



Irish Grassland Association

September 2017

Issue No. 36

“To advance the knowledge of good grassland management in Irish farming”

Special focus on markets and future trends



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Irish Grassland Association Editorial

Dear Member,



Darren Carty
Editor

Welcome to the latest edition of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) newsletter. It has been a very busy period since our last newsletter with a number of events taking place including the sheep and beef conferences and farm walks and the ever popular dairy summer tour.

Attendance at these events was excellent and coupled with bumper crowds at the dairy conference in January and the recent reseeding event, it has been a record year for the IGA with total attendance across all events reaching 1,830. We thank all our members for taking the time out to attend and hope that you had an enjoyable day and picked up some take home messages.

The sheep, beef and dairy events are reviewed in this first section of the newsletter and for anyone seeking further information, remember that papers and presentations are available on the IGA website at www.irishgrassland.com.

It is also worth noting that on page six, details of the upcoming AGM are featured. We are always keen to hear member feedback, not only at the AGM, but right throughout the year so feel free to email secretary@irishgrassland.com with any thoughts, ideas or feedback.

On page 16, we welcome a new contributor with Lauren Baker putting pen to paper with her first feature. While we are welcoming Lauren, we are also saying a heartfelt thank you to Noel Claffey who writes his last Year in My Wellies column on page 18. We wish Noel all the best in finishing his studies and in his future farming endeavours. We are on the trail for new sheep and beef farmers

to take up the mantle and will have these on board for our next newsletter.

Special focus

The last few editions of the newsletter has included a special focus on a particular area and this approach continues with a look at current factors influencing markets in the short and medium-term future. There is a huge level of uncertainty surrounding Brexit, sterling fluctuations and potential trade deals that could strengthen or negatively affect Irish agriculture. This section does not have all the questions or answers but there are some interesting insights and opinion pieces from a range of industry personnel.

We thank Phelim O'Neill from the Irish Farmers Journal for a review update on Brexit which raises massive concerns about the damage potential tariffs would inflict and Meat Industry Ireland's Cormac Healy for his assessment of how sterling could severely effect Irish exports and the action needed to curtail this.

Traditional breeds have enjoyed a major revival with a sharp rise in sire usage in an expanding dairy herd. This is detailed in a facts and figures review of the annual kill, live exports and a changing breed profile of the national herd. Charles Smith of the Irish Angus Producer Group predicts a bright outlook for the higher numbers of Angus cattle coming on stream on page 26.

Paidi Kelly, Teagasc outlines the potential for growth in the dairy herd on page 28 while Bord Bia's Declan Fennell outlines why the next six weeks is a vital period for Ireland and the EU in gaining more traction in emerging Asian markets.

Finally, health and safety is a subject that everyone involved in agriculture needs to take seriously. Our back page features some timely tips that are worth considering.



Date set for the 2017 Irish Grassland Association Annual General Meeting

Maura Callery,
Office Manager
Irish Grassland Association



The 2017 Irish Grassland Association (IGA) Annual General Meeting will take place on Friday 29th September at the Newpark Hotel, Kilkenny at 2.45pm sharp. All members of the Irish Grassland Association are entitled to attend this event. It is a wonderful opportunity to see how the Irish Grassland Association operates and it is also an opportunity for members to become involved in our voluntary Council. Each year a number of seats on our Council become available to be filled through election on foot of existing council members terms expiring. All members of the Irish Grassland Association are eligible to put their names forward for election. If you wish to put your name forward this year, then please contact me to express your interest on (087) 9626483 or email secretary@irishgrassland.com. Constitutionally we need to receive supporting nominations for you in writing from two current Irish Grassland Association members, at least two weeks before the Annual General Meeting. This year, that deadline is 2pm on Thursday the 14th September. As well as the election, a roundup of the year's activities will be presented by the outgoing President. We will also welcome the new incoming President Jan Jensma into office.

This current term with strong leadership from our outgoing President Bernard Ging and tremendous teamwork from our Council, has led to a hugely successful year for the Irish Grassland Association. I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the President and Council to thank everyone involved in running our events, our host families and our sponsors. We would also like to thank you, our loyal farming and corporate members for coming to these events in such overwhelming numbers. We look forward to meeting you all very soon again.

**Registration for members to attend the Irish Grassland Association
Annual General Meeting is essential.**

**Please email our office, secretary@irishgrassland.com
by 2pm Thursday 14th September if you wish to attend.**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2017/18



Irish Grassland Association

Annual General Meeting

(Registration essential by Tuesday 14th September)

Friday 29th September
Newpark Hotel, Kilkenny (Registration essential)



Irish Grassland Association

Student Farm Walks

(Registration essential. Registrations open now)

Monday 9th October
Tullamore



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Irish Grassland Association

Networking Evening & Dinner

(Registration essential. Registrations open to
members ONLY in October. Details to follow)

Tuesday 17th January
Charleville Park Hotel Limerick



Irish Grassland Association

Dairy Conference

(Registration essential. Registrations open
in October. Details to follow)

Wednesday 18th January
Charleville Park Hotel Limerick



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Steps to safeguarding beef production systems

Adam Woods,
Irish Farmers Journal
and Chairman of the IGA
organising beef committee



Farmers attending the recent Irish Grassland Association beef conference heard presentations from the Irish Farmers Journal, Teagasc and Bord Bia. Some of the key messages from the event are outlined below.

Efficiency pays €455/cow – Ciarán Lenehan, Irish Farmers Journal

Making efficiency changes within the farm gate can deliver the equivalent of a €1.20/kg increase in beef price on a typical 50-cow suckler to beef herd. “Controlling what is within your control” was Irish Farmers Journal livestock specialist Ciarán Lenehan’s key message and, while he maintained that lobbying for higher beef prices was also important, farmers had little control on world beef markets at the end of the day. Lenehan outlined how calving home-bred replacements at 24 months versus 36 months could deliver €4,400 to a typical 50 suckler cow herd. Reducing a suckler herd’s calving interval from 399 days to the target 365 days represents a €75/cow income potential. That is €2.20/day for every day a cow slips over 365 days. Reducing calf mortality from 6.4% to 4% could deliver a potential €21/cow. Achieving target weight gains in a beef herd can have a huge impact on profitability. Increasing liveweight gain



and in turn weaning weights will have a huge impact on profitability. In a spring-calving system, selling weanlings, an extra 0.15kg/day in weight gain could deliver an extra €90/cow or €4,500 in a typical 50-cow herd.

Maintaining access to 65m affluent consumers – Joe Burke, Bord Bia

Joe Burke, beef and livestock sector manager with Bord Bia, outlined the challenges that lie ahead in terms of Brexit and the potential impact that it may have. Ireland’s total food and drink export to the UK is valued at €4.13bn, with the beef sector being the major focus when it comes to the UK market, with 50% of Irish beef exports.



This accounted for 270,000t of beef valued at €1.1bn. This means that the beef sector is exposed to any possible trade implications with Britain exiting the EU. By comparison, just 25% of dairy products are sent to the UK. To put the reputation that Irish beef has in the UK in context, Ireland is the only imported beef supplier to the three largest UK retailers: Tesco, Asda and Sainsbury’s as well as to McDonald’s and Burger King. Burke said: “Many British consumers consider Irish beef as being British when it comes

to meat purchases”. At retail level, buyers will only accept product which has been processed within eight days of slaughter and has never been frozen. This is particularly important because mince now accounts for almost 50% of the volume of beef sold to UK supermarkets and means that Irish beef cannot be easily displaced by imports from further afield.

The worst possible outcome would be a hard Brexit where Britain would revert to WTO rules and apply trade tariffs on imported product. At current levels, these tariffs would have a very damaging impact on the Irish beef trade with boneless cuts carrying a tariff of over €3.00 plus 12.8% of value and a rate of €1.76/kg applied to carcasses. Burke finished up by saying that a positive outcome from Brexit from an Irish beef perspective would be one that maintains preferential access to the UK market and allows any alterations to trade be phased in over a long transition period.

