cereals, Beef Finishing

Wednesday, 1st June | 2pm

John Hurley, Castle Hill House,
Knockalaughta, Ballintubber,
Castlerea, Co Roscommon

Suckler to Weanling, Sheep

Wednesday, 8th June | 2pm

Fergal Byrne, Calverstown
Little, Dunlavin, Co Kildare

Sheep, Cereals, Beef Finishing

Wednesday, 15th June | 2pm

Donal & Frederique Keane, Camelton
Stud, Summerhill, Co Meath

Suckler to Beef, Cereal

Wednesday, 22nd June | 2pm

Clive Bright, Ardsallagh,
Ballymote, Co. Sligo

Beef, Direct Selling

Wednesday, 6th July | 2pm

Gavin Tully, Clonhenritte,
Camolin, Enniscorthy, Co Wexford

Cereals

Wednesday, 13th July | 2pm

Declan Houlihan, Corrigeen Organic
Farm, Rathcabin, Birr, Co Offaly

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term. The soil locks away some of the nutrients that are spread and those are not available to the plant. There are opportunity costs even where the necessary fertiliser is applied to the crop or field in the season."

Spreading options
Fertiliser application methods were another topic of Dr. Wall's presentation. He noted the fact that not all P applied will be available to the crop if it is spread across the soil as distinct from being placed close to the plant roots where it is more accessible to the plant. Surface broadcast and incorporation are inferior to a combined drilling fertiliser application. This research has clear implications for fertiliser cost, in this case P application, as a combined seeding/fertiliser system offers opportunity to reduce P application without impacting on yield potential. With fertiliser prices so high, even a marginal reduction is worth chasing, in this case the savings can be significant, always assuming that we are dealing with soils that have reasonable fertility over the long term. Such a targeted fertiliser approach might be considered as feeding the plant and not the soil.

Organic and chemical fertiliser options
David Wall prefaced his remarks about offsetting some fertiliser cost by importing organic manures to substitute for bagged fertiliser. He warned that it is important to know the nutrient value of a replacement manure. He ran the rule across cattle slurry, pig slurry, FYM, broiler litter and SMC (Spent Mushroom

Compost), and provided detailed nutrient analysis and comparative fertiliser value for each category. Apart from the primary purchase cost it is worth examining the N, P, K value of each potential organic manure source to determine which would best suit or match the fertiliser requirements of individual fields. A chart

was provided showing the potential to reduce chemical fertiliser inputs by fifty per cent, replacing the deficit with organic manure sources. It is well worth a look at on the Teagasc website as it gives detailed data on amounts required as cubic metres per hectare or tonnes per hectare, depending on the category to provide

various percentages of the N, P & K required by, in this instance, a crop of spring barley to attain a yield of 7.5 tonnes per hectare. It should be noted that the potential for chemical fertiliser reductions using some alternative sources is, in most cases, considerably higher for P&K than for nitrogen fertiliser, as might be expected.

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Using urea in tillage crops

Dermot Forristal covered several very practical issues during his presentation to the annual Teagasc Tillage Conference. Can we spread urea evenly and accurately in tillage crops? That question was dealt with in detail and several practical tips for application were considered by Dermot.

“Urea is cheaper than CAN and should be considered as a viable alternative in tillage crops to the more expensive CAN alternative. CAN is costing around €2.50 per kilo of N with Protected Urea costing €2.17 per kilo of N. Based on those figures the annual saving from using Protected Urea compared to CAN is up to €83 per hectare based on a nitrogen application rate of 250kgN per hectare. For spring barley, the saving could amount to €55 per hectare based on an N application rate of 165kg per hectare.”

Quality and width

The Oakpark researcher outlined the considerations that must be taken into account when considering urea as a viable alternative to CAN: “However, the big practical question is whether we can spread urea at wide bout widths. Urea has a lower density than CAN. That makes it more difficult to throw and the spread width is more influenced by wind. It is extremely important that good quality urea is procured with large and strong particles. Urea is about eighty per cent as dense as other N alternatives. Because all our spreaders are broadcast spreaders there is a special importance to monitoring spread width. While the density of urea cannot be changed greatly, so that there is always a disadvantage compared to CAN, there are means of improving the spread width dependability by, as I said, ensuring that we start with the best quality urea. Larger, stronger particles will ensure better results. We don’t want the particles breaking up in the spreader or when being thrown from

the spreader. The spreader itself is important. Some spreaders are better at spreading urea than others. A good basic spread pattern is needed. Every spreader operates on the basis of an overlap system. A smooth tapering pattern at the overlap contributes to even spreading. It is more difficult to retain that even overlap with urea.”

Machine dependability

There is an onus on the spreader manufacturer to stand over their machine dependability, as Dermot affirms: “The fertiliser spreader manufacturer must be able to demonstrate that the spreader can deliver an even overlap spread pattern using a urea product. The variation co-efficient established through trials in a test hall should be below 7 per cent because that figure will disimprove in many field conditions. Another consideration is that the fertiliser spreader manufacturer must have the capacity to continuously test the spreading accuracy for various fertilisers. That is because there will be a regular need to change the settings on the spreader. It must be able to operate accurately, whether this is for spreading at twenty-four metres or thirty-six metres or somewhere in between. The third area of prime importance for the grower is to examine the urea product that arrives on the farm and to match it to a fertiliser product tested on the spreader manufacturers database. Size of pellet, pellet strength, shape and density are all considerations that must be taken into account if there is to be a positive outcome from using a urea product to fertilise a

“Getting the spreading wrong will have very serious and very expensive consequences including lodged crops where too much fertiliser is spread, hungry strips where too little is spread, early and late ripening strips depending on under or over fertilised areas. Ultimately, the return from the crop will be seriously impacted if mistakes are made.”

crop. There are phone Apps that will help in making this determination of a product’s suitability to be spread at a particular bout width. If a database match for the product is identified that should reveal the bout width limit, the specific requirements of the spreader such as discs/vanes as well as the specific spreader settings for the width required. A spreader may be perfectly able of spreading CAN at a particular distance. That doesn’t mean it will spread Urea evenly to the same width. A spreader may be well capable of spreading a CAN product up to thirty metres but only capable of spreading Protected Urea to a width of 24 metres.”

Time well spent testing product

Dermot Forristal is strident that a grower needs to spend

time making certain he will have an even, well fertilised crop before he spreads a pellet: “That’s why research is required before a product is used. On farm, it is useful to use trays to test run a spreader before going to the field to spread the product on a crop. That sounds like a lot of time and effort. Put it in context however and you realise how important those tests are to the end result for the crop. A grower with a 100-hectare farm with spring barley and winter wheat in equal proportion will spend €71,000 on fertiliser. Getting the spreading wrong will have very serious and very expensive consequences including lodged crops where too much fertiliser is spread, hungry strips where too little is spread, early and late ripening strips depending on under or over fertilised areas. Ultimately, the return from the crop will be seriously impacted if mistakes are made. There are significant savings to be made from spreading urea compared to CAN, provided the product is well researched and tested before application. A three-hour on-farm test valuing your time at €50 per hour costs €150. That amounts to 0.2 per cent of your total fertiliser bill based on that 100-hectare farm. I would finally say that growers need to be very cautious when spreading with wide bouts and in windy conditions. That warning extends to all fertiliser but most especially in the case of urea products. I advise against using urea blends unless proven from manufacturer verified data as segregated spread patterns are possible.”



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Going for Gold

Donal Fitzgerald, Goldcrop, discusses the benefits of the new spring barley variety GERALDINE

The new spring barley variety GERALDINE will be available to Irish growers this year and, according to Donal Fitzgerald of Goldcrop, it represents a significant advancement in the genetic potential of spring barleys in Ireland. "Ever since we first trialled this line on our trial site in Co. Cork back in 2017, we knew it was something special. It's not often that you get a variety that yields well, stands well, displays very good disease resistance and to top it all off, it also holds very good grain quality which is suitable for malting. GERALDINE is now proven by DAFM trials to tick all these boxes and we believe it will find favour with many growers who will be trying it for the first time this year," says Donal.

Indeed, the figures for GERALDINE on the Recommended List are impressive, headlined by a 5 per cent yield advantage over the controls of Planet and Gangway. Its straw strength and good resistance to breakdown/brackling should also be very appealing to growers. "To put it into context, a 5 per cent yield improvement is worth approx. €85-€90 per hectare to the grower at current market values and against the present climate of massive cost inflation on Irish tillage farms, such an improvement in output value of a crop cannot be ignored. Additionally, knowing that the straw will hold up better at harvest, especially if we get a wet August, will help massively in getting what grain is in the field into the tank and over the weighbridge where it really counts."

According to Donal, the focus in plant breeding is quickly moving towards varieties that are more resilient in varying climates and require less inputs which of course is in keeping with the aims of the new EU Farm 2 Fork policy objectives.

"GERALDINE holds very good resistance to all major plant diseases and so will be less dependent on fungicide application for optimum performance as compared to some other varieties. From a grain quality perspective, we are

hoping GERALDINE will be approved as a malting barley for 2023. Currently, it is under evaluation in a commercial scale pilot test with Boortmalt & Waterford Distillery, we're keeping our fingers crossed for a positive outcome".

AGRONOMIC & QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS	GANGWAY ©	SY ERIBDAL	GERALDINE
Relative Yield (100 = 8.16t/ha)	99	102	105
Resistance to Lodging	8	7	(7)
Straw Breakdown	7	6	(6)
Earliness of Ripening	5	5	(6)
DISEASE RESISTANCE TO:			
Mildew	8	8	(8)
Rhynchosporium	5	5	(7)
Brown Rust	6	7	(7)
Net Blotch	8	8	(8)
GRAIN QUALITY:			
1000 grain weight (g)	47.5	48.7	49.2
Hectolitre weight (kg/Hl)	68.1	65.4	66.1
Screenings % (< 2.2mm)	1.4	1.4	1.4

- ✓ Highest yielding variety on DAFM Rec List 2022
- ✓ Consistently good yield performance measured across 17 official trial sites over 3 years
- ✓ Very good straw strength with good resistance to brackling and straw breakdown
- ✓ Good resistance to all wet weather diseases, makes it easier to manage spray timings in wet May / June period
- ✓ Good grain quality with moderately-early maturity, high hectolitre weight and low screenings
- ✓ A non-GN variety that produces grain suitable for brewing and/or distilling - currently under evaluation in commercial scale pilot test in Ireland

goldcrop.ie

Cutting costs, not corners

Tim O'Donovan of Seedtech took a look at the coming season and prospects for tillage farming in a recent interview with **Matt O'Keeffe**.

