

Irish Grassland Association

Newsletter Issue No. 20 July 2013

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



CONTENTS

Corporate Members	2
Irish Grassland Association President's Address	4
Irish Grassland Association Beef Conference and Farm Walk Review	6
No need to feel swamped if you are farming on wet land	7
Assessing winter fodder supplies	10
Teagasc early maturing dairy calf to beef trial update	14
Irish Grassland Association Sheep Conference and Farm Walk 2013 Preview	17
Irish Grassland Association Dairy Summer Tour 2013 Preview	18



Want to have your company logo on this page?
Contact the Irish Grassland Association office today...

Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath, Ireland.
General Information: secretary@irishgrassland.com
Tel: (087) 96 26 483 Opening hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 9 am to 5 pm
www.irishgrassland.com



Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath, Ireland.
General Information: secretary@irishgrassland.com
Tel: (087) 96 26 483 Opening hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 9 am to 5 pm
www.irishgrassland.com



Deirdre Hennessy
President of the Irish
Grassland Association
2012/13

IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Dear Member,

Welcome to this edition of the Irish Grassland Association Newsletter. The Beef Conference and Farm Walk was held in Mayo in June and was a very successful event with interesting and informative papers in the conference and a visit to Michael Mellett a steer beef producer. Michael is an excellent grassland manager and is achieving fantastic performance from grass. You can read a review of the event on page 6, and John Shirely's article from the Farming Independent relating to the event is on page 7. In the next few weeks we have two more national events. On July 16th the Sheep Conference and Farm Walk takes place at the Hudson Bay Hotel in Athlone and on the farm of P.J. Finnerty, Brideswell, Co. Roscommon. A very good line up of speakers for this event will cover key aspects of sheep production. Philip Creighton previews the event on page 20.

The Dairy Summer Tour will visit Co. Waterford this year, an area that has seen huge expansion in milk production in the last few years. The theme of the Tour is "Growing your farm business efficiently". The two farms we will visit are at varying stages of expansion. David Kirwin is a new entrant and is in the process of completing the conversion from sucklers to milk production, while Kieran and Anne Hearne have come the full circle of expansion. This exciting event will provide people at all stages of their dairy farm business with plenty information and lessons from the experiences of both farms. Eddie O'Donnell previews the event on page 18. More information on and registration details for both events is available on our website www.irishgrassland.com or by contacting the Office Manager, Maura Callery, secretary@irishgrassland.com.

The spring fodder crisis is still very much in everyone's mind, and many are concerned about feed stocks for the coming winter. On page 10 Daren Carty offers some advice and a fodder calculator to help you estimate how much feed you will require for the winter. I would urge all farms to consider their requirements now, and to develop a plan to address shortages sooner rather than later.

The Irish Grassland Association have recently recruited three new Regional Development Officers in the West, South West and South East, see page 5. Over the next few months they will be running events in their areas. I look forward to working with them and would like to wish them all the best in their new role.

Finally, I would like to invite you all to attend the Irish Grassland Association AGM on Thursday 19th September at the Horse and Jockey Hotel, Tipperary. All members are welcome to attend and can register by contacting the Office Manager on 087 9626483 by the 5th of September. The AGM is a good opportunity to see how the Council and the Association operate. This year we will be voting to change the Rules of the Association to a Constitution so that the Irish Grassland Association can apply for Charity Status from the Revenue Commissioners. If you are interested in joining the council of the Association you can put your name forward for election at the AGM. Full details of the AGM are available on page dd. Looking forward to meeting you at the AGM.

DEIRDRE HENNESSY

President of the Irish Grassland Association 2012/13

IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION RECRUITS NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS

The Irish Grassland Association is delighted to announce that three new Regional Development Officers have just been recruited. The new RDO's are John Graham based in the West, Noreen Begley in the South East and Maire Ahern McCarthy in the South West. The objective of the role is that through having more local contact with members the Irish Grassland Association will become increasingly relevant to all farmers who have an interest in improved grassland management.