Terminal index delivers €200/hd on Kildare farms – Christy Watson, Teagasc

Christy Watson, Teagasc adviser, Naas, outlined some interesting analysis of a large finisher client which purchases store cattle and brings them to slaughter. With over 65% of cattle born in Ireland to a beef sire traded, it’s very important that the finisher concentrates on the most profitable animals available to them. While there has been lots of talk around the replacement index, there is little talk about the terminal index of animals, which is more important in finishing systems. An animal with a terminal index of €150 is expected to leave a extra €50 in profit over an animal with an index of €100. So does it work? Watson looked at a herd which finishes over 400 animals annually. He found that the 4/5 star animals were 43kg heavier at slaughter than the 1/2 star animals. He



also showed how the 4/5 stars were slaughtered 22 days earlier which represented a big saving in feed costs. Carcase value for the 1/2 star animals was €1,506, while it was €1,650 for the 4/5 star animals, a difference of €144 per animal. When feed costs are included, the difference comes close to €200/head in favour of 4/5 star terminal animals. Watson finished by encouraging the industry to use the science that is available and start displaying the terminal index at point of purchase.

Huge potential for grass on beef farms – Mike Egan, Teagasc

Irish beef farms have an important competitive advantage in producing beef over many of their European counterparts due to the ability to grow and utilise high quantities of grazed grass.



The cost of producing 1kg of liveweight gain in Ireland from grass is 80-85% less when compared with an intensive concentrate-based system. One tonne of increased grass growth per hectare is worth €105/ha to beef farmers.

The average drystock farm in Ireland utilises 5.4t/DM/ha with scope to increase this to 12-14 t/DM/ha on very efficient farms. Soil fertility, grazing infrastructure and better grazing management are all areas which need improvement if Irish beef farms are to fully capitalise on grass. Farms that concentrate on output from grass-based systems through improved management and performance will increase profits irrespective of beef price.

Egan said: “There are only one in 500 beef farms currently measuring grass on PastureBase Ireland. It has been shown in recent years that farmers who measure will grow and utilise more grass so it’s a change that needs to take place.”



Participants in the forum discussion chaired by Justin McCarthy.

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Dairy Summer Tour – producing milk on leased land

George Ramsbottom,
Teagasc Dairy Specialist &
Chairman of the IGA Dairy Summer
Tour organising committee



This year's Irish Grasslands Dairy Summer Tour, sponsored by AIB Bank focused on milk production on leased land visiting grass based dairy farms in Skeaghvasteen, Co. Kilkenny and Tullow, Co. Carlow on Tuesday July 25th. With stocking rate increasing by approximately 10% since quota removal and one third of dairy farmers renting an estimated 30% of the land they farm, leasing land to increase milk production was the focus of this year's event. The topic attracted a record audience - over 600 dairy farmers from around the country attended the event.

Common themes

Common features of the host farms were the following:

- The relationship that both hosts have with the owners of the land that they lease – both mentioned openness, communication and respect when asked about how they work with the owners of the leased land;
- Their focus on improving soil and breeding the right cow – both farmers place huge emphasis on regular soil testing and planned fertiliser applications and believe in breeding highly fertile, high EBI cows to maximise the yield of grass utilised on their farms;
- Their emphasis on financial budgeting and monitoring – both carefully plan cash flow on a monthly and multi-annual basis.

The Moran Farm

Cathal and Grainne Moran farm at Curraghlane,

Skeaghvasteen, Co. Kilkenny. Cathal started farming in 1997 with 16 cows when the farm also had beef, sheep and tillage enterprises. Today he farms a total of 144 ha where just over half of the 120 ha milking platform is leased. This year's overall stocking rate of 2.5 LU/ha includes 259 cows and replacement heifers. In 2016, the herd produced 450 kg milk solids per cow (4.30% fat; 3.67% protein). Cathal plans to increase this to 360 cows within two years with replacement heifers contract reared off the farm.

The Kealy Farm

Jamie and Lorraine Kealy are first generation farmers. Coming from a non-farming background, they purchased 12 ha of land while Jamie worked as a building contractor. He commenced milk production on a 26 ha fertile leased farm at Slaneyquarter, Grange, Tullow, Co. Carlow calving 60 heifers in the spring of 2014. The lease also included cubicle accommodation and a milking parlour. The following year, Jamie leased another 10 ha across the road from a second lessor and he currently milks 94 cows stocked at 2.6 cows/ha on the milking platform. His herd produced 530 kg milk solids per cow (4.47% fat; 3.70% protein) on 780 kg meal last year. He plans to increase the size of the herd to around 120 cows over the next couple of years.

Developing a relationship

Both hosts alluded to developing a relationship with the land owners talking about the importance of trust which comes from being open and

transparent in their dealings with them from the start. Jamie for example talked of informing the land owner about what his plans are before making changes, 'You've got to remember it's their land you're dealing with'. Minding leased land as if it was their own has helped both hosts to strengthen the relationship that they have developed with the owners of the land that they lease.

Investment costs

Both Jamie and Cathal detailed the investments they made to develop their farms. The costs involved for both are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Investment costs (€/cow) for the Kealy (well developed leased former dairy farm) and Moran (conversion to a specialist dairy farm) farms.

	Kealy	Moran ¹
No of cows costs are based on	100	360
Cow opportunity cost	€1,200	€1,200
Accommodation & milking facilities	€550	€2,500
Land development/improvement	€250	€500
Milk quota	-	€800
Total invested per cow	€2,000	€5,000

For the Kealy's who are leasing a fertile former dairy farm, the investment costs were lower than for the Morans who has leased land adjacent to his own land and developed his own farm. Most of the infrastructural work was already done on the farm that they leased. Total investment still totalled €2,000 per cow because paddocks needed to be adjusted, roadways extended and water system upgraded.

On the Moran farm investment costs were considerably greater. All of the facilities have been constructed on effectively a green field site to include a 30 unit milking parlour, 350 topless cubicles and two lined slurry lagoons. Converting drystock and tillage land to dairy use involved constructing new roadways, reseeding most of the milking platform, soil fertility improvement and developing a paddock system. The investment on the Moran farm has taken place over the past 20 years with approximately 60% of the costs incurred since 2014.

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Lease length determines true cost of the investment

Speaking at the event, Laurence Shalloo, Teagasc Moorepark highlighted the impact of the lease length on total annual costs. Assuming an investment cost of €2,500 per cow (€7,500/ha) with half of the investment borrowed, and a stocking rate of 3 cows per hectare the funding and depreciation costs were €825/ha, €596/ha and €481/ha for leases lasting for 10, 15 and 20 years respectively. Thus the greater the length of the lease, the lower the annual cost of investments made by the lessor on the land.

Generating a return

Of interest to the audience on the day was the capacity of both farms to generate a return on fully or partly leased farms. The financial performance of the two host farms in 2016 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Financial performance of the host farms dairy enterprise in 2016 (€/ha).

	Kealy	Moran
Gross output	4,157	5,252
Variable costs	1,344	2,246
Fixed costs	1,305	1,779
Net margin	1,508	1,227
Own labour cost	775	370
Margin after own labour	733	857

Both farms were operating to a high level of technical efficiency in 2016. The Moran farm was more highly stocked than the Kealy farm in 2016 (2.8 vs. 2.4 LU / ha) in anticipation of extra land coming on stream in 2017. Own labour costs totalling €30,000 were included per farm leaving a margin per hectare of €733 and €857 to cover principle repayments and taxation on the Kealy and Moran farms respectively. Visits to the two farms showed that when farmed efficiently, leasing land for dairying can be a profitable option. According to Cathal, 'There is no point in farming your own land badly and thinking that leasing more is going to make you more money'.

¹ Based on 360 cows milked which is planned for 2019.





Valuable insights at this year's sheep event

Ronan Delany
Sheep and beef farmer
and IGA council member



The Irish Grassland Association held its annual sheep conference and farm walk in Mullingar on the 11th May 2017. The day started with a highly informative conference in the Bloomfield Hotel, Mullingar. Delegates arrived on time in glorious sunshine and the day's events improved from there.

We had presentations from Isaac Crilly, a super, highly efficient intensive sheep farmer from Co. Tyrone. Isaac gave us a fantastic insight into his farm that left the entire room feeling like a trip to Isaac's was needed.

Sheep farmers have been lucky in recent years with the introduction of Philip Creighton to Teagasc Athenry. His trial on litter size and prolificacy has delivered invaluable information on the most profitable sheep systems and also greatly increased awareness of grassland management with paddock grazing and temporarily splitting fields with electric wire being implemented at farm level by a growing number of sheep farmers.

Declan Fennell, Bord Bia gave us a most fantastic insight into sheep meat marketing. As farmers we sometimes overlook this area and it is critical that we actually take a greater interest in this area. Ultimately we need to be giving the market what it wants.

