

**Irish Grassland  
Association**

# IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION

**‘Cow for the systems, or system for the cow?’**

## WHATS INSIDE

Changing times  
for the Irish  
Sheep Industry

Recent Grazing  
Trials at Teagasc,  
Grange

IGA Sheep  
Conference &  
Farm Walk 2011

IGA DAIRY  
SUMMER TOUR  
2011

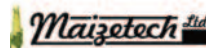
“Small cows  
make big profit in  
Co Down”

IGA demo shows  
how to cut the  
cost of growing  
grass

Update on  
Reseeding Events  
2011



# IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION



**Irish Grassland Association**  
Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath.

# CORPORATE MEMBERS 2011



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# Changing times for the Irish Sheep Industry

**By Darren Carty Irish Grassland Association council member and Irish Farmers Journal**

The Irish Sheep Industry has witnessed dramatic changes over the last decade. Flock and total sheep numbers have continued under downward pressure for over a decade and as a result, one of the main obstacles against potential growth in the sector, is that the sheep flock is starting at a much lower base.

The introduction of coupled payments in Ireland had an immediate influence on numbers with the sheep flocks more than doubling between 1980 and 1995. Flock numbers not only rose on individual farms but on mixed farming systems with sheep and alternative enterprises becoming much more widespread. The mid 1990's represented the peak for sheep numbers in Ireland but numbers have been on a downward spiral ever since.

In the early 2000's the fall in the National breeding flock was relatively consistent dropping by between 100,000 to 150,000 ewes each year. Some reasons attributed were lower returns relative to the labour required, diversification to

alternative enterprises, destocking on commonages and mountains and farmers retiring without being replaced.

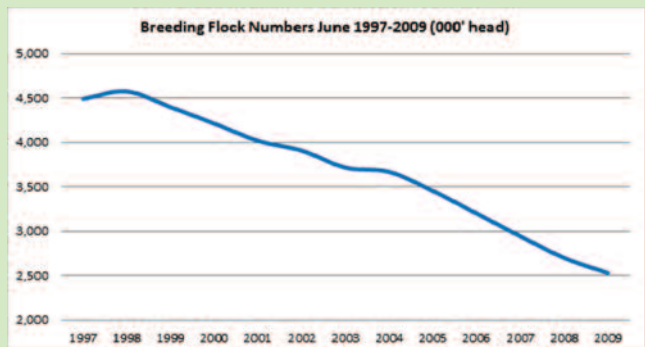
The rate of decline accelerated in 2005 with the introduction of decoupled payments and the end of the requirement on farmers to retain flock numbers to draw down direct payments. This was certainly a major contributing factor for the decline in sheep numbers but it was not the sole reason for the rate of decline ever since.

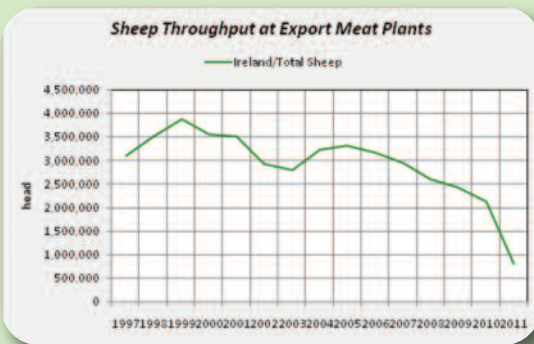
Smaller dairy farmers who in the past ran small flocks of ewes started expanding in dairy and, in most cases, phased out their sheep flocks.

There was also a move to lesser degree to tillage and beef enterprises while the closure of the sugar beet industry had a marked effect on numbers in the south east where sheep became less suitable to many farming systems in the absence of sugar beet tops. The 'Celtic tiger era' also had a part to play as it lured part-time farmers to off-farm employment at the expense of sheep flocks.

All of these factors have combined to reduce the National flock to where it is today with an estimated 2.5million breeding ewes.

This has also brought about major changes at processing level. As can





be seen in the graph; ‘Sheep Throughput At Export Meat Plants’ numbers have fallen from over 3.86 million head in 1999 to just over 2.12 million head in 2010.

There has also been a switch from early lambing to mid-season or later lambing flocks. The one positive to lower numbers is that sheep prices have increased since the end of 2009. However the downside is that prices have increased on the back of tight supplies rather than increased consumer demand. This has led to very variable market conditions, as was witnessed earlier this year, with prices reaching heights that had not been seen for several years but falling back severely as throughput increased. While these higher prices were a very welcome aspect of the trade, most will agree that prices which are sustained at a higher level, without reaching extremes for short periods, will be more beneficial in the long term in sustaining and strengthening the sheep sector.

