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IRISH

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# FARMERS

## MONTHLY



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## CALM AFTER THE STORM

What happens in British politics, even now that Britain is no longer a member of the European Union, is of critical importance to Ireland. This importance stretches across our political, economic, financial and social wellbeing. With millions of Irish and people of Irish heritage living and working in Britain the societal impact of a potential sundering of relationships between the two islands would not be a welcome development. The arguments over the Northern Ireland Protocol, which delivers unique dual trading advantages to people living north of the border, will, hopefully, be resolved before the end of the year. Likewise, the political turmoil that saw huge currency fluctuations with Sterling losing value against the Euro, was not advantageous to our exporters. This has particular significance for our food-related exports to the UK. Even with significant export diversification away from the British market, we are, and will remain, heavily dependent on exports across the Irish Sea. Above all, we need stability in British politics and in the British economy. Business does not thrive in an uncertain environment and the weeks coming up to the appointment of Rishi Sunak as Prime Minister were the very definition of uncertainty.

There will be enough challenges for the Irish economy from Brexit in the time ahead. Up to now, the impact of Britain's secession from the EU has not been felt to the extent predicted. It is likely, however, that the predictions in relation to a lowering in value and volume of Irish dairy and meat exports to the UK have only been postponed, not cancelled. Britain is not finding it as easy as Brexit proponents suggested, to conclude wide-ranging and advantageous trade agreements with third countries, but they are moving ahead. The fact that some of the deals being explored are only replacements

for market access and trade that would have already been available to Britain had it remained in the Union is beside the point. In the coming years we are likely to see more food imports to Britain from Australia and New Zealand, which will impact directly on Irish exports.

While the US is holding firm against engaging in a trade agreement with the UK unless and until there is evidence that the Northern Ireland Protocol is being fully honoured, there is every likelihood that the long-standing relationship between the two countries will result in a trade agreement at some stage over the next few years. That too, may have implications for the Irish economy.

International uncertainty does not end with the return of some stability in British politics. The storm still rages in the form of war in Ukraine. There is, as yet, no sign of calm returning to the EU's eastern front. On the contrary, the situation could deteriorate further in the weeks ahead. Meanwhile, as Ireland does its bit to support Ukraine through backing all EU sanctions on Russia and maintaining an open-door policy for refugees fleeing the war, the strains imposed on our economy will worsen over the Winter. Agriculture is taking its share of the pain with energy and fertiliser costs, in particular, impacting on our ability to produce food. As housing, healthcare, interest rates and energy costs continue to lower living standards, our political system may come under greater pressure. Stability or the lack of it is not only an issue for our neighbours. Societal unease during the gloomy winter months ahead must be managed and massaged. The September Budget has already shown that the cost will be high. It is a necessary, hopefully short-term, cost to manage our way through a difficult period.

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## O'REILLY LEAVES RTÉ AND JOINS ICOS

Last month Damien O' Reilly announced his departure from RTÉ. Damien, who started his career on Shannonside radio, joined RTÉ 24 years ago. A veteran broadcaster, he has anchored Countrywide for the past 13 years. Only recently, Damien won yet another broadcasting award for his show. His appointment to an ICOS Brussels role is a coup for TJ Flanagan and ICOS. Damien has built up an enviable contact list during his years with RTÉ as well as from his various roles in international agri-journalism. He represents Ireland on two journalist organisations, the International Federation of Agricultural journalists, and the ENAJ. During the last 25 years he has built an extensive network of contacts across the media



and political landscapes. He will be a real asset to ICOS and will certainly build on the success achieved by the Coop-representative organisation over the past 40 years since opening an office in Brussels. It is coincidental that Ireland will celebrate 50 years membership of the EU next January. With the many changes and challenges coming down the line including Brexit, climate change and the war in Ukraine, the enduring reality is that agriculture and farmers have a critical role to play in safeguarding food production and mitigating climate change. Damien will be at the centre of informing on, highlighting and influencing the decisions being made in Brussels in the coming years. We wish him well.

## PLOUGHING TO RETURN TO RATHENISKA SITE

Europe's largest outdoor event, The National Ploughing Championships, is set to return to Ratheniska, Co Laois from September 19th to 21st given the triumph of this year's event. The total attendance figures for the 2022 'Ploughing' came to an amazing 277,000 visitors and with over 1,700 exhibitors it was an incredible success.

The widely popular site was confirmed as the ideal location for next year's event at the National Ploughing Championships prize-giving ceremony attended by over 500 in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise. Speaking after the announcement the NPA Managing Director Anna May McHugh said: "We are delighted to be staging the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, Co Laois, again next year. Feedback from landowners, the local community and the wider public has been very positive and all were very enthusiastic to see a return."



"Speaking also with many of the exhibitors and visitors over the 3 days throughout the event, all were very vocal about their wishes to have it staged again in Ratheniska given how well it worked as a location this year. The site has proved popular for several reasons including its central location and surrounding road and rail network. By and large most people travelled to the site with ease and the minimum of traffic delays. This has certainly helped the event in

being such a success this year and we look forward to 2023." Anna May McHugh also congratulated all of the winners who were awarded at the recent prize-giving ceremony. Supreme World Ploughing Conventional Champion Eamonn Tracey from Carlow will again represent Ireland in next year's World Ploughing Contest in Latvia. And Supreme World Ploughing Champion John Whelan from Wexford will take part in the Reversible Class.

# Advantage

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## BIOMETHANE'S TIME HAS COME, HOPEFULLY

Earlier this year the Government increased its 2030 target for indigenous biomethane production to 5.7 terawatt hours. This will require 150 to 200 large scale agricultural Anaerobic Digestion plants to be developed within eight years to supply around 10 per cent of Ireland's total gas demand.

They say timing is everything in business and the RGFI (Renewable Gas Forum of Ireland) Ireland Biomethane Conference and Knowledge Sharing event this month is well worth attending. The RGFI was established in 2014, with the purpose of developing suitable market conditions to enable the growth of a sustainable, indigenous biomethane industry in Ireland.

The conference at Clontarf Castle brings delegates and speakers from across agriculture and food, transport, relevant government agencies and key industry stakeholders together. It is a timely platform to progress the development of a biomethane sector and the associated bioeconomy opportunities which will present strategic opportunities for Ireland. The time has come to grasp the opportunity to develop an indigenous renewable source of gas energy. With no further exploration for fossilised energy likely, at least as long as the Green Party is in Government, the next most practical approach to ensure a sustainable supply of gas is to produce our own. The beauty of this, whatever about the cost, is that biomethane is the gift that keeps on



giving. Once fossil gas is burned it is gone, apart from its negative impact on the climate. With biomethane, there is the prospect of an endless stream of energy. All it needs is continuous replenishment of a feed source, including grass, manure and food waste. The end products include gas and organic fertiliser. What is not to like about the concept, apart from the high initial development costs. If the economics work elsewhere, they can work here in Ireland.

## DAIRY VISION GROUP AGREE TO DISAGREE



**The final report of the Food Vision Dairy Group was delivered to Minister McConalogue last month.** After much delay because of ongoing disagreement among the Group participants, chairman Gerry Boyle signed off on the report, which, it has to be said, does not have the full backing of the entire Dairy Food Vision Group. The former Teagasc Director did indicate when he spoke at a Dublin Castle conference a week earlier that unanimous agreement on future strategies for the dairy sector was proving hard to achieve. That Dublin Castle event, organised by the Department of Agriculture, heard

some speakers express satisfaction with progress towards a lower emission dairy sector while others were dis-satisfied with progress in relation to the achievement of climate mitigation targets and the failure to improve our water quality. The EPA was particularly scathing at the lack of progress over the past six years, producing figures showing that agricultural activities, especially in the intensive dairy areas, were responsible for a considerable portion of the ongoing decline in water quality. Even allowing for the fact that we still have higher quality water status than much of Europe, there is clearly a challenge for the

Irish dairy sector in the years ahead. Issues around that challenge were central to the lack of unanimity for some of the measures proposed in the Dairy Vision Group report. When Minister McConalogue established the Food Vision Dairy Group last January, he gave as a key objective, the development of measures to mitigate emissions while also charting an overall direction for the sector up to 2030. The report does contain proposals on mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and some of these have proven contentious. It sets out 19 recommendations in total, including details on a potential exit scheme to reduce the numbers of breeding ruminants. The IFA has issues with any move towards a 'cap and trade' scheme which it says would amount to a quota under another name. ICMSA and ICOS have also expressed reservations around several proposed measures and Macra expressed alarm at the prospect of barriers being placed in front of a younger generation of potential milk producers. This was the subject of much debate at the organisation's annual Rally in Tipperary last month.



## STUCK IN THE MUD

The ongoing saga over the now-defunct Derrybrien wind farm development in Galway shows no signs of being resolved. With EU fines continuing to be imposed or threatened because of the Irish Government's perceived failure to fully carry out its environmental responsibilities, this is a costly failure both in purely financial terms and in the loss of a significant wind energy source. The 60-megawatt wind farm in Co Galway, which was taken offline by the ESB in March, has been the subject of controversy since a peat landslide occurred during its construction 19 years ago. The State has been continuously fined by the Commission since 2019 over its failure to conduct a proper environmental assessment when planning permission was first sought for the development. Following a ruling by An Bord Pleanála earlier this year denying the development retrospective planning permission, the wind farm was taken offline and the State requested the case be closed. In its ruling, the board said the residual environmental impact from the landslide was permanent and could not be mitigated.

The EU Commission still wants an environmental assessment carried out, so there is stalemate. What is clear is that significant damage was done to the environment and to individual farms caught in the mudslide. What is also clear is that decommissioning the development could cause more harm than good. The landscape is now stable and no good would be served by digging up the infrastructure including hundreds of tonnes of concrete base material. In fact, such action could again destabilise the ground causing another major landslide. An unlikely compromise would be to recompense, as promised, the farms affected and re-commission the wind farm. Would it not be better to salvage something positive in terms of powering 40,000 homes, from what is an unmitigated debacle?



## Dry Cow Management

Maeve Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition,  
Agritech

### A Trouble-Free Spring Starts Now

Prevention of metabolic issues next spring will hinge around management decisions that will be made over the next number of weeks. When costs associated with clinical cases are assessed alongside the time and labour involved in such cases, prevention is always better than cure.

### Body Condition Score (BCS)

It is best practice to dry off cows at or close to the same condition they should calve down in (target BCS 3.0-3.25). The dry cow diet should maintain condition over the 60-day period. Thin cows should be dried off early to allow for recuperation of condition. Cows should be condition scored prior to drying off to make a tailored plan for the herd, which may include grouping cows according to BCS where there is large variation in the herd.

Dry cow nutrition will centre around the quality of silage available. High quality silage will need to be diluted with straw to avoid over-conditioning. Where quality is very low, some level of energy supplementation will be required.

### Dry Cow Mineral Provision

Feeding a dry cow mineral throughout the dry period is essential to build up mineral reserves and allow the cow to calve down without issues. Most Irish silage lacks the required mineral levels to get the cow through the dry period, leading to the provision of a high-quality mineral supplement to avoid metabolic disease risks.

High Potassium (K) levels in Irish silage is a running trend, which will require dilution of K levels in the diet and/or a high level of soluble magnesium to help overcome the risk of milk fever. Clinical cases of milk fever typically cost a farm approximately €312/case, with sub-clinical cases estimated to cost >€100. A cow that suffers from clinical/sub-clinical milk fever is 3 times more likely to retain her placenta post-calving, 4.5 times more likely to suffer from a displaced abomasum and 8 times more susceptible to ketosis and mastitis.

**For more advice on dry cow minerals and silage analysis, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit [www.agritech.ie](http://www.agritech.ie).**



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# InTouch

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

**CATHAL BOHANE,**  
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

Your final grazing will now become weather-dependent, and the importance of building and leaving covers for next year's demands should be the focus on many farms. On average, the grazing year has been good, but we continue to experience occasional extreme weather, which causes issues. Every farm moving forward must prepare for these in the future. With higher stocking rates, we need to calculate the animals' feed demands if grass did not grow for 4-6 weeks. Gone are the days when a few spare round bales sufficiently filled this gap, and with the higher stocking rates, these bales are getting harder to source. Major feed deficits are now a regular occurrence rather than a 1-in-10-year event, and we need to have the insurance in place to deal with these situations.

November's arrival also sees the housing of many beef animals and replacements. While grazing grass still looks fantastic, the quality to sustain growth in animals and the underfoot conditions are absent. Every extra day a beef animal is on-farm, or every kilogram of lost gain on a replacement heifer is a financial loss to the business. The decision to house should be based on performance.

What are your targets for your heifers? This should be determined by their current and target weights. Housing animals on November 15 means they will be 120 days housed on March 15. Going to grass on this date will achieve little gain by the beginning of April but have the potential to build up 20-30 kg for the month of April before being put in calf. This would mean that if the target weight at bulling is 350 kg, then they need to be 325 kg minimum by the middle of March. Once we know their current weights, we will have targets to aim for. Based on 65 DMD silage, you would look at 3 kg of concentrate for 0.75 kg liveweight gain and 2 kg for 0.5 kg gain.

A basic nutrition principle for these weanlings is that energy will grow them out, and protein will grow them up. If we want to build frame on these animals, then knowing the protein of your silage is the first step, and with the majority being about 12%, this will require a 19-20% protein ration to balance the diet. Lower protein supplements will result in small and fat heifers going to grass.

In 4-5 years, these heifers will be your herd of cows, so giving them the attention they need now is essential.



Left to right: Herman Vos (MSD Animal Health), Henrik de Pater (Veterinarian), Prevention for Profit competition winners, Joe Hughes and father Joe, Rachel Donovan (Irish Farmers Journal), Gerrit De Groot (farmer), Jack O'Connor (MSD Animal Health)

## PREVENTION FOR PROFIT COMPETITION WINNERS TOUR THE NETHERLANDS

**On the back of MSD Animal Health's recent Prevention for Profit competition - which this year aimed to showcase the management of Irish dairy calves by identifying farmers that implement best practice with regard to calf rearing - a study tour to The Netherlands with this year's winners was organised.**

The Prevention for Profit competition is in its third-year running and is aimed at progressive farmers that are maximising their on-farm profitability by focusing on the four key pillars of production. These pillars are nutrition, genetics, management, and animal health, together giving an indication of the farm's performance and profitability.

Father-and-son duo, Joe and Joseph Hughes from Carnew, Co Wicklow, were worthy winners of this year's competition and thus earned the trip to see a variety of Dutch dairy farms. On the trip, they visited a range of dairy farms. The farms typically consisted of cows that were producing on average of 10,000L to 12,000L of milk per cow per year equating to an average milk solid production of 650kg to 850kg of milk solids per cow per year. Also being fed an average of 1.8-2.4t concentrates per cow per year and using animal health programmes to reduce BVD and IBR diseases. There was a high level of automation and wearable technology on farms with a lot of SenseHub systems for heat and health detection. The pair also got the opportunity to visit the Lely headquarters where they received a tour of the assembly line and a presentation detailing the history of the company.

Like Ireland, earlier this year the Dutch government announced the emission reduction target for the agricultural sector. This included a reduction of nitrogen usage of 50 per cent by 2030. This will undoubtedly force some farms to cease production under current practices. The government are currently working on a road map on how this could be achieved.



## BORD BIA INVESTS ONE MILLION EURO IN BEEF PROMOTIONS

**Bord Bia has announced a €1,000,000 investment in beef marketing across key UK and EU markets this autumn. Bord Bia's autumn promotional activities this year will specifically spotlight Irish quality assured steak in the UK, Germany, Italy and Belgium; with stewing cuts being the hero product in the Netherlands.**

Additional funding has been allocated to the campaign to deliver a suite of both trade and consumer advertising. Highlights include 110 prominent billboard advertisements across cities in the North-Rhine Westphalia region of Germany; 315 digital billboards near major retail parks in Belgium, and in Italy in addition to 185 billboards, 127 trams and buses across Milan, Rome and Bologna will feature quality assured Irish steak advertisements throughout October and November. In the UK, Bord Bia is promoting Irish steaks with key retail partners, including an organic Irish beef promotion with a leading online retailer. Announcing the investment at the recent SIAL Paris trade show for the food sector, Bord Bia Interim CEO Michael Murphy said: "Bord Bia is investing almost one million euro in beef promotions across Europe and the UK this autumn in a concerted effort to meet the rising challenges of the marketplace and the cost of living crisis, which will impact consumer spending. During the summer, Bord Bia made the decision to enhance its regular autumn promotions in Europe to coincide with the peak in cattle slaughter in Ireland. We are conscious of the challenges faced by farmers and we believe this suite of promotional activities across key European countries and the UK will enhance sales of Irish beef steaks across markets." Irish meat and dairy exporters were back in force at the world's largest food trade fair, SIAL in Paris, the first year the event has taken place since autumn 2018 due to Covid-19. SIAL attracts over 7,000 exhibitors and 300,000 visitors, including key food and drink buyers from over 200 countries.

Minister of State for Research and Development, Farm Safety and New Market Development at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon T.D. and Bord Bia Interim CEO, Michael Murphy led the attendance of the 14 Origin Green verified members that exhibited at SIAL under the banner "Ireland – Origin Green" at two pavilions in the meat and dairy halls, spotlighting their independently verified sustainability credentials. Ahead of the trade fair, Minister Heydon said: "Flagship events such as SIAL are fundamental to the Irish food and drink industry's drive to reconnect in-person with key customers and to partner with them to build sustainable value chains to meet the ambitions of Food Vision 2030, Ireland's strategy for the agri-food sector. Structured engagements such as SIAL offer a real opportunity to communicate the premium quality of Ireland's

food and drink offering, to the benefit of all those along the value chain, with farming families at the centre of this." Bord Bia Interim CEO Michael Murphy noted that trade shows like SIAL are essential for Irish companies looking to expand within Europe and further afield, and to connect with both existing and new customers.

"The biggest challenge faced by companies is negotiating price increases with existing customers in the current inflationary context," he said. "Security of supply and long-term partnerships have never been more important. With Origin Green, Ireland is uniquely positioned to supply sustainably produced food and drink to these international customers who all have ambitious sustainability targets and demands on their Irish suppliers."

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## LATEST RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF FORESTRY TO CLIMATE CRISIS

**Research carried out on behalf of Coillte by RED C into public attitudes to Coillte's new forestry strategic vision shows that there is an almost universal view among the general public that Irish forests are important in helping to address the climate crisis.** In April this year, Coillte, the semi-state forestry company, announced a new forestry strategic vision which aims to deliver multiple benefits from its forests and bring more focus to climate action, setting ambitious new targets on biodiversity and recreation, while continuing to deliver for the forest and wood products industry. The new approach aims to sustainably balance and deliver the multiple benefits from Ireland's state forests across four strategic pillars: climate, wood, nature, and people. RED C has independently analysed feedback from both Coillte's public attitude survey and Coillte's public consultation process, completed during summer 2022, which was part of Coillte's commitment to consult widely with key stakeholders on its new strategic vision. In response to the RED C survey, conducted among a nationally representative sample of adults in June 2022, combined with the response to Coillte's public consultation process, there is an almost universal view that Irish forests are important in helping to address the climate crisis. There is a strong degree of support for planting more trees and increasing forest cover with 4 in 5 Irish adults in the RED C survey agreeing with this, while support is even higher in the public consultation. In terms of climate mitigation, there is overwhelming support for planting trees such as broadleaves that provide a long-term store of carbon. There is also strong

support for conifers among the general public, with 75 per cent of respondents agreeing that planting conifers that grow quickly and capture carbon at a high rate, is important for climate mitigation. Opinions on conifers are more polarized among respondents to the public consultation. While 45 per cent of those who responded to the public consultation believe Coillte's ambition to create 100,000 hectares of new forests by 2050 doesn't go far enough, 44 per cent of the general public believe this ambition is just about right. The majority agree with Coillte's ambition to redesign (rewetting or rewilding) peatland forests where they present a significant carbon emission risk. An overwhelming majority believe that Irish forests are important for nature and biodiversity. Similarly, there is almost unanimous agreement that Coillte has a role to play in addressing the biodiversity crisis. However, there is relatively low awareness that approximately 20 per cent of Coillte's estate is already managed primarily for biodiversity, especially in the public attitude survey. There was a divergence of views on Coillte's ambition to ensure that half of the 100,000 hectares of new forests will be native woodlands, with the majority of respondents to the public consultation agreeing that this was too little, while 51 per cent of adults from the general public agreed this ambition was just about right. A majority of Irish people believe that Irish forests are important in supporting the construction of sustainable homes. There were high levels of support evident that more timber frame houses should be built in

Ireland rather than using concrete or steel with 64 per cent of respondents from the public attitude survey, and an even higher level of 84 per cent of respondents from the public consultation, in agreement. There was also a high level of endorsement with almost unanimous agreement (at least 4 in every 5) for Ireland to be self-sufficient for its timber requirements, that wood should come from independently certified forests and that Coillte should innovate and promote wood products to support the bioeconomy and decarbonise our built environment. Imelda Hurley, Chief Executive, Coillte, said: "We are very encouraged by the feedback from the Irish public, from both the RED C public attitude survey we commissioned and the public consultation process, which is overall very positive regarding our new forestry strategic vision and endorses our view that we are moving in the right direction. We developed our new vision based on our belief in Coillte's ability to contribute positively to the climate crisis. We have always managed our forest estate as sustainably and effectively as possible, and now we are keen to further enhance our contribution, with clear ambitions for afforestation, biodiversity, and developing more great spaces for people to enjoy. Equally, it is very important that we maintain our focus on delivering sustainable wood products and that Coillte remains financially strong, in order to effectively deliver our new vision." Feedback from Coillte's public attitude survey, public consultation and ongoing stakeholder engagement will be considered as part of the development of Coillte's strategic vision.