Tim began the conversation with an acknowledgement of production cost increases: "Everyone knows what has happened with fertiliser prices. Winter cereal growers, when they were planting winter wheat, barley, oats and oilseeds from last August to October, were becoming more sensitive to the potential impact of rising fertiliser prices because the steep rise had begun at that stage. The price increases since then have been unrelenting. With the tensions between the West and Russia escalating, those high prices have become embedded in the trade, at least in the medium term. The winter cereal growers are always the first to suffer from cost increases because they are treating their crops earlier than Spring grain producers. Fertiliser cost surges have been managed before and will have to be managed as well as possible now. Managing the supply chain, managing the risk factors, including credit, have all been highlighted in recent seminars, with Teagasc to the fore. It goes without saying that the first priority is to be in communication with your supplier, your merchant, advisor and consultant in order to set out a plan. That plan can best be constructed with the up-to-date information necessary, including, and especially, a set of soil samples. That's the starting point for discussion. The right planning can have a hugely positive impact on outcomes. If you have already taken actions such as lime application, straw incorporation and slurry or manure coverage in the previous months that makes a difference in how you manage your soil and crops and how much it will cost you to produce a profitable crop. There is nothing like high production costs to concentrate the mind in terms of what and how much fertiliser, for instance, you are going to apply to a crop."

Oilseed production savings

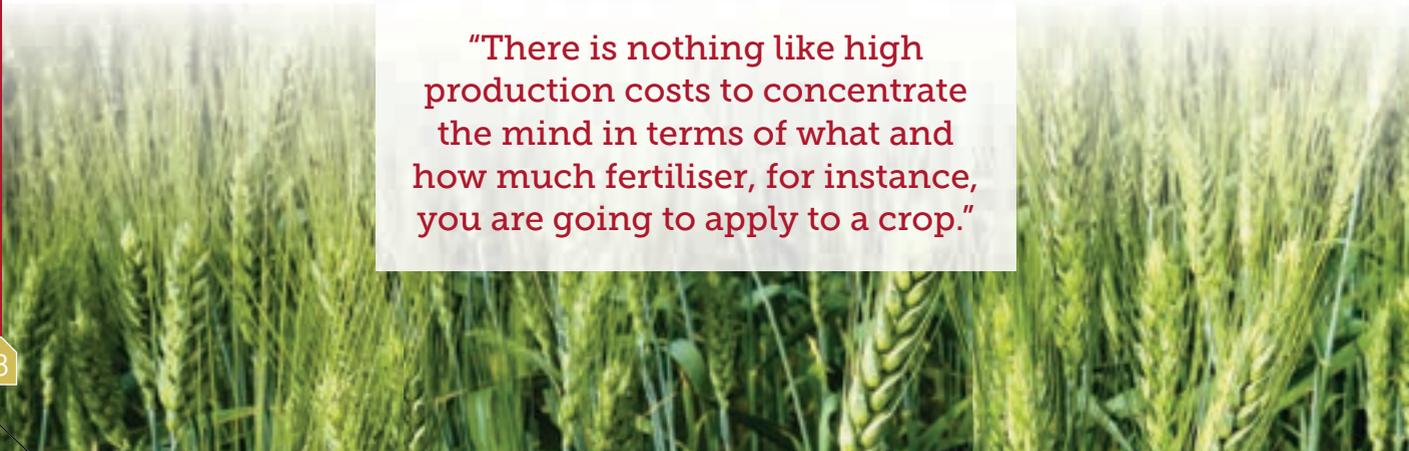
Seedtech produces significant tonnages of oilseed for export and the company is very close to the crops and

their growers. With a wide range of rapeseed varieties, there is, Tim says, considerable opportunity to make savings in particular circumstances. Tim confirmed the potential to reduce nitrogen inputs on Autumn sown oilseed crops that came through the winter period with good foliage, though that window of opportunity has now passed for most crops: "One well-confirmed technology is to look at the crop in late January, early February, assess the leaf canopy to determine the extent of greenery in the crop. Then, a calculation can be made as to how much nitrogen the crop has taken up and take that nitrogen off the total requirement. That has helped growers to make some savings with their oilseed crops. Oilseed is an unusual crop in that it is the only crop that can take up sunshine and fertiliser over the winter, store it in the plant and release it in the springtime to promote plant growth. Winter wheat, barley or oats do not have the same facility within them. It's a bit like a solar battery storing energy for release when needed. I will warn that growers should only act on the science in determining any reduction in nitrogen for any crop. There are advisors there to assist in making viable and profitable decisions in this regard. Growers should seek their advice."

Interestingly, Tim O'Donovan noted that most of the oilseed produced in Ireland, apart from some artisan growers producing oil for culinary purposes, is exported to the UK for crushing and utilisation in the biorefining industry and in the industrial vegetable oil market.

Import substitution.

Between three and a half and four million tonnes of raw ingredients for livestock feed are imported annually. Tim sees more scope for home grown substitution: "We have a relatively small land base of arable crops right now. There is plenty of scope and opportunity to replace a proportion of our imports. We have grown far bigger



"There is nothing like high production costs to concentrate the mind in terms of what and how much fertiliser, for instance, you are going to apply to a crop."

acres historically so there is plenty of additional suitable land that could be used for tillage crops. There does need to be a sustainability component in the end use. Essentially that is a viable price. That will ultimately determine the acreage of crops grown. In terms of protein crops, the growers are there for fava beans, peas and so on. Irish growers produce the highest yields per hectare of fava beans on the planet. Similarly with oilseed rape and winter wheat, we are amongst the highest yielders globally. There are ambitious targets to grow more protein crops and, ultimately, the price will determine whether those targets are met. The market will have to deliver to the producer. Soya production is not yet a viable proposition in most situations in this country. The available varieties, in general, require more sunshine that we get in an average summer. As an EU policy to promote more indigenous protein, there are more suitable sites, particularly in south-eastern Europe to grow soya viably. The Danube-Soy grouping in that region can grow higher tonnages of soy than producers in the United States. For now, at least, our best option is to grow what works, such as beans, peas, oilseeds and clovers. Those will continue to provide most of the protein sources that we can viably grow in this country. We will continue to require specialist protein sources that will have to be imported, for the foreseeable future."

State of the market.

The Seedtech specialist took a crystal-ball gaze at grain market prospects: "Right now, there are not any major weather-induced difficulties for crops in the ground. We will know more by April in that regard. In America it is all down to sowing those ninety-four million acres of maize, or corn as they call it, from early April through to June. At current fertiliser prices there is a view that US farmers will not sow maize on lesser soils and they might switch to other crops. But that presents a challenge for growers who are set up to produce specific crops. That in turn means the clock is set to grow certain acreages of crops and fertiliser prices will only have a limited impact on those set plans by growers."

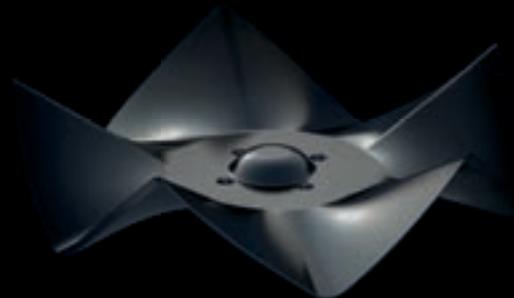
Hedging on price.

"Forward prices are reflective of outcomes as they are presented right now. South American outcomes could have an influence as they have had a dry time with high temperatures. That does impact on second crops in a double-crop system. That is where any price or volume shock will come from, apart from future weather events, if there is any deviation from expected crop and yield outcomes. With higher input costs come higher risks, so it is up to individual growers as to whether some element of forward selling is a part of that risk management strategy."

CrossCutter by Väderstad

Ultra-shallow tillage

Ultra-shallow tillage by Väderstad CrossCutter Disc provides full cut at only 0-3cm working depth. The unique cutting profile crushes, chops and mulches in one single pass. It is excellent in oilseed rape stubble, cover crops and grain stubble.



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VÄDERSTAD



KUHN extend trailed drill range

Kuhn S.A. launched the ESPRO trailed drill at the SIMA show in 2015. Built in Monswiller factory in Saverne, Kuhn introduced a completely different design to its predecessor the SpeedLiner, these unique and innovative features resulted in it the ESPRO being awarded the Machine of the year award for 2015. Originally launched in 3 and 6 metre seed only models the range now has a total of six drills to offer, four seed only drills in 3, 4, 6, and 8 metre and two seed and fertiliser models in 4 and 6 metre. Kuhn Center Ireland has a number of units out working in 3 and 4 metre since the launch with a mixture of seed only and seed and fertilizer drills. Customer feedback has been very positive across many different sowing systems and varying soil types. The whole ESPRO concept is "Higher output, Lower power" which is achieved through the layout and design of the drill. The drill is carried on large diameter offset press wheels running at a diameter of 900mm, which reduces the running resistance and avoids the bulldozing associated with wider one bank wheel systems. The square profile of the 215mm wide tyre offers perfect consolidation for the following seeding discs. All ESPRO drills raise the middle section of their wheel bank when in transport and come with a braking system as standard which allows the user to carry a full hopper on the road. All wheels are mounted in banks of two so changing wheels or fixing that dreaded puncture is



quick and so much easier.

All ESPRO machines are IsoBus controlled and coupled with Kuhn's "Vistaflow" distribution head offers a wide range of tramline widths even when not compatible with the drill width. Half width shut off, alternative rows and wheel widths are all controlled from the cab and also acts as coulter blockage sensors. GPS tramlining and headland control is also possible. Kuhn use a CCI 800 or 1200 screen to manage all of these features and it also contains its own full headland management system which can be set up to the operator's preference. This coupled with Kuhn's new A3 touch screen joystick make it very efficient and user friendly.

Overall, the introduction and the establishment of the ESPRO in Ireland through Kuhn Center Ireland has been very successful. The company is now hoping to further grow their market share through the demonstration of the drill which will be ongoing through out this spring.

LEMKEN: Seed drill combination for business pros

Minimal draught resistance, an integrated compact disc harrow, comfortable operation and a large, divided seed hopper – that is LEMKEN's new Solitair DT seed drill. With this machine, LEMKEN, the specialist for professional crop production, has completely restructured its range of trailed seed drill combinations, focusing all of its developments even more strongly on profitability. To ensure good reconsolidation in the first working step, the new Solitair DT features a leading tyre packer. For the second step of seedbed preparation, the Solitair DT is equipped with a compact disc harrow with relatively large 465mm diameter concave discs, that are individually protected against overloads by leaf springs. If a reduced intensity of tillage is required, vertical corrugated discs can be used instead of the concave discs, which penetrate the soil less, reducing both moisture loss and the emergence of weeds. If targeted reconsolidation of seed rows is required, a trapeze packer roller can be attached behind the disc harrow. At the heart of the Solitair's seeding technology are individual electrically driven, fertiliser-proof metering units, each of which supplies one distributor with seeds. The seed metering wheels are combined into seed wheel sets, eliminating the need to switch seed wheels on and off.



