

# Irish Grassland Association

Newsletter Issue No. 21 November 2013

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

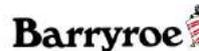


*Photo taken at the Irish Grassland Association Student Conference - October 2013*

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# CORPORATE MEMBERS 2013



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Cookstown, Kells, Co. Meath, Ireland.

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# CORPORATE MEMBERS 2013



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## Irish Grassland Association President's Address



Eddie O'Donnell,  
President of the IGA  
and Dairy Farmer

### Dear Member

Welcome to this edition of the Irish Grassland Association Newsletter. It has been a wonderful late summer and autumn with excellent grass growth helping farmers to try and hit their target grass covers and fill the empty yards after the tough spring. On most farms at this stage enough silage has been put back in the yards to get farmers through this coming winter.

The first article in this newsletter details the first two recipients of Irish Grassland Association student bursary. One of the recipients, Marion Beecher, provides an article outlining the conference she travelled to and the topic for her PhD.

On the 17th of September the Irish Grassland Association held its AGM. This is a very important event in the calendar of the IGA. On behalf of the IGA I would like to acknowledge Past President Deirdre Hennessy on a great year in the job where the Association continued to grow stronger. I would also like to welcome the new members to council and wish them the best for the coming year, and thank all retiring members for their efforts over the past few years.

In mid August 350 people attended the Irish Grassland Association's Dairy Summer Tour kindly sponsored by AIB. This year's event was held in Co. Waterford with the title of it being "Growing your farm business efficiently". This event provided plenty of debate on the day. On page 10 of the newsletter the event is reviewed.

In September the Lifetime Merit Award for 2013 was presented to Dr. Seamus Hanrahan. This was a great event and Seamus received the award in the presence of his family and friends present. On page 12 this event is reviewed.

During the past few months the Irish Grassland Association has recruited three new Regional Development Officers to add to the one already in place. I welcome them to the IGA and wish them well in their roles. Meet the new RDO's on page 14.

The farmer focus in this edition is John Buckley, FBD Young Farmer of the Year for 2013. In the article on page 16 read about how John and his family have progressed the business, are planning for the future and are using grass to drive the business.

On the 14th of October the Annual Student conference, kindly sponsored by FBD, was held in Clane Co. Kildare. This has proved to be a very worthwhile event since it commenced in 2010, and this year's event is reviewed on page 18.

On page 20 Noreen Begley reviews a regional event held in conjunction with IFAC in Toomevara, Co. Tipperary to focus on the financial implications of expansion from a taxation point of view. Approximately 200 people attended this event.

The next big event in the IGA calendar is the Dairy Conference which will be held in Kilkenny on the 7th of January 2014. More details will be available on this and other upcoming events on the website [www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com) and our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/irishgrassland](http://www.facebook.com/irishgrassland) or by contacting the Office Manager, Maura Callery, [secretary@irishgrassland.com](mailto:secretary@irishgrassland.com).

Yours sincerely,

*Eddie O'Donnell*

Eddie O'Donnell  
President of the Irish Grassland Association 2013/14

L-R: Deirdre Hennessy, Irish Grassland Association Past President, with Sarah Vero and Marion Beecher



## IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION AWARDS TWO STUDENT BURSARIES

*Deirdre Hennessy, Past President IGA and Teagasc Moorepark*

Since its foundation, councils of the Irish Grassland Association have worked alongside the most progressive individuals of the farming, research and business communities for the betterment of Irish grassland farming. This relationship has been significant in bringing Irish grassland technology to the forefront as an international science.

This year the Irish Grassland Association set aside a sum of money to support travel to conferences or events deemed to be of benefit to students undertaking a postgraduate degree in grassland research in Ireland. Attendance at relevant conferences and events is an important aspect in the development of a postgraduate student's career and provides an opportunity for Irish research to be presented to international audiences.

Two PhD students, Marion Beecher and Sara Vero, each received a €500 bursary which will go towards covering their costs of travelling to and presenting their research at an international conference.

Marion Beecher is undertaking a PhD research project at Teagasc Moorepark under the supervision of Dr. Eva Lewis, Teagasc Moorepark and Dr. Tommy Boland, UCD on 'Redefining an accurate *in vitro* method of Organic Matter Digestibility (OMD) determination for the assessment of grass quality and subsequent animal performance'. Marion travelled to the International Grassland Congress in Sydney, Australia in September to present a paper on some of her research findings.