### Impact of Northern Irish lambs

The cessation of Foyle Meats in June 2010 as a processor of lamb in Northern Ireland has also led to big changes at processing level both North and South of the border. Foyle was a significant processor of lamb and their absence from the sector today leaves extra lambs in the marketplace. With throughput tightening, many southern plants used these extra lambs in the marketplace to fill the void left by falling supplies with the final result of

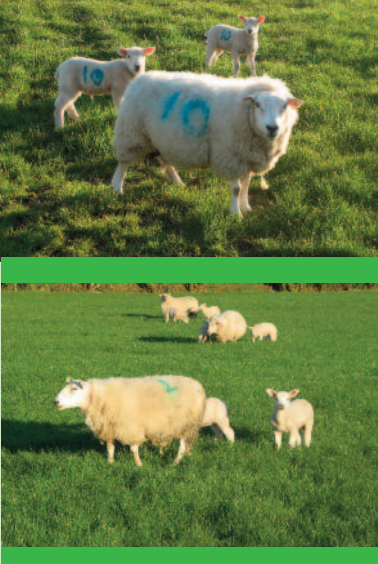
over 100,000 extra lambs were imported from July to December 2010.

As can be seen from Figure 1 (below); ‘Exports of Sheep from NI to ROI 2008-2011’, this trend has continued into 2011 with 5,000-10,000 sheep imported each week and these imports make up a considerable percentage of the weekly kill. For the week ending 18 June 2011, a total of 180,252 sheep were imported for direct slaughter compared to 91,250 for the same period in 2010. In addition for the same period over 16,000 less sheep have been exported North.

### Future trends

Ireland is certainly not on its own in terms of falling sheep numbers. Numbers have fallen by about 25% across the main EU sheep producing countries since 1990. The EU is only about 80% self sufficient to meet its requirement in sheep meat consumption.

Production in New Zealand, the biggest exporter of sheepmeat to the EU is also

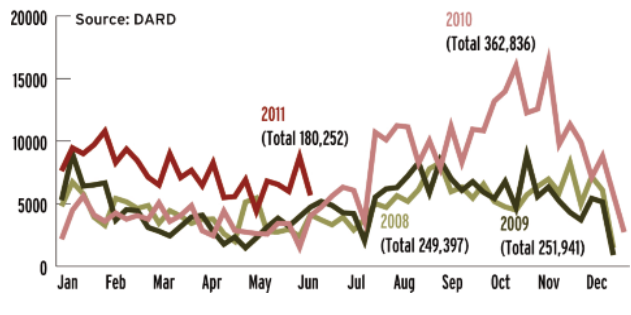


falling, with lamb numbers falling by close to 5m over the last 4 seasons. In 2010, New Zealand failed to fill its EU quota of approximately 227,000 tonnes by 10-15% for the first time in 10 years. This is despite the EU being New Zealand's highest value export market. With torrential storms during the NZ lambing season, this could reduce even more in 2011.

With sheep numbers continuing to fall worldwide and markets emerging in Eastern developing countries, there are positive signs for sheep markets into the future. Hopefully, the sheep sector in Ireland will still be in a position to take advantage, should this materialise.

**Figure 1**

Exports of sheep from NI to ROI 2008-2011







# Recent Grazing Trials at Teagasc, Grange



**Eddie O'Riordan Mark McGee**

Animal & Grassland and Innovation Centre,  
Teagasc, Grange

## Background

High nutritive value grazed grass is considerably cheaper than grass silage and concentrates so maximising its proportion of the annual feed budget, while achieving high animal performance and providing sufficient grass silage of appropriate digestibility for the indoor winter period, is central to a grass-based beef production system.

## Earlier turnout to pasture in spring

### *Suckler cows*

The effect of earlier turnout to pasture in spring, with restricted grazing or full-time grazing, on intake and performance of first-calving suckler cows was evaluated using the Derrypatrick herd at Grange. Three treatments were compared, (i) Indoor feeding (IF): grass silage ad libitum plus 2 kg of concentrate daily, (ii) Restricted grazing (RG): 6 hours daily in one bout (cows only) plus 0.3 of mean pre-experimental grass silage dry matter (DM) intake plus 2 kg of concentrate daily, and (iii) Full-time grazing (FG): (cows + calves). Animals on grazing treatments were offered ad libitum fresh pasture daily. Dietary treatments lasted from 1 March to 29 March. Results showed short-term benefits in animal performance from earlier turnout to pasture. Replacing expensive feedstuffs with cheaper-to-produce grass, and less slurry to be handled, meant greater cost savings. Compared to full-time indoor feeding, **feed** cost savings of ~€0.52/cow/day were achieved with restricted grazing and €1.11/ cow/day were achieved with full-time grazing.