The seed wheel sets can be changed without tools. The coulter bar fitted to the Solitair DT features the proven, parallelogram-guided OptiDisc double disc coulters with depth control wheel. The DT seed hopper holds a volume of up to 5,100 litres and is available in a dual hopper version. The dual hopper allows the Solitair DT to be used for combined seeding with fertiliser or for sowing different seeds. Two variants are available: with the single-shot version, the fertilizer and seeds are placed in a shared seed furrow, whereas the double-shot version places fertilizer in a line below the seed level via separate fertiliser double disc coulters. LEMKEN's new Solitair DT will be launched in four and six metre widths for the 2022 autumn seeding season.

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Comet® is a registered trademark of BASF. Decoy® is a registered trademark of Bayer. Decoy® 250EC contains prothioconazole. Comet® 200 contains pyraclostrobin. Use plant protection products safely. Always read the label and product information before use. For further information, including warning phrases and symbols, refer to agricentre.basf.ie. Pay attention to the risk indications and follow the safety precautions on the label. Triple rinse containers and invert to dry at time of use.

AEROSEM VT: New trailed pneumatic seed drill combination



The new trailed AEROSEM seed drill with a working width of 5 metres (AEROSEM VT 5000 DD) combined with active tillage from Pöttinger combines high output performance with flexibility. Soil conservation and perfect placement of the seed are the most important factors. Pöttinger guarantees this as arable farming professionals with a precision universal metering system and ingenious, robust seed coulters.

Each feature on Pöttinger's AEROSEM VT is designed to increase productivity. The large volume packer tyres reduce the pressure applied to the ground and minimise rolling resistance to prevent the bulldozing effect. A large contact area in combination with the special grooved profile ensures optimum consolidation of the seed rows. In addition, the packer is hydraulically damped to support smooth operation during sowing. This allows high driving speeds to be maintained on different types of soil. Thanks to the trailed seed drill and power harrow combination, the tractor does not need to lift heavy implements. Uniform weight distribution is ensured because the machine is attached to the lower linkage arms and guided by the tyre packer.

The design of the longitudinal pressurised hopper with a capacity of 2,800 litres is completely new. The hopper is divided 50:50 in the direction of travel, so that seed can be drilled with fertiliser or on its own. Special attention has been paid to providing easy access to the seed hopper. An extremely compact design and the intelligent configuration of the seed hopper give the seed drill excellent manoeuvrability. Even with dual wheels, it is possible to turn straight into the next pass. The shortened, low design of the hopper and the integration of the packer into the chassis ensure fast, space-saving turns at the headland.

Kverneland e-drill maxi plus - The combined grain and fertiliser version



Kverneland has extended the model range of power harrow mounted seed drills by the combined grain and fertiliser version of the e-drill maxi plus. The e-drill maxi plus is especially adapted to the needs of the European markets where a growing proportion of cereal is sown in spring and the application of a mixture of different seeds in one step is requested. In order to balance the shorter vegetation phase, the phosphoric fertiliser application supports the initial germination and development of the plants in the most efficient way. In trials of spring sown crops, yields have shown increases up to 25 per cent compared to crops where the fertiliser has been applied by other methods. In addition, in current farming processes flexibility and strong performance are requested since the application of two different seeds in one pass has become more and more popular. The second crop mainly developing after the harvesting of the main crop. The e-drill maxi plus is offered with a hopper capacity of max. 2,100 litres which is divided into an adjustable hopper ratio of 60:40, 70:30 or 100:0 with two independently working metering devices positioned either side. Two electronic low-level sensors, adjustable from outside, monitor small quantities of rape as well as larger quantities of beans. The full hopper volume can be used when sowing one sort of seed only. As with all of the e-drill models, application rates for seeds and fertiliser are controlled by two units of the well-proven metering device, ELDOS. Both are ISOBUS compatible and electric driven which allows fertiliser and seed rates to be adjusted independently. The ISOBUS e-com "plug and play" compatibility enables the e-drill maxi plus to be connected to any ISOBUS compatible tractor, for fully functional use by the tractor's own terminal. Alternatively, Kverneland's IsoMatch Tellus Pro or the IsoMatch Tellus GO can be used. Both are fully ISOBUS compatible. Non ISOBUS tractors can be upgraded to ISOBUS standard by the IM Tellus series.

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Altech®



Nutrition first

Bernard Stack, InTouch Feeding Specialist, Alltech, focuses on taking care of cows and calves' nutritional needs this spring

As spring has now sprung to life on most farms across Munster, there are now plenty of hungry mouths to be fed across the farm. Each group will have a different set of requirements based on age, weight and stage of production.

Freshly calved cows

The golden rule regarding nutrition for freshly calved cows is to take care of their daily dry matter intake requirements. A cow's milk production output rises much faster than its dry matter intake. The transition period from dry cow to the milking herd is critical. The rule of thumb is that the diet should be at least made up of 50 per cent forage — in most cases, this will be grass silage. A lactating dairy cow can eat 18–24 kilograms of dry matter daily, depending on the breed and weight of the cow. It is important to pick a suitable concentrate to match the silage in your yard. This concentrate should be selected based on the result of your silage alone, as the protein and energy content of your silage will determine what concentrate should be fed. The next big question asked is how much meal should I be feeding my cows? To answer this question, it all comes down to how much grass will be in a cow's diet and what the cow is producing. The simple way to work this out is as follows:

In full-time, no grass in diet	0.33 kg concentrate per litre of milk	25 litres x 0.33 = 8.25 kg concentrate daily
Grazing by day (6–7 kg DM grass)	0.22 kg concentrate per litre of milk	25 litres x 0.22 = 5.5 kg of concentrate daily
Out full-time (15–16 kg DM grass)	0.11 kg concentrate per litre of milk	25 litres x 0.11 = 2.75 kg of concentrate daily

Understanding feed ingredients when selecting concentrates

A cow's energy demands post-calving necessitate high-energy feeds. The main sources of energy in a concentrate come from the likes of maize meal, rolled barley and rolled wheat. These three feeds are high in starch and, as a result, provide the cow with an excellent source of energy post-calving. Ideally, two out of these three will be in the top ingredients in the parlour nut.

Next, you must ensure two sources of protein in the parlour nut. These can include soyabean meal, rapeseed meal and maize distillers. To support rumen health, a constant supply of protein is essential in order to help break down the fibre coming from the grass silage.



On the topic of fibre, a parlour nut must include two sources of digestible fibre, such as beet pulp, soya hulls and citrus pulp. Rolled oats are also an excellent source of digestible fibre, as they are also a form of slow-release energy. Ideally, no more than 20 per cent of any fibre source should be included in a concentrate. If using a mixer wagon, long structural fibre also has its benefits, as it helps buffer the cow's rumen pH. Keeping a stable pH of 6.0–7.0 as cows transition from the dry cow diet to the milking cow diet is crucial in order to avoid any acidosis. Long-chop silage bales or chopped straw provide cows with an excellent source of structural fibre, which will scratch the rumen wall, encouraging high levels of rumination. Ideally, the chop length of straw should be 30–50 millimetres to avoid sorting if using a mixer wagon. Sorting of the mix refers to the cows separating the concentrates from the forage. Ideally, to avoid sorting, the total dry matter of the mix should be no higher than 45 per cent DM.

Calf nutrition 1,2,3

Calf nutrition starts with the 1,2,3 rule. This rule refers to the first milking of colostrum being fed within the first two hours of the calf's life, ideally providing at least three litres of colostrum. This is the best possible start a calf

can be given. Colostrum is full of antibodies that will help build up the calf's immune system. Testing the colostrum with a refractometer is recommended to measure the immunoglobulins. It is always a good idea to freeze some higher quality colostrum a young heifer does not have the amount required to feed the calf for the first feeding. After colostrum, a calf should be fed transition milk at 2.5 litres per feed. If feeding twice a day, this would be a total of five litres per day for the first three to four days of life. Clean, fresh water should be made available at all times to calves, as it helps aid rumen development and encourages grain intake. As a calf's daily intake increases, feed at least 12–15 per cent of the calf's birth weight in whole milk or milk replacer daily. Feeding of whole milk or milk replacer should be built up gradually to avoid any stomach upsets in calves. Ideally, calves should be offered a calf crunch from the first week of life, as this will aid rumen development. Calf stater grains need to be palatable to encourage the calves to eat. When choosing a calf starter grain, looking for a high protein feed with at least 18–20% crude protein is advisable. The stater grain should be coarse, with the idea that the coarse ration will scratch the rumen wall, aiding its long-term development. The rough texture of the crunch will also encourage more chewing, which will create more saliva. As regards ingredients for calf starter grains, flaked maize and rolled barley are recommended, as these are similar particle sizes but also two sources of starch that are high in energy. For protein sources, soyabean meal will be the most used ingredient in calf starter rations. For a digestible fibre source, beet pulp would also be recommended. The inclusion of molasses will give a sweet smell to the calf crunch, encouraging the calves to consume this feed. Concentrates should be increased gradually, with calves ideally consuming at least one kilogram of concentrate for three consecutive days at the time of weaning. Calf pellets can be introduced after three weeks. Yet again, the ingredients being fed in the calf pellet should be similar to the calf crunch to provide consistency in the calf's rumen development. As regards structural fibre, straw is recommended instead of hay in racks. Straw will aid the calf's rumen development, while hay can cause a potbelly to occur if too much is offered to calves from a young age. All in all, feeding both cow and calf to their potential in early spring will lead to long-term benefits to your farming business, as it gives both animals the best start to the new season.

