



# IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION

*"to advocate the knowledge of good grassland management in Irish Farming"*



# CORPORATE MEMBERS 2012



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Cookstown, Kells, Co Meath, Ireland.

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IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION - NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2012



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## IGA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



**Dear Member,**

This year has been one of the wettest summers endured by grassland farmers in Ireland which has led to reduced grass production, poorer quality silage conserved, higher levels of supplementation and reduced animal performance. The financial impact of the summer of 2012 will be felt right through to next year. However our grass based systems are currently protecting us from the worst effects of the current turmoil in international grain markets. Grass based farmers have to cope with the vagaries of the weather but are insulated in-part from the volatility in commodity markets which can leave producers operating on negative margins long enough for the most vulnerable to businesses to fail.

In the IGA we have had two very successful events recently promoting the understanding and knowledge of grassland systems to improve farmer's livelihoods. On the 22nd May we travelled to Mullingar for our sheep conference and farm walk (page 6&7) where we saw Gordon and Yvonne Johnston operate a simple all-grass system to deliver exceptional profit.

On the 26th July we travelled to West Cork for our dairy summer tour (page 8&9) to see two exceptional dairy farm families who have undertaken significant expansion of their businesses and simultaneously improved their livelihoods by focusing on good grazing management, cost control and breeding a cow to suit their system. The quality of the farms visited was reflected in the massive crowd that turned out on the day and the feedback and coverage we've received since the event.

Our next major event is our annual beef conference and farm walk (page 18&19) which this year is being held in south Tipperary on September 4th. We again have an excellent grassland farmer to host the farm walk in Jim & Audrey Parkinson, Cashel. This conference is also a BTAP approved event. Admission is by ticket ONLY. Places are limited to 230, so early booking is essential to secure your place. By registering online before 21st August you can avail of the best discounted ticket rates.

The IGA is currently looking for regional development officers who are interested in doing part-time work in developing the association in their region. This work is mainly focused on organising events to serve the members in that region, if you believe this type of work might suit you or somebody you know then please contact the office manager Maura Callery [secretary@irishgrassland.com](mailto:secretary@irishgrassland.com).

The IGA is a voluntary organisation run by a council of members for the benefit of all members. If you are interested in becoming a member of the IGA council, your nomination should be with the office manager in writing by the 1st of September for election at our AGM. All members are invited to attend the AGM in the Maldron Hotel in Portlaoise at 10am on the 18th September. Please email Maura Callery [secretary@irishgrassland.com](mailto:secretary@irishgrassland.com) before 11th September to register if you wish to attend the AGM.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read 'Padraig French'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Padraig French  
President of the Irish Grassland Association 2011/12



# IGA RULES UPDATED TO REFLECT FUTURE REQUIREMENTS OF THE ASSOCIATION



Dr. Andrew Cromie ICBF and  
Past President of the Irish  
Grassland Association

The Irish Grassland Association (IGA) has undergone substantial changes over the past number of years, with significant increases in the number of members (both individual and corporate) and the number events being organised on an annual basis. In addition, the association now has full time and part time staff, as well as significant commitments from both an auditing and accountability perspective. It was for these reasons that a sub-group of the IGA council was established (involving Andrew Cromie, Frank O'Mara and John Donworth) to review the rules of the association and suggest improvements. This was with the objective of making sure that the rules of the association were in line with the future requirements of the organisation from both an operational and legal perspective.

## The rules of the association.

The first set of rules of the association, were established in 1949 (when the association was incorporated). Since then there have been a number of modifications to the rules (in 1962, 1968, 72, 85, 88, 90 & 97), with the changes generally being associated with aspects of council and its make-up.

The review undertaken in 2011/2012 was more comprehensive in that it dealt with all aspects of the association (indeed a total of 17 areas have been defined under the new rules of the association). Examples of specific changes to the rules include;

**Liabilities.** Under the current rules, members of council (who operate on a voluntary basis) are liable for any legal challenges against the association. This was felt to be unfair and as such the new set of rules state that "members of council shall be indemnified against any future liabilities incurred by them in the management of the affairs of the association". In addition, a clause has been included under membership that "members waive their entitlement to claim against a fellow member for personal injury, loss or damage, howsoever caused".

