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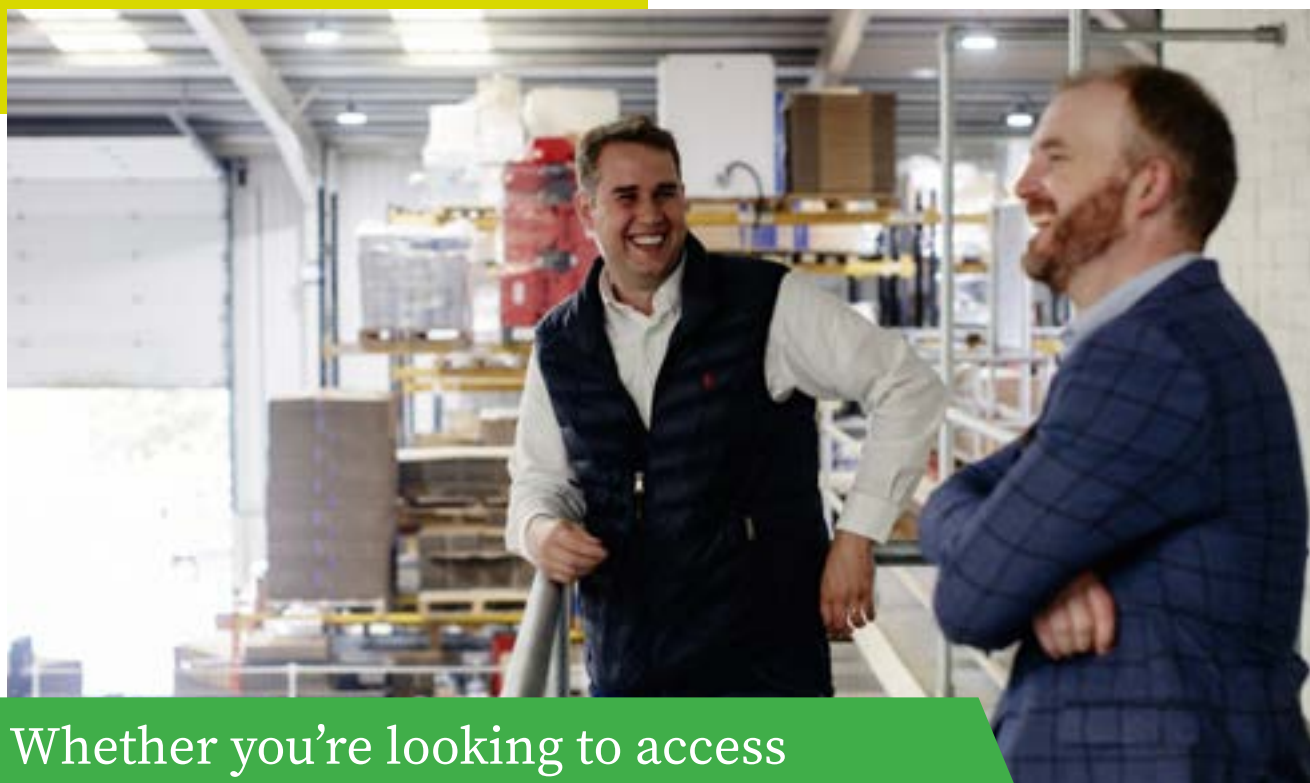
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AUGUST 2025

## EDITORIAL



Matt O'Keeffe, Editor

## THE CAP NO LONGER FITS EU AMBITION

There was a time when the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was the jewel in the crown of the EC/EEC/EU. That is clearly no longer the case. The proposals for reform of the CAP and the broadening of ambitions for the EU are clear indications that other challenges facing the 27-member EU will take precedence over maintaining the integrity of the CAP. Realistically, the erosion of the CAP as a standalone support mechanism for Europe's farmers has been ongoing for many years. The emergence of environmental challenges, some of them related to commercial farming practices, has already claimed a considerable portion of the CAP's financial largesse. We now see new challenges and priorities emerging for the EU that will necessitate further diversion of funding, including migration, competitiveness, defence, research, and ambitions to improve economic and social cohesion across the 27 Member States. Last month, the EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, published her multi-annual budget proposals for five years commencing from 2028. It is notable that the proposals were developed by a close-knit group of officials in von der Leyen's office, without major input from either her fellow commissioners or the European Council of Ministers. This suggests that there is a very long road ahead before any agreement is reached on future EU funding. The fact that the proposed budget is double the current EU budget provokes the immediate question as to where the additional funding is to come from. As referenced in my previous editorials, many Member States have their own financial challenges, before any further monetary commitments are made towards funding the EU. The German economy, particularly, is stagnating and the historical powerhouse of Europe needs to improve its competitiveness significantly before any thought is given to increasing its financial support for the European project. Germany has always been the major financial supporter of the

EU and without its support, President von der Leyen's budgetary proposition is doomed to failure. It is not even clear that the Commission president's cabinet will actively support her budget proposals. The Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, Christophe Hansen, is known to be opposed to any diminution of the CAP as a standalone funding mechanism for European agriculture. It was Ursula von der Leyen herself who instigated the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture in the EU, authored by a fellow German, Professor Peter Strohschneider, with input from a wide range of stakeholders. There was no suggestion in the Dialogue Report that the CAP should be subsumed into a broader, all-encompassing EU budget. The implementation of the Dialogue proposals comes under Commissioner Hansen's brief and given justifiable fears that the funding of the CAP could be reduced and/or spread too widely and thinly under von der Leyen's radical budget proposals, he is unlikely to view the 2028-2033 EU Multiannual Financial Framework with much enthusiasm. A critical aspect of President von der Leyen's budgetary proposals, which may determine its successful implementation or otherwise, is the proposed expansion of funding. Among a range of finance-raising proposals, including increased e-waste and tobacco revenues, a tax on companies with turnover in excess of €100m is the most contentious. Just as there is a limit to how much milk a cow can deliver before compromising its long-term health, there is also an awareness that EU companies, however profitable they may be, must constantly invest in research and development and competitiveness improvements. There is a contradiction between EU competitiveness aspirations, as highlighted under President von der Leyen's budget proposals, and increased taxation on the companies that must ultimately deliver on competitiveness in the global marketplace.

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JURY MEMBER FOR IRELAND

## EARLY BIRDS SEEKING VOTES

While the Irish presidential election is several months away, the early runners are hoping to establish themselves as household names and gain a lead over more tardy entrants. Mairead McGuinness needs no introduction to rural voters and also has broad name recognition among voters generally, having served as an MEP and EU commissioner in latter times, with a useful background in journalism, and as a TV presenter. First to announce her intentions was Catherine Connolly, generally regarded as a traditionalist left wing politician. That may not appeal to most rural and farming voters who would generally be regarded as relatively conservative in their political outlook. In any case, we are very much still in the phony war phase of this not-yet-riveting election. Sinn Féin will be sorely tempted to direct Mary Lou McDonald to announce her candidacy. She has become more circumspect in recent weeks as to her intentions, after ruling out a run previously. With the Galway-based Connolly acting as a proxy sweeper, the Sinn Féin leader's prospects, if she enters the race, should not be underestimated. Mairead McGuinness, meanwhile, would have a broad appeal across the electorate, but would also need a good vote transfer to get her over the line. If Fianna Fáil runs a candidate, there would be every prospect that they could hold off a Sinn Féin candidate, even Mary Lou, with either a Fianna Fáil or a Fine Gael nominee taking up residence in the Áras for the next seven years. There will be many a slip between now and November with several potential independent candidates keeping their political powder dry until September, hoping that a late run is the optimum strategy. Between dirt digging and a well-established practice by the Irish electorate of giving the sitting Government a kick in the arse without any real political consequences, seeking the presidency of Ireland is not for the faint-hearted.

## DOING THE BUSINESS

**In retrospect, one of the shrewdest business decisions made by a farmer-controlled organisation over the past decade was Farmer Business Developments' (FBD) purchase of the hotels and leisure facilities from FBD Insurance.**

While it wasn't quite a fire sale, the insurance company did need to divest itself of the ancillary businesses to burnish its reputation as a purely insuring entity. The capital accrued from the sale was also welcome at the time and FBD Insurance Plc is now the leading Irish-based and Irish-owned insurer in the market. Back to FBD, formerly a holding company owned and tightly controlled by Irish farmers, the Plc/Co-operative hybrid, is now an activist investor in hotels and leisure facilities in Ireland and Spain. The latest purchase of the Grand Hotel in Malahide earlier this year adds considerably to the synergies associated with a multi-hotel operation. Margins and profitability are impressive, with profits before tax of €36.36m last year, up by over €10m on the previous

end of year result. Net assets were €334.5m to the end of last December, a figure that is now inflated by the Malahide acquisition. FBD's core asset remains its 24-hour investment in FBD Insurance, worth over €110m. As befits a farmer-owned investment company, the group's extensive La Cala Resort in southern Spain is a productive cash cow, not only milking over €50m in profits from hotel and golf course income, but also providing regular cashflow from ongoing sales of villas built in conjunction with the Taylor Wimpey construction group. Meanwhile, a landholding in Berlin, close to the newly opened Willy Brandt airport, is a slow burner, but should deliver another payday for its shareholders at some stage in the future. While the initial purchase of hotel and leisure assets was seen as a short-term investment, FBD is clearly in the game for the long term, bar, of course, someone make an offer that can't be refused. Everything should be for sale – at a price!

## NOT SO TARIFF-IC NEWS

**The ballroom of Donald Trump's Scottish hotel was the setting for trade talks between the EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen and the US president, towards the end of last month.**

It was nearing the August 1 deadline – the date of Trump's threatened 30 per cent tariff imposition – there was little time to be dancing around this topic any longer. And so, the result was 15 per cent on most EU imports to the US. Clarity at last. Well, almost. There was initial confusion about where pharmaceuticals stood. Trump stated publicly that they would be treated separately but he was later contradicted by a senior US official who stated that they were, in fact, subject to the 15 per cent figure. Clear as mud. And there was also reference to a zero for zero tariff rate but at time of writing, not a lot was known about that.

The good news – not that many see it quite like that – is that 15 is less than 30. But the welcome across Europe for the deal has been lacklustre (and that is being generous). Here, our Minister for Agriculture, Food and

the Marine, Martin Heydon had this to say: "Since April, our food and drink businesses have faced major uncertainty around future US trade policy. This agreement means an end to that uncertainty and avoids the very significant threats associated with a no-deal scenario." He added that the 15 per cent tariff is a positive for Irish butter imports, which, since April have faced an additional tariff rate of 10 per cent stacked on a pre-existing tariff of 16 per cent. The US is our second most important market for total Irish agri-food, with exports valued at €2bn last year. The Kerrygold brand is now the second biggest selling butter in the US with close to €500m in exports in 2024, while Irish dairy exports in 2024 were €835m. Irish whiskey and spirit sales to the US are worth around €900m annually. Fifteen per cent is significant and will make Irish produce less competitive and will give Northern Ireland an advantage, as the UK negotiated a 10 per cent tariff early this year. It will be interesting to see how this pans out over the next 12 months.



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Dr Mary Kinston, DWI President with representatives from co-ops including; Tirlán, Aurivo, Centenary, Carbery, North Cork Creameries, Dairygold, Arrabawn Tipperary and Lakeland Dairies.

## DAIRY WOMEN IRELAND LAUNCHES LANDMARK FUNDING PARTNERSHIP

Dairy Women Ireland (DWI) has secured a landmark partnership model with milk processors across the country. Founded in 2021, DWI has grown into a vibrant, grassroots network that empowers women across Ireland's dairy industry. From regional meet ups to national conference events, the demand for support, education, and connection has been evident – and it's growing, says the organisation. To date, DWI's work has been made possible through member subscriptions and generous one-off sponsorships from key industry players, including the current flagship sponsors, Kerry Dairy Ireland and FDC.

However, DWI's ability to meet the increasing demand for its services and to reach the women working in dairy across the country, has been limited by funding. In response, the organisation proposed a funding structure where milk processors contribute €2 per supplier annually

for a number of years. This investment reflects a fair and equitable commitment, proportionate to processor size, the organisation has said.

According to DWI, the majority of dairy processors in Ireland have now committed to this initiative. "With this partnership, we are not only securing funding for DWI, but we're also helping processors meet their corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals in relation to gender equality and inclusion," said Mary Kinston, president of DWI. "This is about investing in the future of farming, creating stronger communities, and building a more balanced, resilient industry."

This new model of funding will allow DWI to expand its services, reach more members, and amplify the voices of women working in dairy across Ireland. It represents a powerful and timely step forward for the sector, and shines a light on those investing in women in farming, in a truly meaningful way, Mary added.

## ASA CONFERENCE TO EXPLORE IRELAND'S ROLE IN GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

Ireland's role in global food security will top the agenda at the Agricultural Science Association's (ASA) annual conference next month. Panel discussions on the day will be moderated by Damien O'Reilly, from the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society as experts and primary producers from national and international spheres will assess the agri-food industry's current state of play while casting an eye towards the future.

In launching the conference, ASA president, Susan Maher, said: "In 2022, the Global Food Security Index ranked Ireland as the world's second most food-secure country. While that data also ranked Ireland highly in terms of agricultural research and development – work that our ASA members are spearheading on several fronts—it also concluded that significant policy improvements are required to further strengthen Ireland's standing given the challenging and uncertain international picture." She went on to explain that this year's conference will see industry leaders discuss Ireland's food security future and how it can positively steer Ireland towards even greater levels of quality, reliability and sustainability.

But, she said, the conference will not just be limited to a single agenda-setting item. "As has proven the case at previous conferences, much will be discussed and debated over the course of the day, including food production, food waste and the environment, new scientific developments, the cost of living and its many implications, what we can expect from the next Common Agricultural Policy 2028-2035, the challenges of farm succession and much more."

The annual ASA conference will be followed by the hugely popular banquet which includes the traditional post-dinner 'fireside chat' with a special guest to be announced closer to the conference.



Pictured at the launch of the Agricultural Science Association's 2025 conference: ASA president, Susan Maher and FBD Trust chair, Michael Berkery.



## APPOINTMENT

## DAIRY RESEARCH IRELAND APPOINTS NEW CHAIR

**The board of Dairy Research Ireland (DRI) has appointed Mary Delaney as its new chair, succeeding Jim Beecher, who held the position since 2010.** DRI, also known as the Dairy Research Trust, is responsible for managing the dairy research levy contributed by Irish dairy farmers. This levy funds targeted, farmer-focused research aimed at improving sustainability, profitability and resilience on dairy farms. The board oversees the strategic direction and funding of research programmes aligned with national and EU priorities, while ensuring that farmer needs are at the core of all activity.

Mary Delaney is an agri-business consultant and dairy farmer with over 20 years' experience in Irish agriculture. She has held senior roles in Glanbia (now Tirlán) and the *Irish Farmers Journal*, and currently serves on the board of Bord Bia. A Nuffield Scholar and former president of the Agricultural Science Association, she brings

a strong mix of strategic industry insight and practical farming knowledge to the role.

Commenting on her appointment, Mary said: "Dairy Research Ireland plays a vital role in shaping the future of our sector by backing research that delivers real, practical benefits to farmers. As chair, I look forward to working with the board and our partners to ensure that the research we fund supports sustainable, profitable dairy farming and helps Ireland remain a global leader in dairy."

The board has expressed its sincere thanks to outgoing chair, Jim Beecher, former assistant secretary at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, for his 15 years of dedicated service and leadership. His experience, insights and strategic guidance were key in developing the organisation's strong track record of impact and value for the dairy sector.

## FREE FARM-SAFETY TRAINING THROUGH FRS

**FRS Co-Op is offering free farm safety training to 300 families this year as part of an ongoing initiative designed to improve safety and wellbeing on Irish farms.**

Supported by funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the farm safety training initiative will provide a cost-effective and sustainable training-led approach to foster farm safety and wellbeing within each generation of the family, FRS has said.

At the heart of the initiative is the concept of continuous professional development (CPD), which is a commitment to ongoing lifelong learning through enhancing, refreshing, and updating training and skills.

The Farm Family CPD programme run by FRS Co-Op comprises five online courses that are designed to change attitudes and behaviours around farm safety to reduce the level of on-farm fatal and non-fatal incidents. The free training courses will commence in August. Led by FRS Co-Op's training division, the Farm Family CPD initiative was developed in partnership with the Health & Safety Authority, the IFA, FBD, Teagasc and a number of Irish farm families.

Farming continues to account for a disproportionate level of fatal and serious injury workplace accidents. Since 2014, 38 per cent of all workplace fatal accidents occurred on farms, while research by Teagasc estimates that approximately 4,500 accidents occur on Irish farms each year. Of these, almost half of accidents put the victim out of work for at least four days. FRS Co-Op encourages all farmers to continuously think about farm safety and



Less than 35 per cent of respondents to an FRS survey said they were interested in applying for a chainsaw safety course.

wellbeing, and to avail of the free courses. Commenting, Ben Fearn, head of operations at FRS Training, said: "The five farm safety courses we're launching through the Farm Family CPD programme have been designed to deliver practical training for all generations of the family farm.

"Figures from the Health & Safety Authority show that older people are at the greatest risk on Irish farms, with those over 65 years of age accounting for over half (56 per cent) of all fatal farm accidents since 2020. We've developed the Farm Family CPD training courses to cater for all age groups, with a specific course for those over the age of 65." A nationwide survey of farm workers carried out earlier this year by FRS Co-Op found that less than half of operators were interested in taking farm safety courses despite working with heavy machinery, chainsaws, and livestock every day.

The survey found over 90 per cent of farm operators worked with tractors on farms, while 80% reported using a chainsaw as part of their work. Over 60 per cent operated slurry equipment on their respective farms, while over a third reported regularly using telehandlers and quad bikes.

Despite the high levels of usage of dangerous machinery, less than 35 per cent of respondents to the FRS Co-Op survey said they were interested in applying for a chainsaw operations, tractor driving or quad bike driving safety courses.