## KERRY GROUP REPORT SHOWS STRONG BUSINESS GROWTH

Kerry Group has announced its Q3 year-to-date overview, with a positive performance evident. Edmond Scanlon, Chief Executive Officer comments: "We achieved excellent growth across the period through a combination of strong business volumes and pricing, as we continue to manage through this unprecedented inflationary pricing environment in collaboration with our customers. Our volume growth was broad based across our regions, channels and markets, led by excellent performances in Snacks, Beverage, Meat and Bakery in particular.

We also made good strategic progress with further footprint expansion and strategic acquisitions. While we recognise the current level of uncertainty in the marketplace, we feel very well positioned as we continue to support our customers in addressing the various market challenges and opportunities. Given we have now reported the third quarter, we are updating our full year earnings guidance to 6 per cent to 8 per cent growth on a constant currency basis."

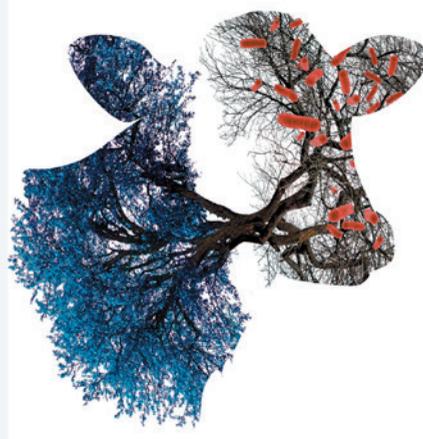
Group reported revenue increased by 16.1 per cent in the period. This comprised of business volume growth of 6.6 per cent, increased pricing of 10.6 per cent, a transaction currency tailwind of 0.2 per cent, a translation currency tailwind of 6.6 per cent, with the contribution from business acquisitions of 4.8 per cent partially offset by the impact of the business disposal of the Consumer Foods Meats and Meals business of 12.7 per cent. Group EBITDA margin decreased by 40bps primarily driven by the significant impact of passing through input cost inflation, partially offset by accretion from portfolio developments, operating leverage, portfolio mix and efficiency initiatives. The overall demand environment continued to be strong through the period. Consumer preferences for new taste experiences, clean label and healthier options remains strong, while the importance of value options continues to rise across categories. The resilience of supply chains remains a key focus across the industry due to geopolitical volatility and inflationary pressures. Given the evolving consumer landscape, customers are continuing to evaluate the relevance and uniqueness of their offering and the need to adapt and expand their product ranges. Against this market backdrop, the level of innovation remains strong as customers target opportunities linked with the changing consumer landscape, while also looking to reconfigure aspects of their operations given the evolving industry environment.



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# LEADING FROM THE FRONT

**DENIS DRENNAN, A KILKENNY-BASED MILK PRODUCER, IS ALSO THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF THE IRISH CREAMERY MILK SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION (ICMSA). AS A FARMER LEADER HE HAS A WIDE-RANGING PERSPECTIVE ON IRISH AND INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURE. HERE HE TALKS TO MATT O'KEEFE ABOUT THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD.**

## **Denis Drennan highlights the importance of food production at this critical time:**

**"We have two catastrophes globally; one is climate change and the other is the war in Ukraine.** Both have led to a food security crisis. There is a famine-watch in 38 countries across the world and we are heading to a population of eight billion people on the planet. We need to focus food production on those areas most able to produce under high environmental standards. Ireland is one of those areas. High quality food production comes at a high cost, and we all need to realise that fact. Food can be produced more cheaply in some parts of the world, but it comes at a high cost to our climate and long-term wellbeing."

## **THE CASE FOR COMMERCIAL FARMING**

One of Denis's main campaigns right now is to ensure that commercial farmers, many of them milk producers, have equal access to the supports and schemes that assist farmers generally in achieving higher levels of environmental management: "Commercial farmers seem to be taking the brunt of the blame when it comes to issues such as water quality, biodiversity loss and carbon emissions outputs. We have continuously sought government agreement that there is a need for environmental care supports that are directly applicable to the commercial

farmer. It is unfortunate that we now have the new Agri-Climate Environment Scheme (ACRES), and unless a commercial farmer is willing to practically forfeit the output of up to thirty or forty acres by completely limiting its output, he or she will not qualify for the Scheme. That's counterproductive and needs to be reassessed. The result for commercial farmers is that there is little recompense for the financial cost, labour input and land management changes required to meet increasing regulatory demands around environmental standards. After all, those regulations are being put in place for the common good, so it is only fair that all farmers are assisted in implementing them. It's all about income foregone by the farmer. Lower stocking rates, reductions in fertiliser application, wider field margins where farmers cannot actively farm, they all represent reductions in income ultimately. Farmers are more than willing to engage in these practices, and it is only fair that there is assistance for them in doing so, just as there is for other less-intensive farmers."

## **DELIVERING POSITIVE RESULTS**

Denis is adamant that focusing on commercial farms in terms of assisting them to meet new environmental restrictions will deliver very positive results: "If you ask farm advisors, they will tell you that the appetite to change

management practices to accommodate higher environmental standards and regulations is there. The pressure is on for all sectors in farming to reduce intensity and impact on the environment as well as to assist in the creation of conditions and infrastructures that will increase biodiversity on farms. They need to be provided with the opportunities to engage and they are not being encouraged sufficiently. It is all stick and no carrot for what is, ultimately, the delivery of public goods. Environmental improvements are good for everyone, not just farmers."

## **REPRESENTING THE FARMER VIEW**

"There is a Citizens Assembly focused on the environment and increasing biodiversity. The representation from agriculture and farming is very low. Farmers are the custodians of the land. They are the ones who engage most with the rural environment and have been at the forefront of shaping that environment for millennia, and their contribution to any discussion is surely of huge importance. As the owners and managers of the land of Ireland, surely farmers should have a higher representation at forums such as the Citizens Assembly meetings on the environment."

## **INVALID COMPARISONS**

The ICMSA leader is worried that Irish farmers may become collateral damage in

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changes to agricultural intensity standards in other countries in the European Union: "The Netherlands government is forcibly reducing farming intensity in their country. It is very difficult to compare agricultural practices in the Netherlands to Irish farming systems. They are completely different systems of farming. The Netherlands has the same number of dairy cows as in Ireland, except they are farmed in an area the size of Munster. They also practice almost entirely confined livestock farming where cows are kept indoors either permanently or, in a few

instances allowed outside to graze for short periods during the year. The grass growth season is much shorter compared to Ireland where we can grow and graze grass almost year-round. That means that the ability of our grasslands to utilise nutrients is far greater than is the case in the Netherlands. That makes the pressures on the Irish environment far lower than is the case in many parts of continental Europe so any comparisons in relation to farming intensity are not valid. I believe that our commercial farmers can fully balance farming to high commercial

and economic standards with the need for high environmental standards. Looking at what has happened over the past decade provides all the evidence needed. As new technologies and methods of farming have been developed, Irish farmers have embraced every one of them. New advice of fertiliser application in terms of the amount used across the year as well as the kilos spread in any one application, has been fully adopted. The same is the case for organic manure applications where it is targeted to high grass growth periods when it is most beneficial.

There are strict closed seasons when no applications are made and there is huge discretion in terms of spreading both fertiliser and manure only when weather and soils conditions are optimum. New machinery for spreading organic manure is in short supply, such as has been the purchasing demand among livestock and especially commercial dairy farmers. Adoption of low emission organic liquid manure spreading is now above seventy percent and rising. Protected Urea, which is a low impact nitrogen fertiliser, is now widely used on Irish farms, even though it has a higher cost than some alternatives."

## FARMER SUPPORT FOR ENVIRONMENT

Denis reiterates his belief in the commitment of farmers to climate change mitigation measures: "I am convinced that there is widespread support among the farming community to adopting all available opportunities to lower carbon emissions, increase environmental care and biodiversity on their farms. We must do what we can to assist in climate change mitigation practices. I'm involved in the voluntary Agricultural Sustainability Support & Advisory Programme (ASSAP), designed to improve water quality. There is 94 per cent engagement and involvement by farmers with over 90 per cent adoption of novel practices advised by the scheme coordinators. That's a voluntary scheme with no regulatory compliance. Farmers make changes because it is the right thing to do."

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<i>Escherichia coli</i>	21.8%
<i>Streptococcus uberis</i>	23%
<i>Streptococcus dysgalactiae</i>	5.7%
<i>Bacillus spp.</i>	2.5%
<i>Trueperella pyogenes</i>	1.8%
Others	14.8%

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Freehlick-Kelly, R. 2020. Bovine mastitis. All-Ireland Animal Disease Surveillance, p.31.

**STARTVAC®** Inactivated vaccine, Bovine mastitis, in injectable emulsion. **COMPOSITION PER DOSE (2 ML):** inactivated *Escherichia coli* (J5) 50 RED®; inactivated *Staphylococcus aureus* (CP8) SP 140 strain expressing SAAC™ 50 RED®; Adjuvant: \*\*RED® Rabbit effective dose in 60% of the animals (serology). \*\*\*SAAC: Slime Associated Antigenic Complex. \*\*\*\*RED®: Rabbit effective dose in 80% of the animals (serology). **INDICATIONS:** Cows and Heifers: To prevent Mastitis. For herd immunisation of healthy cows and heifers, in dairy cattle herds with recurring mastitis problems, to reduce the incidence of sub-clinical mastitis and the incidence and the severity of the clinical signs of clinical mastitis caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*, coliforms and coagulase negative staphylococci. The full immunisation scheme induces immunity from approximately day 13 after the first injection until approximately day 78 after the third injection (equivalent to 130 days post-parturition). Further information available from the SPC or on [www.hipra.com](http://www.hipra.com). For more information about side-effects, precautions, warnings and contra-indications please refer to the SPC, the packaging or product leaflet. **LEGAL CATEGORY:** POM - Veterinary medicinal product under veterinary prescription. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION HOLDER:** Laboratorios Hipra, S.A. la Selva, 135, 17170 Amer (Girona) SPAIN. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION NUMBERS:** EU/2/08/092/003-6. **Use Medicines Responsibly.**

**UBAC®**, emulsion for injection for cattle. **COMPOSITION PER DOSE:** Lipoteichoic acid (LTA) from Biofilm Adhesion Component (BAC) of *Streptococcus uberis*, strain 5616 ± 1 RP.U. Montanide ISA 907.1 mg. Monophosphoryl Lipid A (MPLA). **INDICATIONS:** For active immunisation of healthy cows and heifers to reduce the incidence of clinical intramammary infections caused by *Streptococcus uberis*, to reduce the somatic cell count in *Streptococcus uberis* positive quarter milk samples and to reduce milk production losses caused by *Streptococcus uberis* intramammary infections. Further information available from the SPC or on [www.hipra.com](http://www.hipra.com). For more information about side-effects, precautions, warnings and contra-indications please refer to the SPC, the packaging or product leaflet. **LEGAL CATEGORY:** POM - Veterinary medicinal product under veterinary prescription. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION HOLDER:** LABORATORIOS HIPRA S.A. Avda. la Selva 135. 17170 Amer (Girona) Spain. **MARKETING AUTHORISATION NUMBERS:** EU/2/18/227/001-004. **Use Medicines Responsibly.**

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# Actiglène: Get more grass from your cattle slurry

Research has shown that cattle slurry is an excellent source of nutrients for grassland and tillage crops under Irish conditions.

Slurry spreading can be a costly job as agitating and spreading costs can quickly add up; however, slurry has a real value, even if it is seen as a nuisance by some farmers. The use of Actiglène slurry enhancer has been proven to greatly increase the value of slurry as a fertiliser to grow grass, while also providing a whole host of additional benefits.

Many farmers are now choosing to use this product in their slurry as part of their farming practice to improve overall nutrient management and grass production on the farm.

## How To Get More From Your Slurry

Actiglène, an innovative slurry enhancer product, was brought to the Irish market in 2013 by Grassland AGRO. Actiglène is a beneficial slurry enhancer that combines a number of ingredients and technologies that improve the fertiliser value and consistency of slurry. One of the key benefits of Actiglène enhanced slurry is higher grass yields, as the product has been proven to give yield benefits equal to an extra five bales of silage per hectare under Irish conditions. Along with increased grass production, the slurry enhancer provides benefits such as: reduced time and cost of slurry agitation; and reduced emissions of harmful gases from slurry.

Core benefits:

- Increased grass yields;
- Reduced agitation;
- Reduced harmful gas emissions.

More Grass With Actiglène Treated Slurry Trials carried out in Ireland in 2015 and 2016 show that the use of Actiglène treated cattle slurry increases grass yields by an average of 0.65t/ha, which equates to five bales of extra silage per hectare. This is potentially worth €190 per hectare for Irish farmers and infers an economic benefit of over three times the return on investment when the product is used at the recommended rates.

Actiglène increases grass yields by allowing for nutrients in the slurry to be used more efficiently and by increasing the activity of the soil to breakdown and utilise the nutrients applied.

## How To Use Actiglène

Actiglène is extremely easy to use, as it is applied at a rate of 0.5kg per livestock unit of dry powder on slats and floors, or directly into the tank, once per week during the housing period.

Benefits of using Actiglène:

- Grass DM production is increased by 0.65t/ha of DM, equivalent to five bales or silage per hectare;
- The ammonia emissions in Actiglène treated slurry are reduced by up to 53%;
- Hydrogen sulphide emissions from slurry are reduced in Actiglène treated slurry by up to 80%;
- Micro-biological activity and other actions of Actiglène mean there is less build-up of crust on slurry, which reduces the cost and time of agitation.

# A HOLSTEIN CHAMPION

**MATT O'KEEFFE CHATS TO CHARLIE GALLAGHER, EX CEO OF THE IRISH HOLSTEIN FRIESIAN BREEDERS ASSOCIATION, AS HE LOOKS BACK OVER HIS CAREER AND CATTLE BREEDING IN IRELAND OVER THE YEARS.**

Charlie Gallagher has had a distinguished career in the cattle breeding sector. After completing an Agricultural Science degree at UCD, Charlie worked for a period with Shannon Development. He then moved on to manage Shannon Dairies which started a career-long interest in dairy cattle breeding. A native of north-east Donegal, Charlie alludes to an even earlier exposure to the benefits of breeding: "I grew up on a small mixed-enterprise farm that included a herd of Shorthorn cows. My father bought one of the first Friesian cows in the region. The cow was yielding five gallons a day so there was great interest among the neighbours around the productivity of the cow. My father summed it up by asking why you would keep two cows when one can perform twice as well."

## 'HOLSTEINISATION'

Charlie witnessed the introduction and widespread adoption of the Holstein breed during the 1980s: "There was a quota limitation and the need for higher yields was questioned. The answer given was that increased efficiency always makes economic sense. Fewer cows meant that land could be put to other productive uses. The cows were capable of very high yields and needed good care including adequate nutrition and improved grassland management. When ICBF was set up in 2000, it began to identify traits that should be prioritised in dairy breeding. Fertility improvement was one trait that was pursued successfully. We have come a long way, improving production including milk solids and, as genomics have developed over the past ten years, fertility and longevity have also risen. The next challenge relates to reducing the carbon footprint of milk production. All the time, we need to continue to develop our dairy production model based on a grazing system that provides unique attributes to Irish dairy in global terms."



**"FARMERS NEED TO LOOK AT A VERY BROAD SELECTION OF TRAITS WHEN CHOOSING SIRES FOR THEIR COWS, NOT JUST MILK PRODUCTION AND FERTILITY. THERE IS A CHANGE OF MINDSET THAT WE NEED TO USE ALL THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE WHEN MAKING BREEDING DECISIONS."**

## IHFA SUPREMO

After various roles in the cattle breeding business, Charlie joined IHFA (Irish Holstein Friesian Breeders Association) in 2008, in the role of CEO. For the past fourteen years he was at the forefront of promoting continuous development of the Holstein breed and ensuring that the breed is fit for purpose: "When you look at the breeding index, the EBI, clearly the efficiency of the breed has improved, for the same level

of inputs. Carbon intensity is reducing with improvements of up to 15 per cent over the past decade. The EBI is leading us in the right direction. I think we will have to take an even broader view of breeding in the years ahead. We must examine all aspects of production and how we manage our dairy sector in general and our dairy herds, in particular, in terms of long-term sustainability. That will include broader aspects such as different grass varieties and mixed species swards. All that will become even more important as a changing climate impacts on the way our swards grow and produce feed for grazing and ensiling. For mid-summer production, we will need grasses and plants that are more persistent in drought situations. Farmers are fully aware of this and are acting accordingly. We must ensure that we have a production model that is sustainable in every aspect, while all the time ensuring that our milk production model remains focused on grazing our cows for most of the production season. Where we have come from is not where we are now, and where we are now and what we do will, equally, need to change. The IHFA has been proactive, investing in UCD's Lyons research around high production herds. We also invested in Teagasc's Vista Milk programme. There are challenges ahead. EU policies will require that we look at our herds in terms of numbers. Whether that means herd stabilisation or more productivity from fewer cow numbers remains to be seen. That will present an economic challenge on many farms because many young farmers have developed at significant cost, based on projected cow and production numbers. Altering that financial budget will impact

on profitability and repayment capacity in individual farm businesses. Where debt levels are high, we need to ensure that changes do not damage viability."

#### A BREEDING BALANCE

A priority identified for the Irish livestock industry is to find a balance between the breeding requirements of the dairy and beef sectors. Charlie has given this considerable thought: "Given the fact that more than half of our beef cattle now originate in the dairy herd, we cannot adopt a stance that the male and non-replacement calves produced on dairy farms are someone else's problem. That has to be taken into account when we talk about sustainability because no matter what we say about efficiencies, the welfare aspects of our livestock must be central and every animal produced on dairy farms has to be well cared for and bred to have a productive lifespan. Consumers are demanding that all aspects of livestock breeding and management on our farms are carried out sustainably. In terms of breeding, we now have a Holstein cow that is the right size for our production systems and has the correct conformation to produce a good quality calf for its intended purpose. The IHFA has put a lot of effort into linear scoring, moving up from ten thousand scored a decade ago to 36,000 cows scored this year with several thousand more figures provided for the Gene Ireland programme. That's a significant data base and it must be used by farmers when making breeding decisions. Farmers need to look at a very broad selection of traits when choosing sires for their cows, not just milk production and fertility. There is a change of mindset that we

need to use all the information available when making breeding decisions. The new Teagasc Dairy-Beef Index and sire rankings also need to be taken into consideration."