These results are similar to findings from other studies at Teagasc, Grange using mature suckler cows whereby earlier turnout to pasture in spring with restricted grazing (six hours per day; cows only), of autumn- and spring-calving cows, resulted in **feed** cost savings of ~€0.86 and ~€0.84/ cow/ day, respectively, compared to their comrades indoors.

### *Yearling cattle*

Similarly, a comparison of continental breed, yearling heifers turned out earlier to pasture in spring (full-time) with their contemporaries turned out 21 days later, showed only short-term benefits in animal performance. Nevertheless, replacement of grass silage and 2 kg of supplementary concentrates with grazed grass resulted in **feed** cost savings of ~€0.55/animal/day in this case.

This finding is in agreement with previous studies at Grange, using animals in both suckler and dairy calf-to-beef systems, whereby the additional growth benefit observed in yearling cattle turned out to pasture early is largely offset by compensatory growth in animals turned out later.

## Post-grazing sward height (PGSH)

### *Suckler cows and calves*

In 2010, a trial was set up using the Derrypatrick herd to evaluate the effects of two PGSH on performance of first-calving suckler cows and their calves during the grazing season. Cows and calves were allocated to one of two grazing systems: a PGSH of either 4.0 cm (tight grazing) or 5.5 cm (more conventional grazing).

The stocking rate (2.9 LU/ha equivalent) was the same for each grazing system. The experiment was undertaken from early May to mid-October during which, cows and their calves were rotationally grazed together on predominantly perennial ryegrass swards. Fresh grass was allocated to each system once the target PGSH was achieved. Grass surplus to grazing requirements was removed as silage. At the end of the grazing season (early November) animals were housed indoors and offered grass silage and additionally, calves were offered supplementary concentrates. Average pre-grazing sward height (10.1 cm) and herbage mass (1845 kg DM/ha) was similar for both grazing systems. Cow live weight gain was lower (gut-fill effects) and cow body condition score gain tended to be lower for the 4.0 cm than for the 5.5 cm PGSH. Calf live weight gain was 8-10 kg lower with the 4.0 cm PGSH.

### *Yearling cattle*

The reduction in growth of suckler calves grazing to a lower PGSH is consistent with other recent findings at Grange, whereby yearling steers grazing to a lower PGSH of 3.5 cm (vs. 5.0 cm) in a dairy calf-to-beef system were ~30 kg lighter at the end of the grazing season.

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# IGA Sheep Conference & Farm Walk 2011



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L-R Liam Egan Mullinahone  
Co-Op joint sponsor, Darren  
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farmer) and Eamon Wall  
Sheep Ireland Joint Sponsor

**Breeding, grass and research implementation and dissemination showcased at IGA Sheep Conference & Farm Walk 2011. The IGA Sheep Conference and Farm Walk 2011 will be held in the Newpark Hotel, Kilkenny city followed by a farm walk on the farm of William Hutchinson, Chapelizod, Kells, County Kilkenny.**



Tim Byrne works for AbacusBio in New Zealand as a genetics consultant with a range of technology, agribusiness and breeder clients. He has a depth of knowledge of production systems in New Zealand and internationally, and has worked in a wide range of areas including systems for the integration of leading-edge production and molecular genetics technologies, cost-benefit analysis of DNA-marker integration, electronic identification, and automated drafting systems. Tim specialises in providing advice on the development, implementation, and economic evaluation of breeding strategies. This includes development of multi-trait economic selection indexes for beef and dairy cattle, and sheep throughout New Zealand and internationally. He works closely with breeders in New Zealand advising on mate selection and allocation systems to maintain genetic diversity and maximise genetic gain. At the ICBF Tim worked on breeding programme design and implementation in the Irish industry, and also in the areas of communication and extension.



Andrew Moloney is a sheep and beef farmer in Edenderry county Offaly. Andrew runs a mixed enterprise of mid season lambing ewes and suckler cows bringing progeny to beef. Huge emphasis is placed on grassland management with the focus of achieving maximum weight gain and grass utilisation during the grazing season. Lambs are finished off grass with top quality grass silage and hay used during the winter period to minimise the total concentrates fed in the sheep system.

The second session of the day will provide an opportunity for all interested farmers and stakeholders attending the conference to have an input into the future direction of sheep research in Ireland and its efficient transfer onto Irish sheep farms. Teagasc has recently recruited two new scientists to underpin their national sheep research programme, Noirin McHugh in sheep breeding and Philip Creighton in grassland management for sheep. The workshop will be chaired by former UCD sheep expert Dr. Frank Crosby and will provide a forum to discuss the priority areas of research and the research questions that need to be addressed and the most efficient mechanism for the transfer of that research on to farms.



