



IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION

"to advance the knowledge of good grassland management in Irish Farming"

Newsletter Issue 14 • December 2011

*We hope you have enjoyed attending our events in 2011
as much as we have enjoyed organising them*



IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION



Irish Grassland Association
Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath.

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IGA Presidential Address

December 2011

Dear Member,

Welcome to the winter edition of our Grassland newsletter. As 2011 draws to a close it is an opportune time for all of us to reflect on the year gone by and to put plans in place for next year. 2011 will be regarded as one of the better years for grassland farmers both from a weather and commodity price perspective. It appears from an international perspective that the sustainability of our grass based systems is becoming more apparent both economically and environmentally and this should serve us well in the future in terms of competitiveness.

In the IGA we are currently coming to the end of a five year plan that has transformed the organisation and led, I hope, to a noticeable improvement in the service we offer members. Over the last 5 years we have increased both our active membership and our corporate membership by almost 3 fold. This increase in membership has allowed us to strengthen and diversify the range of activities we undertake for our members. Some of the noticeable new activities include this newsletter, our website, a regional development team working locally with regional events and a new grassland student conference among others.

We in the IGA council have no intention of resting on our laurels and are currently in the process of developing our next 5 year plan. The main objective of this plan is to develop the association to better serve you the members but we will need your help and input into this plan. Early in the New Year you will receive a survey form from the IGA to get your views on the services and activities that the IGA is currently undertaking and the some potential new activities. Your time and input into this survey will influence the direction of the association over the next few years

On pages 14 and 15 of our newsletter we have details of our dairy conferences in January which this year we are running at two locations again. This was a new and quite successful development for the association last year and is part of our strategy to better service members in all parts of the country.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you and your families a safe and peaceful Christmas and a prosperous and productive 2012

Yours Sincerely



Dr. Pádraig French,
President of the Irish Grassland Association 2011/12



Nominations sought for the Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award 2012

The Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award was established by the association in 2009 to acknowledge the unique life contribution of an individual to the understanding and application of grassland husbandry and technology. This prestigious award is a public endorsement on behalf of our Association and its members, to the great and important contribution made by this individual to our industry and lives.



Paddy O'Keeffe
Award Winner 2009



Dr. Sean Flanagan
Award Winner 2010



Dr. Pádraig O'Kiely
Award Winner 2011

If you would like to nominate a person for this award please email your nomination and a justification to secretary@irishgrassland.com before 31st January 2012.

Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award 2011

– *Dr. Padraig O'Kiely*

At the recent Irish Grassland Association beef conference and farm walk the Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award for 2011 was awarded to Dr. Padraig O'Kiely, Teagasc, Grange. The award is presented to individuals, chosen by the council of the Irish Grassland Association, who have contributed significantly to progressive work within grassland technology and grassland farming. Dr. O'Kiely is one of the leading worldwide figures in forage agronomy, conservation and utilisation. He has published almost 600 scientific articles, over 400 articles in technical and popular farming press and has given over 1,000 presentations to farming and industry conferences and events. He has given numerous invited presentations at scientific and technical conferences both in Ireland and abroad. In particular, his research into grass silage production has had a major impact on the productivity and profitability of

Irish livestock production systems. Padraig O'Kiely has also had a significant role in the history and development of the Irish Grassland Association having been on the council from 1987 to 1995 and serving as president of the IGA in 1993/94. It was during his presidency that the Irish Grassland Association launched a major review of its structures and activities which has benefited the operation of the association to this day. Dr. O'Kiely's significant contribution to Irish grassland farming over a period of three decades makes this a most deserved award. The presentation was made by Dr. Aidan Conway, past president of the IGA and former colleague of Padraig's at Teagasc (formerly An Foras Taluntais), Grange. Dr. Conway expressed delight at the awarding of the Lifetime Merit Award to Padraig O'Kiely and highlighted the extraordinary contribution he has made thus far to grassland research and farming over a distinguished career. This award is a public endorsement on behalf of the IGA and its members, to the great and important contribution made by Padraig O'Kiely to the industry.



Padraig O'Kiely was presented with the Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award for 2011 by Dr. Aidan Conway at the recent IGA Beef Farm Walk and Conference held on the Kepak Farm and at the Trim Castle Hotel. Pictured above are Dr. Fearga O'Kiely (wife of Padraig O'Kiely), Dr. Aidan Conway (past-president of the Irish Grassland Association), Dr. Padraig O'Kiely (Teagasc, Grange) and Dr. Padraig French (President of the Irish Grassland Association).

Irish Grassland Association Beef Farm Walk & Conference 2011

The Irish Grassland Association (IGA) held their annual Beef Farm Walk and Conference on Thursday 20th October on the Kepak Farm in Clonee, Co. Meath and at the Trim Castle Hotel, Trim, Co. Meath. The event, which was sponsored by Kepak Group, was a huge success and attracted an attendance of over 250 farmers. The day was split into two parts, with the farm walk taking place in the morning followed by dinner and an afternoon conference.