Sara Vero is undertaking her PhD project, 'Lag time: Extending the achievement of Water Framework Directive water quality timelines beyond 2015 without implementation of additional programmes of measures', at Teagasc Johnstown Castle under the supervision of Drs. Owen Fenton and Tristan Ibrahim, Teagasc Johnstown Castle, and Dr. Mark Healy, NUI Galway. Sara will travel to the Water, Food, Energy & Innovation for a Sustainable World: ASA, CSSA & SSSA International Annual Meetings in Florida, USA in November to present some of her research findings.

We would like to wish each of the recipients all the best with their presentations and we hope that the conference is of benefit to their research and to the wider agricultural research industry. In the coming months Marion and Sara will provide a short article on their experiences at their respective conferences for the Irish Grassland Association Newsletter.

## REPORT ON THE 22ND INTERNATIONAL GRASSLAND CONGRESS 2013, SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

*Marion Beecher, Teagasc Moorepark*

### **'Revitalising grasslands to sustain our communities'**



Marion Beecher

The Irish Grassland Association Student Bursary was used to support a trip to Australia to participate in the 22nd International Grassland Congress 2013. The conference was held in Sydney from 15 to 19th September, and was attended by over 800 delegates from around the world. The theme of the conference was 'Revitalising grasslands to sustain our communities'.

I presented a 10 minute oral presentation entitled "Comparing drying protocols for perennial ryegrass samples in preparation for chemical analysis". The aim of the presentation was to highlight the importance of using the correct drying temperature for grass samples when subsequently determining the nutritive value of grass and ultimately formulating diets. The presentation was well received and I had some useful and productive discussion of my results. One question asked was 'was the chemical analysis conducted on the samples at the different time points when the samples were weighed back?' This was not done as it would have meant chemically analysing the samples when they were still wet. If conducted it would likely show an effect of dry matter % on the chemical analysis results.

I presented a poster titled "The variation in morphological fractions of perennial ryegrass cultivars throughout the grazing season and subsequent impacts on organic matter digestibility". This poster showed the differences in digestibility between the plant components and highlighted that leaf is the dominant plant component and has the highest digestibility. Therefore plant breeders should continue to focus on leaf proportion and digestibility, and farmers should focus their grazing management on maximising the proportion of leaf in the sward, to produce high digestibility grass for grazing ruminants. There was a lot of interest in this poster and I had some good discussion with a plant breeder on the importance of the different plant components in the sward.

The final poster that I presented was titled "Do different breeds of dairy cow differ in their ability to digest perennial ryegrass?". This poster showed that there are differences between Jersey and Holstein Friesian cows regarding digestibility, which suggests that some proportion of the production efficiency differences reported between breeds is attributable to small differences in the propensity to digest herbage. This poster was also well received with particular interest from an organic farmer who asked if we could explain why the Jersey cows were more efficient than the Holstein Friesian cows regarding digestibility. We have investigated this further by measuring the weight of the digestive tract and analysing the rumen microbial population in different dairy cow breeds. Preliminary analysis shows differences between breeds.

Dr Jimmy Smith, Director General of the International Livestock Research Institute in Kenya, opened the conference. His presentation set the tone for the conference by posing the question 'how are we going to produce 60% more food, on a land base which could be at its ecological limit, to feed an expected population of 10 billion in 2050'. He identified that agriculture and livestock systems based on grazing have a major role to play in achieving this. "Grazing livestock are not consuming food that could be directly consumed by people; rather they are converting materials humans cannot eat into milk, meat and eggs that they can."

To achieve this increase in food production he highlighted that we need new science and technology, new institutions, political change, and new policies.

