



Irish Grassland Association

Newsletter Issue No. 17 November 2012

“to advance the knowledge of good grassland management in Irish Farming”



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Irish Grassland Association President's Address



Deirdre Hennessy
President of the Irish
Grassland Association
2012/13

Dear Member,

To date 2012 has proved to be a very challenging year. Poor grass growing conditions in spring combined with almost continuous rainfall throughout the summer has resulted in poor quality silage for the winter period and the supplies of this are limited on many farms. In this newsletter both Karen Dukelow and Darren Carty provide information and guidance on how best to quantify the fodder available on your farm, how to calculate the cost of feeding livestock over the winter, and options to address fodder shortages. From now until the end of the grazing season farmers must endeavour to ensure that they have an appropriate sward closing strategy so that there will be grass available for early spring turnout. On page 6 Karen Dukelow has a guide for autumn closing of paddocks.

On the 4th September the Irish Grassland Association held our annual Beef Conference and Farm Walk in Co. Tipperary. This was an excellent day and a sell out event. In the morning we had four very interesting papers dealing with options to reduce green house gas emissions from beef production systems, managing the transition cow and calf, costs of feed stuffs, and Kevin Farrell described the efficient running of his farm and asked if there is potential from dairy calf to beef to increase profitability on suckler farms. In the afternoon delegates visited the farm of Jim and Audrey Parkinson and were treated to an afternoon of lively discussion on the efficient management strategies, breeding policy and profitability of this suckler farm.

Our Five Year Plan was recently completed under the guidance of William Kingston, Council Member. This plan was developed using the information many of our members provided in a survey undertaken through the post and at a number of our events in 2012. The core focus of the Irish Grassland Association's new Five Year Plan is '*to facilitate the flow of cutting edge grassland information and technology to and between farmers and the wider industry*'. There are more details of the plan available on page 16. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Five Year Plan subcommittee for all their work in developing this plan to ensure that the Irish Grassland Association continues to serve its members in the most appropriate way.

January 8th 2013 is the date for our next major event, which is the Dairy Conference. More information will be available soon on our website www.irishgrassland.com or by contacting the Office Manager, Maura Callery, secretary@irishgrassland.com.

Yours sincerely,



Deirdre Hennessy

President of the Irish Grassland Association 2012/13

Irish Grassland Association AGM



At the AGM of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) front row L-R: Eddie O'Donnell Vice President IGA, Deirdre Hennessy President IGA, Padraig French outgoing Past President IGA and Maura Callery Office Manager IGA with the new council for 2012/13



Deirdre Hennessy President of the Irish Grassland Association making a presentation to Padraig French outgoing President of the Irish Grassland Association



A full report on the new members to the Irish Grassland Association council and outgoing members will follow in our next newsletter





Carrying cattle this winter, what are the costs?

Karen Dukelow, Irish Grassland Association Council and Teagasc Drystock Specialist

In light of high concentrate costs and poorer than normal quality silage, winter costs must be closely looked at this year. A recent survey by Teagasc of 205 samples of 1st cut silage taken across the country had an average DMD of 64%. Eight percent of samples had a DMD of less than 55% and 25% of samples had a DMD of less than 60%. So what are the costs of carrying cattle on this type of silage?

Table 1. Cost of carrying livestock where silage quality is good (62-65 DMD)

	3 month winter	4 month winter	5 month winter
Dry Suckler Cow	€222	€262	€303
Weanling (300 kg)	€249	€289	€329
Store (350 kg)	€267	€313	€358
Store (500 kg)	€319	€375	€430

Table 2. Cost of carrying livestock where silage quality is poor (55-58 DMD)

	3 month winter	4 month winter	5 month winter
Dry Suckler Cow	€235	€281	€326
Weanling (300 kg)	€262	€307	€352
Store (350 kg)	€281	€331	€381
Store (500 kg)	€326	€393	€453

*Meal price assumed at €300/t and silage at €30/tonne

It can be seen from the tables above that it costs about **€80/month** to carry an animal (<2yrs) indoors on silage and meal. If you are doing a cash-flow budget, about half of these costs or **€40/month** are **cash costs** (meal, animal health, straw, interest and machinery running). The remaining costs are silage (assumed already paid for), shed costs and a small margin (€50/head is factored in for weanlings and stores). If forage/silage has to be bought in it is costing about €15/month for light weanlings, €25/month for stores and €40/month for suckler cows.