The Association has an existing RDO in the North East, Donal Callery, and previously had RDO's in the South East and Midlands. Through their hard work and dedication membership numbers in those regions have grown significantly. The RDO's play a very important role in growing membership in areas where the Irish Grassland Association previously has or had a limited presence. As the membership of the Association grows the RDO's will organise local low cost events for the members in their region. It is not possible to host a national event in each region of the country in any one year, however, local events, often free of charge or for a small fee, boost the activity of the Association in an area. Events that have been held by RDO's over the last three years have included reseeding, low cost grass production, grass measuring workshops, succession planning workshop and financial management workshops; all of which have proved very successful. Over the next few months the new RDOs will be organising events in their areas to raise awareness of the Irish Grassland Association and to provide events for existing members. There will be a profile of the each of the new RDO's in the next newsletter.

Irish Grassland Association Beef Conference and Farm Walk Review



Karen Dukelow
Teagasc and Irish
Grassland Association
Council Member

The Irish Grassland Association National Beef Conference and Farm Walk moved west this year and took place on the 18th June in The McWilliam Park Hotel, Claremorris, Co. Mayo. About 180 people attended the event. The conference section took place in the morning, with four excellent papers.

James O'Loughlin, Teagasc Moorepark, discussed land drainage to improve productivity. James urged delegates to put careful thought and planning into any drainage work to be undertaken on farm. James told the audience that there are many things that can be done before costly drainage work to improve grass production on farms; these include getting soil P and K levels up to index 3, correcting soil pH status, reseeding and cleaning existing drains. James also outlined different drainage options and methods. Michael Biggins followed with a paper outlining how he is

getting the most from the grass on his farm through infrastructure, soil fertility management and incorporating paddocks. Michael told delegates that dividing one block of his fragmented farm into seven paddocks allowed him to carry 32 suckler cows in 2012 compared to 25 in 2011, and he harvested 26 bales of silage from the area. Michael stressed that good farm infrastructure allows for much easier animal and grass management.

Two papers on calf and weanling health followed. Dr. Bernadette Early told delegates that the process of weaning is stressful for beef calves, and that imposing additional stressors such as housing or castration around weaning increases the stress. Dr. Early outlined some very useful guidelines for weaning including the weaning procedure itself, feeding concentrates before and after weaning, and avoiding additional stressors. Management of calves and cows at and after weaning is also hugely important to minimise disease and health risks such as respiratory disease, stomach worms and hoose, and grass tetany. Conor Geraghty, veterinary practitioner, presented a very useful paper on practical considerations for good weanling health. Conor used a wide range of photographs of calves, housing, feeding, etc. to deliver his messages and his paper was well received by the audience. Conor gave practical advice for farm bred weanlings and purchased weanlings. In particular for purchased weanlings Conor advised that all and every precaution is taken and that the process of weaning, sale at a mart and arrival at a new farm are all very stressful for animals making them more susceptible to disease and additional stressors should be avoided.

In the afternoon delegates visited the farm of Michael Mellett in Shurle. Michael operates a store to finish system, finishing about 120 cattle on 100 acres. He purchases mostly suckler-bred cattle at about 470 kg and finishes them as steers at 24 to 28 months of age. A key objective of the system on the farm is to achieve a high proportion of live weight gain from grazed grass. Michael operates a rotational grazing system using stone walled paddocks. Steers are grazed in groups of 15 to 20, with 4 – 6 paddocks per group. Grass quality is monitored on a continuous basis and group sizes are adjusted if necessary depending on grass supply. This farm had a gross margin of €800 in 2012 and is one of the top performers amongst cattle finishers who complete profit monitors.



WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR SPONSORS
INTERCHEM AND DAWN MEATS



No need to feel swamped if you are farming on wet land

John Shirley, Farming Independent



Irish Independent
farming

The Irish Grassland Association (IGA) travelled west for their summer beef conference and farm visit. As usual, they came up with some gems. Michael Mellett, the host beef farmer, I'd met before. My belief he is a perfectionist hasn't changed after last week's visit – more on this later.

The IGA conference speaker on drainage, James O'Loughlin, was new to me. His enthusiasm and knowledge of drainage reminded me of the late great John Mulqueen – scientist and champion to those farming wet land. In recent years, Teagasc had cavalierly ignored wetland farming but a couple of weather washouts have jolted the organisation back to reality. Mr O'Loughlin and a couple of colleagues are working to fill the knowledge gaps in this area. Up to 2009, Mr O'Loughlin managed the

Teagasc wetland dairy farm at Kilmaley, Co Clare.