Joe Ryan from Meat Industry Ireland, a body that represents the meat processors in Ireland,

delivered an overview of the industry and where they see the future in terms of processing, grading, and a growing move to value-added over carcass sales.

Kevin Hanrahan, a highly respected economist with Teagasc, spoke to us about the impending Brexit issue facing us all and what implications it may have for us. Unfortunately there is a huge level of uncertainty on what way Brexit will effect Irish agriculture. Kevin's outlook had more worries than positives not only for sheep farmers but for all livestock farmers.

We had an excellent forum chaired by Darren Carty, Irish farmers Journal and IGA council member, where Declan Fennell, Joe Ryan and Kevin Hanrahan took questions from the floor. This was a huge success and was probably the one area we could have enjoyed for longer, given the strong interest sheep farmers have in markets and the influence it has on margins.

Presentations and papers from speakers are available on www.irishgrassland.com.

The sheep event was so lucky to have two fantastic and loyal sponsors in MSD Animal Health and Mullinahone co-op. Both companies had a good presence on the day with excellent content to address most sheep farmer's interests and questions on sheep health and tagging issues.

The hotel really excelled over lunchtime and provided a lamb dinner - what else could we offer at a sheep conference. It was beautiful and everyone was offered more. It is a pity that we don't see lamb on more Irish menus, it would really help to boost consumption.

EXCITING FARM WALK

Farmers getting onto buses were glad to be getting out into the fresh air in the afternoon and excited to see first-hand our host sheep farmer, John Bell who farms in Castletowngeoghan, Co Westmeath.

Little did we know what a treat we were in for, this was a grass farmer who took managing grass for sheep to a whole new level. What was pleasing and always a guide to how highly delegates rate host farms was the interaction between the audience, the host farmer and advisors. This was driven by John's openness to explain his system and the honesty in explaining what worked for him but also importantly what didn't work for him. This farm is a technically high efficient enterprise that is operated in a very simple way that could be transferred to any sheep farm. Delegates certainly left the event with plenty of food for thought and ideas to take home to their own farm.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

It is hard to narrow down the take home-messages from speakers, such was the volume of excellent advice and market insights delivered on the day. Some messages that stood out that are worth highlighting include the following.

Isaac Crilly on lamb drafting:

Isaac's presentation showed that drafting lambs at the correct weight and specification makes sense for the farmer and the processor. 100% of Isaac's lambs delivered a carcass weight between 16kg and 21kg with grades of R and U and fat scores of 2 and 3L. For Isaac keeping lambs moving suited his system and also ensured he was not investing money in producing free meat for the factory.



Philip Creighton on the most profitable sheep system:

Philip's analysis shows that the system that delivered the highest margin in Athenry was the high prolificacy ewes (weaning 1.7 plus lambs) stocked at 14 ewes/ha. He cautioned farmers that the stocking rate of 12 ewes/ha may however be a better system to run as it was less exposed. A vital message was that it is easy to increase ewe numbers and prolificacy but this does not translate into more money. Sheep numbers and prolificacy should only be increased in line with the volume of grass that the farm can grow with prolificacy delivering the greater return.



Joe Ryan on market access:

Joe Ryan told delegates that Irish farmers have a super product that ticks all the boxes on sustainability, welfare standards, quality and taste. Gaining access to the US and China is important to create more market outlets, particularly in an era of falling sheep meat consumption in some EU markets. However, he said that we must not lose sight of the importance of 500m consumers on our doorstep in the EU with lots of positives in emerging markets. There are challenges for farmers and processors in delivering a consistent, high-quality product on a year-round basis.



Declan Fennell on New Zealand lamb:

Declan Fennell says that while New Zealand lamb will always be a competitor to Irish lamb in EU markets, its presence has reduced significantly in recent years. The future of New Zealand exports will depend on how the EU negotiates New Zealand's tariff free quota of about 227,000t of sheep meat. Declan says that this quota must be split with the UK on their exit. He questioned future exports from New Zealand highlighting many environmental challenges for the industry to overcome.



Kevin Hanrahan on Brexit: There are more complexities to Brexit than we could have imagined. Trade deals and potential tariffs will negatively affect Irish exports if preferential access cannot be secured to the UK market. UK exports will also be affected with the flow of Northern lambs to southern plants at risk. The UK's contribution to the overall EU budget could leave a deficit in the CAP budget which could have a huge influence on the family farm income of sheep and beef/suckler farmers. There is a long road ahead and it is important that Ireland gets as good a deal as possible to limit the effect of losing free access to a vital market for Irish exports.



John Bell on transforming his sheep enterprise: John Bell's farm was heavily reliant on concentrate input for finishing lambs as recent as six to seven years ago. Over time and through gradual improvements, his system was transformed. Strategic use of meal still plays a role in the system but costs have been reduced massively. This combined with a robust breeding policy and high levels of output was the backbone of the farm generating a gross margin of €1,105 in 2016 which shows that well-run sheep farms can deliver high performance.



We would like to thank our host farm families who have welcomed us to their farms this summer



Reseeding event held on the Bateman Family Farm Tipperary



Adam Woods Irish Grassland Association Chairman making a presentation to our Beef Farm Walk Host Farmer Tom Halpin



Darren Carty IGA Council Member (who will be retiring from council shortly) along with IGA President Bernard Ging.



The Moran Family who hosted our Dairy Summer tour along with Bernard Ging Irish Grassland Association President and Liam Phelan AIB



The Kealy Family who hosted our Dairy Summer tour along with Bernard Ging Irish Grassland Association President and Liam Phelan AIB



Bernard Ging, IGA president Bernard Ging making a presentation to host farmer John Bell after the successful sheep farm walk.



A Year in my Wellies

Lauren Baker, Killeen, Birr, Co Offaly.



As this is my first feature for the IGA newsletter, it is worth giving some background of my day-to-day farming role and how I ended up where I am today. I am currently working for my parents, David and Tory, on their leased farm in Birr, County Offaly. The farm is owned by Birr Castle Estate and at the moment we are milking 440 kiwi-cross cows and also rearing all our own replacements.

I completed a degree in Food and Agribusiness in UCD in 2015 and got straight on a plane to New Zealand once my exam results were in. For me this seemed out of character, as I had never been involved in our farm at home but my dad's love for New Zealand and my want for adventure landed me in the South Island of New Zealand in the depths of winter. To say it was a shock to the system would be an understatement! With very little practical knowledge of dairy farming and 700 cows due to start calving, I felt extremely out of my depth.

After a few months of work in New Zealand I began to settle in and found I had a love for dairy farming. I stayed working for Alistair and Sharon Rayne for a year and a half, progressing to assistant manager in my second season. It was a huge achievement for me to make the jump to assistant manager level in just 12 months. It was an extremely steep learning curve but I came home with a strong knowledge and passion for grass management, which I apply to our home farm now.

I also came home with an English partner who loves cows just as much as I do. Jeremy is now managing the farm in Birr and I am in the assistant manager role. I did all the calf rearing this spring. It was quite an experience for me as it was my first time doing it, luckily my mum has lots of experience and knowledge in that department so she was a great help. Calf rearing is most definitely not for the faint hearted and takes serious attention to detail. Sick calves make for a massive increase in your workload during spring so all steps must be taken to avoid this.

We have a full time dairy management student who has been an amazing help to us in our first season while we settled in and got to know the farm. We also had a student for 12 weeks during spring to help us through the busy time. We are blessed here with a team of young and very enthusiastic dairy farmers. My dad keeps us all in check and is busy at the moment planning improvements that need to be made for the coming season. We will be doing work on our roadways, calf shed and also a lot of fencing work in the coming two months. Deciding where investment in the farm should be prioritised was a group decision. Mum is in charge of the books and is the go to woman on anything calf related.

My Role

I am currently in charge of all the grass measuring. During periods of high growth, I do a grass cover twice a week and upload the figures onto the Agrinet



system. Following the grass wedge I then allocate all the cow's breaks. We have moved back to 12 hour breaks recently as we are trying to build grass for the autumn. We are using an autumn budget to make sure we are hitting our target covers and build up enough grass for the cows.

The yearlings are currently grazing the callow land, which can't be grazed by the cows and is not included in the platform. The calves are still on the platform at the moment but will be moved to an out block this week (last week of August) to help build covers on the milking platform.

