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MAY 2024

EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

VOTING FOR EUROPE

Next month the voting population of the European Union has an opportunity to decide who should represent them in the European Parliament. As Damian O'Reilly states in this month's Letter from Brussels, the importance of the Parliament has grown hugely in terms of its impact on our lives. Members of the European Parliament now have equal status with the two other pillars of the EU's decision-making infrastructure – the Councils of Ministers and the Commission. That said, the makeup of the Parliament's membership is so broad and diverse that finding common ground to advance legislation is often difficult and there is even a lack of common sense among some of the membership, so ideologically extreme are their views and policies. It is a tribute to the majority of its parliamentarians that they can accommodate these diverse interests and still develop policies and legislation of importance and relevance. In the main, Ireland has been well served by the people we send to the Parliament, with occasional exceptions. The Irish electorate has an opportunity in June to select a new cohort of MEPs to represent us there and we must choose carefully. The European Parliament is not a remote entity. It has immense relevance in our daily lives, impacting on areas such as work practices, health, education, taxation and social policy. For the farming community, the relevance of the European Parliament is particularly strong. By choosing to elect MEPs who understand the impacts of EU legislation on our agri-food sectors, we are at least assured of an informed contribution to debate and negotiation in the Parliament. Outcomes from those debates and negotiations are, by necessity, built on compromise. Even though we will only have 14 members out of a total of 720 MEPs, that does not mean we don't have influence. To start at the basics, our members are fluent

in English, the common communication language used in the Parliament. That allows us to converse coherently with representatives across the 27 Member States. Many of our outgoing MEPs have shown an ability to subtly influence debates and legislation, securing concessions, raising awareness of negative impacts on the people they represent and highlighting the need to protect food production and farm viability. We should not expect to direct or control legislation coming out of the Parliament. That is not a practical proposition. However, our representatives can protect our interests by developing and using their parliamentary skills to best effect. Food producers are directly affected by the increasing emphasis in the EU institutions on environmental protection, climate change mitigation, animal welfare and the general movement towards a net carbon zero economy. The recent decision by the European Parliament to enact a piece of legislation to ease the bureaucracy and regulatory impositions embedded in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) may be seen as a last-minute attempt to placate farmers after months of protests, and to garner votes from farming communities across the EU. The fact that the proposals were passed by a very large majority of the MEPs suggests at least an understanding that the CAP needs a significant overhaul after years of additional regulation have made it overly complex. Local elections will also be held in June. Local authority interaction with farmers is increasing, with inspections around water quality the most obvious example. Again, we need to ensure that the councillors we elect commit to ensuring that landowners are treated fairly in these interactions. The doorstep canvas is an opportunity for all of us to take personal responsibility for ensuring fair play for farmers.

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ELECTION FOCUSES MEPs' MINDS

The overwhelming vote last month by the European Parliament in favour of a piece of legislation on the simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is telling. It is, perhaps, indicative of the attention the MEPs have paid to the widespread discontent shown by European farmers in recent months to the excessive bureaucracy they face in complying with CAP regulations. There is nothing quite like a pending election to focus politicians' minds. The European Parliament, of course,

is only one leg of the stool, with the Council of Ministers and the Commission agreement being needed before any changes in the way the CAP is implemented and regulated can happen. Is it cynical to suggest this was an empty gesture by parliamentarians as they head home to canvass for votes? The CAP change proposition secured 431 votes in favour, with 130 MEPs voting against it and 33 abstentions from the vote. Among the opponents of the bill were some notable Irish names. While Billy Kelleher was in favour, his

Fianna Fáil colleague Barry Andrews voted against the overall legislation, presumably because some amendments he favoured were not included in the final presentation to the Parliament. Clare Daly and Mick Wallace also voted against the bill as did the Green Party's Grace O'Sullivan and Ciarán Cuffe. Luke 'Ming' Flanagan abstained on the vote, while the Fine Gael MEPs, Seán Kelly, Frances Fitzgerald and Colm Markey, supported the measure. At time of print, Maria Walsh is not named on the vote lists provided by the Parliament.



Pictured at the riverbank on their Co. Wexford farm were Tirlán dairy farmers Cheryl and Alan Poole who were present for the launch of the Farming for Water: River Slaney Project. Photo: Patrick Browne.

SLANEY CATCHMENT PROJECT IS AN EXPENSIVE ENDEAVOUR

Tirlán's commitment towards improving the water quality in the Slaney River catchment area is substantial. With the funding being invested by the co-op, results will have to be significant to justify the expenditure, especially as there are already considerable human and financial resources being invested in water quality projects in the region. That said, unless improvements in water quality are achieved within the next two years at most, the death knell of our Nitrates Derogation is almost certain. Danish farmers can no longer avail of the derogation and Irish farms are now the lone beneficiaries of the stocking-rate exemption. Speaking at the launch of the Slaney project last month, Jim Bergin, the soon-to-be-retired CEO of Tirlán didn't leave a tooth in it in terms of his description of the impact of losing the derogation. He likened it to the loss of the sugar-beet industry to the region, with commercial milk production destined for obsolescence, driven into a sub-economic status by low stocking rates and reduced productivity. Half of Tirlán's dairy herds comprise an average of 60 cows. A reduction, as calculated by Jim, to 49 cows would wipe out their viability. The retention of the Nitrates Derogation is now seen as a make-or-break necessity for the Irish milk production and processing sector.

RDS finding common ground

Last month, the RDS hosted a two-day festival on biodiversity and sustainability which brought together scientists, researchers, policy makers, industry professionals and RDS members to explore the latest advancements, challenges and solutions in the fields of sustainability and biodiversity conservation. The event featured three distinct thought leadership sessions including: Summit Forest Futures – Delivering Eco-system Services from Irish Forests; Vision 300 Finding Common Ground; and Summit Delivering Biodiversity on Agricultural Land. The various sessions featured Tom Arnold, economist and policy adviser, Dr Eugene Hendricks, Chair of COFORD, and Anne Marie Henihan, centre director of the Dairy Processing Technology Centre. Jackie Cahill TD, chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, also contributed as did Eddie Punch, independent European Parliament candidate and former ICSA General Secretary. The RDS Forestry & Livestock, Circular Economy, and Sustainability Awards were presented during the event.

WEATHER, MORALE, AND PRICES SHOW IMPROVEMENT

It wasn't only the weather that improved in the latter days of April. The general mental mood of farmers was buffered up from a very low base. The prospect of improving farmgate prices was an additional morale boost. Store cattle prices showed a welcome upward movement as plentiful grass supplies encouraged buyers to put more mouths in their fields. From a low, unprofitable base, grain prices can only go in one direction. There have been tentative indications that lower yield expectations globally, allied to ongoing disruptions in Eastern European grain production and trading, may pull prices up at least towards a breakeven point. Given the amount of lower value spring barley that is being planted currently, with few other options available to grain growers at this late stage in the season, some glimmer of hope for better harvest prices is welcome. Sheep prices have been defying market gravity, providing succour to hard-pressed shepherds. Lamb, hogget and even cull ewe prices have reached levels not seen before, with a €10/kg threshold for spring lamb being touched in some instances. Long may it last.

UCD AND MACRA PARTNER UP

Applications are now open for the UCD and Macra Agricultural Skillnet part-funded Masters in Agricultural Extension & Innovation. The programme, which runs for two years, is a part-time distance-learning course aimed at individuals employed in roles working directly with farmers. Participants on the programme will learn new skills and competences to efficiently support farmers in developing their farm business, change behaviours and incorporate innovation at farm level. The programme is partially funded by Macra Agricultural Skillnet and the closing date for applications is June 28, 2024.

TRACE MINERAL INJECTION PRE-BREEDING

EVEN WELL-FED COWS CAN BENEFIT FROM "TOP UPS" AT A HIGH DEMAND PERIOD.

One of the key performance indicators and a major determining factor for farm profitability is compact calving.

Adequate trace mineral levels are vital for reproductive performance in cattle. Copper deficiency can lead to decreased conception rates, infertility, silent heats and foetal resorption.¹ Zinc deficient cows display abnormal oestrous as well as a decrease in fertility.²

At critical phases in production like breeding, increased demand for minerals, variable oral intake, rumen antagonism and poor absorption can result in oral minerals taking weeks to restore a cow's trace mineral stores, which alone may not be enough to ensure cattle are in adequate trace mineral status to meet profitable targets of a compact calving.

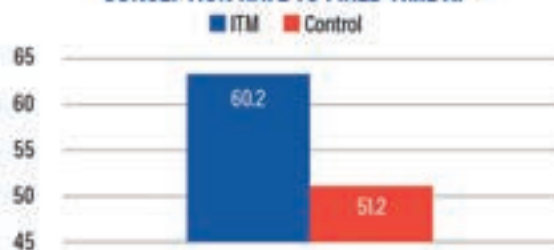
Trial work has shown that strategic injectable trace mineral "Top Up" can help to improve calving distribution.³

Injectable trace minerals bypass the harsh rumen environment and antagonists, raising circulating trace minerals within 8 to 10 hours and liver levels within 24 hours.⁴

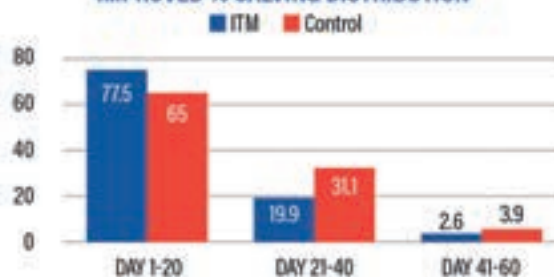
The study illustrated in the graph below indicates that supplementing cows with an injectable trace mineral (ITM) may improve reproductive performance indicators significantly.

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1. Hottel CE, et al. *Vol. 1* (2003) *Eqv* (602): 105-106.

2. Underwood, E.J. (1981) *The Mineral Nutrition of Livestock*, 2nd Edition, Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau, Slough.

3. Marsden JR, et al. *The Professional Animal Scientist* 26, 80-86(2002)

4. Peggis G, et al. *J. Anim. Sci.* 91, 2657-2666 (2000)

Ask your vet how injectable pre-breeding trace mineral supplementation could help get your cows and heifers back in calf more quickly!¹⁴

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BOG-STANDARD RESEARCH REVEALS TRUTH ON EMISSIONS

Lo and behold! The figures used to estimate the emissions from Irish grasslands were wrong. Is it just another case of plucking a figure out of the air and using it to beat up farmers?

Why there was so little questioning of the emissions figures used to justify the rewetting proposals contained in the Nature Restoration Law is puzzling. The one-size-fits-all approach from the EU, in collaboration with several Irish agencies and public representatives, goes well beyond Irish peat-based soils. The same logic, or lack of it, applies in relation to the Nitrates Derogation

where an assumption is made that our long and productive grass-growing season can be compared to European Continental climatic and soils conditions. When some basic research was eventually carried out on Irish peat-based grassland emission rates, it found that a gross over-estimate of 65 per cent was made of the contribution of Irish grassland overall to CO₂e emissions figures. The Teagasc research, discussed recently on a webinar, definitively nails the lie that grassland is a major contributor to greenhouse gas accumulations. Dr Patrick Tuohy outlined

the changes made in the carbon inventory for 2024 by the Environmental Protection Agency, which has now accepted the revised figures, which are backed up by separate research from the International Peat Society. Farmers were heavily criticised for their farms supposedly releasing over seven million tonnes of emissions annually. It turns out the net figure is closer to 2.5 million tonnes. That's before any account is taken of the circular nature of emissions from Irish soils and grasslands, where grass, plants and hedgerows sequester CO₂ in vast amounts.



National Ploughing Association (NPA) managing director, Anna May McHugh congratulates the newly elected NPA chair, John Deery, from Co. Monaghan, and the newly elected NPA president, Mick Mahon, from Co. Offaly. This is the first time that a Monaghan man has held this presidential position.

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REPLENISHING THE STOCKS

CATHAL BOHANE
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

The past number of months have been difficult on farms as an extra 100-150mm of rain made grazing almost impossible. This has put a lot of pressure on animals, as well as on farmers, as they try to juggle feed stocks. The recent upturn in the weather (at time of print) made it possible to return to grazing and relieve the pressure somewhat.

As in all farming scenarios, we can quickly go to the opposite end of a situation and will be very shortly managing an excess of grass. It is important to get through ground area in order to look after animals' intake and energy requirement while also trying to get grass quality back on track. For those that have not grazed a lot, you need to focus on the lower-cover paddocks first before moving to the heavier paddocks. Some of these heavy paddocks will need to be removed as surplus rather than underutilised by grazing. The practice of forcing cows to graze down heavy covers will put a lot of pressure on the animals, as the grass is of lower digestibility and, in order to take the cover down to 4-5cm, it will take longer and reduce overall intake compared to a lighter sward. The silage that will be removed will still be of high quality and certainly needed to replenish the depleted stocks.

Replenishing the silage stocks over the next few months is of paramount importance. Over the years, many sources have advised against making extra silage due to the unnecessary cost. In 2018, when we completely ran out of silage, it was mentioned that this was a one-in-10-year event. Even since then, however, we have had further weather events that extended the season. While we hope for the best, we need to prepare for the worst, and with large numbers on every farm now, the solutions we used years ago are now only a drop in the ocean. Many farms have just gone through a seven- or eight-month winter, and it will happen again – maybe not next year, but more than likely within the next three-to-five years. Consider what you need to protect yourself for an eight-month winter, whether that is grass silage or an alternative forage.

While dry cows will require bulk, the focus should not be on getting bulk alone from the system. When you are dealing with high-producing animals, bulk will fill them but will not take you where you need to go, no matter what the quality of the concentrate is. The focus should always be on quality. If you cannot get it from the system, then you should look at purchasing it, and if you are purchasing, consider an alternative to silage as this will be higher quality and sometimes more cost effective on a quality/dry matter basis.

Finally, in the short term, while the arrival of better weather is very welcome and grazing conditions have improved, it is important to adjust cows slowly and provide some level of consistency. Continue to supplement based on requirement and, if coming off it, do it slowly, especially at this delicate time around breeding.

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Dr Susan Brannick, Aware's clinical director; Stephen Butterly, Aware's head of fundraising; and Dr Lisa Koep, Tirlán's chief ESG officer.

TIRLÁN ANNOUNCES CHARITY PARTNERSHIP WITH AWARE

Tirlán has announced a partnership with charity, Aware, which helps people affected by depression, bipolar disorder, and related mood conditions. As part of this arrangement, many of Tirlán's network of 2,300 employees will fundraise for the mental-health charity. Tirlán will also make a corporate donation to support the work that Aware does.

In 2023, Aware directly supported up to 40,000 people via its support and education services.

Last year alone, Tirlán and its employees raised €116,000 for worthy causes and created a positive impact in communities across the southeast, midlands and northeast.

Tirlán chair, John Murphy explained: "As a farmer-owned co-operative, we're rooted in our communities and eager to support worthy causes that make a real difference on the ground. The incidence of anxiety and depression was exacerbated during the pandemic when people were forced to isolate and cut out social interactions. This has left an enduring legacy.

"Aware plays an even more vital role in such a prevailing environment and we're delighted to support the charity's work. Farming and living in rural Ireland can be isolating at times. But organisations like Aware are breaking the stigma, encouraging people to talk and to get support. Our mental health is just as important as our physical health. We're honoured to play our part in supporting Aware's work."

Dr Lisa Koep, Tirlán's chief ESG officer, was one of over 140 employees who last year took part in the Tour de Tirlán cycle and the Two Peaks charity climb, two of Tirlán's biggest fundraising events. "Our employees and our farmers are among the most generous and contribute a lot to charitable causes. We pledged to give back to our communities as part of our Living Proof sustainability strategy. Our partnership with Aware is Living Proof in action. We look forward to the positive impact working together will have in all of our communities, inside and outside of Tirlán."

Stephen Butterly, head of fundraising at Aware, commented: "Depression is a significant societal issue that is impacting families and communities all over Ireland, every single day. We want to be here for everyone who needs us, and recognition and support from corporate organisations like Tirlán benefit us hugely in our quest to achieve that.

"We know stigma is still inhibiting some people from accessing supports, particularly in rural and isolated areas, with many people citing shame, embarrassment, or fear of judgement for delaying accessing supports."



Damien O'Reilly
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

Back in 2019, the EU Commission launched its Green Deal strategy to make Europe the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. It would be Europe's 'man on the moon moment' according to EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen. For agriculture, the subheading was the Farm to Fork strategy, which aimed to halve the use of pesticides, fertilisers and the sale of antimicrobials, promote sustainable diets, improve animal welfare, and increase organic farming production. It was a welcome document insofar as at least there was a plan. Now all that was needed was some dialogue with those most affected, the farmers.

Astonishingly it didn't happen. Commission vice-president, Frans Timmermans was charged with driving the Farm to Fork strategy while largely ignoring farm groups in the process. Not even a global pandemic followed by the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine could stop the Dutchman from pushing ahead with various pieces of legislation, which would simply never make it across the line without some form of dialogue and compromise with farmers and food producers across Europe. Last summer, he stepped away from the job to lead the Green party in the Dutch elections. Whether it's a coincidence or not, following his departure, the EU Commission began to take onboard the concerns of farmers about various aspects of the strategy.

It began with an acknowledgement of the important role of European farmers by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union address last September, which led to the establishment of the 'strategic dialogue' involving 29 agriculture and environmental representatives to halt the polarisation between food production and environmental sustainability. We await the outcome of those tense discussions, which are continuing as we speak. Then, earlier this year the Sustainable Use Regulation was effectively binned as MEPs could not reach any form of consensus on how this would operate satisfactorily. And, last month, the Commission agreed to simplify aspects of the Common Agricultural Policy where conditionality in relation to Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAECs) was causing problems mainly for farmers in continental Europe. Meanwhile, the Commission also committed to strengthen the position of farmers in the food chain. It has been quite the about turn. Critics suggest that the Commission has caved in to ugly farm protests and the infiltration of the far right to farmer concerns weeks out from the European elections. But the most obvious reason for this is the late realisation by the Commission that its failure to engage properly with farmers from the beginning was a big mistake. The EU Green Deal is an important project, and the next EU Commission will continue to drive it forward, albeit with some resistance if the conservative groupings in the Parliament increase after June. But the farming targets can only be achieved by including farmers in the process rather than shunning them.



Reseeding: Can we afford not to?

Maeve Regan,
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

During times of lower demand, many farmers opt for autumn reseeding, which provides an opportunity to take paddocks out of the grazing platform.

However, given the early onset of winter in 2023, many reseeding plans were postponed and intended for this year, which, in turn, have been delayed by one of the wettest springs on record. Now, however, the main thing is not to allow the recent atrocious weather lead to further delays in renewing old, unresponsive, poor-producing paddocks.

Can we really afford to delay our reseeding plans this year? The straight answer is no. The benefits of reseeding are all too well-known, and it is long discussed as the fastest return on investment on farm. However, in the current climate re-emphasising several benefits might help. Research indicates that new leys, when compared to older permanent pasture:

- Are 25% more responsive to applied nitrogen;
- Result in more available grass in the shoulders of the season (typically periods of increased supplementation requirements);
- Result in faster re-growths; and
- Increase total annual production/ha.

Teagasc estimates that, economically, a low proportion of perennial ryegrass in the sward is costing the average dairy farm up to €300/ha in lost grass production during the growing season. When planning a reseed, the largest gains will be made by replacing the oldest/least-productive swards, e.g. your paddocks with the least number of grazings last year. Where reseeding or sward rejuvenation occurs, clover inclusions cannot be overlooked for obvious reasons due to its nitrogen-fixing abilities. Soil fertility must be centric to the reseeding protocol, especially where we want a successful clover establishment (alongside good management practises in the first 12 months). Over-sowing clover on grazing paddocks can work well – but the best opportunity to incorporate clover into a sward is always at the point of reseeding.

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NEW MSD ANIMAL HEALTH APPOINTMENTS

Kieran Maher joins the MSD Animal Health team from JFC where he held the role of field service technician working on its range of Evolution calf feeders. From Loughmore, Co. Tipperary, Kieran has extensive experience in the field of agriculture and technology, having worked in this area for a number of years.

Coming from a beef farm in mid-Tipperary, and having worked with a local dairy farmer, Kieran is well-rounded in farming knowledge. Kieran has worked with LIC Automation on its product range of Saber SCC and Milk Sensors, ID, drafting and heat-detection systems.

His new role at MSD Animal Health will see him advise and support customers, so they can maximise the benefits of their SenseHub monitoring technology while improving farm management decision-making based on data from their system.

Christopher McGuirk, who previously held the role as on-farm sales representative for the midlands, will also join the technical and customer success team as technical and customer success manager for the midlands area. These new appointments mark the expansion of MSD Animal Health's technical and customer success team.



Thomas Hession, newly appointed senior agronomist with Brett Brothers, pictured with Liam Brett, CEO of Brett Brothers. Photo: Dylan Vaughan.

THOMAS HESSION JOINS BRETT BROTHERS

Brett Brothers have appointed Thomas Hession as senior agronomist. Thomas is heading up the agronomy team, which works in partnership with grain growers throughout the southeast, supplying all inputs and agronomy services to support the intake of 75,000 tonnes of native crops. These crops are the key ingredients for Brett's animal feeds and Flahavan's porridge oats.

Welcoming Thomas to Bretts, CEO Liam Brett said: "Thomas is the perfect fit to manage our complete agronomy

programme which is geared to provide the most up-to-date technology, in a sustainable manner, to all growers who are an integral part of our business. We have made native cereals the main ingredients in our quality rations and are proud of our closed loop seed-to-fork strategy." Thomas, who is originally from Knocktopher, Co. Kilkenny, previously worked with Tirlán for 10 years and is a graduate of agricultural science from University College Dublin.