**Staff.** Under the current rules, staff can be employed but not dismissed. This was felt to be somewhat naïve and as a result a clause has been included under staffing to ensure that IGA council would have the power "to dismiss, suspend, discipline, or terminate the engagement of any person employed by the association in the future".

**Dissolution.** Under the current rules, there is no provision to dissolve the association (in the unlikely event that this was to happen). To cater for this eventuality a clause has been included to ensure that any assets belonging to the association would be divided equally amongst its members (after all others debts and liabilities have been accounted for).

## Status of the association.

In addition to the amendments of the rules, council also gave very real consideration to the possibility of changing the status of the association from that of an unincorporated body (its current status) to becoming a limited company. The primary reason for this was to further protect council and its members from any future legal challenge, by a member or otherwise. However, after much consideration it was felt that a more prudent and cost effective approach to achieving this would be to "strengthen" the rules of the association, particularly in the area of liability and also to ensure that our insurance cover was more than adequate for all events being organised.



## What next regarding the rules?

In undertaking the review of the rules, it is critical to note that the suggested changes are being made in the best long-term interest of the association, including its future members. We would encourage you to review the new set of rules (they have been attached on the IGA website, together with a copy of the existing rules) and support the proposed changes, so that we can ensure a better and more effective IGA in the future. In order for the new set of rules to be adopted they must be passed at the forthcoming AGM (18th September 2012), and will require a 70% majority from the members present for them to be adopted.

*If you have any questions on any aspect of the proposed rule changes, please contact Andrew Cromie (acromie@icbf.com) or Maura Callery (secretary@irishgrassland.com). We would be delighted to deal with your queries.*



L-R Host farmers Gordon and Yvonne Johnston, Dr. Tim Keady IGA Council Member and Teagasc, Darren Carty IGA Sheep Conference Chairman, Claran Lynch Teagasc, Jason Barley AFBI and Conor McMahon Queens University Belfast.

## SHEEP EVENT DELIVERS NUMEROUS TAKE HOME MESSAGES



Darren Carty,  
Irish Grassland  
Association council  
member and Irish  
Farmers Journal

The run up to this year's Irish Grassland Association (IGA) Sheep Conference and Farm Walk saw the topic of weather frequently enter planning discussions. Grass supply on host farmers, Gordon and Yvonne Johnston's farm seesawed from surplus to deficit on a number of occasions before finally settling down for the day. Unfortunately, weather or namely unfavourable weather has continued to dominate the headlines since the event.

While dictating the weather is well outside of our control, both the conference and farm walk left delegates with numerous practical and relevant tips that are well within their grasp and will greatly enhance their farming enterprise. The Johnston's demonstrated how doing the simple things right and careful attention to detail provide a strong foundation for excellent performance.

Farming activities on the farm differ from the norm. No silage is harvested with saved grass, straw and concentrates making up the winter diet. Reseeding is also not seen as priority with Gordon admitting that reseedling would only be worthwhile if he was increasing stock numbers. Despite doing some things differently there is no arguing with the performance being achieved. The scanning rate in mature ewes is over two lambs per ewe with between 1.8-1.9 lambs reared per ewe to the ram. The gross margin in 2011 was also first rate at over €900 per hectare.

In concluding the walk, Gordon had a piece of very valuable advice for farmers considering expanding their flock or increasing the stocking rate. He warned farmers against increasing flock numbers until performance with existing numbers reached a satisfactory level. He said that once this was achieved there is potential to drive performance and output up another notch while increasing output without doing the simple things right will actually in most cases leave the farm in a worse position than where it started.

The morning conference session detailed targeted advice for flockowners to improve their enterprise. There was a similar theme across all presentations with all speakers touching on the the importance of having a structured plan.

### Importance of a structured plan

John Fagan farms in Gartlandstown, county Westmeath and is also an IGA council member. Excellent progress has been made in building a flock of ewes from 400 head to 1350 ewes at present. The major take home message from his presentation was the importance of having a structured plan to work towards.

He advises farmers progressing down any system to take a step back and look at where you want to be in 3, 5 or even 10 years time. The plan does not need to be set in stone but it will give you direction and focus of where you want to be, *"in my enthusiasm as a young sheep farmer I used to think I could do it all in one year. Obviously, this is not possible but what has turned my farm around is having a clear objective of where I am going and how I want to get there"*.