There were a number of interesting papers presented at the conference. Three of the most interesting from my perspective were:

- 'Inter-annual variability in pasture herbage accumulation in temperate dairy regions: causes, consequences, and management tools' presented by D. Chapman, DairyNZ, New Zealand
- 'Estimating crude protein concentration of a grass sward using spectral measurements' presented by J. Moyer, Kansas State University, USA
- 'Can precision farming technologies be applied to grazing management?' presented by M. Rutter, National Centre for Precision Farming, United Kingdom

On the last day of the conference there was a break from the presentations and a number of videos were shown. These videos were of interviews with progressive grassland farmers around the world – Germany, US, Brazil, Sardinia, China, Kenya, Pakistan, Australia, and more. The grassland farmers gave their views on the challenges they face and the direction that future research should take. The farm systems, and environmental and policy conditions varied hugely between countries but the farmers identified the same challenges. Some of the challenges highlighted were:

- Weather
- Land security and cost
- Access to, and cost of, water
- Financial issues
- Balance between production and environmental concerns
- Adopting new technologies

My conclusion from the videos and subsequent discussion was that researchers, advisory/extension personnel and farmers must all work together and communicate more effectively to overcome these challenges.

After the conference I had the opportunity to visit the University of Sydney where I exchanged research ideas with the scientists and lecturers there, and had some interesting discussion on my work. They also presented the research they are currently undertaking. One of the novel ideas being investigated is a robot to move the cows, which further emphasises the importance of technology, sensors and 'big data' in the future of grass-based agriculture. The future vision is to incorporate multiple tasks onto the robot such as monitoring cows at calving, pasture management and taking soil samples, as well as moving cows.

Attending the conference was a great opportunity for me to meet and interact with scientists, farmers and industry representatives. I got the opportunity to explain my research to an international audience and I gained an insight into the research requirements of the future. On a more personal level the presentations and discussions helped me to improve my presentation and communication skills. Finally, attending the conference allowed me to develop my contacts network, which will be extremely important to me in seeking new work and collaboration opportunities when I finish my PhD.



## 22nd International Grassland Congress

Sydney | 15-19 September 2013



L-R: Deirdre Hennessy, Outgoing IGA President, Eddie O'Donnell, IGA President, Paul Crosson, IGA Vice President and Maura Callery, IGA Office Manager, with the new council of the Irish Grassland Association 2013-14

## IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2013

*Deirdre Hennessy, Past President IGA and Teagasc Moorepark*



Deirdre Hennessy

The Irish Grassland Association AGM took place on the 17th September at the Horse and Jockey Hotel. This is an important event in the Associations Calendar. It is an opportunity for all members to see how the Association works, and it is also an opportunity for members to become involved in the running of the Association. All members can put their names forward for election on to the Council. There are 21 elected members on the Council. The Council operates on a voluntary basis to organise the events and activities of the Association throughout the year. This year 11 members put their names forward the election at the AGM. It is a great reflection of the Association that so many people are interested in joining the Council. A number of Council members retired this year, including two Past Presidents, Padraig French and Pearse Kelly. The other retiring Council members were Pat Weeks, Tim Keady, Dermot Grogan and John Fagan. All of the retiring members contributed greatly to the growth of the Association during their time on Council, as well as to the restructuring of the Association and development of five year plans which have and continue to provide direction for the Association. As well as the election, a round up of the year's activities was presented, as were the 2012 accounts. Also at the AGM, members approved the new format for the Rules of the Association. Over the course of the last year the Association applied to the Revenue Commissioners for Charity Status. This required that the Rules of the Association were changed to a Constitution and written in a format required by the Revenue Commissioners. The Council can now proceed with the application for Charity Status.

At the AGM Paul Crosson, Teagasc Grange, was installed as the Vice President of the Association. Bridget Lynch, UCD, was re-elected as Editor of the Annual Journal, and IFAC Accountants were re-installed as the Associations Accountants.

The AGM was my last day as President of the Irish Grassland Association. I would like to thank all those who helped to make this past year a success. The last year was a busy one with eight successful events, the presentation of the Lifetime Merit Award to Dr. Seamus Hanrahan, the appointment of three new Regional Development Officers, the commencement of the AutoGrassMilk Project, the award of two Student Bursaries, the commencement of the process of attaining Charity Status, and the launch of our Facebook page. I would like to sincerely thank the Council who worked with me in 2012/13 for their huge commitment in organising events and running of the Association. Thanks also to our Office Manager, Maura Callery, for her work and commitment to the Association. Finally, I would like to wish Eddie O'Donnell every success for the year ahead as President of the Irish Grassland Association.