Farm Walk Review

By John Shirley,
Irish Farming Independent

Eighteen years ago Irish beef farming was stunned by the sudden death of Noel Keating founder and MD of the Kepak Group. At the time Kepak was growing at a phenomenal rate.

Today Noel Keating's legacy lives on as the Kepak Group continues to innovate. The company gave an industry lead some years ago with the establishment of the KK (Keenan/Kepak) Beef Clubs. This was the first real industry effort at tailoring a section of Irish beef production to suit the high priced Italian market and thereby earn a significant price premium to the farmer.

Putting its money where its mouth is Kepak's own feedlot on the Dublin Meath border specialises in Italian beef. The 2,200 place feedlot proved a major attraction at the Irish Grassland Association beef outing last week.

Ironically to produce the specialist pink lean and white fat carcasses for Italy demands that top quality young suckler heifers and bulls are finished on a non grass diet. Most of the 320 hectare Kepak farm is in a tillage rotation of wheat, barley and maize silage all of which are fed on site to finish about 3000 heifers and 2000 bulls a year. The finishing period is minimum 120 days and all cattle are slaughtered under 22 months. Most are killed at 18 months. Maximum carcass weights are 460 kg (670 to 770 kg live) for the bulls and 380 kg (550 to 650 kg live) for the heifers.

Feedlot manager Greg McCluskey outlined the strict veterinary, feeding and animal welfare regime which is delivering high growth and keeping mortality down to less than 0.5%.

The continental bulls and heifers are purchased from all over Ireland, 45% on farms, 55% through marts, at 12 to 17 months of age. Heifers range from 380 to 500 kg and bulls from 380 to 600 kg. Currently the lighter animals are costing €2.30 to €2.50 a kg and the heavier bulls about €2.16 a kg. They are purchased to grade R or better. Some heifers may be grazed for a period but the bulls go directly into the feedlot.

On arrival the bulls/heifers are rested on a straw bed and;

- Vaccinated against BVD, RSV, PI3 and clostridial diseases.
- Dosed for fluke/worms.
- Weighed graded and tagged.
- Tails and backs clipped.
- Sprayed and groups according to weight.
- Details recorded on computer.

Bulls are then penned either on straw or rubberised slats in maximum group size of ten. This group is kept together right through till slaughter. Heifers are penned on standard slats but rubberised slats are being trialled.

After a 20 day transition all cattle are on a standard high quality TMR (Total Mixed Ration) for the feedlot. Everything surrounding the ration and feeding smacks of precision. Precision in that the ration is standardised at 58 to 60% dry matter, at minimum 12 MJ energy density. Precision in that cattle are fed daily into clean

troughs with a target dry matter intake per day of 2.2% bodyweight. The TMR is constituted at 12.2 to 12.4% protein but interestingly the heifer feed is topped up to 14% protein in order to keep them growing frame and not getting overfat for the duration of the 120 day feeding period. Precision is that water sources are checked daily. Precision in that cattle are checked daily during feeding time for possible health problems.

This is delivering a target 8 to 1 feed conversion efficiency for bulls at a gain of 1.6 kg a day. Heifers are only slightly behind with a feed efficiency of 9 to 1 and daily gain of 1.35 to 1.4 kg a day.

Currently the TMR per head daily for the bulls includes 2.8 kg maize silage, 1 kg straw, 3.5 kg soda grain, 1.5 kg rolled wheat, 1.75 kg citrus pulp, 1.2 kg molasses, 0.6 kg wheat distillers, 0.6 kg rapemeal. Protein % is enhanced with feed grade urea or slower release urea product Optigen. A buffer is added (sodium bicarb) and, in an effort to stop initial weight loss in mart sourced animals, an electrolyte is being tested.

Soya beans and soya hulls are deliberately excluded from the diet to ensure that its non GM status is not put at risk. Feed cost is currently at €2.70 hd/day for the bulls and €2.20 hd/day for the heifers.

When it comes to slaughter time, the bulls especially are handled with TLC and transported with the group mates and slaughtered immediately on arrival at the factory.

This same absolute attention to detail was described later in the day in a paper to the Grassland meeting by beef finisher Patrick O Leary from Trim Co Meath. Finishing young bulls and heifers on a diet similar to Kepak but including some farm made grass silage Patrick and his brother Frank compete with live shippers for the top weanlings.

Within the Charolais and Limousin breeds both Kepak and the O Learys find that the better the quality of the feeding bulls or heifer the higher the chances that they will cover the costs and make a profit.

There is no doubting the quality of the beef produced by the KK farmers and the high standards on the farms, but are the businesses profitable?