Teagasc, in their wisdom, closed the research in this most challenging of wet soil farms. Instead, they have brought in their 'Heavy Soils Programme' where Mr O'Loughlin is working closely with eight dairy farmers across Munster who are farming on heavy soils. These are at Rossmore and Solohead in Tipperary, Boherbue and Macroom in Cork, Castleisland and Listowel in Kerry, Athea in Limerick and Doonbeg in Clare.

The rainfall in Oakpark Carlow in 2012 was 840mm and locals thought it was bad. Some of the farms monitored last year by Mr O'Loughlin had almost double Oakpark's total, he told the IGA conference at the McWilliam Park Hotel in Claremorris, Co Mayo.

Last year will forever be etched in memories as an awful 12 months for Irish livestock farmers, but it was the occupiers of poorly drained soils that suffered the brunt of the hardship and setbacks. Mr O'Loughlin gave data for 2012 versus 2011 collected from his monitor farms:

- Grass grown down 26pc from 10.6t to 7.8t dry matter per hectare;
- Grass utilised down 33pc from 8.1t to 5.4t DM per ha;
- Pasture ryegrass content down 28pc to 17pc;
- Soil potash and phosphate levels down 28pc and 25pc.



James O'Loughlin speaker, Bernadette Earley speaker, Karen Dukelow IGA council member and Beef Conference chairperson, Micahel Biggins speaker and Conór Geraghty speaker.

All of these setbacks culminated in a 47pc collapse in the farm incomes. In light of the struggles of livestock farming on wet land and the high drainage costs, I asked Mr O'Loughlin if they should give up and plant trees. "Certainly not," he answered. "Thirty per cent of Irish milk is produced off wet land. Much of this is in the southwest of the country. "These dairy farmers

are technically very good. They are often well set up with paddocks, roadways, good buildings and milking parlours. All of these help the farmer to succeed on poorly drained soils," he explained. "However, they must plan for years like 2012. This means reducing

stocking rate to two livestock units per hectare. It means establishing a silage reserve of three big bales per cow and managing the farm to minimise pasture poaching The Teagasc man quoted costs from €2,500 to €3,500/ac for drainage. He said drainage was very site specific and that before embarking on heavy drainage investment, he advised farmers to clean watercourses and check existing drains for blockages. Many of the earlier drainage jobs were good but are now choked up, he explained. "Technically anywhere can be drained, but some cases make no economic sense. Use the wetter parts of the farm for silage. Use



low ground pressure machinery." When asked about advantages from grazing smaller cows on wet land, Mr O'Loughlin said the poaching risk was just as high with smaller cows as their smaller feet have the same ground pressure as a larger cow.

Postman delivers ad-lib angle on beef farm walk

The combination of glorious weather, quality cattle, and the tidy picturesque stone-walled farm made the visit to Michael Mellett's beef unit beside Shrulce, Co Mayo a very pleasant exercise for Irish Grassland Association (IGA) members. Farming 43 hectares (106 acres) of dry limestone ground, Michael buys 450kg bullocks in spring or early summer and brings them to beef about a year later when they average about 400kg carcass weight. At all stages he would have 120 cattle on the farm. The core of the enterprise is to get

maximum gain from grass through early grazing and lots of paddocks, with judicious topping up with concentrates. Indeed, the type of lean continental bullocks grading R+ and U would not finish at the young age without the added meals. Routinely Michael introduces about 3kg per head of meals at grass for the final six- to eight-week finishing period. Overall, about 120 units of N per acre is used on the grassland, with the first half bag of urea going out when the soil warms to 5°C. Michael closes early, with all stock indoors by November 1st in the hope of getting the first cattle to grass in February. He told the visitors that having surplus grass was a bigger problem than too little, such is his commitment to providing a leafy bite to his cattle at all times. Most paddocks would be topped twice. Meal feeding also gives extra flexibility in spring. This year Michael selected two batches of cattle in the shed for ad-lib, all-meal finishing. These cattle grew spectacularly well but managed to gobble an average of 15.2kg of meal per head per day over the 70-day finishing period. But, when Alan Nolan of Teagasc did the sums on the ad-lib group finished out of the shed in January and February versus their comrades finished at grass in June, the margins favoured the grass finishing. The actual sums were, ad-lib group 436kg carcass at €4.55/kg totalled €1,987/hd but €442 meal bill reduced the gross margin to €103. The grass group at 406kg carcass at €4.70/kg totalled €1,875 but left a gross margin of €342/hd, mainly due to the low meal bill of €74/hd. But, Michael Mellett does not regret the ad-lib exercise as having cattle moved early allowed him to take good silage cut in mid-May because this ground was not grazed in spring. Michael is a postman for his day job. It is understandable he needs to have some flexibility on grass stocking given the total unpredictability of the Irish weather and his high standards.