It is worth noting that while silage quality is having an impact on wintering costs, the number of months an animal is housed has the biggest impact on overall cost. The winter period should be minimised by using the autumn planner and spring rotation planner to manage grass supply and ensure as short a winter as possible.

The autumn planner sets out a plan to close paddocks so that 60% of the grazing area is closed by the end of the

first week of November. If you start closing paddocks from 10th October, this means closing 15% a week over the 4 weeks. This will allow you to “carry” grass for grazing in January and February. In trial work carried out in Teagasc Moorepark, paddocks closed before early November also grew more grass over the winter. This is because grass on these paddocks had started to re-grow before day length became very short. So closing a good proportion of the farm by early November is the best way to grow grass while paddocks are rested over the winter.

Autumn Planner Worksheet

1. Add up grazing area (include silage ground if planning to graze in Spring 2012)
2. Set a target

Teagasc Target

- Close 60% of grazing area by November 7th
- Start closing paddocks Oct 10th
- Graze out well

Own target?

- Can start closing later/earlier
- Still close 60% by November 7th if you want to graze in January, February and early March



Total grazing area (Acres)

(all land to be grazed in the spring, include silage ground if it will be grazed in the spring)

% grazed	Teagasc Target	Own Target (acres)	Paddock names or numbers	Actual grazed (acres)
Oct 10 - Oct 17th	15% e.g. farm of 100 acres, graze 15 acres			
Oct 18 – Oct 24th	15% e.g. farm of 100 acres, graze another 15 acres, total grazed 30			
Oct 25 – Oct 31st	15% e.g. farm of 100 acres, graze another 15 acres, total grazed 45			
Nov 1st – Nov 7th	15% e.g. farm of 100 acres, graze another 15 acres, total grazed 60			



Quick actions may avert fodder deficit problems

Darren Carty, Irish Grassland Association Council and Irish Farmers Journal

Building a bank or wedge of grass has been very difficult to achieve this autumn. Heavy rainfall in recent weeks has also significantly reduced utilisation of what limited supplies of grass are available. Many farmers have little option but to house all or a large percentage of their stock. Flockowners are also under pressure with grass regrowth stalling following grazing and sheep quickly eating into grass reserves.

When you add this to one of the worst summers on record, it does not paint a pretty picture. Many farmers on heavy farms have had stock housed on and off for periods right throughout the summer. In many cases these animals have made deep inroads into what were already tight fodder supplies. The extent of fodder deficit problems varies hugely from farm to farm. Where a known fodder deficit exists, plans can be put in place to take remedial action. However, there are likely to be problems on many farms that have not yet been identified.

Continuing to farm and thinking that a problem does not exist will only compound issues. The last thing you want is to be faced with a fodder deficit next January or February when it may be much harder to take remedial action. The advice is to act now and carry out a monthly fodder budget.

Fodder budget

The first step is to calculate the farms fodder demand for the winter. The recommendation is to calculate this on a monthly basis as the length of the housing or feeding period can vary greatly from farm to farm. Be realistic in your calculations. You are only fooling yourself if you believe you can turnout stock to grass earlier than what is actually possible for your farm. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the monthly fodder requirement for various classes of stock on your farm. It is based on animals having free access to forage. Stores and weanlings are being offered 2 kg of meal per day.