L-R: Pat Weeks, retiring IGA Council Member, Eddie O'Donnell, IGA President and Tim Keady, retiring IGA Council Member following the AGM at the Horse and Jockey Hotel



Newly elected members to the 2013-14 IGA council L-R: Pdraig Mulligan, Dairy Farmer, Jan Jensma, Yara, Rosalyn Drew, Drummonds, Heinz Eggert, Beef Farmer and Paidi Kelly, Irish Farmers Journal

# REVIEW OF IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION DAIRY SUMMER TOUR 2013

*Eddie O'Donnell, President of the IGA and Dairy Farmer*



Eddie O'Donnell

On the 14th of August over 350 people attended the Irish Grassland Association's annual Dairy Summer Tour for 2013 in Co. Waterford. The event was once again sponsored by AIB. The theme of the tour was "Growing your farm business efficiently". Two farms were visited on the day, David and Isobel Kirwan in the morning and Kieran and Anne Hearne in the afternoon. A large amount of expansion has taking place in this part of Munster over the last six years so the Irish Grassland Association felt this was an appropriate location for this years Tour to visit to two farms that had changed their system and had expanded successfully over recent years.

## **Kirwan Farm**

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 plan and applied for the free allocation of 200,000 litres of milk quota as a new entrant to dairying. David's application was successful and he decided to set up in dairying. Fifty cows and heifers were purchased from one source in the autumn of 2011 and David commenced milking in spring 2012. David has also purchased additional milk quota through the milk quota exchange on top of the free allocation to bring his quota to 363,000 litres. He installed a 12 unit parlour and a new bulk tank and converted some of his cattle sheds to cubicles to accommodate the dairy cows. David installed further roadways on the farm over this summer and is planning on installing more cubicles over the next year. David milked 70 cows this year and is planning to milk 150 cows and rear replacements on his 85 ha block post 2015.



Planning was and continues to be an essential part of the change over from sucklers to dairying in David's opinion, and before entering into milk production he completed a six year physical and financial plan with his Teagasc advisor Seamus Kearney. David feels strongly that this planning gives him confidence in what he is doing and helps him to see how he is proceeding compared to his original budget. The cost of conversion on the farm following the sale of the beef stock will come in at €951/cow for the planned 150 cows when conversion is fully completed. David pointed out that the sale of the suckler cows and remaining beef stock has been a great help in funding the conversion. David was quick to point out that it has taking a lot of hard work to get this far and he plans to have someone working with him in the next year or two. David told delegates that converting to dairy farming has been a steep learning curve. David feels very strongly that one of the best decisions they have made during the process was to source a good core group of cows and this has certainly helped in the conversion process. David is a good grassland manager and that was clear to be seen on the day.

The bottom line is that the farm will generate enough income for two people post 2015 (excluding SFP), fulfilling one of the main reasons behind the conversion. David's net margin per ha has increased from €400/ha (€51/ha after own labour) before commencing milk to a predicted €1,500/ha (€1,100 after own labour) post 2015 when the farm will be fully stocked. David believes that a simple system is essential and he feels he is getting there now.

## We would like to thank our sponsors AIB



### Hearne Farm

Kieran and Anne Hearne are farming near Rathgormack, Co. Waterford. They have expanded cow numbers from 40 to 160 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 and rearing of replacements is currently being carried out on out farms within a few miles of the home block. The farm is home to the CURRA herd and has an average EBI of €180 and is currently ranked no. 32 on the latest EBI list. The herd has excellent fertility results which really helped as the farm expanded. The herd grew from within, making expansion easier to manage from a disease perspective. A new 18 unit milking parlour and winter accommodation has being put in place over the last number of years. It has cost €4,000/cow to complete the expansion on the farm when all extra stock, infrastructure and additional milk quota costs are included.

The Hearne farm is an excellently run farm with very high milk solids per hectare being achieved from the Friesian herd at a high stocking rate. The farm currently has seven bulls either currently or previously in A.I. Kieran feels labour is a big issue on an expanding farm and in his opinion he feels he should have

employed labour sooner than he did. Currently there is full time labour employed during the busy spring period and three days a week for remainder of year. Contractors carry out the majority of machinery work on the farm.

On the day of the Dairy Summer Tour it was clear that this farm is very well run and it showed in the quality of the stock to be seen. Soil fertility has become an issue on the farm over the past two years. Kieran is of the opinion that was taking a lot more out of the soil with his high stocking rate than he was putting back into it so he has focused on that this year after soil sampling the farm in autumn 2012.