"To dramatically reduce the number of fatal and serious accidents happening on Irish farms, we need to change the mindset to understand that there is no such thing as a safe farm," said Ben. "Only a safe and responsible approach taken by those working on farms can eliminate where possible and reduce the risks associated with farming."



## InTouch

CATHAL BOHANE  
HEAD OF INTOUCH NUTRITION

**August – the final month of summer, if you still assume we have defined seasons. It is a month during which we can take stock after a busy milk-production period, after cows are, hopefully, back in calf, and after silage stocks are replenished. Maintaining good progress and planning for the future needs to be the focus for the coming months.**

Being flexible with your feeding over the next month will help maintain milk yield. Maximise grass quality and quantity, but don't be afraid to increase parlour supplement if weather interrupts this. And, do not be afraid to add silage if you are still struggling for intake after maximising concentrates beyond 0.15kg per litre of milk. We are all told that yield should drop less than 2-2.5 per cent per week, but there are no reasons not to maintain yield also. If we look at our co-op performance reports over the last few years, the majority of farms drop more than 2.5 per cent per week, especially in the months of June and July. This is causing the loss of 20-30kg of milk solids or €150 to €225 per cow by not fulfilling the cow's intake and feed needs. Feed pockets, as we call them, happen throughout the year but especially when demand is at its highest during the peak summer months. These can be short or long-term depending on weather and stocking rate, but are noticeable either through an obvious shortage or changing daily yields. A failure to act or act on time is what causes the loss of milk solids, cow condition and possibly fertility.

Both cuts of silage are now in the pit, and it is the time to get them tested for not just what energy, protein and DMD is in there but also minerals, especially for the second cut which will predominantly go to the dry cows. While it will all be eaten regardless, knowing the quality will allow you to balance the diet for the winter, whether that be for weight gain, body condition or milk production. Also, some might say there is no point in testing it if you don't have enough of it, and now is also the time to do some quick sums on the amount of silage you have versus the amount of stock you will have, taking account of any possible extension of the season due to weather conditions. We need the view of hoping for the best but preparing for the worst, where large numbers now on farms will mean even a few weeks of extra silage will require large reserves.

Finally, check to make sure year one and two replacement stock are on target. It is better to regain shortfalls over the next few months now than realising they are 20kg or 30kg off when they are housed later. They are like spring calving cows now, and if we can manage their supply and quality of grass, this should be sufficient, and everything will look after itself, with supplement to be considered if there is an extended weather event only.

## 30% INCREASE IN DAIRY INCOME FORECAST FOR 2025 – TEAGASC REPORT

**A new report from Teagasc economists reveals that the average income on dairy farms in 2025 is now forecast to reach about €140,000, representing a 30 per cent increase compared to 2024.**

According to the report, dairy commodity prices entered 2025 at a high level and have remained strong through the first half of the year, and milk prices are on track to average about 7 per cent higher than in 2024. Combining high milk prices with favourable weather, should result in a 5 per cent increase in Irish milk production, which will result in higher margins for dairy producers. So the average income on dairy farms this year is now forecast to reach about €140,000.

As of mid-2025, the global economic growth outlook has weakened relative to 2024, according to the report, with a number of ongoing geopolitical considerations presenting downside risk, with trade tensions and exchange rate movements creating uncertainty. Nevertheless, the Teagasc researchers found that the outlook for farm incomes this year on most farms is now quite positive. Average income for cattle-rearing farms is forecast to be €25,000 in 2025, up 85 per cent, while cattle 'other' (primarily finishing) farms are expected to see incomes rise by 44 per cent to €26,000.

Lamb prices are likely to be 8 per cent higher in 2025 relative to last year, and all things considered, sheep farms are expected to record an average income of just under €34,000 in 2025, representing a 22 per cent improvement on last year.

In the tillage sector, early indications from harvest 2025 suggest that cereal prices are likely to be lower than in 2024. Average income on tillage farms is now forecast to increase by approximately 12 per cent to €43,000. Much of the increase in income on tillage farms will come from the subsidiary livestock enterprise, which have benefited from higher prices in 2025. The forecasted income on tillage farms for 2025 is expected to be below the previous five-year average.

Agricultural input markets have been relatively stable in 2025, with only modest price changes likely for the year as a whole. Feed prices have declined slightly, with average prices in 2025 likely to be down about 4 per cent compared with 2024. Crude oil prices have eased slightly, and fuel prices are expected to be down by approximately 3 per cent, while electricity prices should continue to remain stable.

In contrast, fertiliser prices in the first half of year, when purchasing is more concentrated, were up around 5 per cent relative to the same period last year. Fertiliser usage is likely to be higher in 2025, driven by the combination of cheaper prices compared to 2022 and 2023 and the continuing improvement in profitability across grassland systems this year. Feed use in grassland systems in 2025 is forecast to be little changed on the 2024 level. These divergent trends mean that overall production costs are broadly in line with 2024 levels, with some variation across production systems. Weather conditions during the first half of 2025 have been excellent for grass growth and have also proven favourable for winter and spring planting on tillage farms. These conditions are contributing to improved grass and tillage yields this year. Average farm income across all systems in 2025 is now forecast to reach €48,500, representing a 39 per cent increase on the 2024 figure.





Damien O'Reilly  
EU Affairs and Communications Manager, ICOS

## LETTER FROM BRUSSELS

**One of the most fulfilling parts of this job is hosting visiting groups of members from home.** And in July, ICOS president, Edward Carr, led a high-level delegation of dairy co-operative chairpersons for a series of engagements with MEPs and other EU Commission officials on pertinent issues, not least the retention of the nitrates derogation. The group also met with EU Commissioner, Michael McGrath, in his office in the Berlaymont building.

The delegation expressed their very significant concerns surrounding the proportionality and complexity of introducing new criteria on habitats as part of the derogation application. There is always the fear that Brussels is not aware of Ireland's unique grass-based system. But they went home somewhat encouraged by the strong recognition there was of that system and the real progress made on water quality by farm families and co-operatives.

Officials from DG Envi and the cabinet of EU Commissioner for environment and water resilience, Jessika Roswall, strongly acknowledged that they did not want to drive people away from our grass- and land-based model of production. Still, there is a job of work ahead in the coming months to convince the powers that be, that Irish farmers and co-operatives are working day and night to improve water quality and there are some recent signs of that work paying off. Farm groups and the Government will continue to work together and liaise with Brussels right up to the minute a decision is made regarding the derogation extension application.

The next multiannual financial framework (EU Budget for 2027 onwards) was announced during the visit, which was timely as the delegation also joined with farmers from across Europe in a protest to highlight deep concern at proposals to cut the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget. The EU finances are under severe pressure, not least with the €800bn Covid-19 loan due for repayment. That, along with a move towards arming up to bolster security, is going to eat into the CAP budget with talk of cuts of around 25 per cent.

Visitors coming to Brussels always leave with a new and clear understanding of how the EU institutions work, from the Parliament to the Commission to the Council. The opportunity to meet key personalities face to face is important in conveying the message about the value of Irish agriculture and such interactions are always welcome here. While some detractors bemoan 'the farming lobby', Ireland's farmers have just as much right to have a voice here as any other profession if not more so considering that almost every rule and regulation impacting their day-to-day work is cooked up, debated, and signed here. I look forward to the next visit.



## Autumn reseeds: don't delay!

Maeve Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

**Early autumn reseeding is the preferred option for many to reseed grazing ground due to reduced pressure on grass availability and the increased availability of grazing ground after second cut silage.**

The prolonged dry spell in April and early May created some hesitancy, although much cultivation was done. Some reseeds were postponed so it's important to get back on track when the opportunity presents itself.

However, timing is crucial so the earlier you plan on completing reseeding, the more flexibility you will have regarding grazing and weed control.

The target turnaround with a reseed should be 50 to 60 days. Therefore, if spray-off is completed by mid-August, target first grazing should be approximately the same date in October. Ideally, one more grazing before winter should create a more established sward for the following spring.

### Get the basics right: timing, clover and rolling

Taking the reseeding opportunity earlier will also help with clover establishment. With clover high on the agenda for those reseeding block ground, it's important to get the basics correct to aid in its establishment. Clover has a high pH requirement, favouring soils at a pH of 6.5, and index 3-4 for P&K.

Avoid jeopardising your investment in reseeding by skimping on weed control or missing the ideal window. Post-emergence spraying is always your best chance to control weeds, typically applied approximately 5-6 weeks after sowing. Where clover was incorporated in the seed mixture, use a clover-safe spray (take care to use a clover-safe spray at the three-leaf stage).

One of the most common issues seen with reseeds where conventional ploughing has not been used is inadequate rolling of new reseeds/poor firmness.

Rolling is essential to create good soil-to-seed contact and also helps to maintain moisture within the seedbed.

New plants emerge quickest where the tractor tyre marks are, or in the headlands due to greater contact. So roll the seed bed prior to sowing to increase firmness.

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## SAFETY PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE WHEN SHOWING LIVESTOCK

CIARAN ROCHE, FBD RISK MANAGER, HAS SOME VERY IMPORTANT SAFETY REMINDERS WHEN SHOWING YOUR CATTLE THIS SUMMER

Photo taken at the Tullamore Show, 2024.

Show day is an exciting day, and showing your cattle is a wonderful and memorable experience. But it is important to ensure that basic safety precautions around livestock are followed so that everyone has a safe and enjoyable day out.

As sponsors of the FBD National Livestock Show at the Tullamore Show, we've seen first-hand the incredible work that goes into getting animals ready for a show. However, it is important not to forget about safety in the excitement of the day.

Show organisers make a significant effort to ensure the safety of everyone who attends their show. They put event management plans in place, conduct risk assessments, implement safety controls, and ensure that they have adequate stewards on site to manage safety before, during, and after the event. It is essential that all members of the public, whether showing livestock or attending the show, follow these safety procedures, pay attention to safety signage, and cooperate with show stewards.

### VEHICLES

Vehicles and livestock pose the most significant hazards at any agricultural show. To help prevent vehicle accidents, it is essential to follow the route dedicated for livestock traffic and to drive at a safe speed. Be vigilant for pedestrians, especially young children.

### HANDLING

Safe handling of livestock starts at home. Before ever getting to a show, ensure that the

### FARM SAFETY LIVE

At FBD Insurance, we're delighted to see the return of the Farm Safety Live demonstration arena at the Tullamore Show & FBD National Livestock Show on Sunday, August 10, 2025. We're proud to continue the longstanding partnership with FRS, the Health and Safety Authority, and the Tullamore Show committee to bring these vital interactive farm safety demonstrations back to the show for the tenth year!

This year's Farm Safety Live demonstrations will emphasise the safe operation of tractors and quad bikes. Fittingly for the day of the FBD National Livestock show, handling of livestock will also be a central feature of this year's Farm Safety Live demonstrations. For the first time this year, the Farm Safety Live area will also feature a new chainsaw safety demo. Throughout the day, farm safety experts will offer practical tips and demonstrations that can be directly applied to everyday farming practices. It's a must-visit stand at the Tullamore Show and we strongly encourage farm families attending the Tullamore Show to visit Farm Safety Live at stand L100.

livestock are used to being handled, trained to walk with a halter, used to getting in and out of a trailer, and that they have an appropriate temperament for showing. In addition, ensure that you wear safety footwear with a steel toe with a good grip.

### CALM

After arriving on site, check on your livestock before unloading to ensure that they are not agitated. If livestock are agitated and not calming down, it is best not to unload that animal. Only unload livestock at the dedicated unloading bays and follow the instruction of show stewards.

### IN CONTROL

Ensure livestock are safely controlled at all times by competent and physically-able persons. Only walk livestock on the designated pathways and lead them with

a halter. Always keep livestock physically secured when in stalls and don't do anything that might spook them. Remember that livestock can be temperamental and easily agitated. It is essential that you keep a close eye on your animal, stay alert to the potential risks associated with the environment, and ensure that safety is managed at all times.

Scan the QR code for more information on showing livestock:





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Ciaran Fitzgerald  
Agri-food economist

# DECARBONISATION REQUIRES PRICE SUPPORT

**When the Irish energy-supply companies were confronted with the challenge of moving away from fossil fuels back in late 1990s/early 2000s it is unlikely that they were told that the future of the planet was at stake unless they upped their renewable energy supply profile, writes agri-food economist, Ciaran Fitzgerald**

In the real world, in order to properly deliver the fundamental change required, a set of financial supports based on grant aid would be needed for the capital expenditure required to build wind and solar farms and other renewable energy infrastructure. In addition to the establishment of these capital support mechanisms, a price guarantee for up to 25 years through a feed-in tariff system was also put in place. The result is that by the first quarter of 2025, over 38 per cent of Irish energy supply, as measured by Eirgrid, has come from renewable sources with wind power being the dominant source. The transition to electric vehicles (EVs) has also been primarily driven by direct price subsidies. After a lull in purchases by would-be EV car buyers, recent data shows renewed interest in owning an EV. Some of this surge in EV ownership may be related to the ongoing enthusiasm for solar panel installation, providing much of the energy required to power the cars.

## A policy gap

One can only wonder why, in the context of Ireland's hugely important agri-food sector, there is absolutely zero sign of a similar approach to that sector's decarbonisation/environmental challenges through food price supports. In the context of EU-wide discussions and proposals around the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform there is

nothing other than wishful platitudes around the challenge of linking the increased costs associated with the EU's green transition to a substantive, realistic and sustainable food price support instrument. Perversely, while Irish/ EU food production is increasingly regulated and restricted, price recovery remains, to a great extent, at the whim of dominant, large grocery retailers.



**THE €8BN SPENT ON LOCAL IRISH RAW MATERIALS GENERATES A FURTHER €8BN ACROSS THE RURAL ECONOMY**

## A critical contributor

Let's not forget that the Irish agri-food sector in 2024 delivered gross turnover of €34bn, with exports of €17bn while the value of farmgate output was €12bn. This shows a significant added-value element accruing at the post-production stages of the Irish food chain. Reiterating a point made several times previously, the Irish agri-food sector – across production, processing and exporting activities – supports 220,000 jobs directly and indirectly. The Irish agri-food sector has unique Irish economy multiplier impacts. Central Statistics Office figures show an expenditure multiplier of 2.0 in the dairy and beef sectors, meaning that the €8bn spent on local Irish raw materials generates a further €8bn across the rural economy. This multiplier impact significantly increases the real economic value of the sector beyond standard metrics like gross value added, which are in themselves subject to trade distortion issues as we know from studies of many of our foreign direct investment companies, especially in the pharma and electronic sectors.



### Additional challenges

The combination of sectoral carbon emissions budgets and the impact of the Nitrates Directive have effectively placed production limits on livestock numbers in Ireland and, therefore, put a cap on processing throughput in the primary milk and beef processing sectors. Meanwhile global demand for Irish grass-fed dairy and livestock products is increasing. In addition to these output constraints, the individual sectors are being required to decarbonise their processing facilities at a combined cost of in excess of €1.6bn, this to be achieved with a low level of state aid supports and absolutely no price guarantee. This contrasts starkly with the generous capital supports and long-term price guarantees accorded to the energy production sector as it transforms from being a heavy fossil fuel user to a renewable energy producer.

### No facility for cost recovery

The market reality for the agri-food sector is that increases in cost which cannot be recovered by increased output (as set out above), will not be recovered in higher prices either, because the sector doesn't have selling power. This is in complete contrast to the vast majority of essential consumer purchases such as energy products, mobile phones, cars and pharmaceutical drugs. Price recovery levels within the Irish agri-food sector over the last 20 years have been non-existent due principally to retail buying power insisting on everyday low pricing in the grocery sector. Meanwhile, food production costs and regulatory constraints have increased incessantly, with the latest sustainable production constraints clearly adding further cost with no guarantee that consumer prices will reflect this increase in costs across the EU. There is total disconnection between production costs and product prices. This disconnect, through an absence of selling power, combined with ever increasing regulatory costs, means that food production in Ireland and the EU is being perversely undermined. An EU and Irish vox-pop is proselyting low carbon food consumption as the way of the future, while zero cost recovery is driving the replacement of

local, highly regulated food with low cost, low regulation, non-EU alternatives.

### Not smart and not joined up

There is clearly acute political consideration here in terms of the broad wish to keep food affordable, but affordable meaning evermore imported, is not clever or sustainable and a fundamental change in policy is required very quickly if a real connection between agricultural policy and food prices is to be achieved. In Ireland, consumer price legislation is controlled by the Department of Enterprise not the Department of Agriculture. At the very least, there needs to be a dialogue established to determine a rational approach to both food affordability and a sustainable supply of indigenously produced food. Food security has been ignored in an age where global food supply chains are increasingly at risk from political, climatic and military challenges. Brussels provides an example of the policy disconnections and lack of coherence to deliver long term sustainable food supplies to European consumers.

### Agriculture policy is the competence of DG Agri

Food safety and regulation comes under the ambit of DG Sante, while DG Competition and DG Markets legislate for supermarkets and food pricing. DG Trade, in turn, does trade deals. Food production has been marginalised. This absence of joined-up policy implementation has effectively greenlighted retail buying power for the last 20 years, leaving food producers and processors with crumbs in pricing terms. This *laissez faire* approach to food pricing is also part of an outdated, globalisation cliché that proposed that the first world EU economy would specialise in 'services' while leaving food production to less developed economies. This strategy, seemingly being pursued without any consideration for climate/environmental impacts or real EU wide jobs impacts, is neither a smart or sustainable policy pursuit. Irish agriculture is currently delivering improved emissions and environmental impacts. Meaningful incentives/price guarantees will accelerate that delivery

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# 'NEVER DOUBT THE ABILITY OF FARMERS TO ADAPT'

**SUSAN MAHER, PRESIDENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION (ASA), WILL PASS ON THE PRESIDENTIAL REINS NEXT MONTH. BEFORE SHE DOES, **BERNIE COMMINS** CAUGHT UP WITH HER TO DISCUSS SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR, THE ASA'S UPCOMING ANNUAL CONFERENCE, AND THE FUTURE OF FARMING**

It has been 10 months (at time of interview) since Susan took over as ASA president from Niamh Bambrick – described by Susan as a trailblazer and inspiration. It has been a busy time. The good kind of busy, though. "It has been fabulous," Susan says. "It has absolutely flown by. We've had 10 events over 10 months, in addition to other initiatives for young graduates, leadership programmes, and international trips," she adds. And, of course, there is the day-to-day running of the association, which prides itself on being the representative body for graduates of agricultural science courses from across all colleges and universities. As such, it is important, she says, to make events accessible to members – events that allow them to connect and engage, and to unite from all areas of the agri-food industry. As president, she has tried to ensure that this happened on her watch.