Table 1: Total fodder consumed per month by various classes of stock (when offered ad-lib)

	Pit silage (t)	Hay (t)
Dairy Cow	1.6	0.4
Suckler cow	1.4	0.35
100-200 kg calf	0.4	0.1
350 kg weanling (plus 2 kg of meal per day)	0.9	0.23
500 kg store (plus 2 kg of meal per day)	1.2	0.3
600 kg finishing animal (5 kg meal per head per day)	1.0	0.25
Ewe	0.17	0.05

- * Figures assume stores and weanlings being fed 2 kg of meal per day.
- * Increasing meal feeding by 1kg per day will reduce monthly silage requirement by 200 kg per head across all classes of stock.

Fodder availability

Once you have calculated the fodder demand, the next step is to calculate the level of fodder you have on the farm. Round bales (4 × 4) and pit silage are the main considerations on most farms. To calculate the tonnage of silage in your pit, multiply the length of the pit by the width by the average height with measurements taken in feet. Divide the figure you get by 45 (or 50 if the pit contains chopped silage).

For example a pit measuring 80 ft long by 40 ft wide with an average height of 8 ft would contain 569 t ($80 \times 40 \times 8 = 25600/45 = 569$).

Round bale silage

Calculating the volume of fodder contained in round bales is different to pit silage as grass is regularly wilted prior to baling and therefore has a higher dry matter percentage than pit silage. Where conditions allowed and silage was baled wilted, one bale of silage will possess the equivalent feed value to approximately one tonne of pit silage. However, where bales were made in wet weather, without wilting, one bale should only be equated to about 700-800 kg of pit silage. Signs to look out for with high DM% bales are bales standing firm and solid. Low DM% bales are likely to have sagged and will deposit a high level of effluent when the silage plastic is cut.

Hay

Calculating the weight of hay is pretty straightforward. The average weight of different size bales is detailed in Table 3. Like straw, the weight of hay bales can vary by up to 50 kg or even greater. Therefore, it is an advantage where possible to weigh bales on a weighbridge at your local feed merchant or weigh if you have a scales available.

Table 3: Weight of various sizes of square bales.

Bale size	Weight (kg)
Small square bale	20 kg
4 × 4 round bale	240 kg
5 × 4 round bale	360 kg
8 × 4 × 3 square bale	570 kg



Final situation

Once you have calculated the volume of fodder on the farm and the monthly fodder demand the final step is to calculate how long the available fodder will last. This is simply done by dividing the total fodder available by the monthly requirement. This information can then be used to determine if plans need to be put in place to purchase in more fodder or if meals or straw can be incorporated into the diet to make available fodder supplies last longer.

Don't delay housing

The mistake must not be made of trying to get over a fodder deficit by holding animals outdoors for longer into the winter. Fields that are currently being grazed and closed rotationally for early grazing next spring should remain closed. While re-grazing these areas may delay the housing date, it will significantly impact on grass growth next spring and can actually increase the feeding period. Be mindful when selecting areas for early grazing next spring. Dry, sheltered paddocks are best as they will allow animals to settle quicker and also increase grass utilisation.

Get your silage tested

As mentioned earlier, fodder supplies vary hugely from farm to farm. On a high percentage of farms, silage could not be harvested at the required date due to poor ground conditions. This increased the yield of silage but had a negative effect of reducing silage quality. A recent Teagasc analysis of silage tested so far this year shows the average DMD reducing from over 70% in 2011 to 64% in 2012. This should be kept firmly in mind when planning diets and concentrate supplementation levels. For example, good quality silage with a DMD of 70% plus and 1.5-2 kg of concentrates will be sufficient to achieve a daily live weight gain in weanlings of 0.6-0.7 kg per head per day. However, for every 5% fall in DMD value, an extra kilo of concentrates will need to be

fed to achieve the same level of performance.

Feeding lower quality silage, without knowing its feed value, can have a marked impact on performance over the winter months. While concentrates costs have increased substantially, failing to achieve target liveweight gains during the winter period can have long term effects on target sale/slaughter/breeding dates and weights.

Additional information

Working examples and worksheets for calculating your fodder supply and demand are available to download on our website www.irishgrassland.com. Top tips to get your farm out of a fodder deficit are also included.