RENEWED CAUTION URGED ON BVD AHEAD OF BREEDING SEASON

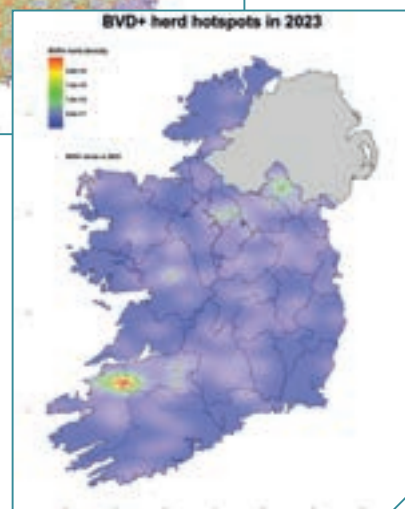
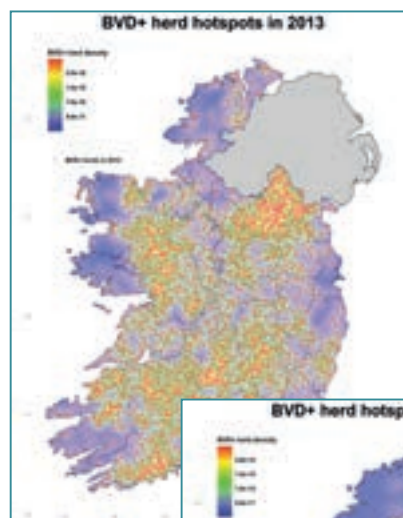
With the onset of the breeding season, which is the highest-risk period for the generation of bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) persistently infected cattle, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue has urged renewed caution on BVD over the next number of months.

As BVD prevalence reduces, so too does the natural immunity of the national herd to BVD. This, along with decreased overall use of vaccination, places herds at increased risk, if infection enters a herd. Research has shown that a BVD outbreak costs €63 per cow in dairy herds and €32 per cow in suckler herds, and this can lead to very substantial financial losses. In the past year, epidemiological investigations have identified the emergence of a small number of local clusters of infection, with infection having spread between herds – this is thought to result from the movement of animals, equipment and people. The situation in the North Kerry/West Limerick area, a concern in 2023, has improved markedly in 2024, according to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Further research has identified that herds within 5km of a positive herd are at an increased risk and the risk is highest for those herds within 400 metres of test positive herds. In this context, herdowners are being asked to focus on biosecurity – to protect their herds and support the final move towards BVD freedom.

Minister McConalogue has emphasised that it is most important that:

- ▶ Herds that have BVD test positive results in 2024 promptly engage with the BVD control programme, quickly remove all test positive animals, and complete the vaccination programme;
- ▶ Herds with test positive cattle in 2023 complete their follow-up 2024 vaccination programme ahead of the breeding period; and
- ▶ Herds that have been notified of BVD test positive cattle in their neighbourhood should seek advice from their veterinary practitioner, review their biosecurity practices, including vaccination policies, and enhance these where needed.



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FARMER MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

THE LATEST RESEARCH FROM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN'S (UCD'S) AGRI MENTAL HEALTH GROUP GIVES SOME INSIGHT INTO WAYS THAT FARMERS CAN ADDRESS STRESS

The arrival of spring, while offering renewal and growth, introduces distinct challenges for farmers. Recent insights from the Agri Mental Health Group at UCD highlights the critical role of psychological flexibility in reducing stress, anxiety, and low mood among farmers. Psychological flexibility is like being mentally agile or adaptable. Imagine your mind as a flexible tree that bends in the wind but doesn't break. It's about being able to handle your thoughts and feelings in a way that doesn't overwhelm you and being open to change. Instead of getting stuck on one way of thinking or feeling, you can adjust and move forward even when life throws you curveballs. It means facing life's ups and downs with an open mind, making room for the tough stuff without letting it control you, and choosing actions that align with what's truly important to you. For farmers, spring can be an extremely busy period full of concerns over weather, lambing, calving and crop planting. These worries can lead to overwhelm. However, cultivating psychological flexibility can provide critical support during these times. The Agri Mental Health Group at UCD has identified three helpful strategies to foster this adaptability, tailored to the farming context during spring, and these are: be open, be aware, and be active.

BE OPEN

Recognise that feeling anxious or worried is a natural part of the farming process. Instead of pushing these emotions away, greet them with openness and curiosity. This approach allows you to move through your emotions with understanding, enabling you to focus on what you can control and act despite the presence of fear.

BE AWARE

During the busy spring season, it's easy to lose sight of the here and now, which can amplify stress. Make a conscious effort to stay present. Take moments to really feel the soil between your fingers, look at the new life on the farm and listen to the sounds around you. This mindfulness can help ground you in the moment, reducing stress and enhancing your focus on the tasks at hand. It's common to be preoccupied with concerns about having enough feed, ensuring lambs and calves are born alive, getting crops in the ground or bad weather. Practice seeing these thoughts for what they are – just thoughts. Imagine them as a background radio noise that you don't have to engage with. By labelling these thoughts (e.g., "Station Worry" or "Station Anxiety"), you can acknowledge their presence without allowing them to dictate your actions. This awareness helps in recognising that these thoughts are transient and don't have to prevent you from doing what is important.



TAKE MOMENTS TO REALLY FEEL THE SOIL BETWEEN YOUR FINGERS, LOOK AT THE NEW LIFE ON THE FARM AND LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS AROUND YOU

BE ACTIVE

Take time to reflect on what truly matters to you in your role as a farmer. Whether it's being a good farmer, sustainability, contributing to your community, or leaving a legacy, let these core values guide your actions and decisions.

This connection to your deeper purpose can provide clarity and direction, especially when faced with the uncertainties of the season. By integrating these practices into your daily routine, you can enhance your psychological flexibility, making it easier to adapt to the challenges of farming with resilience and purpose.

STUDY

A new study is underway by the UCD Agri Mental Health Group, funded by FBD, which is aimed at supporting farmers who are currently struggling with mental health and testing the impact of a scalable, culturally competent intervention tailored for farmer stress and mental health. As part of this study, the team at UCD has developed a survey to understand the needs of Irish farmers in terms of mental health supports. Your participation in our survey will greatly contribute to this endeavour, helping us to tailor interventions that truly meet the needs of farmers. Remember that farmers' wellbeing is just as vital to the farm as the soil beneath your feet. If you are struggling, please seek support. Reach out to a family member, neighbour, or friend. Professional help is always available. Don't hesitate to lean on it when needed. FBD Farm Multi-Peril policyholders can avail of a confidential counselling service over the phone by calling: 1800 670 407.

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IRISH BEEF – THE OPTIMAL SYSTEM

THE STORY OF THE IRISH BEEF SECTOR, OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS OR SO, HAS BEEN ONE OF SUCCESSFUL AND CONSTANT ADAPTATION TO DEMAND AND SUPPLY-SIDE CHALLENGES, WRITES AGRI-FOOD ECONOMIST, CIARAN FITZGERALD

Ciaran Fitzgerald
Agri-food economist

The industry in the 1990s and early 2000s was characterised by the export of frozen, commodity beef to North Africa and Middle East markets and, after the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in 1996, frozen beef exports to Russia.

The real impact of BSE, despite a mistaken initial sense that it was a mainly UK phenomenon, was a huge challenge for all beef producers. It was particularly challenging for beef-exporting countries like Ireland, not least because a significant response to consumer concerns about BSE and beef, right across European markets, was a preference for locally produced product. In addition, many global customers also banned beef imports from the EU. For a country like Ireland, which exported 90 per cent of its production, this very clearly represented a huge challenge.

CONSUMER-FACING REORIENTATION

Nevertheless, in the post-BSE era, while also managing the decision by the EU – as part of a commitment to World Trade Organisation (WTO) deals – to phase out export refund subsidies, the Irish beef sector very quickly and very successfully developed a much more 'direct-consumer-oriented', largely fresh, beef-export business.

By 2023, with annual sales averaging around 600,000 tonnes, Irish beef exports were focused principally on the UK and the rest of the EU countries with world market exports accounting for less than 10 per cent of total output (Figure 1).

Moreover, having successfully adapted to the post-BSE world and the abolition of export subsidies, the Irish beef sector has also coped exceptionally well with the UK decision to exit the EU Single Market after the Brexit vote in 2016.

Figure 2 shows – as per Teagasc's 2023 outlook report – out of a total export value of €2.7bn in 2023, the UK accounted for 34 per

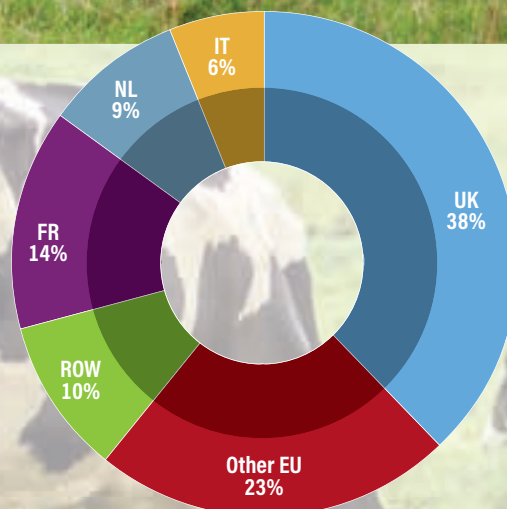


Figure 1: Estimate of Irish beef export markets by volume in 2022.

Source: Eurostat COMEXT, January to August (2022), taken from Teagasc's 2023 outlook report.

cent of Irish beef exports with other EU countries taking 36 per cent of the total.

DEMONISATION OF BEEF PRODUCTION

Climate-change challenges, both in terms of emissions from beef production and the large-scale promotion of artificial/lab-produced meat alternatives, have also impacted the beef sector.

As is the case with the Irish dairy sector, the public narrative of the last three years seems hell bent on demonising and reducing Irish beef output. This is in direct contrast to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) thinking, which prioritises carbon-efficient production systems, and OECD/FAO and EU Commission-



validated research, which highlights the consequences of the carbon leakage effect as a result of replacing Irish beef exports with beef produced in Brazil. Such consequences include twice the emissions and associated environmental destruction.

BEEF COW NUMBERS FALL

The supply side of the Irish beef sector has also seen its fair share of change and adaptation. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reforms of 1992 under Commissioner Ray McSharry created a direct-payment system across the beef production sectors and, in particular, provided direct-income supports for suckler-cow producers. As a result of the direct support, Irish beef cow numbers increased from 500,000 head in the late 1980s to 1.12 million head at peak in 2012.

As part of the 2000 CAP reform and, again, in response to WTO commitments, CAP direct payments were decoupled from production.

While France, Spain and Austria opted to keep a coupled payment for suckler cows, Ireland decided not to avail of this option.

Teagasc/University of Missouri Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) forecasts predicted at the time that decoupling would see a substantial fall in suckler-cow numbers. While this did not happen immediately, the impact of decoupling payments, combined with automatic reductions in supports due to CAP greening requirements, have resulted in a cumulative fall of 309,000 in beef cow numbers from their peak, a 27 per cent fall by December 2023.

This significant and continuing fall off in beef-suckler-cow numbers means that, for the processing sector, the bulk of future supply will have to come from the dairy herd, even as Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures indicate a levelling off in dairy-cow number as indicated by the December 2023 CSO livestock census figures.



Figure 2: Percentage share of exports to the EU, UK and international markets. Source: Bord Bia/CSO.

INCREASING MEAT YIELDS

The response to concerns about the meat-yield capability of animals coming from the dairy herd has led to significant investment in sexed semen to improve breeding accuracy for replacement heifers and improve the meat characteristics of other dairy progeny. Teagasc figures for 2024 show that use of sexed semen in dairy has doubled compared to the previous year. Meanwhile, the need to reduce emissions from the beef sector has also meant a commitment to earlier finishing of beef animals.

JOINED AT THE HIP

The Irish beef and dairy sectors are very much interdependent, with the ongoing decline in beef-cow numbers an increasing percentage of beef factory throughput will come from the dairy herd.

Crucially and very clearly, 'if' Ireland can manage the new Nitrates Derogation (a very big 'if'), a competitive, efficient beef-processing sector will be required. This is especially important in the medium-term scenario given that exporting of live animals is likely to become more and more restrictive, if not banned altogether. In that scenario, processing throughput would need to increase substantially from its current levels.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The beef sector in Ireland has maintained its Irish economic impact over recent years and can even extend this impact into the near future as EU beef production in other member states declines and demand for Ireland's grass-based beef offering is sustained.

As with the totality of the Irish agri-sector, much depends on aligning Irish national policy with the growing awareness globally. This means that a balanced approach to reducing agriculture-related emissions, while feeding an ever-expanding global population from carbon efficient countries like Ireland, is not just desirable, it is also optimal on so many levels.



Damien O'Reilly, EU affairs and communications manager at ICOS

HAVE YOUR SAY ON FARMING'S FUTURE

AS MEPs AND THEIR STAFF BURN SHOE LEATHER IN SEARCH OF VOTES BEFORE THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN JUNE, **DAMIEN O'REILLY**, EU AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER AT ICOS, ADVISES ON WHY SUCH ELECTIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR IRISH FARMERS, AND WHY VOTING IN THEM REALLY MATTERS

It's almost 30 years since I first visited Brussels. I was a young reporter working in local radio invited to visit the EU institutions as part of an Irish media delegation. To this day, the EU offices in Dublin regularly organise media group visits to the heart of the EU where journalists can meet and interview politicians and policy makers. The cynic in me suggests that such a junket is the only way of attracting interest from the media to anything that goes on in the Belgian capital. It derives from the general narrative that what goes on in the European Commission and the Parliament does not have any real impact. The irony is that what goes on in the EU has a demonstrable impact on how we follow rules and live our lives.

CURE FOR INSOMNIA

It is joked that a good cure for insomnia is to start talking about how the EU works. But when I arrived here 18 months ago and began reading into the whole EU process, I became convinced that from an agricultural perspective, it is imperative that farmers and food producers inform themselves of the legislative process since it impacts their livelihoods more than it does any other profession. And they can begin afresh over

the coming weeks as the media spotlight will focus on the whole EU bubble ahead of the European Parliament elections. It is a good opportunity to listen to the discussions and debates, attend a hustling or quiz the candidates looking for a vote. Farmers are not alone in being inert when it comes to the European Union and all that goes with it. That is not good news for outgoing and prospective MEPs. There is a view that power lies with the Commission while MEPs only turn up to rubber stamp legislation. So, what is the point in voting, right? That may have been the perception if not the reality in the early Parliaments. But the Lisbon Treaty (remember that?) effectively gave more power to MEPs who now engage in the 'ordinary legislative procedure'. Our elected representatives now have a big say in the legislation proposed by the Commission.

THE BEGINNING

What we now call the EU27 began in 1957 when Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg signed the Treaty of Rome to form the European Economic Community. A few years later, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) came into force. And in 1973, the next batch of countries joined,

Ireland, Denmark and the UK.

The biggest enlargement happened in 2004 when several of the former Eastern European communist countries were granted membership. In 2014, the EU grew to 28 members with the addition of Croatia and then fell back to what is now known as the EU27 as a result of Brexit. From a time when Ireland was the poorest member of the group of nine half a century ago, we are now net contributors representing a little over one per cent of the total EU population of 450 million. This includes around nine million farms, a big drop over a relatively short period of time. Still, the CAP budget accounts for around one third of the EU's annual pot of money although inflation does not take account of the real devaluation of CAP payments to farmers over the past decade or so.

There are seven principal decision-making bodies in the EU. But the triumvirate that are key to making decisions which impact directly on agriculture are the EU Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the European Parliament.

EU COMMISSION

To make it simple, the EU Commission is equivalent to our ministerial departments. The EU Commission president is Ursula von der Leyen from Germany. She is a member of the European Peoples Party (EPP), which is the largest political grouping in the European Parliament following the 2019 election. And so, as the leading party, the EPP nominee for Commission president usually gets the nod from the majority of heads of government by qualified voting majority to avoid one country vetoing a nominee. That name is then sent to the Parliament where a simple majority is required before the EU Commission president is ratified. Each Member State then nominates a commissioner who must go before the European Parliament as part of their application to prove they are up to the job. Once all remaining 26 get the green light from the MEPs, the president sets about divvying out the portfolios. Each directorate general (DG) is responsible for specific files of legislation. In the outgoing administration, DG Environment had oversight of many files which directly impact farming including the Nature Restoration Law while DG Sante (health and food safety) oversees animal welfare legislation. The job of the DGs is to introduce and/or update existing legislation. It usually begins with a public consultation. And once the

Commission, via a DG, drafts a piece of legislation, it is at that point the real debate begins. From the moment the proposal is public to the day it is adopted or rejected by MEPs and ministers, it could take several years. During that time, democracy is at work.

EU PARLIAMENT

Between June 6-9, Europeans will go to the polls to elect 720 MEPs (up 15 from the current mandate). Ireland will have 14 of that 720. Seats are divided up based on population share. Once elected, MEPs will choose which committees they would like to sit on. This is a key decision. From an Irish farmer's perspective, you want the MEP of your choice to sit on the agriculture or environment committee where the EU Commission legislative files are first parsed. It is the committees that do the spade work in going through the initial Commission proposals line by line, debating and amending as they go.

EU COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

In parallel, the Council of Ministers (agriculture or environment) study the legislation in an effort to reach a consensus. At a later point in the process, the Commission becomes involved again in what is called 'trilogue' meetings. And while all of this is going on, farm representative bodies,

NGOs, lobbyists, national governments, and other stakeholders are in communication with MEPs and ministers with their wish lists and concerns to be added or deleted to the proposed legislative text. When MEPs, ministers and the Commission legal eagles are satisfied that a piece of legislation is sound and fit for purpose and the best outcome for the majority, it goes to the EU Parliament in its entirety, known as 'plenary', for a final vote. Sometimes even at this late point, there are final tweaks and delays. All going well, the file will then have one final look over from the ministers before agreement. Even at this point, there can be a change of heart as was the case with the Nature Restoration Law which was all but home and hosed in March until a number of Member States reconsidered. Brussels has gone quiet in recent weeks as MEPs and their staff burn shoe leather on the election trail back home. Meanwhile the EU Commission will also undergo a shakeup and we anxiously await to see who Ireland will nominate and which commissioner will take charge of the agriculture and environment DGs. The European Parliament election takes place on June 6 in Ireland. In casting your vote for the candidate of your choice, you are having a big say in how you would like to see farming policy shaped from now until 2029 as MEPs do have a big say.

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AGRI-POLICY A PRIORITY FOR 15%

A special Eurobarometer survey carried out among Irish voters across February and March this year found that 69 per cent were interested in the upcoming European Parliament elections, which take place on June 7. However, just 15 per cent said agricultural policy should be discussed as a matter of priority during the electoral campaign, compared to 23 per cent across the EU. In relation to action against climate change, 29 per cent of Irish respondents said this was a priority, compared to 27 per cent across the EU. When asked what the EU should focus on to reinforce its position in the world, 29 per cent of respondents said food security and agriculture, compared to 30 per cent across the EU, on average. However, 33 per cent said that climate action and emissions reductions should be the focus, up nine per cent when compared to the EU, on average.

Thirty-three per cent of Irish respondents also said that the EU should focus on 'energy issues, energy independence, resources and infrastructures'.

THE A-TEAM?

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS ARE FAST APPROACHING, AND IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO VOTE FOR CANDIDATES WHO UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACING AGRICULTURE AND RURAL IRELAND. FROM A VAST AND VARIED PANEL OF IRISH MEP HOPEFULS, WE ASKED **MATT O'KEEFFE** TO SELECT HIS TOP-14 ELECTION CANDIDATES TO REPRESENT IRISH FARMERS IN EUROPE ON HIS VERY OWN A-TEAM

Prefacing his selection, Matt says: "My choices go beyond narrow farming representation, reflecting the many and disparate challenges faced in common among urban dwellers and those of us living in rural Ireland. I will start with those outgoing MEPs who merit consideration for re-election to the European Parliament. These are just my opinions, based on my own research and personal assessment of the candidates' track records."

At the time of print, the list of candidates indicating their intention to contest the European Parliament elections was almost complete. Ireland will now have 14 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), representing an increase of one since the last election. The country is divided into three electoral constituencies: Dublin; South; and Midlands North-West. At least 10 of the outgoing MEPs signalled their intention to run again. The disparate political philosophies of the candidates range from far right to far left, with a considerable number sitting somewhere around the centre of the political spectrum.



Billy Kelleher MEP
Fianna Fáil
Ireland South

Billy has an outstanding record of representation in the European Parliament on behalf of Ireland. He has been especially strident in safeguarding Irish agricultural interests, balanced with an understanding that protection of the environment can be achieved without damaging the economic and social fabric of commercial farming. His work in protecting animal-welfare standards while also insisting on the right to export livestock from Ireland is particularly noteworthy.



Seán Kelly MEP
Fine Gael
Ireland South

Another representative from the Ireland South constituency, Seán is a former GAA president and has brought that deep understanding of the value of sporting activities across all communities in Ireland to his role as MEP. Active in the Parliament in areas as varied as the digital economy and international trade, Seán has been particularly vociferous on promoting an improved Common Agricultural Policy structure and ensuring that the Green Deal delivers economic opportunities for businesses and facilitates a Just Transition to a carbon-neutral economy.