The Irish Grassland Association would like to thank InterChem and Dawn Meats for their sponsorship of this event. The proceedings are available at www.irishgrassland.com.



Assessing winter fodder supplies



Darren Carty
Irish Farmers Journal
and Irish Grassland
Association Council
Member

The spring of 2013 will live long in the memory of every farmer. While grass growth has improved in recent weeks most first cuts of silage are at best on a par to last year and in many cases are 15-20% behind last year's levels. Early action is needed to avoid a repeat of this spring. The first step on every farm should be to put a winter fodder plan in place. This does not have to be anything very detailed or technical; the aim is to get you thinking about the number of animals you will have on hand, the quantity of fodder you need to feed them and how you are currently placed to achieve this. This plan should be updated at regular intervals or if stock numbers or fodder supplies change.

Completing a winter fodder budget

There are essentially three steps that need to be taken.

1. Calculate the volume of fodder already on farm
2. Calculate your proposed winter demand
3. Calculate what deficit/surplus is available

The worksheets listed will give you the information you need to complete this.

Worksheet 1. Winter fodder requirement calculator (pit silage @ 25% dry matter)

Cattle Type	Monthly requirement (A)	No. Stock (B)	Feeding period in months (C)
Dairy cow	1.6t/month		
Suckler cow	1.4t/month		
Weanling 250kg	0.54t/month		
Weanling 350kg	0.7t/month		
Store cattle 500kg	1.3t/month		
10 adult sheep	1.2t/month		
Total requirement			

Worksheet 2. Estimated silage yield (pit silage @ 25% dry matter)

	Area in acres (A)	Estimated yield t/acre (B)*	Total yield A x B
Pit silage first cut		Poor 7t	
		Average 8t	
		Good 9t	
Pit silage second cut		Poor 3t	
		Average 4t	
		Good 9t	
Total estimated yield			

*Estimated yields are lower to take into account lower grass growth this spring

Worksheet 3. Calculating the tonnage of hay on the farm

Bale size	Number of bales	Average weight per bale t (kg)*	Total (t)
4 x 4 round		0.24t (240kg)	
5 x 4 round		0.36t (360kg)	
Small square bale		0.02t (20kg)	
8 x 4 x 3		0.57t (570kg)	
Total tonnes			

*There may be variation in the weight of bales. It is useful where easily achieved to weigh a bale to take a representative sample.

Worksheet 4. Calculating the tonnage of hay on the farm

Bale size	Number of bales	Average weight per bale t (kg variance)*	Total (t)
4 x 4 round		0.15t (140-180kg)	
5 x 4 round		0.20t (180-240kg)	
8 x 4 x 3		0.36t (350-380kg)	
8 x 4 x 4		0.56t (480-600kg)	
Total tonnes			

*There can be significant variance in the weight of straw bales depending on how tight they are packed and moisture content. It is recommended to weigh a sample bale.

Worksheet 5. Calculating the tonnage of silage in the pit

To calculate the tonnage of silage in the pit, you multiply the length of the pit by the width of the pit by the average height. All measurements are taken in feet. Divide the final figure by 45 to convert to tonnes or if the pit contains single chopped silage, divide by 50 as the pit will not be as compacted.

Worksheet 6 Converting baled silage of varying dry matter to 1t fresh weight pit silage @ 25%

% DM of baled silage	Equivalent tonnage of pit silage @ 25% DM
25	0.65
30	0.78
35	0.91
40	1.04

Potential of grass

Alternative forage sources such as wholecrop silage, forage crops, straw and concentrates for example will all have a role to play in winter fodder plans. However maximising growth on your farm and focusing on saving additional silage or hay is the most efficient way of bulking winter fodder supplies. It is the cheapest fodder source and also gives you control on the quality of forage you are feeding.