## FARM WALK

This year's sheep farm walk is being hosted by William Hutchinson, Kells, Chapelizod. The farm has established sheep, beef and tillage enterprises but is continually adopting new technologies to help increase efficiency and drive performance.

There is a wide range of farming practices being implemented on the farm that will be of interest to all flock owners no matter what your flock size is. William runs mid-season lambing commercial, pedigree and yearling hogget flocks. Sheep are mixed-grazed with bulls to improve grassland management and take advantage of the boost in performance mixed grazing provides.

The commercial flock comprises approximately 320 mature Belclare and Suffolk cross ewes. All commercial ewes are lambed outdoors. Last year 25 Easycare ewes were purchased to investigate the merits of the breed and see if there is potential to further reduce labour with outdoor lambing. About 150 yearling ewe hoggets are ran as a separate flock up until weaning and lamb just after the main flock of ewes. These are also Belclare and Suffolk cross ewe lambs with Easycare cross yearling hoggets also now entering the system.

The pedigree flock includes three breeds; Suffolk, Texel and Ile de France. It is run separate for ease of management but according to William this is the only real difference to the commercial flocks. Pedigree ewes are not sponged and receive no preferential treatment, lambing down at the same time as the commercial flock. No creep is fed to lambs unless where ewes are rearing triplet lambs or individual problem cases arise such as ewes have one blind teat for example. Creep feeding arrangements are similar for the commercial flock. Pedigree rams are not fed excessively at any stage and are mostly sold as hogget rams at 1-1.5 years old.

The main emphasis with all sheep on the farm is to utilise grass to its full potential. The farm is split in two distinct blocks, the main block around the farmyard and an out-farm block a few miles away of 24.28ha (60 acre). Sheep are grazed in one of two scenarios. As mentioned above, mixed grazing with bulls is operated as much as possible or where this is not possible a paddock or rotational system of grazing is used. Ewes and lambs are grazed with bulls early in the spring when grass quality is at its highest. As the season progresses and lambs become more dependent on grass (about 9-10 weeks of age), they are forward creep grazed with bulls ahead of the ewes. This achieves maximum performance in both the lambs and the bulls. Ewes can then be forced to graze the sward tighter to 4-4.5cm promoting excellent quality grass re-growth.

Tyfon is also grown as an aid to finishing lambs. William explains that in a normal year, the soil type on the farm results in grass growth reducing significantly in July and August. At the same demand remains high from bulls and lambs. The Tyfon crop provides him with a large supply of dry matter forage that would not be possible from grass. Lambs are introduced onto the crop at 38-39kg and are finished in a three to four week period. Weight gain is in the region of 2kg per day with William commenting that it also lifts the grade and kill-out percentage of lambs. The crop is not used as a substitute to grassland management as grass makes up the sole diet for ewe lambs and lambs less than 38kg.

Since 2009, William is a participant of both the MALP and LambPlus sheep breed improvement programmes co-ordinated by Sheep Ireland. The MALP programme identifies rams with strong genetic links. These bloodlines are tested in commercial conditions to identify the best genetics available going forward. All sheep have been electronically tagged with records such as litter size, lambing difficulties, growth rates, maternal traits and much more collected by means of a handheld electronic reader. This information is transferred back through genetic evaluations increasing the accuracy of Euro-Star predictions on rams.

In addition to all of the above, figures will be available on all production data, financial performance of the three flocks, and performance from grass and Tyfon. William is also a member of a very active discussion group and the merits of such in collecting and disseminating information will also be discussed on the day.

### Prepaid discount rates: €40 for IGA members, €80 for non members

#### Conference fee includes;

- Attendance and bus transfers
- Copy of the 'full day' conference papers
- Refreshments on arrival
- Two course dinner followed by tea/coffee

*Please note that as part of its initiative to attract new members, the conference fee for non members also includes one year's FREE membership to the IGA (for all new d/d memberships). So, if you are a non member and thinking of attending, then don't miss out on this excellent offer!*

You can register and avail of these **prepaid discounted rates** before Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July by:

1. Posting booking form and cheque payable to the IGA to:  
SHEEP REGISTRATIONS, IGA, Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath
2. Making a prepaid registration online [www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com)
3. Calling Maura in our office on 087 9626483. and making a payment by laser or credit card

Any registrations after this date will incur a €10 surcharge for members and €20 for non members.

  
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# IGA DAIRY SUMMER TOUR 2011

## *The cow for the system or the system for the cow?*



We are delighted to once again have ACC as the sponsor of this exciting event. Commenting on the event Sean Farrell, ACC, said ***"ACCBank is delighted to be sponsoring the 2011 IGA Summer Dairy Tour. We look forward to visiting the Kelly and Purcell & McGlew farms, learning from their recent experiences and hearing about their plans for the future"***. The IGA Dairy Summer Tour will take place on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July. Registration will take place at City North Hotel, just off Junction 7 on the M1 motorway.