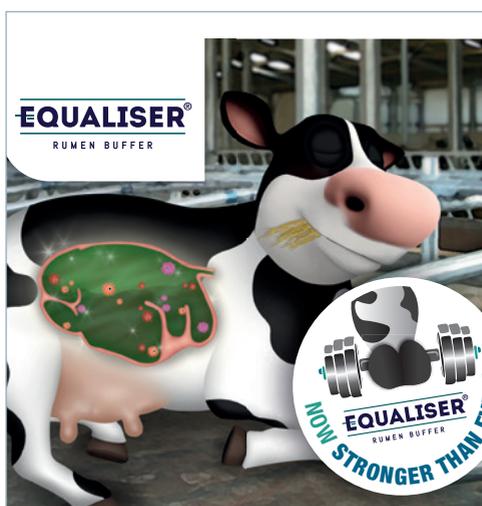
"Ultimately, we need more genotyping. When it was introduced in 2010, I took the initiative of adopting the science for all sires and that has helped to produce a viable baseline. We will have to look at the female side more because we need to know, as with fertility, how those females rank in relation to the genomics of their sire. If we can compare both, we will have a better understanding of where the breed is going, with more information for everyone involved, including purchasers of beef calves from dairy farms."

#### THE JERSEY INFLUENCE

The retired IHFA CEO discusses the ongoing debate over Jersey crossbreeding: "There is a core of people who will continue to crossbreed. The figures confirm that the numbers are low at about six percent. It's not as big an issue as it was before quotas were abolished.

We need to ensure that any negative perceptions of crossbreeding with Jersey, especially in relation to beefing potential of progeny, do not impact adversely on our dairy image and reputation."

Retirement is a flexible concept in relation to Charlie Gallagher: "Because the European Holstein and Red Holstein Conference, which was to be held in Ireland last year, was postponed due to Covid, I still have an involvement in the preparations for the event in Ireland next April. That includes confirming speakers, attracting sponsors, finalising venues and so on, which is keeping me busy."



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# WALKING THE FARM

OVER 450 AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE STUDENTS FLOCK TO IGA BEEF AND DAIRY FARM WALKS

**After a three-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) Student Event - sponsored by FBD - was held on two farms in Co. Carlow and Co. Wicklow on Monday, October 3rd, with hundreds of students from colleges all over the country in attendance.**

The day kicked off on the ABP Demo Farm owned by James and Michael Sheppard in Co. Carlow – examining a sustainable beef system. Opening the event, IGA president Dr. Alan Kelly promised a very engaging day for the students attending and encouraged them to listen, take notes and ask questions, while IGA beef committee chairperson, Niall Claffey, chaired this session.

## NEXT GENERATION

Stephen Connolly, Sustainability Manager at ABP, started out positively by telling students to “keep sustainability in the back of your minds, you are the next generation driving towards our sustainability goals and there are huge opportunities within the beef sector”.

Stephen then went on to give an overview of the farm. Originally a tillage farm, the holding was converted into a dairy calf-to-beef system - in collaboration with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and Teagasc - to examine a dairy-beef system with calves with positive beef traits and sustainability at the core.

The partnership set up means that the Sheppard family are contract rearing the cattle on behalf of ABP. It is a 280ac farm rearing 400 beef calves on a grass-based system – slaughtering cattle at 19 months (heifers) and

21 months (steers). The farm also runs a sheep enterprise with 580 store lambs purchased annually to complement the beef operation. The grazing infrastructure has been upgraded over the years to make the system easier to manage. Stephen explained that in order to have two successful industries, “dairy and beef farmers need to work together”. Niall asked what actions the farm was taking to manage 400 calves in spring. “Proactive animal health rather than reactive actions to manage the workload is key to keeping it a simple and consistent operation,” Stephen replied.

## GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

In addition, grassland management is something that the farm has had to work towards improving but is now a critical action. However, it is a difficult system to manage as it is not always possible to hit the targets and ground conditions can be variable. On the day, there was an average cover of 727kg DM/LU but due to the drop in stocking rate with animals housed that time of year, it is more likely to be around 900kg DM/LU - as growth was outweighing the demand. The farm has a target of 10 grazings in the year but, to date, there have been six grazings with 50 per cent of the silage last year coming from surplus paddocks. The farm has a target of 14t DM/ha; it is currently at 11t DM/ha. In order for this low-input, grass-based system to work effectively - and meet its targets - weekly grass walks are carried out and soil fertility is prioritised.

Stephen explained that everything has not been done perfectly on the farm and that there is always room to improve. The farm historically

had a low soil index, so to address soil fertility, they targeted a number of actions stating that “lime is key”.

They soil tested the entire holding and had a nutrient management plan (NMP) drawn up. Stephen outlined that it is no use to soil test if you are not going to utilise the data, so the NMP is key here. Slurry and dung are used more efficiently with targeted use according to the NMP.

The farm's actions to reduce carbon emissions include: improved feeding through balanced diets; reducing the reliance on soya; and dropping the protein percentage with minimal impact on animal performance. They have also stopped going out earlier in the season with fertiliser and hope to incorporate more clover into swards whilst reducing fertiliser use.

## Breeding, Health and Sustainability

The final stop on the tour focused on animal breeding, health and sustainability, which Stephen mentioned in his opening remarks as underpinning the system on the ABP farm. Genetics underpins the success of the system and Stephen reminded students of the importance of integrated dairy and beef systems and that the bull selection within the dairy system is critical to dairy- beef enterprises.

The farm aims for higher genetic merit animals that can be slaughtered at younger ages, heavier carcasses, that are more feed efficient and, as a result, have a reduced carbon footprint. This is combined with a rigorous proactive animal health programme.

The Sheppard and ABP team meet once a week to discuss any health incidences and develop a herd health plan in conjunction with the farm's

vet. Touching on the sustainability targets set out for the sector including a 25 per cent reduction in GHGs, Stephen says that they are focusing on the quick wins - integrated dairy and beef systems, soil fertility, technology, innovation and animal breeding. He also outlined the three pillars of sustainability - social, economic and environmental - need to be balanced for the system to work.

### COOLATTIN CHEDDAR AND A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP

In the afternoon, the students visited the Burgess and O'Grady dairy farm enterprise just over the border in Co. Wicklow. Following a short chat on the roadside one day, Tom Burgess - a dairy farmer - and Joe O'Grady, a sheep farmer, formed The Burgess and O'Grady farm partnership in 2019. This farm showed huge opportunity to the young audience attending for alternative ways to enter into dairy farming. The milk on the farm is sold to Strathroy and Coolattin Cheddar. Tom founded Coolattin Cheddar in 2003 as an alternative way to add value to his farm and product. This requires time and effort and the cheese is produced from April to November. Twenty per cent of the milk from the farm is sold to Coolattin at the same price as Strathroy. Given the time and

effort required to run this business, a farm partnership was an ideal way for Tom to focus on the cheese business, while Tom could focus on dairy farming - which he has always wanted to get into.

### KEY TO SUCCESS

Patrick Gowning, IGA council member, asked what the key to success of the farm partnership is and both Tom and Joe agreed that trust is number one and clearly defined roles, good communication and a written agreement are what make this partnership a success. The total farmland owned is 85ha and all the land from both parties is leased into the partnership. They lease a further 44ha of land. 99ha forms the milking platform and 30ha for silage. The stocking rate is 2.69 cows/ha on the milking platform and they are milking 267 cows at the moment in a 20-unit parlour with ACRs and cluster flush. Significant investment has been put into the farm to improve efficiencies. The milking parlour and surrounding infrastructure resembles a New Zealand system, influenced by Tom's time spent there. An underpass was installed to streamline parlour access and slurry storage was increased also. There is room to grow the cow numbers but for now they are happy with the current set

up. As with any grass-based dairy enterprise, grassland management is key to the success of the system and to the cheese production, as the cheese gets its yellow colour from the beta-carotene found in grass. The farm reseeds 17ha per year and clover has been incorporated into over a quarter of the farm with plans to further increase this. The farm dries out quickly in warmer weather, so this can be a concern over the summer period particularly. In order to combat poaching in wetter weather, particularly in autumn, the first paddocks are closed in early October. The goals in the grazing system for Joe are to make better use of the slurry and continue to build soil fertility. The herd is a cross-bred system of Jerseys and Holstein Friesian cows. Sexed semen was used as a trial in 2022 with good success, so they plan to further expand this use in 2023. Hereford and Belgian Blue straws are also used. Cow type is important to Tom and Joe and they target a 480kg cow. The herd EBI is €167 with milk and fertility prioritised. The Burgess and O'Grady partnership shows the ample opportunity out there for alternative ways into dairy production and that it is important to have trust, communication, KPIs and clearly defined roles for it to be a success.

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recipe available at: [www.bordbia.ie/pork](http://www.bordbia.ie/pork)

# FOCUS



PIGS



# PIG PRODUCER PERSPECTIVE

**MATT O'KEEFFE TALKS TO A PIG PRODUCER IN CO. CORK ABOUT THE TOUGH ENVIRONMENT FOR PIG FARMERS IN IRELAND TODAY.**

**Pig farmers have been enduring a prolonged period of loss-making due to a confluence of low prices and market oversupply, allied to the highest input costs ever recorded.**

Pat O'Keeffe is a pig producer based outside Fermoy in County Cork and is also chairman of North Cork IFA. He spoke to Matt O'Keeffe recently about the predicament in which pig producers find themselves.

Pat began by outlining the current situation: "Pig farming has been very tough over the past eighteen months. Grain markets on which we rely for our feed, have moved up dramatically from the last quarter of 2021 and even though prices have eased somewhat, they are still very high. To give an indication of the situation, if you go back to September

2020, the composite feed price for a ration on a pig unit at that time was €290 per tonne. The price for an equivalent ration today is €490 per tonne.

That's an increase of €200 per tonne in the space of two years. In the meantime, since early Spring of this year, the price of pigs has gone from a low of around €1.40 per kilo up to €2.08 now in mid-October.

The price has now stalled and in the meantime other costs have also risen steeply. Electricity costs, in particular, have risen hugely and haulage cost increases have also impacted on pig production costs. Haulage includes slurry contracting, pig and feed transport costs. We really don't know what is going to happen in terms of pig prices or production costs."

## BELOW BREAK-EVEN

Pig producers are well known as having strong financial skills with a good knowledge at all times of margins. Pat confirmed that the sums do not add up right now: "A producers would need to be getting at least €2.10 to €2.20 per kilo to have a chance of hitting break even. Even at that, when you undertake a budgeting exercise the costs have increased again. You have to constantly readjust your budgets because the situation is changing all the time. The pig price on mainland Europe is stagnating and unlikely to move up before the end of the year at least. The situation is so volatile, though, that anything could happen."

## NEW MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

The Cork pig producer outlined new markets for pig meat: "There have been new markets developed. There are still new cuts going to



## WHO IS GAINING? BECAUSE IT CERTAINLY IS NOT THE PRODUCER. WE ARE THE ONES UNDER MOST PRESSURE, CONSTANTLY.

### ASF CULL

African Swine Fever has impacted on the global pig market, as Pat explained: "In Europe, Germany and Poland were affected by ASF. They lost their export certification and their pig-meat remained in the EU. Add in Belgium and all that production has been depressing European prices for the past couple of years.

There is also cold-store surplus overhanging the market. Spanish pig producers have been expanding. They have lower costs including lower financing sourced from outside the EU. They have large-scale units with new processing facilities that deliver cost savings and increased added value to produce that have opened up new international markets. It is completely different to the Irish and northern European production and processing model. Their environmental standards are lower than the norm around Europe. Energy costs are lower, and the Spanish ports are larger and can accommodate bigger feed-importing ships, delivering savings of up to €15 per tonne of feed."

### IRISH PIG MARKET

Irish pig producers have been supported to an extent, as Pat O'Keeffe acknowledges: "We have received some support from the government. The processors have been supportive, and the IFA has been very active on behalf of pig producers in keeping pressure on processors, secondary processors and retailers to deliver as much as possible back to producers and secure price increases through the year. The establishment of a Food Ombudsman, which IFA has lobbied

for, is important to answer the question as to where the margin on pig meat is going. Who is gaining? Because it certainly is not the producer. We are the ones under most pressure constantly."

### ENERGY OPTIONS

The Budget concessions on energy are helpful, he notes: "It will all help, and the government hasn't ruled out a review over the coming months. Pig units are small SMEs, with all the associated costs including labour, energy and other inputs. We have always tried to look after ourselves, but we are facing circumstances that have never been faced before. It is an important sector with more than €500 million of production and we want it to continue to be viable in the future. Another positive initiative in the Budget was the support scheme for developing solar power on farms. Biomethane is in its infancy in Ireland. It has potential but there are challenges to biomethane production with high capital costs and low margins on production. More insulation investment as well as upgrading would help but it is difficult to go down that road when there is no margin in the business. Allowing in trained labour from outside the EU would help on the labour front, the same as it would for horticulture or dairy or poultry businesses."

"We would like to see Bord Bia doing more to encourage consumers, especially younger people, in the home market to buy Irish pigmeat. They need to be informed on the variety of eating options available with pig-meat and the fact that it is produced locally with all the benefits of that for employment, the environment and healthy eating."

China, but the volumes of pig meat being exported there are not what they used to be. A lot of Irish pig meat is being sold across Europe. The Australian market has also been good for Irish pig meat sales in recent times. Since the beginning of 2022, Mexico has been buying from us. There are good opportunities being explored for California with some sales already. New market opportunities are becoming narrower all the time. We were told that China would be a market for various cuts of pig meat for five or six years. Irish and European producers expanded on the basis of that advice. That has backfired badly. At this stage the focus should be on supplying the home market, primarily, and the European market after that. Any surpluses can be exported outside the EU because the world market is very competitive with what looks like a serious recession in the world economy approaching, that could drive prices down further. There is the worry that cheaper imports could undermine prices further here in Ireland and while there has been good supermarket support for Irish product there is evidence that cheap imports are being sold in some cases. That's a big concern."



# HOW CLEAN IS THE AIR YOU AND YOUR PIGS BREATHE?

**DR. HAZEL ROONEY, PIG TECHNICAL COORDINATOR, ALLTECH IRELAND, OFFERS ADVICE REGARDING AIR QUALITY FOR YOUR PIGS**

**While pig productivity and efficiency continue to increase each year, the gases and odours from commercial pig operations persist and can often become a serious problem, particularly on larger scale units.** This has implications not only for the pigs but also for the people, with producers often receiving complaints about the smell. Therefore, it is important to understand where ammonia comes from and how we can control ammonia levels in piggeries.

Air quality can be determined by measuring the concentration of pollutants in the air. The main pollutants and gases generated in indoor pig units are ammonia, hydrogen sulphide, carbon dioxide and dust. As ammonia is one of the most common and recognised among these gases, this article focuses on ammonia emissions. Long-term exposure to high ammonia levels (concentrations typically above 20 ppm) can negatively impact air quality and subsequently lead to poor pig health, performance and quality of life within pig units.

#### **WHERE DOES AMMONIA COME FROM?**

Ammonia emission is a natural process

produced by the anaerobic decomposition of animal waste. In pigs, the urea in urine is a major contributor to ammonia formation inside houses. After the urea has been excreted, it is hydrolysed and then converted into ammonia by waste-degrading bacteria in the manure. Once released into the atmosphere, it is easily dissolved where moisture is present on the skin and in the eyes, in oral cavities, and in the lining of the respiratory tract. Ammonia concentrations are generally higher in deep-pit slurry systems, with slats and mechanical ventilation than in other types of pig housing.

#### **HOW DOES AMMONIA AFFECT YOUR PIGS?**

Ammonia is a toxic gas, and as levels increase, so too do the problems! In well-run pig operations, ammonia levels are typically less than 5 ppm. However, once the ammonia concentration increases beyond 5 ppm, pig health and performance are negatively impacted. Figure 1 highlights the impact of high ammonia concentrations on pig health and performance. Pigs exposed to high ammonia levels will show clinical signs, such as increased coughing, respiratory rate and restlessness. Other documented effects associated with exposure to high levels of

5 ppm	Lowest level detectable by smell.
6 ppm	Eye & respiratory irritation begins.
11 ppm	Animal performance reduced.
25 ppm	Maximum level for an eight-hour exposure.
35 ppm	Maximum allowed level for a ten-minute exposure.
40 ppm	Headaches, nausea, and appetite loss in humans.
50 ppm	Severe reductions in animal performance and health. Increased chance of pneumonia.
100 ppm	Sneezing, salivation, irritation to mucosal surfaces in animals and humans.

Figure 1: Impact of increasing ammonia concentrations on pig health and performance.

ammonia include:

- ▶ Tail, ear and flank biting
- ▶ Delayed puberty
- ▶ Respiratory diseases
- ▶ Health problems in farm staff
- ▶ Environmental pollution

Even minimal exposure to ammonia can be harmful. A previous research study demonstrated that grow-finisher pigs exposed to 50 ppm vs. 5 ppm of ammonia for just 20 minutes a day on four occasions experienced reduced performance and decreased live bodyweight gain (893 g/day vs. 955 g/day).

### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM ON YOUR UNIT?

If you suspect that you may have an ammonia issue on your unit, either due to a change in pig performance and behaviour or a noticeable increase in ammonia odour in your pig houses, it is recommended that the level of ammonia is measured and monitored. Ammonia levels are expressed in parts per million (ppm) and can be easily measured using different tools, such as portable electronic devices, testing strips and Draeger tubes. Measurements should be taken multiple times in a sampling day to account for changes in ventilation, at floor level and at different points of the house. It is important to consider the height of the pigs when measuring ammonia levels.

### REDUCING AMMONIA LEVELS IN PIG HOUSES: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The quality of the air indoors contributes to the health and productivity of pigs at all production stages and depends on several factors, such as:

1. Management: ventilation, relative humidity, stocking density, lower critical and upper critical temperatures

2. Environmental: housing design, season, gas concentrations, dust levels
3. Nutritional: overfeeding protein

A holistic approach is needed to improve the air quality in pig houses, from checking ventilation to providing the proper equipment to implementing nutritional strategies and ensuring optimal manure management. Here are some areas to focus on for improving ventilation and reducing poor indoor air quality:

✓ **Correct ventilation** is key to reducing ammonia emissions. Determine that all fans are in working order to ensure fresh air enters the units but avoid over-ventilation above manure-covered surfaces. Clean fan blades and louvers and ensure that the fan motor and thermostat are properly maintained.

☀️❄️ Check **air inlets and monitor house temperatures** regularly. Also, test the additional heat sources inside your buildings.

🗑️ **Manure management** is crucial when it comes to lowering ammonia emissions. Remove slurry regularly to prevent a crust from developing on the surface, and try to avoid storing manure for extended periods, where possible.

🏠 **Pen design and hygiene** are also important factors to take into consideration. Clean slats and lying areas and try to keep pigs clean and dry (in ideal circumstances). If designing new houses, try to keep the depth of the slurry to a minimum.

### REDUCING AMMONIA LEVELS IN PIG HOUSES: A NUTRITIONAL APPROACH

In addition to implementing a holistic strategy

on-farm, pig producers and animal feeding operations often utilise nutritional strategies and technologies in the feed as effective tools to minimise ammonia emissions and the smell coming from piggeries. Alltech's De-Odorase® is a natural solution designed to reduce environmental ammonia levels when added to the diet.

Formulated from 100% pulverised yucca, De-Odorase is designed to enhance air quality by controlling faecal odours, ammonia and other harmful gasses associated with the decomposition of animal waste, creating a healthier environment for the pig, the farmer and their staff, and the wider community. De-Odorase helps by:

- Reducing unwanted faecal odours caused by ammonia and other gases by 30–50%
- Promoting better respiratory health, lowering the incidence of pneumonia
- Maintaining feed efficiency and growth performance in pigs
- Creating a healthier environment for pigs and farm workers

### CONCLUSION

As animal numbers and farm sizes increase, efforts to minimise health, welfare and public concerns regarding ammonia emissions from pig facilities are essential. Management practices, such as ensuring optimal ventilation in grow-finisher houses, monitoring room temperatures, avoiding overstocking pens and regularly removing slurry, should be implemented to prevent high ammonia levels. The use of natural feed additives, such as Alltech's De-Odorase, should also be utilised in pig diets to reduce ammonia production and create a healthier environment for pigs and farm staff.

References available upon request.