Implementing a successful breeding plan and a grassland management plan that included reseeding and splitting large paddocks into more manageable areas for grazing has significantly increased the volume of grass grown and lifted animal performance. Constructing new housing facilities to give grazing ground a rest period over the winter months has also paid dividends.

### Increased efficiency drives profit

The Teagasc BETTER Sheep Farm Programme was set up in autumn 2008. Its goal was to implement advances in sheep research at farm level and monitor the impact of these. The results speak for themselves. Analysis presented by Better Sheep Farm Programme adviser, Ciaran Lynch, showed gross physical output increasing on average by 148% from 2009 to 2011.

Improving technical efficiency also resulted in variable costs reducing by 5% despite increases in flock size and significant investments in correcting soil fertility issues. These two factors, combined with an increase in market values, have resulted in gross margins increasing by 250% or €440 per hectare.

While increased market values have had a positive influence on farm gross margins, Ciaran Lynch told attendees that increasing productivity has been responsible for 58% of the increase in gross margins.

Litter size, the percentage of ewes lambing and lambs weaned per ewe put to the ram have all increased significantly. Lamb mortality has also been maintained at a low level. This has been achieved despite higher litter sizes and an increase in the number of lambs born. All of these factors combined have influenced output on the farms. This is the primary driver of improving farm profitability and provides the scope to significantly lift enterprise returns provided variable costs can be kept in check and do not increase by a similar level.

Ciaran highlighted implementing a farm plan as central to making improvements in technical efficiency. Flock size, breeding policy, grassland management, parasite control, winter management and farm layout changes were the main areas identified as requiring attention.



Darren Carty Irish Grassland Association sheep conference chairman making a presentation to Host Farmers Yvonne and Gordon Johnston.

### Digestibility central to high feed value grass silage

Dr. Tim Keady, Teagasc and an IGA council member told delegates the most important factor influencing silage feed value and consequently the performance of animals offered silage is digestibility. Most of the factors that determine grass silage digestibility are within the control of the producer. Digestibility can therefore be influenced by adhering to the following advice;

**Harvest date:** The yield increases the later the harvest date but this has a direct influence on reducing digestibility. Mid-May is the target harvest date for swards closed in late autumn. Where grazed, harvest after a regrowth interval of 6 to 7 weeks.

**Sward type:** produced from a perennial ryegrass sward has a higher digestibility than old permanent pasture but this has the potential to consistently produce high feed value silage.

**P & K and soil fertility levels:** Inadequate P & K levels and soil pH will reduce herbage yield and reduce the response to fertiliser N.

**Crop lodging:** lodging will accelerate the rate of decline in herbage digestibility due to an accumulation of dead leaf and stem at the base of the sward.

**Wilting:** should be ensiled after a 24 to 30 hour period if wilting and not to a higher dry matter concentration 25%.

**Mowing height:** to a stubble height of 5-6cm is recommended to minimise the level of stem and dead material (and potentially soil contamination) which will reduce digestibility.

**Additives:** Additives should be seen as an aid and not as a solution to poor management.

**Chop length:** length affects silage intake by sheep with shorter chop lengths desirable.

### Reducing the risk of anthelmintic resistance

Jason Barley and Connor McMahon gave a presentation on the problem of anthelmintic resistance and advice to limit its development. To do the presentation justice, it will be covered in detail at a later stage.

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Host Farmers along with delegates from AIB (event sponsor) and Padraig French President of the IGA

## 2012 DAIRY SUMMER TOUR

*Pat Weeks, IGA Council Member*



Pat Weeks, Dairy Farmer and Irish Grassland Association Dairy Summer Tour Chairman

The Irish Grassland Dairy Summer Tour sponsored by AIB went to West Cork on 26th July. Nearly 400 farmers visited the O'Donovan Family based in Skibbereen and the Shannon Family based in BallinasCarthy. The theme of this year's tour was "Growing the farm business".