During the visit to the Kepak unit budgets for fattening bulls and heifer were shown. In each case a selling price of €3.75 a kg carcassweight was assumed.

Finishing bull budget.

Sales (402 kg carcass) €1,508

Less purchase €1,030

Mortality €5

Gross output €473

Variable costs

Straw €5

Maize silage €76

Concentrates €208

Vet/Medicines €10.50

Slurry and interest €14

Total Variable costs €312.50

Gross margin/hd €160.50

Sensitivity analysis +/- 10% in beef price +/- €154. +/- 10% purchase price +/- €103. +/- 10% meals +/- €21.

Finishing Heifer Budget

Sales (325 kg carcass) €1,219
 Less purchase €874
 Mortality €5
 Gross output €340
 Variable costs
 Straw €5
 Maize silage €76
 Concentrates €178
 Vet/Medicines €10.50
 Slurry and interest €13
 Total Variable costs €281.50
 Gross margin/hd €59.50
 Sensitivity analysis +/- 10% in beef price +/- €122. +/- 10% purchase price +/- €87. +/- 10% meals +/- €18

Is this budget, assuming the same selling price for bulls and heifers, the bulls left the higher gross margin. With a staff of 5 including office secretary and manager, plus machinery, lorries etc, the fixed costs are estimated at €70 a head if 5000 cattle/year are put through the feedlot.

Conclusion.

At today's prices for store bulls and heifers, farmers will need well over €4 a kg for beef out of sheds next spring. At the Grassland meeting the talk was that deals are being done with some meat plants for €4.20 a kg, but I didn't see the contracts.

**Beef conference review**

by Paul Crosson IGA Beef Conference Chairman and Teagasc Grange

The afternoon conference session began in the Trim Castle Hotel with **Dr. Edward O'Riordan**, Teagasc, Grange and **Patrick O'Leary**, cattle finisher from Trim, Co. Meath continuing the cattle finishing theme. Dr. O'Riordan outlined the latest research

results from Grange on finishing male suckler beef cattle. This paper outlined the merits of bull beef production over steer beef production in terms of increased live weight gain, carcass and lean meat proportion. The evolution of bull beef production systems at Grange to increase the proportion of total slaughter weight achieved from grazed grass was described. The objective of these systems is to reduce feed costs per kg of beef produced while maintaining high lifetime daily gains and producing high value carcasses. Patrick O'Leary farms in Dublin and Meath. He undertakes all-year round finishing of bulls and heifers for Kepak Group. Therefore, cattle are finished to clear guidelines with regard to the type of animal in terms of carcass traits (weight, conformation and fat score). Bulls are primarily bought in the spring and are sold before 22 months of age at 420 kg carcass with the objective to grade U or better. Heifers are purchased mainly in Elphin, Co. Roscommon and are also slaughtered at under 22 months of age. Patrick highlighted the problem he has with his system arising from the pattern of calf births in this country which results in peaks and troughs in the supply of suitable animals. He therefore, carries more cattle than he would like at particular times of the year, especially over the winter months, which puts pressure on storage capacity.

Given the importance and cost implications of BVD for the Irish cattle herd, **David Graham** from Animal Health Ireland, outlined the national BVD eradication programme. This programme will involve tissue test tagging of calves at birth. The tissue punches are sent to a laboratory for testing. Herds with negative tests for all calves in the first year will simply continue the process of tag testing of calves in the following years. Where virus positive results do occur, the option to re-test these animals to confirm that they are PI will be available. Additional testing will be required in the herds to identify and remove any other PI cattle. PI cattle should be culled from the herd as quickly as possible. A surveillance phase, based on targeted blood sampling of young stock (plus bulk tank milk in dairy herds) will be used in the second part of the programme to confirm that herds are remaining free of infection.

Willie Treacy, Louth Suckler Farmer and demo farm in the Teagasc/Farmers Journal BETTER Farm Programme, described the importance of grassland renovation and reseeding to maintain output on his farm. The overall effect of all changes on his farm has been to increase from €248/ha in 2008 to €639/ha in 2010. The message was clear. If you want to improve gross margin then you need a planned approach to driving output on our farm which must be allied to improved technical efficiency and cost control. To facilitate greater output on Willie's farm, reseeding of older and poorer performing swards has been critical. A reseeding plan on the farm has seen 52 acres or 31% of the farm reseeded over the past 3 years. Two main methods have been used; conventional ploughing and the guttler system. The guttler system has proved to be a success as the turnaround time from reseed to grazing is much shorter. The cost is also a big advantage with a saving of about €100/acre with the guttler method. Both spring and autumn reseeding has been practiced. Willie noted that with autumn reseeding the field is gone out of production for 6 months in some cases whereas with a spring reseed this was as little as 6 weeks.