# FOCUS ON GUT HEALTH TO IMPROVE FEED CONVERSION



**ACCORDING TO TEAGASC FIGURES, SEPTEMBER SAW THE PRICE OF COMPOSITE FEED RISE TO €476 PER TONNE, UP €94 SINCE THE START OF THE YEAR. WITH FEED EQUATING TO 76 PER CENT OF THE COST OF PIG PRODUCTION, FARMERS ARE TRYING TO IMPROVE FEED CONVERSION RATES WHEREVER POSSIBLE. MAUREEN PRENDERGAST, SWINE TECHNICAL MANAGER AT MSD ANIMAL HEALTH, EXPLAINS WHY GUT HEALTH IS SO IMPORTANT TO GROWING PIGS.**

**Gut health plays an essential part in the absorption of nutrients and resulting feed efficiency. If gut health is compromised at any point, the pig won't achieve expected growth rates and days to finish will be increased.** Like humans, pigs are monogastric, so their digestive systems work in a similar way to our own. Most of the nutrient absorption takes place in the small intestine. Digestive enzymes break down the proteins, fats and carbohydrates which pass into the bloodstream via tiny, finger-like projections called villi that line the jejunum and ileum. Many gut health and digestive problems are picked up from the pig's environment. Bacterial pathogens, like Salmonella, Strep. suis and Lawsonia intracellularis are readily introduced via their mouths. Young, pre- and post-weaning piglets with immature digestive systems are particularly at risk.

## **POST-WEANING ILEITIS**

Ileitis is one of the most common digestive diseases in growing pigs and is caused by the Lawsonia bacteria. The word means

'inflammation of the ileum' and the disease is caused when the infected villi become swollen and unable to absorb crucial nutrients, including lysine. Lysine is one of the costliest additives in pig feed, but if the villi in the ileum are damaged it cannot be fully absorbed. Lysine or other undigested nutrients passing into the large intestine disturb the microbiome, allowing pathogenic bacteria to thrive. This results in diarrhoea or faecal looseness that can often be grey or pasty in appearance. The dose of bacteria ingested by pigs will determine disease severity, as well as the pigs' diet, genetics, immune response, including maternal antibody presence, intestinal microflora and general health and stress. However, some pigs may display few external signs, but still be affected internally. Experienced staff often recognise that activity levels are reduced when pigs are unwell and that the pens may seem quieter. Piglets, especially, will stay where it is warm and show little interest in food or drink unless it's positioned very close by. Some farmers that have installed water systems that measure

consumption have observed that a drop in water usage can actually predict incidence of disease. Most pigs will recover from visible signs; however, they continue to eat less, affecting development and contributing to lower than expected growth rates. They may also be more susceptible to secondary infections, such as Salmonella.

### LONG-TERM DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS

One of the unique features of ileitis is the long-term damage to gut integrity. Thickening of the gut caused by the disease remains for the rest of the fattener's life. Because the ileum is so essential to the way feed is digested, farmers see a significant impact to FCR and ADWG right up until slaughter.

The effect of ileitis can be seen post-mortem. Thickening of the folds and ridges can easily be seen and felt in diseased ileums. They may also have large, raised nodules and appear dark or bloody. Within groups of finished pigs, it's common to see a range of severity and this may explain why batch unevenness is such a feature of subclinical ileitis.

### CONTROL MEASURES AND VACCINATION

Farmers can improve general gut health across the herd in conjunction with both their vet and their nutritionist. Particular attention should be paid to weaning management and water quality. Hygiene across the unit is essential as most digestive diseases are transmitted via infected faecal matter. Your vet can test for specific pathogens and recommend treatment methods accordingly. Management of ileitis on farm has relied heavily on the use of zinc oxide and in-feed antibiotics, but with recent legislation changes, farmers are increasingly adopting vaccination as a control measure. Farmers should discuss their vaccination regime with their vet who can also advise on infection control and on-farm biosecurity.



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**For more information speak to your vet**

#### Use medicines responsibly.

Porcilis® Lawsonia lyophilisate and solvent for emulsion for injection for pigs: Each dose of 2 ml reconstituted vaccine contains inactivated *Lawsonia intracellularis* strain SPAH-08. Porcilis® Lawsonia ID lyophilisate and solvent for emulsion for injection for pigs: Each dose of 0.2ml reconstituted vaccines contains inactivated *Lawsonia intracellularis* strain SPAH-08. Legal Category: RO1 [POM] NI [POM-V]

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# ADOPTING BEST PRACTICE

EMER MCCRUM AND CIARÁN CARROLL, TEAGASC, DISCUSS BEST PRACTICE ON PIG FARMS.

Since 2019, performance and output on Irish farms has continued to advance. In the last three years, national average figures indicate that born alive has increased by 1 pig per litter, pigs produced is up 1.2 per sow per year while FCR weaning to sale tightened by 0.04 in the same period. This is considerable progress achieved in a relatively short space of time and is testament to the hard work and dedication of pig farmers and staff across the country. Now ask yourself - what did you do differently? What changes have you implemented on farm in the last three years to support this progress? In order to maintain progression into the future, what changes will you make to support the modern pig, capable of superior prolificacy and growth rates? You need to ensure you are in a position to optimise and effectively manage performance improvement in order to keep pace with progress. This can be difficult however especially given the challenging financial situation in the last 14 months.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight a number of relatively low cost but high impact best practices that can be implemented on farm to maintain and support improved performance. The strategies discussed are centred on areas where relatively simple

changes will yield quantifiable results to support progression into the future.

## PAIN RELIEF FOR POSTPARTUM SOWS

As discussed above, increasing litter sizes in the past decade has improved sow output but this has presented challenges for pig producers. One such challenge is in the area of colostrum intake, which as we know is essential for the lifetime performance of the piglet. Colostrum yield per sow has not increased in line with litter sizes, yet it remains critical that each piglet consumes sufficient colostrum (200g+) from the limited pool available. Adequate colostrum intake should help increase pre-weaning growth, weaning weight and subsequent lifetime performance. The PigNutriStrat project at Moorepark recently looked at strategies to ensure all pigs in the litter received sufficient colostrum intake. One such strategy involved administering Meloxicam (Loxicom® Injection, Norbrook, Ireland) to sows as soon as possible after the placenta was delivered. The idea was that administration of pain relief would facilitate greater suckling by the piglets. The results show that administering pain relief to the sows increased piglet colostrum intake by ~18g (Figure 1),

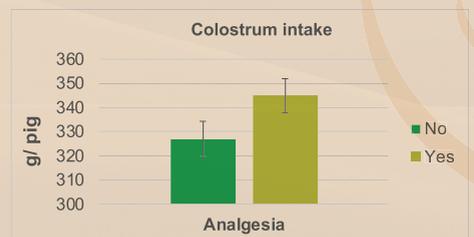


Figure 1. Effect of analgesia (pain relief) on average colostrum intake

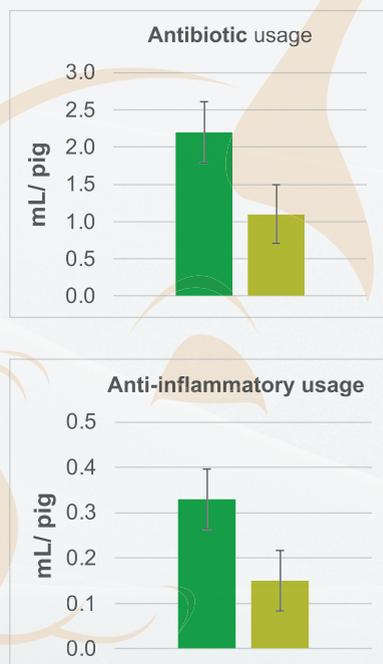
While this increase in colostrum intake at first glance does not look to be a major effect, it was sufficient to lead to an increase in average piglet weaning weight of 350g at ~26 days (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Effect of analgesia (pain relief) in sows on average piglet weaning weight

This study also recorded the number of clinically sick piglets identified per litter during the trial. Researchers found that

on sows administered with pain relief, the number of clinical cases reduced by ~65%, which significantly reduced the need to treat suckling piglets with both anti-inflammatories (by ~55%) and antibiotics (by ~50%). Make sure to consult with your vet.



**Figure 3. Effect of pain relief in sows on the volume of antibiotics and anti-inflammatories administered per piglet**

We can conclude that administering pain relief to sows as soon as possible after delivery of the placenta will increase colostrum intake and weaning weight in piglets. It will also reduce the number of clinical cases of disease identified per litter thereby reducing the need to use injectable antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. At a time when farms are dealing with higher numbers born alive, the administration of pain relief to sows and gilts can help to ensure optimal management and performance of larger litters.

## GILTS

Gilt development and management is critical in the reproductive performance of the sow herd as future reproductive success is directly linked to a strong gilt breeding policy. The average replacement rate nationally has increased by almost 3% since 2019 equating to an additional 4,000 gilts required per year. While this may equate to just 18 additional animals per year on an average 600 sow unit, there are hidden costs associated

with a high replacement rate. Aside from the direct rearing costs, disproportionately young herds are exposed to lower gilt litter sizes with poorer performing pigs and mortality twice that of other parities from birth to sale, which subsequently reduces the number of pigs produced/sow/year. A low average herd age also increases the risk of herd health destabilisation as a result of the lower immunity in gilt offspring. Gilts do not breakeven in the herd until the 3rd parity and yet currently in Ireland 13% of gilts are culled before the 1st litter and 32% are culled by the 3rd litter. 32% of sows therefore do not cover rearing costs. It is therefore extremely important to keep an eye on your annual replacement rate and if it is higher than recommended, investigate the factors that may be contributing to this.

Strategies to improve sow longevity must be targeted at replacement animals. Gilts must be managed, housed, and fed appropriately during the developmental phase to improve retention and reduce involuntary removals.

## 2.1 REARING CONDITIONS

Research conducted on Irish farms found that lameness is a substantial contributor to the premature culling of sows and young sows in particular are more susceptible. Lameness may also be an underlying factor in other involuntary removals as sows culled for poor body condition or reproductive failure can often be lame. The GILT LIFE project at Moorepark found that rearing gilts in single sex pens from weaning to service benefitted the welfare and subsequent performance of the animals. Gilts reared in single sex pens tended to grow faster than mixed sex pens, possibly due to experiencing less stress as gilts reared with entire male pigs were exposed to higher levels of activity, more aggression and sexual mounting compared to gilts reared in female-only pens. Gilts reared in single sex pens therefore had lower body lesion scores and less hoof damage, probably as a result of less physical interaction taking place. In addition, sows reared in female only pens had fewer piglets born dead, which could have a positive effect on lifetime performance.

It is worth investigating if it is possible to sex pigs or separate replacement females at weaning to improve welfare and subsequent performance. Research has found that the earlier gilts are managed separate to males, the larger the reduction in lameness.

With that said if separation at weaning is not possible, investigate whether there is opportunity later in the rearing phase to house gilts in single sex pens. Rearing gilts in female-only pens reduces their exposure to behaviours that can injure hooves and therefore increase the likelihood of culling for lameness in later life.

## 2.2 NUTRITION

When examining strategies to improve sow longevity, it is impossible to ignore gilt nutrition. A gilt nutritional program should be tailored to meet the nutrient demands for adequate protein growth, target bone and reproductive tract development and avoid over conditioning upon entry to the sow herd. Inappropriate nutrition during the developmental phase can contribute to the problem of lameness in replacement gilts. Diets specifically for the developing gilt are formulated around the nutritional requirement for bone development and fat deposition. This includes a higher energy to lysine ratio plus higher Calcium and Phosphorus levels in addition to the vitamin and mineral premix containing zinc, copper and manganese. The Limb Health in Pigs project in Moorepark trialled ad libitum feeding of a developer diet from 70kg to ~130kg compared to feeding a finisher ration over the same period. Gilts fed ad libitum developer had reduced lameness and reduced claw damage without any negative impact on the target age at service compared to gilts fed finisher ration. The project found that over 90% of the gilts fed finisher were affected by claw lesions at the time of service. The GILT LIFE project investigated the effects of mineral supplementation (Copper, Zinc and Manganese) during rearing and found mineral supplementation increased bone mineral density.

As finisher diets are formulated for fast growth rates and high lean meat deposition, higher average daily gain in gilts fed this diet is associated with an increased incidence of culling for lameness. In addition, feeding finisher diets can cause gilts to become over conditioned at service which impacts subsequent performance as discussed in more detail below. The benefits associated feeding gilt developer over finisher feed from 60-70kg translates into improved longevity, welfare and productivity of the breeding herd. A recommended gilt feeding programme arising from this research is as follows:

- ▶ From 60kg commencing feeding gilt developer diet
- ▶ 13.5 MJ DE per kg, 0.8% lysine, 1% calcium, 0.8% phosphorus, 300ppm biotin
- ▶ Feed Level: 2kg per day at 60kg rising to 3kg per day at 100kg
- ▶ Target weight gain of 5kg per week

### AGE AT SERVICE

Recent Danish research found that the target age at service for gilts is 34 to 38 weeks of age (238 to 266 days). After this point, the frame of the animal becomes too large and there is an increased incidence of leg problems. Older gilts also risk becoming too fat which is associated with a reduction in farrowing house intakes. In addition, the research found that the high service age resulted in 23% of the sows from the group culled before second litter service. This corresponded to a larger analysis of 33 Danish herds which found sow longevity reduced with increasing age at first service. 34 weeks is the minimum age as if served prior to this, the frame of the animal is too small and the gilt will struggle to achieve sufficient intakes in the farrowing house. This results in excessive condition loss, which can lead to a reduction in the numbers and quality of pigs weaned, a reduction in subsequent born alive and an increase in the weaning to service interval. Working within these targets will optimise the performance of the gilt in her first lactation and beyond.

### CONDITION AT FARROWING

In order to ensure optimum first litter performance it is recommended to body condition score gilts prior to farrowing. Each week score the condition of the gilts (1 to 5) prior to transfer to the farrowing house and mark the number on the animals back. Once finished add up the numbers and divide by the number of gilts to get your weekly average and record this information. 3 to 3.2 is the target body condition for gilts prior to farrowing and if results outside of this range are detected, gilt management should be revised. As discussed above, gilts that are too fat will struggle to achieve the necessary farrowing house intakes whereas thin gilts will grapple with the demands of rearing her litter. Such stresses on first litter sows can contribute to early removal and an increased replacement rate. A five-minute weekly check-up on body condition however

will highlight if problems exist here and the practices outlined above should be reviewed to rectify condition.

### STAFF

Your staff are your best asset and keeping them happy is key to the future success and profitability of your unit. Job satisfaction as opposed to money can often be the main career motivator for many people. In numerous employee surveys, criteria such as good communication with co-workers, being treated with respect, a feeling of accomplishment in a role and doing interesting work ranked higher than pay in job standards most valued by employees. This is good news for employers as such criteria add little or no cost to a business. Job satisfaction leads to higher production and performance on farms, in addition to reduced staff turnover.

Staff who feel valued by their employer and who feel they are contributing positively to a unit are more satisfied. One key strategy to improve this is to share information with staff. Such information can include:

- ▶ ePM PigSys Herd Performance Reports
- ▶ Infographics
- ▶ Newsletters
- ▶ Skills videos

Available on the  
Teagasc website

One of the most important aspects of managing a pig unit is ensuring that staff are aware of what performance is expected and whether the unit is hitting these targets. If you and your staff get a good handle on the week-to-week targets, the rest will fall into place. A target board is a great way to keep track of weekly targets on farm. Each week the unit manager can update the weekly performance on the board by using a black marker if targets are reached, and a red marker if results are below target. This system gives all staff an immediate picture of how the unit is performing and has the benefit of making the target board more visual. It is a good idea to locate the target board in high traffic areas such as the canteen or office where the results will generate discussion.

Regular 'roundtable' sessions can be used to go over different topics with all staff. It is an opportunity for staff to share ideas in order to improve farm performance. The manager should use this time to go over production records (e.g. Teagasc ePM PigSys Herd Performance Reports) with staff to

let them know how the farm is doing, both physically and financially. It also enables new goals to be set for the farm and this information can subsequently be fed into the target board. Open discussion in roundtable meetings allows for two-way communication between staff and management which is also important for job satisfaction. This is a great opportunity to ask for staff input – what are the problem areas on the farm, what are the causes, what targets would they set, how will they go about achieving them? It is important to act on good suggestions in so far as possible as employees like a manager willing to listen to their ideas.

In the case of new staff members, take time each week to walk together through their section until you have established the employee feels competent in carrying out their duties. While walking, draw attention to the pigs in their care in addition to the buildings and equipment. This is a great opportunity to share your own knowledge and answer any questions, which is a valuable support network for the staff member as they adjust to their new role. Investing this time in your employees demonstrates your interest in and commitment to their long-term success in the role.

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*The above presentation was given at the recent Teagasc Pig Conference 2022*

# PRODUCING PIGMEAT SUSTAINABLY

## GERARD MCCUTCHEON - TEAGASC, OAK PARK – EXAMINED THE ISSUE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT THE RECENT TEAGASC PIG CONFERENCE.

**Global demand for food continues to grow. It is hard to believe that the world population has risen from three billion in 1960 to over seven and a half billion at present.** It continues to rise each year and is expected to hit eight billion by 2030. As the world population edges towards nine billion people by 2050 the challenge for the sector is to develop a "sustainable" and safe food chain in the production of pigmeat.

### SUSTAINABILITY

A useful definition of "sustainable" is "meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Bruntland Report, 1987). Future food production systems must be sustainable in terms of delivering a supply of safe, healthy food with low environmental impacts in terms of emissions and biodiversity. This will require a huge level of innovation and involve major improvements in efficiency and waste reduction and access to new types of technology. Sustainability must be economic, social and environmental. Some people associate "sustainability" with the three Ps - profit, people and planet.

### HOW SUSTAINABLE IS PIGMEAT PRODUCTION?

How can we assess whether pigmeat production in Ireland is sustainable? Our aim must be to demonstrate the environmental sustainability of the system used to produce pigmeat in Ireland, and, show that the sector is committed to improving this in the years ahead. We can do this by highlighting best practice on Demonstration and/or SignPost farms. There is a huge body of work in establishing best practices and communicating this to all pigmeat producers. Some areas to assess this process are listed below but it is expected that new areas will be added as we progress on this journey.

### SUGGESTED INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABILITY:

#### Economic Indicators:

- ▶ Profitability of the process over time,
- ▶ Production costs and prices received for pigmeat,
- ▶ The economic value of the sector to the national economy.

#### Environmental Indicators:

- ▶ Carbon footprint per kg of liveweight produced,
- ▶ Energy use per pig produced (kWh /pig produced),
- ▶ Emissions from production,

- ▶ Nutrients retained, excreted and recovered (mainly nitrogen and phosphorous and some trace minerals),
- ▶ Water use per pig produced.

#### Social Indicators:

- ▶ Employment value of pig farm to local community,
- ▶ Indirect value to local/ national economy,
- ▶ Antibiotic usage per kg of pigmeat produced,
- ▶ Improvements in animal healthcare and welfare in our production system.

Various models have been developed to measure the total carbon footprint of many production systems. For pig production these take account of the feed ingredients used, the transport of the feed, the pigs produced per sow per year and the various inputs (feed type and ingredients, energy inputs, manure storage and management etc) as well as the amount of pigmeat produced.

A model which has been developed by the Carbon Trust in the UK is currently being reviewed by Bord Bia to support the claims made by the Origin Green Programme. The proposed Carbon model will benchmark best practice at individual farm level alongside the overall national average figures for the sector. The proposed Carbon model for the Irish pig sector was developed in collaboration between Bord Bia (who engaged The Carbon Trust to develop and validate the model) and the Teagasc Pig Development Department. It is proposed to pilot this model with a number of pig farms on a voluntary basis over the next 12 months. Over the years many improvements have been achieved in terms of the "sustainability" credentials of pigmeat production. The on-going work on the Teagasc SignPost farms will help deliver the relevant messages to a much wider audience over the next few years. This will be an important part of communicating the pertinent messages on this journey of improvement.

### FUTURE FOCUS

The emphasis in the future should be a renewed focus on the use of organic fertiliser (in the form of pig slurry/manure) to replace chemical fertiliser in the growth of grass and various tillage crops. Podcasts, short videos and some news articles to disseminate the messages from these demonstrations have been developed and will continue to demonstrate that pig manure/slurry can replace chemical fertiliser. In collaboration with the Teagasc Tillage Specialists and relevant Advisors we have run a number of Demonstrations on farms to highlight this message. We would hope to

repeat this in the future. It is expected that the use of renewable energy sources and bioenergy to replace fossil fuels (directly and indirectly) on pig farms will continue to increase on pig farms as a result of the economic savings that can be achieved in energy/fuel costs. There are still challenges to be dealt with, but we must focus on improving efficiency at all stages of the food supply chain while not compromising food quality.

### EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENTS OVER THE YEARS

It is important to recognise the achievements of the past and build upon those achievements. It is useful to look at 1990 as a base year (because it is a reference year in terms of the Kyoto Agreement which is often cited in relation to green-house gas emission targets) and compare current productivity and input usage.

Irish pig producers produced 1350kg of pigmeat per sow in 1990 (with an FCE from weaning to sale of 2.45). This figure has improved to 2,549 kg of pig carcass weight/sow in 2021 and an average FCE of 2.39 from weaning to sale. This was achieved by increased output/sow/year (i.e. 21.9 up to 28.1 pigs produced/sow/year) and increased slaughter weights (82 kg liveweight in 1990 up to 118.4kg liveweight in 2021). While the drop in FCE weaning to sale is very small (2.45 to 2.39) it is very significant particularly when you factor in the rise in sale weight (as the FCE increases as the pigs get heavier). The output of pigmeat produced per sow has increased greatly between 1990 and 2021 as shown above. During this time there has also been a strong focus on reducing inputs, in particular reducing feed usage per kg of pigmeat produced along with achieving greater efficiency in the use of other inputs (such as energy, healthcare products, etc). This is evident in the crude protein levels in diets used in 1990 compared to the reduced levels used today which has resulted in reduced excretion of surplus organic nitrogen in the pig manure.

Also the level of phosphorus (P) excreted by pigs has greatly reduced from a figure of 26kg/sow plus progeny / annum in the early 1990s to a current level of 17 kg/sow plus progeny/annum. This was achieved through more accurate formulation of diets on a digestible P rather than a total P basis, and by the use of phytase enzyme to improve the digestibility of plant bound P in the feed ingredients.

All of the changes through the years have improved the sustainability of the production process. There is room for further progress and new technologies and innovations should further enhance the "sustainability" credentials of the sector.

**BORD BIA'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021 HIGHLIGHTED THE PERENNIAL PRICE SWINGS OF PIGMEAT ON INTERNATIONAL MARKETS, IN THIS INSTANCE, A SEVERE COST/PRICE SQUEEZE WHICH IS SHOWING FEW SIGNS OF IMPROVING TO THE EXTENT THAT PRODUCERS COULD LOOK FORWARD TO RECOUPING EVEN A FRACTION OF THE LOSSES ENDURED OVER THE PAST YEAR.**

**Last year, as the report confirmed, the global pigmeat market was adversely impacted by reduced Chinese import demand from the end of the first quarter due to pig herd culling as African Swine Fever again raised its ugly head in China.**

The outcome was a significant redistribution of pig meat to other markets across the world during the second, third and fourth quarters of 2021. The effect on European pig meat suppliers was particularly acute, exacerbated by the coincidence of historically high production volumes allied to lower export opportunities. That, as the Bord Bia report confirmed, was only one aspect of the perfect pig market storm that eventually drove producer prices far below break-even levels. German pig meat production was affected by curtailments to its exports because of ASF in some German pig units.

#### **DEMAND DECLINE**

The year had started out well with positive Chinese import demand for pig meat in the early months of 2021. However, in the following months demand began to decline with imports falling by 9% to 1.4 million tonnes, compared to 2020 levels. That set the scene for the remainder of 2021 as a new ASF variant emerged in China, again leading to herd liquidation. Falling prices encouraged Chinese producers to sell early in order to avoid further price reductions. Bord Bia-monitored estimates from the Chinese Statistics Bureau showed Chinese pig output rose by 36 per cent during the first half of 2021 compared to 2020 levels. However, for the second half of the year production was estimated to have slowed down as liquidation eased.

#### **CONTINUING IMPACT OF ASF**

The impact of ASF continues to threaten other Asian markets, while in Europe this

# GLOOMY PIG MARKET OUTLOOK

disease has been detected in commercial piggeries across key producing member states, especially in Germany as mentioned above, as well as Poland, Romania, and Serbia. Together with these disease incidences, government interventions in other important pig production countries also impacted on international supply and demand, as confirmed by the Bord Bia report. In the Philippines, pig meat production was expected to reach one million tonnes last year, around 40 per cent below pre-ASF levels. Producers there were slow to repopulate herds, fearing further ASF outbreaks. In addition, the Filipino government-imposed price caps on retail pork to control consumer prices and this also created a disincentive to expand pig-meat production. As a result, Philippine pig-meat imports reached record levels of 425,000 tonnes for 2021 as the government reacted to lower domestic output by temporarily lowering tariffs and increasing quota volumes.

#### **PRODUCTION VOLATILITY**

Irish pig-meat production increased by around 5 per cent to 336,000 tonnes in 2021, as productivity at farm level continued to improve. Production across Europe showed single digit growth earlier last year, which then tapered off as the year progressed, reflecting the impact of lower producer prices and higher costs of production. However, European pig-meat output did increase by 2 per cent in 2021 to reach record levels of 23.7 million tonnes driven by growth in particular member states, most notably Spain and Denmark. European pig-meat exports started the year strongly, increasing by 9 per cent to 3.7 million tonnes for the first eight months of 2021, before slowing as the year progressed to finish the year around 5 per cent higher at 5.7 million tonnes. Strong increases in demand from countries such as the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, the US, Australia, and

the Ivory Coast were reported by Bord Bia. Shipments of European pig-meat to China fell by around 5 per cent to two million tonnes for the first eight months of 2021 accounting for 54 per cent of total EU pigmeat shipments for the period.

The European average pigmeat price for 2021 fell by around 11 per cent to €1.43/kg compared to 2020 levels. Irish pig prices, while 8 per cent above the EU average for 2021, were still 8 per cent below 2020 at €1.55/kg. Topping off the dismal market for Irish pig producers, feed, energy and labour costs all surged ahead, putting producers in a precarious loss-making leaving position.

#### **THE ROAD TO LOSS**

That is all by way of outlining the scenario which has led to Irish producers losing incredible amounts of money this year in their production units, with some being forced to exit pig production altogether and others becoming even more reliant on borrowed money and some government subvention to remain open. The war in Ukraine has piled more pressure on pig producers with cereal prices soaring to historically high levels. There is little optimism that production costs will reduce substantially in the short to medium term. Energy costs are now multiples of what they were 12 months ago, with ongoing scarcity of energy supplies continuing to drive up electricity bills on pig farms. Last month, IFM reported on historically high cereal prices for tillage farmers.

These reflect international grain prices and are responsible in the greater part for the ongoing losses being experienced by pig producers. With feed costs at these inflated levels and supply meeting or exceeding demand there is no mechanism by which pig producers can pass on the impact to processors, retailers or consumers to an extent that would the sector to return to profitability in the immediate future.

# FOCUS



SAFETY

# THE VALUE OF INSURANCE

**CHRISTY DOHERTY, HEAD OF AGRICULTURE WITH AXA, DISCUSSES THE INSURANCE COMPANY'S SPONSORSHIP OF THE NATIONAL DAIRY SHOW, HELD AT MILLSTREET LAST MONTH, WITH MATT O'KEEFFE.**

"It has been a very positive sponsorship for us. We have been involved in supporting the IHFA (Irish Holstein Friesian Breeders Association) over the years and this year we were the title sponsor of the AXA Dairy Show and that's set to continue in the coming years. It's the perfect opportunity for AXA to partner with our dairy clients at what is considered to be the premier dairy show for pedigree Holstein breeders."

## A GREAT DAIRY DAY OUT

One hundred and sixty, mainly Holstein with some Jersey, livestock were showing at the Green Glens Arena with the Supreme and Exhibitor bred Champion accolade going to Hallow Atwood Twizzle 1181, a cow bred by Philip and Linda Jones who own the Hallow Holstein dairy herd in Wexford. This is a cow that has had real form this year, having already won the top prize at Tullamore and the Reserve Champion award at the Baileys Cow championship at Virginia Show in August. The Jones's kept it very much in the family at this year's Millstreet event with Philip's brother Garry and wife Izzy Jones winning the Intermediate and Junior awards. The Dairy Show had a number of ancillary events and exhibitions, as Christy explained: "There were Innovation Awards highlighting the latest developments in dairy technology, as well as a range of technical and policy discussion seminars. We had a vet, Hazel Mullins, on hand to discuss livestock health issues with farmers who attended the Show."

## UPDATING INSURANCE POLICIES

On the broader theme of farm insurance in general, Christy Doherty was adamant of the need for farmers to regularly refresh their policies: "There is under-insurance among many farm policies. That's a direct result of global inflation. Just to give an example. If there are, for instance, parts to be secured for a tractor, these have increased in cost due to energy cost rises. So, everything is increasing in price and that extends from the farm itself to the house, where replacement of fire or water-damaged contents has risen hugely in cost. It's the replacement costs that are catching people out. The net result is that farmers can be under-insured unless they do something about it. My advice is to make contact with your insurer, get someone out to assess where a farm needs to be in terms of the level of insurance required for the business



Christy Doherty (Agri Business Manager, AXA), Hazel Mullens and Denis Kiely (Show Director)

**STEEL DOORS, PADLOCKS, WELL PROTECTED WINDOWS AND GOOD SENSOR LIGHTING AROUND THE VICINITY OF THE FARMYARD ARE PRACTICAL AND PRECAUTIONARY INITIATIVES TO PROTECT PROPERTY.**

and family home. The replacement costs have risen so much, and insurance policies need to reflect that fact. It is difficult to keep track of cost, including replacement cost as well as the up-to-date valuation of a wide range of insured items in a farm business. That's where you require expert assistance from your insurer. Establishing the correct value to put on machinery, for instance, is very difficult. Farmers do need to create a catalogue of their machinery and ancillary items on their farms. Getting current prices from their machinery dealers is a practical way of updating machinery valuations. That catalogue can then be updated regularly. I think farmers should even photograph each machinery item and then invite their insurance representative to visit to review the insurance policy."

## LOCK UP YOUR BUSINESS

The AXA Head of Agriculture took the opportunity to highlight security challenges on farms: "I encourage farmers to take security very seriously. Most farms have a workshop. It needs to be well secured. Steel doors, padlocks, well protected windows and good sensor lighting around the vicinity of the farmyard are practical and precautionary initiatives to protect property. The cost, and there is a significant cost, is far less than the loss of valuable equipment. Insurers do take the level of security into account, so it is worthwhile from a number of perspectives."

## SHOP AROUND

Like many members of society, there is a reluctance on the part of some farmers to even consider changing service providers: "That extends not only to insurance but also across energy, telecommunications, banking, in fact, any service provider. Farmers owe it to themselves and their businesses to get the best value they can in any input for their business.

There is evidence that farmers are willing to change. We are in the farm insurance sector for the past four years and have built up a client base of 30,000 farm businesses. That indicates a willingness on the part of farmers to shop around for the best option for their insurance needs.

I don't think it is so much a reluctance to change as a lack of understanding of how straightforward it is to change service provider, and I include other services as well as insurance, in that observation. It has been made very easy by various service providers for customers to change as they wish. Many companies, including AXA, have taken the paperwork out of the system so that there is less need for paper-based policy proposals and documents to be going to and fro between the service provider and the customer. Farmers, like everyone else, need to consider that a phone call that might take less than 15 minutes could save a lot of money for their businesses."

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mothaíonn an fheirm é.**



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland





# FARMER'S MENTAL HEALTH AT RISK

**NEW RESEARCH INVESTIGATING THE RISK FACTORS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE AMONG FARMERS IN IRELAND, CONDUCTED BY UCD SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCE, HAS REVEALED THAT FARMERS ARE CURRENTLY UNDER IMMENSE STRESS WITH 1/4 OF FARMERS AT RISK OF SUICIDE.**

**According to the study, Government policies designed to reduce climate change and a perception of being misunderstood by the public are driving forces in the stress being experienced today by farmers in Ireland.**

The research was overseen by Dr Tomás Russell in the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science in collaboration with Alison Stapleton from the UCD School of Psychology and funded by the HSE National Office of Suicide Prevention. Tomás states that Dying to Farm: Developing a Suicide Prevention Intervention for Farmers in Ireland highlights a serious crisis among the farming community. "There is a mental health crisis

in our farming community at present. Our results show that nearly 1/4 of farmers are at risk of suicide. Our research has also found that Government policies designed to reduce climate change are having a significant impact on farmers' mental health and adding significant stress to farmers which in turn is causing higher suicidal ideation and higher distress among farmers."

## **WORRYING RESULTS**

The study, which was conducted over a one-year period, aimed to investigate risk factors of mental health and suicide among farmers in Ireland and also identify types of interventions to support mental health among

the farming population in Ireland. Data was collected from ten 1:1 interviews with farmers; and four focus groups, three with farmers and one with professionals who provide support to farmers. There were 256 respondents to the survey: 185 males, and 71 females with an age range from 21-70 (averaging at 38.5). Dairy farmers constituted the bulk of respondents – 133 farmers' main enterprise was dairy, beef farmers accounted for 63, mixed enterprise 26, sheep farmers numbered 21, tillage 4 and 'other' 9. Shockingly, 23.4 per cent of respondents were considered at risk for suicide; 55.5 per cent of farmers experience moderate to extremely severe depression; 44.1 per cent of farmers experience moderate to

**FARMERS FEEL MISUNDERSTOOD, THAT THE PUBLIC DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THEM AND THE ROLE THEY ARE ALREADY PLAYING IN ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE ON FARMS.**

extremely severe anxiety; and 37.9 per cent of farmers experience moderate to extremely severe stress. "We used the Depressive Symptom Inventory Suicidality Subscale and cut-offs identified by Glischinski et al. (2016) in identifying the percentage of farmers considered at-risk for suicide. For identifying farmer stress, anxiety and depression we used the 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scaled by (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)."

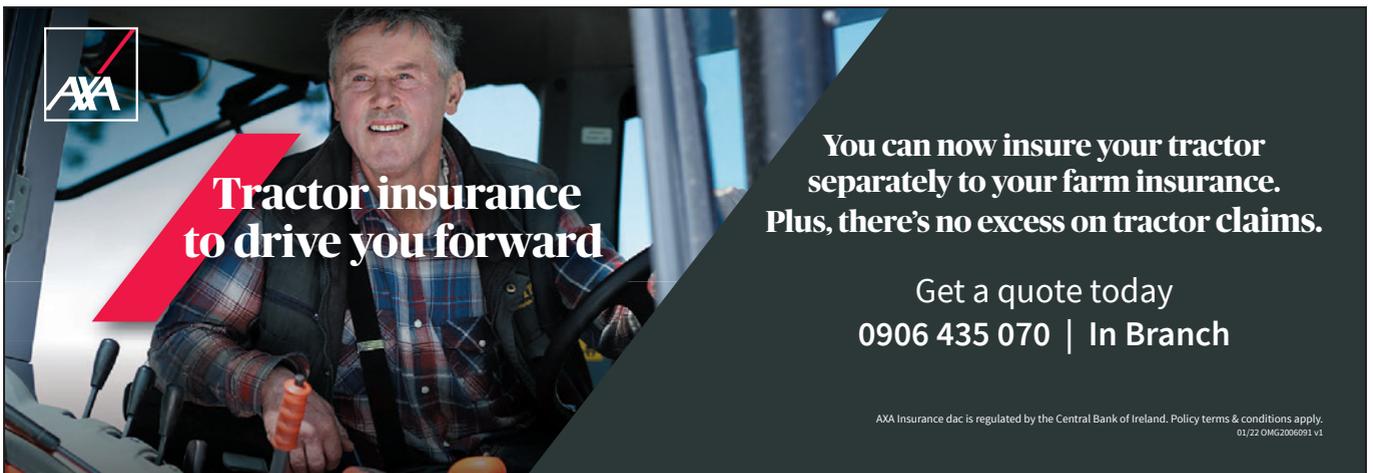
"Farmer stress is associated with higher suicidal ideation and higher distress. The top three stressors for farmers were identified as: Government policies designed to reduce climate change; outsiders not understanding farming; and concern over the future of the farm. In addition, higher levels of farm attachment is associated with lower well-being."

**INCREASED STRESS**

"Farmers are feeling increased stress and pressure from the Government policies on

climate change, which they feel they have not had a voice in. In addition, farmers feel misunderstood... that the public doesn't understand them and the role they are already playing in addressing climate change on farms." Tomás adds that increasing psychological skills among farmers will have an impact in lesser suicidal ideation and lesser distress and work in this area is ongoing. "Psychological skills describe how we respond to unwanted thoughts, feelings and sensations and there are a number of interventions and approaches that farmers can use to reduce stress and suicidal ideation. We are currently working on analysing the data to see the most suitable interventions for farmers."

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# FARM SAFELY WITH ELECTRICITY THIS WINTER

AS WE FACE INTO THE WINTER SEASON, WORSENING WEATHER CONDITIONS AND LESS DAYLIGHT HOURS CAN INCREASE THE SAFETY RISK ON THE FARM WITHOUT SOME FORWARD PLANNING AND PREPARATION.

**As well as risks such as livestock or machinery, farmers need to be aware of the dangers of working near electricity wires.** As electricity is so much part of all our daily lives, we can sometimes take it for granted and may become blind to the risk it poses if not respected and managed correctly around the farm.

By always asking yourself "Are you sure it's safe?" we can all go home to our families and loved ones safely every day. ESB Public Safety Manager Michael Murray is asking all farmers take some time to read these electrical safety tips so that you can be prepared for winter season ahead.

## SAFETY TIPS FOR OUTDOORS

At this time of year storms can cause damage to electricity wires and poles, so always be alert and keep a safe distance. Remember fallen electricity wires are live and therefore dangerous to approach. Report any damage immediately by contacting the ESB Networks' emergency number: phone 1800 372 999 (24/7 line).

Always watch out for electricity wires and cables.

1. Electricity wires are always live; never approach them. Always keep a safe distance because electricity is very powerful and can jump gaps.
2. Wires can become low or fall to the ground when damaged by timber or wind,

so always know where wires and poles are on your land, and anticipate dangers, especially when dark.

3. If you see fallen or low wires, keep clear and phone ESB Networks immediately on 1800 372 999
4. If carrying out maintenance around the farm be mindful of the presence of electricity wires and poles. Always Look Out and Look Up for wires and poles and contact ESB Networks before carrying out work near the electricity network.

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS THIS WINTER

Around your home and farm ensure that all electrical fittings and equipment are in good condition. Ensure outdoor lights and portable electrical equipment are properly rated for outdoor use and plug them into a portable residual current device (RCD) for extra safety.

- ▶ Only use electrical equipment that is fit for purpose and in good condition
- ▶ Check for damaged or frayed wires, loose connections or damaged equipment. With damaged equipment, disconnect from the electricity supply immediately – it is always safer to disconnect remotely at your electrical distribution board. Replace faulty equipment when safe to do so.
- ▶ Electrical equipment generates heat, always switch off when not in use and keep any combustible materials clear.
- ▶ Always unwind extension leads

completely to avoid overheating and don't overload sockets with adaptors or extension blocks.

- ▶ Check that the RCD works by pushing the test button. This is located at your electrical distribution board.
- ▶ Always get advice from a registered electrical contractor when carrying out electrical repairs. Information [www.safeelectric.ie](http://www.safeelectric.ie)

Standby generators are a convenient source of electricity in emergency situations when the ESB Networks supply is unavailable. Special rules apply to the installation of standby generators which your registered electrical contractor will be familiar with.

## DO

- ▶ Always ensure a proper change-over switch is installed at the main distribution board.
- ▶ Always use a registered electrical contractor.
- ▶ Always notify ESB Networks of the presence of a standby generator.

## DON'T

- ▶ Never use a temporary generator without a change-over switch.
- ▶ Never plug a portable generator into a socket.
- ▶ Never use a temporary generator without a change-over switch.



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:  
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# SAFE AND SOUND ADVICE

**CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, IS URGING FARMERS TO THINK SAFETY BEFORE CARRYING OUT FARM BUILDING OR MAINTENANCE WORK; AND ALSO HIGHLIGHTS AGE-RELATED RISK FACTORS ON FARM.**

**Farm building and maintenance work, in particular work at height can be very dangerous, with this in mind farmers need to ensure that all work is carried out in a safe manner.**

Some of the largest liability claims FBD handle on our farm policies relate to farm building and maintenance accidents. As appropriate get competent and insured contractors to carry out the work.