I strip graze the calves and find the use of a back fence brilliant in encouraging quicker recovery. The calves were weighed last week and we are

happy with their progress, the average weight was 162kg. There were six calves slightly under target so they were separated and are being allowed to roam over the cows paddocks a few days before the cows graze them. We find this helps their weight gain massively and it won't take long for them to catch up with the others. We previously had 25 calves in the lighter mob but all bar the six had met their target weight so were joined back in with the big mob.

Moving home and working in the family business alongside my partner is a pleasure. I find the easiest way to avoid conflict is to have each person's role extremely well defined. This prevents us from stepping on each others toes and ensures we can work well together.



A Year in my Wellies

Noel Claffey, Kilbeggan, Co Westmeath



Introduction: Noel Claffey farms 140 acres (100 owned and 40 rented) with his father Tommy. Both Noel and Tommy have off-farm employment with Noel in the final stages of a PhD with Teagasc Athenry and UCD. His research aims to uncover the effects of production factors on various meat quality attributes of Irish lamb. At home, the farm operates both beef and sheep enterprises. The beef herd consists of 60 suckler cows with calving split between autumn and spring. Progeny are predominantly sold as weanlings. The herd consists primarily of Limousin and Simmental crossbred cows, most of which are mated to a Charolais stock bull. Approximately 25 cows are selected for AI each year to either breed replacements or, in the case of highly terminal cows, to breed show quality calves.

2017 winding down

Thus far 2017 has been an excellent year for growing grass and thankfully both enterprises are going well on the farm to date (written 25th August). Silage was slightly delayed as a result of the poor weather in the first two weeks in June, however we did get the pit silage harvested on the 12th of June and also managed to make hay and baled silage over the same week, while excess grass from paddocks has been taken out over the season when surplus allowed.

Autumn born calves were weaned in mid-July and are been targeted for sale in mid-September, while spring born calves will be targeted for sale from mid-October onwards. Calves have been allowed to creep graze ahead of the cows all summer and this has worked well. Creep feed has been introduced to all spring born calves except heifers' ear marked for breeding who have been grouped together, these however will receive creep for approximately four weeks around weaning to aid weaning management and reduce

stress. Breeding ceased on the last day of June and cows have since been scanned, from which three cows have been marked for culling. Following scanning, heifer and bull calves were separated to prevent unwanted stress on both groups as heifer calves begin to cycle. Autumn calving will begin in the middle of September with both cows and heifers to calve.

In recent weeks Easter dinner has been a topic of hot discussion in our household, this is a weird conversation to be having in August but preparations are under way for Easter 2018, as a team of Texel rams were let off to 96 ewes to produce spring lambs for the Easter market. Rams were released on the 5th of August with the view to begin lambing in the last days of 2017. Ewes had been grazing after grass for six weeks prior to tupping. 39 replacement hoggets have been purchased and will be joined to Texel rams later in the autumn with a planned mean lambing date of mid-to-late February.

As autumn progresses and we begin to sell stock, the priority will turn to building covers for the spring time, both for the early lambing ewes and lambs as well as targeting earlier turn out of cows and calves next year, if weather permits. Fertilizer and farm yard manure will be applied to ground targeted for early spring grazing. General maintenance work such as painting, repairing sheds as well as power washing and disinfecting have been carried out over the summer so all in all it has been a productive year.

This will be my last contribution to this column, I would like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this publication for the last year, and I hope who ever has read the articles has enjoyed them as much as I have enjoyed writing them.

Presidential address and intro into market section

Writer Bernard Ging, IGA president 2016/2017

Exciting but also worrying time for Irish agriculture

Irish agriculture is in an unusual position. There is an air of optimism in dairying, driven by a recovery in milk price, which in turn is encouraging continued expansion and attracting new entrants into the sector. The beef and sheep sectors have experienced an indifferent year with prices weak at the start of the year, strengthening mid-year and weakening considerably in recent weeks.

Market forecasts are also hard to get a handle on. There has been much talk around gaining increased access to Asian markets which we are told is a real plus given that the population increases to rise and more affluent consumers in the market. On the negative side however, you cannot seem to turn on the television or open a paper without seeing a reference to Brexit and the dangers it brings.

To be honest, I have not invested too much thought into the forecasts as depending on what source you listen to there is various outcomes. None of these are good from an Irish perspective but at the same time there is a long road to go before we truly know what the result will be and unfortunately there is not very much we can do expect to keep pressure on our farm organisations and representatives in Government to ensure we get the best deal possible.

What I can do is continue to work on the things I have control of inside the farm gate. We have tried to take the same approach in IGA events this year – we have focused on visiting good farms where there has been a wealth of take home messages and combined these with inviting specialist speakers to events so that our members can keep well-informed of market developments. The special focus section of this newsletter has also concentrated on giving a range of views on what changes may materialise in the different sectors in the short-term future and we hope that you find this information useful.

Thank you

I am coming to the end of my year as Irish Grassland Association President. While it has often lead me outside my comfort zone, I have enjoyed the challenge and in particular getting the chance to visit so many great farms and events that I may have otherwise missed. The support I received from every member made the task easier and for that I am very thankful.

The IGA council give up their time voluntarily and we are lucky to have a committee of like-minded people that have a common goal to improve the wellbeing of farming across all sectors. I wish Jan Jensma the very best of luck in the role and have no doubt that the organisation will continue to go from strength to strength.





Brexit – a huge challenge for Irish farming

Phelim O'Neill,
Markets Specialist,
Irish Farmers Journal



The decision by the UK to leave the EU is the biggest challenge facing Irish farming in a generation. Britain is the main export market for all commodities produced on Irish farms and any change to the single market conditions that currently exist will be at least disruptive adding cost to doing business, and at worst will end the trading relationship altogether through massive tariffs.

The immediate impact of the UK decision to leave the EU has been the steady decline in the value of sterling which was trading at 70p to €1 in late 2015. As the referendum approached, sterling weakened and then weakened further when the result was known and today as it appears the UK is destined to forgo all trading relationships with the EU, it stands at 92.5p = €1, its lowest level against the Euro since 2009.

2 Sep 2015 00:00 UTC - 1 Sep 2017 09:31 UTC **EUR/GBP** close: **0.92074** low: **0.69949** high: **0.93063**



If the UK leaves the EU as scheduled on 29th March 2019, the trading relationship will change, the only question is by how much. The best case scenario will see the UK remain part of a customs union and the single markets with its former colleagues. This is effectively being part of the EU in practice but not politically. Norway operates in this way having twice voted to remain outside.

However indications so far have been that the UK want the flexibility to make trade deals and control the access of people to the UK. These flexibilities aren't available to countries that remain part of the single market or customs union. Therefore, there is a real possibility that in pursuing these ambitions, the UK becomes what is described as a third country with its trading relationship with Ireland and other EU countries based on WTO rules.

This would be devastating for Irish farming, particularly beef and cheese production where over half of all production is sold to the UK. Under WTO rules these sectors carry amongst the highest tariffs based on a rate per tonne plus a percentage of the selling price as well. On boneless beef this amounts to €3.04/kg plus 12.8% of the products value while on cheddar cheese it is €1.67/kg.

This nightmare outcome for Irish farmers is a real possibility because after the first two rounds of negotiations the parties remain deadlocked. The UK want to proceed to establish a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the EU after they leave but the EU are refusing to even enter discussions on this until the issue of the UK's Brexit bill, the rights of EU Citizens in the UK after Brexit and the Irish border are settled. Most opinion suggests that a FTA cannot be negotiated in the time left before the UK leaves.