### The O'Donovan story - Expansion on a large land base

The O'Donovan's story starts back in 1976 when Derry and Anna got married, two year later Derry's father had the foresight to hand over the reins to Derry when he was 26 years old. In 1978 the farm consisted of 54.6 ha and 95 cows supplying around 500,000 litres to Drinagh Co-op. The farm now consists of

three milking platforms and two young stock blocks totalling 399

ha milking and almost 600 cows supplying over 2.3 million litres to Drinagh Co-op. Derry, Anna and two of their sons Norman and Damien are involved in the business. The massive expansion on this farm has happened by adding additional land through leasing and purchase, and operating a low cost spring calving system. The Dairy Summer Tour visited Norman's milking platform at Ilen Farm but most of the farm details presented related to the whole farm business.



O'Donovan Family



## Cow type

Derry described the lessons learned along the way from milking 100 to over 600 cows. Cow type has changed dramatically since Derry started farming. In the early years the O'Donovan herd evolved to a high producing Dutch Holstein Friesian herd milking over 6,000 litres (1,300 gallons) in all year round milk production. Derry said "Herd fertility was poor and dis-improving, and maintaining the herd was costing a lot in veterinary calls."

Approximately 15 years ago the O'Donovan's started using New Zealand Friesian semen to reduce cow size, improve herd health and fertility, and produce more milk solids. Over the last number of years the policy has moved to using Jersey crossbred bulls on the predominantly Friesian herd. The target is to have a cow producing 420 kg of milk solids on a grass based diet calving compactly in the spring and consuming less than 500 kg concentrate.

## Cost focus

A farming trip to New Zealand in 2002 started a major change in direction for the farm when the difference between 'cash flow' and 'profit' became apparent. At that time the farm had gross output of 35 c/litre but costs were extremely high at 88% of gross output. A family decision was taken to move out of all year round production, away from purchased feed and growing maize, to allow a clear focus on growing grass and spring milk production. A clear policy on reducing costs and managing costs was implemented. Stocking rate on the milking platform is currently 2.3 LU/ha and grass utilisation is 9.2 t DM/ha. For the last three years costs have been maintained at 61% of gross output.

Norman told delegates "All expenditure is questioned and investment in sheds and housing is minimised. We are not afraid to house dry cows on slats and housing is not plush but it's adequate." Derry made the point that when all borrowings were cleared in 1997 the business got caught in a comfort zone and the farm business stagnated for five years. The clear message given to farmers attending the walk was 'work on the business, not in the business and borrowed money helps focus the mind'.

## Conclusion

The West Cork ethic of hard work is clear to be seen in the O'Donovan story. Damien summed it up at one stage when he said "it can only go wrong but we won't let it go wrong because we'll work at it." As Norman and Damien committed to the family business it has grown from strength to strength and will grow even more once the quota brakes come off. All three herds are currently on once-a-day milking and by 2020 the O'Donovan's expect to be milking 1000 cows producing over 4.2 million kg milk solids, a truly impressive performance.

## The Shannon story - Expansion on a limited land base

Robert Shannon is farming with his wife Shirley and four children just outside Ballinascarty in West Cork. Over the last five years Robert has more than doubled herd size to 83 cows currently with a quota of 568,261 litres in a split autumn/spring calving system supplying milk to Lisavaird Co-op with over 30% supplied during the winter months for the Carbery Winter Milk Scheme. Young stock are contract reared four miles away.

The Shannon Family



### Limited Grazing Platform

What Robert is doing will interest a lot of farmers in Ireland as he has not gained access to extra land but instead has increased stocking rate of cows on his current grazing platform. He is now stocked at 3.8 cows/ha on the grazing platform all year round, with whole crop silage bought in as the main winter feed. Robert is measuring grass for a number of years and last year he utilized 13.5t DM/ha.

The herd is split calving with roughly 40% calving in autumn and 60% in spring. Robert feels that the split calving is very advantageous in terms of grassland management, "the winter system is driving the spring system, with the dry cows from the winter milk herd I can clean up paddocks and get the best of grass into the milkers from this time of the year onwards. I would see of a benefit of +0.15% in the protein when grass quality is ideal," he said.