At this years' Dairy Summer Tour the Irish Grassland Association will pose the question ***'do you select the cow for the system, or the system for the cow?'*** The Dairy Summer Tour will visit two farms in Co. Louth. The farms while in very close proximity to each other have contrasting philosophies; one is adapting a grass based system to suit the feed requirements of a high production herd, while the other farm is going the route of selecting the most suitable cow for a grass based system.

The tour will visit Philipstown Farm, home to the Monamore Herd of Holstein Friesians. Tom Kelly is a life long Holstein Friesian breeder and has achieved national and international recognition as an owner, breeder and judge of high quality dairy stock. Tom started milking 40 cows in 1979 as a liquid milk supplier. Today he milks approximately 280 cows on a grazing platform of 96 ha. Approximately 40% of the cows on this farm are winter calving. Breeding is a big focus on this farm, with emphasis placed on type and on milk solids yield. Tom began measuring grass in 2009. Grazed grass is the base feed on the farm from March to October, supplemented as required with concentrate. Cows are fed to yield above 22 litres. During the visit we will discuss Toms breeding strategy and his grassland management system for his high producing dairy cows



Tom Kelly, Philipstown Farm, Host Farmer



Andrew Purcell and Alfred McGlew, Kiltallaght and Rinkinstown Farm, Host Farmers

The tour will also visit the farm of Andrew Purcell and Alfred McGlew. Andrew and Alfred are both farming since the early 1990's. In 2007 they formed a farm partnership. At that time Andrew was milking 70 autumn calving cows supplying liquid milk, while Alfred had a herd of 70 spring calving cows on a leased farm. Since forming the partnership they have expanded the farm and today have a milking platform of 90 ha milking 241 spring calving Friesian cows with a quota of 1.2 mn litres. Young stock, which are cross bred Jersey and Norwegian Red are reared on outside blocks of 51 ha. Attention to detail, a strong working relationship, good stock and grassland management are key to why this partnership is working and making 1+1 = 2+. Come and learn the key messages from Andrew and Alfred on making a partnership work.

**Early booking is strongly encouraged as places will be limited for this event. A special discount registration fee applies to registrations up to and including Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> July.**

**PREPAID DISCOUNT RATES:****€40 for members €80 for non members****Conference fee includes;**

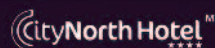
- Attendance and bus transfers to both farms
- Copy of the 'full day' conference papers
- Refreshments on arrival
- Two course dinner followed by tea/coffee

Please note that as, part of its initiative to attract new members, the conference fee for non members also includes one year's FREE membership to the IGA (for all new direct debit memberships). So, if you are a non member and thinking of attending, then don't miss out on this excellent offer!

You can register and avail of these prepaid discounted rates before Wednesday 20th July by:

1. Posting booking form and cheque payable to the IGA to: DAIRY REGISTRATIONS, IGA, Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath
2. Making a prepaid registration online [www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com)
3. Calling Maura in our office on 087 9626483 and making a payment by laser or credit card.

*Any registrations after this date will incur a €10 surcharge for members and €20 for non members.*

**ACCOMODATION**


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[www.citynorthhotel.com](http://www.citynorthhotel.com)[info@citynorthhotel.com](mailto:info@citynorthhotel.com)**Update on the Liston Herd Host Farmer 2010 Dairy Summer Tour**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010, the morning session of the Dairy Summer Tour took place on the farm of Aidan, Mary and Fiachra Liston of Ballyaileen, Croom, Co. Limerick. I chaired the session on the Liston farm and one of the issues on the day was the projected performance of the Liston herd for 2010.

The Liston's, in conjunction with their local Teagasc advisor, Jim Barry, had set a target of 5,100 litres of milk per cow for their 180 cow herd for 2010. I have

extracted the following figures from the Tour Booklet from the day. Beside the estimated figures, I have placed the actual performance figures for 2010.

As you can see from the table, milk production came in 168 litres per cow ahead of target. Fat % was 0.1% less than that predicted, while milk protein percent was 0.05% ahead of target.

Milk production per ha, which is the driver on the Liston farm came in at 1,273 kg per ha, or 61kgs per ha ahead of the projected figure.

On the day of the Summer Dairy Tour, the audience was sceptical of whether the projected production performance could be achieved. They were right to be sceptical, since milk production on the day of the tour was 18 litres (3.96 gallons) per cow. The cows had lost milk in the days leading up to the tour. Weather at the time was wet, grass was growing rapidly and cows were "loose".

However, milk production stabilised again the following week and the cows milked as well in September, as they had done for the second half of July.