MESSAGES:

- ▶ Higher cost for 2022 are asking serious questions of how you farm.
- ▶ Make your cost saving plan for fertiliser.
- ▶ Manage the Spring Rotation Planner to increase April grass yield.
- ▶ Plan to GROW 15 tons grass.
- ▶ Plan to achieve 10 grazings/paddock this year.
- ▶ Graze silage ground on milking platform twice – again in April.
- ▶ Weigh maiden heifers now!
- ▶ It is vital to milk record at least 4 times this year.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO LEAD US INTO 2022

1. What were your costs in 2021 and how much will they increase in 2022?
2. What are you going to do about the cost increase?
3. How can you prepare yourself for a future of lower nitrogen use?
4. How can you achieve 2021 profits in 2022?
 - ▶ It is projected that all costs will go up on average 20+%.
 - ▶ Milk price may increase 2-3c/l which will help.
 - ▶ If we keep doing what we always did; we can expect the same answer! That will lead to trouble!
 - ▶ The solutions? They will be driven by the cost of grazed grass relative to silage and meal costs.
 - ▶ Grazed grass will cost 11.8c/kg DM.
 - ▶ Silage will cost 22 -28 c/kg DM.
 - ▶ Meal will cost 40 - 46c/kg DM.
 - ▶ It is easy to make up your mind from these relative costs. The focus must still be on getting over 90% of the cows' diet from home grown grazed grass and silage.
 - ▶ You must become a lot more cost conscious and **do something about it**. The best place to start is to do a monthly Cost Control Plan for 2022. If you are not able to do it get your Agricultural Adviser/Consultant to formulate it with you.
 - ▶ How to prepare for a life of lower Nitrogen use while aiming to grow 15+tons DM/ha? It will involve the

following:

- ▶ The most significant driver of farm profit is tons of grass utilised per hectare and nothing has changed this year to alter that advice,
- ▶ Making absolutely certain that ALL your fields are Index 3 & 4 for P & K and over 6.3 pH. Can you tick that box?
- ▶ White clover on the milking platform, 40-60% of the area, should be your target; plus, red clover on outside blocks being used for silage can grow 3 cuts with 80 -90 units N/acre.
- ▶ Improved grassland management will be necessary to generate yields of 15+tons DM/ha. These are:
 - 9-10 grazing's per paddock per year,
 - Grazing at the appropriate pre-grazing cover (PGC) for the grazing stocking rate (SR) for the various times of the year.
 - On-off grazing being practiced to the highest standard,
 - 10% of farm reseeded each year,
 - Minimum soil compaction by animals and heavy machinery,
 - Making much better use of slurry being spread by LESS.
 - Cutting a higher % of farm for first cut silages and a lot less or no second cut silage.
- ▶ To generate higher profits, having outlined cost savings above, farmers need to focus on:
 - ▶ Farming with a cow that has:
 - High EBI, high fertility genetic ratings (€120+), very good health traits with a maintenance figure of €20 or more (mature cow less than 540kgs), with PD's for % F & P of 0.27 and 0.17 respectively, and 30+kg milk solids.
 - Been derived from culling the 5-10% worst cows in the herd each year,
 - Herd replacement rate of less than 15% per year,
 - Delivers 1kg of milk solids per 1kg cow body weight with only 1 kg meal.
 - ▶ Achieving maximum milk price by accruing no penalties for SCC, TBC, antibiotics, etc.



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- ▶ Achieving good calf and cull cow prices,
- ▶ Achieving less than 2% cow deaths.

WHICH FERTILISER TO USE?

- ▶ As of every year, you should spend time deciding, based on price and soil test results, which fertiliser or combinations best economically suits your own situation.
- ▶ Price is a big driver of the decision this year. At current prices, which are huge, the basics will approximately cost (€ per kg) the following:
 - ▶ Nitrogen: €2.67 for CAN, €2.09 for Urea, €2.54 for protected Urea,
 - Consideration must be given to the efficiency of each product which is: Urea 82.2%, protected Urea 96.25% and CAN 96.25%,
 - Therefore, for every 40kg N/ha applied, the effective N applied will cost:
 - ♦ Urea = €70.43,
 - ♦ Protected Urea = €97.79,
 - ♦ CAN = €102.8
 - You can make up your own mind from this information but the decision is obvious.
- ▶ Phosphorous is costing €4.63
- ▶ Potash is costing €1.48, and,
- ▶ Sulphur is costing €3.
- ▶ Value for money decisions:
 - ▶ 10:10:20 and 18:6:12

are a lot better value than straights, or using Urea and 0:10:20

- ▶ Using Urea and 0:10:20 will save you €100 per ton instead of 27:2.5:5
- ▶ Using Urea and 0:7:30 will save you €100 per ton instead of 24:2.5:10
- ▶ Nitrogen: It was recommended to have 23 units N/acre applied

in February. With that applied you should apply 2.5 bags 18:6:12 in early March, that is 45units N and, if not P or K has been applied to Index 3 soils, 15 units P and 30 units K.

- ▶ If P and K are Index 1 & 2, then use 4 bags 10:10:20 over a few months.
- ▶ Silage fields must get 4-5bags 0:7:30 and Urea – slurry

very suitable and can be used to reduce the amount of bag manure.

- ▶ Slurry of 7% DM contains 10, 6 and 36 units of N, P and K respectively per 1000 gallons - where it is being used discount bag fertiliser need as outlined in previous bullet point.
- ▶ Manage field with clover as per all other fields.

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USE THE SPRING ROTATION PLAN TO ENSURE APRIL GRASS

- ▶ To make April grass happen you must have 30+% and 60+% of the milking platform area grazed by the 1st March and 15th March respectively.
 - ▶ Not achieving these targets will mean you will be short of grass during April, if heavily stocked; the result is more meals. And you will not be able to go a stocking rate of 4.6-4.9 cows per hectare until well into May. Therefore, you will be short of silage.
- ▶ Use the **spring rotation planner** to make this plan. It is available on PastureBase or through your Adviser. Now, on 1st March, if you are short of the 30% grazed you must increase the area being grazed/day so as to achieve 60%+ on 17 March. This will mean reducing meal levels to 1-2kgs/day (12-14% P).
- ▶ As you only give a certain proportion (specific area) of the farm each day regardless of the amount of grass on it, you have to “read the signs” so as to make the correct decisions:
 - ▶ If there is a lot of grass on that area and cows are not grazing it out well, reduce the meals – don’t be afraid to only feed 1kg/day,
 - ▶ If they are ‘**skinning**’ the area and look empty or discontented, you must increase the meals or feed some high-quality silage as a last resort for a few days.
 - ▶ It is worth knowing that with a normal spring calving herd the cows intake will average 14 -15kgs DM intake per day.
- ▶ Ground conditions have disimproved a lot in February and there is a lot of grass on farms; so farmers must be committed to grazing twice per day.
- ▶ Cows must be brought in off the field after 2.5 - 3 hours grazing. If out longer, even on fine days on dry land, they will be walking around, eating very little and poaching

the land – one of the big reasons for poor growth.

- ▶ Cows, when eating more than 8kg DM/hd/day, should be out twice per day.
 - ▶ **Plan the day as follows:** At 7am, milk and feed 1-2 kg meal, after milking leave them in the cubicle shed with no feed until 11am, let them out for 3 hours, milk again at 2pm. with 1-2 kg meal, leave them out on grass from 4 -6pm, bring into cubicle shed for the remainder of night, providing only adequate silage that will have been used up by 12 – 1 pm.

YOUR PLAN TO GROW 15 TONS GRASS/HA

- ▶ Being a key KPI (Key Performance Indicator) we must plan to make it happen.
- ▶ You haven’t a chance of achieving it unless all fields on farm have a pH of 6.3, all are Index 4’s for P & K – no more talk on that – just do it! Reseeding also is a big help.
- ▶ You must make a **Grassland Plan** for the year, NOW, so that the acreage you have is adequate to provide grazing and silage for all livestock being kept. I have an Excel programme for that, it works as follows by providing the following grazing hectares:
 - ▶ Apr-May: 4.7-4.9 cows/Ha; 2500kgs (cattle wt.)/Ha and 23 calves/Ha,
 - ▶ June-July: 3.6-3.9 cows/Ha; 2200kgs/Ha (cattle weight); 14calves/Ha
 - ▶ Aug-Sept: 2.7-2.9 cows/Ha; 1700kgs/Ha (cattle); 7 calves/Ha.
- ▶ Once these areas have been allocated the remaining area of the farm must be cut for a heavy silage cut. (With the nitrate restrictions you have no chance of having enough silage unless you close large areas of the farm for 1st cut and take heavy cuts).
- ▶ You will know I am not in favour of a grazing system that involves taking out surplus bales – only rarely



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Management Hints

when we have massive growth.

- ▶ From this plan you know the area being grazed by the cows from April to October and this will be managed using the **grass wedge**.
 - ▶ The pre grazing cover (PGC) for a SR of 4.7 per ha and a 21 day rotation for a 550 kg cow producing 2kgs MS/cow (means 17kgs DM/cow of a daily requirement) is calculated as follows: $4.7 \times 17 \times 21 + 50 = 1730$ kgs DM with an AFC of 800kgsDM/ha. (50 = post grazing height of 50cms).
- ▶ In my experience, so as to be able to graze cows at 4.7+ per hectare from 15-20 April, one needs to have an average farm cover (AFC) of over 650kgs/ha in early April. This is only achieved by:
 - ▶ Having the specific % areas grazed,
 - ▶ Having adequate levels on N applied in time,
 - ▶ And by feeding the required levels of meal as directed by a grass budget.

TARGET 10 + GRAZINGS PER Paddock IN 2022

- ▶ Why? Because every extra grazing results in that paddock growing 1.3 tons of dry matter more in the year. A phenomenal piece of knowledge! Let's do it... how?
- ▶ The first big step towards achieving this is to complete the 1st rotation on or before the 1st April or as early as possible for your soil type. Why?
 - ▶ Because by finishing on the 1st April instead of 10th April you have picked up 10 days of this extra rotation you planning for.
- ▶ By not starting the last rotation until the 10 October you only have to achieve 8 grazings in 190 days, which gives you an average rotation length of 24 days per rotation.
 - ▶ That means, starting the last rotation on the 10th instead of 1st October you have picked up another 10 days of this extra rotation you planning for.
- ▶ Therefore, the two key targets are to end the 1st rotation as early as possible and start the last rotation as late as possible.