Karen Dukelow, Teagasc, Bandon, described a grassland management project initiated by the Bandon Beef Discussion Group in 2011. The group established a grass hub farm on the farm of Roy Kingston, Bandon (Group Secretary). They subsequently met on this farm in January, March, April, June and September as well as attending grass farm walks in February, May and July. The approach was largely intuitive and thus grazing management for the year was focussed on three periods: spring, summer and autumn grassland management. In this paper Karen outlined how the group set targets for each farm and put the key principles of grassland management into practice in order to meet these targets. Lessons for 2012 were highlighted in the presentation and suggested that, although substantial progress has been made on these farms, there is much more room for improvement.



We would like to thank our sponsors



Irish Grassland Association Council & Staff



Padraig French
President
Head of Livestock systems Department
& Dairy Enterprise Leader



Deirdre Hennessy
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Grassland Research Officer Teagasc



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Ger Murphy
IGA Council Member
Suckler to weanling farmer
Member of the BETTER
farm programme



John Fagan
IGA Council Member
Sheep Farmer



Anne-Marie Flanagan
IGA Regional
Development Officer
Dairy Farmer



Donal Callery
IGA Regional
Development Officer
Farm Manager/Consultant



New Co-opted council members

Karen Dukelow: Karen Dukelow is a Business & Technology Drystock Advisor, based In Clonakilty. Karen works with cattle farmers to improve profitability and to help them meet cross compliance regulations. One of her main areas of work is working with discussion groups in regard to grass, breeding and financial analysis of their farm enterprises.



Karen Dukelow



John Noonan

John Noonan: John Noonan works as a drystock advisor in Teagasc Westport. The work includes securing direct and environmental payments for clients. Group work plays a significant part of John's work establishing and progressing groups like the Mayo Mule and Greyface group and the Mayo Mountain Blackface group. Both groups are focused on improving farm incomes through efficient grass use; improved flock performance, and marketing quality stock for commercial sheep farmers nationally. Reseeding and introducing new grass varieties are key to increasing output and increasing the proportion of income from sale of products from farmgate.

Michael Bateman: Michael Bateman is a Dairy Farmer from West Cork milking 300 cows. He operates a spring calving, grass based system and rears all his replacement heifers. He is a member of the Crookstown discussion group.



Michael Bateman

Retiring Council Members

JACK KENNEDY:

Jack is the dairy Editor for the Irish Farmers Journal. His role is to relate and advise farmers on issues influencing best practice inside the farm gate. Jack's objectives are to improve and sustain dairy farmers' profits by following what the best farmers are doing to create profit all over Ireland. Jack has now retired from the Irish Grassland Association after serving 8 years on council.



Jack Kennedy



Michael Doran

MICHAEL DORAN:

Michael retired after serving 7 years on the Irish Grassland Association council. He is a suckler farmer bringing all cattle through to beef, and also has a mid season sheep flock. Since decoupling few real changes have been made on the farm but in an era of rising costs changes have to be made on the farm to try and get more gain from grass and shorten the time spent indoors at high cost. Kale is grown to keep cows out until Christmas and allow grass to be closed off in October to allow early turnout in spring. Male cattle are now being finished as bulls to make use of their much better feed efficiency. Michael is seeing out his 4 year term as the chairman of the IFA livestock committee which is finished in January. He is also chairman of the Beef Stakeholder Group in Teagasc and is Vice Chairman of the ICBF Board.



Kevin Twomey

KEVIN TWOMEY:

Kevin is retiring from the Irish Grassland Association council after serving 5 years on council. Kevin Twomey is a dairy farmer from Ballhooly Co. Cork. Kevin milks over 300 cows having started as a new entrant in 1995. Kevin is spring calving on to a simple grass based system. Kevin is also Chairman of Dairy Ireland.



We would like to congratulate our vice-president Deirdre Hennessy on her recent marriage to James Wycherley.

We wish the happy couple a long and happy life together





Positive year, positive outlook for sheep

Darren Carty Irish Grassland Association Council Member and Irish Farmers Journal

Sheep farmers have witnessed a second consecutive year where farm gate prices have increased significantly. Bord Bia figures for the year to date show Irish lamb prices averaging 479c/kg. This is 9.4% ahead of 2010 figures, or a sizeable 41c/kg, with the average lamb price for 2010 standing at 438c/kg.

The main difference in lamb prices in 2011 compared to 2010 has been a gradual increase over all months of the year with prices lifting by the highest margin during the months of March, April, May and June. Spring lamb prices remained at a higher level for several consecutive weeks compared to previous years where there was a peak in price and a rapid fall thereafter.

The increase in farmgate prices is a welcome aspect to the trade but we cannot forget that input costs have also continued to climb up. Fuel and fertiliser are the main movers, with both commodities realising significant price rises and along with other costs have eroded some of the potential gains of higher price returns.