The focus should be to continue to drive grass growth. Fertiliser is expensive but it will give a fantastic return on investment where applied at the correct timing on productive grassland. Surplus grass grown can be taken out of the rotation as baled silage and will serve as an excellent way of boosting supplies. Additional fertiliser should be targeted to high performing or reseeded fields and in good ground conditions. Remember, where you are taking cuts of silage, applying a compound fertiliser to replenish phosphorus and potassium levels will pay dividends in maximising grass growth. Recommended nitrogen application rates are 25-30

units after each grazing. It is also important to keep a close eye on the amount applied so that you do not exceed REPS or Nitrates limits. For second cut silage, spread 60-80 units of nitrogen, about 8 units of phosphorus and 28 units of potassium and cut after 40 to 50 days.

Slurry applied on warm summer days will have very little nitrogen value but it will supply in the region of five units of phosphorus and 30 units of potassium per 1,000 gallons. It is important to spread slurry as soon as possible after first cut silage has been cut (first five days is best) to reduce sward contamination and palatability issues for grazing livestock. Where applying slurry on pasture, diluting it or spreading with alternative methods such as direct drilling or a trailing shoe for example will reduce the length of time to re-grazing.

Selling stock

In some cases the best option to reduce winter fodder demand may be to reduce stock numbers carried over the winter. It is important to plan early and identify the animals most suitable for sale so that steps can be taken to maximise their sale value. Breeding animals should, where at all possible, be the last animals selected for selling as adopting this approach will safeguard the future production potential of your herd or flock. Some practical steps that can be considered include;

- In sheep flocks, selling cull ewes or store lambs earlier, where grass supplies are tight, will reduce competition for grass and allow a final cut of silage to be saved or alternatively allow the breeding flock to be grazed for longer into the winter.
- Scanning will be a vital tool in suckler and dairy herds to identify barren cows. These animals can be dried off and finished off grass/indoors or sold for further feeding in the mart.
- In a suckler to weanling system, autumn born and early spring born calves can be weaned early. Calves can be given access to good quality grass and supplemented with concentrates to have them in prime condition for sale while cows can be tightened up or used to graze out paddocks. Creep grazing will also work very well in achieving this goal.
- Many dairy herds have adopted the approach of culling unproductive or problem cows and retaining a replacement breeding animal in her place. These cows are being sold on a phased basis with the focus of marketing them early before the likely increase in numbers towards the end of year.

Teagasc fodder census for 2013

Teagasc and industry stakeholders are planning a national fodder census on the 30th June. The target is to estimate the reserves of fodder saved on farms in the year to date. An easy to use calculator is being circulated and farmers are encouraged to complete and return the data. This will allow a national estimate of winter fodder stocks to be assessed early and plans to be put in place early to deal with any shortfall in fodder.

Help is at hand

Where you are in doubt about calculating your fodder plan or are considering alternative forage sources, help is at hand to deal with all scenarios. Teagasc and private consultants are offering advice to clients and non-clients. A fodder planning booklet that assesses the value of alternative forages is available at www.farmersjournal.ie and further advice can also be obtained on the Teagasc website www.teagasc.ie.

Teagasc early maturing dairy calf to beef trial update



Robert Prendiville
Teagasc Grange
and Irish Grassland
Association Council
Member

Background

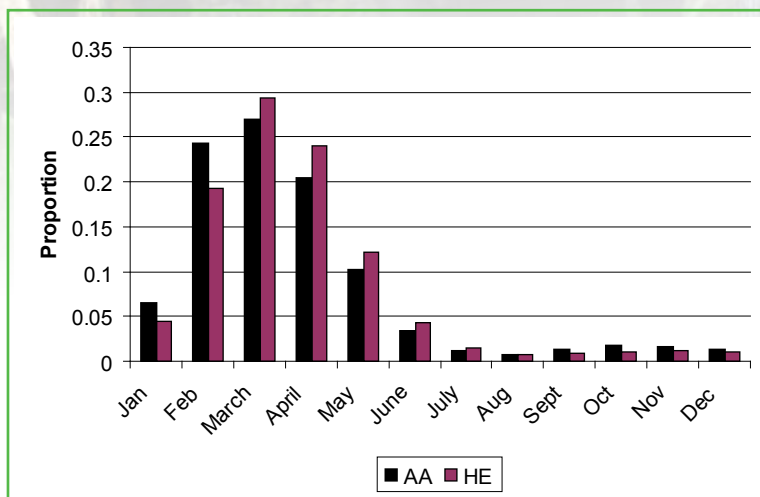
Currently dairy farmers are preparing for the abolition of milk quotas in 2015. Consequently, the proportion of dairy sire usage has increased in dairy herds. In 2010, approximately 60% of dairy cows were bred to dairy bulls. The remainder were bred to beef bulls - Aberdeen Angus (14%), Hereford (11%), Limousin (6%) and other continental breeds (5%). With their short gestation and ease of calving the Aberdeen Angus and Hereford are popular beef breeds for many dairy producers.