GRAZE SILAGE FIELDS TWICE

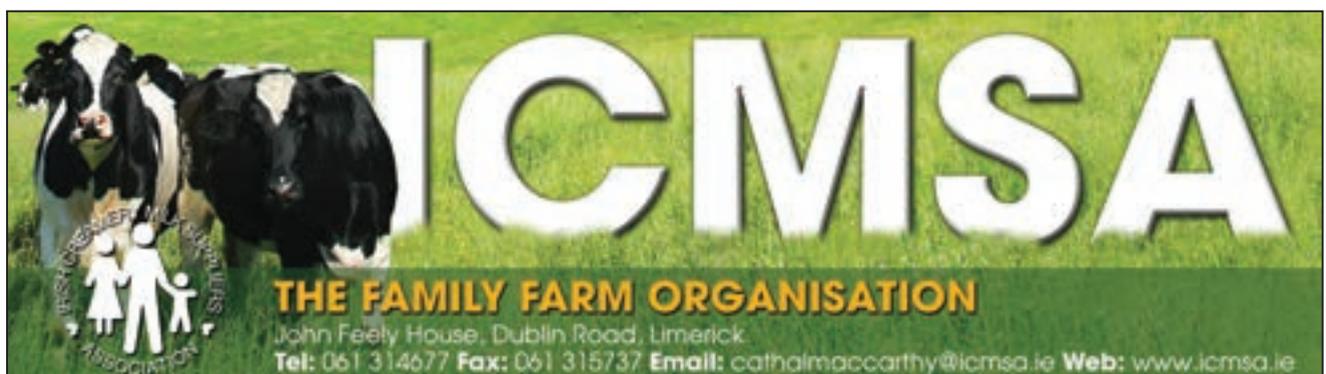
- ▶ If you want to reduce meal costs then you should graze silage ground twice before closing, particularly on the milking platform. This is so because more grazed grass is available. This practice saves huge meal bills in early

April.

- ▶ It will only delay silage cutting by a few days because growth rates will be over 90 in late May compared with 30 kg DM per day in early April.
- ▶ There will also be a strong possibility of split cuttings of 1st cut - facilitates the availability of after grass over a longer period.
- ▶ To push this concept to its' limit the silage ground must be grazed from 10th-20th April, giving an average closing date of 15th April:
 - ▶ So, work backwards on your silage area to set this up,
 - ▶ Silage will be cut between the 5th and 12th June and will have a DMD of over 70%.
- ▶ Therefore, on the milking platform with this plan, silage fields will be grazed the 2nd time from 8th to the 18th April. These paddocks will have had to been grazed the first time from 20 to 28 Feb (approx).
With this in mind, graze your paddocks now accordingly.

WEIGHT MAIDEN HEIFERS NOW

- ▶ Bulling heifers must now weigh 53% of their mature weight: That is 295kgs for a Friesian and 285kgs for a Jersey - Cross on 1st March.
- ▶ There are few problems with bulling heifers on dairy farms:
 - ▶ Most of them are not big enough at calving,
 - ▶ Some are too fat and heavy – bulling heifer over 360 kgs will have trouble going incalf and will remain in milking herd for shorter periods,
 - ▶ We have too few AI bred heifers with very high EBI's with high % F & P available.
 - ▶ Neither are they at grass long enough pre-mating because they will lose weight for 6-weeks after going to grass if they have done "too well" on silage.
 - ▶ Iodine and copper are two key minerals to promote 'heat' and good conception rates – if grass is deficient in those, you are in trouble because, unlike cow, they will be on no meals.
- ▶ To produce enough heifers from your own herd you must:
 - ▶ Plan to bull all your cows and bulling heifers once/ twice with an AI Friesian or Jersey. This will be elaborated on in April management hints,



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

Management Hints

- ▶ Make sure not to let any Friesian heifer calf die,
- ▶ You must make sure **now** that this year's bulling heifers are big enough for bulling in May.
- ▶ Conception rates will be best if:
 - ▶ They weigh 320-340 kg at mating start date (MSD),
 - ▶ They are on the 3rd heat on service day,
 - ▶ They are well used to the grass diet at that time (let them out early March).
 - ▶ No injections within one month MSD (mating start date).
 - ▶ Adequate cover for minerals, particularly Iodine.
- ▶ Manage animals accordingly to achieve these objectives.
- ▶ Let out big yearlings heifers (290+ kg) onto grass immediately:
 - ▶ They will lose weight for 4-6 weeks (gut-fill) after let out,
 - ▶ They will be well conditioned into the grass environment by the time the breeding season starts.
- ▶ 'Small' bulling heifers are the issue and they represent the potential of your herd to expand next year or give you an extra cash income of €1500+ each. Therefore, consider your options with them:
 - ▶ A 'small' yearling heifer is one weighing less than 240 kg on 1st March,
 - ▶ There are 60 days to 1st May which is an appropriate MSD,
 - ▶ With good grass they will put on 1.0 kg/hd/day of live weight gain,
 - ▶ With good grass and 1-2 kg meal for some of the time they will do 1.25 kg/day,
 - ▶ They may be still a little light, so it is suggested you delay their bulling date for 15-20 days, and serve with a Jersey, which, even though not totally advisable represents a far better option than carrying them over for another year.
- ▶ Vaccinate for BVD, IBR and leptospirosis now or over next two weeks, (do the cows also):
 - ▶ This is a 'must do job' for most herds,
 - ▶ It must be done 3-4 weeks (at least) before bulling.
- ▶ Stock them on grass at 2,500 kg weight per hectare, or seven to nine per hectare until July. Equally a copper bolus may be required if copper deficiency is a problem on your farm. Also address iodine where necessary.
- ▶ A let-out worm **is not** necessary for these animals (or any other yearlings).
 - ▶ Don't waste money.
 - ▶ But if Fluke, Liver or Rumen, is a problem (check dung sample) dose before let-out.

NEW VETERINARY REGULATIONS (FROM 28TH JANUARY)

- ▶ It is important to know them and make plans to operate within the rules. There is a serious risk of antibiotic resistance in humans due to overuse of antibiotics on farms and society. Personally, I was lucky that a 12-week programme of antibiotics, only two drugs available, last year cured a staph aureus infection in my knee.
- ▶ 28th January 2022: all antibiotics you use will require a

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

Herd fertility in pasture-based dairy farms is a key driver of farm economics¹.

According to Teagasc, "a cow calving in May will generate €400 less profit than a cow calving in February, due to higher feed costs and reduced yield. For every 100 cows, compact calving is worth on average €10,000 - €12,000 (€100 - €120 per cow/ year)"²

Age is particularly important in farming systems with restricted calving periods. Teagasc advise that the first step towards improving calving distribution is ensure heifers conceive early in the breeding season to generate large numbers of early-calving heifers¹².

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

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

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

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

It is estimated that every open day outside of the compact calving window costs the system €3.08/day/head³.

Heifers born in the first 21 days of the breeding season will come off grass heavier and hit puberty earlier meaning more efficient reproduction in the herd, a key driver of profitability. Age and weight at first breeding are closely correlated¹. Heifers that were heavier at the start of breeding had increased incidence of oestrus and higher pregnancy rates at the end of the season than lighter animals¹. In a 2013 study, it was reported that younger calving heifers achieved more days in milk over 5 years, with >44% of their days alive spent in milk production compared with only 18% - 40% in cows calving later⁴. Thus, good heifer fertility results in the best subsequent performance in future lactations.

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

A study from a leading US university demonstrated that cows receiving injectable trace mineral supplementation prior to mating had improved conception rates to fixed time AI and an improved calving distribution compared to those that did not receive supplementation⁵.

**Further information available from: Virbac Ltd. Unit 16 Woolpit Business Park, Windmill Avenue, Woolpit, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP30 9UP.
Tel: +44 (0) 1359 243243. Use medicines responsibly.**

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prescription which is valid for 5 days.

- ▶ 2nd February: From that date all old antibiotic prescriptions will no longer be valid.
- ▶ You will have to move towards Selective Dry Cow instead of blanket treatment – overall use of mastitis drugs must decrease.
- ▶ Certain High Priority antibiotics will no longer be available – your Vet will suggest alternatives.
- ▶ You will only be allowed to store small quantities of antibiotics on your farm.
- ▶ 1st June 2022: From then on you will require an antiparasitic prescription from Vet to control parasites in livestock.
- ▶ From this it is obvious that very, very good animal preventative care is and will be required from this year.

BITS AND PIECES FOR MARCH

- ▶ **Condition score** the whole herd now; cows that are a BCS of 2.75 or less should be put on OAD milking, but continue to feed well.
- ▶ Continue dry cow minerals to March, April, calves.
- ▶ Feed magnesium to milkers at grass if on low levels of meals. They need 2-3 oz/cow/day.
- ▶ If feeding cows' **milk to calves**, feed the morning's milk as the evening's milk is worth more to sell because it is higher in % fat and protein (worth 0.5-1.5 c/l),
 - ▶ Feed milk replacer (not cow's milk) to replacement heifer calves to prevent the spread of Johne's disease at 6 litres/day. With the price of milk this year we should feed all milk replacer.
 - ▶ **Let out** suck calves to grass in early March as they will thrive as good as indoor reared calves, have less disease and you will have less work

- ▶ Give them a fresh area of grass every 4-6 days
- ▶ Provide straw in a rack at all times
- ▶ Feed 1 kg meals/calf/day but protect against bird contamination (Coccidiosis)
- ▶ Before selling male calves, check their EBI – it may be very high and they could be valuable.
- ▶ **Contract Mate:** some farmers have very low EBI herds, being particularly low in genetics to get a good price for milk due to low % F & P genetics. I suggest:
 - ▶ That these farmers enter into a contract NOW with very good farmers (I have a list) and buy high quality genetic heifer calves from them in Feb next year.
 - ▶ They themselves could put all their cows in calf to AI Beef sires and make really good money for such calves.
 - ▶ What is now happening is that the very good guys are only now AI'ing with dairy for 3-4 weeks and then beef AI.
 - ▶ I have a number of farmers who have done it with good satisfaction.
- ▶ **Milk recording** is a must do now as there is much more you can do in terms of cow selection for mating or culling.
- ▶ **Farm roadways**, particularly damaged ones, must be resurfaced to prevent lameness – serious consequences to BCS and peak milk yield at this time of year.
- ▶ Start researching the AI bull catalogues/Active Bull list for the best and most suitable AI bulls for your farm and cows.
- ▶ We are in a time of big, big farming change and the following Chares Darwin quotation is apt:

“It is not the strongest or most intelligent which survive change; it is the one that is most adaptable to change.”



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McCormick's new X6.4 P6 Drive

The main highlight at McCormick is the new X6.4 P6 Drive Stage V range, designed and built for those looking to find versatility, performance and comfort in a single tractor; an ideal and irreplaceable companion for open-field and multi-utility operations, hay harvesting, and operations that require a loader.

Stage V compliant, thanks to the exhaust gas post-treatment system, the range features three models X6.413, X6.414 and X6.415, powered by 4.5-litre, 16-valve, 4-cylinder FPT NEF 45 engines with a maximum power output of 155hp. The powertrain and transmission layout allows for a wheelbase of 2,560 mm, providing great stability, and at the same time versatility and manoeuvrability.