The outlook for Irish lamb is optimistic. Production is falling in all major sheep producing countries with the EU estimated to be only about 78% self sufficient in lamb in 2011, consuming approximately 1.2 million tonnes of sheepmeat and only producing slightly over 900,000 tonnes of sheep meat. Production is also falling in New Zealand. In 2010, New Zealand only filled its EU quota to 87% and it is also predicted to fall short again in 2011. Prices have also exploded in New Zealand, with lamb prices lifting above Irish and UK prices in September. This combined with emerging markets means the EU may be a less economically destination to export lamb in future years. This may have positive implications for Irish flockowners with a greater demand for Irish sheepmeat within the EU.

Irish competitiveness

Increasing concentrate prices can be seen as both positive and negative in Irish lamb and beef production systems. Admittedly, higher concentrate prices increase costs at critical feeding times of pre-lambing and possibly post lambing for example. But, higher cereal prices also increases the cost of production of poultry and pork, strong competitors in the market place to lamb. In an Irish context, sheep, beef and dairy production have a secret weapon of being able to cash in on our least expensive resource, grass. Maximising the role of grass in the production of lamb, beef and milk must be a key focus to minimise production costs and increase performance.

Many EU countries have witnessed severe pressure on high cereal-input based production systems. Spain, Portugal and Italy have all seen the cost of lamb production jump in the last two years with our main export market, France, also coming under increasing pressure in 2011. The French sheep sector combines a mixture of sheep dairying in Northern France and pasture based lamb production as you move further south in the country. Lamb production in dairy enterprises is dependent on high cereal diets. This has greatly lifted costs in recent years with a drought in 2011 rising costs further and inserting huge financial pressure on many systems. Significantly higher ewe numbers have been culled which may not be replaced in future years.

Grass puts Ireland in a very strong position but grassland management is a continuous process. It is not just as simple as turning a switch and automatically having your farm set up to perfectly. Simple steps taken each year will build on your ability to exploit grass. Now may be a good time to sit down and look at the areas that can be improved in 2012. Do you know the fertility status of your farm? As mentioned above fertiliser prices are rising. Spreading fertiliser without knowing what is needed can be a waste of money. A soil sample is inexpensive relative to the cost of fertiliser and will



tell you what nutrient inputs are needed. A plan can then be put in place to address any nutrient deficiencies over a number of years.

Another area that can be looked at is field sizes. Did all your sheep roam over large fields in 2011 leading to either under grazing or overgrazing? Can some fields be split temporarily to adopt a rotational grazing system or can group size be managed better to exploit grass growth. Of course it would be great to think that we could have all fields the same size, same level of grass growth etc but the reality is that there are numerous factors to consider on any particular farm. It all boils down

2012 wish list

The prospects for Irish lamb are good. Supplies are falling in all the major sheep producing and exporting countries worldwide. This may present real opportunities for Ireland in future years. There are a number of areas or wish factors if you would like to call them that would strengthen the position of Irish lamb and the Irish sheep sector. Below are just a few of the important points to consider.

- We cannot deny that lamb is an expensive meat relative to the other meat protein sources of poultry and pork. Lamb is recognised as a high quality meat and as such attracts a higher value. For lamb to continue to attract a price premium we need to ensure a first class eating experience each and every time a consumer purchases lamb. Flockowners and processors both have a role to play. Flockowners need to aim to produce a quality product but processors must in the future provide more direction and feedback to the type of product they require.
- Lamb prices have increased in the last two years on the back of reducing supplies worldwide. To build a sustainable future for sheepmeat we also need to increase lamb consumption. The best possible situation is where lamb prices are rising on the back of increasing demand from growing consumption both in Ireland and the EU.
- Value added products have the ability to enhance the overall worth of a carcass of Irish lamb. Irish processors have made good progress in this area in recent years with the volume of lamb exported in carcass form to EU countries reducing year on year. Many of the processors branded range of lamb products are emerging as popular products overseas and are gaining an increasing share in the market place. These value added products also have the ability to entice higher numbers of younger consumers to purchase lamb products. Traditionally lamb is viewed as a speciality product, like a roast leg of lamb on a Sunday for example. We need retain the position of lamb being a top quality eating experience but also build on the selection of easy and quick to cook products available in the marketplace.
- The supply of lamb diminishing quickly in the first few months of the year is a growing concern. Having a situation where record prices are being paid for hoggets, some of which are often inferior quality, is unsustainable long term. If Ireland is to grow its percentage share into high value markets it needs to be with a top quality product. It is also however easy to see why early lamb producers have switched more to mid season lamb production in recent years with high costs of production and uncertain returns. Moves to incentivise a supply of early lamb with guaranteed returns to flockowners may help reverse the supply/demand issue in spring.
- The Quality Assurance debate is ongoing for the last decade. Having a quality assured product gives Irish lamb access to more markets. But at the same time flockowners producing a quality assured product need to be recognised for delivering this product and rewarded accordingly.