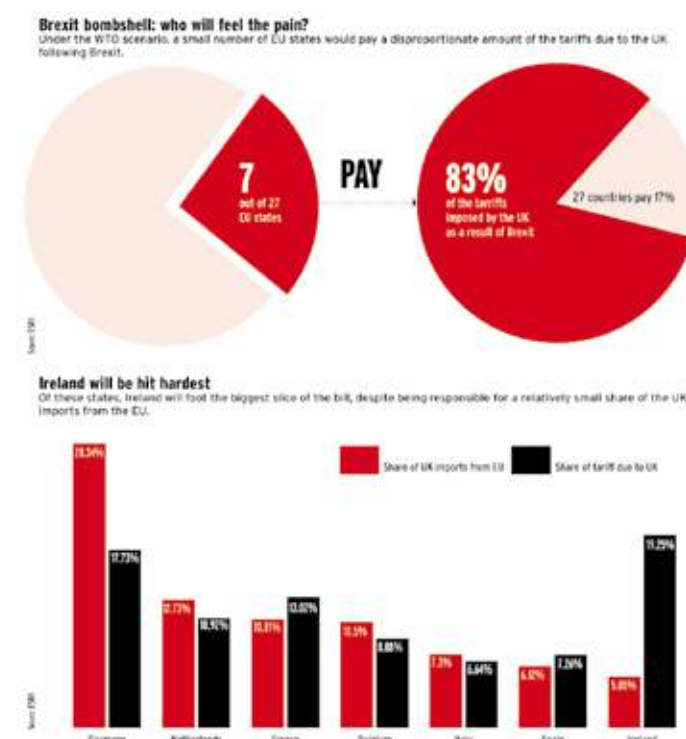
One angle that is gaining favour in the UK is the possibility of having a two or three year transition period after Brexit to create the space for a longer term trading arrangement be negotiated. The current Government are open to this but only on the basis that they can pursue their own trade discussions at the same time. That is unlikely to be well received by the EU negotiators and the consent of all 27 remaining EU members is required for any variation to the notification by the UK on leaving on 29th March 2019

If a FTA between the UK and EU is the eventual outcome, it will allow continued access to the UK market for Irish agricultural produce. The problem is however if the UK make other trade deals from major exporting countries of agricultural produce such as the USA, Australia, New Zealand or the South American countries, the UK market would become "flooded" with cheaper alternatives to Irish produce. Irish exporters could cope with the UK leaving the single market but if

they leave the customs union to make separate trade deals then Irish farming is particularly exposed.

The extent of Irish agriculture exposure to the UK is demonstrated below. In overall trade by the 27 members of the EU, Ireland accounts for just 5%. However, in a WTO tariff situation, that 5% of business would carry 19% of all EU 27 tariffs such is the rate on agricultural produce. Contrast this with Germany who has 28% of all EU 27 trade with the UK which reflects their huge car trade. However because tariffs are just 7.9% on cars, this 28% of trade would generate less tariffs than Ireland at 17%.

What is also striking is just how little most EU 27 countries are exposed to the UK for trade. Twenty of the twenty seven members would be paying just 16% of overall tariffs post Brexit under WTO rates which means whatever the UK does on leaving will have minimal impact on their trade. Ireland is the EU country most exposed to the effect of Brexit, whatever form it takes, and within that agriculture will be the most exposed sector of the Irish economy.



While the indications from UK position papers published recently is that they are intended on pursuing an arrangement outside the customs union and the single market, the Labour party who are the main opposition party in Parliament have announced that their policy is to accept membership of the single market and the customs in any interim arrangement and possibly in the longer term as well. This would be the ideal outcome of Brexit for Irish agriculture but it is by no means certain.



The most difficult trading period in the last decade

Cormac Healy
Meat Industry Ireland
in conversation
with Darren Carty



The Irish agri-food and drinks sector has enjoyed a period of sustained growth with the value of food exports rising to over €11bn in 2016. Within this, beef exports contributed €2.38bn, dairy products and ingredients €3.38bn, pigmeat €615m, poultry €275m and sheepmeat €240m while the export of live animals had a value of €150m.

The effect of the UK's decision to leave the European Union is growing in severity and has the potential to greatly damage a sector that is responsible for supporting 230,000 Irish jobs. The risk is reflected in the value of Irish exports reducing by €570m in 2016. According to Bord Bia this stemmed primarily from the euro strengthening by 13% against sterling in 2016, reducing the competitiveness of Irish exports.

Growing consequences

The damaging consequences of the Brexit vote for Irish exports have become much more apparent in recent months with Cormac Healy, Director, Meat Industry Ireland, warning that, in the context of sterling value, Ireland is in the midst of the most difficult trading period in the last decade.

"The reality is that the UK is our most important market. In terms of the meat industry it is highly reliant on the UK market, 56% of overall meat exports go there. Our total meat exports are in excess of €3.5bn, €2bn of that is exposed to sterling so therefore the recent weakening in sterling is having a huge impact. Since the vote sterling has weakened in the region of 20% against the euro."

Cormac says that the weakening in recent months is

giving rise for even greater nervousness, particularly with predictions of sterling and euro potentially going to parity. "Most worrying, since April of this year we have seen a steady weakening of over 10% to get to the current rate of over 92p to the euro. We did hit 90p temporarily last October but there was a quick reprieve from that. Now we are at 92p and its unprecedented territory, I would say probably the most difficult trading condition in the last decade and commentators are pointing towards parity; that is the real fear we have."

Squeezed margins

Cormac says this putting huge pressure on the margins returned; "while there may have been some initial benefit of hedging that has gone now. We are 12 to 14 months into this difficult period so if someone is hedging now they are doing so at a much poorer rate than before the Brexit vote. While there may have been some recovery of price in the market, it is nothing to the extent that would cover a 20% devaluation in sterling and this is leaving margins being squeezed tighter and tighter." While businesses will continue to hedge on currency the sustained period of sterling devaluation means businesses are become more exposed to the full impact of sterling and witnessing margins being eroded. This is a cumulative effect", says Cormac.

A solution for Irish exports would be customers and consumers carrying some of the costs but this is unlikely to happen with British retailers competing strongly to maintain market share which means very little hope of price inflation. Overall, food inflation year-to-date in the UK is running at just 1.6%, with meat price inflation only reaching 0.65%.

Political intervention

With very serious challenges facing Irish exporters, Cormac says the Irish Government needs to act fast and work with Brussels to prevent irreversible damage. "We would see this as not normal market movements, it's a structural shift between the euro and sterling on foot of a political decision. The response hasn't been there and the action needs to happen now. We have called for additional funding, certainly there's need for mitigation funding to assist companies in the short-term with regards to dealing with cashflow issues and in the medium-term on investment."

Market diversification has been raised as a solution to Brexit related trading difficulties. Cormac however is keen to point out that while market diversification is a vital component in finding markets for Irish produce, it is illogical to expect that market diversification could solve a growing problem for the reducing competitiveness of Irish produce, in the short term.

"Yes, we need more feet on the street in terms of delivering market diversification but it's not as easy as saying Irish companies need to diversify their market. For access to many international markets, there is a Government / competent authority role in terms of removing export restrictions. Diversification takes time and investment - the UK accounts for over 50% of Irish beef exports, if it was easy to diversify then Ireland would already be doing it, the volumes concerned are massive".

Added complications

The trading difficulties described above are discussed

in terms of a reduction in the value of sterling to the euro but Cormac explains there are other factors that also have the potential to greatly effect Irish exports. "Sterling is only one element of the challenge facing Irish exporters. We also have to be mindful of the deal negotiated between the UK and Europe in terms of trade. If there is a hard Brexit with high tariffs introduced, then this will increase the scale of the challenge facing Irish exporters to a whole new level. The Irish Government needs to be much more proactive in ensuring Ireland gets a fair and workable outcome."

A weakening sterling is also interfering with Irish exports to EU markets. This is most apparent in the sheep sector. The UK is a significant importer of sheepmeat with an import requirement of approximately 90,000t, the majority of which comes from New Zealand and Australia. These imports occur mainly in the off-season with the UK a major exporter of lamb during peak season throughput with exports falling shy of just 80,000t in 2016. Cormac says that Irish lamb exports are now seeing very competitively priced UK product in our main export markets, which is putting downward pressure on prices. This will become an even greater challenge if the value of sterling continues to weaken against the euro.

Cormac concluded by saying that swift action and intervention on the part of the Irish government and Brussels has never been more important. "What we don't want to do is find ourselves, wherever negotiations finish, with a lower market share in the UK market or a significantly weaker sector."