For projects that are scheduled to last more than 30 days, involve more than one contractor or involve a particular risk, it is a legal duty for a farmer (the client/person for whom the project is being carried out) to appoint, in writing, a competent Project Supervisor for the Design Process (PSDP) and a Project Supervisor for the Construction Stage (PSCS). The PSCS is responsible for safety during the construction process. Falls from heights are the main cause of fatalities and serious injury when maintenance and repair work is being carried out. It is essential that every precaution is taken to ensure the safety of all persons working at height.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Regulations 2007 (Part 4, Work at Height) is based on a risk assessment approach and requires that the process for selecting the most appropriate work equipment for any activity takes into account the following hierarchy of controls:

1. Firstly to avoid work at height where possible

2. Then to prevent falls from height; and, failing that
3. To reduce the consequences of a fall

It must be ensured that:

- ▶ All work at height is properly planned, organised, supervised and carried out safely
- ▶ The place where work at height is done is safe
- ▶ All work at height takes account of weather conditions
- ▶ Those involved in work at height are instructed and trained
- ▶ Equipment for work at height is carefully selected and appropriately inspected
- ▶ Give collective protection measures (e.g. guard rails) priority over personal protection measures (e.g. safety harnesses)
- ▶ The risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled
- ▶ Injury from falling objects is prevented

When carrying out work at height always ensure that there is a safe means of access. If a ladder is used ensure that it is in good condition, footed, secured at the top, and extends at least one meter above the roof access level. Use appropriate crawl or roof ladders as appropriate and always have a system of fall prevention or fall protection in place. For more extensive work at height the use of scaffold or a cherry picker may be more appropriate.

## INSURANCE

Before carrying out construction work it is vital that appropriate insurances are arranged to provide you with protection against any legal liability in the event of an accident on the construction site.

Just because you employ contractors to do a job, who have their own Insurances, their Insurances may not protect you regarding any legal Liability you may have if you are drawn into a claim arising from an accident for which you may be deemed responsible or partially responsible for.

FBD Insurance Farm Multiperil clients with existing Employers and Public Liability insurance in place are afforded protection for farm outbuilding construction work under their Farm Multiperil policy as standard. Traditionally insurers exclude construction activities under their individual policy contracts due to the nature of the risks and severity of potential claims.

FBD understand construction works are part of farming activities. We know that farmers invest in their infrastructure to ensure they can maintain and expand their farming business.

The following categories of construction works are covered if farming clients are deemed legally liable for an incident giving rise to a claim;

- ▶ Maintenance & repair of outbuildings
- ▶ Alterations or extensions of existing outbuildings
- ▶ New farm outbuilding construction projects

We would strongly encourage farmers to engage fully insured competent contractors

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to carry out works of this nature who are experts in this field. In addition, we will be pleased to check contractor's insurance details for you at no charge. Talk to the team in your local FBD Insurance branch today for more information. Make safety a priority on your farm, stop taking risk.

### AGE-RELATED RISK FACTORS

Farming is a great way of life and very rewarding, but by its nature, it is also a very hazardous occupation. Agriculture is the sector with the highest number of fatal workplace accidents annually. Older farmers and older people who live on the family farm are at significant risk. Of the 208 people who died in work-related incidents in the Agricultural sector from 2011-2020, 47% of the victims were aged 65 years or older. The high rate of work-related fatalities to older workers indicates that older farmers may need to take special precautions to avoid serious injury or fatality when engaged in certain farming activities. The physical capabilities of older farmers vary by individual. While some people maintain good strength, flexibility, eyesight, and hearing well beyond age 65, others do not.

Older farmers, however, can continue to be safe and productive members of agricultural operations. The key is their ability and that of their families to recognise age-related risk factors, as well as the willingness to modify expectations and physical activity accordingly, and to adjust working practices as appropriate.

FBD is urging farmers to recognize the key age-related risk factors when managing safety on their farms.

**Strength:** Muscle strength decreases with age, and this can result in changes in posture

that increase the likelihood of sprains and strains. It is important not to compensate for decreased physical capabilities by adopting unsafe work practices or taking shortcuts in established safe procedures.

**Mobility:** Reduced mobility may also be an issue for the older farmers, and where this is the case, farmers may not be able to move out of the way of danger quickly.

**Vision:** To be safe, farmers must be able to recognize objects clearly at a variety of distances and in changing light conditions. This capability, however, tends to gradually decline with age. In addition farmers routinely work in situations that do not have adequate light, such as in fields at dusk or at night, or inside dimly lit sheds.

**Hearing:** Everyone suffers some hearing loss as a result of aging. In addition to this normal hearing loss, farmers of all ages suffer from more noise-induced hearing loss than the general population. After years of exposure to tractors, farm machinery, and confined livestock, an older farmer may not be able to hear the warning signs of an approaching hazard.

**Illness and disease:** Some age-related medical conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism result in reduced mobility, making it harder to climb on and off machinery and get out of the way to avoid potential livestock related injuries. If the fingers, hands, or arms are involved, reaction time also may be decreased by making it more difficult to manipulate tractor and machinery controls. Prescription medications often taken for these conditions, along with pain relievers, may further slow reaction time. Older farmers should consider the following points before undertaking any task:

- ▶ Risk assess the hazards and associated

risks before carrying out work activities, in particularly work involving tractors, machinery, livestock or working at heights.

- ▶ Use of well-maintained and designed livestock handling facilities, including calving gates.
- ▶ Ensure that farm vehicles and machinery are maintained in a safe operation condition.
- ▶ Before each job ask yourself...
  - ▶ Can I carry out this job safely?
  - ▶ Do I need to get help?
  - ▶ Do I need to engage a specialist contractor e.g. for work at height or building repair?
  - ▶ Do I have the appropriate equipment & facilities to carry out the work safely?
- ▶ Always inform someone about where you are going and when you expect to be back; carry a mobile phone when out on the farm.

Older generations have so much experience, understanding and knowledge to contribute to the family farm. FBD urges farm families to take time to identify hazards and risks which may particularly affect older people on family farms. Understanding and assessing these risks is important but undertaking action is critical to making family farms a safer place for all.

Always Think Safety First.

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*Statistics: Health & Safety Authority's A Review of Work-Related Fatalities in Agriculture in Ireland 2011-2020*

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## MESSAGES

- Most big planning decisions are made in November.
- Stop grazing when target grass covers are reached.
- Mastitis control; a new era begins now.
- Dry cow management depends on silage quality and cow BCS.
- Only feed meals to animals in need.
- Replacement heifer management must be high priority now.
- Apply Lime, P. and K this November.
- Know about "food fraud" so that you can debate the merits of the food you produce.



By Matt Ryan

**MOST PLANS SHOULD BE MADE IN NOVEMBER!**

- » **Whether milk price is high or low realistic plans must be made in November:**
  - Costs are increasing, there are calf issues and environmental concerns, dairy farmers must be very careful with spending and investment.
  - No doubt, there is a 'rainy day,' a poor profit year, will come sooner rather than later.
- » **Planning, starting now, will be essential to successfully negotiate these challenges.**
- » **Some dairy farmers, because of very high incomes this year, will spend carelessly. The essentials are: dry cow treatment, cow BCS, replacement heifer weight targets, investment in lime P & K, labour for spring, pay essential creditors, adequate land area for the livestock planned for next year.**
- » **Financial planning, which most farmers are very neglectful of, starts now:**
  - To do a financial plan now you must update your 2022 financial accounts. This is possible because very few financial transactions take place in December – you will be 95-98% accurate. This gives you a lead into the 2023 plan – where you can reduce cost and where you can expect to make more sales.
  - From this you will know the quantities of: fertiliser (do a fertiliser plan), meal (500-600kgs/cow), veterinary products and medicine, dairy products (30-40cc/cow/day teat dip, etc.), insurance, etc.
  - With this information you should get three quotations/tenders from different merchants for each individual input.
- » **A lot of thought needs to be put into your labour requirement for 2023, both in terms of quantity and type.**

One labour unit should, in an efficient set up, be able to manage 130-160 cows with extra help during the calving season. Some large cow farmers get in a "night time calver", which is a great idea! The idea should be considered by 2-3 medium sized farmers who might share one such person, operating to strict hygiene protocols.

How and where can I source this "help"? You must be proactive through all public media.
- » **Associated with labour is the need to "Contract rear calves". This is determined by the acreage available to "carry planned**

livestock" in 2023 and not by spring labour availability.

- » **Capital investments to be made - decide on where your farmyard is deficient in terms of:**
  - Environmental needs, such as slurry storage, soiled water storage, housing for cows, calves, and electricity efficiency, etc.
  - Labour efficiency: The number of rows being milked in parlour (target is 7- 8) has a big effect on labour requirements; calf housing; roadways & paddocks.

**HOUSE COWS WHEN AT TARGET GRASS COVERS**

- » **Because grass will be invaluable next spring to minimise meal feeding levels, you must now end grazing when the farm cover is 700 to 850kgs DM per ha. The former for 2.5 cows/ha and latter for 3.5 cows/ha with a range in between.**
- » **Every day you delay closing in the autumn reduces spring available grass by 12kgs DM. Whereas every day you delay grazing in spring only increases yield by 8kgs DM. This is the most important decision and action you will take in November, so try to get it correct.**
- » **As grass grows less than 1 - 3 kg DM/ha/day over the winter, and if you need an opening cover of 1000 (last year proved we can deal with covers of up to 1100) then you must close at over 750 - 900kg DM if stocked at 3.5 cows/ha on the milking platform.**
  - To close at these covers you may have to leave one or two paddocks with covers of 1500-1600.
  - If you don't know what I am talking about, contact your adviser immediately or your discussion group - a grass training workshops can help.
- » **Farm covers over 2300 lose quality very fast, therefore, where that has arisen get extra stock in to eat off.**
- » **Over 60-70% of the grazing area must be grazed off and closed by 1st November.**
  - For heavily soils it should be 80%.
  - The paddocks being grazed in November will not be grazed until 20 th March to early-April. These paddocks will be furthest away from milking parlour, have poorer grazing infra-structures, have old grasses, be slower growing, good clover swards and maybe silage fields.
  - If that not done and a high proportion remains you must get in extra stock to get that proportion eaten off as soon as possible.

- » Therefore, keep grass in the diet for as long as possible, ration the silage and feed some meals now.
- » Clover swards must be closed with not more than 350 kg DM on them.
- » Every farmer should be using the autumn rotation planner to guide grass allocation per day but measurement must also be done so as to STOP grazing when target closing covers are arrived at.

### MASTITIS CONTROL – A NEW ERA

- » As the cure rate of mastitis/SCC is 50-70% with dry cow treatment, this is one cost that cannot be avoided.
- » As it only cost €3-€7 per cow, dry cow treatment represents great value for money.
- » The big difference from the past to now is that your Vet will be heavily involved in assessing the appropriate drying off drug/procedure for your herd. This is because society wants farmers to be more careful/considerate when using antibiotics and anthelmintics so that their over-use is minimised. This, it is hoped, will ensure that there will be no human or animal bugs resistant to antibiotics.
- » Therefore, there will be more teat sealers used on cows with low levels of mastitis and you will need a prescription from your Vet to use the usual dry cow antibiotic.
  - Vet advice will ensure you use the best teat sealer and appropriate dry cow antibiotic – talk to him/her early in the month.
  - It would be advisable to do a milk recording in early November to identify cows with low SCC who are suitable for teat sealing.
- » **Dry off cows that:**
  - Are within 56 days of calving.
  - Have a daily milk yield of 7 litres (0.7kg MS) or less per day
  - That have SCC levels of over 300,000,
  - First calver that have milked for 270 days, and,
  - Thin cows, being particularly concerned about high yielders, who “milk off their backs”.
- » **Drying off cows is not an easy task and much care, time and planning must be set aside for the job.**
- » **The following suggestions should be taken on board:**
  - Treat all quarters of each cow with the same treatment.
  - CMT (California Mastitis Test) test cows prior to drying off to identify problem quarters. In problem quarters, administer one lactating cow tube every 12 hours for 3 milkings prior to drying off. All milk should be discarded during this procedure.
  - Dry cow antibiotic tubes and/or teat sealant should be administered after the final milking.
  - Milk out the quarter fully before infusing the dry cow antibiotic/sealant.
  - Disinfect the teat end – vigorously, rub the teat end for 10-15 seconds with cotton wool soaked in methylated spirits.
  - Do not contaminate the nozzle of the antibiotic tube before insertion into the teat canal.
  - Infuse the contents of the antibiotic tube into the quarter – hold teat-end firmly between thumb and forefinger and with other hand, gently massage the antibiotic upwards into the teat (NOTE: This is not done with teat seal).
  - Teat spray (post milking teat disinfectant) treated quarters

immediately after infusion at a rate of 20 cc/cow.

- Record cow number, date and product details of all dry cow treatments
- Mark the cow (leg band or spray paint on udder) so that cows that have received dry cow antibiotic therapy can be readily recognised.
- Do not leave cows in yards or soiled areas in the period immediately after dry cow therapy application.
- Maintain dry cows separate from the milking herd if possible and put dry cows in clean, dry paddocks (particularly for the first two weeks after drying-off) to reduce teat exposure to environmental mastitis bacteria.
- The cow is at a greater risk of new infection for the first 3 weeks after drying off.
- Keep a close eye on cows to identify new infections.
- » **Some farmers are teat sealing heifers now; but if being done, because you have heifers calving down with mastitis, then it must be done extremely carefully and is a tough job.**
  - A roll-over crate makes the job easier,
  - Teat sealing cows or heifers is a job that must be done with extreme hygiene care – if not animal deaths within a week will result.
- » **You should cull cows that:**
  - Had 3 or more clinical cases this year and had 2-3 high SCC readings during the year.
  - It is a waste of money treating these cows as they will continue to spread infection to other cows next year.
  - Two and three teeters have no part to play in profitable farming.
  - Sell these cows in November.

### HEALTH AND PARASITE CONTROL

- » **Firstly, cows and replacements need good facilities:**
  - Each cow has to have a cubicle, that is, 50 cows need 50 - 55 cubicles.
  - Each cow needs 2 ft. of head space if being fed meals.
  - Each cow needs 0.75 to 1.0 ft. silage feeding space.
  - Cubicle and yard surfaces must be in good repair, kept clean every day.
  - Access to feeding area must be adequate, and not restricted, with an access passage, 6ft wide, from cubicles to silage area every 5-6 cubicles.
  - Shed must be adequately ventilated, which is enough inlet and outlet area, with no draughts.
  - Daily, you should walk carefully through your cows, not looking over the rail, to ensure none are sick, lame, stressed, free of mastitis, and putting on body condition.
- » **Because parasites reduce animal performance, we must deal with them.**
- » **Weanlings must be dosed at housing for ostertagia type two stomach worms.**
- » **You never know when Fluke hits, therefore, if in doubt, get a dung sample tested through your vet. Remember, all fluke doses have a milk withholding period, so it is best not done until drying off.**
- » **All animals will need to be treated for lice at housing.**
- » **Lameness must be addressed and prevented by:**
  - Having good and adequate facilities, but overcrowding, poor

ventilation, with bad surfaces and poor nutrition management are real issues.

- Getting the Farm Relief Service to examine the whole herd and deal with lame cows has real merit – experts know what they are doing!
  - A footbath 3 consecutive days every month will have merit if there is a problem on the farm.
- » Consult your Vet on dosing/vaccination management now to alleviate these tasks in spring.

### DRY COW MANAGEMENT DEPENDS ON...

- » There is a great temptation to milk on thin cows to generate cash flow.
- » Cows that are dried off thin will calve down thin which will result in:
- Calving difficulties,
  - Poor milk yields next year, as every 50kgs below target (1 condition score) will result in a loss of 450 litres,
  - Surveys show that cows calving down in body condition scores (BCS) of less than 3.00 have a lower chance of going in-calf.
- » Drying off thin cows in early November means they need no meals during the dry period if the silage is good. The cheapest way of managing thin cows this autumn/winter is to dry off early and feed no meal if silage is good enough – see Table 1.
- » Divide up your cows into three groups, based on condition score (BCS):
- » Group (1): BCS 2.75 - 3.25. Most of the herd will be in this group and will need no special attention with silage 68% DMD or better.
- » Group (2): BCS 2.75 or less. For sure these cows need meal, the amount depending on the quality of silage (Table 1) and, if calving in Feb must be dried off in early Nov. A cow that is 2.75 BCS now and due to calve in early Feb in a BCS of 3.25 and being fed 68% DMD silage; she has 84 days to calving of which there are 40 days where there is no BCS gain. Therefore, she only has 44 "effective" days for meal feeding and she need to put on extra 0.5 BCS or approx 25 - 30kgs of weight. This will require 150+kgs of meal or 3.4 kgs/cow/day for the 44 days. Therefore, the meal feeding period is too short, but you have to feed her.
- Group (3): BCS 3.25+ cows:
- Cows that are very fat at calving down will underperform by milking poorly and have a lower in calf rate next year.
  - Some farmers push on the left-over silage from groups (1) or (2) to these animals.
  - Other farmers will feed only 5 Kgs DM per day of silage with

straw. That means only giving them 25-30 Kgs of fresh (20% DM) silage per cow per day plus 4-5 kgs fresh straw.

**Table 1: Recommendations for dry cow feeding (10-12 weeks dry period)**

Silage DMD	Body Condition Score at Drying-Off			
	< 2.5	2.5	2.75	> 3.0
> 72	Sil + 1 Kg	Sil ad-lib	Sil Restr.	Restr.
68 - 72	Sil + 2 Kg	Sil + 1 Kg	Sil ad-lib	Restr.
64 - 68	Sil + 3 Kg	Sil + 2 Kg	Sil + 1 Kg	Ad-lib
60 - 64	Sil + 4 Kg	Sil + 3 Kg	Sil + 2 Kg	Sil + 1 Kg

**Sil = Silage Restr = Restrict**

- » Some farmers see this three-grouping requirement as impractical but it will result in 3-4 more cows per 100 being in calf, less calving problems, less feed wasted on fat cows and more milk per cow next year. If separate groupings is an issue for you, then, you must invest a small amount of money in meeting this requirement.

### MEALS TO ANIMALS IN NEED

- » Many farmers will decide to feed no meal to any stock. This may be the correct decision if all stock are meeting target weight gains but some do:
- Milking cows (2-4kg, 16-17%P), if grass is tight and silage is poor
  - Small weanlings (1-2kg 14% P ration);
  - Small in-calf heifers (1-2kg 14% P ration);
  - Autumn calvers; feed 3-8kg, depending on grass supply.

### REPLACEMENT HEIFER CARE

- » First things first; weigh your weanling (called R1's) and your in calf (R2's) heifers now to see how they compare with the targets.
- Targets: R1's and R2's should be 40% and 80% respectively of their mature weights. Mature weights are: HF = 580 kg; NZ/Br Fr = 550kg; J x HF = 545kg.
  - Then act on the results.
- » On many farms, replacement heifers are below target weights at most stages in their lifetime, with the result that culling from 1st to 2nd lactations are very high. Being away over targets is also seriously damaging:
- ▶ R1'S gaining more than 0.8kg/day, deposit too much udder fat and consequently milk poorly,



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- ▶ R2's calving down 40+ kgs over target weights, while milking more in their 1st lactation, subsequently milk a lot less and suffer early culling.
- » The target weights for 1st November are as follows:

Breed	R1's (40% Mature Wt)	R2's (80% Mature Wt)
Holstein:	224 kg	448kg
British Fr/NZ Fr	220 kg	440 kg
Jersey x H	218 kg	436 kg

- » Animals under target should get extra meal. With good silage, for every 10kgs R1's are under target they need 40kgs of extra meal and for every 10 kgs R2's are under target they need an extra 60 kgs meal over a period to bring them to target.
- » Heifers suffer on most farms at this time of year.
  - They are left to "run around" cleaning up bad pastures, either at home or particularly on out - farm blocks.
  - There is only 90-120 days to calving.
  - At an expected weight gain of 0.75 Kgs per day, you need 100 days to put on 75Kgs.
  - Remember the last 3-4 weeks before calving does not count for weight gain as the animal's intake is very low and she diverts most feed into calf growth.
  - Mix the incalf heifers with the 1st calvers so as to minimise stress now and particularly after calving when stress, then, can have a detrimental effect on her subsequent weight gain and conception rates.
- » Use Tables 2 & 3 to plan your meal feeding strategy for your weanlings.
  - Meals will give the following weight gains:
    - ▶ 1kg and 2 Kgs of meal will give 0.25 and 0.4 Kgs gain per day respectively.
    - ▶ R1's should be fed to gain at least 0.5Kgs per head per day. Some will have to gain more to catch up.
- » At grass next spring they should gain 0.75Kgs. (60 days of Mar and Apr X 0.75=45 kgs). From this information you can decide what management treatment animals of various weights require.