FROM BEEF TO DAIRY – A Farmer's Experience



By Karen Dukelow, IGA council member and Teagasc

A scheme for the allocation of milk quota to new entrants was introduced by the Department of Agriculture in 2009. 200,000l of quota were allocated to 70 new entrants to dairying in 2009. This quota accounts for a quarter of the 1% annual milk quota increase decided in late 2008 as part of the EU CAP health check. The scheme was also operated in 2010 and 2011.

Mark Kelleher is farming 36 ha in Bandon Co. Cork and was a successful applicant in the 2009 scheme. He commenced milk production in May 2010 and he purchased milk quota in the quota exchange earlier this year and now has quota of about 270,000l.

Previous to dairying, Mark ran a beef enterprise on his farm. And when he got the go ahead to enter dairying he had about 20 suckler cows and 80 followers on the farm. He feels that being involved in suckling has been a great help to him. He knows how to handle stock and the cattle were a valuable asset, as he was able to sell cattle to help fund the purchase of dairy cows. He sold existing stock gradually in order to maximise their value, so he sold cows with calves at foot and dry cattle were sold in the spring.

So, what was Mark's approach to "converting" his beef farm to a dairy farm? When he heard he was successful in September 2009, he commenced the building works. The existing yard consisted of a round roofed "hay barn" with lean-

tos along with silage slabs. He had already extended at the back of the sheds with a slatted tank, so following the go ahead he put cubicles into one of the lean-tos and also built on a feed passage and calving pens.

Mark's biggest decision was where to locate a parlour. He had planned to put the parlour into an existing lean-to, but following discussions with other farmers and milking machine installers Mark decided to build a new building adjacent to the existing buildings. This has meant that he has built a well-designed bright parlour with plenty of scope for expansion.

Mark bought both a second-hand bulk tank and 12 unit milking machine and there is room in the existing parlour for at least another two units. He installed batch feeders and steel troughs for meal feeding in the parlour..

Mark decided to hit the ground running and purchased 35 calved cows with high yield potential mostly first calvers in May of 2010 from 3 pedigree herds. He is hoping to be able to sell surplus stock when he is well established. Mark has purchased a further 19 first calvers this year and is hoping to milk 48 cows in 2012. In the future he hopes to milk 70-80 cows and rear his own replacements.

"Mark decided to hit the ground running and purchased 35 calved cows with high yield potential"



To maximise utilisation of grass, Mark has invested in new farm roadways, and cannot get over how much easier it is to manage stock as a result. He has also invested heavily in water, with a new well and all paddocks serviced with 1inch piping and new troughs. He has reseeded most of the ground and has noticed a big increase in grass production but hasn't set on a fixed paddock system yet. This is because he feels that he is not at his final stocking rate and is happy to allocate grass daily with temporary fencing until he has his system bedded down.

One of the big challenges in 2011 was keeping grass quality right as stocking rate was not high enough to keep up to grass supply. However, Mark has enjoyed the challenge of getting into dairying. He has made every effort to build up his skills base. He is an active member of the Bandon Grass Group facilitated by local Teagasc dairy advisor, Tom Curran. Mark also did a DIY AI course, so he has more control over the breeding of his cows. When I asked did he find heat detection difficult (he had not used AI on his suckler herd), it did not seem to bother him! Mark admits there is work to it, and observes his cows at least three times daily during the breeding season.

So what advice would Mark give to other new entrants to dairying?. Mark was delighted with his final choice of parlour location, saying "when deciding on parlour location you need

to be flexible and leave plenty of room around the parlour" He would advise anyone to build a purpose-built parlour rather than trying to fit a parlour into an existing shed. Mark was also happy that he purchased mostly first calvers "This is less risky than buying in-calf heifers and at least you get milking straight away". He did buy some older cows and was unhappy with these. "I made a mistake by purchasing cows in May. Looking back, May is too late in the year to buy cows as you have less choice and you can end up with later calvers"

Overall, Mark is happy that he made the decision to get into dairying. He feels that cattle farmers and especially those involved in suckling have many of the skills required. Mark is still investing in his dairy enterprise

"when deciding on parlour location you need to be flexible and leave plenty of room around the parlour"

especially in replacement stock and says "I won't generate an income until I am producing replacements from my own herd" However, Mark is willing to make this sacrifice in order to secure the long-term viability of his family farm.