### Breeding the right cow

Excellent animal performance is one of the striking features of the farm. Robert's cows are a great example of what can be achieved with a focused breeding programme. Herd EBI is currently at €130 (ranked in top 10% nationally) with an almost even split of €58 from milk and €61 from fertility. The milking herd consists mainly of pedigree Holstein Friesian with a small number of pedigree Jersey and a few crossbreds. Last year's profit monitor has average cow yield of 7,314 litres at 4.03% butterfat and 3.69% protein, that is 582 kg milk solids/cow. To achieve this level of milk solids production Robert is feeding one tonne of concentrate/cow. Robert's feed cost/litre for 2011 was 4.12 c/l.

Robert is passionate about cow breeding and bred the very successful bull Ballydehob Justice (BYJ) who has nearly 700 daughters milking in Ireland at the moment. Thirty eight cows from the 83 in the herd currently have OJl in their bloodlines so he has to select his bulls carefully to avoid inbreeding.

### Expansion issues

Growing the herd organically from his own stock was something that put strains on cash flow as replacement sales were a big part of Robert's business. In terms of expanding the herd, complying with the Nitrates Directive was one of the most challenging aspects in Robert's opinion. The solution to this for Robert was contract rearing - land that was being used to rear heifers could now be stocked with cows and used to generate a greater return.

### Conclusion – Expanding on a limited land block

Many farmers considering expansion will struggle to get their hands on extra land to expand cow numbers. Robert feels that 3.8 cows/ha (similar to 3 cows/ha if making winter feed on farm) is near the maximum he would go. He is a great example of what it takes to make this system work – high EBI cows delivering excellent milk solids, focused grassland management to achieve the most from grazed grass and a strong focus on costs, with the whole system achieving strong profits. Attention to detail has been a key part of his success to date. To quote Robert "For this farm 2015 has happened here already".



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Padraig French and William Kingston from the Irish Grassland Association council making a presentation to Norman Bateman and his wife Geraldine

## IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION LIFETIME MERIT AWARD 2012 AWARDED TO WEST CORK DAIRY FARMER



William Kingston,  
Dairy Farmer and  
Past President of  
the Irish Grassland  
Association

Prior to the 2012 Irish Grassland Association Dairy Summer Tour the Lifetime Merit Award was presented to West Cork dairy farmer Norman Bateman. Norman first heard about the Irish Grassland Association in 1964, having competed in the National Grassland farming competition run in 1964 by Macra Na Feirme. Norman was told by the two other winners of the competition that the Irish Grassland Association was well worth joining for its cutting edge technology and best farming practices. Norman joined in 1965, and since then his attendance at Irish Grassland Association events has been remarkable. Throughout his time he has put cutting edge grassland research and technology into practice in his dairy business with outstanding results through the decades. Norman was exposed to much of this research and technology at Irish Grassland Association events. From his initial beginning of his dairy farming career in Cahera, Bandon through to the present day Norman has encountered his share of obstacles but has achieved massive success. The financial disciplines of that initial 'brown accounts book', combined with a well-bred, highly stocked herd of cows, Norman grew his farming business and succeeded in converting the dream of having another generation farming. Norman's sons, Michael, Barry and Donald, are now continuing the family farming business and further developing their business for future generations.

The Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit 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. This award to Norman Bateman is in recognition of his substantial contribution to the Irish Grassland Association and to Irish grassland farming.



Paddy O'Keeffe  
LMA 2009



Sean Flanagan  
LMA 2010



Padraig O'Kiely  
LMA 2011



The Bateman Family





## EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE FROM GRASS ON LOUISBURGH FARM



John Noonan, Irish Grassland Association Council Member and Teagasc Mayo

Grass is the cheapest feed for livestock, and needs to be a large part of the animals diet if you are to make any margin. Profitability on sheep farms are dependant on keeping costs low, high output and maximising price be it through quality bonuses producer groups and good marketing of stock. Sheep farmers are finding it difficult to get performance from grazed grass and are commonly supplementing lambs with creep feed to make up the difference. In many cases especially in wet summers this is necessary and provided the meal is competitively priced and targeted for a set period; it can give some reward.

Michael and Laura McNally, Roonith Hill, Carrowniskey, Westport, Mayo have three daughters; twins Deirdre and Kathleen; and Hannah and farm 26ha (adjusted).