Table 2: Meal requirements for Weanling Heifers on Silage.

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

- » It is obvious from above that:
  1. Silage must be analysed (contract rearers must also)
  2. A weighing scales is essential to manage heifer target weights, therefore, discussion groups should buy one together.
- » With good management weanlings that are 20% under target would achieve target mating weights; therefore, feed extra.
- » All this information is essential to bring to the attention of contract calf rearer's so that subsequent hassle doesn't arise. We have had cases where the owner of the animals has been very

trusting of the rearer's ability, based on past history, and hasn't monitored silage quality and animal target weights. There is only one loser in that situation!

Table 3: Protein levels (%) in meal required to supplement silage of different % Proteins,

Kg Meal	% Protein in Silage			
	8%	10%	12%	14%
2kg	20%	18%	16%	14%
3kg	18%	16%	14%	12%

- » Manage replacement health care as above.
  - Many farmers give the Lepto vaccine now or earlier to R1's so as to minimise spring work.

### STOP TALKING ABOUT SOIL FERTILITY - RECTIFY NOW!

- » According to Teagasc, the Top 25% of farmers utilise 2.3 tons grass dry matter more than the average farmer doing Profit Monitors to achieve highest profit. There are many factors but soil fertility will be high in the list of differences. Over 90% of farmers' fields are deficient in either lime, P & K.
  - ▶ Low P. results in yield of grass being reduced by 10-30%
  - ▶ Low K. results in yields of grass being reduced by 5-15%. Apply 40-50 units/acre of K now if field not index 4.
  - ▶ Low calcium (lime levels) also results in poor yields, death of perennial ryegrasses and clover and poor use of nitrogen fertiliser.
- Do a soil test now and do it regularly, every 2-3 years.
- » Apply LIME now - it is the cheapest of all nutrient inputs and gives the most benefit.
- » The basic Phosphorous requirements for 2.5cows/ha with Index 3 are 19 units for grazing plus 16 and 25 units extra for 1 and 2 cuts of silage respectively and,
- » 33 units of Potash for grazing plus 98 and 127 extra for 1 and 2 cuts of silage respectively per ha. A lot of P and K, but that's what has to be applied. As a base dressing (per acre) now; apply 2 bags 0:10:20 for grazing and 3-4 bags 0:7:30 - that's for Index 3. If you are Index 1 or 2 you need a lot more.

### GLOBAL FOOD FRAUD

- » You should google this and read what Prof Charles Elliott; Queens University, has written about it. This will empower you to debate with your non-farmer friends the value of knowing where their food comes from....not manufactured in a laboratory! Food fraud is widespread and it involves cheating the consumer and trying to get a financial advantage over one's competitor.
- » Some of the foods affected are: honey, rice, seafood, herbs and spices, oregano, infant formula, rape seed oil and many more.
- » Eventually it will dawn on people that food produced by the primary producer, the farmer, is guaranteed safe and sound from the land.
- » Farmers must make sure to keep it that way.

### FINAL MESSAGE:

This month concentrate on all the Ms: Monitoring, Management, Manpower and Motivation.



# Considering alternative protein sources in dairy cow winter diets

Dr. Mj Doran, InTouch Feeding Specialist, Alltech Ireland,  
on feed alternatives this autumn

Global soybean meal prices have spiralled to record levels, prompting some Irish farmers to ask, "what are the alternatives to feeding soybean meal to my herd this autumn?"

Irish dairy farmers predominantly operate a grass-based production system. The advantages of this include lower milk production costs and reduced greenhouse gas emission (GHG) intensity compared to other milk production systems. Disadvantages include a high seasonality of milk production and, therefore, a limited product portfolio exists from milk output. Another major challenge is low dietary protein utilisation by the cow — also commonly known as low cow nitrogen (N) utilisation efficiency (NUE), which is caused by high concentrations of crude protein (CP) within grass. Therefore, little can be done to control protein intake in cows that graze full-time. However, 2022 has presented its own set of challenges to Irish and European farmers. Amidst the deepening crisis in Ukraine, farm feed, fuel, electricity and fertiliser costs have soared to record levels. In response, farmers are now keeping a closer eye on input costs. The Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) states that between October 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022, there was a 19 per cent decline in total chemical N fertiliser sales compared to the same period in the previous year. While this statistic may look good with our climate change obligations in the backdrop, a consequence of applying less chemical N fertiliser is lower protein silages. In 2022, InTouch proximate analysis results show that many silages are protein deficient (27 per cent of silages greater than 13 per cent CP; Figure 1). Where these silages are included in full or part-time total mixed rations (TMR) or dry cow diets during the winter, they will lack dietary protein, negatively impacting rumen function and milk production unless the issue is addressed.

The issue of low protein silages can be addressed in a couple of different ways while also using alternatives to soybean. In recent times, the amount of red and white clover planted on agricultural land has increased. This would normally be used to grow perennial ryegrass (PRG)-based swards. Red clover silage typically ranges between 16–20 per cent CP; however, the crop has different attributes to PRG swards and, therefore, needs to be managed accordingly. White clover is generally incorporated into PRG swards due to its higher persistency and physical structure. Despite the many advantages of including a legume, like clover, in pasture-based swards, increasing its presence on-farm is usually done as part of a longer-term strategy. The faba bean also holds significant potential to offset soya usage in Ireland. On a dry matter (DM) basis, the faba bean is 29% CP and has a high energy value of 13 megajoules (MJ) of metabolisable energy (ME)/kilogram (kg) of DM, highlighting its potential as a bovine feedstuff. Very recently, research conducted at University College Dublin investigated substituting soybean meal with rolled beans in concentrate supplement. So far, results of this work seem promising. Farmers have also become increasingly interested in including protected urea-based feed additives like Optigen® in dry and transition cow diets. Typically, 100 grams (g) of Optigen will replace 700 g of soybean meal, and in certain circumstances, this can equate to lower feed costs/cow/day. Additional rumen space from including Optigen, and reducing soybean meal inclusion, should be filled with extra fibre in dry cow diets to limit energy

intake. In milker diets, this additional space should be filled with high-energy feeds, like concentrate supplement, to strike a better ruminal protein:energy balance. Improving this balance can then elevate cow NUE and feed efficiency. Furthermore, including Optigen in the diet during the dry cow period can have a rumen pre-conditioning effect, establishing rumen bacteria associated with Optigen feeding. Once the cow calves down, rumen bacteria can then feed off the Optigen, leading to increased feed efficiency for the subsequent lactation. A typical dry cow feeding rate for Optigen can range from 50–80 g, allowing for up to a 50 per cent reduction in soybean meal inclusion in some scenarios (Table 1). Optigen can then be fed at a rate of 100–150 g/cow/day in early lactation. The feed rate will depend on factors like silage quality, concentrate supplement inclusion level, milk production, etc. For Optigen to work successfully in the first weeks of lactation, freshly calved cows should be offered a high-energy TMR diet while housed full-time or a high-energy buffer (> 20 per cent starch + sugars and 11.5 MJ of ME/kg of DM) while cows adjust to grazing.

On a finishing note, adopting the above strategies will positively affect whole-farm NUE. Currently, Irish farms have an average NUE of 25 per cent, with targets set out to reach 35 per cent. Improving whole-farm NUE will go a long way in helping us reach our GHG reduction targets for 2030, as set out by the Irish government.

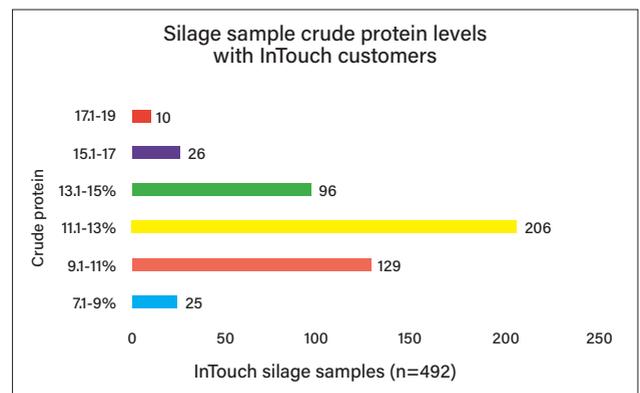


Figure 1: Silage sample crude protein levels with InTouch customers

Feed ingredient (kg)	Traditional dry cow diet	Dry cow with Optigen®
Second cut grass silage <sup>1</sup>	28	28
Dry cow mineral	0.15	0.15
Barley straw	2.5	2.8
Soybean meal	0.8	0.4
Optigen®	-	0.07
Dry matter intake (kg/cow/day)	11.4	11.4

<sup>1</sup> 30% DM, 10 ME/kg DM, 11.5% CP, 56.9% neutral detergent fibre and 65% dry matter digestibility

Table 1: Dry cow diet before and after Optigen® inclusion



# THE NEW McCORMICK 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.



## STORMY CONDITIONS

**While the thunder and lightening literally raged here in Ireland, as I sat down to write this column, a storm was brewing in the British House of Commons... thunderous comments and floods of insults, resulting in Liz Truss becoming the shortest serving Prime Minister in UK history.**

We may give out about our political system here, but one thing we don't have is a revolving door at Government buildings and stability, I would argue, is a very good thing. I believe stable governments with clear-thinking strategies for the future is what is needed now more than ever. The exchange of goods and services - from farm machinery to food - between our two nations is a major part of our economy and we need to protect that flow of business. Brexit has caused its problems, but we are beginning to work with it now and we need to continue to do so.

Now, down to the business in hand and good news to start: farmers' debt levels are at their lowest in 10 years according to the Central Bank. Costs on farms are due to go up but farmers are in a strong position to deal with these increases, owing to strong commodity prices this year.

The ACRES scheme has finally opened up to over 30,000 farmers - closing date is the 21st of November and full details are available from the Department of Agriculture or Teagasc. BPS payments are starting to make their way to farmers now; some €734 million will be distributed to approximately 114,200 farmers. The outlook also looks better for fertiliser supply as companies in Europe are back manufacturing CAN, with gas prices falling over the last few weeks. But farmers are going to have to order up their supply ASAP to avoid delay in the spring of next year.

A few weeks ago the first ever fire officer machinery rescue course was held at Nenagh Fire Station in Co. Tipperary. The course was designed to provide fire officers with information when dealing with fires of agricultural equipment. All areas were covered from tractors to balers and self-propelled and much more besides. Over 130 officers were involved in the day.

Meanwhile, Kevin Burke Tyres have been appointed new ALLIANCE distributor for Ireland. Elsewhere, machinery auctions across Ireland are reporting good turnouts and sales, with good clean machinery securing high prices. Customers are willing to travel to get a bargain; there is a demand out there for clean kit, with older tractors and trailers fetching high prices. So readers, it is worth your while to pop down to your local machinery auction to either buy or to sell.

Until next month, farm wisely and farm safely.



## UPDATED KVERNELAND GEOSPREAD SPREADER RANGE

The Kverneland GEOSPREAD spreader range will be available with an updated design and new features. At the same time Kverneland is introducing the possibility to use the GEOSPREAD disc spreader range as a front-rear combination. This combination will not only increase the total capacity up to 6000 or 7000 litres, but also the efficiency and accuracy will be increased by spreading two different applications in one pass. This results in saving time and reduces soil damage. The GEOSPREAD spreader fits different types of farms. From smaller dairy farms with grass land with a lot of boundaries, to big arable farms with different crop types. The spreader design focuses on clean-ability and durability to maximise precision and user friendliness. "We have been listening to customers' input for years, so we understand their needs when taking care of their crops and their business," explains Linda Segers, Marketing Manager. "Spreading is all about precision. You want to be sure that the product which is applied is perfectly dispersed, giving value from every granule, even at high driving speed.

The Kverneland GEOSPREAD spreader allows users to quickly and easily optimise the spreader settings after measuring the actual properties of each batch of fertiliser, instead of the generic fertiliser properties that other spreaders use. This results in a more precise configuration of the GEOSPREAD spreader and leads to a much more precise nutrient distribution and spreading pattern." The actual properties of each batch of fertiliser are different, even if the name and the brand of the product are the same. Kverneland measures the physical properties of each batch of fertiliser with the shaker box and litre weight to determine the granule size distribution and specific weight (kg/l). With the interactive phone App and website, or AutosetApp on the IsoMatch Tellus terminals, it is easy to find the optimal advice for each type of fertiliser to maximise precision and accuracy in the spreading pattern. Pavel Dvořák, Product Application Specialist,



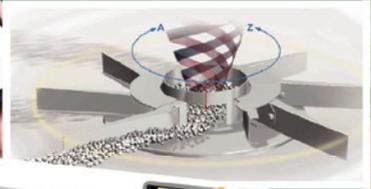
also highlights nutrition accuracy: "By using the front-rear spreader combination the nutrition accuracy will be increased by spreading two different fertilisers in one pass. Instead of spreading a blend it is possible to apply two different fertiliser types with different physical properties, both with a correct setting to get a perfect nutrient accuracy and spreading pattern. As a result, there will be an increased yield and more efficient use of the applied fertiliser." As from January 2023 the Exacta TL GEOSPREAD iDC (intelligent Disc Control) will be available in combination with a completely new user interface which is easy to use.



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## KRONE ADDS 4 NEW TRAILED TEDDERS TO THE VENDRO RANGE

Krone has expanded its latest range of Vendro tedders with 4 new trailed models starting with the T 900 (9m), T 1020, (10.20m) T 1120 (11.20m lower linkage) and the C 1120 (11.20m three-point linkage) these new models are 8 and 10 rotors machines with 5-6 tine arms per rotor. Grass tedding has become a vital part of making high quality silage. Krone has released the mid-range of trailed machines to meet the demand from farmers and contractors looking for larger high output tedders. The Vendro now come as standard with the Krone OptiTurn rotors with exceptional contouring allowing the curved 3D tines to cleanly pick up the crop

and spread it out evenly with no lumps. Declan Smyth Machinery Demonstrator with Farmhand LTD explains that the Krone OptiTurn rotors been tested and developed in Ireland over the last number of seasons and have proven capable of adapting to our extremely heavy conditions and successfully turning the grass to get a good wilt. Border spreading is controlled hydraulically as standard on all new Vendro models and is operated from the comfort of the cab, this means the grass is being tedded away from the boundary and back into the field while also maintaining an even spread.

Like all Krone tedders, the new model

Vendro's also have a complete mechanical driveline. The driveline consists of the main gearbox with a slip clutch, the drive shafts, the maintenance-free Octo Link finger clutches plus the sealed rotor gearboxes for minimum maintenance. The Vendro C 1120/1120 Plus model has a three-point headstock as standard. Its wings are operated from a single-acting spool for extra stability on slopes. The working height is quickly adjusted on a simple crank handle or hydraulically from the cab. The C 1120 chassis uses the transport wheels as jockey wheels in the field to ensure the OptiTurn tines are guided along the contours for an excellent quality of tedding. Another feature of the C 1120 is the hydraulic floating system on the transport axle which is a standard feature. The intelligent weight distribution system ensures a smooth ride on the headlands and prevents scuffing when turning. The C 1120 is available with a hydraulic curtain for tedding along headlands, the unit is mounted on the right-hand side in the direction of travel. The C 1120 is fitted with 10.0/75-15.3 tyres as standard but is also available with wider tyres (15.0/55-17) as an option.

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**farmhand**  
WORKS FOR THE FARMER



## LIGHTWEIGHT JUWEL COMPLETES THE LEMKEN PLOUGH RANGE

With the Juwel 6, LEMKEN is now introducing the little brother of the Juwel 7, 8 and 10 mounted reversible ploughs. From next year, this particularly low-draught model will replace the EurOpal and VariOpal 5 and 6 ranges, which for 25 years have been trusted companions for farmers who value good work results and durability.

The new Juwel 6 with a 110 mm frame box section and an underframe clearance of 80 cm is available in versions with three to five furrows. The M version offers four different working widths per body which

can be adjusted mechanically. The Juwel 6 M V features an infinitely variable hydraulic working width adjustment and hydraulic frame swivelling is available as an optional extra. When combined with the iQblue Connect electronics kit, the implement can be easily transformed into a smart plough with ISOBUS control and connected to your farm management system.

The basic equipment includes the tried-and-tested Dural bodies. Made from specially hardened steel, DuraMaxx bodies are also available and meet maximum requirements

in terms of durability. Mechanical non-stop overload protection is recommended for stony soils. As with all LEMKEN mounted reversible ploughs, the Optiquick adjustment system for side draught-free work is already on board. All LEMKEN mounted ploughs are equipped with the new pendulum wheel, the height of which can be adjusted without tools via a series of holes. For material protection and greater working comfort, hydraulic suspension is also fitted to the depth wheel. A simple conversion kit is available if you want to upgrade to a Uni wheel for road transport.

The Juwel 6 is suitable for tractors from 70 to 130 hp and will be available from specialist agricultural machinery dealers from March 2023.

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## BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

**What a baptism of fire Liz Truss has had in her first few weeks as Prime Minister, much of her own making. And why should we on this island be concerned?** Very simple: if the UK economy suffers, we will feel the impact. Over 42 per cent of tourists to Ireland come from the UK, not only contributing to jobs in the hospitality industry, but to agriculture, which provides produce to hotels and restaurants. The Common Travel Area (CTA) allows the UK to be our first stop in good and in bad times, where we have unfettered access to employment, education and the national health service etc. I find it hard to understand the attitude of so many I have talked to who are openly delighted to witness the debacle the UK finds itself in, when the situation over there can have a knock-on effect on our own wellbeing.

### WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

I have written in past about the lack of responsibility of "campaigning journalists", many with little knowledge of the agricultural sector, venting their views and opinions often based on misinformation or fake news. One topic being covered

in particular is the dangers of eating red meat. Campaigning journalists have undoubtedly created a worldwide backlash against eating red meat. They have influenced global government policies to reduce national herds without a care in the world to farmers and agricultural contractors whose livelihoods are affected.

I simply direct them all to read the recent research by the independent Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, School of Medicine. Having analysed the plethora of health guidance linking certain diets, behaviours and conditions to illness, they have rejected a lot of the health-related arguments of the anti-red meat lobby as being totally untrue. But will that stop the misinformation been trotted out? I don't think so. Regrettably, we live in a world of negative journalism where true journalists are outnumbered, where the truth behind a story doesn't suit their agenda. Why have I bothered to write this article and make the points I have? Because I believe the majority of people believe what they read and journalists have a duty to be truthful and balanced in their reporting. I won't hold my breath that there will be a stream of articles correcting the misinformation on the consumption of red meat or any apology to farmers and agricultural contractors for the damage done to their livelihoods; but I live in hope.

## RIP DR BERNARD KRONE

**Dr Bernard Krone, long-time owner of the Krone Group, passed away after a short serious illness in Spelle, Emsland, on October 14th, 2022, at the age of 82.**

His passing is not only mourned by his family and relatives as well as more than 7,000 employees, but also the international agricultural engineering and European commercial vehicle industry, which the passionate family entrepreneur Dr Bernard Krone decisively shaped through his many years of work. Dr Bernard Krone continuously developed the company and made ground-breaking decisions to diversify the business: In addition to entering the commercial vehicle sector, he established, among other things, self-propelled technology in agricultural engineering and specialised the Krone company in forage harvesting technology. He thus shaped the corporate group over many decades, developed products and set the course before officially retiring from the operational business in 2010 and handing over the helm to his son Bernard Krone. His most important advice to his successor: "Always remain the blacksmith from Emsland like your great-grandfather, your grandfather and your father."

Dr Krone was also fully devoted to association work: at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in the Agricultural Machinery and Farm Tractor Association (LAV), as President of the European Agricultural Machinery Industry Association (CEMA), in the Association for Mechanical and Plant Engineering (VDMA), as longstanding Vice President of the German Association of the Automotive Industry (VDA), and as Chairman of the "Trailers, Special Bodies and Buses" manufacturers' group. The Institute of Technology of the University of Braunschweig awarded him an honorary doctorate. He received the Tilo-Freiherr-von-Wilmowsky Medal for "many years of valuable impulses for the benefit of people employed in agriculture", the Max-Eyth-Denkünze in gold, and the former Prime Minister of Lower Saxony, Christian Wulff, presented him with the Cross of Merit on Ribbon of the Order of Merit of Lower Saxony. Prime Minister President Stephan Weil awarded him with the Cross of Merit 1st Class of the State of Lower Saxony. In addition, Dr Bernard Krone received the LEO industry award in the category "Innovation/Idea" for the concept of the well-known long truck.