The P6-Drive transmission with 6 Power Shift gears and 4 ranges offers 24 + 24 ratios, which rise to 40 + 40 when a creeper is fitted. Power output is enhanced by the 4-speed

PTO.

The front hitch can lift up to 2,500kg and the electronic rear lifting system up to 7,200kg.

The maximum rear wheel size is 650/60R38 and maximum allowed weight is as high as 9,500 kg.

The closed-centre hydraulic system features a 123 l/min pump capable of handling up to 7 spool valves.

Design, ergonomics, comfort and technology applied to improving working conditions are the other features that make X6.4 P6-Drive the ideal partner in the field and on your farm.

A distinctive feature of the McCormick High Visibility cab is its FOPS-homologated panoramic roof and the hatch for natural ventilation, which enhance the tractor's performance when using the M40 front loader for bales handling. Also worth mentioning are the LED headlights. Up to 14 headlights are available, 8 of which are



incorporated in the roof to provide excellent night vision.

The cab sports a mechanical suspension that, combined with the suspended front axle with independent arms further improves driving comfort.

The cab is designed with high quality automotive-derived materials. The same attention to design and functionality is found in the control instrumentation with its fully ergonomic design, a 12-inch touch screen monitor and all-in-one multifunction joystick.

Great emphasis was placed on adopting solutions that would make tractor maintenance easier. In this context, the new 90-degree opening bonnet and radiators arranged in a fan-shaped layout allow for easy, quick and safe service.

X6.4 P6-Drive features the PSM (Precision Steering Management) system to control and manage satellite guidance. This state-of-the-art technology integrates with the ISOBUS implement control system and the McCormick Fleet & Remote Diagnostic Management system, which significantly reduces operating costs while enhancing efficiency and profitability.



Times of change

As we move into better times regarding the threat of Covid and

with restrictions lifted, I am delighted see that the machinery shows are back in full swing once again with the AJS Spring Farm Machinery shows taking place and the recent announcement of the highly anticipated and welcome flagship show - the FTMTA Farm Machinery Show – which will make its welcome return this summer on the 13th and 14th of July 2022 in Punchestown. This is an outdoor show this time around, so get booking now for tickets and stands! Meanwhile, the National Ploughing Championships are gearing up for a return to the highly popular venue of Ratheniska, Co Laois. The general machinery market in Ireland is very positive with reports that the agricultural machinery finance market is up by 37 per cent application-wise so far this year... now this is stretched over all agricultural-based sectors.

On a European front, demand is strong for agricultural machinery with long lead-in times for machinery overall in Europe being the norm. The greatest challenges going forward is the shortage of the basic components and price increases, so the importer, distribution and dealers need to now understand, as well as farmers, that this is the new norm and to order in good time.

Elsewhere, times are changing for the worse, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfolds while we go to press. Ukrainians are fighting for their lives and for democracy. Whatever the outcome, the global economy will be directly affected. It is also important to note how valuable Ukraine is from an agricultural point of view: 9.3 per cent of the country's GDP was generated from agriculture in 2020, with 73 per cent of agricultural output from crop farming.

Everyone should hope for a swift resolve to this dire situation and pray for those directly affected.

Until next month, farm wisely and farm safely.

Noel Dunne

The new BorderTS boundary spreading system for AMAZONE ZA-TS and ZG-TS fertiliser spreaders

AMAZONE has developed the BorderTS deflector for the ZA-TS mounted spreader and the ZG-TS trailed spreader for even more precise fertilisation up to the field boundary when at those larger working widths. Unlike conventional deflectors, the BorderTS system is integrated into the software of the fertiliser spreader. The new deflector is used in conjunction with the disc-integrated AutoTS border spreading system and has a special baffle construction.

The advantage of AutoTS is very evident at larger working widths. A short spreading vane is activated in the disc-integrated border spreading system, so that the fertiliser is accelerated less and therefore is only applied across the required distance. AutoTS enables fertiliser to be spread much more effectively, right to the edge of the field, thereby achieving an

additional yield of up to 17 per cent in this area, compared to conventional border spreading systems. Both the border spreading systems work according to the principle of fertilising from the first tramline to the edge of the field. To achieve even higher yields at the edge of the field, the new BorderTS deflector can be used in conjunction with AutoTS. BorderTS spreads the fertiliser directly from the edge of the field to the crop. When doing so, the shutter nearest the field boundary is left closed. AMAZONE has specially developed the new BorderTS deflector for the TS spreading systems, so that, when used in combination with AutoTS, can achieve excellent results in lateral distribution right to the edge of the field, without applying fertiliser across the border. This enables increased yields of up to 27 per cent on the outer five metres of



the field boundary area, in comparison with conventional border spreading systems.

In addition to the use of the new BorderTS deflector on areas with row crops or a special tramline system, the deflector can be used extremely effectively for the first application in cereals. Here it is always crucial that the full amount of fertiliser is applied exactly at the field boundary without throwing fertiliser beyond it. The growth of plants that have been driven over in the field boundary area is not permanently impaired during that first application. At large working widths, the fertiliser must be accelerated considerably more, in order to achieve a good area of overlap with the spread fan of the first tramline.

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Tyre and Wheel Specialists

Kubota (UK) introduces M6-001 Utility series



Kubota (UK) Ltd has taken the covers off a cost-sensitive, five-model M6-001 Utility series tractor range. As the successor to the MGX models, the M6-001 Utility series spans 104-143hp, and meets EU Stage V emissions thanks to an improved exhaust after-treatment package that contributes to a lower cost of ownership.

Short wheelbase models include the M6-101U and M6-111U, and both use a 3.8-litre Kubota V3800 four-cylinder engine. Maximum power outputs are 104hp and 111hp, with maximum torque figures of 346Nm and 379Nm respectively. These two models weigh 4.3 tonnes and use a 2.54m wheelbase.

Long wheelbase M6-121U, M6-131U and M6-141U use Kubota's 6.1-litre V6108 four-cylinder engine. Power outputs are 123hp, 133hp and 143hp, with maximum torque figures of 503Nm, 544Nm and 586Nm respectively. These three larger models weigh 4.8 tonnes and use a

2.68m wheelbase.

Engine technology on all models has seen an improvement in exhaust after-treatment, with DOC and DPF performance increased to deliver greater operational flexibility and lower cost of ownership. DPF regeneration can now be achieved at a much lower engine speed – typically 1,200rpm down from 2,000rpm – and using a much lower working temperature of just 50 degrees C. The latter makes regeneration much easier to achieve with light engine loads, lower noise levels and a reduced fuel burn. The DPF cleaning interval for M6-001 Utility range is 8,000 hours for the 6.1 litre engine, and up to 6000 hours for the 3.8 litre engine, again contributing to lower operating costs. Engine oil change intervals are every 500 hours on all models. All M6-001 Utility models get a 40kph semi-powershift transmission, which uses eight powershifts in three mechanical ranges to provide a

24x24 gearbox. The option of a creeper range increases the choice of ratios to 32x32. Transmission functionality includes auto-shifting in each range, and a sensitivity dial – the latter allows operators to adjust the responsiveness of gear changes to suit load on the tractor. Operator comfort is provided by an air suspension seat in the same cab frame shared with M6-002 and M7003 models, while front axle suspension is available as an option. A wide sunroof offers generous visibility for those looking to equip the M6-001 Utility with a loader, of which there are two variants - 3.7m or 4m lift height to the pin, and maximum lift capacities of 1,950kg or 2,200kg respectively.

A fixed displacement open centre hydraulic system provides 71 and 77 litres/min of oil flow respectively for short- and long-wheelbase models, while two mechanically operated spool valves are fitted as standard. Two additional spools are optional. Cat III rear linkage includes electronic linkage control with a five-tonne lift capacity on short wheelbase models and 6.1 tonnes on long wheelbase tractors. PTO equipment comprises a two-speed 540/1000 as standard, with a 540 Eco available as an option. All models can be equipped with an optional front linkage with 2.6 tonnes lift capacity, an optional 1,000rpm front pto, and the capability to run pto-powered equipment while stationary.

M6-001 Utility models also benefit from Kubota's portal front axle with bevel gear drive, offering generous ground clearance and a 55-degree steering angle.

Kubota's M6-001 Utility series is priced from £53,300 (€63,735 ROI) for the 104hp M6-101U, with the M6-141U costing £75,200 (€89,925 ROI). A range of Kubota Care warranty packages are available, offering up to five years and 5,000 hours of cover.

Vaderstad launches the Spirit 600C InLine combination drill

Väderstad has launched the Spirit 600C InLine combination high capacity seed drill for the UK market, complimenting the Nordic and Fix fertiliser application systems already in the Spirit range. The InLine-version of Spirit places a low fertiliser rate together with the seed in the seed furrow, providing the plant quicker nutrient uptake and shortening the time of emergence. Separated airflow ensures fertiliser is distributed independently from the seed. The intensity of the airflow is easily adjusted, ensuring that both the seeds and fertiliser are placed with optimal precision. The InLine system is highly beneficial when working with moderate levels of fertilisers. The fertiliser is metered with the Fenix electric metering system, which is the same unit used for the seed metering. It is both highly precise and non-corrosive. Split cells in the rotor



and an angled exit from the metering unit, efficiently prevents any pulsing

and ensures that all plants have the exact same access to fertiliser.

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Back to harvest

As our March issue of the *Irish Farmers Monthly* is traditionally devoted to a Tillage Focus and reviews of all things tillage, I have decided to return for this month's 'Monthly Round-up' section to a story I picked up last harvest.

I was on the hunt for a combine that was not complicated, easy to use and fitting with my budget. I called William Goodwin of EV Condell, Portlaois for some advice and he said: "I have exactly what you are looking for", so we went to see the New Massey 7347 S ACTIVE, which he had just delivered two days' prior to Eamonn Fennin in Co Kildare. The 7347 S ACTIVE was a 6 walker machine; it came with a 20ft header, a multi-crop separation system, a 8600 litre tank and a 306hp SISU Agco powered 7.4 litre engine. We worked in a field at the back of the Clanard Court hotel, which is owned and run by Eamon's family. There we set into a crop of Bazooka: this is a hardy variety and had performed well in this field. On the day in question we were running at a temperature of 27 degrees, moisture at 15 per cent and running on average 4T per acre and at a speed of 3.8 km per hour, with an excellent straw behind. Harvesting conditions were perfect.



Eamonn Fennin and William Goodwin discuss the comfort and ease in the New Proline cab. According to Eamonn functions are easy to operate, the combine is fuel efficient and the back-up from the dealer is excellent: "it's what suits me perfectly. I don't need complications: ease of operation it is what it's about."