## HIGHLIGHT

One standout moment of the year for Susan, was an event she organised at University

College Cork (UCC), which facilitated an evening of debate on the vision for agriculture in 2050 – a weighty but important topic. It featured presentations and discussions from guest speakers including Prof. Rogier Schulte from Wageningen University and Thia Hennessey, professor of agri-food economics at UCC, among others. It was an informative occasion, and a hugely important topic to contemplate, particularly now. Susan shares her thoughts on what agriculture in 2050 will look like. "It is about having a sustainable food system that can navigate the challenges around sustainability and producing enough food with fewer resources. It's about maintaining our competitiveness as an industry, and it's about being able to support our farmers, so they're at the heart of this entire discussion," she says. Of course, with challenge comes opportunity, and Susan says to never doubt the ability of the sector, particularly farmers, to adapt, and to innovate. She highlights the equal importance that should be placed on sustainability in all its forms – social,



Susan Maher, president of the Agricultural Science Association.

economic and environmental – because without them, there is no farming future.

## THE FUTURE OF FARMING

In her professional career, Susan is an agricultural development manager with Bank of Ireland. She meets the farmers of the future all the time and notes the level of professionalism they are bringing to the sector. It bodes well for the future we mentioned above. "The number of agricultural science graduates is phenomenal. For many of them, their primary role is farming, but they're doing it in a way that backs into the science. And a lot of them are early adopters of these technologies that are going to solve the problems in the sector," says Susan. Formal agri-education is beneficial in other ways: "It also means that they have a network of friends in the Department or in Teagasc, for example, so while they may be farming full-time, they are very engaged in industry and



### ADVICE FOR YOUNG FARMERS

Susan's top tips for young farmers:

- ▶ Stay engaged with the industry, and develop and use your network.
- ▶ Get involved in the ASA – if you are an agri-science graduate – there are huge learnings to be had at the ASA events held throughout the year.
- ▶ Learn more about and take part in the ASA Fellowship Programme, in partnership with FBD, which aims to recognise and promote scientific inquiry into agriculture. This year's winner will be announced at the 2025 banquet. More information is available on the website.

what the future direction is, and that helps them make the right decisions for their farms." The future farmer theme comes to mind with the recent announcement from the EU Commission in relation to the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its funding parameters. For all its controversial aspects, there are some positives to be found, particularly around additional funding supports for young farmers, according to Susan.

"That intergenerational piece is a positive," says Susan. "Ireland will be at the table with regards to negotiating the best position for the country and whatever that is, farmers will adapt. I do think there are some positives in the current proposal, there are huge question marks as to how funds will be allocated and it does pose questions for parts of the sector that are heavily reliant on it [CAP]. But I do like the idea of it focusing on that future farmer and making the sector as attractive as we can to encourage young people into farming." Susan sees intergenerational renewal at work every day in her capacity as an agricultural development manager. She feels very lucky to be in the position she is: "I am out with farmers every day, I am looking at their farm systems, I am looking at their finances, sitting at the kitchen table with them, and having that conversation with them about whatever investment is required."

Susan says there are wonderful farm-succession stories out there, and they happen when the older, established, parent farmer accepts their son or daughter into the fold early in the process. From there, these partnerships can thrive.

She continues: "There is a generation of farmers that were in a quota regime so for a lot of their farming life there was no ability to expand, but for the last 10 years, there has been great expansion, and great investment in innovation, genetics, soil health, automation around the day-to-day processes, and so on. You can see the corresponding impact that has on farm profitability. You can see the corresponding impact that has on work-life balance. It is really important that the future farmer can see that it is a job with a beginning and an end, and they can have family time at the weekend. Younger farmers are not prepared to, nor should they, work 12-hour days, seven days a week," says Susan.

### INFLUENCING STRATEGY

When it comes to backing younger farmers and devising a strategy that helps such farmers' ambitions become reality, Susan says having that personal interaction is key. "When I go out onto farms, I hear first-hand what the challenges are, and what they are doing to navigate them. That enables me, as an agri-manager, to come back into the bank and look at what we are doing to support farmers. We use the learnings from our customers to devise our future strategy and look at how we can support them, from an environmental perspective, for example, to take on new initiatives with sustainability linked funding. "Equally, with the more short-term challenges around weather and fodder, we need to be agile as a bank to move quickly to put supports in place for farmers who need cashflow quickly. Being out on the farm and being connected to farmers gives me a real link into what is happening at ground level." The ASA presidential role also links in here, she explains: "The ASA, particularly in the last 12 months, has given me a really good connection to the industry so I can see what the industry is doing and what that impact is on a day-to-day level for farmers."

### ASA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Next month, September, the ASA hosts its annual conference at the Rochestown Park Hotel in Cork. It will conclude what Susan describes as 'the highlight' of her career, as her 12-month tenure comes to an end, and ASA vice-president, Dale Crammond, takes over. The theme of the conference, which is sponsored by FBD, is around Ireland's role in global food security; it boasts an impressive line-up of speakers and panelists, and will be moderated by former RTÉ broadcaster, Damien O'Reilly, who is currently EU affairs

and communications manager with ICOS. Ireland, as we know is a significant exporter of agri-food products. According to recent statistics published by the Central Statistics Office, Irish agri-food exports reached a record value of €19.2bn in 2024. But we are a small country, so what role do we play in global food security? Susan shares her thoughts: "We are mass exporters of agri-food and drink products. Irish farmers produce sustainable premium proteins that are in huge demand around the world, and that's backed into our sustainable programmes like Origin Green. Industry and farmers play a huge role in that. That makes me very proud, and as a country, we should be very proud. But [global food security] is a complex issue, so we are bringing in some interesting speakers to look at competitiveness, food waste, and the environmental challenges."

Among the national and international speakers are: Dr Kevin Deegan, who is vice president of innovation at Valeo, the largest co-operative in Finland; Prof. Thia Hennessy from UCC; and Brendan Gleeson, secretary general of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Also in attendance will be: Jim O'Toole, CEO of Bord Bia; Roberta McDonald from Agreena; and Pat Whelan, CEO of James Whelan Butchers – he has collaborated with Munster Technical University in the launch of a butchery and gastronomy degree – who will look at sustainable food systems of the future. "The event will include a discussion on trade and will also feature a number of farmers and industry leaders who will discuss what is needed at farm level to support sustainability and generational renewal," Susan adds. "And it all leads into our black-tie banquet, which is the networking event of the year, attended by 500 industry leaders. It is a wonderful event."

The conference will be extra special for Susan, as her father, Philip, who served as ASA president in 1997-1998 will also be present. "This is a legacy that is really nice to have and one that I am very proud of," she says.

### ASA SUPPORTING CHARITIES

Susan highlighted two charity events supported by the ASA: the inaugural AgTag rugby event took place this year in aid of Embrace Farm and the Waterford Hospice; and a second event, which took place on International Women's Day, in association with Macra, was in aid of Breast Cancer Ireland.



# UNLOCKING NUTRITIONAL POTENTIAL FOR LIVESTOCK PERFORMANCE

**AT THIS POINT IN THE SEASON, MAINTAINING PEAK MILK PRODUCTION ISN'T JUST ABOUT HITTING TARGETS, IT'S A KEY INDICATOR OF COW HEALTH AND INTAKE, WRITES EDDIE PHELAN, RUMINANT COMMERCIAL MANAGER AT ALLTECH IRELAND**



Eddie Phelan, ruminant commercial manager at Alltech Ireland.

A drop in milk yield or solids often points to reduced dry matter intake (DMI), which can have knock-on effects on fertility and cause the familiar 'lull' in calving during early March. This year, a soil moisture deficit has hit grass growth hard. On top of that, high temperatures and dry conditions are pushing grass to go reproductive at lower covers. Many farms are seeing seed heads even at 1,200–1,400kg DM/ha, and are resorting to grazing lighter covers just to hold quality. Where reproductive grass is being grazed, farmers are seeing a noticeable decline in both milk volume and solids. Remember, in a spring-calving system, cows are just past peak, and any drop in yield should ideally be no more than 2 per cent per week. If you're seeing steeper declines – say from 28L to 24L over a month – that suggests a more serious issue with intake, costing up to €1,500 across a 100-cow herd.

## PICA – MORE THAN A PHOSPHORUS DEFICIENCY

As the summer rolls on, more farmers are reporting symptoms of pica – cows licking walls, plastic, or even urine. The first instinct is often to blame phosphorus deficiency, but it's important to look at the bigger picture.

► **Fibre** is a big one. Cows on lush, leafy grass often don't get enough effective fibre to ruminate properly. Rumination produces saliva, which not only helps maintain rumen pH but also recycles phosphorus back into the digestive system. Watch your cows – aim for around 60 chews per cud. If they're not chewing enough, rumen function and mineral balance could be off.

► **Sodium** is another one to keep in mind. Symptoms like urine licking can often point to a salt deficiency. Free-access salt blocks are a cheap and easy fix worth trying.





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► **Phosphorus**, of course, is still crucial, especially during drought conditions when mineral uptake from grass is reduced. Cows need around 60–70g/day, with roughly 50g typically coming from forage. Topping this up via dairy nuts is often the easiest method, though blocks and water supplements can also help. The good news is cows usually respond quickly to added phosphorus when needed.

**HEAT STRESS – HIDDEN DRAIN ON PERFORMANCE**

While Ireland doesn't experience the extreme highs of southern Europe, we are seeing more days that qualify as having heat stress conditions, where cows can no longer regulate body temperature effectively. The ideal comfort zone for a dairy cow is between 5°C and 15°C. Once temperatures and humidity rise above this, cows begin to divert energy toward cooling down, rather than producing milk. The effects can be wide-ranging; yield losses of 10-25 per

cent, reduced conception rates, suppressed immunity, and increased risks of mastitis, lameness, and poor rumen function. To combat heat stress:

- **Water is essential**  
Ensure cows have access to clean, fresh water; roughly a 7L reserve per cow and a flow rate of 0.15L/minute.
- **Shade and airflow help**  
Avoid long periods of standing on yards. Some farmers hose yards before milking or install sprinklers but avoid prolonged misting, as it increases humidity. Let cows dry off between sprays.
- **Feeding strategy matters**  
Offer fresh grass during cooler evening hours to boost intake. Use high-energy, high-quality concentrates and consider slower-release starches like maize meal to support rumen health. Watch for changes in manure. It's often the first sign of rumen upset.
- **Minerals matter more in heat**  
Supplement with electrolytes and ensure

mineral balance is maintained, particularly as intake falls during hot spells. Bioplex and Sel-plex are organic forms of copper, zinc, manganese and sel-plex and are proven to impact herd performance when heat stress may be prevalent.

**PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**

As we face into the second half of the grazing season, challenges like grass quality, mineral balance and heat stress demand extra attention. The good news? These are all areas where smart nutrition and management can make a real difference both to cow health and farm returns.

**VISIT ALLTECH AT THE 2025 TULLAMORE SHOW**  
Alltech will be in attendance at the Tullamore Show on Sunday, August 10. The company invites you to visit the Alltech stand where it will showcase the latest in nutritional technologies aimed at improving animal performance and overall farm profitability. The team will be joined by representatives from Keenan, along with a machine from the impressive Keenan MechFiber+ range. Whether you're curious about precision feeding, ration quality or cow health, there will be something to suit your system.

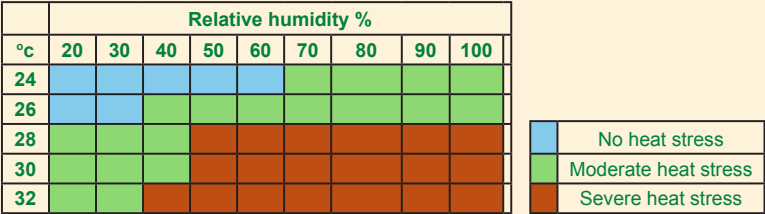


Figure 1: Humidity and heat stress. Source: Alltech.





# FOCUS

AGTECH



FOR THE FIRST TIME, IRISH TILLAGE FARMERS WILL BE ABLE TO CALCULATE THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF THEIR CROPS WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF A TILLAGE FEATURE ON THE AgNav PLATFORM. **BERNIE COMMINS** CHATS TO DR SIOBHÁN JORDAN, WHO HEADS UP TEAGASC'S TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER OFFICE, TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT AND WHY IT IS A GAME-CHANGER FOR IRISH TILLAGE FARMERS

# GAME-CHANGING TECH FOR TILLAGE

From the start of this month, all tillage farmers in Ireland can calculate the carbon footprint of their farms using a life cycle assessment (LCA) model that is specifically tailored for tillage. An LCA model looks at the inputs, outputs and potential environmental impacts associated with a product, service or organisation throughout its life cycle, according to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Prior to this, Irish tillage farmers could only use international figures, and although it is early days, it appears that our Irish tillage footprint is tidy – and that's official. Collaborating with Tirlán, Teagasc has developed an LCA model to evaluate the carbon footprint of native grains from cradle to farm-gate, with the scope of the model extending from the acquisition of raw materials right through to harvesting. This was made possible with the help of 48 large-scale farmer suppliers of Tirlán located in the southeast, east and midlands of

## AGNAV – A REMINDER

Bord Bia, Teagasc and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF), with the support of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine are collaborating in AgNav, which is an online sustainability platform accessible to farmers and advisors. AgNav utilises the three agencies' collective knowledge, data, support tools and other resources, to enable delivery of climate targets for the agri-sector. It was launched in 2023 and has been catering for beef and dairy sectors since then.

Ireland. These farmers participated in a pilot study where they shared, with Teagasc, their harvest data. This included crop type, variety, area, seeding rate, rotation, yield, moisture content, drying method, and storage period. In addition, they provided information on straw chopping, incorporation, and removal, and included cover crop planting rates and destruction methods. Soil information was also captured including topsoil texture, pH, nutrient indexes and cultivation techniques, for example plough-based, minimum tillage and direct drill. Types and amounts of

fertilisers and organic manures applied were also recorded, as well as liming rates and the number of tractor passes of fertilisers and crop protectants. Precision farming, biodiversity, and recorded grain and straw incomes were also provided. Quite a few crop varieties were included such as winter wheat, winter barley, spring malting barley, winter oats, winter oilseed rape and spring feed barley, and the totality of land included in the pilot was 11,500 hectares, which is about 3.3 per cent of our national tillage area. In brief, the pilot showed that the





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carbon footprints of large-scale Tirlán grain growers were low by international standards. The participation of these farmers was key, Siobhán explains, to incorporating a uniquely Irish LCA model for tillage to AgNav: "It enabled us to design the best model [for AgNav], helping us refine what exact data points really contributed to the baseline number. Because it's always important – when you are collecting primary data – that you're asking for the most important data numbers rather than the nice-to-have [numbers]." The LCA model utilises national information on agricultural emissions and carbon capture and retention – sequestration – to determine carbon footprint as kilogrammes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per tonne (CO<sub>2</sub>-e/t) of grain produced. The methodology, Siobhán says, is ISO compatible and progressing towards Carbon Trust certification: "From a worldwide perspective or European perspective, it shows that this model has huge credibility, that it has been peer reviewed and published as research, but equally that it is of a really good standard."

**Based on the latest global statistics, primary production of grain crops is worth over €1.2 trillion to the world economy. In Ireland, crop production contributes about €1.3bn per annum to the economy, supports 11,000 jobs and ranks as the third- or fourth-largest agricultural subsector in terms of goods output at basic prices. Source: A life cycle assessment model of Irish grain cropping systems focused on carbon footprint published in the *Irish Journal of Agricultural and Food Research*.**

### SUSTAINABLE SECTOR

Recently, the Irish Grain Growers (IGG) published its 2026 budget submission. In it, it referenced the tillage sector's carbon footprint, stating: "A recently conducted LCA for Irish grain on a wide range of commercially grown Irish cereals has confirmed that Irish-grown crops are among the most carbon efficient in the world. For Irish oats, this was confirmed to be at 207kg CO<sub>2</sub>-e/t compared with 1,000kg CO<sub>2</sub>-e/t for

countries like Italy and Spain." But, the IGG pointed out, tillage farmers are not properly rewarded for the sustainable farming practices that are commonplace on tillage farms. Can AgNav address and rectify this? Siobhán explains: "Yes. Farmers [tillage] have long suspected that their products have a very low carbon footprint, but up to now international default emission factors have only been available.

"So what's unique about this is we now have Irish-based emission factors, and early results are absolutely showing that they are low in comparison to the international supply. I think the addition of tillage to AgNav will really showcase our environmental credentials internationally and contribute to the national climate goals.

"But also I hope that it will really spur on feed manufacturers to consider using Irish grain and question why they are not, rather than using imports. And, I think there should probably be a little pressure put on feed compounders regarding formulations, to ask the question, why are they not using Irish grain given the sustainability credentials of it."

Already there is strong interest in AgNav from tillage farmers, according to Siobhán: "That was evidenced at Teagasc's crops and technology open day. We really saw a lot of farmers interested in how this will work and when will they be able to input their data." Farmers have been able to input data from August 1, coinciding with harvest time.