With concentrate costs at historically high levels, systems of beef production that utilise pasture efficiently and are focused on low concentrate input systems have the potential to improve farm profitability.

Previous research at Grange Research Centre evaluated the merits of early maturing crossbred animals from the dairy herd (both heifers and steers). A 19-month production system, where animals were slaughtered off pasture, was identified as a blueprint for early maturing spring born crossbred heifers. The early maturing spring born steers were slaughtered at 23 months of age. These animals were housed at the end of the second grazing season and given an 84 day finishing period. Due to the seasonality of dairy production over 80 per cent of the Aberdeen Angus and Hereford calves from Holstein-Friesian cows are born from February to May (Figure 1). In seasonal calving systems where the majority of calves are born in spring, these blueprints limit supply of product to the marketplace from September to March.

Figure 1.

Proportion of Aberdeen Angus and Hereford calves born per month to dairy cows.



A number of products (Hereford Prime and Certified Angus) currently on the market

capitalise on the eating quality traits of animals from these sire breeds within pre-defined carcass weight, age and fatness specification. Since early 2011 Teagasc have developed a joint research programme with ABP Food Group, Certified Irish Angus and Irish Hereford Prime, the Irish Angus Cattle Society Ltd and the Irish Hereford Breed Society to optimise the production of this enterprise by developing technology for each of the key stakeholders involved, including the beef bull breeder, the dairy farmer, the beef farmer and the meat processor.

Current experiment

In spring 2011, a trial was established at the Johnstown Castle research farm. A total of 128 early maturing dairy cross calves were assembled. Sixty-four February born calves were purchased in early March, 32 males (16 Angus and 16 Hereford) and 32 females (16 Angus and 16 Hereford). An additional 64 April born calves, identical in breakdown to that purchased in March, were purchased in late April/early May. Varying production systems were generated by adjusting the age at slaughter for February and April born heifers and steers (Figure 2). The objectives of the experiment were to establish systems of production that are profitable to producers and marketable for processors while ensuring a continuous supply of high value product to the marketplace. Low input pasture based systems were the focal point for all production systems investigated. Performance results from the calves purchased in the first year of the three year study are presented.

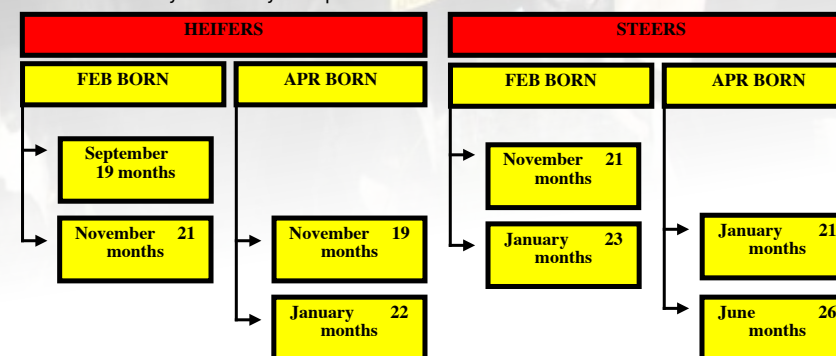


Figure 2. Production systems for early maturing heifers and steers.

Heifer production systems

Each finishing system contained 16 animals. Of the 32 February born heifers, the first 16 animals (8 Angus and 8 Herefords) were slaughtered in September at 19 months of age. The remaining February born heifers were slaughtered in November at 21 months of age thus providing data for a further two months finishing. Both heifers in 19 and 21 month production systems were slaughtered off pasture. Animals received 2.5 kg of concentrates per day for 60 days pre-slaughter. Heifers in the 19 month production system were 454 kg at slaughter

yielding a carcass weight of 228 kg. Live weight and carcass weight of 471 and 238 kg were achieved for heifers in the 21 month production system, respectively. Carcass conformation for heifers in both production systems were predominately 'O=' with carcass fat classes of 3=. The April born heifers also had two ages at slaughter. The first group were slaughtered in November at 19 months following supplementation with concentrates for the final 60 days at pasture. The remaining animals were housed and finished on silage *ad-libitum* with 4 kg of concentrates per day. These animals were slaughtered in January at 21 months of age. April born heifers in the 19 month production system had a live weight at slaughter of 464 kg yielding a carcass weight of 235 kg. Live weight and carcass weight of 501 and 248 kg were achieved for heifers in the 21 month production system, respectively. Carcass conformation for heifers in both production systems were predominately 'O=' with carcass fat classes of 3=/+.