According to William, smaller machines allow for more easy to manage straw crops and of course better quality straw as they are not as heavy and will dry quicker, meaning that they can be baled faster.



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A fair playing field



Tom Murphy
Professional
Agricultural
Contractors of Ireland



At this time of the year I enjoy meeting up with contractors who are all geared up for a new season; inspecting new machinery and

with existing machinery fully serviced and ready to go. Their enthusiasm is remarkable, given the fact their business is more a leap of faith rather than one built on a traditional business plan. If an aspiring agricultural contractor went into his bank with business plan and spread sheet in hand he wouldn't get past the most junior bank official let alone get into the manager's office to put his case.

Contractors fall into two categories: full time not farming, and those who also farm or have a reasonable acreage that can be used as collateral. When we read the annual sales figures for farm machinery, it is this group that skew the statistics.

Over the decades that I have been involved with contractors it is apparent that contractor/farmers are able to acquire finance much more easily than those without land. We also know that in certain situations these contractors can also apply for the machinery grants that farmers can avail of. Being able to benefit from a grant means the contracting side of their business is effectively being subsidized by their

farming business, giving an unfair advantage against the full-time contractor. As we start the tillage season the bigger farmer/contractor can knock the bottom out of the price a full-time contractor needs to charge.

Registration for Agri Contractors

This anomaly can be fixed quite easily by requiring all agricultural contractors to be registered and allowing them equal access to grants; after all they are working the land in the same way as farmers. Registration could also be used to allow the purchase of Agricultural Diesel, with the added benefit of minimising unauthorised or criminal use. Farmers, the machinery trade, finance houses and contractors, all need each other to survive. One cannot survive without the other; however we need a levelling up of the playing field for contractors and a greater acceptance of their contribution to farming. We often refer to agricultural contractors services to the farming sector as vital, essential and other expressive words; however the simple fact of life is that without a professional and profitable contracting sector, farming on this island would collapse.

It is worth remembering that after a lifetime of dedication to supporting farmers, unless a contractor has family to take over his business there is no goodwill when he goes to sell up at retirement.

So, my message to all is: look after your agricultural contractor, don't quibble and try to get a discount on a fair price. That way you will help ensure continuity of service.

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Sands Range of agricultural crop sprayers

Sands Agricultural Machinery Ltd have been involved in the application of agrochemicals since the 1960s and have been designing and building self-propelled crop sprayers since 1975. This has given the company a wealth of knowledge and experience that enables them to produce high specification machines to satisfy the demands of today's farmers and growers. The latest Horizon range of self-propelled crop sprayers has been designed to offer maximum in-field performance with the highest level of operator comfort. Available in six model sizes, these technically advanced sprayers have been developed in

house by Sands and have incorporated numerous 'operator' led features. This has made the Horizon a true drivers' machine, with the impressive cab layout allowing for long days spraying without excessive fatigue. All the components used in manufacture have been carefully selected for quality, reliability and durability to ensure minimum downtime and maximum output.

The Horizon Range of sprayers all share the same panoramic category 4 filtered cab specifically designed for Sands and no-one else, the Range have two different trim levels which depending on what size of machine you chose, the 3000



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and 3500 have a more conservative feel armrest with mechanical switch gear, whereas the 4000 and above have an ergonomically designed armrest with 'soft' keys and functions. both trim levels have panoramic curved glass giving unhindered in key areas of operation with a wide opening full glass door. With the range from 3000 litre capacity tank sizes to 6000 litre tanks and booms up to 40 meters being able to spray at, (depending on section configurations) 12m, 24m then either 28m, 30m, 32m or 36m down to what your final boom size is. Sands VG boom uses the 12m fold point as the incline hinge point this means that with a boom of 36m there are three, 12m sections that can follow the contours of the ground more precisely. With the latest technology available Sands can fit any spray control system so we can meet the customer's exact needs. The main importers in Ireland for Sands Agricultural Machinery sprayers are Furlong Equipment Services, Stradbally, Co Laois.





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The versatile EUROPROFI COMBILINE rotor loader wagons from Pöttinger have guaranteed smooth operation, high output and convenience in forage harvesting for several decades. These multi-purpose loader wagons are available with or without unloading beaters. 35 knives ensure all models chop to a theoretical length of 39 mm. To meet the high demands in the field, the loader wagon professionals have upgraded the EUROPROFI with another

optimisation: The new front panel for even more operating convenience and flexibility.

Thanks to the optimised geometry of the front panel, the forage compression flap can now be better adjusted to the crop. The spring-loaded flap controls the automatic loading system. The sensor switches the scraper floor on and off, with a time delay if required. The 2,000 mm wide forage compression flap ensures perfect filling of the loading chamber,

right up to the edges. On the standard versions, two basic positions can be set manually. Infinitely variable hydraulic adjustment of the inclination is also available as an option. This also allows the flap to be fully retracted, so that the top section of the loading chamber can be opened when the loader wagon is deployed in harvest transport mode. Roof ropes, which are available as an option, can easily be removed.

For maximum conservation of the forage, an optional sensor is available to monitor the loading torque on the rotor. This is particularly important with wet, heavy crop, which makes it more difficult for the material package to reach the forage compression flap. In this situation, the automatic loading system and the scraper floor are controlled based on the torque of the loading rotor. This configuration enables the wagon to be filled while maintaining the best possible forage structure even in the most difficult conditions. The appropriate loading strategy can be selected from the driver's cab to match the current task.

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Our built agricultural heritage

The GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings Grants Scheme has been, without doubt, one of the more imaginative and progressive initiatives in terms of preserving and renewing the built heritage in farmyards across the country. Anna Meenan, Project Manager for the scheme, outlines its history

“The scheme was first launched in 2008. Over eight hundred building repairs and renewals all over the country have been supported through the scheme. That’s quite impressive. We don’t look at the scheme in terms of just the buildings themselves and their use for agricultural purposes, though that is important in its own right. In addition, most of those buildings are wildlife habitats. If you think about the discussions that are ongoing in terms of climate and biodiversity and helping to improve the environment, we feel we have helped farmers through a range of individually small actions to improve biodiversity and support the living environment on their farms for our wildlife across a range of species.”

Bat havens

The most obvious question is where would all the bats, owls and other birds be if it weren’t for those farm

outbuildings scattered across our landscape? Anna confirms the important role farm buildings play: “Birdwatch confirmed recently that they were worried about falling swallow numbers. One of their obvious habitats is under the eaves and in the rafters of farm buildings. So those buildings are essential to the wellbeing of those birds. The fewer farm outbuildings kept in good repair, the fewer nesting habitats that are available, it is as simple as that. Farmers often note that they have seen bats around their farmyards when they are out at night caring for livestock. They often do not know exactly where they are roosting or nesting. Often, it is when a survey has been undertaken that the habitats of these nocturnal and often shy creatures are identified. Bats are a good barometer of a healthy surrounding environment as they indicate a healthy balance involving farming, food sources and safe habitats for the bats.”

A diverse range of buildings

A study of previous projects supported under the Farm Buildings Restoration Scheme highlights the range of buildings and their diverse construction throughout Ireland, as Anna confirms: “One of the things I try to do, when I see photographs of individual buildings, is to consider where the building is situated geographically. The shape, construction, materials of the building will often give you that information. While the buildings are often humble, architecturally speaking, compared to the public or classical buildings we are familiar with, they often have unique features. Slated buildings, for instance, show



“Bats are a good barometer of a healthy surrounding environment as they indicate a healthy balance involving farming, food sources and safe habitats for the bats.”

Minister for Agriculture,
Food and the Marine
Charlie McConalogue
TD with Anne McFarland
of Dunmore Gardens,
Carrigans, Co Donegal

that there was a vibrant slate making industry in Ireland in previous times. Different slate shapes or composition can indicate a specific geographical location. Stonework is also a key indicator of provenance and the financial wherewithal of the original owners to use cut stone, quarried stone or rubble stone in the construction. Mortar type, the layout of the building and its original purpose can tell a lot about farming practices, financial wellbeing and location. There are specific styles and construction types that can be particular to a specific region of the country. At the same time that you look at an old farm building you are often looking at the agricultural heritage of the farm on which it located.”

Planning a restoration

Anna explains the various considerations when planning a restoration: “Access for protected wildlife is very important. The actual timing of the restoration is also important to take account of the nesting season for various bird species. That usually runs from May to late August depending on individual birds. Consideration of the works proposed will influence when the work should be undertaken. Some jobs will have minimal impact in terms of disturbance of habitat. Provision of access can be quite simple. If a farmer has a slated building, for instance, it is quite straightforward to include a bat-access slate, while at the same time protecting the inside of the roof from the weather, which is obviously of prime importance. Leaving a small gap at the eave can also provide an access point. It is not difficult to accommodate access for wildlife; it just needs to be considered and implemented in the most practical manner. There will be no extra cost, it won’t damage the building or compromise the restoration project by allowing moisture or rainfall to get in.”

The process

There are, naturally, criteria for involvement in the scheme, which is closed for application until early 2023, Anna explains: “The farmer has to be a GLAS participant. While the scheme is administered by the Heritage Council, it is funded by the Department of Agriculture. The intended project must be a farm outbuilding, or at least now used as a farm outbuilding and that must be its future intended use. It is important that applicants think about the types of repair that are needed to preserve the building and facilitate its continued use as a farm building. Our focus is on repair, retaining as much of the original material as possible, and/or, replacing where necessary with similar material. The durability of many original materials is really impressive on many farm outbuildings. In the event that an application is successful, then the input of a conservation specialist with an understanding of what is involved in making viable and lasting repairs in keeping with the original structure is needed. However, that’s not required in the initial application.” Applications closed last month for this year’s projects. It is anticipated the scheme will be active again in 2023.

Vehicle Safety needs to be a priority



Ciaran Roche, FBD Risk Manager, on the importance of vehicle safety



Regrettably, 208 work-related fatalities occurred in Agriculture during the period 2011 -2020. This represents 42 per cent of all workplace fatalities according to the Health and Safety Authority's "Review of Work-Related Deaths in Agriculture in Ireland 2011-2020". 93 (45 per cent) of these fatal accidents involved vehicles. Of the 93 fatal accidents 55 per cent involved

tractors, 14 per cent involved loaders/telehandlers and 14 per cent quads, with this in mind it is essential that they are maintained in good condition and only operated in a safe manner by competent persons. Farmer operators rely heavily on tractors and other vehicles (including quads) to get their work done quickly and effectively. Not only are tractors and vehicles essential on the farm, they can help save time and increase productivity, but they are also very hazardous if not operated in a safe manner, and tragically the evidence of this is all too clear. 29 per cent of fatal vehicle accidents involved a crash and 25 per cent involved a parked vehicle rolling and striking the victim. Vehicle accidents are caused mainly by:

- The operator (e.g. human error, inexperienced operators, rushing & speed, fatigue, lack of concentration / distraction (mobile phone));
- Unsafe environmental conditions (e.g. steep gradient, poor weather, poor driver vision);
- Unsafe Vehicles (e.g. poor mechanical condition of vehicle including the braking system);
- Unsafe Systems of Work (e.g. failure to follow safety procedures or ignoring a warning).