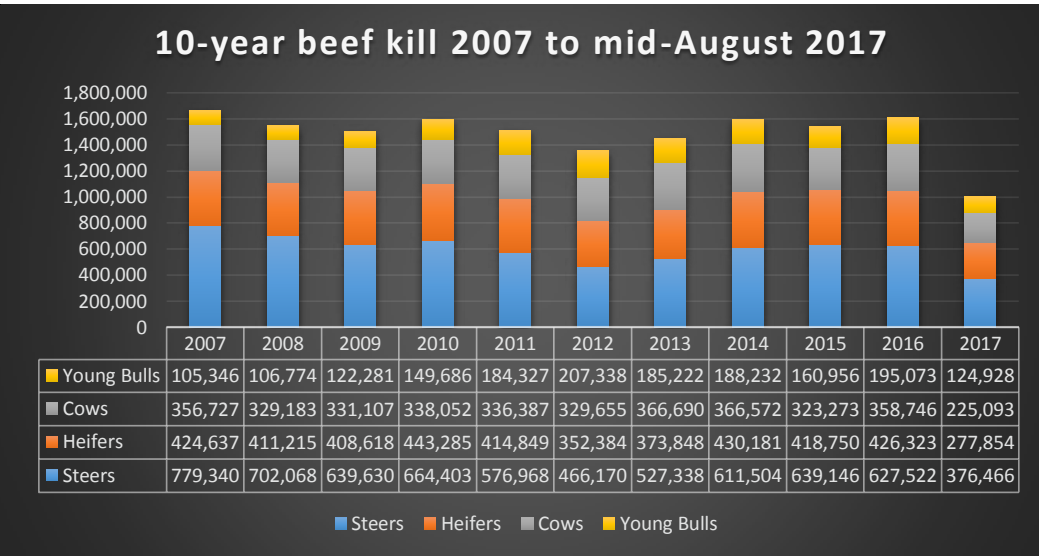


Irish facts and Figures – A rapidly changing beef marketplace

Darren Carty,
IGA Council Member
Irish Farmers Journal



Ireland's beef sector is in a period of rapid change, driven primarily by expansion in the dairy sector. Dairy cow numbers rising by over 300,000 head since 2010 has significantly increased the number of cattle in the marketplace while fluctuations in live exports have also had an effect on the beef kill. There are more big changes to come if future forecasts materialise and dairy cow numbers continue to grow from 1.4m head in 2017 to 1.6 million head in 2020.



Beef kill to reach 10-year high?

The beef kill has witnessed sharp fluctuations over the last 10 years. It dropped to its lowest level of just shy of 1.4m head in 2012 and increased sharply to 1,643,813 head in 2014 which contributed to the beef factory protests that producers will clearly remember. The kill dipped in 2015, reducing by 63,529 head. This fall was partly due to producers switching from bull beef back to steer beef, in response to the

marketing difficulties in 2014, with a 27,276 head drop extending the beef production phase for these male animals.

The kill recovered in 2016, increasing to 1,641,646 with lower exports of cattle north for direct slaughter presenting more cattle to factories. The bull kill also increased beyond levels seen in 2014 with more producers availing of an under 16-month bull beef production system and the possibility of having these

animals priced on the Quality Payment Scheme (QPS) grid.

While only two thirds of the way through 2017, it is already apparent that there will be another sharp jump in the annual beef kill. The number of cattle processed is gaining ground week-on week with 55,257 more cattle processed to the week ending 26 August 2017. At this rate the 2017 kill will exceed the 1.7m head mark and in doing so reach a 10-year high.

Whether or not the kill remains in this position or continues to grow will be influenced by predicted growth in the dairy herd materialising, the suckler herd remaining stable and the level of live exports. If the suckler herd continues to expand, it will take a sharp rise in live exports or a significant reduction in the suckler herd to keep the kill at the current level with higher throughput of cull cows from a larger dairy herd another component to consider.

Can live exports grow and create greater competition?

Live exports have recorded impressive recovery in 2017 with the volume of cattle leaving Ireland up to mid-August rising 45%, or 45,236 head, to reach 146,610 head. The recovery in exports has been driven by calf exports rising 26,648 head to 99,962. The number of weanlings exported live has doubled, but from a low base to reach 14,650. The increase here is stemming from 12,000 animals being exported live to Turkey, with further shipments organised for the coming months.

Any increase in live exports is

massively welcomed by Irish beef and dairy farmers as it reduces the number of cattle in the Irish market and helps competition. It is worth pointing out however that while live exports have improved in 2017, they are still well below levels reached in previous years and many would say well below where they need to be given the increase in calf births.

As the graph shows, the standout year for exports over the last 10 years is 2010 with all sectors performing excellently and contributing to total live exports reaching a massive 338,966. The follow on impact of this on the beef trade can be seen in the previous table where the beef kill

reached its lowest level in 2012.

What has changed since the 2009 to 2011 period and can we continue to secure recovery in live exports? There are many factors influencing this answer. There is no doubt that there is potential to grow calf exports given that we have 300,000 dairy-born calves in the market over 2010 levels. The challenge here in recent years has been the price of Irish calves with farmer competition rising average prices and reducing the scope for live exporters to operate and make a margin. This occurred primarily in 2012 but prices have remained strong since. The growth in demand for Angus and Hereford-

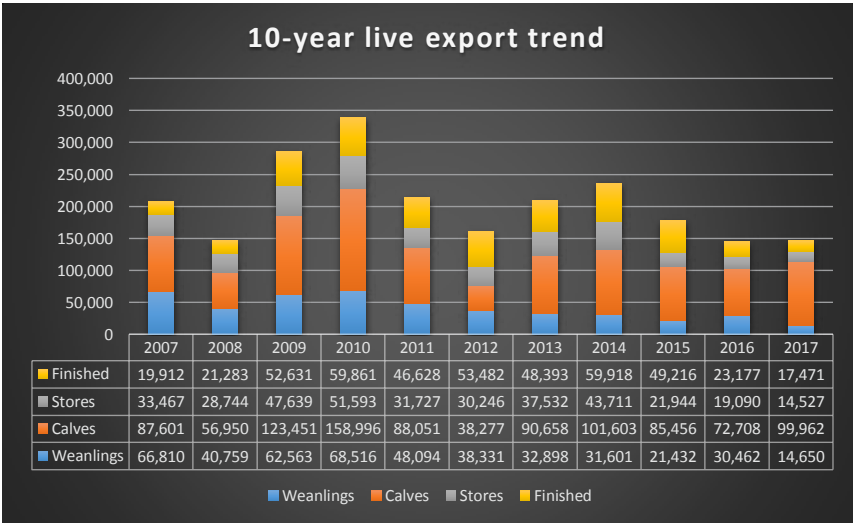
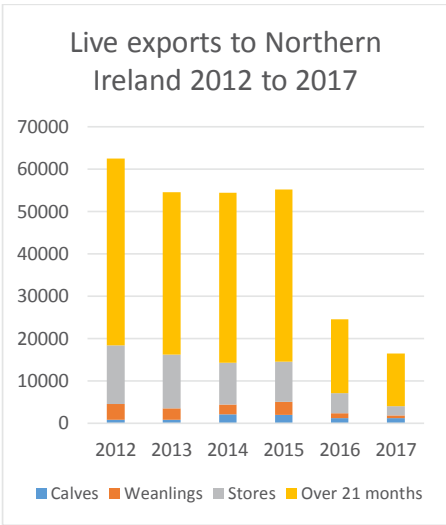
sired calves from the dairy herd and subsequent price increase has also largely closed the window for exporting Angus calves at the latter end of the main exporting period.

The fall in live export of weanlings has been a harder market to rejuvenate. Live exports of high-value E and U grade weanlings to the Italian market was the backbone of this trade for large periods of the last 10 years. In recent years however the market has been hampered by economic difficulties

in Italy and the price of weanlings in Ireland reducing the opportunity to return a margin to exporters.

The weanling trade has been boosted by rising demand from non-EU countries with Turkey helping the trade since mid-2016. The Department of Agriculture and Food established a strong portfolio of non-EU markets for live exports of Irish cattle. While there is strong interest, many of these destinations are unfortunately being hampered by economic

difficulties and political uncertainty. The other big area where exports have fallen as touched on previously is a sharp fall in live exports to Northern Ireland. Exports were on a downward trend from 2012 to 2015 but collapsed in 2016 when many northern processors moved away from processing Irish born cattle in Northern plants. These animals became commonly known as nomad cattle and a solution on these processing difficulties looks now even further away when Brexit is added into the mix.