The McNallys carry 167 Mule (Mayo Blackface x Blueface Leicester) ewes crossing them with Suffolk rams. They scan about 1.9 and sell over 1.7 lambs reared/ewe to the ram; with all lambs except triplets finished of grass. In 2012, scanning results as follows; 35 triplets, 29 singles, 107 couples and only 3 ewes were barren; with a total of 318 scanned for and 307 born alive.

The scanning results are acted on with singles receiving no meal, doubles getting 1lb flat for a month pre-lambing and triplets get .5lb from scanning, building up to 1.5lbs at lambing.

This is an easy care flock with the toughness and mothering ability of the Mayo Blackface in the mule ewe maximised by lambing the ewes outdoors in sheltered paddocks with a small shed used for weak lambs or triplets if necessary. What strikes me about this farm is the quality of grass offered to ewes and lambs to achieve excellent thrive. When the lambs are weaned ewes are kept on a bare paddock for 10 days and are then moved to good quality grass covers, to help maintain and increase condition. Ewes were weaned two weeks earlier this year due to grass shortages and after rearing a big crop. They are also used to clean out paddocks after the lambs have moved. Lambs are moved into covers of 6-8cm and are moved to fresh grass when they graze down to 4.5 to 5.5 cm.

### Management Post Lambing/meal feeding ewes.

The 30 or so ewes with triplets are treated as a separate flock and receive 1lb of meal per head for a month, creep is given to the triplets for 10 weeks and in 2012 the triplet flock have received 2 ton meal. After 10 weeks the triplet flock join the main flock and no further creep is fed to lambs. In a normal winter ewes 6 tons of concentrates is fed working out at 36kg/ewe. In 2012 ewes were given 8 tons meal (50kg /ewe) due to the very wet winter and the poor grass growth at lambing.



**No winter feed is made on the farm.**

This spring, ewes rearing triplets had a difficult time with 10% of ewes getting mastitis and loosing a quarter; all young ewes and they must be culled.

Next year Micheal is thinking of getting an automatic feeder for triplets based on experience of the last number of years.

**How Good Performance is Achieved**

Michael was in dairying and has a number of paddocks/fields that ewes and lambs are moved to regularly, receiving fresh clean grass constantly. The farm is extensively stocked and Micheal makes no winter forage but builds up grass from August to help tide him over the winter. His neighbour takes paddocks for round bales if they get too strong and applies slurry which keeps the quality high. If a shortage of grass ever occurs he can use those round bales.

A major feature of Michaels' farm is his commitment to grass. He reseeds a paddock each year to improve sward quality and to help produce grass at the "shoulders". Micheal regularly shakes a bag of grass seed or clover on very bare ground /open swards prior to applying slurry. This suits well in wet years especially for clover seeding and getting the benefits later in the season.. His swards are in great condition with high clover content. The swards are very clean with no rushes or docks present.

Topping is an important management element on the McNally farm. Normally Micheal tops 4 - 5 times a year both to maintain quality and as a necessity since stocking levels are low. However, this year the land is only topped twice in 2012 due to the very wet conditions. As Michael commented, "Topping is as good as applying fertiliser".

Lambs are drafted at 42 – 44kg. They are separated from the main group and moved to clean grass. The remainder are dosed with a mix of Cydectin and Cobalt. Lambs tails are rung and castrated at birth and are dagged around tails where necessary during the year. All lambs got good quality grass high in clover content .. If a paddock is getting dirty, especially in dry weather, lambs are moved to clean pasture as they will not thrive. After a heavy shower the paddock freshens up and lambs are moved in to graze again. Lambs are never expected to graze a paddock bare or graze grass gone too strong.

Michael's first batch of 30 lambs were sold on July 15th without having received a worm dose or any meal and straight off the ewes. They were sold live averaging 46kg and made 97 euros. 90% of his lambs are normally sold by late November. Lambs are drafted every 3 weeks and sold as they become fit with wethers sold at over 50 to 55kg and ewe lambs 45 to 50 kg liveweight (mainly for breeding) all achieved with grass only.

Clover is incorporated into swards by either broadcasting with granulated lime followed by a slurry application or by conventional reseeding. Chieften and Crusader were used in recent years because of their smaller leaves and suitability in sheep swards.

To improve profitability from sheep in future years, we will need to have greater focus on grass utilisation; species suitability for different soil types and identifying ewes that are easy care and easily kept over the winter.