Careers in agriculture – third level options

Bridget Lynch, Irish Grassland Association Council and UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science



With the recent downturn in the economy has come a ‘boom’, albeit a volatile boom, in the agri-food sector which has resulted in a phenomenal increase in demand for third level agriculture related courses at all levels. The agri-food industry is now an attractive option for school leavers and those wishing to change careers or up skill with a wide range in offerings both full time and part time in the agricultural colleges, institutes of technology and universities. The opportunities in the agri-food sector are wide, varied and challenging with graduates working in all sectors from farm to fork! For some school leavers who have their heart set on a career in agriculture the challenge starts with gaining admission to their course of choice as the interest in agriculture has increased as has the demand, and as a result minimum CAO points for entry to level 6,7,8 courses have soared (Table 1). For example minimum CAO points for entry to Agricultural Science (DN250) in UCD has increased by 130 points, Agricultural Science in Waterford Institute of Technology (WD078) by 170 points and Veterinary Medicine (DN300) by 30 points in the last 5 years.

Teagasc offer further education in agriculture, food, horticulture, forestry and equine studies. Many of the courses incorporate management practices and technologies on the home farm, supervised project work and discussion groups. In collaboration with Institutes of Technology there is an opportunity for students to advance from certificate level courses to honours degree level and beyond. Further education courses are accredited by FETAC while the higher level courses are accredited by HETAC which means that graduates have a qualification which is recognised at home and abroad. The Teagasc agricultural colleges in Clonakilty, Kildalton, Ballyhaise and agricultural colleges Gurteen, Mountbellew and Pallaskenry currently offer a wide range of further education and higher level courses as follows:

- Certificate in Agriculture - FETAC Level 5
- Advanced Certificate in Agriculture - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Agriculture (Adapted for Part-Time Farmers) - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Dairy Herd Management - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Drystock Management - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Agricultural Mechanisation - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Farm Management - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Machinery and Crop Management - FETAC Level 6
- Certificate in Horticulture - FETAC Level 4
- Certificate in Horticulture - FETAC Level 5
- Advanced Certificate in Horticulture - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Horsemanship & Stud Management - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Forestry - FETAC Level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Greenkeeping - FETAC Level 6

Table 1. A summary of minimum CAO points for entry to level 8 and 7/6 programmes in Irish institutes of technology and universities 2012.

Third level institute	Course CAO code and title	Min entry points 2012	Level
UCD	DN250 Agricultural Science	445	8
UCD	Animal and Crop Production	445	8
UCD	Animal Science	445	8
UCD	Agri and Environmental Science	445	8
UCD	Food and Agribusiness	445	8
UCD	DN251 Animal Science – Equine	440	8
UCD	DN252 Dairy Business	430	8
UCD	DN261 Food Science	455	8
UCD	DN271 Forestry	350	8
UCD	DN272 Horticulture Landscape and Sportsturf Mgt	335	8
UCD	DN300 Veterinary Medicine - Undergraduate entry	580	8
UCC	CK505 Food Science	405	8
DCU	DC170 Horticulture	380	8
UL	LM068 Food Science and Health	350	8
UL	LM093 Equine Science	340	8
Maynooth	MH405 Equine Business	380	8
WIT	WD076 Forestry	270	7/6
WIT	WD078 Agricultural Science	380	7/6
WIT	WD096 Horticulture (Waterford - Kildalton College)	220	7/6
WIT	WD097 Horticulture (Dublin - National Botanic Gardens)	210	7/6
WIT	WD126 Agriculture	355	7/6
WIT	WD164 Food Science with Business	245	7/6
Cork IT	CR010 Agriculture	330	7/6
Cork IT	CR011 Horticulture	185	7/6
Dundalk IT	DK685 Agriculture	325	7/6
Dundalk IT	DK784 Veterinary Nursing	390	7/6
Athlone IT	AL731 Veterinary Nursing	400	7/6
GMIT	GA172 Rural Enterprise and Agri-Business	290	7/6
GMIT	GA777 Agriculture and Environmental Mgmt	350	7/6
UL	LM180 Equine Science	340	7/6
Letterkenny IT	LY826 Applied Agriculture		7/6
Letterkenny IT	LY837 Food Science and Nutrition	225	7/6
Letterkenny IT	LY847 Veterinary Nursing	380	7/6
IT Tralee	TL650 Engineering (Agricultural)	230	7/6
IT Tralee	TL748 Agricultural Science	305	7/6

Not all colleges offer the full range of further education courses. However, due to increased demand there has been an increase in the number of colleges offering the advanced certificate courses. Please check the individual college websites for more details.