### AGNAV FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

While ambitions remain to further develop AgNav, Siobhán says that what has been achieved so far is hugely positive: "If we look at the EU's Vision for Agriculture that was launched earlier this year, they talk about voluntary on-farm sustainability compasses and that is exactly what AgNav is, but we have almost leaped ahead of what is a vision for agriculture in Europe to what is actually being done in Ireland." But, while there is a lot done, there is more to do, as Siobhán explains: "We have a sheep model developed but we need to do a co-design with farmers and get that



## THE PILOT SHOWED THAT THE CARBON FOOTPRINTS OF LARGE-SCALE TIRLÁN GRAIN GROWERS WERE LOW BY INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

moving to the software stage. By the time we do the pilot with the farmers, it's probably going to be quarter one of next year." Then, there will be LCA models developed for the pig and poultry sectors and further down the line, biodiversity, and above- and below-ground carbon calculations will be included. Siobhán adds: "Alongside all that, we will also have new forecaster features and general updates every year to the beef and dairy systems, and the tillage model."

### VOLUNTARY VERSUS COMPULSORY

Currently, AgNav is being rolled out by Teagasc via its Signpost Advisory programme, and more widely via processor sustainability schemes. So far, more than 16,500 dairy and beef farmers have voluntarily partaken in AgNav.

The voluntary nature of the programme is a positive thing, according to Siobhán. The carrot works better than the stick, she says. "I think the carrot here is in helping farmers and getting them to think about their agricultural practices. It is about education and understanding why they are doing these things. I think that comes through better when it is utilised voluntarily. If you use a stick approach, will all that get lost in a scheme, will practices change long-term?" Siobhán says that other countries look enviously at Ireland's AgNav platform. The ICBF's centralised breeding database has been hugely valuable to AgNav as it already amassed so much important breeding and genetic information. Such a repository does not exist elsewhere, says Siobhán. "That is what has given us the leapfrog here," she says.





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# AN AMBITIOUS CIRCLE: FROM POLLUTION TO SOLUTION

ALLTECH IS INVOLVED IN A COLLABORATION TO ADDRESS PHOSPHORUS RUN-OFF INTO LOUGH NEAGH WHILE TRANSFORMING AN AGRICULTURAL WASTE PRODUCT INTO VALUABLE RESOURCES. DR PATRICK WARD FROM ALLTECH SHARES THE DETAILS WITH **BERNIE COMMINS** AND EXPLAINS HOW THE PROJECT AIMS TO BENEFIT THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

**Slurry separation is not a new concept, and the process of separating the liquid and solid fractions has multiple benefits.**

The liquid goes back into the slurry tank, which now has more space without the heavy particles. The mixing and spreading of that liquid is easier, particularly when using low emission slurry spreading kit. It also retains the good nutrients required to feed the soil when spread. The separated solids that are removed contain high levels of phosphorus, a problematic agricultural run-off nutrient.

## LOUGH NEAGH

In Northern Ireland (NI), agricultural run-off has contributed to an ecological disaster with the extensive pollution of Lough Neagh, which supplies more than 40 per cent of Northern Ireland's drinking water. The lake has a surface area of 392km<sup>2</sup>, is approximately 31km long and 14km wide. According to a report published last year titled, *The Lough Neagh Report: Blue Green Algae and Water Quality in Northern Ireland*, 'Lough Neagh is NI's most important natural resource and is of huge economic significance for those who depend on it for drinking water, its fishing and eel industries.' Lough Neagh's agricultural pollutants have co-offenders in the form of human

sewage and wastewater treatment works but agriculture is the biggest contributor. In 2023, toxic blue green algae was detected at Lough Neagh, and the problem persists today. Eel fishing is currently prohibited there for the rest of this year.

It that same report mentioned earlier, directly NI's agriculture minister, Andrew Muir, described Lough Neagh as an example of 'a collective failure to deal with the environmental challenges' faced in Northern Ireland. And, he added that 'regulatory and policy frameworks have failed to adequately protect water quality, the Lough Neagh ecosystem and wider environment'. In an effort to address this, a 37-point action plan was devised, one of which involved the launch of a small business research initiative (SBRI) project by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). This aimed to improve the 'sustainable utilisation of slurry' (SULS) and remove excess phosphorus from the environment.


## COLLABORATION

Cue the Mid-Ulster Biorefinery and Circular Economy Cluster, a collaboration between various companies and organisations in NI to, ultimately, construct a 10-megawatt

biomethane facility in the region. The starting – and most important – point on this journey is Lough Neagh and ensuring that phosphorous run-off is stopped. Along the journey are important stages such as: separating the slurry that is causing the run-off, removing the phosphorous-rich solids, using this to feed an anaerobic digester to produce biomethane, pyrolysing (heating to a very high temperature) the digestate (byproduct of biomethane production), and creating greener construction products such as bricks and paving slabs from this.

**The Mid-Ulster Biorefinery and Circular Economy Cluster is comprised of Cemcor (construction materials supplier), Road Safety Contracts (waste management and environmental maintenance company), Tobermore (paving and walling system manufacturers), and Alltech (global animal nutrition and health company). The Centre for Competitiveness (C for C) was awarded £4m to lead these companies in establishing the sustainable utilisation of slurry programme (SULS), part of the Lough Neagh action plan. A focus of this involves funding nutrient separation equipment that will separate slurry on farms, producing a material that is high in phosphorus, to be used as a feedstock for anaerobic digestion (AD) to produce renewable biogas.**





## THERE'S ENOUGH WASTE MATERIAL FROM PIG SLURRY, CATTLE SLURRY, EVEN POULTRY MANURE, TO GO INTO A DIGESTER IN THAT MID-ULSTER AREA. AND OUR FOCUS IS TO OPTIMISE THAT

An aerial shot of Lough Neagh, Co. Antrim.

The SBRI-sponsored project carried out by this Mid Ulster Biorefinery and Circular Economy Cluster is at the pilot stage of separating the slurry on farm. A custom-built separator led by Dr James Young, C for C project technical lead, and fabricated by Vogelsang, has recently been acquired for the purpose. The separated solids then undergo analysis and this is where Alltech comes in. Patrick explains: "We are obviously an agricultural company with a strong history of biotechnology and analytical chemistry. We bring a lot of the experience that we have in science to the agriculture industry." He continues: "So, regarding the slurry, what we're trying to do on the analytical side and biotech side is see how much we can improve the separation – via enzymatic or chemical or mechanical process – to extract even more of the phosphorus [from the liquid]. Typically, you can have 60 per cent

[phosphorus] in the solid fraction, and 40 per cent in the liquid fraction. We're trying to increase that [solid percentage]."

A number of farms are involved in the pilot and Patrick explains how it works: "The liquid fraction stays with the farmer. It's still rich in nitrogen and potassium and it has some other nutrients and minerals, and it will still have some phosphorus – that's not all removed," he explains. Samples are then analysed at Alltech's European Bioscience Centre in Dunboyne, and tested for dry matter, volatile solids, and total phosphorus, for example. Samples are simultaneously analysed at Queen's University Belfast. The Dunboyne facility has a biochemical methane potential laboratory, so scientists there are also investigating how to optimise the anaerobic digestion process. Patrick explains: "This involves us taking the separated solid, putting it under anaerobic conditions – whatever

conditions we think would be best for the anaerobic digester that we are aiming to set up, or for people who are taking the material – and we're able to quantify the amount of methane that is produced from samples. So then we can build that into our business model of how we're going to optimise the digester based on the separate slurry solids."

### POSITIVE MESSAGE

This is a positive story about turning a waste product into a wanted product. "The project, so far, has not been about utilising any crop-based material," explains Patrick. "So we're not going to be utilising grass for it. There's enough waste material from pig slurry, cattle slurry, even poultry manure, to go into a digester in that mid-Ulster area. And our focus is to optimise that," he says.

### FUTURE PLANS

While a feasibility study has been carried out with KPMG, the success of this project is dependent on separating even more solids from the slurry. Patrick explains: "We are at the early stages because we are still trying to optimise this feedstock and if we can improve it by 10-20 per cent, it will make a big difference to how we decide to proceed." Crisis breeds opportunity. That is what Alltech founder, Dr Pearse Lyons used to say, Patrick recalls. "This is a crisis. But we have tools now to solve that crisis. It's an opportunity to utilise these agricultural byproducts and waste streams as a power source, not just to generate clean energy for Northern Ireland, but also to remove as much phosphorus as we can from waterways and land."



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# SMART COMPANIES, SMART FARMING

IRELAND'S AGRICULTURAL SECTOR HAS ALWAYS ENCOUNTERED CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES BUT FROM THESE, INNOVATION THRIVES AND PROBLEMS GET SOLVED. IN THIS CONTEXT, WE HAVE A GROWING AGRI-TECH SECTOR TO BE PROUD OF THAT IS OFFERING SMART FARMING SOLUTIONS THAT ARE ENHANCING CROP CULTIVATION, ANIMAL HEALTH, AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES. **BERNIE COMMINS** OUTLINES JUST SOME OF WHAT OUR BEST AND BRIGHTEST ARE OFFERING, THE AWARDS THEY ARE WINNING, AND THE PROBLEMS THEY ARE SOLVING



Moonsyst co-founders Desmond Savage and Peter Gesler.

## MOONSYST

**Moonsyst was founded in 2020 by Desmond Savage and Peter Gesler. The dynamic duo initially developed what is referred to as an ingestible 'Fitbit' for cows; a smart rumen-monitoring solution.**

Information gathered from the animal's rumen helps farmers to accurately detect heats, monitor health conditions, and ultimately, improve productivity. It is supported by cloud-based Internet of Things (IoT) software that can be accessed on a phone and/or PC, anywhere, and at any time.

The company's most recent product is a bolus for calves and other small ruminants such as sheep, goats, and deer. It measures rumination and pH in the rumen, which provide an indication of rumen function and how well the animals are responding to the feed provided. Last year was a rewarding and award-winning year for the livestock-monitoring-technology

company. Following completion of the third AgTechUCD Agccelerator Programme, Moonsyst was named the AIB and Yield Lab AgTech Start-up 2024, receiving a €10,000 prize fund. Also in 2024, it won two awards at the AXA Insurance National Dairy Show: the Technology Innovation and Sustainability Innovation awards for its calf bolus product. And, at Agromek 2024, the calf bolus product received prestigious 'Star' recognition.

According to a 2018 paper published by Teagasc researchers, 'feed intake behaviour' is one of the best indicators of health and welfare of dairy cows. A healthy rumen makes for a happy cow, as Moonsyst puts it, and its bolus technology can help to identify early onset of respiratory issues, mastitis, milk fever, metritis and lameness.

Enterprise Ireland says it supports an agri-tech sector that employs about 5,000 people and generates sales of around €1.6bn annually, with exports exceeding €1bn.

## AGNAV - NEW TILLAGE FEATURE

The recent addition of a tillage feature to the AgNav platform is a game-changer for Irish tillage farmers because for the first time ever, they can get an accurate carbon footprint for their tillage enterprises. AgNav has been in place for two years already for the livestock sector, helping farmers create customised farm sustainability action plans that can help to reduce emissions, improve water quality, and enhance farmland biodiversity. Now it can provide a lifecycle assessment (LCA) of the carbon footprint of every Irish tillage farm (CO<sub>2</sub> eq/kg grain). This is based on Teagasc research from Johnstown Castle and Oakpark initially but, as it is taken up by tillage farmers, more and more localised information will be peer reviewed and added so the AgNav tillage tool will improve over time. While tillage carbon footprinting tools exist across Europe, they rely on local research data and while they are accurate, they are based on different specifications. AgNav, however, is uniquely Irish and is live since the start of August.

*You can read more about AgNav tillage on pages 22 and 23 where Bernie Commins interviews Dr Siobhán Jordan, Teagasc's head of technology transfer and commercialisation.*



### AGNAV'S ACCOLADES

Last month, AgNav was awarded Sustainability Initiative of the Year at the Grocer Gold Awards in London, UK, beating six other finalists in the sustainable products and services category. This marks AgNav's second UK award this year. In June, it won the Sustainability Award at the British Culinary Federation Awards.

Developed through a partnership between Bord Bia, Teagasc, and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF), AgNav is a free, easy-to-use online tool designed specifically for Irish farmers. It provides reliable, science-based insights to support farmers' environmental and economic goals. Using AgNav, farmers can create customised farm sustainability action plans helping to reduce emissions, improve water quality, and enhance farmland biodiversity.



Pictured at the Grocer Gold Awards in London: host, Naga Munchetty with Dr Siobhán Jordan, Teagasc; Edel McEvoy, Bord Bia; Natasha Browne, Teagasc; Mick Houlihan, Bord Bia; Chris Tyas, chair, GS1 UK, award sponsors (all in front); Seán Deane, Bord Bia; Adam Leyland, editor in chief, The Grocer (back).



Mary B Dunphy, FBD Insurance; Gary Ryan, director, AgTechUCD; and Marion Cantillon, PitSeal.

### PITSEAL

Another company deserving of recognition on completion of the 2024 AgTechUCD Agccelerator Programme was PitSeal, which was named the FBD AgTech One to Watch 2024. PitSeal is an award-winning company founded by Marion Cantillon, who is a PhD Walsh Scholar at Teagasc and University College Cork. She has invented an incredible eco-friendly, biofilm spray for pit silage that eliminates the need for plastic covering. The product reduces plastic waste as well as greenhouse gas emissions as it can be later eaten by livestock. Eaten by livestock, you ask? Well, yes, the product is comprised of unique strains of seaweed and nutrients – these form the airtight, water-repellent seal – and it can be eaten later as part of animals' winter feed. A side effect of the product is farmer safety because the requirement to get up onto the pit after it has been covered by plastic to weigh it down is no longer there.

PitSeal's innovation has been making waves for Marion who featured in the *Sunday Business Post*'s '30 Under 30' in 2023, which celebrated the best tech minds in the country. Marion and PitSeal were winners of the Innovation & Technology category in Visa's 2023 She's Next Grant Programme. The company won gold in the National Start-up Awards in the sustainability-focused category, and at the end of 2024, Marion was awarded the Global Excellence in Agriculture - Outstanding Young Agri-Entrepreneur Award at the AgriNext Conference.



The Herdwatch team pictured at the opening of their brand-new headquarters in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary.

### HERDWATCH – HERDI

Multi-award-winning Herdwatch is no stranger to the agricultural world. Launched in 2012, it introduced in 2014 the first iteration of its mobile livestock management app – the first of its kind at the time. It allowed farmers to record their compliance requirements 'on the go', with a cloud-based system that also functions fully offline. In 2020, it was back with version two, Herdwatch NextGen, the result of two years of R&D and a €1m

investment. Last year, it celebrated its tenth anniversary with more than 22,000 producers worldwide using its platform which encompasses cattle, dairy, sheep and pasture-management solutions. The company recently unveiled the Herdwatch Enterprise Suite which connects and digitises the agri-food supply chain providing antimicrobial oversight, sustainability insights, AI-powered predictive analytics and is QA scheme compatible.

It also recently revealed details of its new AI assistant, Herdi. This facilitates farmers being able to speak into the app on their phones and record important info and updates making the gathering and inputting of information even more convenient. The company also recently opened its new state-of-the-art global headquarters in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, which will be focused on innovation and will support the company's growth and expansion plans, it says.





**Stephen Fagan receiving a Special Commendation at the RDS Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Development Awards on behalf of Micron Agritech.**

#### MICRON AGRITECH

In 2022, Micron Agritech won the Best Overall Start-up

Award at the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Arena at the National Ploughing Championships for its product that provides rapid on-site parasite testing for grazing animals. The company's rapid liver fluke test allows farmers to easily test livestock for liver fluke on-site through its Micron Kit app, with results delivered in minutes using AI analysis. Infections in livestock by liver fluke are a major economic problem for farmers, reducing yield and leading to significant treatment costs, as well as representing a serious animal-welfare issue, so Micron Agritech's innovation provides an efficient, reliable solution to this issue. Recently,

Micron Agritech has introduced new offerings; Micron Analytics and Predictive Animal Welfare System (PAWS). The former, the company says, will revolutionise how vets, animal health professionals, and animal owners track and manage patient health.

It allows users to monitor test results, track trends and make data-driven decisions for better animal-health management. The latter allows the user to stay ahead of disease outbreaks and the first phase of this is the nematodirus forecasting system, which has an interactive map that shows real-time risk levels across different regions. Last year, Micron Agritech was included as part of Think Business's top-100 list of hot young Irish start-up companies to watch in 2025. Earlier this year, the company received a special commendation at the RDS Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Development Awards under the Sustainable Rural Innovation category. And it is understood that a partnership is underway with veterinary pharmaceutical company, Dopharma.

#### INNOVATION STANDOUTS

##### ► SAMCO MANUFACTURING LTD

Next month, the annual National Ploughing Championships take place and will once again feature the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Arena and awards. Each year, the arena showcases the brightest and best agri-innovators and in 2024 the top award went to Samco Manufacturing Ltd for its new application system and mulch film designed for earlier planting and growth of potatoes. This was the result of being approached by Italian potato growers who had learned about Samco's maize-growing film. With the new mulch film, the potato plant establishes an earlier growth pattern due to the microclimate generated by the film covering the surface above the plant. This will ultimately enable earlier harvesting and entry to the market where growers will have a greater price premium.

The Enterprise Ireland Innovation Arena Champion Award goes to already established companies with a focus on scaling and innovation. Samco was established in 1997, designing and manufacturing the Samco three-in-one machine which sows seed, sprays the soil with pre-emergence herbicide, and lays a thin layer of degradable mulch film over the seed bed. Samco's system has typically been used to grow maize, corn, sunflowers, sorghum, soya, beet, rice and many types of vegetables.



##### REAP INTERACTIVE

Another company that was successful in 2024 at the Innovation Arena awards is Reap Interactive, which was named Start-Up Innovator of the Year, receiving a €10,000 prize fund. Its BovinePlus product uses AI and image analysis to provide real-time data on weight, health, and water intake. It offers insights which it says can boost profitability and efficiencies, and support sustainable livestock management. It tracks each animal individually, eliminating reliance on herd averages. Reap Interactive was founded on 2015 by CEO, Kieran Supple.

##### SPECIAL MENTION: EVOGEN

In 2024, Evogen won the One to Watch Award at the end of the third New Frontiers Programme delivered by IADT Media Cube in partnership with NovaUCD. It aims to help dairy farmers to maximise profits through smarter genetic selection. It uses advanced data analytics and AI to analyse farm-specific environmental factors to take the guesswork out of breeding decisions.