Irish Grassland Association (IGA)

Annual Dairy Conference 2012,

in Westmeath & Cork

Sponsored by Pfizer Animal health



Animal Health

The Irish Grassland Associations' annual Dairy Conference will once again take place in two venues this January, Athlone on 10th January and Cork on 11th January. The theme of this years conferences is "Planning the transition to quota abolition" and will be once again sponsored by Pfizer animal Health



At the launch of the Irish Grassland Association Dairy Conference are Philip Donohoe IGA and William Minchin Pfizer Animal Health (Event Sponsor)

Grass utilization is one of the best performance indicators available, so setting the farm up to maximise pasture production and utilisation has never been more relevant. The "Grass Session" will focus on this topic and will feature the views of research and farmers alike. The dairy heifer calves bred from the 2012 breeding season will begin production in a post quota environment. While great progress has been made in Irish dairy cow breeding in recent years it is critical that farmers maximise the potential gain from the breeding technologies to put the most profitable cows on the ground post 2015. The "Breeding Session" will provide an insight into the new breeding technologies and their contribution to profitable dairy production. Once a day milking (OAD) is an option for expanding dairy cow numbers during the final years of the quota while minimising any superlevy implication. The "OAD Session" will examine the financial impact of OAD up to quota abolition and whether this practice leaves your dairy business in a stronger position post quotas. You will also hear the views and experiences of farmers who have taken the OAD route. There is no substitute for experience, so this year in our Cork venue, we hope to harness the experiences and wisdom of a number of Past Presidents of the Irish Grassland Association as they give their views on planning the transition in our very own "Presidential Debate."

Commenting on the event William Minchin Product Manager with Pfizer Animal Health said, We are delighted to enter our 4th year as the main sponsor of the annual Irish Grassland Association Dairy conference. Pfizer wish the organisers and all attending farmers every success in the coming year, and we look forward to an excellent two days.

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December 23rd**

**DAY 1: IGA Dairy Conference Tuesday
10th January: Hudson Bay Hotel,
Athlone, Co Westmeath**

Members €40

Non Members €80

Conference fee includes; attendance, copy of papers proceeding from the “full day” conference, refreshments on arrival and two course dinner. For non-members, conference fee is also inclusive of one year’s membership FREE to the IGA (for all new d/d memberships)

9.00am	Registration, with light refreshments on arrival (Included in conference fee)
10.00am	Padraig French, President of the IGA - Opening Address

Session 1 *Title: Setting the farm up for high pasture production post 2015*
Chairpersons Name: Eddie O Donnell, Dairy Farmer and IGA council member

10.15am	Michael O Donovan, Teagasc, Moorepark
10.35am	John McNamara, Dairy farmer, Co Limerick
10.55 am	Discussion

Session 2 *Title: Putting Genomics into practice*
Chairpersons Name: Michael Bateman, Dairy Farmer and IGA council member.

11.30pm	Francis Kearney / Sinead McParland
11.50pm	Kevin Downing, Dairy farmer, Co Cork and ICBF
12.10 pm	Discussion
12.45pm	Lunch

Session 3 *Title: OAD milking - a strategy to best position yourself for life post quotas?*
Chairpersons Name: Philip Donohoe Dairy Farmer and IGA Past President 2010/11.

1.45pm	Laurence Shalloo, Teagasc, Moorepark
2.05pm	Panel Discussion with OAD farmers Melvin Mooney, Tipperary / Joe Leonard, Meath / Neil O Sullivan, Waterford
3.00pm	Close Conference

**DAY 2: IGA (full day) Dairy Conference
Wednesday 11th January,
Morans Silver Springs Hotel Cork**

Members €50

Non Members €100

Conference fee includes; attendance, copy of papers proceeding from the “full day” conference, refreshments on arrival and two course dinner. For non-members, conference fee is also inclusive of one year’s membership FREE to the IGA (for all new d/d memberships)

9.00am	Registration, with light refreshments on arrival (Included in conference fee)
10.00am	Padraig French, President of the IGA - Opening Address

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Chairpersons Name: Eddie O Donnell, Dairy Farmer and IGA council member

10.15am	Michael O Donovan, Teagasc, Moorepark
10.35am	John McNamara, Dairy farmer, Co Limerick
10.55am	Discussion

Session 2 *Title: Putting Genomics into practice*
Chairpersons Name: Michael Bateman, Dairy Farmer and IGA council member.

11.30pm	Francis Kearney / Sinead McParland
11.50pm	Kevin Downing, Dairy farmer, Co Cork and ICBF
12.10pm	Discussion
12.45pm	Lunch

Session 3 *Title: Presidential Debate*
Chairpersons Name: Padraig French, President of the IGA and Teagasc Moorepark

2.00pm	Panel Discussion with a number of IGA Past Presidents, discussing topics of the day
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Session 4 *Title: OAD milking - a strategy to best position yourself for life post quotas?*
Chairpersons Name: Philip Donohoe Dairy Farmer and IGA Past President 2010/11

3.15pm	Laurence Shalloo, Teagasc, Moorepark
3.35pm	Panel Discussion with OAD farmers Michael McCarthy, Cork / Ann Moore, Cork / Shane Phelan, Waterford
4.30pm	Close Conference



GRASS RESEEDING

By Dave Barry, Goldcrop

Grass is the key ingredient in Irish livestock farming and sets us apart from most other countries. The benefits are seen in reduced production costs and in the green and environmentally friendly image of our milk and meat products. The rainfall that so often makes grass utilisation difficult is what allows such a consistent supply of grass from year to year. 2011 was a good year for grass growth and the weather allowed a long grazing season.