One of the clear messages from the day was that cash flow budgets are an essential part of the expansion process as a lot of cash is being tied up in the farm. Replacements that would have being sold prior to

expansion are being retained in the business so they are a big cash drain. Kieran feels strongly that loans should be put over at least 10 years; they can be paid quicker if you want but it takes the pressure off in the early years of growth.

The farm profit has increased substantially since expansion commenced with net margin per hectare going from €690/ha (€145/ha after own labour) in 2005 before expansion begun to €1,610/ha (€1,190/ha after own labour) in 2012 when herd size was 150 cows. Kieran has a goal of selling 80,000 kg milk solids from his current farm enterprise (1,600 kg MS/ha) which is an excellent target for this free draining spring producing farm.





L-R: Seamus Hanrahan receiving the award from Dr. Tim Keady, Irish Grassland Association Council Member

## DR. SEAMUS HANRAHAN RECEIVES THE IRISH GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION LIFETIME MERIT AWARD 2013

*Tim Keady, retired IGA Council Member and Teagasc Athenry*

The recipient of the Irish Grassland Association Life Time Merit award for 2013 is Dr. Seamus Hanrahan. This prestigious award is a public endorsement by the IGA of the important contribution of an individual to the understanding and production of animal product from grassland. Dr. Hanrahan received the award for his outstanding contribution to prime lamb production from grassland through innovative and applied science allied with his leadership and determination to transfer all technology to the industry - particularly the development of the Belclare breed, work on genetic control of ovulation rate and embryo survival, genetic variation in lamb growth and carcass composition, parasite control, both through management and genetic means, measurement of grass intake and nutrition.

Seamus joined the AFT Western Research Centre at Belclare, Co. Galway. His initial work focused on factors influencing ovulation rate, thus litter size, and evaluation of ewe genotypes. In 1981 Seamus became Head of the Sheep Department in AFT (and subsequently Teagasc) a position which he held until he retired in 2010. Also, in 1985 Seamus was appointed Acting Assistant Director of AFT.

In the 1980's Seamus evaluated factors affecting grass intake in sheep, differing in breed, age, stage of lactation and number of lambs reared, by modifying and improving the n-alkane methodology. Initiated in 1988 and for the next 25 odd years Seamus continuously selected within pure-bred flocks of Suffolk and Texel for growth rate to demonstrate the potential benefits of exploiting genetics. In the 1990's and 2000's Dr Hanrahan showed that ewe breeds differ in parasite resistance and subsequently set about identifying the genes involved.

Throughout his career Seamus worked on the genetics of the reproduction of ewes, lamb growth and carcass composition; and actively encouraged and facilitated work on grassland management and ewe nutrition. A lasting memorial of his work will be the Belclare breed which he developed for prolificacy whilst also having good carcass characteristics. This work involved establishment and active collaboration with the Belclare Sheep Society

Seamus is firm believer in technology transfer and has addressed IGA sheep conferences on at least 10 occasions since their initiation in the mid 1980's. In 2000 he was responsible for initiating a Technology Evaluation and Transfer (TET) programme. The aim of the TET programme was to develop more effective transfer and evaluation of technology from research to the wider industry through the direct partnership with 45 commercial farms throughout Ireland,. The main emphasis of this programme revolved around effective prime lamb production from grazed grass. This project preceded the current Better Farm Sheep and Beef programmes, which Seamus was instrumental in establishing in 2008.

Seamus has served as an external examiner for the Bachelor Degree in the Faculty of Agriculture, University College Dublin, and for PhD degrees in many universities in Ireland and overseas. He was Senior Editor of the Irish Journal of Agriculture and Food Research for 20 years.

In summary, Dr. Seamus Hanrahan has been the cornerstone, and leader, in research and technology transfer to the Irish sheep industry in Ireland for the last 40 years. Therefore it is an honour for the Irish Grassland Association to award Dr. Seamus Hanrahan the Lifetime Merit Sward for 2013 in recognition of his lifelong contribution to, and his leadership of, animal science research, particularly research relating to prime lamb production from grass based systems, and the transfer of these findings to all levels of the industry





## MEET OUR NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER TEAM

The Irish Grassland Association is delighted to have recently recruited three new Regional Development Officers (RDOs). Noreen Begley, South East, Maire Ahern McCarthy, South West and John Graham, West, join Donal Callery, North East on the Regional Development Officer team. Over the coming months, the RDOs will be organising events in their areas to raise awareness of the Irish Grassland Association and to provide events for existing members. A short profile and contact details for each of our RDOs is presented below.