There are now 11 higher level programmes appearing on the CAO list. All of these courses are conducted jointly with various Institutes of Technology, thus facilitating the best use of the core competencies of each of the partner institutions. Recruitment to the courses is through the CAO system with a number of places reserved for mature students and holders of designated FETAC awards.

- Higher Certificate in Agriculture - HETAC Level 6
- Higher Certificate in Technology in Agricultural Mechanisation - HETAC Level 6
- Bachelor of Business in Rural Enterprise and Agribusiness - HETAC Level 7
- Bachelor of Science in Agriculture - HETAC Level 7
- Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and Environmental Management - HETAC Level 7
- Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Science - HETAC Level 7
- Bachelor of Science in Horticulture - HETAC Level 7
- BSc in Land Management in Agriculture/Forestry/Horticulture – HETAC Level 8
- Higher Certificate in Business Studies in Equine Studies - HETAC Level 6



New for 2012 – Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management (Level 7)

With the expected future expansion and intensification of the dairy industry there will be a concurrent increase in demand for commercial dairy farm management skills. As a result a new Teagasc/UCD programme for future professional dairy farm managers has been developed. The award is a Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm management (Level 7) validated by UCD. It is a two year programme with professional work experience being a core component. Participants will spend two years on approved host farms, trainee managers will move to a different host farm at the end of a 12 month block. The programme will also incorporate approximately 6 weeks of contact modules. These modules will be delivered as 1-2 days courses in one week block release and include Dairy Production Technology, Dairy Farm management, and Growing Your Dairy Business.

Applicants must possess at minimum a Level 6 advanced Certificate in Agriculture or an equivalent major award. Important dates and events for those interested in a career in the agri-food industry and who are weighing up their options in the next few months are as follows:

- UCD open day November 17th
- UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science Information Evenings @ 19.30
 - Galway, Radisson Hotel November 7th
 - Kilkenny, New Park Hotel, November 21st
 - Cork, The Gresham Metropole, November 28th
- Non-standard entry (including progression from ITs and mature entry), UCD, March 13th
- WIT open day 11th December
- CIT open day 16/17th November
- The agricultural colleges generally run their open days in March, for more details please check www.teagasc.ie/events





Review of the Irish Grassland Association Beef Conference and Farm Walk 2012

Heinz Eggert, Chair Irish Grassland Association Beef Conference and Farm Walk Sub-Committee and Beef Farmer.



The Irish Grassland Association Beef Conference and Farm walk took place in Co. Tipperary this year. The event was sponsored by ABP and Herd Plus. The delegates met in the morning at the Horse and Jockey Hotel for the beef conference in which four papers were presented.



Dr. Paul Crosson, Teagasc, Grange presented a paper on *Strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from Irish beef cattle systems*. He outlined that agricultural derived emissions have shown a steady decline in recent years and through better grassland management further reductions can be made by extending the grazing season, improved sward quality, increased usage of clover and improved manure management. Emissions can also be reduced through improved animal productivity. Reducing age at first calving, improving feed efficiency, increased animal performance and improving calving rates are all ways to lower greenhouse gas emissions and also improve profitability on the farm at the same time. Paul outlined that Teagasc in conjunction with Bord Bia are working to develop a system to measure and reduce emissions on Irish beef farms, and are also in the process of

developing a software program which will assist producers in reducing emissions in a cost effective manner while also improving profitability on Irish beef farms.