Grass reseeding is an important grassland management tool leading to increased productivity of livestock farming. Essentially you are sowing the very best grass varieties that are available and replacing broadleaf weeds, grass weeds and older less productive perennial ryegrass plants. There has been a strong message from research and advisory organisations and the seed trade in the past ten years that reseeding pays and delivers increased stock carrying capacity, reduces costs and increases profitability. Based on reseeding rates in Ireland in the past few years this message is being taken up by farmers. There is however much more potential to exploit this important management tool to continue improving efficiency.

In looking at the reseeding rates in any particular year the most important influence is the weather. A farmer needs a good supply of grass on the farm and suitable soil conditions to carry out the cultivation and seed sowing operation, both requirements are weather dependent. On examining the reseeding rates in Ireland over the last 25 years; the level of reseeding is closely linked to weather conditions in the April to September period.

The area of land reseeded with grass in 2011 was about 5% ahead of the ten year average. There was strong demand for grass seed in spring and the autumn was less busy. Weather conditions throughout the summer were good in most of the country; parts of Leinster became very dry at times during the summer and the North West was very wet in August and September. Grass seed availability was tight particularly in the autumn. The more popular recommended list varieties were especially scarce. Grass seed prices also increased in 2011 due to increased production costs for seed and tightness of supplies.

In 2010 the area reseeded was among the biggest for any previous year with rates at 30% ahead of the 10 year average. In 2008 and 2009 the reseeding rates were 30% behind the average due mainly to very poor weather in the April to September period.

Looking forward to 2012, assuming the weather plays its part; grass reseeding rates should again be ahead of the ten year average. The message on the benefits of reseeding that is being delivered by Teagasc and The Irish Grassland Association is certainly having an increasing impact with farmers. In 2011 there were many open days and demonstrations organised by these two organisations that very graphically demonstrated the benefits. Also, there are many farmers planning expansion in dairy production over the coming years and they are likely to increase their reseeding rates as part of these plans. Grass seed supplies will again be tight in 2012 and prices will be higher. It is good advice to secure grass seed mixtures early in the season if you want to pick from the very best varieties.

Grassland reseeding is one of the best paying investments available to grassland farmers. Grazed grass is the cheapest feed for cows

and drystock and grass silage is among the cheapest winter feeds you can produce. Reseeded pastures will produce higher annual yields of grass compared to old swards. Grass digestibility and intake potential will improve. Based on recent research at Teagasc Moorepark the biggest impact on improved profitability from reseeding comes from a substantial increase in spring grass yields and autumn grass yields. In a recent study at Moorepark, pastures with 100% perennial ryegrass produced February growth rates of more than twice those of pastures with 40% perennial ryegrass. The annual improvement in profitability is worth over €200 per hectare for the 100% perennial ryegrass sward versus the 40% perennial ryegrass sward.

Perennial ryegrass dominant swards will use nitrogen more efficiently. Fertiliser prices have increased in 2011 and look set to increase further in 2012; this provides an extra incentive to reseed. Reseeding will increase the tonnes of grass produced and increase the grass utilisation and therefore the stock carrying capacity of the farm. This coupled with the improved return on fertiliser should return the reseeding cost within two years.

The timing of reseeding is hugely influenced by weather conditions and grass supply on farms. Spring reseeding generally leads to more successful establishment and gives better opportunities for post emergence weed control. Generally with spring reseeding there is less impact on the grass available for grazing due to high growth rates on the rest of the farm while the reseeded area is out of production. Ideally graze once or twice, reseed in April and be back grazing in June. Generally when you plan on spring reseeding you are more likely to get it done.

Grass varieties are constantly being evaluated in recommended list trials, grassland research centre trials and on farms. There is new information coming available all the time about grass varieties. This influences the choice of varieties for the ideal grass mixture whether for grazing or silage. The Irish recommended list is the most valuable source of information on the grass varieties that are available. Varieties are evaluated for a minimum of two separate sowings and four harvest years at a range of sites around the country. Varieties will only be listed if they show sufficient merit in terms of overall yield, seasonal yield, digestibility and ground cover score. Over the past eight years there were 99 varieties evaluated for the first time, 23 of these were listed and 76 were rejected.

The recommended list trial protocol has been adjusted in 2011 to improve the usefulness of the results. There are now two separate trials for all varieties; there is a simulated grazing trial and a two cut silage trial and this information will be presented in future recommended lists probably from 2014.