Maria Walsh MEP
Fine Gael
Midlands/North-West

Maria is looking for a second term in the Parliament. She has focussed on womens rights, gender diversity, vocational education training and mental health during her time as a European parliamentarian. The US-born MEP has also been active in promoting EU-US relations. She has also been vocal on the importance of supporting farmers' mental health and wellbeing, as well as ensuring that weather-impacted farmers in her constituency are helped through this difficult period.



Chris MacManus MEP
Sinn Fein
Midlands North-West

Chris replaced Matt Carthy as an MEP in 2020 when the latter was elected as a TD. Chris is a regular commentator on farming and fishing issues, he served on the Parliament's Agriculture Committee, among others, and has spoken on farmer concerns around the rewetting of farmland. Chris is an advocate of continuing Irish neutrality.



Luke 'Ming' Flanagan MEP
Independent
Midlands North-West

Now a seasoned EU parliamentarian, Luke has long been associated with the decriminalisation of cannabis. That, however, belies his advocacy

around turf-cutting rights, the impact of habitat restoration on his region, and the need to reform the EU's asylum policies.



Ciarán Cuffe MEP
Green Party
Dublin

The former TD and Minister of State for Horticulture is an architect, with a particular interest in urban planning, public transport and heritage. Ciarán has been president of the European Forum for Renewable Energy Sources, a cross-party European parliamentary network that works to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency. Last year he was the recipient of the Energy, Science and Research Award at the annual MEP Awards..



Finian McGrath
Independent
Dublin

Finian, a former Minister of State, is running on a disability-rights platform. He also lists health and housing among his priorities, if elected to the European Parliament. He has a particularly strong volunteerism ethos, regularly giving his time towards various charities and disability groups.



Nina Carberry
Fine Gael
Midlands North-West

Nina may have become more of a

household name after participating in the Dancing with the Stars and Ireland's Fittest Family TV shows, but she is a former champion jockey, a businesswoman, and an author who was born and raised on a farm. The Meathwoman has said her priorities include increasing opportunities to live and work in rural Ireland, and equality of opportunity in education and work for young people. She also said she would be a strong, common sense voice in Europe for rural and farming communities.



Barry Cowen
Fianna Fáil
Midlands North-West

The former short-lived agriculture minister has strong name recognition and is regarded as an able debater and public representative. Fair Deal and Just Transition for communities across the agriculture, climate and energy sectors are his priorities and mirror issues that will come increasingly to the fore in the next European Parliament.



Ciaran Mullooly
Independent Ireland
Midlands North-West

A former RTÉ reporter, Ciaran is a committed community activist, with strong views on the need to promote rural, social and economic wellbeing. Rural development is a particular priority for him, having gained valuable experience working for Roscommon LEADER programme. Latterly, Ciaran's attentions have turned to local tourism and how the Just Transition Fund can support rural life.



Eddie Punch
Independent
Ireland South

A former ICSA general secretary, Eddie has broadened his appeal to the electorate ahead of the June election. He emphasises the need for EU structures to support family farming and small businesses in rural Ireland. The Clareman also puts mental health and disability supports among his priorities if elected.



Peadar Toibín
Aontú
Midlands North-West

Peadar Toibín is the leader of Aontú, a party with relatively conservative views on several social issues that resonate with a significant section of Irish society. He would provide a balance for the liberal agenda that is in the majority in the European Parliament. However, his long-term intention, it seems, is to continue as a member of Dáil Éireann.



John Mullins
Fine Gael
Ireland South

With a business background, John knows the importance of protecting Ireland's corporation tax regime and is conscious of the potential impacts of EU trade negotiations on Irish exports, including agri-food products.



Lisa Chambers
Fianna Fáil
Midlands North-West

Despite a recent misstep in relation to her referendum voting intentions, Lisa has a legal background that would be useful in scrutinising EU legislation. She is a Mayo native and should understand and promote the economic, social and environmental issues of importance to Ireland.

A comprehensive list of all candidates is available on:
www.europeanmovement.ie



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- ◀ Next month, the local and EU elections take place. In June 1997, there was a general election, reflected by the issue's front cover in May of that year, and continued inside with a focus on what the four main parties of the day would do for Irish farming if elected to Government. We spoke to the sitting agriculture minister at that time, Ivan Yates, a Fine Gael TD; Joe Walsh, Fianna Fáil's agriculture spokesperson; Senator John Dardis, Progressive Democrats' agriculture spokesperson; and Senator Jim Townsend, Labour's agriculture spokesperson. The questions related to action that the parties would take to increase beef prices; what the policy was on milk quotas for the future; if they would restore the junior ministry for food; when computerisation of cattle movements would be introduced; and, simply, what each of these men would prioritise if they became the new agriculture minister.



- ◀ In 2008, we asked the question: Can Irish agriculture slash greenhouse gas emissions and meet the 2020 challenge of a reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of 20 per cent? In the article, Donal Nugent wrote, that 'Ireland is unusual among EU countries in that the agricultural sector is a major contributor to its overall GHG output, representing some 27.7 per cent of total emissions'. This is still true for the sector but that percentage is well into the 30s now! Meanwhile, Trevor Sargent who was the then Minister for Food is quoted in the article saying: "It would be counterproductive if a crude reduction in emissions simply had the impact of relocating agricultural production to a less efficient Third world country." Sixteen years later and this all still sounds very familiar!



- ◀ *The Monthly* certainly got that call right. FBD Insurance remains in the vice-like grip of its farmer shareholders. Investors have come and gone but majority ownership and control remain firmly in farmers' hands through their proxies, Farmer Business Developments Plc and FBD Trust. Long may that remain the case. Farmer Business Developments has taken on the hotels, foreign land and leisure assets of FBD Insurance, allowing it to concentrate on its core insurance business. Reserves are strong, profits are healthy, and FBD Insurance pays an impressive annual dividend to its shareholders



Bring Back the Ballrooms



The Showband Era. Happy faces at a Clonalong ballroom many years ago.

Many people in the dating / introductions business reckon modern-day pubs and nightclubs are not conducive for meeting people. Cecilia O’Keeffe Dewdney describes today’s social outlets as “fairgrounds” while Susan Swan says the music is played so loudly that people can hardly be heard.

The showband era is recalled by many as the ideal way of meeting people. In the fifties, halls sprung up overnight and most towns had at least one of these cavernous venues. For about 20 years couples, young and old, jived to the beat of Dickie Rock and Brendan Bowyer and many a marriage was sown there. But the showband era couldn’t last forever with new generations demanding new scenes and by the mid-seventies the halls

were closed, relics to an age past. But they might not be consigned to history if a Mayo farmer had his way. ICMSA county chairman and former Mayo Person of the Year, Muredach McAndrew believes the “ballrooms of romance” should be re-established. Speaking at the Mayo World Convention in Ballina last month, he called on wealthy Mayo exiles to make money available towards the building of these halls. Muredach was concerned that young men were being left on farms while the girls (unhappily) went to Dublin for education and work. The building of ballrooms of romance would go some way towards diminishing Mayo’s increasing singles population according to Muredach.

▲ You can hardly find a nightclub these days, so many have closed in recent years. Back in 1997, it was the ballrooms and showbands that were lamented in this article. Many people, according to this, believed that nightclubs were not conducive to meeting people, instead preferring the ballrooms and dancehalls where real bands played real music. ICMSA county chair, at that time, Muredach McAndrew believed that the ‘ballrooms of romance’ (a reference to a William Trevor short story) should be re-established. He called on wealthy Mayo exiles to ‘make money available towards the building of these halls’. He said he was concerned that ‘young men were being left on farms while the girls (unhappily) went to Dublin for education and work’. Imagine these ‘girls’ moving away in search of better jobs, payments, and prospects!



▶ Fluke and worms were praying for mercy back in 2000 but Novartis had some bad news for them with this hilarious advert!



Subsidy Junkies

It is well known that the majority of subsidies... (text continues in small font)

Subsidies addicting subsidy?

It has been known for some time that the subsidy system... (text continues in small font)

▶ In 2008, Matt O’Keeffe wrote about ‘subsidy addiction’ among Irish farmers. “It is unlikely that the industry could function at this stage without recourse to a huge range of subsidies.” Referring to the many reforms of the subsidy system, he talked about the most recent of them, the Single Farm Payment which in other countries was linked to production. “Ireland, almost uniquely among European countries allows payment without any production requirements,” wrote Matt. “The land has to be kept in good environmental order, a task that in itself costs money but there is no onus on the farmer to actually produce anything.” This was also the year that all Single Farm Payment recipient names were made public, something that farmers would not welcome, he said. He added: “The publication relates only to the Single Farm Payment. Perhaps it is just as well that it will not include other farm-related payments such as the Suckler Welfare Scheme, REPS, grant aid under the FWM or FI schemes, forestry grants, or the Farm Assist Scheme to name but a few.”

UCD students on a field trip to the Burren in Co. Clare.



HELEN SHERIDAN IS THE PROGRAMME DIRECTOR FOR THE AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES DEGREE PROGRAMME WITHIN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN'S (UCD'S) SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCE. HERE, SHE PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

PLOUGHING A NEW COURSE

Agri-Environmental Science is one of the 14 degree options offered by the School of Agriculture and Food Science, UCD. Given the breadth of programmes and expertise of the associated academics (there are 84 academic staff currently), the programmes offered by our school cover the entirety of the food chain from 'farm to fork'. This also means that our academics work in close collaboration with those in other aspects of agriculture such as Animal and Crop Production, Animal Science, Food Science, and Agri-Business Management, to name a few, and ensures that we understand and appreciate emerging issues in these areas of the agri-food sector. Agriculture, and the environment in which it operates, are like two sides of the same coin—both are equally dependent on the other. It is essential to acknowledge both the positive and negative relationships that particular agricultural practices may have with the wider

environment and to understand the science underlying these relationships.

SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS

We're solution-driven. We don't just identify the challenges, but also identify and discuss various solutions with our students. In doing this, we try to instill in them an understanding that truly sustainable solutions need to address environmental, economic and social concerns. Solutions that put farmers out of business are not sustainable solutions. We are very proud of the fact that all our BAgrSc. degree options are underpinned by strong science. Therefore, stage one is very focused on providing the scientific foundation to the rest of the degree. This includes (bio)chemistry, physics and biology. In addition, our students also take a module called Land Use and the Environment. Within this we introduce them to the importance of

biodiversity and land use in terms of delivering a whole range of ecosystem services upon which our food production systems ultimately depend, e.g. nutrient cycling, pollination, carbon sequestration etc. In addition, we cover the big global challenges around climate change, water quality, biodiversity loss and discuss these in the context of policy commitments, advancements in research, etc. In stage two, our students focus on the principles of crop and animal production, as well as learning how to apply the knowledge gained through their stage one science modules in areas like soil science, ecology and microbiology, while also becoming more aware of the innate diversity of the Irish rural landscape. At the end of stage two, our students undertake a week-long residential field course in the Burren, Co. Clare. This is a hugely important opportunity for our students to develop a practical understanding of the

relationships between agriculture, geology, climate and biodiversity. It is also a great opportunity for our students to get to know each other and to build life-long friendships, an aspect of university life that is often forgotten when students get embroiled in the 'points race'.

In stage three, students across the BAgSc. programmes really start to specialise in their chosen path. This is no different for our Agri-Environmental Students who study modules such as Soil Science Applications, Agri-Environmental Issues and Policy, and Plant Diseases and Pest Management. In spring of stage three, students start their Professional Work Experience (PWE). This involves a period of 16 weeks when the students gain practical professional experience working on farms and also in other agri-environmental related areas, e.g. with agricultural and environmental consultants, with Teagasc, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), etc. This is a fantastic opportunity for all BAgSc. students to gain experience working in their chosen field. While many students stay in Ireland for the duration of PWE, a number travel abroad each year to undertake part or all of their PWE in other countries. If students are particularly interested in travelling, they can also undertake a period of study abroad, travelling to a university elsewhere in the world, such as the US, New Zealand or Australia, to study for a period of one trimester (term). We have 12 such partner universities with existing student exchange agreements.

In stage four, our students take advanced modules in agri-environmental management. These are very applicable to real world scenarios and include Agri-Environmental Nutrient Management, Environmental Monitoring, Wildlife Conservation and One Health – which covers topics like zoonoses (diseases spread from animals to humans) and the causes of this – an area of extremely high priority over recent years, for obvious reasons. Our students also get the opportunity to further develop their field and lab skills through a range of field trips that include: a two-day residential field course in the midlands that covers a range of habitat types and introduces the students in a very practical way to the process of habitat classification and

mapping, using techniques in Geographical Information Systems (GIS), and facilities such as the Teagasc Research Centre at Johnstown Castle, and Luggala Estate in Co. Wicklow.

RESEARCH PROJECT

The 'capstone' module for our stage four students is their research project – this requires our students to identify a particular research question and then work through the scientific process, experimentation, field research etc. to find an answer to that question. Our academics provide a range of topics for students to select from, but students can also choose a topic outside of this that particularly interests them. This is a hugely valuable experience as it gives students first-hand experience of what research entails, teaches them valuable field and laboratory skills, as well as skills in writing, time management, data management and interpretation etc.

CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH

The people who deliver the modules across our BAgSc. programmes are also the ones undertaking the research (95 per cent of all academics are research active). This means that our teaching is informed by our research and our students are among the first to hear about new discoveries. For example, a number of colleagues (from across the School of Agriculture) and I have been working on the multi-species sward research that has been ongoing at UCD Lyons Farm for more than a decade. Our students were among the first to know that we can produce 20 per cent more herbage dry matter per hectare from 60 per cent less fertiliser nitrogen compared to perennial ryegrass swards, and animals fed on these swards are reaching their target slaughter weight approximately five weeks earlier than their counterparts fed on perennial ryegrass. These are the kinds of solutions we need to meet increasingly challenging policy commitments – 'low input-high output' systems. Other colleagues undertake research in equally exciting and essential areas including: nutrient and manure management, zoonoses, antimicrobial resistance, pollinators, soil biology (other examples of why biodiversity is vital for food production) and soil carbon sequestration, as well as seeking to better understand how plant roots interact

with soil and how crops respond to environmental stresses including drought, flooding and new 'invasive' pests. Of course, we are in the enviable position of having access to the 600-acre UCD Lyons Farm, which has all of the main farming enterprises including dairy, sheep, beef and tillage. It is also the location of the Long-Term Grazing Platform, a participant site in the Global Farm Platform – a network of international sites which focus on enhancing the sustainability of ruminant production systems. We are also incredibly lucky to have access to the five-acre Rosemount Research Station on our Belfield Campus. Rosemount is home to some really high-tech equipment such as the CT scanners for scanning root architecture and the plant phenotyping suite that allows researchers to better understand the effects of different stressors on crops. This is becoming increasingly important as we experience less predictable weather patterns. In addition, resources such as the controlled environment chambers allow researchers to modify the environment in which plants grow, so that they can assess how they respond to changes in CO₂ concentration, temperature, etc.

ON THE FUTURE

The only thing certain about the future is that it will be less predictable than the past. The challenges are significant and there are many dimensions to them. To develop truly sustainable solutions, we need many perspectives around the table – including farmers, scientists and policy makers. In a time when agriculture and the environment are regarded by some as being at opposite ends of the spectrum, it has never been more important that we have people who understand how inextricably linked the two are, people who understand the science behind the challenges and who can bring a balanced but informed voice to the table. These are the kind of people we help to produce through our Agri-Environmental Science degree at UCD. In addition to the BAgSc. in Agri-Environmental Sciences programme, the Environment and Sustainable Resource Management section at UCD also offers three exciting one-year MSc. programmes in Environmental Resource Management; Horticulture and, Wildlife Conservation and Management.



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FOCUS

A light brown cow with yellow ear tags stands in a green field under a blue sky. The cow is the central focus of the image, looking directly at the camera. The background shows a line of trees and a clear sky.

FOCUS

BEEF



MANAGING A SHORTER GRAZING SEASON

KEVIN GRAHAM, BEEF SPECIALIST AT ALLTECH IRELAND, OFFERS SOME ADVICE FOR FARMERS AFTER A DIFFICULT FEW MONTHS RESULTED IN AN EXTENDED WINTER SEASON AND SHORTER TIME FOR GRAZING

To say that the grazing regimes on Irish farms have been difficult to implement this year would be an understatement.

Most farms are six weeks, or more, off where they would normally be in terms of grazing. However, on a more positive note, it is great to see the return of some milder conditions and, hopefully, this will help kick-start the grazing season with the help of some drier spells. Extended winters can be somewhat difficult to manage, particularly where forage supplies are limited; if sufficient forage can't be supplied, there can be a negative effect on animal performance and profitability. Even when winter feeding ends, farmers face another challenge: conserving enough forage for the coming winter. A point to note here is not to compromise on quality grass silage, particularly with first cuts, by delaying harvest dates to increase total yield. It is best to harvest

the first cut as soon as possible even if yield is lower; a 'bulkier' second cut can be taken later in the season. Due to a delay in letting cows out to grass this year, it is inevitable that animal performance has suffered as a result, particularly on farms where low-energy, low-protein diets were utilised pre-turnout. The focus now should be on maximising grass growth, utilisation and animal performance. Not only will this help gain some of the ground lost due to bad weather, but — depending on farming systems — it can allow more cattle to be finished on grass rather than having to be rehoused later, which uses more forage. Maximising the performance potential of cattle during the grazing season is essential. Three important areas are:

- ▶ Grassland management;
- ▶ Animal health; and
- ▶ Supplementation.

GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

Grass is always mentioned as a way to boost returns on beef farms — it is a crop that we can grow and utilise in large quantities. It is also a relatively cheap crop to grow and provides cattle with a great source of energy and protein.

In a normal year, I would be highlighting the benefits of an early turnout and leafy spring grass, mainly due to the nutritional value of spring grass relative to other feed options. Leafy spring grass can have an energy value as high as 1.05 UFL per kilogramme of dry matter, a protein content of 18 per cent to 22 per cent, and a digestibility value greater than 80 per cent. When we compare this to the average grass silage in use on beef farms, with an energy value of approximately 0.7 UFL per kilogramme of dry matter, a protein content of 12 per cent and digestibility value in most

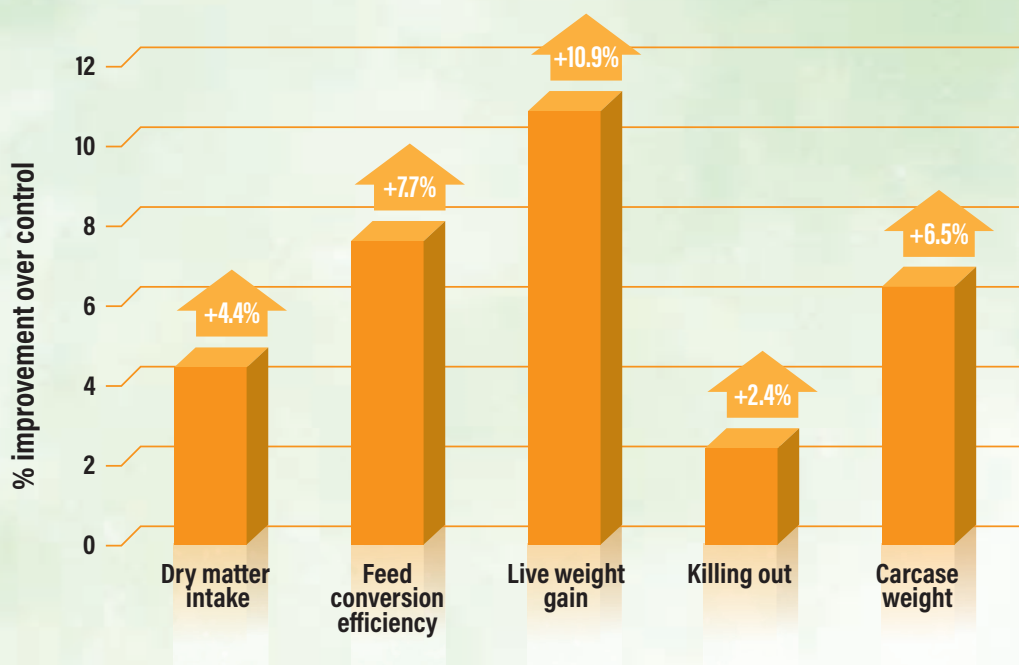


Figure 1. Percentage improvements in performance parameters in beef animals fed a Yea-Sacc diet compared to a control diet (R Fallon et al., Teagasc Grange Research Centre, 2003).

cases around 65 per cent or less, it is easy to see that performance levels greater than one kilogramme (kg) per day can be achieved at grass, as opposed to a typical liveweight gain of 0.6kg per day indoors.

This year, it will be important to graze down to a height of 4cm where possible. This will ensure that all the dead material is grazed and that top-quality leafy grass will be produced for the next rotation.

As the summer progresses, ensure that high-quality leafy material is presented to the cattle. Grass that is allowed to become too 'stemmy' will seriously reduce animal performance. Stemmy paddocks like these should be used for silage, rather than trying to get cattle to graze the sward down to the required height. To maintain grass quality during the summer, aim for a pre-grazing grass height of 8cm to 10cm. Topping may be necessary to clean out paddocks and ensure high-quality regrowth. Working off these points will help ensure that the grass presented to your cattle will be of the highest possible quality, which should lead to maximum performance.

ANIMAL HEALTH

Parasites such as worms and liver fluke can have negative effects on performance at grass, so it is important to put an appropriate plan in place to reduce these effects. It is worth noting that parasitic infections can build up over the

grazing season. The period of greatest risk is during the second half of the grazing season, up to housing, especially if no mid-season control measures have been utilised.