As every dairy farmer knows, last autumn was a terrific period for milking cows. Yields held up very well throughout the autumn, and grass growth was exceptional.

The Liston's have a high stocking rate on the milking block (3 cows/ha). Consequently, they began taking action in September to ensure they had grass in the milking cows diet, day and night until drying off. Twenty cows (11% of the herd) were not in calf at the end of breeding season. They were sold at the end of September. The first lactation animals were dried off from the middle of October.

The really bad frost in the last few days of November made up Fiachra Liston's mind to dry off the rest of the remaining milking cows (total 80). These were dried off, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December. The annual milk recording records for the Liston's herd for 2010, shows that the herd milked, on average, for 271 days in 2010.

<b>PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>2010 – Estimate</b>	<b>2010 – Actual</b>
<b>Stocking Rate (Lu/Ha)</b>	3.0	3.0
<b>Grass Utilised</b>	8.5	8.3
<b>Yield (litres/cow)</b>	5,100	5,268
<b>Fat %</b>	4.25	4.15
<b>Protein %</b>	3.45	3.49
<b>Milk Solids/Cow</b>	404	415
<b>Milk Solids/ha</b>	1,212	1,273







Irish Grassland Association



# “Small cows make big profit in Co Down”

Paul Turley  
Host Farmer

**T**he ideal type of cow for suckler beef production in Ireland is just one of the questions that will be debated at the forthcoming conference and farm walk, being hosted by the Irish Grassland Association, Ulster Grassland Society and Irish Farmers Journal, in Downpatrick, County Down on Tuesday 19 July 2011.

The event will include a morning mini conference at the La Mon House Hotel, Belfast, (registration 9.30am) where speakers will include Dr. Andrew Cromie (ICBF), Dr. Francis Lively (AFBI) and Kieran Mailey (CAFRE) & AgriProfit Northern Ireland Suckler Beef Programme and an afternoon visit to the farm of Paul Turley, Downpatrick. Paul was

Registration  
9.30am  
La Mon Hotel,  
Belfast

recently profiled in the Irish Farmers Journal, where the article entitled “small cows make big profit in County Down” has generated much interest amongst beef farmers. Other themes being picked up on the day will include breeding targets for profitable suckler beef production, improving labour efficiency on the farm and grassland management to maximize gross margin per hectare.

Speaking at the launch of the conference, Gerard McBrien (regional development officer for the Irish Grassland Association) commented that “the conference and farm walk are in response to a growing concern amongst Irish beef farmers regarding the type of cow that dominates our suckler beef systems. There has been some excellent work in the North on the issue of cow type on both the Greenmount Hill farm and also on commercial beef farms, with the latter being as a result of strong price contracts between retailers, processors and producers. These contracts ensure that farmers such as Paul Turley are absolutely

focused on achieving compact spring calving (average calving interval for the 120 cow herd is 364 days) with all steers being slaughtered of grass at ~17 months and an average carcass weight of some 300 kg. The event will be a unique opportunity for IGA members and guests to see at first hand a top class suckler beef operation and the type of cow that is prevalent in these systems”.

Commenting on the event, Phillip Donohoe, president of the IGA, acknowledged the unique nature of the event. “We are delighted to be co-hosting this event with the Ulster Grassland Society and the Irish Farmers Journal. We have developed a close working relationship with both organizations over many years and I have no doubt that we will have an excellent event in Co. Down on 19 July”.



Justin McCarthy Irish Farmers Journal, Paul Turley host farmer, Gerard McBrien, RDO Irish Grassland Association and Norberry Royle Ulster Grassland Society President.

### PREPAID DISCOUNT RATES:

€35 for members €70 for non members

Conference fee includes;

- Attendance
- Copy of the ‘full day’ conference papers
- Refreshments on arrival
- Two course dinner followed by tea/coffee

Please note that as part of its initiative to attract new members, the conference fee for non members also includes one year’s FREE membership to the IGA (for all new direct debit memberships). So, if you are a non member and thinking of attending, then don’t miss out on this excellent offer!

You can register and avail of these prepaid discounted rates before Wednesday 13th July by:

1. Posting booking form and cheque payable to the IGA to: BEEF REGISTRATIONS, IGA, Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath
2. Making a prepaid registration online [www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com)
3. Calling Gerard on 087 7990179 or Maura in our office on 087 9626483 and making a payment by laser or credit card.

Any registrations after this date will incur a €10 surcharge for members and €20 for non members.

In addition the IGA will be organising buses, with buses leaving the evening before the event and returning the evening of the event. To book a ticket for the bus please contact Gerard McBrien: 087 7990179

To book for this event please register on line  
[www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com) before Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> July.