Also, sheep farmers will drive the improvements in recording by paying premium prices for 5 star rams with high reliabilities; that are worth an extra 2 euro per lamb weaned.

**Main Features of the Enterprise.**

- High level reseeding/incorporating clover.
- Regular topping to keep quality swards
- Not intensively stocked-difficult to control grass at times
- Removal of round bales and inclusion of slurry to keep swards fresh
- Paddock system with good fences
- Good handling facilities and jobs combined to reduce workload
- Sheepdog
- Highly productive mule ewes that lamb outdoors
- Ram care very important and kept in the best grass all year around –feet treated regularly





## STUDENT CONFERENCE 2012



John Kelly, Sheep Farmer  
and Irish Grassland  
Association Student  
Conference Chairman

This year is the third year of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) student only event for third level students studying grassland production and agriculture. Last year's conference was held in Carlow/Wicklow and was a general conference with papers on dairy, beef and sheep in the morning followed by a choice of either a dairy or sheep farm walk in the afternoon, students who attend were final years from UCD and the advanced dairy and drystock certificate students from Ballyhaise, Kildalton, Clonakilty and Gurteen.

This year we have a programme to cover all enterprises again: dairy, beef and sheep in order to appeal to a wide spectrum of students. The location for this year's conference is in Gorey Co. Wexford and the format will again consist of a conference in the morning followed by a farm visit of the student's choice in the afternoon.

The speakers in the morning conference are:



Ciaran Lynch  
Teagasc sheep BETTER  
farms co-ordinator



Brian Costello  
Dairy farmer and  
independent grassland  
consultant (Grasstec)



Andrew Cromie  
Irish Cattle Breeding  
federation (ICBF)

The IGA is delighted to present three excellent speakers for this year's student conference. All three speakers are at the leading edge of research and advisory work in their sectors and provide an excellent opportunity for students to learn from their experiences.

After lunch the students have a choice of two farm visits on either a beef farm or a dairy farm. These farmers are:

**Cathal Crean, Gorey, Co. Wexford: Beef BETTER farmer**

OR

**Kevin and Richard Murphy, Corriganeagh, Gorey, Co. Wexford: Teagasc monitor dairy farmer**

Both of these farms are run by progressive farmers who have both been part of monitor farm programs. Here students will see excellent grassland management practices and how the focus on this has shaped their business going forward.

This unique student conference has grown in popularity over the last two years and we are delighted to announce continued sponsorship by FBD insurance. One of the aims of the IGA is to show that grass and its management is a huge positive story in the future of Irish agriculture. What better place to start than with the next generation of farmers and agricultural professionals.



***We would like to  
thank our sponsors***





Marianna Kowalczyk Herd Plus, Florence Woodlock ABP, Tim Keady IGA Council Member and Teagasc and Jim Parkinson Host Farmer

## BEEF CONFERENCE AND FARM WALK 2012



Dr. Tim Keady, Irish Grassland Association council member, Teagasc, Athenry.

### PREMIER BEEF EVENT FOR THE PREMIER COUNTY

The Irish Grassland Association (IGA) this week launched their annual Beef Farm Walk and Conference entitled "Irish Beef Farming – challenges and opportunities". This premier beef event takes place on Tuesday 4th September at Horse and Jockey, Co. Tipperary. ABP and Herd Plus are the sponsors for "Irish Beef Farming – challenges and opportunities". The event is BTAP approved event and it will consist of a visit to the farm of Jim and Audrey Parkinson near Cashel, Co Tipperary, preceded by a conference at the Horse and Jockey in the morning.

Whilst many producers are considering, or are in the process of converting their beef farms to dairy units, Jim and Audrey Parkinson who were dairy producers, sold their dairy herd in 2007 and converted to suckler beef production. Today Jim and Audrey run a 100 cow suckler beef herd and also have a beef finishing enterprise on 77 ha. The herd consists of 65 commercial Limousin cross suckler cows and 35 pedigree Limousin cows. The objective of this farm is to maximise profit, therefore depending on prevailing market conditions the progeny are either finished on the farm or sold as weanlings.