Steer production systems

Consistent with the heifers production systems; the steers were either February or April born and had two ages at slaughter. The first group of February born steers were slaughtered in November at 21 months of age. Animals were finished off pasture with 2.5 kg of concentrate supplementation. The remainder of the February born steers were housed and finished indoors on silage *ad-libitum* with 4 kg of concentrate supplementation per day. These animals were slaughtered in January. Live weight and carcass weight of 533 and 278 kg were achieved for heifers in the 21 month production system, respectively. February born steers in the 23 month production system had a live weight at slaughter of 574 kg yielding a carcass weight of 289 kg. Carcass conformation for steers in both production systems were predominately 'O=' with carcass fat classes of 3-/+.

Late born steers also have two slaughter dates. The first group were housed in November after the second season at pasture and finished at 21 months of age on silage *ad-libitum* plus 4 kg of concentrates. These animals were slaughtered in January and were 545 kg live weight at slaughter. Carcass weight for these steers was 270 kg. The final group were housed and stored over the second winter on a diet of silage *ad-libitum*. These animals were turned out to pasture for a third season and were slaughtered in June at 26 months of age. Live weight at slaughter was 605 kg and a carcass weight of 315 kg was achieved. Carcass conformation for steers in both production systems were predominately 'O+' with carcass fat classes of 3+.

Conclusion

The finishing systems are presented from the first year of the research study being carried out at Johnstown Castle; the aim of which is to establish sustainable systems of production for early maturing heifers and steers that are profitable to producers and result in a high value product that is continuously available to the marketplace. Current results suggest that satisfactory animal performance is achieved yielding adequate carcass weights, conformation scores and fat classes across all systems.



Irish Grassland Association Sheep Conference and Farm Walk 2013 Preview



Philip Creighton
Teagasc and Irish
Grassland Association
Council Member

The Irish Grassland Association Sheep Conference and Farm Walk 2013 will take place on Tuesday 16th of July. The conference will take place in the morning in the Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone, with registration open from 9.30 am, followed by a farm walk on the farm of P.J. Finnerty, Brideswell, Co Roscommon.

P.J. operates a mixed sheep and cattle farm. The sheep enterprise dominates and is run as a mid-season lamb production system. The main flock consists of 300 ewes which lamb from late February, followed by a further 120 ewe lambs which start to lamb three weeks later. There is a strong focus on breeding prolific ewes on this farm with the majority of ewes made up of Belclare and Blue Leicester crosses. As a result lamb output per ewe consistently averages an impressive 1.7 lambs weaned/ewe. Grassland management is a top priority with strong emphasis placed

on utilising as much grass within the diet of the finishing lamb as possible. A paddock system and a planned reseeding programme help to maximise the use of grass on this farm.

The conference will feature two sessions. The first session will deal with sheep breeding and nutrition. Dr Noirin McHugh will outline the benefits to be gained from concentrating on breed improvement within flocks and how to use performance evaluations when selecting rams. Frank Campion is a PhD student working with UCD and Teagasc investigating ways of optimising the nutritional management of high prolificacy sheep. He will outline the project he is working on and some results to date. Session two will focus on flock health. Damien Barrett will discuss current studies within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the Schmallenberg virus and its potential impact on Irish sheep flocks, while John O'Rourke a veterinary practitioner, based in Roscommon will discuss fluke and its control options.

This is an STAP approved event. For further information or to register visit www.irishgrassland.com or contact Maura in the office on 087 9626483.



**WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR SPONSORS
SHEEP IRELAND AND MULLINAHONE CO-OP**





Irish Grassland Association Dairy Summer Tour 2013 Preview

We would like to Thank
our Sponsors AIB

The Irish Grassland Association Dairy Summer Tour will take place in Co. Waterford on Wednesday 14th August. This is a region which has seen a large amount of expansion over the past six years. We are delighted to have AIB as the event sponsor again this year. The event is titled "*Growing your farm business efficiently*". The tour will visit two very good grassland farmers, at different stages of development and expansion.