SUPPLEMENTATION

As the grazing season progresses into the autumn, grass growth often slows, and in some cases, quality can deteriorate. On many beef farms, concentrates are then introduced. Supplementation with concentrates at this stage has many positives, particularly where grass supply is limited and quality may not be adequate to provide enough energy to successfully finish cattle on.

In most cases, supplementing cattle with 2kg to 3kg of concentrates per day will help supply the additional energy required. The benefits of this additional supplementary feeding include cattle achieving higher carcass weights; it can also increase kill-out percentage and conformation. There is also the potential to finish cattle earlier and subsequently miss the main supply of cattle being finished off-grass, thereby achieving a higher market price. In terms of concentrate inclusion and its formulation, be sure to consider the quality of grass in the diet. Grass in the autumn period is often high in protein, and dry matter can be variable, while effective fibre may be low in some cases. To balance this, concentrates need to contain a good level of digestible fibre,

such as beet pulp or soya hulls. They should be low in protein – 12 per cent is sufficient – and energy dense. A concentrate like this, with a balanced supply of energy and protein along with digestible fibre, will help avoid the loose manure issues commonly seen at this time of year. Without concentrate supplementation, excess amounts of protein being consumed through grass, with a low level of fibre in the diet, often lead to loose manure in the autumn period.

You may want to consider the use of a live yeast technology (such as Yea-Sacc), which has been shown to improve rumen function by boosting rumen pH, ensuring that the rumen bacteria work more efficiently. Such improvements result in an increased conversion of both grass and concentrate, leading to higher animal performance. Research from Teagasc – Grange Animal & Grassland Research Centre – has shown that the inclusion of this product in beef diets can improve performance by over 10 per cent (Figure 1).

Managing each of these key areas will help to support overall performance of cattle during this grazing period. Cattle should reach target weights faster, be easier to finish, and essentially leave a higher margin. The technical team at Alltech can offer nutritional support and advice and help you address any negative issues your cattle may be experiencing.

A man with dark hair, smiling, stands in a barn. He is wearing a red long-sleeved shirt under a black quilted puffer vest with a small logo on the chest, light blue jeans, and black rubber boots. He has his hands in his pockets. The barn has a corrugated metal roof and wooden beams. Several black cows are visible in the background, some lying down. The floor is covered with straw and hay.

THE ANGUS ANGLE

MATT O'KEEFFE EXPLORES THE WORLD OF MEATH-BASED ANGUS PRODUCER, RICHARD GILSENAN, WHO WORKS WITH THE CERTIFIED IRISH ANGUS PRODUCER GROUP, AND WHOSE FAMILY ALSO RUN AN AGRI-RETAIL STORE

Multitasking is the name of the game for Richard. As well as being involved in the family beef farm, and working with the Certified Irish Angus Producer Group, his family also run an agri-business, Gilsenan Agri Ltd. "My grandfather established it. It's years and years in the making," says Richard. "It's a small family agri-business, retailing in fertiliser, meal and general hardware," he adds. After secondary school, Richard completed the agriculture degree course offered by Dundalk Institute of Technology, in conjunction with Ballyhaise Agricultural College: "After my four years there, I pushed on to do the MSc. in Food Business Strategy at the UCD Michael Smurfit Business School. The degree and the masters complement each other very, very well in terms of providing a broad perspective in my career," he says.

PROMOTING IRISH ANGUS

Richard's role with the Certified Irish Angus Producer Group is two-fold, he explains: "It combines project manager and marketing roles. Certified Irish Angus was established in 1995 by a group of breeders. It's now Ireland's largest producer group with over 10,000 active members. The role of the organisation today is to protect the authenticity and attributes of the Irish Angus breed, specifically promoting Certified Irish Angus animals. "I also support both ABP and Kepak in procurement and marketing of Angus cattle. ABP and Kepak are our processing partners. The ultimate customers for Certified Irish Angus are in foodservice and retail, both with different process partners. Musgraves provides our foodservice outlet. They work with several of the large restaurants. And Tesco is our big retail outlet for Certified Irish Angus. The producer group has been involved with Tesco since 2008."

PRODUCER BENEFITS

Richard is clear about the value to producers of the producer group: "Anyone that delivers Irish Angus to ABP or Kepak factories can become a member of Certified Irish Angus.



THE ROLE OF THE ORGANISATION TODAY IS TO PROTECT THE AUTHENTICITY AND ATTRIBUTES OF THE IRISH ANGUS BREED

By supplying cattle there, they can avail of a guaranteed premium. From April 1, there is a guaranteed 25c premium bonus once you are signed on as a member of the group. Throughout the year, it's a 10 cent bonus, and it can vary from 10c to 30c across the year, depending on cattle supply and demand. These cattle can be crossbred Angus animals, and a lot of Angus cattle are coming off the dairy herd, especially since the milk quota was abolished in 2015. The increase in dairy numbers has led to an increase in dairy beef cross Angus animals. Better breeding is delivering better cattle for the beef sector," he says.

THE HOME FARM

The Gilsenan farm is home to a suckler herd, with an emphasis on breeding Angus cattle. Richard explains: "We have a herd of predominantly Limousin-breed suckler cows, which we cross with Irish Angus bulls, and we're getting really good results. We bring all the progeny to slaughter, and they grade very well in the factory. Angus has a huge advantage for us especially, because this is a part-time cattle-farming enterprise. They're easy calving, the calves jump up and they suck straight away [when born] and there's very little work with them, which is a huge benefit for part-time farmers. After we calve down, we take them through to slaughter at two years of age. We also buy in cattle and that allows us to put together batches of cattle for finishing."

BENEFITS OF DATA

The introduction of the Dairy Beef Index (DBI) is a game changer, Richard agrees: "It is,


because it gives a value on the calf. Every calf in the initial stages looks very much the same. It's hard to distinguish between a good calf and a bad calf at that stage. The data puts a figure on the calf, with a predicted Commercial Beef Value (CBV). When the breeders are picking sires, they're able to predict the CBV value so they can put a value on the calf before the calf is even born. The calf buyers, in turn, know what they are getting and have a better prospect of making a margin on that animal."

WEATHER IMPACT ON AGRI-BUSINESS

Richard comments on the impact of the poor weather on the family agri-business: "In early April, fertiliser was only starting to move. Most farmers get the fertiliser delivered. With the agri-business, we would also have seen a lot of farmers having to buffer feed, with additional dairy rations and beef mixes for cattle, even to maintain the body condition score of the cows. We have a weighbridge there as well and farmers were weighing trailers of silage every day for the month of March. On our own farm we would have had cows out by the end of February in a normal year. So, we've seen and personally experienced the huge strain on farmers."

FARMERS NEED TO HIGHLIGHT SUSTAINABILITY

The Meath man takes a long-term view of his career and farming in general: "I'm going to push on with my work for Certified Irish Angus and keep developing my career in the agri-food and business fields. Coming from a farming background, I can see that, as a community, the farming sector has a lot of challenges facing it at the moment, especially in terms of sustainability. We need to change people's perspective on farming, and we need to showcase the fact we're the first country in the world to implement a national sustainability programme through Origin Green. We need to keep marketing ourselves well and getting our proven green credentials across to consumers as best we can."



ON A QUEST TO REDUCE FINISHING AGE

PAUL SMITH, MARK MCGEE, BERNADETTE EARLEY, EDWARD O'RIORDAN, PAUL CROSSON AND DAVID KENNY FROM TEAGASC GRANGE, AND ALAN KELLY FROM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN (UCD) OUTLINE THE NEW BEEF-QUEST PROJECT, WHICH AIMS TO IDENTIFY THE KEY FACTORS AFFECTING THE LIFETIME LIVE WEIGHT GAIN PERFORMANCE OF THE NATIONAL BEEF HERD

As part of the Irish Climate Action Plan, a 25 per cent reduction in agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (from 22Mt of carbon dioxide (CO₂) equivalent (eq) to 17.25Mt CO₂eq), by 2030 was established. For the beef sector, reducing the average finishing age of the national prime beef cattle population (i.e. steers, heifers, and young bulls), from 26 to 22-23 months has the potential to reduce agricultural GHG emissions by 0.73Mt CO₂eq. Indeed, analysis conducted as part of the latest Teagasc Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) highlighted a reduction in the finishing age of prime beef cattle to contribute towards 15 per cent of the Irish agricultural sector's 2030 GHG reduction target.

FINISHING-AGE POTENTIAL

By reducing the finishing age of beef cattle, it is possible to reduce the overall quantity of GHG emissions (predominantly methane – CH₄) an animal emits over their lifetime. For example, if a steer undergoing finishing was emitting on average 230g of methane per day, a one-month (28 days) reduction in finishing age, would produce a CH₄ saving of 6.4kg



NATIONALLY THE MEAN AGE AT FINISHING IS SIX-TO-NINE MONTHS LATER THAN ACHIEVED ON GRASS-BASED, HIGH-PERFORMING COMMERCIAL AND BEEF RESEARCH FARMS

or 180kg of CO₂. Beyond the environmental benefits, reducing the finishing of beef cattle is economically advantageous, by decreasing the daily input cost associated with rearing an animal, and thus is a key contributor to on farm profitability. Although much of the GHG emissions benefits are likely realised when the animal is older, and subsequently emitting a higher proportion of GHG emissions, an overall improvement in live weight gain across all stages of the animals lifetime, will ultimately reduce the overall time required to

produce an animal, and benefit the daily input costs associated with raising beef cattle.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Since 2010, the average finishing age of the Irish prime beef cattle population has reduced by roughly two months of age, with minimal impact to the average carcass weight. For example, the average finishing age of suckler-bred steers has reduced by ~1 week/annum with a slight increase to average carcass weight. However, in spite of this, nationally the mean age at finishing is six-to-nine months later than achieved on grass-based high-performing commercial and beef research farms. Therefore, in order to expedite a reduction in the average finishing age of the prime beef cattle population, there is an urgent need to identify and quantify the key factors currently impeding Irish beef farms from achieving potential live weight targets throughout the animal's lifetime.

ON A QUEST

The Teagasc-led Beef-Quest project, recently funded by the Department of Agriculture,

BEEF2024

'Securing your Future'



Wednesday, 26 June | 9am



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The focus of BEEF2024 will be on the application of technologies that will help beef farmers increase the profitability and environmental sustainability of their family farm businesses.

Technology Villages

- Grassland & Forage
- Suckler Beef
- Dairy Calf-to-Beef
- Advisory, Education & Opportunities
- AgTech

Highlights

Engage in panel discussions covering key topics across a range of beef cattle production systems throughout the day.

Don't miss the demonstrations on the use of protected urea, calibration of spreaders and farm infrastructure.

View the cattle from the various suckler and dairy-beef studies at Grange and see the principles of safe calving and handling of livestock with our cow simulators.



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Food and the Marine, aims to investigate the effects of nutrition, health, and on-farm environment factors presently constraining animal-growth performance and the finishing age of cattle on beef farms, and to assess their impacts on GHG emissions and on farm profitability. In collaboration with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) and UCD, the Beef-Quest project will undertake a multifaceted approach to identify the key factors impeding lifetime live weight performance on commercial beef farms, and assess the barriers to technology adaption on farm. Using data currently available within the industry from commercial suckler- and dairy-bred beef farms, the

lifetime weight gain performance of the national beef herd will be characterised to help identify key junctures in the production cycle, whereby growth targets are currently not being achieved on commercial farms. Following this, a new large-scale, on-farm study is planned to determine the key animal nutrition, health and on-farm environmental related factors presently constraining growth performance, and subsequently contributing to the older finishing age of cattle on Irish farms. Data amassed from the on-farm study, will be utilised to determine both the environmental and economic benefits associated with the optimisation of animal nutrition, health and on-farm

environment, and subsequently aid the identification of the most effective on farm measures for reducing the finishing age of Irish beef cattle.

Finally, through a series of interviews and surveys with farmers, the fundamental sociological factors underpinning key production decisions on farms which impact finishing age, will be investigated in order to assess the likelihood of uptake and adoption at farm level, of some of the key strategies identified as part of this project.

TARGETED SOLUTIONS

Overall, Beef-Quest will identify, quantify and rank the primary on-farm technical and

behavioural-related bottlenecks negatively impacting beef cattle finishing age. Using this new information more targeted, high-impact and deliverable solutions can be proposed and disseminated to reduce the finishing age of cattle, thus improving the sustainability of Irish beef production. A roadmap for policy makers and the wider agricultural industry, will be formulated detailing the most effective means of reducing the national finishing age whilst maintaining both beef production levels and international reputation of Irish grass-based beef production.

The Beef-Quest project has been funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Competitive Research Funding Programme (grant number: 2023RP892).

TEAGASC BEEF OPEN DAY

Details of the Beef-Quest project as well as other key research focused on animal nutrition, genetics, breeding, grassland management and GHG mitigation, will be presented at the Teagasc Beef Open Day on June 26 in Teagasc Grange (Eircode: C15 PW93). For up-to-date information on the open day, please visit the Teagasc website and Teagasc Beef social-media channels.



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BEEF MARKET UPDATE

JOE BURKE, BEEF AND LIVESTOCK SECTOR MANAGER WITH BORD BIA, OFFERS AN UPDATE ON THE CURRENT MARKET TRENDS AFFECTING BEEF EXPORTS

So far this year, market conditions across export markets remain fairly stable and the UK continues to be a key destination for Irish trade. Last year, 47 per cent of our beef exports were destined for the UK market. We have a steady trade in the UK, where domestic beef prices are strong and that continues to drive this position. Continental Europe also currently represents 47 per cent of exports, similar to last year. However, relatively speaking, domestic beef prices around the EU are a bit more competitive; there is more resistance on the part of consumers to the higher prices



Joe Burke, Bord Bia.

MEAT MARKETING SEMINAR

that are prevailing across the beef category. While beef production is considerably tighter around Europe – it has dropped about 3.5 per cent – disappointingly we are not seeing an increase in price as a result. On average, for the week ending April 21, Irish farmers received €5.21c per kilogramme (c/kg) – excluding VAT – for R3 steers. Across the EU, where the majority of male cattle are produced as young bull beef, R3 males are averaging just €5.04c/kg. By comparison, in the UK, R3 steer prices are equivalent to €5.69c/kg – this shows our strength here and the main basis for our reliance on this market.

Meanwhile, approximately six per cent of Irish beef exports are going outside of Europe and the UK and that reflects the fact that these markets are quite competitive – South American and Australian beef are very dominant among global beef markets. The Chinese market reopened for us, thankfully, last year but volumes remain quite subdued overall because of the price-sensitive nature of the market currently.

SUPPLY

Supply-wise, across the EU we have seen a decline of 3.5 per cent of beef in tonnage last year. This year, across the EU forecasts indicate that we might see a further decrease of between 1 and 1.5 per cent. However, in Ireland, a few factors are having an impact, resulting in slightly higher supplies than we would have been expecting. This is partly weather-related as farmers had little choice but to finish their animals in the shed, rather than put them out to grass, making it a better business decision to fatten them over the last couple of months. And the number of cull cows has increased slightly, which reflects the pressure on the dairy side – nitrates regulations, stocking rate restrictions, lower prices and high input costs – causing farmers to cull cows that are surplus to their requirements. We still anticipate cattle numbers to tighten over the next few months, partly due to the delay in turn-out. With the weather, the supply of cattle coming ready off grass is likely to be delayed to July, which might leave tighter supplies during May and June, and push some of these animals into the autumn as result of the slow start to the grazing season.

Another important factor is that we are seeing average carcass weights decline. Last year, grazing conditions were also difficult and that meant animals didn't perform as well as they should and were slower to put on weight and finish. Also, more of our animals are coming from a dairy background and, on average, they will have lighter carcass weights. This has contributed to a few kilos less per animal slaughtered.



THERE IS A FIVE PER CENT DECLINE AND A 12 PER CENT DECLINE, RESPECTIVELY, FOR ROASTING JOINTS AND STEWING BEEF

CONSUMER TRENDS AND PERCEPTIONS

When it comes to consumer trends, the British market is always a useful indicator and a good source of data to focus on. For the first three months of this year, the volume of beef purchases at supermarket level declined by 1.4 per cent and prices paid per kg increased by 7.1 per cent year-on-year. This shows that beef continues to be a stable protein and something that people are reluctant to cut out of their basket, or substitute too easily. On the other hand, we continue to see some pressure with inflation, in terms of the consumer shopping bill. Outside of food, though, pressure has eased in terms of fuel and energy costs. In the beef category, steak and burgers are performing steadily and holding volume year-on-year. Meanwhile, there is a five per cent decline and a 12 per cent decline, respectively, for roasting joints and stewing beef, which suggested the more convenient formats are coming out on top. While roasting and stewing cuts are still popular, perceptions that they require more effort to cook, and also the fact that more shoppers are buying for one or two servings rather than for large families, is affecting this. Elsewhere around Europe, we are seeing a further decline in terms of engagement in the beef category, and some more substitution of beef with cheaper proteins, especially chicken.

PGI STATUS

Meanwhile, Bord Bia has been busy communicating the recent protected geographical indication (PGI) status of Irish grass-fed beef in the marketplace, as an additional strong endorsement of our product. It adds to our established reputation, and customers readily understand what Irish grass-fed beef means. In some markets, we see a higher level of association and

recognition with the status, especially in Italy where over 40 per cent of consumers count themselves as being familiar with PGI and deem it as being worth paying more for. France and Switzerland will also be key markets for PGI and we hope to gain traction in these countries soon. We have activity scheduled with journalists and buyers in these regions to link-in with suppliers and we are targeting additional listings and increased premiumisation. While this status is about reputation, it also offers the potential to grow the value of the product and see that distributed proportionally along the chain.

CHEFS' IRISH BEEF CLUB CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

The Chefs' Irish Beef Club (CIBC) is an exclusive forum of leading and Michelin-starred chefs who value Irish beef and publicly endorse it. Founded by Bord Bia in 2004, the club has over 90 member chefs across eight countries. Their preference and advocacy for Irish beef enhances its premium reputation abroad.

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the club, Bord Bia is hosting a three-day event to showcase Irish beef in May, featuring over 60 chefs and attracting media from France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and Switzerland. Joe explains: "The first day will be all about the farms, engaging with the chefs and celebrating all things Irish food. On the second day, we will travel to Dublin and come together for a 'culinary inspiration' event looking at trends within the premium foodservice sector internationally. Finally, we conclude with a celebratory gala dinner for the chefs and Irish industry leaders. There will be plenty of engagement and it will be great to get feedback from members and to further showcase Irish beef."

MART TIME

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY ASKED RAY DOYLE, LIVESTOCK AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES EXECUTIVE WITH ICOS, TO GIVE US AN UPDATE ON THE ROLE OF MARTS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR TODAY AND WHY THEY ARE AS IMPORTANT AS WHEN THEY WERE ESTABLISHED 70 YEARS AGO

The livestock mart sector in Ireland is 70 years old this year and it still plays a crucial role in the agricultural industry, providing numerous advantages for both primary producers and, ultimately, meat purchasers alike. The marts' key service as central hubs where livestock are bought and sold, facilitating economic transactions in a secure, guaranteed fashion, and fostering growth within the industry is still as important today as during the 1950s when they started.

PIVOTAL

Covid-19, ironically, was one of the pivotal moments of positive change within the livestock marts in Ireland, as the key advantage of livestock marts is their role in price discovery and the independence of the auction ring. The advent of digital platforms and online auctions has revolutionised the way livestock trading is conducted. Farmers and traders can now buy and sell livestock online, enabling them to reach a wider market and streamline the trading process. Online platforms offer transparency, convenience, and efficiency, leading to improved price transparency and reduced transaction costs.



THE ADVENT OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND ONLINE AUCTIONS HAS REVOLUTIONISED THE WAY LIVESTOCK TRADING IS CONDUCTED

BALANCE OF POWER

By bringing together numerous buyers and sellers in one location, the marts enable impartial and competitive pricing based on supply and demand dynamics, which have been beneficial to farmers, especially over the

last three or four years whereby the balance of power has become more neutral compared to the pre-Covid era where the large meat processors and retailers had the upper hand. Producers receive fair market value for their livestock, and can always refuse the final bid if they want to try the mart another day, while buyers can access a wide range of options to meet their specific needs. This is now very evident for certain types of factory stock that buyers can now bid on remotely through the various software companies that supply the livestock marts.

Although farmers can and do trade their livestock privately the most recent prices achieved in the local mart continues to be the reference for these trades and while this may be convenient for farmers, they don't have the security of payment that dealing with a fully licensed and Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA)-compliant mart ensures. Additionally, farmers that bring their livestock to their local mart offer producers access to a broader customer base beyond their local area. Farmers that trade their animals in their local or regional mart can reach buyers from different geographical regions and tap into new market opportunities. This expanded market access not only increases sales potential for farmers but also fosters competition among buyers, leading to better prices for producers and more choices for buyers.

SOCIAL SERVICE

Marts also provide a service that you can't put a price on but has immense value. They facilitate important social interaction and networking opportunities where producers, neighbours, buyers, industry stakeholders, and experts can interact, share knowledge, exchange information and simply have a chat. These social interactions facilitate helping others, learning, collaboration, and the dissemination of best practices within the agricultural community.



THEY FACILITATE IMPORTANT SOCIAL INTERACTION AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Your local mart also contributes to local and regional economic development. It helps to generate employment opportunities, support ancillary industries, and drive economic growth in rural areas. It facilitates a combined rural Ireland turnover of over €2bn, which flows back into the local economy, bolstering businesses and infrastructure in the surrounding communities. This creates a ripple effect throughout the economy, stimulating demand for goods and services such as transportation, feed supply, veterinary care, and equipment manufacturing. Moreover, the revenue generated from livestock sales at markets flows back into the local economy, bolstering businesses and infrastructure in the surrounding communities.