Currently, the Parkinson's operate an autumn and spring calving pattern. However their objective is to calf all cows during the autumn. Jim aims to maximise animal performance from grass, both grazed and ensiled. This is achieved by consistently producing high feed value silage and grazing leafy pastures during a long grazing season. Cows and their progeny are put to pasture in mid March and are not housed until mid November. Male weanlings which are not being sold at weaning graze leafy pasture until housing and are then finished on ad-libitum concentrates until slaughter at 18 months of age.

On the day of the visit delegates will have the opportunity to see and discuss many issues involved in efficient beef production including;

- the suckler herd with progeny at foot
- replacement and breeding policy
- weanlings from the autumn herd and their management to finishing
- finishing bulls
- grassland management
- winter feeding





**The conference will feature 4 papers on many aspects of beef production. Speakers include;** Dr Paul Crosson, Teagasc, Grange will present a paper on "Strategies to reduce green house gas emissions from beef farming". The focus of Paul's paper will be on those options which concomitantly reduces green house gas emissions whilst increasing farm profitability.

Mr John Gilmore, a veterinary practitioner based in Roscommon, whose presentation is entitled "Transition period management of the suckler cow and calf". This presentation will discuss the critical period extending from 1 month prior to 1 month post calving.

Dr Eoghan Finneran will present a paper entitled "Options for reducing feed cost on beef farms". This paper will discuss costs of producing grazed grass and alternate feeding options for the indoor feeding period.

Kevin Farrell, a beef producer from Ballymahon Co Longford will outline his system of beef production using progeny from the dairy herd.

The number of tickets for this Premier beef event (BTAP approved) is limited to 230, therefore early booking is strongly encouraged and admission will be by ticket only. By registering before Tuesday 21st August you can avail of our pre-paid discount of €30 for Irish Grassland Association members and €70 for non Irish Grassland Association members. This includes refreshments on arrival, 2 course dinner, bus transfer to the farm and conference proceedings. Non-members will also receive one year's free membership if they wish to become a new d/d member.

You can now book online at [www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com) where these best pre-paid deals are available or call Maura Callery the Office Manager on 087 9626483.

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IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION - NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2012



## ON-FARM VARIETY EVALUATION TRIALS

In 2010 a study was set-up by the Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Moorepark, to examine the performance of perennial ryegrass cultivars on commercial farms. The objective of this study is to evaluate the yield and persistency of cultivars, sown as monoculture, on commercial farms. This information will improve our understanding on how cultivars can be expected to yield and persist when sown on commercial farms. There are currently over 45 farms involved, with this number increasing steadily and it is expected that over 100 farms will become involved.

Cultivars are sown as monoculture (one single cultivar). Only one cultivar is sown per paddock. A late heading diploid (Tyrella) is used as the control cultivar and this is sown on all farms, then depending on how much is being reseeded and how many paddocks each farmer is interested in sowing to monoculture, between one and 6 other cultivars are sown on each farm. Each farm has a minimum of 2 cultivars, with the maximum number of cultivars on any farm currently standing at 7 monocultures. The farmer is responsible for completing a weekly farm cover throughout the growing season and this information is used to determine the yield performance of each cultivar. During the winter period each paddock is visually assessed for ground cover or proportion of perennial ryegrass in the sward by Moorepark personnel. This information will be used to determine the persistency of each cultivar across a range of soil types. The data generated within the study, will increase the information available to farmers on the potential performance of cultivars and their expected persistency under animal grazing across different soil types and locations in the country. This is a long-term study, the performance of each cultivar will be monitored on each farm for the lifetime of the sward. This information will be useful to all grassland farmers in the future when selecting cultivars for reseeding.

To become involved in the study or to get further information please contact

Dr. Mary McEvoy, Teagasc, Moorepark. Phone: 025-42649

or email: [mary.mcevoy@teagasc.ie](mailto:mary.mcevoy@teagasc.ie)





Irish   
Grassland  
Association

# WE WANT YOU

Following the previous successful recruitment of part-time Regional Development Officers the Irish Grassland Association are keen to recruit persons to cover the South West and West of the country.

Applicants should be farming, part-time farming or from a strong farming background.

An established relationship with the Irish Grassland Association would be a distinct benefit.

If you are interested in applying for this position a full job description and application form is on our website

**[www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com)**

or call our Office Manager Maura Callery on 087 9626483.





# IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION

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