Profile of farms

David and Isobel Kirwan are farming near Stradbally Co. Waterford. David was part of the Teagasc BETTER Beef Farm Programme up until the end of 2011. In spring 2011 he completed a business plan and applied for the free allocation of 200,000 litres under the New Entrants Scheme.

David was successful in his application, and after much thought and discussion with his family and local advisor, he decided to establish a

dairy enterprise. In autumn 2011, David purchased 50 cows and heifers from one source and he commenced milking in spring 2012. David has purchased additional quota through the milk quota exchange on top of the free allocation bringing his quota to 363,000 litres. He has converted some beef sheds to cubicles and installed a new bulk tank and a second hand 12 unit milking parlour. The farm has seen a lot of change in the last 18 months, moving from a split spring/autumn calving 120 cow suckler to beef farm to a dairy farm currently milking 70 cows. The farm still has a lot of beef stock on the farm as it is in a transition phase but David has plans to move to 150 cows over the next two years while also rearing replacements on the farm. David is currently increasing and improving the infrastructure on farm to cater for the new and expanding herd, e.g. he is adding more roadways to the central roadway that runs through the middle of the farm to create better access to paddocks and is increasing water access across farm.

Kieran and Anne Hearne are farming near Rathgormack, Co. Waterford. They have expanded from 40 cows to 160 cows over the past number of years and expanded milk quota from 230,000 litres to 770,000 litres. The farm is a good free draining farm stocked at 3.3 cows/ha on the milking platform. The majority of winter feed production and rearing of replacements is undertaken on out farms within a few miles of the home block. The herd has an EBI of

€180 and is ranked at number 32 on the latest list of EBI herds. Kieran was a runner up in the national EBI competition in 2005 and 2006. The herd has excellent fertility, which really helped as the farm expanded. The herd grew from within, making disease and herd health somewhat easier to manage. A new 18 unit milking parlour and winter accommodation have been put in place over the few years. Kieran has had to optimize the infrastructure on the farm to cater for the expanded herd, and has also examined and adapted the labour system on the farm with the focus being on simplifying and streamlining operations. This is a very well-run and well managed dairy farm with very high milk solids production per hectare being achieved from a Friesian herd at a high stocking rate.

Delegates will learn about dairy expansion at contrasting stages from the new entrant stage at David Kirwinn's to a farm that has come the full circle of expansion at the Hearne's. This exciting event will provide people at all stages of their dairy farm business with plenty information and lessons from the experiences of both farms. "Growing your farm business efficiently" is very important aspect of both of the farms and neither would be where they are today without strong, rational business planning and careful financial management. Profit monitors have been completed on both farms for the last 15 years, providing the farmers with valuable information on which to build the technical and financial efficiency of their businesses. We look forward to meeting you at the Dairy Summer Tour.

DATE SET FOR THE 2013 AGM - 19TH SEPTEMBER

The 2013 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association will take place on Thursday 19th September in the Horse and Jockey Hotel Tipperary at 10.30am. All members are welcome to attend and can register by contacting the Office Manager Maura Callery on 087 9626483 by the 5th of September. It is a good opportunity to see how the Association operates and it is also an opportunity for members to become involved in the Council. Each year a number of seats on Council are available to be filled through election. All members of the Irish Grassland Association are eligible to put their names forward for election. If you wish to nominate an individual, then send us your letter of nomination and a letter from another member seconding this nomination. Nominations must be received by the Office Manager two weeks before the AGM, this year that date is the 5th of September. As well as the election, a roundup of the year's activities will be presented, as will the 2012 accounts. Over the course of the last year the Association has applied to the Revenue Commissioners for Charity Status. This requires that the Rules of the Association are changed to a Constitution and written in a format required by the Revenue Commissioners. A vote will be taken at the AGM to accept the Constitution before the application for Charity Status can be completed. The Rules written in the required Constitutional format will be available online in late August www.irishgrassland.com. We look forward to meeting you at the AGM or some of the upcoming summer events.



Irish Grassland Association

Cookstown, Kells, Co Meath, Ireland.
www.irishgrassland.com

General Information: secretary@irishgrassland.com

Tel: (087) 96 26 483 Opening hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 9am to 5pm

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK:
[WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/
IRISHGRASSLANDASSOCIATIONIGA](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/IRISHGRASSLANDASSOCIATIONIGA)