The second paper was presented by **John Gilmore** MVB MRCVS who spoke about the *Transition period management of the Suckler cow and calf*. He pointed out that there is huge potential to improve performance figures for the Irish suckler herd. John explained that through improved management of the suckler herd during the transition period, the number of calves produced per 100 cows can be significantly increased above the current level of 80 calves per 100 cows. He urged delegates to draw up a health plan specific to their herd with the help of their vet. This should take all past health issues and future threats into account. Once the herd plan is drawn up it should be strictly adhered to at all times and reviewed and updated as necessary. Critical herd health and management decisions should be part of the health plan. These should include body condition scoring, adequate nutrition, treatment of internal and external parasites, vaccination programs for the cow and calf, and care of the calved cow and newborn calf including colostrum management. John added that sire selection is important to prevent difficult calvings in heifers and cows as they have a direct link to health and fertility issues.



Dr. Eoghan Finneran Teagasc Grange presented the third paper on *Options for reducing feed costs on beef farms*. Eoghan showed in great detail in his presentation the cost saving than can be made with home grown feeds. Home grown grain, whether rolled, treated or ensiled at high moisture and beet based diets have the potential to reduce feed costs by up to €37/head for a carcass gain of 80 kg in a steer finishing diet. The take home message in this paper was that maximising performance with forage based diets can give a considerable cost saving to potentially expensive high concentrate diets. But he warned that animal performance can suffer where high levels of feed management are not practiced during storage or throughout the feeding period.



The last paper of the conference was given by **Kevin Farrell**, a beef farmer from Ballymahon in Co. Longford. Kevin farms with his wife and four sons on 76 ha of grassland. He farms a 60-cow suckler herd and a flock of 230 ewes. Increasing farm efficiency and in particular improved grassland management has allowed Kevin to utilise extra grass produced on the farm with a dairy beef enterprise. He challenged the audience with the question; *can a dairy beef enterprise increase profitability on suckler and beef farms?* Kevin was not afraid of showing his animal and financial performance from the dairy beef enterprise which is giving him a margin of €331 per animal. In his first year he finished 18 dairy bulls with this expanding to about 50 bulls in 2012. But Kevin warned that such beef enterprises can only remain profitable if all aspects of the production system are given close attention to detail. This includes maximising liveweight gain from grass, having a good approach to animal health and sourcing good quality calves from known sources to reduce the risk of disease.

After lunch at the hotel the delegates visited the farm of **Jim and Audrey Parkinson**, New Inn Co. Tipperary. Jim and Audrey are running a 100 cow Limousin suckler herd on 75 ha with the help of their daughters Alyssa and Estelle. They own 54 ha with a further 21 ha leased. Thirty five cows are pedigree stock, and most of these pedigree progeny are sold privately off the farm. Sixty cows are autumn calving and the remaining 40 cows are calved in the spring. Jim is planning to move to all autumn calving over the next couple of years as it will ease management and allow for outdoor calving. Most of the commercial stock is finished on the farm, and frequent weighing is used to monitor weight gains.

Jim and Audrey's goal is to run a very efficient and profitable farm business which must stack up economically and be labour efficient with the normal working day finishing at 6 pm. To achieve their ambitions, ease of management is a priority. Silage and slurry work is carried out by contractors. A tight calving pattern reduces the number of grazing groups with a rotational grazing system maximising grass utilisation.

Jim's breeding policy reflects his down to earth approach to his business. Replacement heifers are not bred from repeat offenders and are only bred from milky cows. ICBF HerdPlus data and weanling weights are also strongly considered when selecting heifers for breeding. Only 5 star stock bulls are considered for breeding with calving ease a must.

Grassland management is a high priority in the overall management and Jim stressed the importance of flexibility especially in the current wet year. He walks the farm at least once a week to assess growth, demand and to estimate grazing days ahead. Paddocks with high covers that have gone too strong for grazing are skipped and cut and baled. He uses dry cows and in calf heifers as "grazing toppers" to clean up after the main herd.