### Event tickets

€35 For IGA Members

€70 Non-Members

Register online

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Or call Maura 087 9626483/

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### Accommodation



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**BEFORE WED 13<sup>th</sup> JULY 2011**





# IGA demo shows how to cut the cost of growing grass



We would like to thank our host farmer and our speakers from industry and research

**On 24th May the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) held a “Live” Grass Machinery Demonstration that focused on low cost grass production on the farm of Mr. Patrick Murtagh, Doon, Virginia, Co. Cavan.**

This special member's only event attracted a crowd in excess of 200 delegates. The event focused on a number of areas that demonstrated to farmers various ways to significantly reduce the cost of growing grass including live demonstrations and presentations on:

- Clover sowing (reduce nitrogen requirement)
- Slurry injection (the current value and cost of cattle/pig slurry)
- Fertiliser spreader calibration, proper usage of fertiliser, soil analysis
- Weed control



## IGA demo shows how to cut the cost of growing grass

*By Derek Casey Irish Farmers Journal*

I am featuring a couple of machines that farmers can choose from for reseeding grass – the Sumo Moore Unidrill and the Cross grass reseeding drill. I also look at what farmers can do to improve their fertiliser spreading accuracy, as shown at the recent Irish Grassland Association demo held in Cavan.

### SUMO MOORE UNIDRILL

The Sumo Moore Grassland Unidrill is a new arrival on the market and it was demonstrated at the IGA event on the farm of Patrick Murtagh in Virginia. Speakers from the IGA, Teagasc, Goldcrop and industry as well as local contractors focussed on a number of areas that should significantly reduce the cost of growing grass. Presentations were given on clover sowing, slurry injection, fertiliser spreader calibration, proper usage of fertiliser, soil analysis and weed control.

The Sumo Moore Grassland Unidrill pictured is owned by Grangegeeth, Co Meath contractor, Pat Keally. Pat told me that he bought the machine last season from Sam Moore in Northern Ireland for about €25,000 including the Accord seed hopper. He told me this drill weighs 2.5 tonnes and it needs about a 140hp tractor.

This machine uses close row spacing (32 discs spaced 3.5 inches apart) so that one pass seeding can be made into either a grass or cereal stubble or a conventionally tilled seedbed. It uses a compact three point linkage mounted chassis for quicker headland turn performance in smaller fields, and a central seed metering system for sowing





combined. Sam Moore says it has the ability to sow down to the very last seed quantity with all seed types. The soil engaging unit is from the proven grassland Unidrill on a trailing rubber suspension arm. Unlike the Guttler or the Cross machines, the Moore machine uses discs. It places small seeds down into the soil (at the correct depth) through the use of single disc and seed tube coulter arrangement. During the demonstration at the Irish Grassland Association event, the Moore drill was placing clover seeds near the top of the surface because placing them any deeper would have damaged germination rates. Pat was sowing the clover at a rate of 2kg/acre. The following red prism roller is similar to the one found on the Guttler machine and it serves the same role – a firming roller to ensure good soil to seed contact.

With the Unidrill new seeds can be introduced into existing swards, either by seeding directly into glyphosate sprayed off grass stubbles, or by stitching in without chemical, using cultural control of the existing sward. Seeding into stubbles or conventionally tilled seedbeds can be easily done as well. Apart from clover and grass seed, this unit could also be used for sowing the likes of kale and rape.



Donal Callery IGA, Maura Callery IGA, Derek Casey IFJ speaker, Patrick Murtagh host farmer and John Fagan IGA

**Grassland Moore unidrill.** The Grassland Moore Unidrill, unlike the Guttler Greenmaster or the Cross seeder, places seeds down into the soil through the use of single disc and seed tube coulter arrangement.

### CALIBRATING THE FERTILISER SPREADER

At the IGA event farmers also heard from David Borland of Farmhand, who are distributors of the Amazone range of fertiliser spreaders. David spoke about how to go about calibrating your fertiliser spreader and the different equipment that is involved in doing that job. He explained that farmers have a choice for this job; they can either pay the machinery dealer to do it for them or, alternatively, they can buy the trays and measuring kit themselves for €250 plus VAT.

My own view is that at current fertiliser prices that is a very reasonable price because once you have the trays you can use them as many times as you want to keep your spreading accuracy at a high standard. However, David said most farmers prefer to drop the spreader into their local dealer for calibration. Whatever route you take, the important thing is that it gets calibrated preferably once a season or, at most, once every other season.