VITAL FOR THE ECOSYSTEM

In conclusion, livestock markets play a vital role in the agricultural ecosystem, offering a wide range of advantages that benefit producers, consumers, and the industry as a whole. From price discovery and market efficiency to risk management and quality assurance, the marts serve as dynamic hubs of activity that drive innovation, promote sustainability, and foster economic prosperity. By leveraging the benefits of livestock markets, stakeholders can enhance their competitiveness, mitigate risks, and contribute to the growth and resilience of the livestock sector.



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THE SYSTEM IN USE TODAY FOR WRAPPING BALES REDUCES WASTAGE AND INCREASES OUTPUT

MATT O'KEEFFE SPOKE TO LLOYD DAWSON, SALES DIRECTOR FOR SILOTITE, ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF SILAGE-BALE TECHNOLOGY

UNDERWRAPS

Baled silage has revolutionised fodder preservation in Ireland since its introduction in the early 1980s.

Since then, silage-bale technology has improved incrementally, delivering better preservation, greater ease of handling, faster baling, and improved cost efficiencies over time. Lloyd Dawson began his career over 30 years ago with Irish Ropes, manufacturers of the iconic Red Setter baler twine, well known to an older generation of farmers. Lloyd explains his career progression: "I started with the Irish Ropes group, and they were subsequently bought by British Polythene Industries (BPI), who were the owners of the Silotite and Visqueen ranges of silage wraps, silage and silage sheetings products. At this stage I'm now sales director for Silotite, overseeing the Irish and UK markets as well as large part of the Southern Hemisphere including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, China, Japan, India and Pakistan."

IMPROVED BALE QUALITY

Lloyd has witnessed significant change over the course of his career: "The technology around bale wrapping has changed immeasurably, even in the last decade. Last year marked the 40th anniversary of the Silotite brand and in those four decades we've seen huge changes, not just in the technology of manufacturing the film, but also

in the bales themselves.

"The bale weights have doubled. We went from twine to net, and now we're moving away from net to the film system. And with that has come investment in the technology required to make better films. The film is longer, stronger, but lighter than the previous generation, making it more efficient. The system in use today for wrapping bales reduces wastage and increases output, and if you take a winter like we've had this year, that's very important.

"Bale uniformity has made bales much more dependable. The biggest surface of a bale is around the barrel. That's two thirds of the bale's surface. The way bales were wrapped in the past, most of the film was on the ends of the bale, and the least amount around the barrel, where the biggest surface is. And, if you go five centimetres into that bale, that represents 37 per cent of the entire contents. The development of the filament film has given extra protection because you're cross-wrapping in a different direction. The result is that the bale has much more strength in how it's being protected," he says.

All of this contributes to the preservation of the bale for longer because the structure is better, they are more durable, and hold their density. Lloyd continues: "In turn, they open more easily for feed out and, with the netting gone, the fodder doesn't become enmeshed

inside the netting, and it can all be recycled in one place."

BALED OVER PIT

Commenting on the advantages of baled silage over pit silage, Lloyd says: "If we take a clamp, the average wastage can be up to 25 per cent. The average wastage in a bale has been about five per cent and with the film system we're seeing that percentage drop below two per cent. Trials have shown that's given farmers an extra five euros of feed value per bale.

"Most farms have a silage pit or clamp and they want to reduce wastage. There are products in the market that achieve that goal. Cling seal or a vacuum sheet, which sits directly on top of the clamp, is an example. The farmer puts the standard silage sheet on top and that creates a vacuum with the cling film sucked down onto the surface, reducing wastage on the top and shoulders of the clamp."

RAPID MECHANICAL PROGRESS

Bale technology has been matched with improvements in baler machinery technologies. Lloyd explains the progress: "The original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) have rapidly developed novel technologies. Three or four years ago, there was a choice of one or two machines.

Today, every major OEM in the marketplace has a baler available that can apply the latest film products. Farmers can see the benefits, including silage quality, ease of use and lower wastage. There are efficiency and environmental gains. The amount of film applied to the bale is reducing its environmental footprint. Now, we're looking at bringing films into the market that will have recycled content in them so we're not relying entirely on virgin materials from the oil industry. Close to 90 per cent of film used by Irish farmers is being recycled and, since 2022, the cost has gone up by 80 per cent, from 14c a bale to 25c per bale. We're reducing the amount of film applied to the bale, bringing that cost down by 10 per cent. There are other developments to reduce costs, including transport costs and combination machines. A contractor wants to spend as much time as possible on the tractor baling. If we increase the length of the roll by removing the box and use sleeve packaging which is 10 times lighter, you've 20 per cent more length, reducing transport and packaging costs. That sleeve can be recycled with the

bale. Everything can be recycled in one place, and we're being encouraged by European legislation to reduce the amount of single use package. The world has signed up to become carbon neutral. We're ahead of the game, and farmers are joining in on that and getting the benefits from it."

THE COMPLETE NUTRITION BALE

In Ireland, we associate bale wraps predominantly with grass silage. That's not the case everywhere, Lloyd says: "There's any number of forages that can be wrapped. In China and South Africa, for instance, they are using compactor balers rather than field balers. They are stationary and the crops are harvested and brought to the balers. Many crops are grown under irrigation. They're using total mixed rations (TMR), mixing more than one crop with bales weighing up to 1.3 tonnes and annual throughputs of up to 200,000 bales. The bales are then transported to feed lots. Everything is in the bale, manufactured specifically to farmers requirements, a total food package, if you like. You've got maize, alfalfa, sugar beet, proteins

and minerals all mixed. Each bale has an identification code with the data stored in the Cloud, so the farmers know exactly what they are purchasing."

WHAT ARE THE NEXT BIG CONCEPTS?

Sustainability is our big step forward. We don't invest in machines that have a slow output. We want machines that allow us to make our products more sustainable. That means we must be able to incorporate recycled content. It means we must be able to produce thinner and stronger films. That's the technology that we're going towards and that's going to reduce the volumes to be collected, with the farmer getting higher quality silage.

"You have a choice how you go forward in terms of film manufacture. A mix of fossil, a mix of organic, mechanically recycled, a mix of chemically recycled and you can have a mix of renewable polymers grown from starch. It'll be a mix of all of that. We aim to decouple ourselves from the fossil side of it, increase the recycled content, but we must make sure we keep the quality and performance of the product."

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ENERGY



ANAEROBIC DIGESTION: A SLOW BURN

THE TARDINESS IN DEVELOPING A COMMERCIAL ANAEROBIC DIGESTION (AD) INDUSTRY OF SCALE IN IRELAND MEANS THAT THERE IS LITTLE POSSIBILITY THAT THE AMBITION TO HAVE UP TO 200 PLANTS OPERATING BY 2030 CAN BE REALISED, WRITES **MATT O'KEEFFE**

Given the fact that the technology is tried and proven in Northern Ireland, the UK, across Europe, and globally for many years, there is little justification for the inordinate delays in progressing the development of biogas production. And, yet, lack of progress is what we have. Even when the Government finally publishes its support measures for developing a viable AD industry, the planning system, complete with opportunities to stymie developments indefinitely, means that, even if the Government intervention provides adequate encouragement for progress, the rate of that progress will be far too slow to meet any targets set, either in terms of timelines or scale. From a farmer perspective the optimal model for agricultural AD in Ireland will be centralised plants, with several farms in the catchment area supplying the feedstocks.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

Other countries in Europe have developed successful AD industries. Almost 40 per cent of Denmark's gas consumption comes from biomethane, with a national ambition to increase biomethane production to substitute 100 per cent of Danish gas demand before

2030. Most of Denmark's biogas is produced from farm manure. Closer to home there are 80 AD plants in Northern Ireland, which mostly use agricultural feedstocks, including silage. In addition, there is a food-waste stream from the Republic being transported to NI for use as a feedstock in biodigesters there. In Denmark, Northern Ireland, and elsewhere across Europe, biogas has been promoted through public financial support.

TEAGASC AD MODEL

Teagasc has progressed the development of a pilot AD plant at its Grange Research Centre to final pre-production stage, with full commissioning and production expected in the coming months. The digester consists of a 1,600m³ concrete tank fitted with external insulation protected by steel cladding. The tank is covered by a gas-tight membrane on top. The unit will, at least, provide an example of what is involved for anyone interested in developing a biogas production facility. The Grange plant is being constructed on a relatively small scale. To reach the national target of 5.7TWh of biomethane by 2030, at least one 150 large-scale AD plants will have to be constructed. These plants will

Energy unit terms explained

Terawatt hours, abbreviated as TWh, is a unit of energy representing one trillion watt hours. A kilowatt hour is equivalent to a steady power of one kilowatt running for one hour and is equivalent to 3.6 million joules or 3.6 Megajoules (MJ).

Gigawatt hours, abbreviated as GWh, is a unit of energy representing one billion (1,000,000,000) watt hours and is equivalent to one million kilowatt hours. Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained>

least 40GWh. For comparison, the Teagasc Grange AD plant will have an annual capacity of 3GWh. The Grange unit is calculated to produce in the region of 75m³ of gas per hour, with a target of operating for at least 8,000 hours per year. That would put annualised gas production at 560,000m³. Translating that into actual energy equivalent gives a calorific value of 22 Megajoules (MJ) per cubic metre, which equates to six kilowatt hours per cubic metre. Using those figures per cubic metre of gas produced across annualised

production targets indicates a yearly output rate from the plant of 12.3 million Mj or 3.4 million kWh. It should be noted that up to one quarter of the production is required for processing the energy. The figures above provide the raw data. Further processing of the gas into biomethane enhances the heat equivalent value up to 45Mj per cubic metre. The digester will be fed with a mix of slurry and silage, the mix varying across the year, depending on raw feed availability. Winter slurry from 1,000 animals on the Grange farm will be used, as well as grass silage at 25 per cent dry matter, from 70 hectares. Greater efficiencies in the operation of the pilot AD plant including shorter retention and gas collection timescales should be able to deliver a third more biogas per hour.

COMMERCIAL VIABILITY

This would be some way off the output figures being secured on average from most biogas units across Europe. Scale and output are critical to ensuring commercial viability of biogas plants, with the reality that the competitive benchmark is with the price of natural gas. We can argue about the validity of this comparison, given that, like coal and oil, natural gas is already semi-processed when it is pumped out of the ground and the major costs are in further refining and transport for end use. Nevertheless, this is the commercial reality in which the nascent Irish AD industry must operate. The development of AD plants internationally was not achieved without the use of public money for the public good. In order to secure some degree of energy security in relation to gas needs, countries like Germany invested in indigenous gas production, even though the alternative was considerably cheaper and did not require public subvention. The full realisation

of the benefits of that policy only became fully clear when Russia began using its gas supply lines to the West as a bargaining chip in its aggressive territorial expansion ambitions that saw Crimea subsumed in 2014 and the military annexation of Ukraine still being pursued aggressively.

A CRITICAL NEED

For Ireland, the necessity of replacing at least ten per cent of imported natural gas with domestically produced biomethane is critical. Apart from the fact that we are at the

end of an unreliable gas pipeline through the UK, our indigenous gas resource from the Corrib Gas Field is already well past peak production. We have, for ideological reasons, curbed, in fact banned, further gas exploration, most notable in relation to a potentially huge gas field off Barryroe. Neither do we have port facilities for large scale storage of imported natural gas, with belated realisation of this weakness being reflected in the proposed development of inadequate storage facilities that will not be available for some time, if ever.

Biomass Required

Sawdust | Woodchip | Pulp wood Forestry thinnings & residues

Bord na Móna has a substantial annual biomass requirement to fuel its power plant at Edenderry Co. Offaly. The company is offering suppliers a continuous year round offtake with sustainable contracts.

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Bord na Móna





ENERGY BOOST

STRONG SUPPORTS TO HELP FARMERS ADOPT RENEWABLE TECHNOLOGIES TO EITHER REDUCE THEIR INPUT COSTS OR EARN ADDITIONAL INCOME FROM THEIR BUSINESS ACTIVITIES ARE ESSENTIAL AND THE OUTLOOK IS GETTING BRIGHTER, WRITES PAT SMITH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, LOCAL POWER LTD

SOLAR PV

The 60 per cent Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) grant for solar PV installations on farms coupled with a full VAT refund and 100 per cent tax write-off makes solar PV one of the best investments any farmer can make in their business.

Nigel Flynn, a poultry farmer in Monaghan, installed a 50kWp (kWp stands for kilowatt 'peak' power output) system with us in 2019 and has just been approved to expand the system using the dedicated 60 per cent TAMS grant opportunity.

Commenting on solar PV, Nigel said it is one of the best farm investments he has made as the solar PV system provided a buffer for his farm from the worst of the energy price volatility over the past couple of years.

With supports available, Nigel is now expanding the solar PV system and installing battery storage to optimise the use of energy generated on the farm. Nigel said he is proud to play his part in improving sustainability and believes it is important everyone does what they can to address the challenge of climate change.

Quality technology is important, he said,

and he chose German-warranted Solarwatt glass panels which now provide 30-year product and 30-year performance warranties promising over 90 per cent efficiency after 30 years. They also come with five-year all-risk insurance cover from Aon.

AGRI-BASED BIOMETHANE

The Government's long-overdue support measures for biomethane are promised this month (May). In all likelihood, the support is going to be a capital grant to assist in the building of the plants, which will reduce the kWh price required for the renewable gas, and this support will be coupled with a renewable heat obligation requiring businesses to purchase a percentage of their gas from renewable sources to reduce their future heat





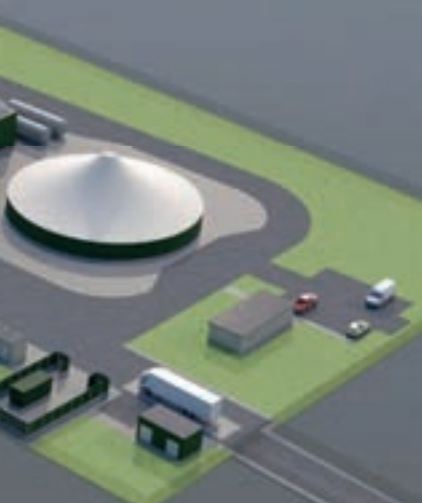
FARMERS WILL BE ASKED TO PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN PROVIDING THE FEEDSTOCK REQUIREMENTS FOR THESE PLANTS, CREATING NEW SUSTAINABLE-INCOME-EARNING OPPORTUNITIES

An image of the 50kWp system installed on Nigel's farm in 2019.

and transport emissions. Assuming this happens, farmers will be asked to play a central role in providing the feedstock requirements for these plants, creating new, sustainable, income-earning opportunities. Thousands of acres of land will be required to grow silage, maize, fodder beet, and whole crop cereal, to power these plants.

Continued on page 48

Carnaross Plant is on a 10-acre site using Biogest anaerobic digester (AD) technology.



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Farm slurries, manures, and chicken litter can all be used in a biomethane plant and, assuming the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's (DAFM's) regulations facilitate the export of slurries from derogation farms and import of digestate at the end of the process, these plants may provide another cost-effective way of dealing with nitrate issues on farms.

The first plant is going to be based in Carnaross, Co. Meath. This 4MW plant secured full planning without a hitch thanks to an expert team and proper farmer and community engagement. Planning is the first hurdle any project has to overcome and many factors need to be carefully assessed in advance to minimise the risk of failure. Assuming the economics for building the plant materialise, local farmers will be asked to grow about 40,000 tonnes of silage per year for this plant. The plant will also take in a similar quantity of farm slurries, chicken litter and manures. After taking the gas from the feedstock, there will be circa 70,000 tonnes of high-powered pasteurised digestate which, again, farmers will play a central role in recycling. To give you an idea on the value of the digestate, one tonne of digestate will provide nearly all the nutrients for growing one tonne of silage – that is how much value can be placed on this. We expect 30 to 40 of these plants to be built across the country in the coming years and we aim to work closely with the farming community to optimise the opportunity. However, Government policy is key to ensuring this happens and a solid support structure now needs to be delivered without any further delays.

BEAT THE PEAK BUSINESS SCHEME

Recently, ESB Networks launched a Beat the Peak Business scheme which aims to reward eligible commercial electricity users who reduce their energy use weekdays between the hours of 4.30pm and 7pm with

kWh payments of up to 82c/kWh. This now means that businesses which have hourly interval metering to allow measurement of current base loads during peak energy use times, and are passed by ESB networks to participate, can secure these attractive kWh payments for reducing their energy use during peak demand times on the grid. One way for businesses to achieve this is by reducing energy use in their business or by using alternative energy sources to displace bought-in energy during these peak demand times. This scheme now presents opportunities for businesses and farms to improve paybacks on solar and battery storage systems.

However, traditionally paybacks on battery storage are much longer, and take up to 10 years without a grant. With this new opportunity, the waiting time for paybacks for installing battery storage to participate in Beat The Peak, and also to optimise the use of renewable energy generated from solar, will be halved. We believe that the need for grid balancing technologies is going to grow exponentially as the amount of renewables connected to the grid grows and battery storage is going to play a major part in this. ESB Networks has more work to do to make this opportunity attractive, but first steps taken are encouraging and positive.

GRID CONNECTION

I strongly recommend that anyone interested in installing larger solar PV systems move early to apply for grid connection. A grid connection agreement allows you to sell surplus electricity generated to a utility company and, in many cases, significantly improves the economics and sustainability of your investment. Local Power Ltd has extensive experience in putting successful grid connection applications together and we do this free of charge as part of our service.

There are four grid connection options available. The micro-generation scheme is for smaller systems of up to 9kWp on single phase and 15kWp on three-phase connections and requires no grid connection agreement other than an NC6 form submitted to ESB Networks.

The mini-generation scheme facilitates installations of up to 25kWp of solar PV on single-phase connections (maximum allowable on single-phase connections) and up to 75kWp on three-phase connections. This requires a grid application to ESB Networks and, once a fee of €950 including VAT is paid, ESB Networks will assess your site with a view to granting an export agreement.

The Small-Scale Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (SRESS) allows the connection of up to 300 kWp of solar PV and follows a similar process with a fee of circa €1,220 being paid to ESB Networks in advance of assessment. The process takes approximately three months, and ESB Networks have scaled up their teams to try and deal with applications as quickly as possible.

System sizes above this must enter a large-scale connection process that can take several years to get approval. For example, Local Power Ltd submitted an application for a larger system almost three years ago and hopes the grid agreement will be approved in the coming months. Already, under the mini and small-scale generation schemes, there are nearly 3,000 grid applications submitted for approval. ESB Networks have scaled up their assessment teams and approvals should be achieved within two to three months.

Local Power Ltd sees grid connection becoming a bigger and bigger issue going forward and strongly advises those interested in installing solar PV to get their application in for a grid connection asap.

THE UPCOMING IRELAND BIOMETHANE - PATHWAY TO 2030 CONFERENCE, WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 12 IN CROKE PARK, WILL SEE THE TOPIC OF AGRI-FEEDSTOCK-BASED BIOMETHANE PRODUCTION IN IRELAND BROUGHT TO THE FORE

THE FUTURE OF BIOMETHANE



The event is organised by Renewable Gas Forum Ireland (RGFI) and will be the first formal stakeholder engagement opportunity following the publication of the National Biomethane Strategy.

Both the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan, and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, will address the conference, alongside a range of panellists and presenters.

OPPORTUNITY

PJ McCarthy, CEO at RGFI, explains: "The conference marks a significant milestone in the progression of agri-feedstock-based anaerobic digestion in the production of biomethane in Ireland. The event is timely in the context of the launch of the National Biomethane Strategy.

"With Ireland transitioning from conceptualisation to implementation, this event will be one of the first opportunities for all stakeholders, in particular farmers and the co-op sector, to engage on the implementation of the National Biomethane Strategy and roadmap. This new renewable gas industry will be farmer-centric and it is therefore important that farmers and their co-operatives input to the Roadmap at this vital stage in development. There will be a number of practical 'mini-Masters' in the afternoon, which will enable delegates to delve into key areas such as sustainability,

finance and funding, planning, and licensing and permitting, as well as technology and operations."

STAKEHOLDERS

RGFI is collaborating with Northern Ireland's Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, and colleagues across Northern Ireland to ensure that this event is inclusive and impactful.

"We also welcome the involvement of the Biomethane Industrial Partnership (BIP) and the European Biogas Association (EBA), underscoring the broad European interest. This is an opportunity to mobilise all stakeholders to provide input into the roll-out of the National Biomethane Strategy," PJ said.

RENEWABLE GAS FORUM IRELAND

Established in 2014, RGFI is a not-for-profit forum dedicated to fostering the growth of a sustainable biomethane industry in Ireland. As a proactive member of the European Biogas Association (EBA), the European Renewable Gas Registry (ERGaR), and the Biomethane Industry Partnership (BIP), RGFI plays a pivotal role in guiding strategic approaches across Europe.

CONFIRMED PANELLISTS, PRESENTERS AND RAPPORTEURS

- ▶ Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue.
- ▶ Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications and Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan.
- ▶ KPMG Sustainable Futures, Russell Smyth and Philip Connolly.
- ▶ European Biogas Association, Harmen Dekker.
- ▶ Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Jonathan McFerran.
- ▶ Teagasc, Dr Paul Crosson and Dr Ciara Beausang.
- ▶ Gas Networks Ireland, Pdraig Fleming.
- ▶ Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, Denis Drennan.
- ▶ Nephin Energy, Tom O'Brien.
- ▶ Flogas, Eoin Brennan.
- ▶ Entrust, Kieran Tarpey.
- ▶ Future Biogas, Philipp Lukas.
- ▶ Dairy Processing Technology Centre, Anne Marie Henihan.
- ▶ Climeaction, Paul Murphy.
- ▶ Damien O'Reilly, ICOS (chair of the event).