The 2011 profit monitor results showed that Jim is achieving his goals. The farm is profitable and is on par with the achievements of the Teagasc/Irish Farmers Journal Better Beef Farm Program on a stocking rate of 1.92 LU/ha and a gross output 697 kg/ha. With a gross margin of €809 per ha Jim is among the top performing suckler farmers in Ireland.

The delegates were most impressed with Jim and Audrey's farm, their management system and the quality of stock. The take home message was that with attention to detail, a clear vision and focused farming can be an enjoyable and profitable business.



We would like to thank our sponsors Herd Plus and ABP





William Kingston, Project Chairman being presented with the Irish Grassland Association Five year plan by Dr. Pat Bouge, Broadmore Research

Irish Grassland Association Five year plan

Deirdre Hennessy and William Kingston, Irish Grassland Association Council

In 2007 the Irish Grassland Association undertook a review of the Associations activities and put in place a five year plan to grow the Association and to ensure we had a clear focus for all our activities. Since that strategic review took place membership numbers have grown significantly to over 900 members plus 90 corporate members. This membership allows us to hold a range of high quality events each year at a favourable cost to members. It has also allowed us to develop the Irish Grassland Association in areas where we had few members previously through the recruitment of part time Regional Development Officers.

In 2011 the Council decided that we once again needed to review our activities and our focus. A sub-committee, chaired by William Kingston, was established to develop a new Five Year Plan. This began with a Council brain storming session in June 2011. This was followed by a survey of members, and some non members, in 2012 at the Dairy Conference, Beef Conference and Farm Walk, the Sheep Conference and Farm Walk, and through a postal survey. Dr. Pat Bouge, Broadmore Research, was engaged to analyse the survey and facilitate discussions on the formation of the new Five Year Plan.

A large number of responses (220) to the survey were received and analysed. Approximately 50% of the responders who were members are new members or are members for less than three years; this is a direct result of our recruitment drive over the last few years and the increased publicity of our events. The survey indicates that members are particularly happy with the quality of our events, the newsletter and our increased visibility.



The core focus of the Irish Grassland Association's new Five Year Plan is '*to facilitate the flow of cutting edge grassland information and technology to and between farmers and the wider industry*'. The Five Year Plan has seven broad areas:

- Membership
- Servicing members
- Voluntary commitment
- Events/Activities
- Communication
- Industry good
- Strategic management.

The new Five Year Plan has shifted the focus slightly from the recruitment of new members to servicing existing members. While on-going recruitment is vitally important to ensure an active, vibrant Association, it is very important that the needs of existing members are prioritised. Areas of the country where Regional Development Officers (RDO's) have been present in the last three years have seen increased membership through increased activity in those areas. The five year plan proposes continuing with the strategy of placing RDO's at locations around the country where the Irish Grassland Association currently has a small presence. As well as recruiting new members the RDO's will run a number of local events for members.

The Irish Grassland Association must continue to ensure that we are servicing our members through our events and activities. We must continue to be proactive on issues and push the boundaries of grassland management and production efficiency; challenging researchers, farmers and the wider industry; monitoring the services we provide to members and reviewing members needs, views and levels of satisfaction with the Association on an on-going basis. It is very important that the Association remains focussed on its core goals and objectives.

Our corporate members are also a very important and now integral part of the Association. Going forward we must ensure that corporate members are being adequately served by our range of events and activities.

The Irish Grassland Association is a voluntary organisation and as our membership grows so too do the demands on the Council. Over the next few years we will endeavour to put in place procedures and structures to ensure that the voluntary council can continue to serve the Association's members.

The Irish Grassland Association plays a key role in facilitating the flow of information from research to farming, and indeed from farming to research, through its Conferences and Farm Walks, as well as its local events. It is hugely important that the association maintains the high standard of its events into the future through good quality speakers and excellent host farms.

Our Newsletter is an important means of communicating with our members and with the wider grassland industry. It keeps our members up to date events and happenings within the Association. Our website is also an important source of information for our members.