ALISE CALLAGHAN BVSC MRCVS, RUMINANT VETERINARY AREA MANAGER  
MSD ANIMAL HEALTH DISCUSSES THE MAIN CAUSES OF ABORTION IN SHEEP,  
AND THE BEST WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR FLOCK INTO THE FUTURE



# CONTROLLING ABORTION: PLAN NOW TO PROTECT YOUR FLOCK

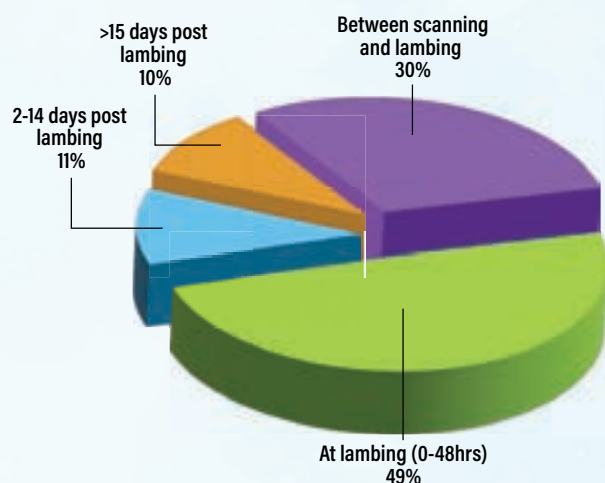
The number of lambs weaned per ewe is a critical performance indicator for sheep flocks. The industry aim by 2027 is a target of 1.55 lambs weaned per ewe for mid-season lowland flocks in Ireland. Understanding the factors that influence this metric is essential for farmers striving for

success. One significant contributor to lamb loss is the control of abortion, as up to 30 per cent of lamb losses can occur between scanning and lambing (see below image). Infectious causes of abortion are responsible for a large proportion of these losses, with data from regional veterinary laboratories

showing that the primary infectious agents are *Chlamydomphila abortus* (causing enzootic abortion of ewes [EAE]) at 22.2 per cent and *Toxoplasma gondii* (causing toxoplasmosis) at 21.4 per cent of all samples submitted. Other common infectious causes include *Campylobacter* spp., *Listeria* spp. and *Salmonella* spp.

While abortion storms are easily identified with losses of up to 30 per cent in some cases, any abortions above a level of 2 per cent within a flock should be investigated. Accurate diagnosis is crucial in future control of abortion within a flock. Submitting freshly aborted foetii along with placentae to the local veterinary laboratory will give the best chance of an accurate diagnosis. Further to this, barren rates exceeding 2 per cent within a flock also warrant investigation. There are several reasons for a high empty rate, with toxoplasmosis being one major cause. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain accurate records and identify barren ewes, as well as those that have previously aborted, to effectively monitor flock performance and direct an investigation.

When lamb losses occur (% of total losses)



**REMEMBER**

Discussing diagnosis and control measures with your vet can help avoid unnecessary pitfalls during this breeding season and subsequent lambing time.

**ENZOOTIC ABORTION OF EWES**

Enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE) is caused by the bacteria *C. abortus*. The disease usually enters a naïve flock through the purchase of infected replacements, and to a lesser degree wildlife may be implicated in the spread of infected material between flocks. Transmission is ewe to ewe and occurs through the ingestion or inhalation of the bacteria from infected lambs, placentas, and vaginal secretions following abortion. Aborted ewes will shed the bacteria for up to two weeks post-lambing. Lambs can also be born already infected from ewes carrying the disease. For this reason, it is imperative that any aborted ewes are immediately isolated from the rest of the flock and any aborted materials and contaminated bedding are removed and destroyed. Ewes which are infected in one lambing season will often abort the following season. After infection the bacteria lies dormant (latent infection) until the next pregnancy triggers reactivation leading to the invasion of the placenta, resulting in foetal death, abortion, or the birth of weak live lambs. Abortions tend to occur in the final three weeks prior to lambing time. Although rarely reported, abortions can occur during the same pregnancy if infection occurs more than six weeks pre-lambing. In naïve flocks abortion storms due to EAE may affect up to 30 per cent of the flock. If faced with an outbreak control measures should be discussed with your vet. During an active outbreak of EAE, treatment with long-acting antibiotics may lessen the severity of the infection. It is important to note however, that antibiotic treatment does not reduce shedding, does not confer immunity, and therefore does not aid in future years. Maintaining a closed flock will help reduce the risk of EAE. If this is not possible,

sourcing replacements from known EAE-free flocks is recommended. When purchasing replacements from unknown sources you may be purchasing latently infected animals (there is currently no test available to identify these animals). Vaccination is the only sustainable long-term control strategy for EAE. It has been shown to reduce abortion caused by *C. abortus* and provide immunity for at least three years. In any infected flock, a proportion of ewes may already be latently infected and may abort at subsequent lambings. Vaccination has also been shown to reduce the number of abortions in these ewes. Vaccination should take place at least four weeks pre-breeding. It is advised to vaccinate the entire female breeding flock in the first year. Thereafter, vaccinate all replacements, regardless of source.

**TOXOPLASMOSIS**

Toxoplasmosis is caused by the protozoan parasite *T. gondii*. The rodent population act as a reservoir of infection for this disease. Cats then feed on infected rodents and go on to shed *T. gondii* oocysts (eggs) in their faeces. One cat can shed enough oocysts to infect thousands of ewes. Infected cats will continue to shed for one to three weeks following primary infection, after which time they develop immunity and are much less likely to be of concern. The oocysts are very resilient and can survive for long periods in feed or on pasture. Ewes become infected by ingesting oocysts from contaminated feed/bedding. Once a ewe has been infected, she soon becomes immune and is unlikely to show signs of the disease in subsequent years. It is only when infection is picked up during pregnancy that problems occur. The outcome of infection depends on the stage of pregnancy when infected. Abortion storms can occur if previously naïve flocks become exposed during pregnancy. The true loss due to toxoplasmosis is hard to determine due to its role in early embryonic death and barren ewes often going undetected. Feeding a coccidiostat may be of benefit in controlling toxoplasmosis but, as the disease can strike at any time, in-feed medication would need to be administered throughout the last two-thirds of pregnancy

and therefore is financially and practically prohibitive.

Control measures include controlling the rodent population, having rodent proof feed stores and neutering farm cats. These control measures can help reduce the challenge on farm, however the only long-term effective strategy to control toxoplasmosis is to vaccinate. Vaccination at least three weeks pre-breeding provides immunity; reducing the effects of infection, namely early embryonic death, barrenness, and abortion caused by *T. gondii*. Natural exposure to the parasite typically enhances flock immunity, however in flocks with very high challenge revaccination may be warranted after two years. The entire female breeding flock should be vaccinated the first year, thereafter vaccinate all replacements as they enter the flock.

**ZOONOTIC**

Both *C. abortus* and *T. gondii*, along with other infectious causes of abortion are zoonotic. They pose significant risks to pregnant women and individuals with compromised immune systems. Every precaution should be taken during lambing season to minimise the risk of transmission to personnel. Pregnant women should also avoid handling or administering vaccines for EAE and toxoplasmosis.

Infectious agents responsible for ovine abortion significantly affect the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of sheep flocks. Timely diagnosis and integration of control strategies into flock health management are essential. Strict hygiene and biosecurity measures are crucial to help control infectious abortion within a flock. Vaccines are available for the two primary infectious causes of abortion in sheep and should be considered when formulating flock health plans. Vaccination protocols and control plans should be discussed with your vet now, ahead of breeding season to ensure the best possible outcome next lambing season.





By Matt Ryan

This month, I am sharing some important messages from Teagasc Moorepark's recent dairy open day titled, *Innovating for the Future*.

## OVERVIEW

- » Since 2015, milk output has grown by 96% but there are challenges:
  - Environmental policies.
  - System creep, that is, unintended slippage of the core principles of an efficient dairy farm.
  - Variable pasture production.
  - Increased reliance on meal supplementation.
  - Labour shortages – due to full employment across the economy.
  - Ongoing uncertainty in policy and trade conditions.
- » Table 1 identifies where we are on the key performance indicators (KPIs) and the future targets. Advisory efforts are helping to deliver these – many farmers are proving that they are achievable.

Table 1: Key performance indicator targets for future dairy farming in Ireland.

	Key performance indicators	2023	Future target
Farm systems	1. Stocking Rate (L/ha)	2.13	2.53
	2. Net Margin at 35c/l (€/kg MS)	€0.06	€1.97
	3. Net margin at 35c/l (€/ha)	€57	€2,480
Breeding and animal health	1. Six-week calving rate (%)	68%	90%
	2. Sexed semen (% of all dairy AI semen)	34%	100%
	3. CBV of non-replacement dairy calves	€45	€200
	4. SCC (,000cells/ml)	172	<120
Forage and meal	1. Pasture utilised (tonnes DM/ha)	8.0	12
	2. Home grown forage in cows' diet (%)	78%	>90%
	3. Meal/cow (kg)	1,216 kg	<500kg
	4. Meal crude protein (%)	16.7%	13%
Environmental sustainability	1. GHG emissions (kg CO <sub>2</sub> -e/kg FPCM)	0.88	0.63
	2. Biodiversity (% habitat on farm)	7%	>10%
	3. Nitrogen surplus (kg N/ha)	147	100
Social sustainability	1. Hours worked/cow/year	40	16
	2. Farm hours worked/week Feb-June	61	<28

- » Input costs are a huge issue – in 2024 they were up 35% on 2020 figures.
  - Meal feeding levels rose 50% from 2020 to 2024.
  - Remember, silage and meal are three and four times, respectively, more expensive than grazed grass.
- » Environment:
  - Environmental standards are measured under the following headings:
    - Greenhouse gas (GHG) and ammonia emissions**
      - Reduce GHG emissions by 25% from 2018 to 2030.
      - Take a bow! Irish GHGs are down 4.1% from 2018 because farmers are adopting the advised practices.
      - Irish ammonia emissions continue to decline and are near EU compliance targets.
    - Water quality**
      - We have to work harder to achieve more improvement.
      - Biodiversity
      - This will have to be more than 10% of the farm.

## » Costs

- From 2021 to 2024 costs/litre have gone up from 26.8c to 38.2c; a massive 43% increase.
- What if – and it is possible in this uncertain political world – milk price decreased to 30c/L?
- Variable costs are over 52% of the total, driven by:
  - A huge increase in meal usage.
  - Meal usage increased from 945kg in 2014 (this was high then!) to 1,216kg in 2023.
  - 'Concentrate usage on Irish dairy farms is largely independent of SR' – digest that research statement!
  - Marginal milk (profit) results in high-milk-price years when farmers focus on yield (kg MS/cow) instead of profitable inputs.
  - Imagine, meal costs are nearly 40% of on-farm variable costs and nearly 29% of overall costs!
- Fertiliser cost, are driven by the market.
- Breeding costs have increased because of the extensive use of sexed semen.
- » Fixed costs have increased because of political turmoil, increased depreciation due to more investment in buildings and machinery – the latter always results when milk price is good.

## MAKE DAIRY FARMS ATTRACTIVE WORKPLACES!

- » We must ensure that dairy farms are great places to work.
  - With increased herd size (now it is approx. 100 cows/farm) comes the need to make our farms attractive workplaces:
    - Nearly 1,000 Leaving Cert agricultural students were interviewed as to what was important in their future job choice:
      - 77% said pay/income.
      - 68% listed job satisfaction.
      - 64% working hours/time off.
    - Dairy farmers must do everything to provide these standards and they are all achievable.
  - Farmers are working 61 hrs/week (Feb-June period) while the target is 48hrs (achieved by many).
    - Finishing time by dairy farmers averages 19.08 (target should be 18.00).
    - Farmers take 19 days off per year, the top 25% farmers take 33 days while the research target is 60 days/year.
    - Are these statistics good enough to attract young people into dairy farming?
  - How can we get nearer the research figure?
    - Adjust milking times:
      - 10:8-hour (start milkings at 7am and 3pm) milking interval.
      - Once-a-day (OAD) milking in spring until more than 50% of cows calved, and again in autumn or when some cows are thin.
      - Do 10 milkings per week and take a two-week annual holiday.
      - Get a relief milker to allow you have one to two days per week off – transition-year students will be 'mad for' this work.
      - Any of these options do not result in economic loss.
    - Employ staff full-time if you are working outside the hours specified above:
      - Someone, recently, said that farmers prefer to forego high profits which could be used to employ staff, by excessive investment in meal and machinery which they or family members have to drive.
      - A proactive approach to acquiring staff should be

undertaken.

- Contractors must be used on a regular basis to guarantee constant availability.
  - Contract-rear all calves.
  - Get or share with a neighbour, a night-time calver.
  - Get someone suitable locally to rear calves.
  - Use vets to dehorn calves.
  - Use contractors to make all silage, spread all slurry, spread most of the fertiliser, do some or all winter feeding. This will reduce the need for expensive machinery and will save on on-farm labour.
- Put a labour-saving system in place to record financial transactions, calf registrations, and essential paperwork.
- Decide to run a 'simple system' of dairy farming:
  - Challenge yourself to achieve this by going away for a few days with no phone, leaving your family to run the system. On coming back, take their advice on what you now must do to simplify things.
- Automation technologies must be adopted; consider the following:
  - Automatic cluster removers, automatic machine wash, automatic yard scrapers, automatic gap release on paddocks, automatic heat detection, various phone Apps, soiled water sprinklers, etc.
- Develop farm management skillset for your future:

**Self-care:**

- Rest, nutrition, exercise, time off, do regular health checks.
- Have contingency plans in place in case of injury for both short and long term.
- Over 23% and 50% of dairy farmers have recorded 'burn-out' and sleep issues, respectively.
- 25% of dairy farmers have not taken a holiday in three years; this is shocking!
- Studies have shown that the main causes of 'burn-out' are heavy workload, using outdated and laboursome work practices.

**Time management:**

- Set a start and finish to your day – set a good example.
- Use a whiteboard for your to-do list.
- Prioritise jobs and activities.
- Organise weekly farm staff meetings.
- Organise time off to match industry standards, including a full two-week holiday.

**Have a networking routine for:**

- Team and family communications.
- Discussion group participation.
- Local community activities.

**Grassland:**

- Measure weekly and discuss actions.
- Do a spring and autumn rotation plan.
- Plan your winter feed requirements in March.

**Livestock:**

- Plan livestock preventative care on the calendar.
- Focus on healthcare and biosecurity.

**Financial planning:**

- Be 'on-top' of record keeping, data analysis and benchmarking.
- Update your cost control plan monthly, quarterly and yearly.
- Do a comprehensive annual financial assessment/plan in December-January.
- Then make your new cost control plan for the year.

**BREEDING AND FERTILITY MANAGEMENT:**

- » Breeding and reproductive programmes are intrinsically linked.
  - EBI is and will be the main driver, and it will be updated later in

2025 using a 2015-born cow as the base/reference cow.

- Sexed semen has transformed the type and quality of dairy and male calves born on dairy farms,
- In 2021 there were 417,852 male dairy calves born. It is projected that in 2026, this will reduce to 252,000; the difference being replaced by beef calves. This is because sexed semen usage will have increased by over 315,000 in that period.
- Sexed semen offers an opportunity to be more selective when choosing dams.
  - If you choose, for mating, the top 30% EBI cows with a reliability of 60%, their mean EBI will be €28 higher than the herd average. If they were genotyped it would be €40. Hence, the advice is to select your best cows from a fully genotyped herd for mating to the best bulls for faster herd genetic gain.
- As bulls and cows now have a prediction of their genetic resistance to TB, as well as other health traits, we must incorporate these into our selection decision so as to have healthier cows in the future.
- All farmers should genotype all breeding animals – it is free – but costs €6/animal in the second year. The benefits are enormous!
- Gestation length is an important consideration:
  - Too short or too long is problematic – the ideal is 280-282 days. Bull selection based on EBI data is accurate.
- Uterine infections reduce cow fertility, and identifying affected cows early provides time for appropriate intervention:
  - Most cows resolve infection but 10-20% fail to do so.
  - The Metricheck device is a useful tool to identify the level of vaginal discharge and subsequent treatment required.
- Milk-based pregnancy testing from day 28 post AI is 98.7% accurate.

**MORE GRASS DRIVES PROFIT!**

- » Grassland management to maximise grass grown per hectare is the key to farm profit:
  - The following costs of feeds per tonne (t) of dry matter (DM) should convince you:

• Grass sward (11t DM/ha)	€110
• Grass + white clover Sward (13t DM/ha)	€85
• Grass sward (15t DM/ha)	€80
• Multi species sward	€88
• Pit silage	€230
• Bale silage	€262
• Concentrates	€326
  - Message – grow more grass/ha to dilute costs. Feed as little meal as possible as it is three-times more expensive than grass.
  - If a cow requires 1.7t DM/winter by switching from baled to pit silage one would save €55/cow.
  - Measure grass 35-40 times at least throughout the season and act if your data is not in line with those in Table 2.

Table 2: Farm cover targets throughout the grazing season.

Date	Avg. farm cover	Cover/Lu	Rotation length
	(kg DM/ha)	(kg DM)	(Days)
Feb 1 (opening)	>1,000	330	60
Mar 1	750	250	40
Apr 5	600+	200	25
May, June, July	510	170	18-24
Mid August	750	250	25
Sept 1	990	330	30
Oct 1	110	370	35
Nov 1		65% closed	
Dec 1 (closing farm cover)	>700		



- » The target is to grow 15+t DM/ha with less organic nitrogen(N); and it is only possible by:
  - Soil fertility: pH >6.5, and index 3 or 4 for both P and K.
  - Sward renewal: 8-10% reseeded and 15-20% over-sown every year.
  - Grazing infrastructure: Very good paddock set-up, roadways and water.
  - Grazing management: This must reach new levels to manage clover N fixation.
- » Cows grazing grass-white clover swards with 20% clover, compared with grass only swards have:
  - Higher yields (+230kg/cow).
  - More milk solids (+32kg/cow).
  - Are €504/ha more profitable.
- » Now, precision N management is the key to foster nitrogen fixation by clover – it can be as high as 100kg N/ha (81 units/acre) – see Table 3.