IRISH FARMERS MONTHLY TAKES A LOOK AT A SPECIAL REPORT CONTAINED IN THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED SCSI/TEAGASC ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL LAND MARKET REVIEW & OUTLOOK 2024. IN IT, BARRY CASLIN, ENERGY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST WITH TEAGASC, REVIEWS THE DEMAND FOR LAND IN RELATION TO RENEWABLE ENERGY PRODUCTION

LAND DEMAND

While most agricultural land will continue to be used for food production, Barry says, there will be an increasing proportion devoted to the production of renewable energy, predominantly across wind, solar and anaerobic-digester-sourced gas. The rationale for farmer involvement, he explains, is mainly economic. Renewable energy production can offer farmers opportunities to diversify their income streams and, in many cases, increase farm profitability over existing enterprises.

CHOICES FOR LANDOWNERS

Barry provides a timely warning of the need for 'informed decision-making, strategic engagement and a collaborative approach between landowners and renewable energy companies'. He outlined the choice of approaches available. For example, hosting solar panel installations on land or roofs, or providing sites for wind turbine installation. Provided the government delivers a viable support mechanism, there will also be opportunities for farmers to supply feed stocks, mainly slurry/manures and grass silage for the proposed network of anaerobic digesters to be built around the country over the next decade. All this involvement is contingent on landowners securing a return that is at least as good, if not far better, than the return from existing land-use activities on their farms.

TARGETS

The premise of all this renewable energy production is the Climate Action Plan 2024, which sets out ambitious targets to reduce emissions across the economy and to produce 80 per cent of our electricity requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030. Barry outlines the enormous challenge and opportunity ahead: "The renewable energy targets require that there will be an additional nine gigawatts of onshore wind energy capacity and eight gigawatts (GW) of solar PV, while the draft biomethane strategy has a target of 5.7 terawatt hours of gas from anaerobic digestion by 2030." He lists the direct and indirect implications for agricultural land use: "Agricultural land will be needed for the growth of feed stocks used in anaerobic digestion that produces methane, for onshore wind generation and for solar PV energy generation." In addition, he writes, farmers can earn money from selling electricity to the grid (or by reducing electricity purchases from the grid) through the installation of microgeneration or small-scale renewable electricity generation.

CHALLENGING AMBITION

Without doubt, the most ambitious target set out in the Climate Action Plan document is the full-scale development of up to 200 anaerobic digestion (AD) plants in Ireland by

2030. The technology is straightforward. It is widely used in Europe, the UK and Northern Ireland. That is not the challenge. But to build a plant requires planning, financing, construction and completion. All of that takes time and 2030 is less than six years away. Even if there are no planning objections with consequent delays, the timescale is tight. Barry describes the potential role of landowners in the project: "To meet the biomethane target, an estimated total land area of 120,000 hectares, close to three per cent of available agricultural land, will be required to cultivate the necessary silage for anaerobic plants. Additionally, winter slurry from around 1.3 million cattle will be needed, representing 20 per cent of all winter cattle slurry production in Ireland. These projections assume an equal mix of grass silage and slurry on a fresh weight basis." Outlining the wider implications of these biodigester demands on agricultural land, he writes: "If the targets for biomethane production are to be met, there will be consequences for existing land-uses, with land that is currently used to raise cattle and other livestock, being used to exclusively grow grass for biomethane production. This diversification will likely lead to some displacement of livestock."

LAND-USE REDIRECTION

The Teagasc energy specialist also analysed

the other renewable energy production impacts on land-use change: "Further land-based wind turbine installation to reach the set target capacity of 8GW by 2030, depending on a range of factors, including individual turbine output capacity, would require up to another 2,667 turbines being installed across the country. With each turbine requiring two acres, to account for site, access routes and setback allocations this implies a total land area of 5,334 acres, with most of the surrounding land being available for cattle or sheep grazing." He also elaborated on the impetus for solar developments: "The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) has been instrumental in driving the adoption of solar PV and wind projects in Ireland. In the initial three auctions, a total of 2.7GW of contracts were awarded, accounting for over one-third of the 2030 target. Notably, the fourth RESS auction is scheduled for the second quarter of 2024, indicating continued momentum in renewable energy development. The consultation for the fourth onshore RESS auction is now open. "Currently, there are 18 solar projects connected to the Irish grid, signalling the progress made in renewable energy integration. The microgeneration support

framework has also played a pivotal role in accelerating solar deployment, with seven hundred systems registering per week at certain points during 2023. By the end of last year, Ireland had connected 300MW from microgeneration alone," he writes.

"When combined with additional ground-mounted solar farms, the total connected capacity reached 1GW by the end of 2023. The third RESS auction, held on September 15, 2023, saw significant participation from the solar sector. Twenty solar farms, covering approximately 2,500 acres, along with three wind farms, successfully secured funding in RESS 3. It is noteworthy that the average support price was €100.47 per megawatt hour (MWh) for RESS 2. However, despite the success, this auction delivered the smallest volume of renewable energy among all auctions to date, and at the highest price, indicating some challenges in the market landscape"

He went on to say that the the 2030 solar PV target is 8GW, which is equivalent to roughly 16,000 hectares of solar farms, if all the 8GW were achieved exclusively via larger-scale solar PV arrays. Realistically, some of the targets are likely to be delivered by

microgeneration and smaller-scale generation installations.

SUMMARY

In summarising the implications of increased renewable energy production on the Irish landscape, Barry writes: "Diversifying Irish agricultural land use and decarbonising the Irish electricity system are both critical components of the national Climate Action Plan. The use of agricultural land to grow grass as a feedstock in the generation of biomethane will be central to the achievement of the national targets for biomethane production and will, if achieved, see up to 120,000 hectares of land required.

"Further onshore wind energy production will require 2,000 hectares. Up to 16,000 hectares could be required to achieve the 8GW solar PV energy generation target by 2030. All these new renewable energy uses of land open up novel opportunities for Irish farmers and landowners. In many instances, the income-earning potential of land leased to a solar or wind energy generation company will exceed the income likely to be earned per hectare from conventional agricultural production systems."



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- Implementing the National Biomethane Strategy
- Sustainability
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- **Russell Smyth**, Partner & Head of Sustainable Futures, KPMG Ireland
- **Philip Connolly**, Associate Director Sustainable Futures, KPMG Ireland
- **Harmen Dekker**, CEO European Biogas Association
- **Philipp Lukas**, CEO Future Biogas
- **Padraig Fleming**, Biomethane Programme Manager, Gas Networks Ireland
- **Tom O'Brien**, Group Chief Executive, Nephin Energy
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MESSAGES

- For good breeding-season management you will be rewarded next year!
- Do the 'why wait' programme for moving week three AI into week two.
- Switch scanning the herd to 39, 46, and 53 days post-mating start date.
- Use high DBI beef AI bulls to give you saleable calves.
- Be on top of your grazing management by measuring once/twice per week.
- The amount of nitrogen you apply depends on the clover content.



By Matt Ryan

BREEDING SEASON MANAGEMENT BRINGS GREATEST REWARD

» Your biggest challenge of the year:

- To get 90% of your cows calving down in the first six weeks of calving in 2025.
- To have 6-10% of cows not in calf.
- To get the whole herd in calf with 1.7 straws/cow, or less.

» There are a few important cow-fertility facts to be aware of before you head into breeding:

- The fertility target for black and white (B&W) cows is €110+.
- The fertility targets for Jersey-cross cows are €65+.
- If your herd is under these targets, then:
 - BCS will be 3.0 versus (v) 2.75.
 - More endometritis (75% v 25%) at six weeks.
 - Lower cyclicity (80% v 20%) at six weeks.
 - Weaker heats – 40% lower peak activity.
 - Poorer conception rates to first service (33% v 56%)
 - The six-week in-calf rate will be 41% v 72% for fertile cows.
 - Don't expect to make a 'silver purse out of a sow's ear'. If your herd has fertility problems, you will have your breeding season's work cut out for you.

» Poor submission rates can be due to many factors, but many farmers miss 20-40% of cows that are in heat – 30% of the herd should come in heat every week (or 4.3% of the herd per day) for the first three weeks – if this is not happening, something is wrong:

- Heat lasts, on average, eight hours (the range is two to 18 hours and 55% of cows have heats that last less than eight hours) and the cow in heat only stands for two to three seconds for a standing mount. Therefore, the cows will only be seen in standing heat for one to two minutes for all of the two-to-18-hours period.
 - This proves it is a difficult task! Also, if the heat period is disturbed (by collecting for milking, strangers, dogs, people, machinery nearby, etc.), she may not stand for heat any more. Such breaks occur in 30-40% of cows.
 - Late calving cows have shorter heats.
- Lame cows, often refuse to be mounted, so it is best not to them put on the AI list. The same goes for cows with mastitis.
- 10-15% of cows show heat at night and may not show signs in the morning.
- Heat may occur in 4-8% of pregnant cows – insemination at that heat may cause abortion and delayed calving; hence, the need for good records.

- Tail painting or other heat-detecting aid is an essential routine on every farm and with three observations per day (before morning and evening milkings and at 9pm) will pick up 90% of in-heat cows.
- For tail paint to work well/be easy to interpret, it must only be two inches wide by nine inches long from the tail head forward to highest point on backbone – all loose hair must be removed first.
- Ensure cows are on an adequate plane of nutrition prior to and during, the breeding season (Table 1).
 - Meal feeding does not improve fertility where cows have adequate quantities of good quality grass and are milking less than 30 litres per cow per day.
 - So, to avoid embryo loss, cows must be kept on the same or better plane of nutrition for the two weeks before and after service (Table 1).
 - Where grass intakes are reduced due to wet weather, shortage of grass or poor quality (far too common), supplementation is necessary.
- There are very important principles that can be interpreted from the research findings detailed in Table 1.
 - Animals must be on a regular, adequate plane of nutrition both before and after service.
 - Being on a consistently low/lowish plane of nutrition doesn't result in more embryo loss.
 - Going from a high plane of nutrition, for whatever reason, to a low plane of nutrition results in serious embryo loss (62%).
 - Like sheep, the principle of 'flushing' is best, that is going from a low plain of nutrition to a high one.

Table 1: Effect of nutrition on embryo survival rates in heifers (Diskin, Teagasc).

	L - L	L - H	H - H	H - L
No. heifers	66	65	60	56
Total pregnant	46	46	39	21
Embryo survival rate (%)	70	71	65	38

L = Animals on 70% of their energy requirement.

H = Animals on 120% of their energy requirement.

» The non-return rate (NRR) should be 70% or better. This means that in a 100-cow herd, 30 cows should have been submitted each week with only nine cows repeating in week four. What is wrong if more are repeating?

- BCS was either too fat at calving or lost too much weight up

to mating start date (MSD) so energy intake could have been reduced.

- Service-day management problems:
 - Poor storage of AI straws.
 - Poor AI technician technique.
 - Cows under stress on day due to feed or water shortage.
 - Poor facilities for service – the ordinary cattle crush is not suitable for AI service.
- With conventional semen the best time to serve a cow is eight to 16 hours after the onset of heat.
- With sexed semen the best time to AI is 14 to 20 hours after the onset of heat:
 - Obviously, collars have made a very positive impact on the timing precision of AI.
- » The repeat window is 18 to 24 days. If there is blood on the vulva, she is gone off heat and there is only a 7% chance she will go in calf if you serve her. Use that information to 'pick' her up in 21 days' time or use prostaglandin (PG) in seven days' time to bring her on sooner.
 - Minerals could be a problem (usually fourth or fifth in line of causes), particularly selenium (Se), iodine (I), copper (Cu), cobalt (Co), and maybe potassium (P), manganese (Mn), or magnesium (Mg).
- » Non detected oestrous (NDO) should not be greater than 10%. That means that all cows bar 10% should be mated in the first three weeks. Lower suggests you are not actively 'picking up cows' that are on heat.
- » 18 to 24-day return interval – this must be over 70%, otherwise something is wrong with your heat detection.
- » Target less than 10% (one to 18 days) short repeat intervals. A high percentage repeat interval of less than 18 days suggests poor heat detection and that cows are being submitted when not in heat.
- » Target less than 25% long repeat intervals (24+ days). A lot of long intervals suggests 'over cautious' heat detection and failure to AI cows that are on heat; but there could be embryo loss.
- » Remember, a missed heat will cost you €150 on your next year's profit. Many farmers are having 10+ missed heats per 100 cows.
- » Good heat detection is the way to avoid that loss.
- » Because nearly half the cows in the country are by stock bulls, I suggest that farmers with a low EBI herd should use all beef AI and buy in good calves next spring or better still do a contract NOW with someone for them next spring.
- » I strongly recommend to you that you PLAN to get by this year without a stock bull because:
 - They are dangerous around the place.
 - They can move from being fertile to being infertile quite frequently, thereby giving you too many April calvers.
 - They cost on average €800-€1,000 per year to get approximately 30-40 cows in calf – very expensive!
 - Collars will now enable farmers to manage without stock bulls and be more precise on AI timing when using sexed semen.
- » If you have a vasectomised bull, one per 20-30 cows, let him into

the herd five to six weeks after start of mating date. Do it before that and he will be wrecked.

DO 'WHY WAIT' FROM WEEK THREE TO WEEK TWO

- » It is too late to now do the full 'why wait' programme, but this can tighten up the calving spread.
 - This programme involves bringing cows that are due to be mated on week three of the breeding season to week two. How?
 - Record the heats of those that come during the period minus-one to minus-seven days pre-mating start date (MSD).
 - These cows should have PG seven days after MSD. That means they will undergo AI two to three days later.
 - Farmers are reluctant to use beef bulls because of longer gestation lengths.
 - A big loss of MS/cow and the possibility of the cow being culled next year because of late calving.
 - The 'why wait', if used, will be bringing cows into heat 11 days early and so will mitigate against longer gestation high CBV beef bulls.

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SCAN AT 32+ DAYS POST AI

- Scanning cows to confirm pregnancy is usually done three to four weeks post breeding-season-end, but a much more beneficial cost-effective scan is one that is done 30-39 days post AI.
- This is a once-per-week task for three weeks post MSD. The benefits of this early scan are enormous.
 - More accurate prediction of data of calving.
 - Cows that are not in calf can be managed under vet advice.
 - False pregnancies are identified.
 - Weak pregnancies are identified.
 - With this information, planning and remedial action can be undertaken.
- » How do you operationalise it?
- » With collars it is easy, as you have all the AI dates.
 - If using paint, in the week cows are served put a different colour paint on all cows served that week.
 - This paint is put in a strip across her front shoulder where it won't be rubbed off during 'mounting'; eg. blue, yellow and green.
- » For the cows served in each of the first three weeks of breeding, this allows you scan cows 32, 46 and 51 days after MSD.
 - All the blues will be scanned on day 32, the yellows on day 46, etc.
 - A very good scanner is worth their weight in gold to you for this task.
- » At a recent virtual farm walk, a farmer who did both the 'why wait' and the early scan last year said it is a no-brainer decision!

DAIRY HERD - BEEF BREEDING

- » The reason to use sexed semen is that we then use appropriate beef AI bulls on the remainder of our cows.
 - The advantages are obvious.
- » A male calf that is easier to sell.
- » A better calf for the national beef herd.
- » Because of genotyping, the actual beef value of calves is readily identifiable through their commercial beef value (CBV) - most farmers know about it after this spring.
- » Producing a saleable animal should not jeopardise the health of the cow or calf, or the ability of the cow to produce milk and go back in calf.
- » The CBV is expressed in terms of Euros and there is also a star rating with five stars in the top 20% and one star in the bottom 20% for CBV.
- » The target is to have as many four and five-star calves as possible.
- » This is achieved by using high star bulls (DBI) on our cows (our cow herd is what we have, be it good or bad), so the focus must be on the bull, bearing in mind the dairy herd beef sub-index.
 - If the herd's beef sub-index is €12 then the bull's DBI must be €85 and €128 for the calf to have a CBV with a four-star and five-star, respectively.
 - If the herd's beef sub-index is €4 then the bull's DBI must be €72 and €112 for the calf to have a CBV with a 4-star and 5-star, respectively.

- » To avoid calving havoc, we want a beef bull that can provide the shortest possible gestation and relatively easy calving.
- » My April Management Hints, based on farmer experience, carried a list of suitable beef bulls but the ICBF top-20 beef bulls, generally, meet the necessary criteria.
- » As much time must be spent on this bull choice as on choosing your dairy AI bulls.

MANAGE THE GRASS WEDGE!

- » This spring has been very challenging, and the carry-over effect is ongoing with low nitrogen usage, no silage reserves, and now, excess grass affecting quality.
- » Hence, the need to measure grass, at least, weekly.
 - It will put you in control of meal feeding and the area that can be close/cut for first-cut silage.
- » The grass wedge drives summer grazing management and I think many farmers who are measuring are not making decisions to save on meal feeding.
- » The quality of grazed grass is totally dependent on grazing grass that is the correct pre-grazing cover (PGC) for each individual farmer's grazing stocking rate.
- » Post grazing height, 3.5-4cm, is another key driver of:
 - Grass quality for next grazing and subsequent summer grazing; and
 - The amount of grass utilised per hectare.
 - Because every 1cm of grass remaining on a field when cows leave the paddock is 200kg/ha of grass DM.
 - If you leave that after you for each of the six summer grazings you have LOST 1.2 tonnes of dry matter per hectare.
 - Why? Because none of this left-over grass is available for the next grazing.
- » In my opinion, most farmers 'give' too many grazing hectares to their cows during late-April to mid-June.
 - The target MUST be 4.5-4.7 cows per hectare.
- » The following calculation drives your PGC:
 - For a stocking rate (SR) of 4.5 cows/ha, with an allowance of 18kg DM/cow/day and a 21-day rotation and a residual of 50kg DM this is how you calculate PGC.
 - **SR x allowance x rotation + residual = 4.5 x 18 x 21 + 50 = 1,750kg DM/ha.**
 - Insert your own planned SR, intake per cow (18kg required by a reasonably sized cow to produce 2kg MS/day), rotation length and residuals.
- » Before making decisions to bale, feed more meal, etc. you must also watch your average farm covers (AFC).
 - The target figure is 150-200kg DM/cow. For example, at a stocking rate of 4.5 cows/ha, the target AFC, with good grazing management, would be:
 - **SR x 170 = 4.5 x 170 = 765kg DM/ha.**
- » If your PGC is greater than 1,750 and your AFC is greater than 765, then, it is very likely you will need to cut out one to two paddocks immediately for silage.
- » If both figures are under these targets, then you will either have to feed some meal for a short period or graze some silage ground.

NITROGEN USED - DEPENDS ON CLOVER CONTENT

- » Know how much nitrogen (N) you are allowed use and then spread accordingly throughout the year, based on clover content in April (Table 2).

Table 2: Nitrogen (N) fertiliser application (kg N/ha) strategy for a dairy farm on a range of sward clover content assessed in April (Source: Teagasc).

April average clover content	Feb	Mar	Apr	May (2 rota)	June (2 rota)	July (2 rota)	Aug	Sept	Total (kg N/ha)
Grass sward	24	36	20	32	28	28	21	23	212
5%	20	35	20	20	25	20	20	20	175
10%	20	35	20	15	15	10	15	20	150
15%	20	35	20	15	10	SW	10	20	130
20%	20	35	20	15	SW	SW	SW	15	105

SW= soiled water.

- » You won't grow enough grass if you don't have 53% of your year's N allowance used by the end of May on grass-only swards.
- » On swards with 20% and greater clover, you will have to have had 86% of the nitrogen applied.
- » This is the month to use N – more important than ever this year to review what quantity you have used to date and adjust upwards.
 - Growth rates and responses are best – 1kg N will grow 30kg DM grass.
 - Will enable you get most of your winter feed in the first cut – cheapest by far.
- » You must use N appropriate for your stocking rate and clover content.
 - If you use too much you will have none left for the remainder of the year and be in trouble with the Nitrates Directive.
- » Spread N three to four times per week, never at weekends, by spreading N on ungrazed paddocks three days before cows are due to graze them.
 - Be careful that large quantities of N are not spilled on the ground on headlands as cows will be poisoned.
- » On light soils deficient in S, you will grow more grass (10-50% based on research).
 - With no restriction in S use, you must use 20-25 units of S from now to the end of season.
 - If using S on copper-deficient soil, make sure to give animals a copper bolus.
 - Don't use sulphur if your farm doesn't respond to it.
- » Potash should be used where it is low.

GRAZING TIPS

- » Practice 24-, 36- or 48-hour grazing areas for cows (forget about strip grazing or 12-hour blocks). This results in cows having too small an area from which to get their feed.
 - This further results in the 'bully' cows chastising the timid cows with the outcome that the latter have to stop grazing and move away, thus reducing their grazing time. Heifers and shy feeders suffer/suffer stress due to this bullying.
 - High-performing cows also suffer because they have to eat

more grass to produce the extra milk.

- These cows will be grazing late in the afternoon while other lower-yielding cows will be lying down (observe this yourself).
- Unfortunately, for the high-yielding cows who are grazing late in the afternoon, grass cover will be low. Consequently, bite size is small and, intake is reduced by 1-2kg DM, and the DMD will be 1-2% lower due to more stem. The result: lower milk yields and loss of weight.