The Irish Grassland Association Council would like to thank all our members who responded to our survey. We look forward to using the Five Year Plan to continue to ensure the Association remains focussed in the coming years and continues to serve our members to the highest standard.





Farm Focus - Update on the Monamore Herd, one of the 2011 Dairy Summer Tour host farms

Deirdre Hennessy, Irish Grassland Association President

On the 26th July 2011 the Dairy Summer Tour visited the farm of Tom and Rhona Kelly in Co. Louth. Phillipstown Farm is home to the famous Monamore herd of Holstein Friesians. On the day of the visit Tom had 200 cows milking. He had more cows dry at that time of year than normal due to quota restraints. Here we have an update from Tom on how 2011 worked out for him in terms of milk production and how he has dealt with the tough conditions of 2012 so far.

Milk production is high on the farm. In 2010 the average 305 day milk yield was 10,000 litres/cow at 3.64% fat and 3.33% protein (702 kg MS/cow). In 2011 total milk output was lower than in 2010 due to drying off cows earlier; on the upside this controlled milk supply and no super levy fine was incurred. Total milk delivered in 2011 was 1.92 million litres. The 305 day milk yield, based on 230 cows, was 9,294 litres per cow at 3.53% fat and 3.38% protein (642 kg MS/cow).

Fertility on the farm is now improving in 2012. Over the winter it was discovered that the effectiveness of one of the farms AI operators was declining over the previous two years. Identifying this factor is contributing to overall fertility improvements in 2012.

In autumn 2011 a successful auction was held on the farm and extra milking cows were sold. The proximity of the farm to Northern Ireland resulted in 75% of the animals sold that day going North mostly due to the fact that there were no quota issues in Northern Ireland last year. There is always a demand for high quality stock from this farm.

Overall in 2011 grass was not plentiful due to low rainfall in June and poor grass growth in early autumn combined with a heavy stocking rate on the grazing platform. Fortunately Tom had access to 16 ha outside of the farm for grazing dry stock in September and October. All livestock were housed by the 7th November and considerable grass growth was observed over the winter enabling turnout by day on the 8th February. The dry weather in early spring 2012 was great at the time but was a high price to pay for the year that has followed.

Fodder quality during the winter of 2011/2012 was excellent reflecting the growing and harvesting conditions. First cut silage was 82% DMD and 17% crude protein and second cut silage was 71% DMD and 12% crude protein.

Spring 2012 got off to a great start with early turnout facilitated by excellent grazing conditions, although spring growth rates were not spectacular. Cows were out by day from 8th February to 12th of March and fulltime thereafter. There was a lot of maize silage left over from the winter and as grass supply was tight this was used as a buffer feed in spring for grazing cows for the first time ever. The farm vet had suggested using the maize as historical milk fat levels in spring were low suggesting a requirement for a fibre source to be fed while grazing in spring. An effect on milk fat content was observed with 2012 milk fat content 0.2 to 0.3 percentage points higher than usual.

As spring progressed into summer the situation on the farm changed drastically in May when the semi heavy land became very susceptible to poaching. The maize silage was all gone at this stage and so round baled silage was used as a supplement. Some of this was made in 2012 off paddocks that could not be grazed after the end of April. This regime really hit the high yielding cows that make up the herd and fat and protein levels have been poor all summer.



Tom Kelly and some of his staff at the Dairy Summer Tour 2011

The incessant bad weather experienced since the end of April of this year brings reminders of the heavy ground on this farm not seen for the last 30 years. While the objective throughout the year was to maximise grazing Tom says that he has learned very clearly that it does not pay to poach paddocks. The better soils on this farm can take some abuse but the heavy ones penalise you hard if they are abused.

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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 or call our Office Manager Maura Callery on 087 9626483.

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Date for your diary

Irish Grassland Association Dairy Conference 2013

‘BACK TO BASICS’

will take place on Tuesday

8th January 2013 at the Clonmel Park Hotel.

sponsored by



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in the coming weeks.

For further information contact Maura at
secretary@irishgrassland.com or 0879626483