He was also awarded the Emsland Medal, the Grashof Denkmünze – the highest award of the Association of German Engineers – and the "Grossen Wagen" of the Bundesverband Güterkraftverkehr (BGL). The VDA appointed him an honorary member in 2013.

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Creates exceptionally even mix

# Pro-Control Slurry Monitor

SlurryKat launch two new pro-control application work and monitoring systems. The latest systems can be specified with any of the company's premium plus dribble bar or trailing shoe applicators.



SlurryKat now offer a new full ISOBUS control, monitoring and data recording system.

Standard features on both systems include:

- ▶ SlurryKat Digitech magnetic Flow meter
- ▶ Pro-Control monitoring system which supplies the following information
  - ▶ Live Flow Rate
  - ▶ Live application rate
  - ▶ Target speed to fit with desired application rate
  - ▶ Total applied and specific field loading

All rates/areas can be formatted in cubic metres per hectare or gallons per acre at the touch of a button. The new Pro-Control system can be purchased in a variety of configurations which include full machine control for hydraulic systems on all SlurryKat tankers or umbilical systems. In our contracting operation we are also incorporating John Deere's Harvest Lab 3000 and GPS guidance from StarFire 6000 for complete control and slurry can be applied in terms of N, P or K in addition to volume based application on the field

## ISOBUS

The ISOBUS system provides the operator with all the mentioned standard features but does not require any additional internal screens to be fitted to the tractor interior. All information is displayed on the tractor's integrated virtual terminal screen. Additionally the applicator can be specified with load sensing hydraulics and all operating functions can then be operated from the ISOBUS display. The ISOBUS Pro Control is finally where we want to arrive with our slurry equipment manufacturing control systems and is where we see the future in use on modern tractors. The system is as simple as hook the tanker or dribble bar on and connect one ISOBUS plug on the rear of the tractor, the load

sensing pressure, flow and signal oil lines and the system does the rest. All info is displayed and controlled on the virtual terminal in the cab and is so easy to use even for inexperienced operators. All work for each task is easily assigned and saved to a customer for billing or record keeping purposes.

## BLUETOOTH TABLET VERSION

For customers with load sensing but do not have an ISOBUS ready tractor, SlurryKat have also developed a tablet based system offering all the functions of the ISOBUS system. This is achieved by using built in Bluetooth technology which also allows the operator to control the working functions of the applicator and monitor all the flow parameters from a tablet in the cab. This tablet based system also incorporates a data saving package where all work can be assigned and saved to a customer for billing or record keeping purposes. SlurryKat has further developments already underway for 2023 to further enhance precision slurry application that will equal precision crop spraying.

Pictures above of the system in our own 6155R tractor with its 4640 Virtual terminal display

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# MCHALE FUSION 4 RANGE

**AT THIS YEAR'S NATIONAL PLOUGHING CHAMPIONSHIPS, MCHALE PRESENTED THE NEW MCHALE FUSION 4 RANGE OF INTEGRATED BALER WRAPPERS COMPRISING OF THE MCHALE FUSION 4, THE MCHALE FUSION 4 PRO AND THE MCHALE FUSION 4 PLUS WITH FILM BINDING TECHNOLOGY.**

**In designing the Fusion 4, operator comfort and friendliness were at the forefront of the machine's development.**

All machines in the Fusion 4 range deliver a number of new features with the higher end Fusion 4 Pro and Fusion 4 Plus being ISOBUS compatible allowing the operator to experience the highest level of customisation and machine performance. The new Fusion 4 range introduces McHale's most advanced pick-up featuring enhanced throughput, increased bale density and faster wrapping speeds. A focus has also been placed on operator comfort whilst still ensuring the reliability and heavy-duty build quality that McHale is renowned for remains.

## PROFI-FLO PICK-UP

McHale have created their highest output pick-up for the Fusion 4 range. The new Profi-Flo pick-up has been designed to increase crop intake through more efficient crop flow and has been engineered to ensure end users are operating with a high-performance pick-up that is designed to suit various working conditions. The new tapered feed channel encourages the crop to flow from the pick-up, towards the rotor and into the bale chamber, maximising throughput. To reduce maintenance, all Profi-Flo pick-ups are fitted with a heavier driveline which reduces chain load and increases chain life.

Customers can choose between a 5-tine bar cam track pick-up or, the optional, 6-tine bar camless pick-up which has increased in width. Behind the tines, customers will notice a number of changes to improve the flow of crop into the chamber.

McHale have also introduced the Adaptive Intake which has been specifically designed to allow the intake area to automatically adjust up and down to changes in material flow. The design of this intake area has a number of advantages:

- ▶ It automatically adjusts to the volume of crop which allows the machine capacity to be maximised in light and heavy rows / swaths.



- ▶ Intake area automatically adjusts to allow the machine to better handle uneven and lumpy rows / swaths.
  - ▶ Better crop intake.
  - ▶ Less chance of blockages occurring.
- Martin McHale - McHale Marketing & Sales Director said: "The new Fusion 4 range has focused on higher output and comfort for the operator. There is an increase in throughput thanks to the new Profi-Flo pick-up along with higher bale density and faster wrapping speeds. The design team have also enhanced the baling experience for the operator using ISOBUS technology on the Fusion 4 Pro and 4 Plus."

## 1000 RPM GEARBOX

All machines in the Fusion 4 range are equipped with a 540 rpm gearbox as standard. In order to optimise machine performance, a 1000 rpm gearbox is available as an optional extra which provides the following advantages:

- ▶ The 1000 rpm gearbox results in an increase in PTO speed with a substantially reduced torque. This reduces the sharp loads on the drive line, providing the clutch setting with 10% more capacity which reduces the risk of blockages and provides more throughput.
- ▶ The option to select 540 rpm (if

available) on the tractor for easier restarts in the unlikely event of blocking.

- ▶ Better fuel economy is achieved due to lower tractor engine revs by running the machine at the recommended PTO speed of 890 rpm when using the 1000 rpm gearbox.

## OTHER NEW FEATURES

The McHale Fusion 4 range is fitted with Dual Grease & Oil Pumps. The grease pump is connected to the downward movement of the bale tip, while the oil pump is connected to the upward movement of the bale tip. This ensures that grease and oil is applied evenly and continuously as the machine operates. A larger Net/Film Brake has been fitted to all Fusion 4 Plus machines which provides 25 per cent more stretch to be easily achieved. This is especially effective when operating in cold weather with NRF that requires a higher stretch percentage. Cut & Hold Slider Brushes make the Fusion 4's performance even more reliable by reducing friction to eliminate plastic tearing, particularly in hot or wet conditions. The cut & holds also feature a hydraulic tap to lock the cut and hold in the open position for the ease and safety of maintenance.

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# ICMSA



Pat McCormack,  
President, ICMSA

## FOOD VISION PREMISED ON COMPLETELY FALSE EITHER/OR BETWEEN COMMERCIAL FARMING AND SUSTAINABILITY

**ICMSA has indicated that we are not in a position to 'sign-off' on the Food Vision report due to that fact that several matters and concerns we raised are still outstanding.** Of particular concern is the proposed reduction in N usage and the impact that will have on farm incomes. We also note that while the need for financial support is mentioned in the report, there are no firm commitments from Government to support farmers both for the additional costs arising from the report and the incomes losses that will be suffered as a result of the report being adopted. These are critical issues for ICMSA, and we insist that they should form part of the 'Just Transition' policy so often cited by officials spokespersons. In addition, we are disappointed that our proposal in relation to the Voluntary Reduction/Exit scheme whereby the lands in question could be used by another farmer to maintain his/her cow numbers was not taken on board. These are just some of our specific concerns and there are others. Taken altogether, ICMSA has attempted to challenge what we see as the Government's fundamental misapprehension of the role and structure of Ireland's farming and agri-food sector. Take, for instance, the meaning of 'vision' set out in the Government's press releases for the event that stress the ambition (for Ireland) to 'become a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) over the next decade.'

But Ireland is already a world leader in sustainable food and has been for at least a decade. The challenge the Government should be addressing – the 'vision' it needs to recognise – is the need to keep it as a world leader.

Irish farmers don't want to appear to be arrogant or overly sensitive, but it's a bit galling for us to hear that the Irish Government thinks we can become world leaders in sustainability. Ireland is recognised as the most sustainable dairy producer in Europe - if not the world - and fifth most sustainable beef producer in the world. Ireland's ambition should not be to lead the world in sustainability – we already do – our ambition should be to show how progressive commercial farming is compatible with greater sustainability and the transition to lower emissions farming.

The fundamental problem here is an 'either/or' between commercial farming and environmental sustainability. This is a completely false binary that compels Irish policy into what we see as a pointless and useless debate between 'sustainably good' organic and non-commercial land stewardship models, and 'sustainably bad' commercial dairy and beef farms. All policy and funding seems to be directed at widening that false distinction when logic, science and economics would dictate that it should be going towards closing any perceived gap.

We are already internationally recognised as being in the front-rank of sustainable farming and food production. What we need to do is stay there. Irish policy and funding should be going towards moving our world-beating family farm sector towards lower emissions and a more environmentally friendly basis. Our family farms are where the expertise is, where the added value is, where the economic multiplier is, and where the social and rural infrastructure is. Effectively neglecting that while pouring resources into what we can only describe as niche farming and land stewardship models is very odd and could end up eroding the leading position Irish farming already occupies. Ireland must really understand what we already have in terms of farming and food-production capacity. We must know where we are starting from. ICMSA would say that we are starting from an already advantageous position and that must be the basis for policy.

We'd have serious concerns that not everyone at the highest levels understands that and have decided instead to impose their own very questionable analysis of what it is we do and where we need to go. The irony is that we'll end up losing what we already have without ever achieving the organic Never-Neverland current policy has set as our destination. As it stands, we believe Food Vision sets us on course to lose/lose.

# Beekeeping

## – IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

**OUR NATIVE BEES ARE DECLINING, SO WHAT CAN BE DONE BY FARMERS TO PREVENT THIS?**

We take them for granted, but bees are the most important pollinator of crops and native plants in Ireland. They're a key component of our wildlife and one of the busiest, least appreciated work forces that we have.

A study by the Department of the Environment this year found that bees are worth €53m a year to the economy. Crops such as apples, strawberries, raspberries, tomatoes, blackcurrants, peppers, courgettes, and pumpkins are heavily reliant on bees for pollination. What's more, it's estimated that almost three quarters of our wild plants rely on insect pollinators, of which bees are the most important. We currently have a total of 101 different species of bee, but almost half of these are these solitary or wild bees are in worrying decline.

### ON THE DECLINE

According to the National Biodiversity Data Centre, which is funded by the Heritage Council and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, more than half of Ireland's bee species have undergone substantial declines in their numbers since 1980. The distribution of 42 species has declined by more than 50%.

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan made Ireland one of the first countries in Europe with a strategy to address pollinator decline and protect pollination services. It encouraged everyone, from farmers to local authorities, to schools, gardeners, and businesses, to come together to create an Ireland in which bees could survive and thrive. The first plan covered the period 2015-2020 and a new version has been developed for 2021-2025.

Part of this plan is aimed at farmers and suggest ways in which they can help to keep bees alive. It explains evidence-based actions to help make farmland more pollinator friendly. These include maintaining native flowering hedgerows, allowing wildflowers to grow around the farm, providing nesting places for wild bees, minimising the use of artificial fertiliser, and reducing pesticide inputs.

### WHAT FARMERS CAN DO

How land if farmed is important for our native pollinators. It's a fact emphasised by Mary Montaut, secretary of Kilternan, Beekeepers Association. "Farmers are the caretakers of our insect life and can have a big impact on the welfare of our bees," she says.

She says that increasing monoculture in agriculture is also responsible for the decline. "If an entire field has only one plant in it, it's not attractive to a bee," she says. "What bees need is a mixture of different plants. Trees are also important. The Chestnut, the Bird Cherry, the Hawthorn, and the Sycamore are all very attractive to bees because of their flowers. Heather is another draw. They are good sources of pollen and nectar for bees.

A lack of weeds is also detrimental to the bee population.

"In fields planed with crops, the



edges don't need to be naked. Hedgerows are another important environment for all sorts of insect life including bees. "Don't over cultivate the hedgerows," says Mary. "Let them get a bit overgrown and flower. This will also keep nourishment in the soil. Although bees are above ground, the underground is very important for them too."

She also advises the use of a catch crops, which is a crop grown in between other crops. "Flowers, such as Linaceae or Phacelia, that attract bees, can be added to a catch crop. If you plant them, they spring up quickly and you get lovely green manure which nourishes the soil."

And while many species of bee here are in decline, the honeybee, which is the only bee to be kept, is not. Honeybees have been kept in Ireland for over 1,500 years and there is no evidence to suggest that they impact solitary bees.

#### KEEPING HONEYBEES

Mary has been keeping bees since 1995 and would encourage anyone to take up the practice. "If you're not terrified of the prospect of being stung, then most definitely try it out and see if it is for you," she says. "There's no danger. The stings can be uncomfortable but if you wear the correct protective clothing and move gently while handling the bees you won't get stung. A proper bee suit with a proper bee hood will keep you more than safe."

The best way to learn about the practice she says is to join a short course and there are plenty to choose from in different parts of the country. The Beekeeping Federation of Ireland runs a number of courses for beginners.

"There's no advantage whatsoever in trying to do it any other way because most of the courses will actually take you through the steps in a very practical fashion," says Mary. "Most of them are approximately eight weeks long and include visits to live hives. The courses are taught methodically in a step-by-step process. You learn the different parts of hive, how the brood develops and what it all means."

Mary has enormous respect for the bees. "I regard them with immense wonder," she says. "They are sentient beings. I hate to disturb them, but if they're cross with me, I simply go away and come back. It's a wonderful hobby and I would encourage anyone to do it."



## 'S' IS FOR SUSTAINABLE

**We are all agreed that sustainability in relation to farming has three main components. Economic, environmental and social sustainability are the three legs of the much-mentioned sustainability stool.** A deficit in one or other area renders the stool unstable and not fit for purpose. Having raised sustainability in the consciousness of farmers, perhaps it is time to take another step in placing it front and centre of our conversations, especially in relation to livestock breeding. The EBI (Economic Breeding Index), which was developed from the original RBI (Relative Breeding Index), has been broadened far beyond its original remit. As knowledge of breeding attributes develops there is an increasing realisation that targeted breeding can deliver significant further improvements in health, productivity, fertility, longevity and even disease prevention. Much of this has been accommodated by the development of genomic science and the identification of traits that can deliver real and substantial improvements through selective breeding. Is it time to herald this progress by again changing the first letter of our Breeding Index? Should it now become SBI, to reflect the fact that while economic value is still of huge importance in breeding, there are

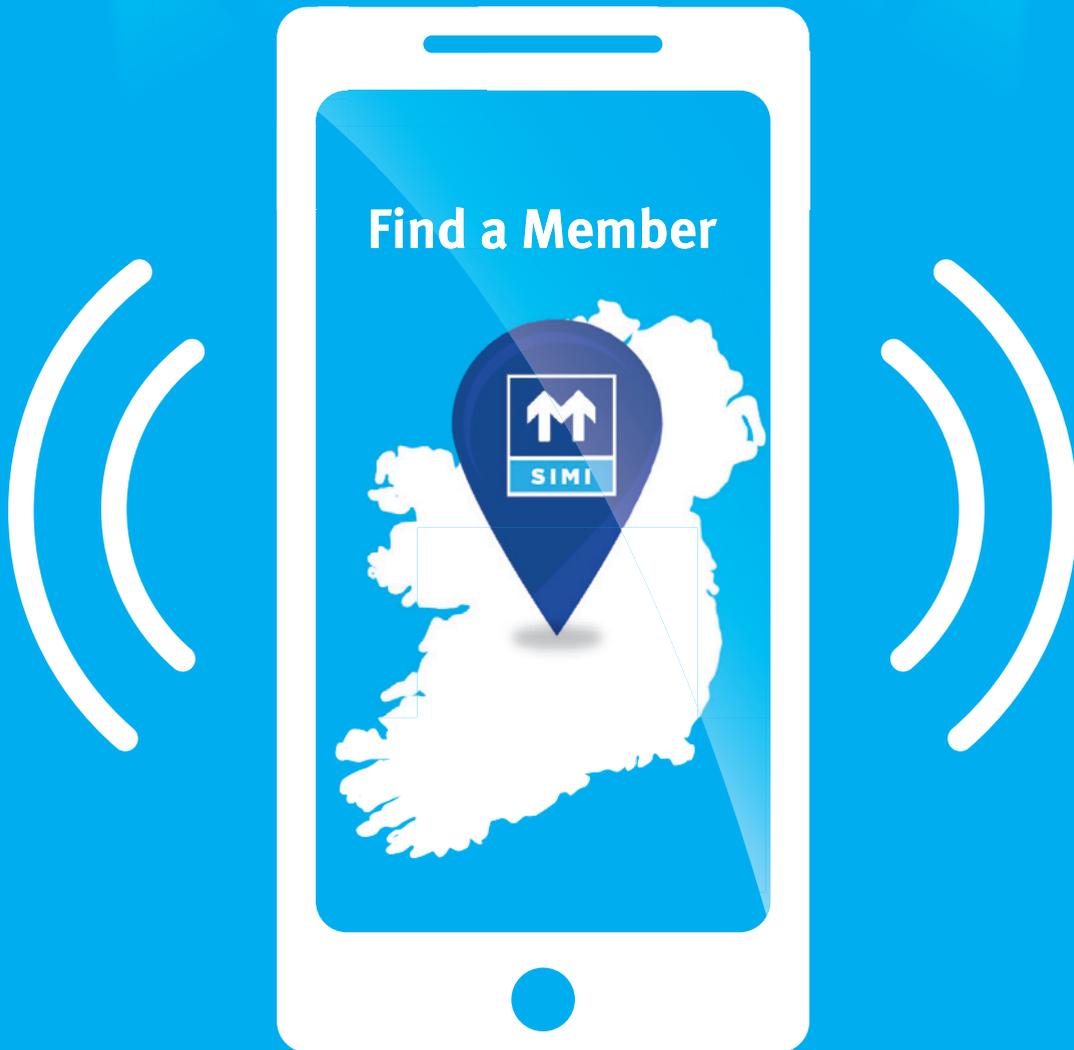
other breeding selection criteria – some already included in the Index, which should be fully acknowledged by renaming it Sustainable Breeding Index. The change, in one sense, would be inconsequential, given that it would not herald a change of breeding policy, but only more fully reflect the fact that many other aspects of breeding priorities, apart from purely economic, are already included in the EBI. That, however, misses the point. Virtue signalling, despite the bad press it receives, has its merits. If we are actively pursuing a livestock breeding policy that includes so many achievable traits that, while linked to economic improvements, have impacts on the other legs of the sustainability stool, we should take the opportunity to publicise that fact. As further sub-indexes are developed, the rationale for a subtle name change to reflect these additions will become more compelling. Improving the carbon footprint of milk production is an ongoing process. Much progress has been made to the extent that we can claim to be amongst the most carbon efficient milk producers globally, or even, depending on the criteria used by other claimants, the most efficient producers through turning a low value carbohydrate, grass, into a high value edible protein, milk. Feed conversion

efficiency has long been recognised as a key component of profitable milk production. Our breeding policies have long reflected this fact with the ubiquitous Shorthorn cow of a century ago, having been replaced by the Friesian over the decades. The ability of selected breeds and breed-lines to produce more milk or beef from similar feed inputs differentiates the also-rans from those animals that are profitable. In pursuit of one positive attribute we have, almost unknowingly, contributed to the development of breeding attributes that lower milk production carbon footprint. This is a positive outcome and has taken on a new significance. The future profile of farms and livestock herds, dairy, beef, sheep and pigs, will include carbon efficiency. To date we have generally used sectoral averages to publicise improvements. As we move through this decade there is increasing likelihood that individual farms will be carbon calibrated. Every aspect and facet of a farm will be assessed and monitored to calculate a carbon sum, reflecting the degree to which each farm is a carbon emitter and/or a carbon sequester. Intensive breeding for sustainable improvements will deliver carbon reductions and they too will have a value.

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