Total	Mid Sept.	Mid Aug.	Mid July (2 rot)	Mid June (2 rot)	Mid May (2 rot)	Mid April	Mid March	Mid Feb.	April clover content (%)
212*	23	21	28	28	32	20	36	24	Grass sward
175	20	20	20	20	20	20	35	20	5% clover
150	20	15	10	10	15	20	35	20	10% clover
130	20	10	SW	10	15	20	35	20	15% clover
105	15	Soiled water	Soiled water	Soiled water	15	20	35	20	20% clover

- » **Earlier autumn closing (+high AFCs) reduced clover content during the following spring, particularly in swards with lower initial sward clover content.**
  - Therefore, it is important to close clover swards in the correct rotation order and with medium to low AFCs.
- » **Increasing the level of N fertiliser in spring resulted in reduced levels of N response and N uptake:**
  - Hence, the recommendation is to apply 60kg N/ha (50 units/acre) in spring, 33% in February and 66% in March – this provides the optimum combination of DM yield, N response and N recovery.
- » **Autumn closing date does not affect late lactation milk production:**
  - Closing dates have a significant impact on grass availability and milk production in the following spring.
    - Farmers stocked at 2.9+ cows/ha must have AFCs above 800kg DM/ha on December 1 so as to ensure an opening AFCs over 1000kg DM/ha.
  - Spring grass availability is one of the main drivers of cow performance in early lactation and this benefit, achieved in early lactation, can be maintained into mid-lactation.
    - Opening AFCs of 1,157kg, 857kg and 630kg yielded 2.11, 2.07 and 2.00 kg MS/cow/day over the spring trial period.
    - For each 1kg increase in daily grass allowance, there was an increase in milk yield of 0.35kg/cow/day.
    - DM intake per cow increases by 0.8kg/cow/week up to 6 weeks and by 0.3 kg/cow/week from 7-12 weeks.
    - If grass supply is low in spring, feed silage in February not March. If silage has to be fed (either 3.4kg DM/cow/day or 5.4kg DM/cow/day) there is no difference in milk yield over

- » **Multi species swards (MSS) can maintain herbage production with 50% less N compared with a ryegrass sward.**
  - MSS increased DM intake per cow by 2.4kg DM/cow/day and milk yield by 24kg MS/cow.
  - Plantain, in ryegrass-white clover swards reduced urinary N by 25%.
  - Urinary N was reduced by 9% by incorporating white clover into ryegrass swards while reducing bag N.
  - Species persistency, red clover, and chicory, is an issue in intensively grazed MSS, while plantain levels reduce after four years,
  - White clover in all swards mixes increased DM yields at all levels of N.
- » **Grass-red clover swards can produce high silage yields with reduced N levels.**
  - When grass-red clover silage was compared with grass silage in spring, the % fat and milk yield were reduced. There was no difference in the autumn.
    - Hence, do not feed grass-red clover silage to spring calved cows.
  - Using 33kg N/ha (26 units/acre) for first cut increased cumulative production by 0.9t DM/ha.
    - Grass-clover swards can provide a yield advantage of up to 2.9t DM/ha over grass only swards.
  - Select red-clover varieties on the basis of persistency and yield.
- » **Protected urea gave the same grass yield as CAN and urea while reducing ammonia emissions by 58-65% and nitrous oxide by 70%. Farmers must use only protected urea from now on.**
  - Protected urea was able to maintain production during poor growth (2024).
- » **Nationally, the % fat in milk declines from spring to summer by 0.44% (2023). The reasons are unclear.**
- » **Reseeding costs €1,100/ha and it will have repaid itself in two years.**
  - Less than 2% of our national grassland is reseeded annually – target 10+%.
  - There is no loss in production in the year a paddock is reseeded in spring.
- » **Lime – the forgotten fertiliser!**
  - The following illustrates the beneficial effects of lime, P and K on the efficiency of nitrogen use (Opt = optimum levels):
    - Low pH, P and K = 35% nitrogen use efficiency.
    - Optimum pH, low P and K = 53% nitrogen use efficiency.
    - Optimum pH and K with low P = 54% nitrogen use efficiency.
    - Optimum pH and P with low K = 57% nitrogen use efficiency.
    - Optimum pH, P and K = 63% nitrogen use efficiency.
- » **The message is clear – get pH levels over 6.3 and 6.5 for clover.**
  - Lime also plays an important role in the availability and supply of soil phosphorous (P) as the following shows for a soil pH of 5.5:
    - No P = soil test 1 ppm P.
    - Lime only = soil test 5.5 ppm P.
    - P only = soil test 8 ppm P.
    - P and lime = soil test 17 ppm P.
    - Note: 5t lime/ha and 100kg P/ha applied and tested after 12mths)
- » **The following shows the effect of soil pH on grass-clover sward yield:**
  - pH 5.5 gave a yield of 8,100 kg DM/ha,
  - pH 5.9 gave a yield of 8,375 kg DM/ha,
  - pH 6.3 gave a yield of 8,710 kg DM/ha,
  - pH 6.8 gave a yield of 9,340 kg DM/ha,
  - This is clear message as to the economic value of optimum pH for reseeded.

- » Silage quality for milking cows and replacement heifers should be 74% DMD, while 68-70% DMD is adequate for dry cows, mainly influenced by:
  - Soil fertility, sward quality.
  - Delayed cutting date.
  - Grass variety.
  - Pit management, poor pH and slow and uneven pit rolling.

#### FARM INFRASTRUCTURES MUST BE UPDATED!

- » Electricity independence is the future!
  - We should plan to use electricity to milk, cool milk, provide all on-farm lighting, scrapie cubicle passages, power quad bikes, maybe some tractors?
  - Solar PV can reduce electricity bills and increase energy independence.
  - Payback periods range from three to 10 years, depending on battery storage and grant support.
  - Self-consumption of solar power maximises financial return over exporting to the grid.
  - A 26kWp system can offset 7.5t of CO<sub>2</sub> annually – supporting climate goals!
- » Herringbone parlour efficiency can be improved. As milking accounts for 33% of annual labour requirements on dairy farm, to reduce, consider the following:
  - Automatic cluster removers (ACRs).
  - Automatic machine washing.
  - Eight to nine rows per milking time.
  - Rapid exits.
  - Power washer quality.
  - Motorised backing gates,
  - Good cow and udder health.
- » Factors associated with bulk tank SCC.
  - Low SCC:
    - Seasonal calving patterns.
    - Family involvement.
    - Keeping mastitis occurrence and treatment records.
    - Effective fore-milking routines.
    - Pre-milking udder preparation.
    - Post-milking teat disinfectant.
    - Reduced SCC levels were observed with the use of ACRs, automatic machine washing and strategic use of dry cow treatment.

- High SCC:
  - Longer morning milking durations.
  - Certain parlour designs, including rotarys, and those with straight breast rails or backing gates.
- » Management of poorly drained soils:
  - Over 30% of Irish grassland soils are deemed to be poorly drained.
  - Teagasc's heavy soils programme aims to help such farmers.
  - Through this programme they have shown that grass production has increased by 4-7t DM/year.
- » Farm roadway surveys show that most are suboptimal – taking longer for cows to move to and from milking – mainly due to:
  - Poor surface conditions due to congestion points, increased verge width, and capability for water to run freely off the roadway to the field.
  - Roadway width – they have not increased with increased herd size. When these were improved by a total upgrade, it resulted in 1.1 hours saved annually for every €1,000 invested,
  - But the best return was achieved by upgrading the surface resulting in 1.7 hours per year saved for every €1,000 spent.
  - Dairy and beef farm roadways can have elevated phosphorous concentrations throughout the whole year; as the P can be index 4 and they represent a big pollution risk.
- » Be aware that slurry and soiled water storage may have to increase by 20% and 33% respectively because surveys show that:
  - Slurry and soiled water tanks collect 0.41 cu.m/cow/week and 0.30 cu.m/cow /week, respectively.
  - Spreading slurry at the appropriate time can save €43/cow compared with spreading it at unfavourable times.
  - Slurry storage costs (estimated) are:

Storage type winter	Unit cost	For 200 cows /20-week
Slatted tank	9 ft deep, 16 ft wide	€790/cow
Overground tower	plus cover, reception tank & agitator	€835/cow
Slurry bag	Dilute slurry (<4% DM)	€350/cow

#### QUOTE FOR THE MONTH

"Contentment is a constant feast."



## OVLAC PLOUGHS, DISC HARROWS AND CULTIVATORS.

- Extensive range of tractor mounted and trailed ploughs, disc harrows and cultivators.
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# Pilot Audits - Giving Farmers Their Say

This summer, pilot audits are taking place on farms\* across Ireland to test proposed updates to the Bord Bia Sustainable Quality Assurance schemes.

These pilot audits are a trial run of new draft criteria – and the farmers taking part are providing valuable feedback to help shape the final version.

\* beef, sheep, dairy, pig, poultry, egg, and horticulture.

## Why are updates necessary?

Practical updates	Market needs
To reflect real farming practice.	To support access to key export markets.
To improve the audit process.	To keep pace with global competitors.
To comply with updated legislation.	To support Ireland's strong reputation overseas.

## Who's involved?

The draft criteria have been developed in conjunction with Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) made up of:

- Representatives from leading farm organisations.
- Representatives from industry, research and regulatory organisations.

Bord Bia certified farms were nominated through the TACs and agreed to take part in the pilot audits.

## Nothing is changing just yet

The final version of the criteria won't be confirmed until pilot audits are completed and reviewed. When the time comes, you'll get plenty of notice and clear guidance so you can prepare for your next audit.

## Next steps

Bord Bia will keep you updated through:

- Post
- Bord Bia website ([farm.bordbia.ie](http://farm.bordbia.ie)).
- Farmer demo events and meetings.





# MASSEY'S NEW MF 9S FLAGSHIP TRACTOR NOW AVAILABLE IN IRELAND

THE NEW MF 9S RANGE, WHICH REPLACES THE OUTGOING MF 8700 S SERIES, INCLUDES SIX MODELS WITH POWERS FROM 285HP TO 425HP, AND IT IS NOW AVAILABLE IN IRELAND AND THE UK. IT GETS 'FROM THE CAB' TREATMENT THIS MONTH

All six models feature the innovative Protec-U design, the Dyna-VT transmission, best-in-class visibility from the new cab, while the flagship model has an unladen power-to-weight ratio of 25.4kg/hp. And they are all powered by an updated six-cylinder, 8.4L AGCO Power engine, with Engine Power Management (EPM) offering up to 30hp extra for all models, except the flagship 9S.425.

Models start with the MF 9S 285, which offers a maximum power of 285hp as standard with a maximum EPM power of 315hp, while torque output is 1,250Nm@1,500rpm at maximum power, and rises to 1,400Nm@1,500rpm with EPM. The largest model is the MF 9S.425, which has a maximum power of 425hp and maximum torque of 1,750Nm@1,500rpm. Updates to the engine include a new turbocharging design with a single advanced turbo replacing the twin turbo system, while it complies with Stage V emissions regulations using a simplified All-In-One system of DOC, SCR and SC, without the need for an EGR valve.

To increase the time between fill ups, the 660L fuel tank is 10 per cent larger than previous models, while the engine is also designed to run on HVO fuel to offer users the option to run more sustainable fuels. As standard, the new models are fitted

with MF's renowned Dyna-VT continuously variable transmission that offers new power management to deliver additional power and torque compared with previous models. Central to this is a separate hydraulic oil reservoir that eliminates the risk of contamination and helps extend service life.

## PROTECT-U DESIGN AND NEW CAB

The new MF 9S features the Protect-U cab design with an 18cm gap between the cab shell and the bonnet to reduce heat, noise and vibration transfer to the cab, resulting in a 69dBa working environment, which is one of the quietest on the market. Not only this, the 3.4m<sup>3</sup> cab offers best-in-class visibility with a 6.6m<sup>2</sup> glass area, and a new wiper now covers 72 per cent of the area. Instead of a traditional dashboard, the new MF 9S has a digital vDisplay on the cab's A-pillar which shows tractor information and allows settings to be changed via a rotary knob on the steering column. Without a dashboard, and the tractor's wasp-like bonnet design, forward visibility has been greatly improved over the outgoing tractors. All models come in Exclusive specification only, which offers a Premium specification seat with large armrest, Datatronic 5 touchscreen terminal and Multipad joystick, to allow easy adjustment of settings on the

go. The new cab features a cooled storage compartment under the passenger seat, while the ventilation system offers 14 outlets to suit operator preference. An optional Professional Package provides an air hose connection and electrical supply mounted near the steps, along with a removable toolbox, hose, air gun and torch. A new 360° LED lighting package offering 23 work lights is also an option. Central tyre inflation and technology features For the first time, the MF flagship range is available with an integrated central tyre inflation system (CTIS) to reduce soil compaction and fuel use and allow operators to change pressures to suit working conditions. The system is controlled through the Datatronic 5 or Fieldstar 5 terminals. It uses two 650L/min compressors, which take just four minutes to increase pressure in a typical set of VF 710/75R42 + VF 620/75R30 tyres from 0.8 bar to 1.6 bar. Tractor Implement Management (TIM) is available on the MF 9S series and offers TIM ISOBUS implements to control forward speed and hydraulics on the tractor to improve operations whilst reducing operator fatigue. MF has also introduced MF AutoTurn on the 9S series. This feature automatically steers the tractor into the next wayline on headland turns, while AutoHeadland can automatically start and stop two headland sequences,





**Noel Dunne**  
Machinery editor

## FAVOURITE TIME OF THE YEAR

**Well readers, we are in full flight with harvest 2025. It is my absolute favourite time of year; celebrating the bounty of the fields and marking the end of the growing cycle.** We fill the barns with crisp grain to feed ourselves and our livestock, and with the straw to bed and feed them over the coming winter months. It's the reward for a job well done in the field.

Our front cover this month was taken on the farm of Paul O'Connell from Co. Laois – it is the New Holland CX 8.70. I visited Paul on a sweltering day when we had optimal cutting conditions. We had an interesting conversation about all things tillage (a conversation that continues with his dad, Dan, when we meet for our regular Friday evening pint). In this month's Field Report, you can catch up on how myself and Paul got on, and why Paul is such a fan of the New Holland and its capabilities. By the way, next month, I will be carrying a report on how former Tullow, Leinster, Ireland and Lions legend, Sean O'Brien, is getting on with his new Krone mower. Not to be missed!

Now, down to the business at hand – tractor sales update. Although June tractor sales are down year on year, for the first six months this year 1,326 units were registered compared to 1,290 for the same time period in 2024, according to figures from the FTMTA. While the new tractor market dropped 13 per cent in the month of June this year compared to June last year, overall the year-to-date figure is up by 3 per cent.

The price of green agricultural diesel is steadying up a bit at the moment. It had rocketed in recent weeks but as we went to press, prices were settling down to about €1 to €1.05 per litre. At this time of year, this is very welcome news.

The hedge-cutting season is almost upon us so pull out machines and make sure they are serviced and ready to go. Farmers will be eager to get cutting once land is dry.

Elsewhere, Claas has just launched a new Scorpion 848 telehandler – their biggest telehandler yet. In addition, engines and tanks have been updated on their ever-popular Claas Lexion range and Claas has further developed the Trion series and has added the new Trion 760 top model. I will have full reports on all these products in the September and October issues of the magazine.

In other news, Pottinger has added Campbell Agri Engineering of Hackballscross, Co. Louth to its dealer network. Headed up by Karl Campbell, the company will be a full line dealer for border counties and north Leinster and will offer repair and service to both existing and new customers in the region.

Leinster Farm Machines – well-known Claas and Lemken dealers – has been appointed agents for SAM Sprayers for Ireland, while Sky Agriculture, formerly Sulky, has made changes to its P30 double disc units – more on this later. Well-known machinery dealers JH Fitzpatrick Ltd Agricultural Machinery, located on the Laois/Kildare borders recently celebrated 70 years in business, with Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Hayden, invited as guest speaker, and attended by their main suppliers, supporters and friends. I will have more on this in the September issue.

I have heard on the vine that Massey Ferguson is returning with a bang to this year's ploughing championships in Tullamore, Co. Offaly! Stands are selling fast for this year's event and interest in same has exceeded last year's by all accounts. Should be a good one.

And finally, our good friends in the FTMTA are holding their biannual conference in the Heritage Hotel, Killenard, Co. Laois on October 8. This year's conference is titled Navigating the Evolving Agricultural Machinery Landscape 2025. I am very much looking forward to this.

Until next month, farm safely, farm wisely.



helping to improve accuracy and repeatability.

ECO hydraulics and best in class kg/hp

An unballasted weight of just 10,900kg, the MF 9S.425 offers a best-in-class power-to-weight ratio of just 25.4kg/hp. The lightweight design increases the overall payload and, for heavy draft work, the tractors can be ballasted up to 18,500kg, which offers a power-to-weight ratio of 64.9kg/hp for the MF 9S.285

A Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) of 16t at 50km/h, which is 1t more than the MF 8700 S, and Gross Combination Weight (GCW) of up to 50t (depending on market), gives users more options to adapt weights to specific operations. A new suspended front axle offers a turning radius of just 5.75m, depending on tyres, while a larger 125mm diameter rear bar axle enables more power to be transmitted to the ground and supports larger loads.

The uprated ECO hydraulic system delivers 205 litres/min at just 1,650 rpm or 270L/min at 1,850rpm, which helps save fuel and cut noise levels. The MF 9S delivers the oil by an open-centre and a closed-centre pump, with a dedicated pump for control valves. There are also various options for users requiring greater flow for certain implements, including a new dual closed-centre pump option 340L/min at 1,650rpm or 400L/min at 1,850rpm capable of powering six valves with varying flow rates. Alternatively, a new configuration with six valves enables a single three-quarter inch coupler to provide a flow of 170L/min, while the five others still deliver 140L/min. Decompression levers for easy disconnection are standard and a larger 101-litre hydraulic tank offers greater capacity to run demanding implements.