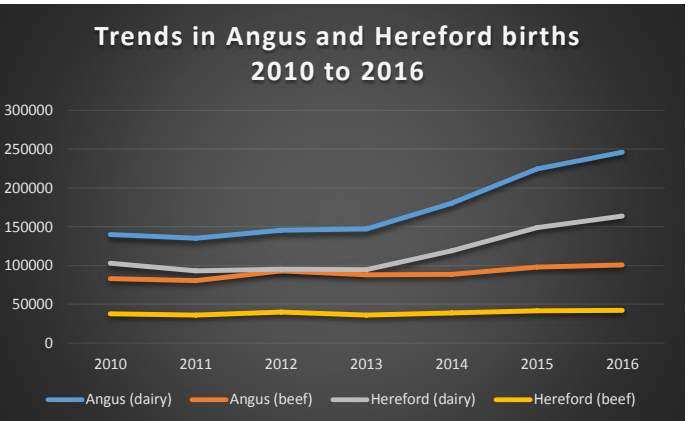


The national beef breed profile is changing

The breed profile of the national herd is changing in line with growth in dairy herds, a resurgence in demand for traditional breeds and a focus on easy calving and more maternal breeding in the suckler herd. The number of Friesian births has understandably increased by 158,716 from 2010 to 2016, as reflected in the table. There has also been huge growth in the number of Angus births with 123,430 extra Angus calves born. Over 100,000 of these additional Angus calves were bred by dairy cows with the balance now standing at 246,138 Angus x dairy cross calves and 100,634 beef Angus calves. Hereford births have also increased by about 60,000 in the dairy herd and close to 5,000 in the suckler herd.

There is also notable changes in continental breeds with Limousin now the number one sire of choice for the suckler herd, with 356,611 suckler births in 2016, with Charolais next up with 331,956 births. Overall Charolais births have reduced just shy of 40,000 in the period with Limousin increasing by a similar amount. Belgian Blue sire usage has also reduced significantly with 32,365 fewer Belgian Blue sired calves born in the last six years. This has been influenced in the suckler herd by a reduction in the trade for high-value weanlings to the Italian market.

Trends in beef births by breed of sire			
Breed	2010	2016	Difference
Friesian	611853	770,569	158,716
Limousin	374895	416,706	41,811
Charolais	383870	344,389	-39,481
Simmental	73014	68,144	-4,870
Aberdeen Angus	223342	346,772	123,430
Hereford	140627	205,748	65,121
Belgian Blue	91055	58,690	-32,365
Shorthorn	15189	15,583	394
Montbéliarde	9472	7,775	-1,697
Other	29,765	24,946	-4,819
Salers	11673	16,203	4,530
Blonde D'Aquitaine	10485	9729	-756
Jersey	17099	23,122	6,023
Aubrac	Not available	8,101	N/A
Parthenaise	Not available	7,819	N/A





There has been a sharp rise in the number of Angus calves born in the last four years with growth being driven by increased births from the dairy herd.

Happy to handle growing numbers of Angus cattle

Charles Smith,
General Manager Irish Angus
Producer Group in conversation
with Darren Carty*



The Irish Angus Producer Group is over 20 years running, having been formed in 1995 by six breeders with the aim of improving coordination and marketing of Angus beef on the Irish market. The group developed alliances with beef processors and over time saw sales of their produce expand beyond Ireland and into the EU. The membership base increased gradually in the 90's and early 2000s. Membership has grown rapidly in recent years with the number of producers trading through the group now standing at over 12,000 producers. Growth in membership and numbers of cattle has escalated since 2013, in particular, following an upward trend in the number of Angus cattle born to dairy cows.

Some producers have been cautious about demand for Angus cattle continuing to grow but Charles Smith, General Manager of the Irish Angus Producer Group says their group are well placed to continue to grow. "Angus cattle are not a new phenomenon in the country. When the group was set up Angus cattle numbers were probably reducing as continental numbers were growing but before this the Angus, Hereford and Shorthorn breeds were the mainstay beef cattle and indeed suckler cows in the country. Growth has been phenomenal in the last few years in particular but so too has been the rising awareness of the eating quality of traditional breeds, not just in Ireland but also across Europe. We are seeing Angus opening

more doors into European markets and a close relationship with our processing partners, ABP and Kepak, and the hard work and commitment of all involved continues to deliver greater market share. With opportunities afoot in the US and China, I believe there is room to continue to grow sales of Angus beef", says Charles.

Charles acknowledges another worry some producers have raised in the last few years, that is a reduction in the quality of cattle coming from the dairy herd. This is stemming from two sources, greater use of crossbreeding in the dairy herd and a focus on using short gestation, easy calving bulls. Charles explains "the quality of cattle has reduced slightly in recent years. You could expect a portion of this could be attributed to new members that may not be used to working with Angus stock but there is also no doubt that changing genetics in the dairy herd and the use of sires with lower carcass attributes is starting to have an effect. The percentage of O- grading cattle has grown from 6% a few years ago to about 10% to 11% which is typical of what factories are also seeing."

Addressing this challenge is something Charles says the Irish Angus Producer Group is keen to work on. "The rate at which membership has grown has left us with a range of farming systems. In the last few years in particular we have seen

a change in our farmer membership profile. Some of these are small-scale suckler farmers who are running a small dairy-beef enterprise in place of a few suckler cows or alongside a suckler herd to increase output, while we also have some beef finishers who would have been purely continental cattle buyers but are now purchasing a percentage of Angus cattle as they are meeting more of these type of cattle in the marketplace. We are keen to help these producers and provide them with the information they need to ensure cattle hit the required specification and can take advantage of the premium. There is a lot of good practical research and demonstration work being carried out such as the dairy-beef trial with Teagasc and ABP in Johnstown Castle so it's a matter of developing a system and integrating more with producers to deliver this advice. One of the most important areas we will be focusing on is the type of animal to purchase."

Retail link-up

Charles says the fact that the group has grown to such a level and has developed as an independent body is giving them a lot more power to take some control of marketing their produce, an element he thinks is critical in growing market share and commanding the optimum return. "There has never been a more appropriate time for us to develop. Competition among retailers is intense and everyone wants to have a point of difference. Ireland is in an ideal position to offer beef that is produced to the highest welfare standards with strong environmental credentials. The fact that the Irish Angus Producer Group has its own certification gives us more independence to deal with retailers and improves the attractiveness of the product we are offering. Many consumers want to know the background of the produce they are buying and we can give them a fantastic story in Ireland, not just in beef but in everything we produce."



Charles Smith (centre) says the group are looking to build on initiatives such as the Certified Irish Angus Beef Schools Competition.



Winners of the Certified Irish Angus Beef Schools Competition run by the Irish Angus Producer Group, along with its processor partners, ABP Ireland and Kepak Group were Emily Browne, Tara Frehill, Shauna Jager and Eithne Murray from Our Lady's School, Terenure.



Charles says one area that the group will be working closely with members on is optimum selection of good quality calves



The Potential Future in Dairy Expansion

Paidi Kelly,
Teagasc animal and
grassland, research and
innovation programme



Milk production has increased dramatically in Ireland since milk quota removal. Ireland produced 6.7 billion litres of milk in 2016, a 35% increase on the 2007-2009 base level of production used to set the Food Harvest 2020 target of 50% extra milk. Record levels of milk are being produced again in 2017 so the 50% target looks like it will be achieved well ahead of 2020.



This extra production has come from an extra 300,000 cows (2016 average cow numbers was 1.35 million) as well as an increase in productivity per cow. There has been a 42% increase in milk solids production against the 2007-2009 base due to farm level improvements in fat and protein %.

While milk production has increased, more important is the change seen at farm level; debt per kilo of milk solids has actually reduced during this period and cost of production has decreased slightly as the extra production is predominantly coming from grazed grass. Maintaining a strong focus on producing milk from grazed grass is essential to keep Irish dairying competitive at a global level.

Further expansion of Irish dairy farming is on-going. More dairy heifer calves were born in Ireland in 2016 than any of the previous years leading up to milk quota removal so a further increase in cow numbers is likely in 2018. The profitability of dairying versus other farming sectors is leading to continued conversions to dairy farming which will further drive milk production increases. In the Teagasc 'People in Dairy Report' an increase of cow numbers to 1.6 million by 2025 was predicted, with the milk pool growing to approx. 8.3 billion litres. To facilitate this expansion it is projected that over 6,000 people will need to enter Irish dairying over this period, creating significant employment opportunities in rural Ireland.

Labour required

The increase in cow numbers has led to a significant increase in average herd size which was 76 cows last year, up from an average of 58 cows in 2010. There has been a particularly significant increase in herds milking greater than 100 cows. In 2016 nearly half of all cows were milked in herds of greater than 100 cows. This number increased by over 50% from 2013 to 2016 indicating a rapid change in farm structure. There are approximately 4,200 farmers



milking greater than 100 cows and average herd size amongst this group is 155 cows. This is a key driver of the increasing career opportunities in Irish dairying as more and more farmers require full and part time employees to run their farming business.