Key Steps to Safe Tractor Operation

Always maintain tractors in good condition, in particular the brakes, lights, mirrors and wipers. Special attention must be given to ensure that all brakes are serviced on tractors as there have been a significant number of fatalities due to brakes not working effectively. Ensure that all controls are in maintained in good working order and clearly marked.

Make sure all moving parts such as the PTO shaft are guarded properly. Ensure that a cab or safety frame is fitted. Only allow competent experienced people to operate tractors. Avoid rushing and always be vigilant. Always park the tractor safely and remove the keys.

Quad Bike Safety

The underlying causes of quad bike accidents are usually one or more of the following: lack of training and experience, excessive speed, carrying a passenger or an unbalanced load and turning over on a slope or due to hitting a rock, rut or bump. The most important safety issues with quads are training, experience, wearing personal protective equipment, maintenance and a good knowledge of the terrain. Head protection is essential as a significant percentage of serious injuries with quads involve head injuries. On Wednesday 24th November 2021, the Minister for Business, Employment and Retail, Damien English TD, signed the statutory instrument which will see the introduction of mandatory training and wearing of appropriate protective equipment (PPE) for users of all all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) when using such vehicles for work purposes. These regulations will come into operation on 20th November 2023.

Child Safety

Tractors and vehicles account for most of child fatal accidents on the farm and therefore children must not be allowed access to the areas where tractors and vehicles are in operation. They must be supervised at all times when on the farm. As per the "Code of Practice on Preventing Accidents to Children and Young Persons in Agriculture", children under the age of 7 must not be allowed to ride on a tractor and children over the age of 7 may only ride on a tractor provided the tractor is fitted with a properly designed and fitted passenger seat (with seat belts) inside a safety cab or frame.

Remember: Always maintain tractors and vehicles in good condition and only allow competent persons to operate them. It could be the difference between life and death.

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The Green Consultants Gravy Train – “All Aboard!”

Farmer reaction to the new Agri-Environment Climate Measure (AECM) is bound to fall very quickly on the ‘project teams’ that will be assigned to the various locations around the country earmarked for the scheme. It is perfectly obvious that what we have here is yet another layer of consultants all of whom will draw down hefty fees from funding that could – and should – be reserved for active farmers and addressing the environmental objectives of those farmers. The structure proposed has smoothly inserted another level into the established ‘State - Consultant-Farmer’ structural model that was already siphoning off huge sums from funds intended for farmers. It is an extraordinary fact that as overall direct supports to active commercial farmers decrease, that the potential for fat fees for consultants seem to multiply.

Wouldn't it be very interesting if the Minister could spell out the estimated budget for consultant fees associated with all schemes in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan? We won't be holding our breath on that one, but we can safely assume that the consultants' fees look set to skyrocket compared to the previous periods and all at the expense of family farms who continue to see their payments undermined and cut.

An even more interesting question is who these ‘consultants’ will turn out to be? Who exactly is going to comprise these ‘project teams’? I can almost guarantee that they will be drawn to a significant extent from the most vociferous elements of the environmental movement and that all will have varying degrees of connection to groups that are already on the record as being critical of commercial farming. So, I believe what we have here is funding intended for farmers now being used to fund a newly-added layer of consultants who might take it upon themselves to undermine commercial farming. What exactly are these teams bringing to the work that wasn't to be found in the Department of the Environment, Parks and Wildlife, EPA or the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine? To be honest, from ICMSA's view, this looks uncomfortably like a green gravy train for supporters and friends.

Nor is this the only curious aspect of AECM: it is a fact that the scheme is openly targeted at those areas that have already done very well out of convergence. Is it fair that possibly up to 50 per cent of the budget will go to a small proportion of the country and that landowners – rather than farmers – will qualify for payments? Why are these landowners getting a maximum payment of €10,000 while farmers in other



Pat McCormack
President, ICMSA

areas – even in the unlikely event that they can qualify for the scheme – only qualify for a maximum of €7,000, with a limit of 30,000 participants for the rest of the country? The Government is talking out of both sides of its mouth on environmental matters; speaking about the challenges but not prepared to put the necessary funding in place to address these challenges. There are environmental objectives to be met right across the country and there should be equal treatment in relation to access to these schemes. Levels

of administration should be kept to a minimum rather than adding another layer of highly questionable effectiveness – and one, moreover, that will be paid out of funds that should rightly be reserved for farmers.

The diversion of funding away from commercial to either ‘hobby’ farming or people who just own land and don't farm at all is now well under way. We can expect to see a sudden interest in acquiring land in these areas and that doesn't seem to bother those with responsibility for oversight. ICMSA has warned repeatedly that we are moving away from supporting food production to, effectively, land stewardship. We have listened very closely to people on the environmental challenges and we've put forward constructive proposals in relation to this. What we seem to have ended up with, however, is a scheme to reward the consultant professionals and owners of land rather than farmers. That's not isolated either; there's a clear trend in this regard across a number of schemes. This AECM plan marks a big step in that very risky direction. A very significant win for logic and coherence was registered in the Supreme Court decision on the Belview plant. It remains to be seen whether this represents the end of what has been a protracted and arduous process by Glanbia, but it certainly should. Events of recent days have thrown into very stark relief some rather smug assumptions about the future of both energy supply and food security.

Many of us – and certainly in ICMSA – have been making these points for a very long time. The sound of tanks rolling seems to have concentrated minds and I think, I hope, that we can have a more realistic and, almost literally, grounded debate about where we are now and where we need to get to. That debate must proceed from and on the basis of reality and not aspiration. It must start from where we are now – not where we'd like to be. And it must start with the acceptance that in any conflict between reality and fantasy – whether of the political or environmental variety – that reality will always win.

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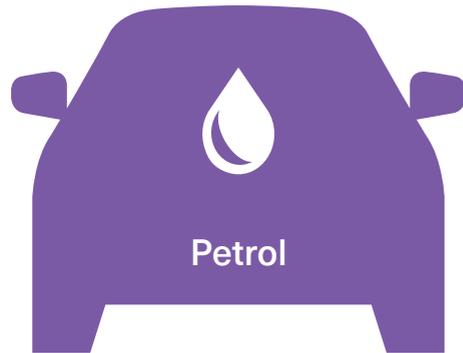
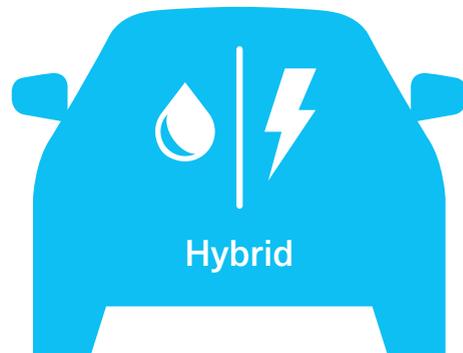
Farmers carry the cost of Belview delay

So many Glanbia milk producers are disappointed and angry at the entire An Taisce objection process over the planned construction of a continental-style cheese making facility at Belview in South Kilkenny. The entire exercise by An Taisce caused undue delay, additional cost and reputational damage to the whole economy not just to Glanbia coop and its farmer members, and to what end? The question to be asked at this stage is which part of the word 'NO' do An Taisce's representatives not understand? They were told they had no case in their initial objection to An Bord Pleanála. They were told the same in very strong terms by Justice Humphries when An Taisce appealed to the High Court. Finally, they had to be told the same again by a unanimous decision of the Supreme Court. Yet, it is not even certain now that An Taisce fully accept or realise that they had no basis for their objections to the cheese factory.

Meanwhile the cost to Glanbia Coop and its family farms has been huge. The two-and-a-half-year delay means that the cost of construction has gone up substantially because of building cost inflation. What was €240m could now be closer to €300m. There is the cost of sales foregone this year, next year and probably in 2024 also. There is the reputational damage to Glanbia because they entered into contracts to sell product that they could not produce because of the planning delays. There is the loss of income for milk producers who are constrained in their milk production for at least the next two years and who had anticipated supplying milk for premium continental cheeses, which deliver a higher return than cheddar. That's money out of the family farm incomes of thousands of Glanbia milk suppliers for several years.

There are the legal costs to Glanbia from being involved in these court cases. People think because Glanbia is a large company it can well afford it. The reality is that Glanbia is a Cooperative owned by its farmer members. If cost is added, then profit is reduced and farmer suppliers are paid less for their produce. The legal costs were apportioned to each group represented in the courts. The Attorney General is paying his own costs, effectively the taxpayer is paying. An Bord Pleanála is to pay its own costs. Again, the taxpayers are hung out to dry to pay the costs for a governmental agency. An Taisce has to pay its own costs, except that, in reality, the taxpayer will bear that cost because An Taisce receives most of its finances from the government. Glanbia has to pay its own costs. That means that the money comes out of the incomes of its members and off the price they get paid for their produce. Let's talk about the self-proclaimed protectors of the environmentalist who constantly preach at, chastise and criticise farmers for their perceived shortcomings in relation to environmental protection.

What do these so-called environmentalists actually do in practical terms to improve the environment? In the past twelve months alone, Glanbia farmers planted 100,000 native trees and hedging. Those initiatives are replicated in every townland across the country. How many trees does An Taisce plant? Irish farmers invested €83 million in LESS equipment since 2015. Investments in breeding, manure storage and other sustainability-building initiatives are a multiple of that figure. That's real environmental commitment, not hot air. There has been more than enough condescending criticism of farmers.



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NETWORKS



ARE YOU SURE IT'S SAFE?

Always ask yourself the question, are you sure it's safe?

When working on the farm, remember to always look up and look out for overhead electricity wires.

Plan ahead when moving high loads or operating farm machinery and stay clear of electricity poles, stays and overhead wires.

Always stay safe and stay clear of electricity wires.

For emergencies call:

1800 372 999

Supply interruption updates:

powercheck.ie

Follow us on twitter:

@ESBNetworks

For more information:

esbnetworks.ie

Serving all electricity customers