## NEW INTEGRATED FURROW PRESS FROM LEMKEN

By introducing the integrated FlexPack furrow press for the Diamant 18 semi-mounted plough, Lemken extends the range of applications for professional ploughing technology, including in dry and stony soils. This makes the 6- to 8-furrow Diamant 18 the only single-wheel semi-mounted plough on the market that can be combined with a directly mounted furrow press as standard, the

company says. This solution is ideal for farms and contractors who prioritise efficient work processes and precise tillage, particularly in challenging site conditions.

To make the combination of the Lemken Diamant and FlexPack technically possible in the in-furrow version, the design of the transport wheel was changed and the wheel was moved behind the base frame with the

introduction of the Diamant 18. This new position of the wheel provides a low centre of gravity, reducing torsional loads and ensuring high tipping stability at the headland, smooth running on the road and low loads on the wheel arm. The rearmost plough body therefore reliably maintains the set working depth, even in hilly terrain, producing an even ploughing result regardless of the topography.



## The Juwel reversible mounted plough Lights out for weeds

We offer various plough body shapes for turning tillage with the LEMKEN Juwel plough series. plough body shapes in order **to work shallowly**, maintain the **layer structure in the soil** and still ensure a reliable **reduction of weeds**.

Contact: Derek Delahunty, LEMKEN Area Sales Manager  
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The Catros+ 6003-2TS Special is a weight-optimised, affordable and high-performance option.

## AMAZONE INTRODUCES NEW CATROS COMPACT DISC HARROW

The new Catros+ 6003-2TS Special from Amazone is a weight-optimised and cost-effective variant to Amazone's range of trailed compact disc harrows in a six-metre working width. The Amazone Catros+ 6003-2TS Special offers all the same advantages as the existing models in the Catros family. It is ideal for shallow soil tillage from a working depth of 5cm and can also be used at depths of up to 14cm to reliably incorporate larger quantities of organic matter. And operating speeds of up to 18km/h maximise efficiency, according to the company.

By dispensing with added equipment such as front tools, catch crop seeder boxes or

the double disc roller, the Catros+ 6003-2TS Special is a simple yet robust frame concept. Thanks to this new weight optimisation the compact disc harrow achieves an axle load of less than 3.5t in every possible configuration. As a result, there is no need for a braking system. Even without a braking system, EU type approval is available for this model. The machine is offered in a fixed basic configuration with a Category 3 lower linkage, fully hydraulic working depth adjustment and 510mm coarse serrated discs. The roller can be individually selected from a specially compiled range of rollers to suit every type of soil. The Catros Special features the comfortable Smart Frame System. This

frame concept allows the working depth to be adjusted hydraulically whilst on the move. This is done by simply rotating the disc carrier arms. When the working depth is increased, the discs are turned away from the main frame, which increases the distance between the rows of discs, the frame and the packer roller. While doing so, the main frame always remains parallel to the ground. A one-off alignment of the frame at the start is sufficient. Furthermore, the swivelling bogey chassis can be used in two different positions while working. In position one, the bogey chassis is lifted right over the disc element. The resulting additional weight can be used to improve the penetration of the discs into the ground in especially heavy and hard conditions. In position two, the bogey chassis is positioned behind the machine at a height of approx. 50 cm above the ground. This ensures that the machine is optimally balanced and, together with the hydraulic shock absorption system, enables exceptionally smooth running under even the toughest conditions. The Catros+ 6003-2TS Special also features maintenance-free disc bearings. With no need for lubrication, this results in a significantly reduced overall maintenance time. Farmhand editorial

## Tullamore Show

National Livestock Show

Sunday 10th August



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## JH FITZPATRICK CELEBRATES 70 YEARS

Marking a significant moment in Irish agri-business, Kildare-based agri-machinery company, JH Fitzpatrick Ltd recently celebrated 70 years in operation, including 50 years as an international Case IH dealer, and a founding partnership with the Texaco brand. What began in

1954 with just two Texaco fuel pumps, and a small-repair workshop, has grown into one of Ireland's most respected names in agricultural machinery and engineering solutions.

To commemorate the milestone, a special celebration was held last month at the company's premises in Monasterevin. The event featured expert talks, exclusive offers, and a strong turnout from the local farming community and long-standing industry partners.

Among the guest speakers were Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon; Simon Pratt of Case IH; and James Twohig of Valero, the company that markets fuel in Ireland under the Texaco brand. Each offered their congratulations and reflected on the importance of partnership and innovation in supporting Ireland's agricultural sector.



Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Martin Heydon, with founders, Mary and Joe Fitzpatrick, and directors, Donal and Theresa Fitzpatrick.

Commenting, Donal Fitzpatrick, director of JH Fitzpatrick Ltd said: "Celebrating 70 years was not only about reflecting on our journey so far, but also about reaffirming our commitment to the future of farming in Ireland. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who joined us on the day and to all our customers who have supported us over the decades."

Over those decades, JH Fitzpatrick Ltd has built a reputation for reliability, innovation, and outstanding customer care. The company says it remains committed to delivering expert engineering solutions and cutting-edge machinery, and continues to evolve with the latest in precision farming technologies and eco-friendly equipment to support Irish farmers into the future.



Founders, Mary and Joe Fitzpatrick pictured at the special anniversary celebration event.



**Tom Murphy**  
Professional Agricultural  
Contractors of Ireland

## THE DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

**In another life, I read many bureaucratic reports and one of the main things it taught me is that it is in the DNA of bureaucrats to wax lyrical about the wonderful benefits to be gained from their proposals.** But buried deep within the gobbledygook is the reality. It is often said that the devil is in the detail and Brussels is very good at making their proposals look like a great deal for farmers.

Now we have another draft proposal from the European Commission, to pool the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) into simple national and regional partnership funding, to commence from the start of the next EU budgetary cycle in 2028. I love the word

'simple' but when has anything coming out of Brussels ever been simple? The headlines are well written, and we all know what has been put on the table. But it is yet another blow to the farmers who rely on CAP payments to survive. Certain funding for agriculture will no longer be ringfenced, with financial support diverted from farmers to other non-farming areas.

### A SWEETENER

One little sweetener is to offer an increase from €100,000 to €300,000 to support young people to establish a new farm. But what savvy young person would ever risk landing themselves with such a huge financial millstone? In addition, as I see it, the Commission has completely abandoned the idea of food security, not only in Ireland but across Member States. If you need proof, just look at the EU/Mercosur trade agreement. Do they know that Mercosur countries are cozying up to the BRICS group of 10 countries led by Brazil, Russia, Iran and China. What happens if they say no to a continuation of the Mercosur agreement or change the terms? We live in such an uncertain world, but it seems lessons have not been learned,

from the frequent disruption of shipping to the invasion of Ukraine and the knock-on affect this has had on the food chain.

Importing food that could be produced in Ireland, rather flies in the face of Brussels utterances on how we must save the planet, reduce our carbon footprint and make European farmers leaders in environmental protection. But we are OK to turn a blind eye to countries that have scant regard for their carbon footprint, their levels of environmental pollution or environmental damage and other costly standards set for European farmers. This makes a complete mockery of the policies coming out of Brussels. Since 2010, Ireland has steadily increased its food and beverage imports. With the right policies and supports in place many of these imports could be produced in Ireland. I won't even talk about the beef we import, while at the same time we are being forced to reduce the national herd.

Let's not fall for the smoke and mirrors proposals from Brussels and see it for what it really is, another underhand attempt to reduce CAP payments to farmers. We must 'beware of Greeks bearing gifts' and insist our Government and MEPs vote no.



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BORN TO **FARM**





SlurryKat has launched a new Generation 3 range of mobile nurse tanks, complementing its popular tank range first introduced in 2015. While it continues

SlurryKat CEO and principal design engineer, Garth Cairns, said: "This new range of nurse tanks really takes a big step into providing stronger machines that are also cleaner

However, it's the new design elements that really set these tanks apart from others on the market. Garth said: "Looking at the tank itself, the sides have taken on a new chevron style, very similar to the bellows of an accordion. That type of design is the very first of its type on the market."

"The advantages of this type of design, when used as the tank sides, means we no longer have to use bracing from the floor to the sides.

"It is a common problem on other nurse tanks that use smaller pipes, when sediment, such as sawdust, can gather in this area and block the flow. We have continued using that high-flow pipe right through all our nurse tanks from the very first-generation models," he said.

Optional extras include the integrated umbilical headland management system on the umbilical pump, which prevents slurry flow to the field during headland turns with no time limit, preventing excess application.



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## E-SERVICES OPTION FOR TOPDOWN AND OPUS

Väderstad's TopDown and Opus cultivators have entered a new generation with the introduction of Väderstad E-Control, an iPad-based control system, along with the ability to apply prescription map tillage via Isobus Task Control. With E-Services, machine control moves entirely into the tractor cab. Operators can take full command of the cultivator either through the Väderstad E-Control app or directly via the tractor's Isobus terminal. This digital integration enhances both precision and convenience in the field.

From adjusting individual working depths to fine-tuning the intensity of discs, tines, levellers, or packers, the system makes complex setups intuitive. Operators can also store and recall different machine configurations tailored to specific field conditions. With four programmable pre-set buttons, switching between modes becomes seamless.



A standout feature of Väderstad E-Services is its compatibility with prescription maps.

A standout feature of Väderstad E-Services is its compatibility with prescription maps, a key tool in precision agriculture. By using these maps, the machine can automatically adjust its settings based on real-time field data such as soil type, moisture, or topography.

This smart adaptability helps optimise crop performance, reduce input costs, minimise environmental impact, and improve long-term soil health. Väderstad TopDown 400-700 and Opus 400-700 can now be ordered with E-Services as an optional upgrade.



### E-Services for TopDown and Opus

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Now, these machines can seamlessly utilise prescription maps for automatic, in field machine adjustments.

Alternatively, with a touch of a button, the driver can dynamically adjust the working depth or intensity of the discs, tines, levellers, or packer, all while in operation.



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**VÄDERSTAD**





# HOT AND HEAVY HARVEST TIME IN CO. LAOIS

**LAST MONTH, ON ONE OF THE HOTTEST DAYS OF THE YEAR, NOEL DUNNE SHARED A COMBINE HARVESTER CAB WITH PAUL O'CONNELL, A WELL-KNOWN TILLAGE FARMER IN CO. LAOIS. HERE, HE SHARES THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY**

**Paul farms 850 acres in Jamestown in partnership with his wife, Aine and father, Dan.** He runs a fleet comprising three Massey Fergusons – a 7720 S VT, a 7719 S VT complete with loader and a 1455 S complete with loader supplied by EV Condell Ltd – as well as a John Deere 6930, supplied by TFM for back up. He also has a Case IH tractor – just in case! JH Fitzpatrick, a local dealer in Co. Laois, supplies Paul's machinery – an Amazone 3M one pass drill, an Amazone 6201

trailed sprayer, and a Bogballe M35W Plus fertiliser spreader, while Smyth Trailers supplies the tri-axle trailers directly. But the jewel in the crown of Paul's fleet is the New Holland CX 8.70 supplied by Armstrong Machinery in north county Dublin. The CX 8.70 is known for its performance, versatility, and simplicity; Paul is a big fan: "You don't need complicated equipment. Clear, easy-to-use systems are far better and less stressful for drivers, and New Holland keeps it simple."



Originally, Paul operated a Deutz Fahr combine as well as a New Holland machine – both of which he held onto for 14 years. Two years ago, Paul decided to stick solely to New Holland, and he went for a CX 8.70.

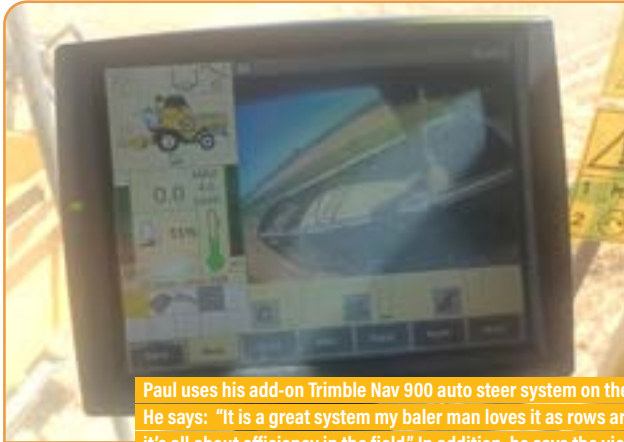


When I asked Paul why he is such a fan of New Holland, he explained that output is a priority for him and New Holland has consistently delivered in this regard. His last combine was supplied to him by JR Perry Ltd in Athy and when that dealership closed a few years back, Paul went with Armstrong Machinery in north county Dublin, dealing with Charles Hutchinson there.

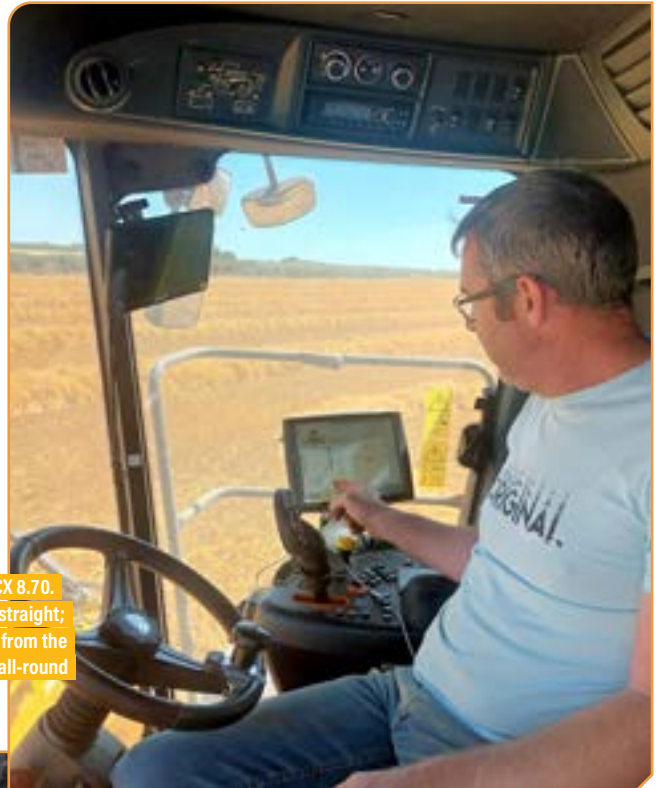


## KEEP IT LOCAL

Buying locally is important for Paul, who is a one-man owner driver: "It is important to my operations to have back up at key times that's why I buy from local dealers."



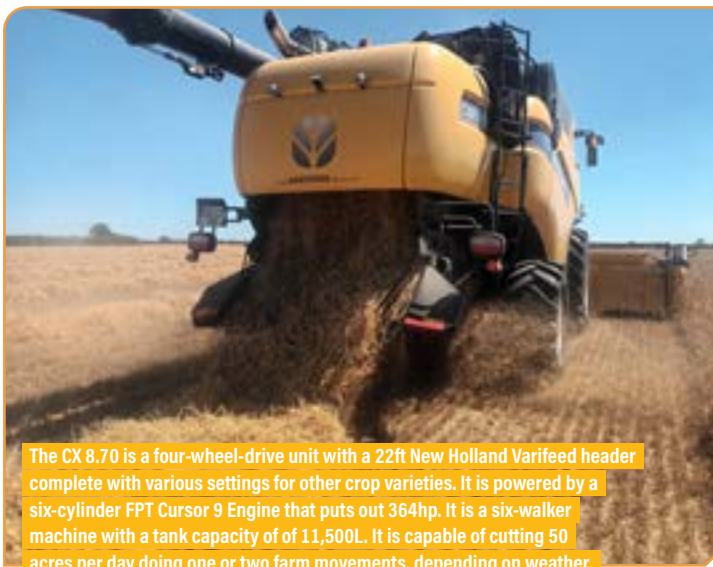
Paul uses his add-on Trimble Nav 900 auto steer system on the CX 8.70. He says: "It is a great system my baler man loves it as rows are straight; it's all about efficiency in the field." In addition, he says the view from the cab is excellent: "I like the cab and interior there is an excellent all-round view for long days in the cab; it has everything you want."



Paul's New Holland CX 8.70 is a large-capacity straw walker machine. All his straw is baled and sold to the west of Ireland predominantly, and to parts of Cork. His end customers appreciate good quality straw.

## TILLAGE CHALLENGES

Asked about the challenges facing tillage farmers, Paul said: "Prices will have to rise, and respect is needed for quality-produced Irish grain. Apart from the obvious inputs costs and machinery cost, the dairy industry has a large part to play when it comes to both land rental and purchase."



The CX 8.70 is a four-wheel-drive unit with a 22ft New Holland Varifeed header complete with various settings for other crop varieties. It is powered by a six-cylinder FPT Cursor 9 Engine that puts out 364hp. It is a six-walker machine with a tank capacity of 11,500L. It is capable of cutting 50 acres per day doing one or two farm movements, depending on weather.



Paul's Massey Ferguson 7720 S pictured in front of one of his Smyth trailers. Grain is brought directly to the yard for storage in purpose-built grain sheds. Paul believes in buying high quality machinery from local dealers: "Back up is key for me at both planting and harvesting time. Downtime is expensive time," Paul says.



## CLAAS ANNOUNCES NEW PRODUCT ADDITIONS FOR 2026

Claas recently announced the addition of a brand-new round baler model – the Cerex – to its product range for 2026. As well as that, there are updates and new additions across its combine, baler, mower and telescopic handler ranges. Here is a taste of the new goods.



- ▲ **Lexion** users will have the option of a new addition to the range, the Lexion 8500 which rounds off the lower end of the Lexion 8000 series. Powered by a 549hp Man engine, it has a 13,500L or the option of a 15,000L tank and features the APS Synflow Hybrid threshing system. In addition, the Lexion 8700 and 8600 now come with more powerful 646hp and 598hp engines and larger grain tanks. All models also now come with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a DAB+ radio and Bluetooth.