Where are employees required

A wide variety of people are required in Irish dairying in the future including:

- Part time farm assistants who will be needed particularly in the spring during the busy calving period and relief milkers who will be needed throughout the year. These positions in particular may suit people who are looking to supplement their income along with other pursuits.
- Full time farm assistants – helping the dairy farmer completing the day to day jobs on the farm.
- Herd managers – take more responsibility for some of the management decisions on the farm, particularly around grass and cows.
- Farm managers who take responsibility for running the farm business
- Future successors who may be from within the family, or who enter the business via a collaborative farming arrangement.

There are a number of new examples of people in Irish farming who are running their own farming business in conjunction with a farm owner via lease, share farming and partnership arrangements. These arrangements are likely to become more and more popular in the future due to the number of farmers without successors. Hence there are exciting career opportunities in Irish dairying and milk quota removal has meant that you don't need to own a farm, or even be from a farm, to have a successful career in dairying.



Representatives of Bord Bia, Sumikin Bussan, Department of Food and the Marine, Irish Embassy Tokyo, Dawn Meats, ABP.

Raising the profile of European beef and lamb in Asia

Declan Fennell, Bord Bia Lamb Manager



The Asian market has long been heralded as a market that can provide huge opportunities for Irish exports. The most desirable markets that practically every significant exporting nation wants to gain feasible access to are China, Japan and Hong Kong. This is not surprising given the rate of population and economic growth.

There are market opportunities for several products with pigmeat and dairy already making good inroads. Beef has been a slower burner but hopefully Chinese inspectors who are currently visiting Irish factories will give the green light on a market Ireland has been working hard on gaining access to since the BSE ban was lifted in 2015. Gaining access for Irish sheepmeat has been lower down the pecking order of priorities but hopefully this will be fast tracked on the back of good news on beef access.

The potential for growth in these markets can be shown by a quick look of Irish exports to Japan. The value of Irish food exports to Japan has grown from €36m in 2012 to €55m in 2016, with increased trade recorded across a wide range of categories including dairy, pigmeat, seafood, beef and beverages. Ireland regained market access for beef to Japan in 2013 and exports of beef and offal have increased four-fold since then to €7m last year. The recent EU-Japan trade deal will deliver greater access in the future when tariffs reduce and give more access to a market that is only 40% self-sufficient in beef and

which recorded imports of 68,000 tonnes of beef offals in 2016.

Table 1. January to June exports to Japan

Beef offal	2016	2017	% difference
Val	€2.42m	€3.86m	+72%
Vol:	436t	657t	+50%

EU beef and lamb promotion

Earlier this year, Bord Bia won the contract to promote EU beef and lamb in China, Japan and Hong Kong in a campaign valued at €3.75 million (comprising of €3 million in EU funding and €750,000 from Bord Bia). Winning the right to drive this EU campaign is recognition of Ireland as an exporting country with a strong history of promoting and supplying quality beef and lamb that is sustainably produced.

The timing is also fitting as diversification into more international markets has never been more important. The EU Beef and Lamb campaign allows Bord Bia to promote Irish and EU beef and lamb in these expanding markets at a very opportune time, as Ireland moves closer to being the first major EU country to secure market access to China for beef. The recent trade agreement between the EU and Japan represents another positive, and timely, opportunity to expand the range and volume of trade in the region.

This additional funding has enabled Bord Bia to significantly intensify its promotional work in the Asian market including participation at five key trade shows in the region, compared to two last year. As part of the campaign, Bord Bia, together with



Hofex Trade Show, Tokyo, March 2017



Sampling European Beef at the EU Beef Technical Seminar, Tokyo, July 2018

the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, will welcome 20 high level officials from key Chinese Agencies and Ministries to Ireland in September, this compares to just four or five officials who travelled in previous years.

Targeted promotion

In addition, a series of business to business (B-2-B) information and promotional measures targeting key opinion formers will be rolled out across China, Hong Kong and Japan. These promotional measures will be underpinned by the campaign theme “European Beef & Lamb - Excellence in Food Safety & Sustainability.” The overarching aim is to build an awareness and understanding of European Union standards of food safety, quality assurance and traceability of beef and sheepmeat products.

The target audience will cover a broad spectrum of disciplines to include regulatory authorities, trade associations, importers, retail, food-service, executive chefs and media. Activities will focus on six key areas to include; communications, social media, trade fairs, knowledge transfer, chefs’ academy and trade seminars and study visits. Origin Green will be promoted alongside the ‘Enjoy It’s From Europe’ logo at trade fairs, information seminars and networking forums.

A summary of some of the initiatives carried out to date and plans for the remainder of the year are outlined below.

March marked Bord Bia’s first major promotion under the programme with a strong presence at Foodex-Tokyo, a key food trade fair which attracted over 80,000 food buyers, importers, processors, retailers, restaurateurs and chefs.

In May, Bord Bia intensified its promotional activities with an EU Beef and Lamb stand at Hofex-Hong Kong, a key food fair which attracted over 38,000 food buyers, and SIAL-Shanghai, Asia’s largest food trade fair. At SIAL, Bord Bia was also represented by an “Ireland – Origin Green” pavilion with nine Irish meat companies participating.

In July, Bord Bia together with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Sumikin Bussan, one of Japan’s largest beef importers, hosted a technical EU Beef trade seminar and tasting event for some 50 major Japanese beef buyers in Tokyo. Coincidentally this event took place the week following the trade agreement between the EU and Japan

Bord Bia have also been active on **social media** in the region, establishing an EU Beef and Lamb presence on Wechat and Weibo in China and on Facebook in Hong Kong and Japan. There will be a total of over 200 posts throughout the year that will cover B2B topics such as product & technical, production and environmental information as well as more B2C focused topics on recipes, cooking tips and fun facts. During July and August Bord Bia has been producing new photography and video content from Ireland and in each of the markets that will support on-and-off line print and digital marketing activities. A number of new fusion recipes themed “East Meets West” have been developed that are tailored for each market to best highlight the quality and flexibility of Irish and EU beef and lamb.

Forthcoming events include;

- 14 Sept:** Bord Bia together with DAFM will host an EU Beef & Lamb Trade Seminar in Hong Kong.
- 17 - 29 Sept:** 20 high level Government officials will travel into Ireland on a two week knowledge transfer study visit.
- 19 - 21 Sept:** Bord Bia will exhibit at the Food, Meat & Aquatic Exhibition (FMA), Guangzhou under the “EU Beef & Lamb – Excellence in Food Safety & Sustainability” banner.
- 22- 23 Oct (TBC):** Fifteen Chinese and Hong Kong importers and media will travel to Ireland on a five day inward study visit.
- 18 - 20 Oct:** Bord Bia will exhibit at the China International Meat Industry Exhibition (CIMIE), Beijing under the “EU Beef & Lamb – Excellence in Food Safety & Sustainability” banner.
- November:** Bord Bia will host a second EU Beef Trade Seminar in Japan.
- December / January:** Bord Bia will host an EU Beef & Lamb Trade Seminar in China.

Autumn health and safety tips



Autumn is a busy periods on Irish farms with weaning calves, drying off cows and housing just some of the tasks facing livestock farmers. This leaves aside a busy harvest and sheep breeding on mixed enterprise farms. Here are some tips to keep in mind to stay safe this spring.

- Young children are inquisitive about machinery and livestock. A farmyard is not a playground and children should never be allowed to come onto the farm unsupervised. Teaching children the dangers of farming is beneficial and this extends right up to young adolescents.
- Getting trapped or crushed by machinery is one of the greatest causes of farm deaths. Never leave a vehicle without applying the handbrake and only work under equipment where there is additional safety supports to jacking equipment.
- Carry out required maintenance to buildings and take any necessary action to improve lighting in yards or sheds.
- Animals will be transported much more frequently by trailer in the coming months. Ensure your trailer is in prime order with lights working and that you have the necessary license. Loading cattle is high risk, don't be complacent or let your guard down.
- Cows can become agitated around weaning while autumn calving also poses a risk.
- Ensure all PTO guards are in place and that cultivation, planting and winter feed equipment is in good working order.
- Always keep chemicals and animal remedies in a secure area that can be locked. Invest in a good mask, gloves and safety clothing and take the necessary precautions if dipping or administering health treatments.
- There will be a spike in slurry spreading to get tanks emptied before the prohibited spreading period kicks in. Never enter a shed when tanks are being agitated and keep the agitation point closed when not in use and locked once spreading is finished.
- While possibly not as busy a period as spring for livestock farmers, it is important to take time out as the risk of accidents increase with fatigue. Take time to recoup and visit the doctor for a yearly health check.