- » Post grazing heights must be measured, using a plate metre so as to be sure you are grazing down to 3.5 to 4cm.
 - If, after any grazing, there is grass remaining in paddock (1cm =200kg DM/ha), cows should go back out and clean it out.
 - This is best done by letting cows straight out of the parlour. Bullies and dominant cows will be first and will have it cleaned by the time the shy feeders arrive. After one to two hours, they should be moved to the new paddock.
- » Cows should enter a fresh paddock in the evening (not after morning's milking) because the grass will have much higher sugar levels – this could result in one to two litres more milk.
- » Topping must be carried out when the 'tall grass' area is greater than 25% of the paddock area; but if this is happening frequently, it means you are under-grazing paddocks.
 - Lower N use will probably necessitate more topping or cutting out bales.

BITS AND PIECES

- » If you need to know the potential of your cows' milk yield for this year, multiply your May peak per cow per day by 220.
- » This will be important so that you know the band you will be in for stocking rate.
 - Example, if a cow peaks at 25L/day in May, then her expected yield per year will be 5,500L/year.
 - Unfortunately, most farmers are not achieving these multiplication factors, so use your own based on last year.
 - Milk record this year – talk to co-op now.
- » Cut first-cut silage in two lots:
 - Fields closed six to eight weeks should be cut in late May.
 - Late closed (light covers) fields should be cut from June 10-15.
 - This procedure should ensure an even arrival of aftergrass and less chance of shortages in June and July.
 - To maximise the area cut for first-cut silage and minimise the amount of surplus round bales off milking platform, you must stock the cows at 4.5 cows/ha on the grazing area during this period. With impending silage shortages next winter, this is a must-do task this May.
- » Don't wean calves until they are 95kg to 110kg weight and eating 1.5kg to 2kg meal – they must be out at grass.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Protected urea, white and red clover, sexed semen and beef AI are the new norm on dairy farms."



CASE IH RELEASES REDESIGNED PUMA AFS CONNECT CVXDRIVE

CASE IH HAS A NEW FULL LINE OF REDESIGNED PUMA AFS CONNECT CVXDRIVE 185-260 AND MULTICONTROLLER 185-220 POWERSHIFT LONG WHEELBASE TRACTORS

Made in St Valentin, Austria, they feature a larger, quieter cab, customisable functions, integral AFS Connect telematics, more power and a bigger footprint, according to the company.

In addition to the now-established front-end styling with enhanced lighting, one of the most visible changes on the new Puma AFS Connect tractors is a new cab design. This provides 8 per cent more volume, giving the operator more head and leg room and additional storage.

One of the most significant upgrades is reduced internal noise levels of 66 decibels, which is among the lowest in the sector, matched by an interior which features premium automotive-style trim. There is 11 per

cent more glass area for enhanced vision and safety, and a windscreen wiper providing up to 240° of coverage.

COMFORT AND CONTROL

To match comfort with control, a new Multicontroller armrest on both Multicontroller (with 19-speed PowerDrive full powershift) and CVXDrive (with CVX continuously variable transmission) models now incorporates more features, many customisable. It incorporates a turn-and-press encoder dial that can be used if preferred as an alternative to swiping the new 12-inch AFS Pro 1200 touchscreen for display navigation and feature selection. Through the terminal, the CVX transmission and front axle suspension responses can

be configured, and LED-lit remote valve paddles assigned according to preference. Operation of the AFS 1200 is supplemented by hot key quick-access buttons. A semi-active hydraulic cab suspension, adjustable to individual preferences or changing terrain, further boosts ride quality and comfort, while optional Case IH Advanced Vehicle Suspension (AVS) enhances this further by integrating the semi-active cab suspension, rear hitch and front axle suspension, coordinating them via software that reacts instantly to changing surfaces. Via the AFS Pro 1200 touchscreen terminal, operators can set up and control AccuGuide guidance, make tractor and Isobus implement settings, and set up AFS Connect telematics



to record and transfer operating data to the MyCaseIH online portal and allow remote machine monitoring/support by owners and, with permission, dealers. Five years' AFS Connect subscription is standard.

Puma AFS Connect models are also available with Tractor Implement Management (TIM), which extends the Isobus links with compatible equipment by allowing the implement to automatically adjust the tractor's speed and steering according to the workload, such as swath density when working with a baler.

PROVEN DRIVELINES

The new Puma tractors combine a compact 2.88m wheelbase with rated power outputs of 180-220hp (Multicontroller models) and 180-260hp (CVXDrive models). Maximum respective figures with Power Management boost are 224-260hp and 224-302hp. There is up to 11 per cent more power, 15 per cent more fuel tank volume, and 18 per cent more contact area from larger tyre options.

Stage V 6.7L FPT NEF six-cylinder engines in Puma AFS Connect tractors produce a maximum 1,250Nm torque at 1,500rpm on the largest model, with up to 11 per cent more power across the range. Engine service interval has been extended to 750 hours. On CVX models, larger, stronger axles permit a gross vehicle weight of up to 15,000kg and allow fitment of up to 2.05m rear tyres (710/70 R42), increasing footprint by up to 18 per cent for more traction and flotation. On 50km/h models, top speed is attainable at 1,550rpm to minimise fuel consumption from the 15 per cent larger fuel tank, which holds 470L of diesel and 54L of DEF, for up to three hours' extra work. The new tank moulding incorporates toolbox and stowage space, and adjacent is an integral 5L hand-washing tank.

A new combination of added-value telemetry services grouped to encompass all aspects of service support is now available for Case IH Puma tractors. Key features of Safeguard Connect, which complements AFS Connect telemetry, include extended Safeguard warranty, pre-season inspection, dealer remote support, Max Service 24/7 back-up, AFS Connect subscription and full operator training.



NOEL DUNNE
Machinery editor

THE NEVER-CHANGING WEATHER

Well readers, the year is flying by! I decided to look at what I was talking about this time last year and lo and behold, it was weather that dominated the conversation: "It's eight degrees in the home yard, nights are cold, there is still spring drilling to be done but with the mixed weather, things are at a standstill for the moment anyway as land remains wet." Not much has changed, eh?

I also looked back at a piece our editor, Matt O'Keeffe wrote in April 1995 where he spoke about coming out of a bad January, February and March, which saw wind rain and even snow dominate the scene. The weather is ever changing, but also never-changing it would seem.

Summer is about to begin, and we have a LOT of catching up to do. As I pen this month's column the weather is good, temperatures are in double digits, work is starting to get done, and the roads are busy with agricultural kit. For the past few days rain has stayed away except for a few showers but we will live with that. More of this please!

Farmers' confidence is starting to creep back as work finally starts to get done – once the weather turns at all, people feel better in themselves. I know that as crops go in late it will affect yields but that's the gamble you take. It's better in the ground than in the bag, though some farmers may feel that it would be better left in the bag this year. At the end of the day, and year, there are bills to be paid and loans to pay back – no crop means no harvest means no pay day (no matter how small). Not much of a choice. Keep the faith. All will come good.

Now, down to business! The whole area of renewable energy – in particular, solar panels and wind energy – is getting a lot of press at the moment. Farmers want and are willing to improve their carbon footprint and with the Government introducing a TAMS grant to support installation of solar panels, and easing the complications of applying, we will see more solar panels being rolled out across the country. But there is still a lot of work to be done on the electricity infrastructure in this country and how excess power can be returned to the grid and at what price. There are the challenges as the finer points are ironed out, but this is the future. We are now living in the era of alternatives and change when it comes to powering our homes and businesses. But my advice is, before you get in to anything, seek professional assistance to find out if it is the correct route for you, your farm and family – an hour with your solicitor could save you a lifetime of hardship.

On the tillage front, it's been another spring of hardship. I often hear tillage farmers around me say you will get two good years and one bad one and that seems to be the old cycle we are in. Details of a €100/ha tillage payment was announced back in mid-April. This payment will apply to all winter crops planted in autumn/winter 2023, and spring crops in 2024. We need to increase our tillage area but there are a lot of obstacles in the way – price of hire land, availability, weather, input costs, volatile prices for crops, etc. The Government, in my opinion, will need to keep a closer eye on the tillage sector to keep it viable and to give confidence to tillage farmers to continue into the future.

On the machinery front, dealers are busy with services and repairs, parts are busy, and enquiries are coming in still... the tractor market is back year on year by 13 per cent to the end of March this year and there were 878 new tractors sold compared to 959 units in 2023. That's to be expected in the climate we are in. General machinery sales are good with expectations of a bigger demand for grass kit this season. Chatting to a few dealers, they all agreed the weather is a big factor at the moment. Confidence is king when it comes to making machinery purchases. You will get finance as there is a lot of companies out there offering 0% on grass and tillage kit.

Yes we all know it's going to be a slower year, but we just have to keep moving forward and play what's in front of us.



'I DID NOT CONFORM TO THE CAREER NORM'

LAOIS-NATIVE, TILLY DOYLE, IS A PARTS REPRESENTATIVE AT TEMPLETUOHY FARM MACHINERY (TFM) IN CO. LAOIS. HER NON-FARMING AND NON-MACHINERY BACKGROUND MADE LITTLE IMPACT ON HER CHOSEN CAREER PATH. SHE LOVES ANIMALS, AND FARMING, AND IS A SELF-CONFESSED MACHINE-HEAD. THE 19-YEAR-OLD TELLS BERNIE COMMINS ABOUT HER JOURNEY TO TFM, HER PASSION FOR PARTS, AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

"My parents are both from Dublin and moved to Laois 25 years ago. Blow-ins, still," she jokes. "My dad worked in newspapers on the marketing and management side, and he now works with a public affairs company. My mum was an interior designer in Dublin and gave it up to bring up five children, four girls and a boy, in Laois. There is no direct farming background in the family but my great grandparents on both sides in Galway and Limerick were farming."

The farming influence was all around Tilly as she grew up and there was no denying her affinity to the land and animals. "I am surrounded by farms here and many of my primary-school friends were from farm families. I love animals, especially cows, and farm machinery, especially tractors. No idea where that came from! I was lucky to get summer work on local farms helping out, and as I went through college, I was lucky enough to find myself in Co. Donegal, on placement for four weeks. As they had robots to milk the cows, I was sent out doing all machinery

work, involving fencing and spreading slurry. I think that was where my love for machinery came from too. I was driving a New Holland t7-230 pulling a 2,500 gallon tanker and I absolutely loved it! It was great experience and definitely helped my confidence when driving machinery," she says.

NON-CONFORMING

Tilly's interest in farming – more than her desire to have, as she calls it, a 'high-flying job' – sadly led to her being bullied in secondary school. This was because, she says, she did not conform to the career norm. She was interested in land and farming and was determined that her education must include agricultural science. An open day in Gurteen College opened that door. "My parents brought me to a Gurteen College open day and as soon as I got in the gates, I knew this was for me," she says. Shortly after, she commenced boarding full time at the Tipperary agri-college – the only student that year with no farming background, and one of just 11 girls.

Gurteen's hands-on learning experience really enthused Tilly: "That was my favourite part," she says. "I thoroughly enjoyed the farm practicals where I was learning a lot of new skills out in the yard, and particularly on the farm walks, seeing other people's set-ups. Everyone has a different way of farming and that was interesting to see." Back in the classroom, the livestock-breeding lectures really piqued her interest, she says. The course was transformative: "My parents think that the Gurteen College course was the best thing that ever happened to me," Tilly says. "I am happy, confident around cattle and machinery, and I am now doing what I love, working with great people in a great industry." But Tilly's parents did worry a little, too, about how she would make her mark in a male-dominated industry and if she would be able to make a career in the agri-sector. "I am only five foot three inches and not exactly built for roughing it with cattle or a broken spreader," she says. Her father confided in a friend who put them at ease: "My dad rang his good friend and neighbour in Laois, Noel Dunne

(machinery editor, *Irish Farmers Monthly*) whom he knew from his newspaper days. Noel said the industry needs more women and that Gurteen was a fantastic place. He was right."

A CHANCE WITH TFM

A week after Tilly graduated with a Green Cert from Gurteen College, a farmer friend told her about the job in TFM. "I heard that there were 10 other applications for the role in the parts department, all male, and I did not rate my chances," she admits.

"But I had two rounds of interviews, and I ended up getting the job. I am just 19 and I was going to be the youngest ever wage earner in our house, and in my dream job." And what does such a dream job involve? Tilly explains: "The job entails dealing with a lot of parts every day. Stock comes in and is sorted into different bin locations, every part has its own bin and it is critical to get them sorted properly. I also deal with customers coming in looking for parts. We have a system called Parts Advisor where we can locate each and every part on different models of John Deere machines. I'm kept busy through the days and

I'm always making sure every customer is looked after in a timely manner, too." While Tilly admits that it felt a little daunting at first working in such a male environment, she has settled in really well. "I just needed an open mind, we all need a modern mindset that accepts women's roles in the farming future – we are half of the entire workforce! I don't feel any different to the lads here in TFM. I can shout as good as any of them if I ever need to, and they know it," she jokes. "I am treated no differently and rightly so except, maybe, when it comes to trying to lift a new and expensive gearbox or something equally heavy or expensive," she says.

The management and human resources (HR) functions at TFM have enabled Tilly to integrate well and she feels supported by the entire team: "TFM have been absolutely fantastic. They have a dedicated HR function and great managers. All the lads have been a great help as I am quite new to the machinery side of the industry. I'm part of a great team here at TFM, they never fail to keep me on my feet. They are all a huge help, I'm always learning something new every day!"

"Clients now ask specifically for me when

they phone for parts, which is great. At first, a few of the older generation were a bit concerned when they saw this 'little woman' behind the counter, but they are over it now and I love all our customers," she says.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THE JOB?

Tilly: "Where do I start? I love farm machinery, farm talk, our customers and staff. I live five minutes' drive from TFM, and it is the best job in the world for me. There will always be a need for farm machinery and the technology is changing at an incredible pace. And we are right up there with the changes here in TFM."

HALF THE WORKFORCE

Tilly is well placed to promote the machinery sector among women, and she is happy to do so: "Machines are just that, machines. Most people – regardless of sex – are capable of operating farm machinery with training. Farming and the agricultural machinery



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industry need more women. We are half the workforce of the world and we need to be getting out there, ploughing, drilling, seeding, spreading, and harvesting. Women need to see other women in the industry, and I would love to see more women coming in here as customers of TFM."

WHAT IS CHALLENGING ABOUT THE JOB?

Tilly: "Ensuring the right parts are passed out at the right price and keeping the inventory up to scratch is stressful. Parts are critical and no one can afford to be without the correct parts and fast installation at crucial times of the year. That's why we are here and why I am here."

PLANS FOR FUTURE

When asked what the future holds, not even the sky is the limit for Tilly: "I would like to be here with TFM, with more experience and responsibility! Eventually, I would also like to

farm my own land as well – with help, as this is a busy job in TFM!

"In the distant future, I might go into politics like Mairead McGuinness, who worked alongside my father years ago. She has a top job in Europe and still has a working farm. She is a fantastic ambassador for women in farming and for Ireland in Europe."

Tilly has a further ambition: "I would like to be working alongside livestock as an embryologist or vet as I found my passion in that on my travels working on farms around the country."

And she has this piece of advice for anyone – especially women – who might be considering a career in agriculture or machinery: "There is nothing to stop you except perhaps some outdated thinking that it is not a woman's job. Well, those people and any woman thinking of going into the farm-machinery industry, can ring me up here in TFM and I will tell them that, as half the world's workforce, we are absolutely capable of operating, selling, managing and minding any agricultural machine."

"If you have a passion for farming whether you come from a farming background or not, it definitely is possible."

QUICKFIRE ROUND

BC: Are you a machine head?

Tilly: Yes, absolutely. My dad is a petrol head, but I am the biggest machine head in our house, by far.

BC: What car do you drive?

Tilly: I have a modified silver 2010 mk6 Golf. In my free time I do love to try do a few bits to my car, as it is also one of my big interests.

BC: What is your favourite tractor make and model, and why?

Tilly: My favourite tractor is a CASE IH 1455XL as it's a very good pulling tractor rated at 145bhp. A serious machine!

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KVERNELAND GROUP APPOINTS NEW NI DEALER

Kverneland Group Ireland has announced a new partnership with Walmsley Tractors Ltd, a leading agricultural equipment retailer based in Kesh, Co. Fermanagh. Established in 1969, Walmsley Tractors is a cornerstone of the local farming community, offering a comprehensive range of agricultural equipment for farmers and contractors.

Walmsley Tractors Ltd has several service vans, enabling the company to deliver an excellent after-sales service. This dedication to customer support aligns seamlessly with Kverneland Group Ireland's mission of prioritising customer satisfaction and ensuring the longevity of its machinery.

As part of this partnership, Walmsley Tractors Ltd will offer the full range of Kverneland products as well as original Kverneland parts. This expanded product offering will provide farmers in Co. Fermanagh with access to innovative solutions designed to enhance productivity and efficiency on the farm.

Philip English, managing director of Kverneland Group Ireland, commented: "We are thrilled to partner with Walmsley Tractors Ltd, a company with a rich heritage and a strong commitment to serving the needs of farmers and contractors. Together, we look forward to providing farmers in Co. Fermanagh with access to high-quality machinery backed up with exceptional service."

Darrel Walmsley, of Walmsley Tractors Ltd, added: "Joining forces with Kverneland Group Ireland represents an exciting opportunity for us to expand our product offering and better serve our customers. We are



Allan Hetherington, Kverneland Group Ireland; Darrell Walmsley and Stephen Walmsley, Walmsley Tractors LTD; and Philip English, Kverneland Group Ireland.

proud to partner with a company that shares our values of quality, reliability, and customer satisfaction."

Allan Hetherington, key account manager for Kverneland Group Ireland, said: "Partnering with Walmsley Tractors Ltd couldn't come at a better time, especially with Kverneland Group Ireland offering the best finance packages in the market on 100 per cent of the full range of Kverneland equipment. This collaboration is a significant boost for farmers, and we encourage them to get in touch with Walmsley's to explore how this partnership can benefit their operations."

A LONG WAY TOGETHER



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U-TURNS

Over the last month, several serious issues have hit the headlines, which will affect farmers and agricultural contractors. There is the Road Safety Authority (RSA) announcement of proposed new regulations for tractor drivers now holding a 'W' licence. This would require tractor drivers doing any non-agricultural work to hold a category CE or CIE licence and a Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (Driver CPC) with a requirement of completion of one day of CPC training every year on an ongoing basis. The consequences, if this became law, is that other regulations would also be triggered. For example, under the EU Working Time Directive, the requirement to have tractors fitted with a tachograph, the use of marked diesel, and the requirement for an NCT-type test would all be required from day one. When the proverbial hit the fan, the RSA was quick to do a U-turn saying 'it had become aware of a proposal due in September of the EU's fourth Driving Licence Directive, with a revised definition of tractors'. Anyone who knows how new European legislation works realises that Member States are consulted from the very start regarding new legislation; it would be most surprising if Ireland was not included in these debates.

This is the second embarrassing episode for RSA and Government in this area. Similar legislation was attempted a few years ago, designating agricultural contracting as a commercial activity even when supplying services to farmers. PAC Ireland requested an urgent meeting with the Department of Transport and pointed out the error in their thinking and the proposed legislation did not proceed any further. However, this debacle does not surprise me, as it is felt by many that, in relation to these matters, the haulage industry holds too much sway over the department, as well as within the RSA and at National and European level. Lobbying costs money and there is no doubt that the haulage industry has it.

COMMON SENSE

Common sense needs to be applied to the use of tractors for non-agricultural work such as construction and within local authorities. I particularly reference where the use of a truck is just not realistic because it would get bogged down and where the use of tractors on the road for short journeys doing non-agricultural work is more practical. I do not condone tractors being used for long distance haulage, but this can be dealt with by enforcing a mileage radius. I have always acknowledged there is a fine balance in achieving fairness and not encroaching on to the hauliers' business, but we must not let a few mavericks with tractors who are blatantly breaking the rules, be the reason for taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

FAIR REPRESENTATION

The second issue was the statement by Copa and Cogeca, the European representative body for farming organisations, criticising the Commission announcement that small farms below 10ha (24.7ac) would be exempt from Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) inspections, creating an unlevel playing field. The Commission, in trying to respond to the wave of protests across Europe, has set out clearly its intention to reduce the onerous administrative burden on small farmers and national governments who are required to police legislation. The Commission have stated that they will also be moving to the use of Copernicus (satellite technology), which will reduce costs considerably for all. It should be remembered that sixty five percent of CAP payments go to small farmers, who are a vital component of the food production chain. Copa and Cogeca are often criticised for only representing big farmers when they are supposed to represent all farmers, both large and small – which they are clearly not doing in this instance.

ENTRIES OPEN FOR INNOVATION ARENA AWARDS

Enterprise Ireland's Innovation Arena at the National Ploughing Championships (NPC) is an annual exhibition platform, providing Irish companies the opportunity to showcase their products and services to a potential audience of more than 250,000 visitors at one of Europe's largest outdoor events.

This year's NPC returns to Ratheniska, Co. Laois, from September 17-19. The event attracts international visitors and buyers, offering Irish businesses the opportunity to engage with potential new customers from overseas. James Maloney, senior development adviser and Innovation Arena project manager, Enterprise Ireland, provides some background to this year's Innovation Arena Awards, and why Irish companies should enter.

"This year's Innovation Arena will focus on Innovations for Future Generations, which includes solutions that address issues across animal science and technology, agri-engineering, digital technologies, animal health and nutrition, sustainability and climate action, and farm health and safety," he said. "Applications for this year's competition are now being accepted. It is open to Irish-owned companies, researchers and academics who are delivering forward-thinking solutions to help futureproof the industry."