- ▲ The **Trion 760** is a new addition at the top of the Trion range, powered by a 507hp engine and has a 13,500L tank with the APS Twin Hybrid threshing system. Other updates also include Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a DAB+ radio and Bluetooth.



- ▲ The **Scorpion 848** is a new addition to the Scorpion telehandler range which has a maximum load capacity of 4,800kg and lift height up to 8m and is powered by a 156hp engine driving through a Varipower Plus transmission.



- ▲ The **Cerex 700** is a completely new high-capacity variable round baler that comes in above the Variant. Bale diameter is from 0.90cm to 1.60m (Cerex 760RC) or 1.83m (Cerex 780RC) and can achieve bale densities over 135kg/m<sup>3</sup> with baling rates of up to 60 bales an hour.



- ▲ All **Variant 500** series balers will now come as standard with the new Claas Multiflow HD pick-up. This features five tine bars, is 2.1m wide and features a new cam track that requires 20 per cent less drive and has heavy duty plastic strippers. Pick-up speed is 146rpm for up to 20 per cent more performance.



- ▲ The **Disco Contour** range has been completely renewed and now comes with the option of either tine or roller conditioners and features grey protective covers. A new option is counterweights for a more even load on the tractors rear wheels, especially when using smaller tractors and when working on slopes.



- ▲ The **Disco 1100 C/RC Business** has a maximum working width of 10.70m, has load sensing and Isobus control. It features reinforced telescopic arms with independent adjustment and with RC versions there is the option of either a tine or roller conditioner driven through a scissor gearbox.





Denis Drennan  
President ICMSA

## EVERY POT ON THE STOVE IS COMING TO THE BOIL...

**The Russian revolutionary leader, Lenin, is reputed to have observed periods of emergency, decision and stress as follows: "There are years when nothing happens, and there are weeks when years happen."** In our house, I think my mother would have used a more domestic analogy. She'd have said that every pot on the stove was coming to the boil. Recently, Irish agriculture has seen every pot on the stove coming to the boil and smoke coming out of the oven and the microwave pinging. What looks suspiciously like a very one-sided agreement with the US on tariffs that will put a 15 per cent tariff on our food exports to them merely puts a full stop to what has been a very depressing period for those of us trying to believe that the present Commission will ever understand their role and purpose.

### A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME

We have had the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 'reform', and the parachuting in of the Habitats Directive – and now this! It's difficult to underestimate the seriousness and downright bad faith with which farming in general has been treated by the Commission. The MFF and vaguely outlined CAP reforms should fool no-one – and they certainly don't fool us. They are actually just a speeded-up timetable for the EU's withdrawal of direct supports to farming and primary food production. That, in turn, means two things could happen. The first is that high standards and sustainable food production within the EU will fall and that the paramount importance of food security so vividly illustrated by Covid-19 has been forgotten. The second thing – and this should particularly set alarm bells ringing in Kildare Street and Brussels – is that food prices across the EU

will rise as farmers are forced to seek more from the marketplace to replace the reduced supports.

Immediately after the announcement on the MFF and CAP, the ICMSA noted the simple logic that must apply: as the direct supports for farmers fall, they will have to raise prices as they sell along the chain with a resulting impact at the point of sale to the consumer. The reaction of media was interesting and highlighted the fact that, in some quarters at least, it is still expected that the farmers themselves are somehow expected to absorb these 'hits'.



### THE MFF AND VAGUELY OUTLINED CAP REFORMS SHOULD FOOL NO-ONE – AND THEY CERTAINLY DON'T FOOL US

There is an amazed reaction when farmers say – and of course the ICMSA has always said this – that they can't afford to subsidise everyone else's food bills. The EU Commission's plan is now effectively open and obvious: farming and primary food production across the EU is to be market-based and the threat to our prices from sub-standard imports that are produced off unsustainable and environmentally destructive systems will simply have to be addressed. The EU would be very foolish to ignore food security, the very basis for the formation of the EU. Some people might think this is an alarmist statement, but it is actually no more than observing a fact.

### JAW DROPPING

In terms of the so-called simplification agenda, the fiasco of the Habitats Directive is actually worse than the announcements

of so-called CAP reforms. The introduction of the Habitats Directive at this late, late stage, with just a few months to go before an expected extension of our derogation is just jaw-dropping. Just as the data and science were beginning to show water quality stabilising and slowly improving, a whole new set of protocols have been parachuted in without any coherent explanation as to how it will be applied to the 7,000 or so farmers currently operating under derogation. To say this is blatant shifting of the goalposts is to understate what was involved; the ball was in mid-air before the Commission ran in to move the goalposts – and they're still moving! No-one seems to know what an 'appropriate assessment' will involve? More to the point, who'll be carrying it out and what will be the defined standard?

### PROMISES

We've had many promises from the Commission on CAP on support and simplification. CAP and EU agriculture policy was already teetering on the brink of credibility before these announcements as the years of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' convergence and inflation ate away at any real value. July's announcements simply underline the slide towards irrelevance in the long term. The EU can no longer even pretend to be an asset to farmers; it's an obstacle, a negative, that causes more problems than it provides solutions. In its 75 years of existence, ICMSA has always prided itself on having the answers to any questions it raises. For once, we're going to 'park' that tradition and just ask the question of the EU Commission: what are the implications for a typical Irish dairy or livestock farmer in terms of the financial loss under its recent proposals on CAP and nitrates and how they expect those farmers to make a living based on the Commission proposals? These are very simple questions and the Irish Government is, at the very least, either obliged to pressure the EU to answer them, or answer the questions themselves.

A large crowd attended the organic tillage farm walk on the farm of Tommy Delahunt in east Wicklow.



# 'HUGE DEMAND, LITTLE SUPPLY'

**IN PART ONE OF HER SERIES ON ORGANIC FARMING, BERNIE COMMINS WRITES ABOUT A RECENT ORGANIC TILLAGE FARM WALK SHE ATTENDED IN EAST WICKLOW. WHILE THERE, SHE LEARNED ABOUT THE TRIALING OF PROTEIN INTERCROPS, AND THE GAINS TO BE MADE WHEN THESE ARE GROWN WELL**

On a sweltering summer's day, on the farm of Tommy Delahunt, the supply and demand imbalance for organic cereals was highlighted. Niall Ryan was present from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), and he outlined a significant deficit, which presents great opportunities for tillage farmers thinking about conversion. "We have a deficit of 30,000t this year and they will have to come from somewhere," he

said. "There is great opportunity there. There is huge demand and very little supply, so that is a win-win."

Several years ago, Tommy Delahunt recognised that opportunity and followed through with partial conversion, and he has been making great progress in a short timeframe. Initially, 17 hectares (ha) of land on his east Wicklow farm went to organics, which has increased to 31.15ha currently – he operates non-organically, also. He grows a range of organic crops, showcased at the farm walk such as winter and spring cereals, a barley/pea intercrop (combi-crop), as well as multispecies grass sward.

Tommy's organic oats are grown on contract to Flahavan's and the pea/barley intercrop is for the feed market, and sold on contract to another farmer. One of the highlights of the walk was learning about Tommy's profitable pea/bean intercrop, the growing of which is a relatively new concept, according to Teagasc.

## GROWING ORGANICS PROGRAMME

Tommy is one of 13 participant farmers in Teagasc's Growing Organics programme, which is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine. According to Teagasc this is a five-year monitor-farm initiative aimed at supporting and showcasing best practices in organic farming. A key feature of the programme on Tommy's farm is the trialling of protein crops for the organic animal feed market. In 2024, Tommy achieved a yield of 5.5 tonnes per hectare (t/ha) from his pea/bean intercrop, which was sold to an organic dairy farmer.



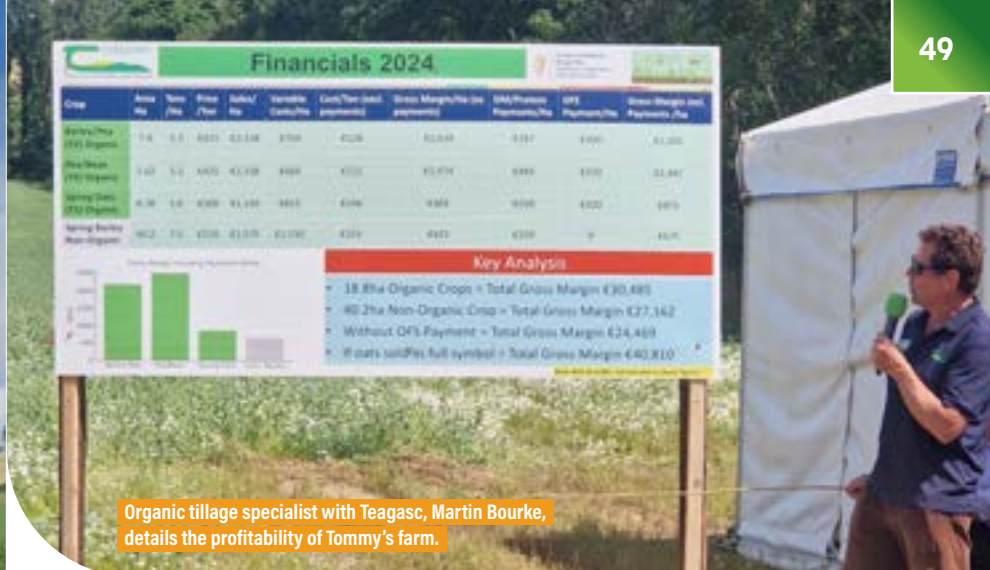


## PEA PRIORITY

Tommy's farm is also one of three organic farms involved in the Valpro Path trial, which focuses on growing high-yielding protein crops across Ireland, Italy, Germany, Denmark and Portugal. In Ireland, Teagasc researchers are focusing on intercropping peas with fava beans to help prevent pre-harvest lodging that peas are prone to.

Organic tillage specialist with Teagasc, Martin Bourke, was present and explained more: "The objective of this [trial] is to look at the amount of peas sown in the country. Peas are seen as having tremendous value but, traditionally, peas lodge and one of the things they are looking at [in the trial] is growing them with a scaffolding crop that acts as a support for it. Beans in this particular situation provide that scaffold, and is just a secondary crop."

"From the organic side of things, we see the potential in growing peas as an animal feed for the livestock farmer. We like peas because they are like our 'herbicide' – peas smother the weeds, so they are like a herbicide even though there is nothing chemical about them," said Martin.



Organic tillage specialist with Teagasc, Martin Bourke, details the profitability of Tommy's farm.

Under the Valpro trial, a certain ratio of pea to bean is being used and the trial on Tommy's farm has a ratio of 70 per cent pea and 30 per cent bean. "Based on results, they think that 30 per cent bean is correct," said Martin. "But there were harvesting difficulties last year when the pea grew too tall for the bean to support it. The pea lodged and it was very difficult to harvest it." This was believed to have been connected to the total seed rate, which was too much. This year, they are trialing fewer seeds overall, but keeping the ratio of 70 per cent pea and 30 per cent bean." At the farm walk, there was a notable difference in the height of the 100 per cent pea crop, which was shorter than the pea/bean intercrop.

## PROTEIN PROFITABILITY

Outlining the profitability of Tommy's enterprise in 2024, Martin commented that the figures are extremely attractive. Last year was year number two of conversion for Tommy's intercrops and his pea/bean intercrop performed very well. It yielded 5.5t/ha, commanded €425/t, and its gross margin was €1,674/ha. The barley/pea intercrop performed similarly in terms of yield and price/t but its gross margin was slightly less, at €1,634. However, the protein payment was greatly enhanced for the pea/bean crop because it is a 100 per cent protein crop, so Tommy received the full rate of payment of €493/ha. He also received €320/ha under the Organic Farming Scheme.

For his barley/pea intercrop, which comprised 70 per cent pea and 30 per cent barley, he received €247/ha under the protein aid scheme, as well as €320/ha under the Organic Farming Scheme.

"You make your own luck – but this is not just luck," Martin said of the barley/pea crop. "This is a very good crop, and that is why it fetched

€425. Tommy managed to look after the crop, and the peas really well, to make sure he had a high protein crop, which is particularly important for dairy farmers. That all comes back to good management."

## NON-ORGANIC COMPARISON

The performance of a non-organic crop was detailed on the day also. Just over 40ha of conventional spring barley was grown by Tommy in 2024, yielding €210/t. Variable costs here were €1,150/ha, which, Martin said was competitive, compared to an expected cost of €1,289 for conventional spring barley. Tommy's was less because he replaced some of his chemical fertiliser with poultry manure. The gross margin per hectare for this crop was €425/ha, added to the straw incorporation payment of €250/ha, which brought it to €675/ha.

There is one message to take from this, Martin said: "Tommy is growing nearly two acres of a conventional crop to give him the same margin as one acre of organic. The figures are extremely attractive."

## SYSTEMS CHANGES

Since converting to organic tillage farming, there have been a number of systems changes on Tommy's farm:

1. Introduction of intercropping.
2. Growing organic feed on contract to other farmers – 10.5ha.
3. Growing organic oats on contract to Flahavans – 13.48ha.
4. Experimenting with trials on: mechanical weeding; seeding rate and ratios of cereal/legume; sowing dates; organic maize; optimising use of poultry manure pellets



MATT O'KEEFFE  
EDITOR

# THE CASE FOR PROHIBITION

**Tobacco smoking was banned in public houses and other areas where people congregate indoors because of the unassailable evidence that smoking kills.** It is a carcinogenic agent, proven beyond doubt to cause cancer. Based on that evidence, the only curiosity is why the various tobacco products are not banned entirely. The usual arguments around sending tobacco users underground into the same clandestine world as class A drug users were trotted out, as well as the daft notion that people have the right to harm themselves if they so wish. These arguments do not stand up to any cursory, not to mention close scrutiny, but the use of tobacco continues to place a major burden on our health services. So, we all pay, through our taxes or foregone benefits, for the casual health risks taken by others.

The arguments for curbing the use of alcohol are, however, not as publicised, nor are they as accepted, as those associated with tobacco use. A large cohort of the population believes that moderate alcohol use is harmless, and that there is little evidence to prove otherwise – despite the World Health Organization clearly stating that this is not the case.

## HYPOCRISY

Regardless, the fact that our Government is considering placing health warnings on alcohol products for consumption in this country reeks of hypocrisy, as if we didn't already have a surfeit of that particular commodity already. This piece of nanny-state legislation has been postponed until 2029 – a clear case of kicking the (beer)



## THE FACT THAT OUR GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING PLACING HEALTH WARNINGS ON ALCOHOL PRODUCTS FOR CONSUMPTION IN THIS COUNTRY REEKS OF HYPOCRISY

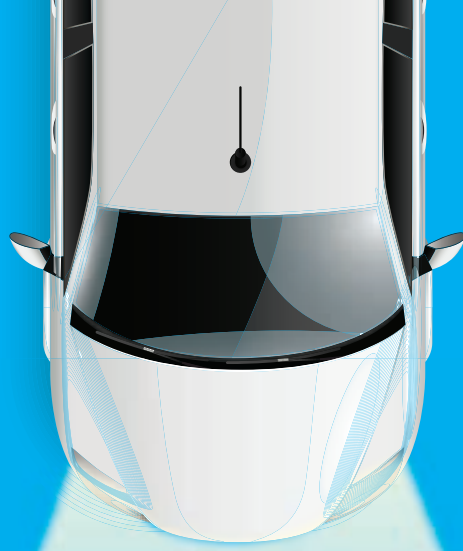
can down the road. We are significant exporters of alcoholic products. Last year alcoholic drink exports totalled €2.1bn. There is no suggestion that health warning labels would be stuck onto alcoholic products for export. Think about that for a moment. The proposed/postponed legislation on labelling alcoholic products is an assertion that alcohol consumption is unhealthy in the extreme. While our legislators are committed to saving Irish imbibers from themselves, we are, apparently, quite happy to sell the same products to others without any health warnings whatsoever. Apparently, this puritan

zeal to save us from ourselves cannot be allowed to interfere with commerce and profit. We appear to have decided that, if what we are selling is unhealthy, then it is for the purchasers in other countries to decide on that for themselves. We clearly have no responsibility to highlight the perceived health risks from consuming Irish whiskey and other alcohol-rich drinks which we sell to foreign consumers. The same case could probably be made for drug dealers, if we were to take the argument to its illogical conclusion.

## CONSUMPTION FALLING

The movement towards either partial or total alcohol prohibition in Ireland comes at a time when alcohol consumption is falling. It has not been determined whether price, health fears or alternative product choices are driving this consumption decrease. There is a suggestion that cocaine is now the social lubricant of choice for many Irish demographics. That being the case, our efforts to influence the consumption of alcohol use are even more misguided. It's not an argument the anti-alcohol zealots will entertain but the legislation towards near-criminalising alcohol use could usher in the Law of Unintended Consequences. We already know that cocaine use is endemic in Irish society. Many otherwise law-abiding citizens see no connection between cocaine use, wider drug abuse, gangland violence and the health and policing costs to Irish society, generally. Use and abuse are two distinct entities. Are health warnings on alcohol products really the best solution to misuse of, and overuse of alcohol?





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# Milk Quality Farm Walk

Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025 | 11.30am

2024 National Winners of the NDC & Kerrygold Quality Milk Awards

## Kennedy Farm

Drangan House, Cahir, Co. Tipperary

Eircode: E21 HP92

Facilitated by Teagasc, Dairygold Co-op, National Dairy Council and Ornuu, and celebrates the excellence of Irish Dairy Farming, highlighted annually, by the NDC & Kerrygold Quality Milk Awards.

*The farm walk will address the following topics:*

- Farm Performance
- Milk Quality
- Investing in People
- Farming for the Future: Water Quality, Biodiversity, Facilities

To complete the farm walk arrive anytime from 11.30am to 1.00pm. Farm walk duration 2 hours.



For more information visit: [www.teagasc.ie/milkwalk](http://www.teagasc.ie/milkwalk)