The tray test is simple. First, a run through the trays is made with the tractor and spreader, as it would be operated in the field. Fertiliser collected in the trays is then transferred into test tubes and the contents are recorded. From this something called the Coefficient of Variation (CV) is found by measuring the variation in each tray from the average. The lower the CV the better; a CV of 10-15% is acceptable and will prevent crop striping. However, surveys indicate that a lot of spreaders in use today have CVs of 30% or more. For cereal spreading, research shows that improving the CV from 30% to 10% will bring a yield benefit of around 0.25t/ha in wheat. If the result of the first run is unsatisfactory, adjustments are made to the spreader settings and other runs are done until an acceptable CV is obtained. These adjustments could involve any number of issues.

The spreader David was using was a two tonne Amazone ZAM Stockman III, which is priced at €6,870 plus VAT. The two tonne spreader is a handy size because it can take three of the big 600kg bags.

### Some other tips for fertilizer spreading are;

- The spreader needs to be 0.75m from the ground. If you don't have a measuring tape, as a rule of thumb the spreading discs should be higher on the back than on the front
- Ensure the top link is set at the correct level
- Tighten the lift arm stabilisers to prevent the spreader rocking on rough ground, and make sure both lift arms are level to minimise bias
- It is essential to maintain the same forward speed all the time, e.g. 10km/hr
- At the headlands, shut off the spreader once the back wheels of the tractor meet the inside track of the headland run. This prevents covering an area already spread.
- Remember fertiliser is thrown backwards as well as sideways. If your spreading width is 12m, wait until you are 9m out from the ditch before turning on. Again, this prevents wastage.
- Cover the spreader hopper to keep the fertiliser dry and spreadable
- Check the spreading vanes for wear; vanes on a 12m spreader typically last 3-4 seasons, an 18m spreader 2-3 seasons and a 24m spreader 2 seasons. A new set of vanes cost from €350-€450.



# Update on Reseeding Events 2011

*we would like to thank our event sponsors*



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## Next Reseeding Events

**3<sup>rd</sup> August**

Farm of John Fagan,  
Gartlanstown,  
Mullingar,  
Co. Westmeath  
11am-1.30pm



**4<sup>th</sup> August**

Farm of Jimmy Garivan,  
Belclare, Westport, Co. Mayo  
2pm-4.30pm

**5<sup>th</sup> August**

Farm of Padraig Mulligan  
Corkamore,  
Templeboy,  
Co. Sligo  
11am-1.30pm



To date two reseeding events have been held by the Irish Grassland Association in 2011. The first was held in Co. Limerick on the 28<sup>th</sup> April on the farm of Pat and Olive Weeks, and the second was held on 5<sup>th</sup> of May in Co. Galway on the farm of Henry Walsh. These events are kindly sponsored by Germinal Seeds and Goldcrop. At both events speakers discussed with the audiences the practicalities of reseeding and the benefits in terms of production that can be gained through reseeding. Getting soil fertility right was highlighted as a critical issue in the reseeding process. Reseeding was then viewed at the Weeks farm, while in Galway the paddock had been sown the previous day due to weather conditions but the machinery was present in the field and there were discussions on the reseeding method, seed bed preparation and a paddock sowed last year was walked. At both farms several weeks of dry weather were experienced from approximately 10 days post sowing and this has likely reduced the rate of grass growth after germination.



*Olive and Pat Weeks, Host Farmers*

At the Limerick farm three methods of reseeding were used - ploughing, discing and min till using the Guttler drill. Fertiliser was applied at rate of 1.5 bags/ac of 10-10-20 after sowing. All seeds were rolled immediately after sowing. The area that was discing was rolled twice as it seemed softer underfoot than the min till and ploughed areas. Seeds germinated within 2 weeks of

sowing. Growth to date has been lowest on the ploughed area. There are no real differences between the discing area and the min till area, which both have a cover of approximately 250 kg DM/ha at the moment, and are just ready for post emergence spraying. It is expected that these paddocks will be grazed before the end of June, which means they will be back in the rotation within 9 weeks. At the start of June 0.75 bags/acre of 10-10-20 were applied, and 0.75 bags/ac of ASN were applied in mid June.



*Maura Callery IGA along  
with host farmers  
Martin and Henry Walsh*



*Dr Sean Flanagan, Galway (IGA honary  
member) and Brian Ryan, Loughrea at  
the reseeding event in Galway*

At Henry Walshes farm reseeding was undertaken using the discing method. No P and K fertiliser is allowed on this farm as all soils are Index 3 or Index 4 and so slurry was applied at a rate of 4000 gal/acre before discing. The paddock was rolled immediately after sowing. The cover on the paddock at the moment is approximately 250 kg DM/ha, the same as at Weeks farm. Weeds are currently "thumb" size and just ready to be sprayed. Henry is planning on putting cows in to graze this paddock before the end of June, which means they will be back in the rotation within 8 weeks.



Irish Grassland  
Association

c. July 2011

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