There will be a number of awards in this year's competition, with an emphasis on applications from start-up companies under five years old and established companies that are focused on scaling and innovation. There will be an overall start-up award winner, who will receive a €10,000 prize, as well as mentoring supports from specialist Enterprise Ireland advisors. James continued: "Those who are successful in their submission will automatically be offered an exhibition spot within the popular 'AgTech Hub' at the Innovation Arena. And, Enterprise Ireland will host a workshop for exhibitors to provide advice and help prepare for the competition. This will assist applicants in maximising their opportunity in the Innovation Arena and at the National Ploughing Championships for 2024." Last year, NovaUCD-based Proveye won the Start-Up Innovator of the Year prize. It focuses on helping users make better decisions to solve challenges like maximising yield and crop management.

"Irish agri-tech innovators are truly shaping the future, and it is estimated that the industry exports more than €1bn worth of innovative solutions to 43 countries across the globe. "While the UK and Europe remain our largest agri-tech markets, exports to other more diverse markets like Pakistan, Bangladesh and North Africa are on the rise, opening up fresh opportunities for Irish innovators who want to explore new international opportunities" James said.

The closing date to enter the Innovation Arena Awards is June 7. To find out more, visit Enterprise Ireland's website.



KRONE'S BUTTERFLY MOWERS IDEAL FOR SHORT-HARVEST WINDOWS

Krone's butterfly mowers, the EasyCut B 880 CV/CR (Collect) and B 1050 CV (Collect) can, according to the company, handle the heaviest grass and reduce drying time, so they efficiently use short-harvest windows.

According to distributors, Farmhand, six sets have already been sold and will be operational in Ireland in 2024.

These triple-mower combinations come with conditioners as a standard feature and can be equipped with cross conveyor units. Combined with Krone's four-metre front-mounted mowers, the EasyCut B 1050 CV (Collect) achieves a maximum working width of up to 10.45m. The mower combinations are hitched to the tractor by means of an optimised three-point attachment, telescopic outrigger arms ensure optimal front mower positioning and the standard conditioners in combination with cross conveyor units form a perfect combination for swathing.

The outrigger arms of the EasyCut B 880 CV/CR (Collect) can be adjusted mechanically in two positions to a working width of 8.52m or 8.72m. The EasyCut B 1050 CV (Collect) is even more variable. Thanks to hydraulically telescoping outrigger arms, the working width can be adjusted steplessly from 9.30m to 10.45m. Depending on the working width of the front-mounted mower that is used, the overlap can be adjusted to suit field conditions. This ensures a consistently neat cut with the highest possible acreage output, according to Krone.

With unpredictable harvest windows, the use of a conditioner has proven to be advantageous for shortening the time the grass is left on the field. The EasyCut B 1050 CV (Collect) and B 880 CV (Collect) are equipped with Krone's tine conditioner, currently the largest on the market with a diameter of 64cm. Its tempered on-grid V-shaped steel tines

condition the mowed material intensively facilitating reduced drying times. The tines have floating suspension, so they can avoid foreign objects. The conditioning can be adapted to the crop by adjusting the rotational speed (600/900 rpm) and the distance from the deflector sheets to the optimally arranged tines. This is a simple but also very efficient process, says Krone.

The EasyCut B 880 CV/CR Collect and B 1050 CV Collect mower combinations are equipped with hydraulic cross-conveyor belts, making it ideal for light crops of grass and for harvesting whole crop silage. The cross-conveyor belts have very large dimensions and bring the mowed material together to form a uniform swath.




Adjusting the belt speed from the tractor cab will alter the width of the swath to suit the harvester. The belts can be switched on and off individually while working. This allows for even more set-down modes in addition to swathing, such as clearing field edges or wide spreading on one side. For the latter process, the Collect models set the grass down in two passes so that a Krone four-rotor rake can form a finished swath in one additional pass. This reduces sward damage and saves time and fuel.

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The new loaders feature an innovative three-section design.



CLAAS INTRODUCES NEW GENERATION OF FRONT LOADERS

Claas introduces new generation of front loaders

Claas has introduced a new generation of innovative front loaders suitable for use with its Axos and Arion tractor ranges.

The six new models from FL 40C to FL 140 cover lift capacities from 940kg to 2,490kg (measured 80cm in front of the bucket pivot point) and a breakaway force from 1,820kg to 3,120kg. Maximum lift heights at the bucket pivot point range from 3.50m to 4.50m.

The new loaders feature an innovative three-section design, complementing the design of the Claas tractors. The double-angled boom shifts the pivot point mechanism of the parallelogram downwards by more than 20cm. This gives the operator an even better view of the frame and attachment, especially as the front crossbeam has been lowered by 10cm. The boom is also designed for the most demanding tasks. All hydraulic hoses are integrated into the frame for protection.

The familiar Firlock coupling system from the FL and FL C front loaders

has been retained and the locking mechanism is fully automatic and entirely mechanical. To unlock, you simply release a small lever on the boom. With the Mach multi-coupling system, all hydraulic and electrical lines can be connected to the tractor in an instant – without the need for any additional plug connections. This system makes the job of attaching the front loader fast and safe.

With the optional hydraulic Fastlock system, attachments can be locked at the press of a button from the comfort of the cab, in addition to automatic mechanical locking. Third and fourth functions can be connected via the Mach 2 multi-coupler, which features leak-free, flat-seal couplings. A pressure relief function for the third function is available on request.

The automatic bucket return function automatically returns the bucket to the horizontal loading position – increasing operator comfort and productivity to boot. Optional LED work lights illuminate the loading area perfectly in the dark.

The 100 Million Trees Project seeks to make the tree-planting journey an easy and enjoyable process for farmers.



A TREE-PLANTING PROJECT IS PARTNERING WITH FARMERS TO RESTORE IRELAND'S NATIVE TREES AND BIODIVERSITY

NEWROOTS

According to the adage: 'The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.'

This has never been more apt than it is today, as there are many environmental reasons to encourage farmers to consider forestry: carbon dioxide absorption, improved water quality, better drainage, and increased biodiversity.

The 100 Million Trees Project seeks to make the tree-planting journey an easy and enjoyable process for farmers, without the need for a land-use change, licence applications and associated red tape. The initiative was developed in 2022 by brothers Richard and David Mulcahy, and it aims to plant 100 million native Irish trees across Ireland over the next 10 years, in a bid to reverse the immense environmental damage caused by the reduction of forests worldwide and the loss of biodiversity.

Richard, who is chair of the consumer division of the Uniphar Group in his day job, bought his first small forest of 11 hectares in 2000 and has since planted a further 46 hectares

of mixed native and pine trees on his farm on the Wexford/Wicklow border.

David, a consultant cardiologist and founder of the CRY clinical service, has been planting trees for 25 years and founded Bugs Bees and (Native) Trees in 2020 to encourage tree planting.

MIYAWAKI METHOD

The 100 Million Trees Project employs the 'Miyawaki method' of densely planting between 500 and 2,500 native Irish trees across small areas of land. By planting excess trees together, they grow 10 times faster, 30 times denser, create an area 30 times more biodiverse, and a rapid carbon sink. This inexpensive approach requires significantly smaller planting areas and can be carried out on unused or fallow land.

"We planted 20,000 trees last year, creating 18 mini forests with 15 types of native trees around the country," explains David. This year, the goal is to plant 250,000 trees and farmers are among the groups the project is hoping

to on-board. "If we could get the farming community, GAA community and church community to take part, we could make a very big difference. You can plant 2,500 trees on a quarter of an acre and, working on the basis of 138,000 farms in Ireland, if every one of those gave up a corner of the big field, you would have a very significant planting of native trees."

Planting trees on a quarter of an acre or less means no licence or permission is needed, and the project supplies the trees free of charge, along with labour and horticultural expertise. "If they prepare the land, we will plant their forest within weeks, no matter what part of the country," David says.

IN A HEARTBEAT

Donal O'Keeffe, a cereal farmer in Delvin, Co. Westmeath, took very little persuasion. "I heard about it from my heart consultant!" he says. "David found out I was a tillage farmer and asked if there was any place we could plant some trees. I had a corner of a



The project fits the needs of farmers aiming to improve the environment and protect biodiversity on their land.

field that was wet more often than not, and even if we did get to sow it, we might not get to harvest it the following autumn. When David suggested this, it suited me down to the ground. Putting trees into it would help to dry out the ground around it, even outside of the tree area, and leave everything farmable. I'm not losing land that's producing anything significant and it's doing something that I think is very good."

The effort required by cereal farmers to prepare the land is minimal, he says. "I ploughed that corner of the field when I was doing it for winter wheat. There's no solid surface, so it was really easy to plant the trees. I got a small number of my family to give us a hand on the day, and David brought down four professional foresters. We got a lovely day in November and it was quite enjoyable."

Donal found a second site and he planted over 2,000 trees in each. "There's Rowan, Scots pine, hazel. They are all deciduous and native," he says. The mini forest, he hopes, will help to support nearby fauna. He explains: "Just 100 metres away from it, we have a badger family under a row of beech trees, they've always been there. We have two beehives on the farm now, and foxes, and I'm told there are otters in the river, and the beech trees have buzzards in them every year, which are very enjoyable to listen to. I would imagine these new trees will be a huge attraction to wildlife.

"My sister is into bird watching. She lives in Galway and is in the Burren regularly. I expect she will be the most regular visitor to the forest when it gets up and running. It should

be something that a younger generation could do school projects on to see what biodiversity it has produced."

SOWING THE SEEDS

Donal has been spreading the word among his fellow cereal farmers and there is already interest. "For cereal farmers, if there aren't any cattle or sheep on the farm, you don't have to fence it, so taking out little corners that grow very little anyway could be an advantage. I've a guy, I cut his grain, and he is very interested in doing this. He was lined up to do it, but the weather was just so wet."

The project fits the needs of farmers aiming to improve the environment and protect biodiversity on their land, without changing land use. "I put in some forest five or six years ago on poor land. It's deciduous trees and it looks great, but that land is in forestry forever and some farmers are reluctant to do that. This project is ideal because it's only small parts. Most tillage farmers are very well disposed to the environment so small plots like this fit into the niche between larger forestry and will not impede a commercial tillage operation."

The speed and ease of the initiative is another selling factor. "One of the things that I'm hearing time and again is the amount of paperwork, the number of forms that have to be filled in, the number of schemes involved. "I understand the detail required in a lot of these schemes, but it's become very, very cumbersome. The big advantage of the 100 Million Trees Project is there is no bureaucracy," says Donal.



BY PLANTING EXCESS TREES TOGETHER, THEY GROW 10 TIMES FASTER, 30 TIMES DENSER, CREATE AN AREA 30 TIMES MORE BIODIVERSE

TRY HARDER

David believes the farming community can be a strong partner in restoring Ireland's biodiversity. "Our major worry is we're losing all our birds and we're losing our beauty. There's been about 30 per cent reduction in bird species, up to 60 per cent in Germany. Native bees are getting a hard time. We're not working closely enough with nature. We need to try harder.

"The farmers I've dealt with, once they're getting the trees free and we help them plant them, they are delighted with the effort. These mini forests need very little management in the long term and will be a very nice little area of biodiversity going forward."

This initiative could not happen but for the good will of companies like the Uniphar Group who pay for the supply and planting of 200,000 trees this planting season in 77 mini forests throughout 19 counties!
For more information:
100milliontreesproject.ie



Denis Drennan
President, ICMSA

WITHDRAWAL OF DAIRY-REDUCTION SCHEME – FARMER PATIENCE BETRAYED

The old axiom says that a person's actions provide a much truer picture of their character than their pronouncements. If we had ever forgotten the wisdom of that old warning, then the Government's eye-popping cynicism – on full display in their withdrawal of a dairy-reduction scheme – brought it back to the forefront of our minds and must govern our future attitudes toward this Government. That the decision came just days after the leaders of both main parties to the coalition told their respective ard fheiseanna that they would support farming makes the subsequent decision on a dairy-reduction scheme even more corrosive and damaging to their reputation among farm communities. Remember, it was Minister McConalogue himself who had proposed such a scheme (effectively an 'exit' scheme) and instructed his officials to 'flesh it out' to the extent that they calculated a baseline figure that was carried in the farm media. But then another option possibly offered itself: why not just regulate the dairy farmers out of existence? Much cheaper. And that is what I believe they have decided to do. Obviously as Ireland's specialist dairy farmer organisation, we think that's a decision that will have ruinous consequences for the rural areas of Ireland. That might seem an exaggeratedly pessimistic view, but we are forced to believe –

through the weight of evidence – that Minister McConalogue and his Cabinet colleagues, despite their protestations, do want our dairy and livestock sectors effectively gone. And, in fairness to the minister, he has been giving us hints. In the interview on Morning Ireland in which he announced the reduction scheme would not be proceeding, he pledged support for farmers to grow crops and get involved in biomethane, but was notably half-hearted about the beef sector and weaker again on our world-beating dairy sector, both of which are collapsing in stages in front of his eyes.

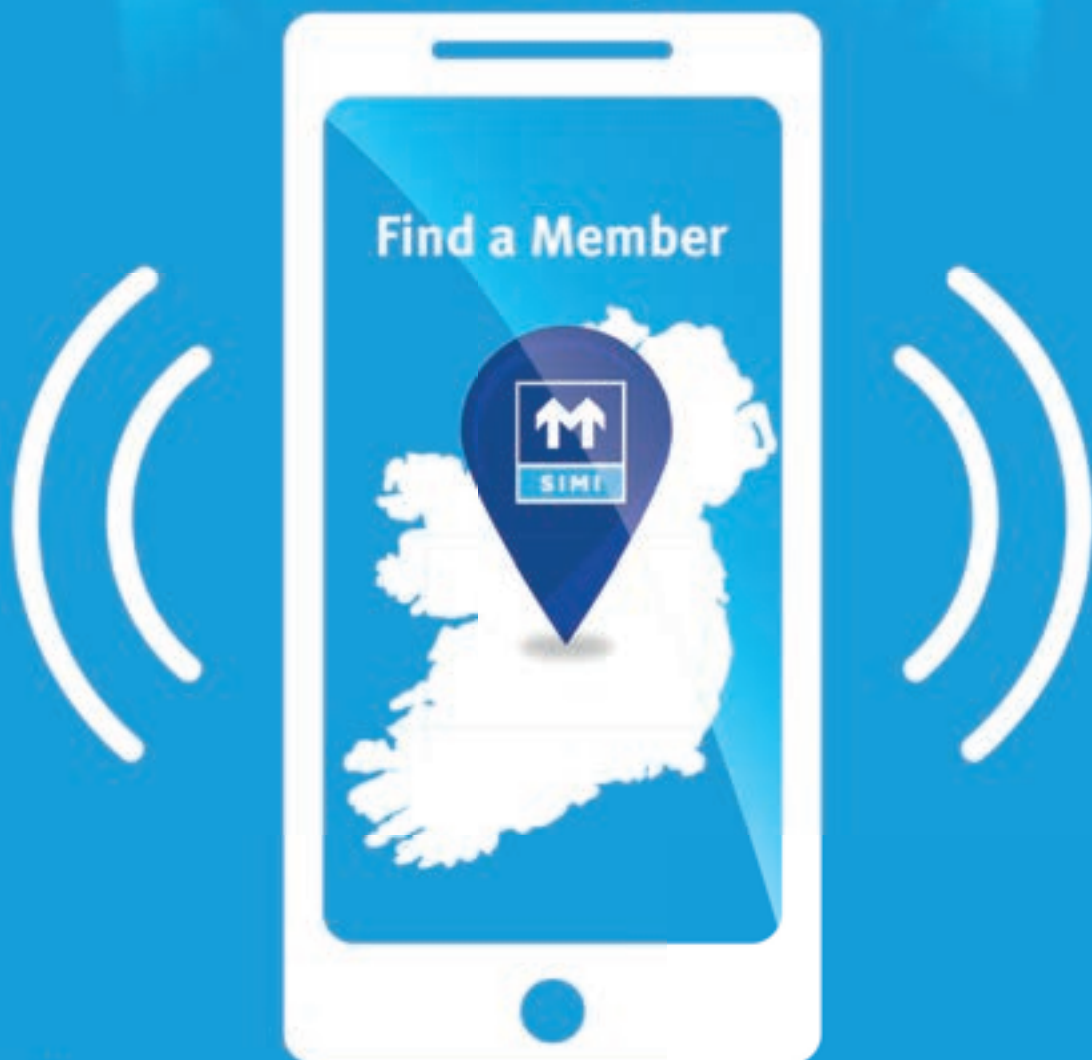
The decision on the dairy reduction scheme is cynical and slippery. The minister's own officials proposed this scheme in February 2022, they put figures on it and the minister stated publicly what the base year would be. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) officials pushed strongly for the inclusion of this scheme in the final report. This created an expectation, and farmers began making preparations on the basis that the scheme was on the way. Now, after waiting for two years, they realise that they have been led up the garden path and the minister has no intention now of introducing an exit scheme. He's just going to regulate dairy farmers out of existence with no exit package. It is unbelievably cynical and gives a

glimpse of what the Irish Government really thinks of its dairy and livestock farmers and the sectors that they built. It's worth noting that the ICMSA met with department officials a number of weeks ago and we were informed at that stage that this scheme was still under active consideration and no indication was given that it was going to be abolished. The only way of describing the treatment of Irish dairy farmers and their representative organisations on this question is 'two-faced' and it is deeply unacceptable. The most insulting aspect of this demoralising incident is that the people and groups who participated in the Dairy Vision Group had to learn via a radio show that the minister is scrapping two of their key recommendations. Even the Dutch Government, involved recently in a historic row with that country's farmers, introduced a well-funded transition scheme and disdained the cheapskate 'regulating-out-of-existence' approach of our Government. It's a really poor day for the DAFM and an even poorer day for those of us who assumed that we could accept in good faith what we were being told was going to happen. The ICMSA will be meeting with Taoiseach Simon Harris shortly and we will be asking him blunt questions about this episode and others. We cannot continue with this uncertainty – created by our own Government – for any longer.

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MATT O'KEEFFE
EDITOR

NO BALANCE SHEET FOR NET ZERO

Net zero carbon is a popular mantra. It, essentially, allows a balance sheet to be constructed allowing any business or economy to utilise carbon savings through sequestration, renewable-energy production and other means to offset the use of fossil-sourced carbon. Farming would seem to be an obvious candidate to benefit from the net zero carbon template, except it is not working out that way. Such obvious offsets as solar installations and substituting fossil-fuelled energy use for a renewable source of electricity are not allowed as an offset on a farm's carbon account. Instead, the energy sector is the beneficiary of this carbon credit. Likewise, in the event that a farm uses wind-generated energy to provide electricity on the farm, that cannot be used to deliver a carbon account credit. Again, the energy sector gains credit. The list does not stop there. The development of an anaerobic digester renewable-gas-production system on a farm would not result in a credit being written into a farm's carbon account. The establishment of a forest enterprise has no positive effect on a farm carbon balance sheet, even though trees have the potential to sequester vast amounts of carbon for up to hundreds of years, increasing incrementally as the

years go by. Apparently, because the State supports forestry, it secures any carbon credits accruing to a plantation. On a pasture-based farm, there would be an expectation that grass, as it sequesters carbon from the atmosphere, would qualify for credits on the carbon account. Not so. Soils are well known for their ability to take in and store carbon, and with careful management, sequester additional carbon deposits over time. That scientific fact does not deliver a carbon credit on the farm carbon balance sheet, either.

FOCUS SHIFT

The entire focus has been on cows emitting methane through respiration. No notice is taken of, and no credit is given for, the fact that livestock-production systems are based on a circular sequence of actions. The cow eats grass, belches methane as part of its natural digestive system, and the methane, over time, in the form of CO₂, is sequestered by grass as part of its growth pattern. The result, in a stable population of cattle, is net zero carbon release on the balance sheet. There is no new carbon being produced, simply a circular movement as grass operates its phenomenal ability to use photosynthesis as the natural process through which it lives and grows. Google reminds us that

photosynthesis is the process by which plants, including grass, use sunlight, water and carbon dioxide to create oxygen and energy in the form of sugar, the result being the verdant growth so closely associated with Irish pasture-based livestock farming. This natural phenomenon is ignored completely when any assessment is made of the impact of livestock farming on the environment and, most especially, when assessments are being made around methane outputs from livestock.

FOUR LEGS BAD

There is a lazy assumption when it comes to livestock production, that - to paraphrase the *Animal Farm* mantra - 'four legs bad'. There is the view that cattle have an entirely negative effect on the environment and contribute, without mitigation, to increases in greenhouse gases, especially methane. The reality is nowhere near as simplistic as that. Yet, we continue to hear about the necessity to reduce cattle numbers in Ireland. Apart from the Brazilian ambition to increase its cattle herd by a margin greater than four times the entire Irish herd, the execution of this scientifically lazy, ill-conceived and flawed demand would be economically and socially damaging, and environmentally irrelevant.

“
THERE IS A LAZY ASSUMPTION WHEN IT COMES TO LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION, THAT - TO PARAPHRASE THE ANIMAL FARM MANTRA - 'FOUR LEGS BAD'”

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1. Herds with high prevalence of IBR may need to vaccinate calves from 2 weeks of age intranasally. Next vaccine should be given at 3-4 months of age either intranasally or intramuscularly.
2. Intramuscular Vaccination.
3. Cowley DJB et al, Aspects of bovine herpesvirus infection in dairy and beef herds in the Republic of Ireland. Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica 2011, 53:40.
4. Kynetec data April 2020.

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