### **DONAL CALLERY**

Donal Callery originates from a dairy background in Co. Cavan. He is married with three children and has lived in Co. Meath for over 20 years. Donal runs his own home farm (both in Co. Meath and Co. Cavan) breeding pedigree Limousin and commercial cattle in addition to breeding Irish Sport Horses. Donal has been a member of The Irish Grassland Association (IGA) for 23 years and has worked as the IGA North Eastern Regional Development Officer for the past four years.

Donal was Manager of the Cookstown Limousin Herd since the early 90's in Kells Co. Meath and is farm manager of the Skidoo Pedigree Charolais Herd for the past four years. He is well known among farmers especially in pedigree breeding circles.



## MAIRE MCCARTHY

Maire McCarthy is a native of Kilbrittain in West Cork. She grew up on a mixed dairy and beef farm and has always had a keen interest in agriculture. Maire is married to Brian McCarthy and they have a mixed dairy and beef farm in Innishannon Co. Cork. They are supplying Bandon Co-op. Maire is very involved in the day to day running of the farm. Maire is currently a serving member of the board in Bandon Co-op.

Maire is a qualified financial advisor, having worked in financial services for 25 years she is currently working on a permanent parttime basis with cmor financial services (financial services arm of Crowley McCarthy accountants)

Maire has a very keen interest in agriculture particularly the dairy industry. Maire has enrolled in the Food Business & Corporate Governance Diploma in UCC for the 2013/2014 year.



## JOHN GRAHAM

John Graham has worked in the voluntary agricultural sector with Macra, Fresh Milk Producers and the IFA on a full-time basis over the past 8 years. John has also been dairy farming and is currently farming a small suckler and beef herd.

He is a firm believer in that the only route to profit is through quality grass production, "You are what you eat, your bank balance is what your cows eat!"

He will endeavour to promote and serve quality grass production and the producers in the Connacht Ulster region.



## NOREEN BEGLEY

Noreen Begley studied Agricultural Science in UCD which she graduated from with first class honours in 2005. Upon completion of this she undertook a PhD at Teagasc Moorepark, which was entitled "An evaluation on the Norwegian Red and Norwegian Red x Holstein Friesian dairy cows under Irish production circumstances". This was a farm participatory study where 46 commercial herds around the country with each of these farms having the three breeds for comparison purposes. This was completed in 2008, following which she completed a two year post-doctorate also at Moorepark.

Since 2011 Noreen has worked on the dairy farm at home with her husband. She took up the role of Regional Development Officer for the South East in August.





Picture credit: Niall Duffy, West Cork Photo

## YOUNG FARMER OF THE YEAR'S GRASS FOCUS

*Paidi Kelly, IGA Council Member and Irish Farmers Journal*



Paidi Kelly

It's been a great autumn so far for the new Macra FBD Young Farmer of the Year, John Buckley; now that the hype from his national victory is calming he can focus on farming and taking advantage of the ideal weather the Bantry area has enjoyed in recent weeks. Growth averaged 60 kg DM/ha/day for nearly all of September on the farm and building an average farm cover of 1,300 kg DM/ha on 1 October is an excellent achievement, along with becoming the second ever Cork winner of the Young Farmer of the Year competition. All the press and hype is fine but John is a farmer and is delighted to get back to the cows and grass, he said – "Winning Macra FBD Young Farmer of the Year is a huge honour and all the media stuff is important but I got the award mostly for what I do inside the farm gate, that's what really matters."

John farms in partnership with his father Corney and milks 156 cows on their 36 ha grazing platform in Aughaville, Bantry, in West Cork. The home farm is located on a hill typical of the rolling West Cork countryside; soil type ranges from heavy a peat soil to a more brown earth soil which is a lot drier and grows more grass. The herd is 60:40 spring:autumn calving which means demand varies a lot throughout the year – John explained: "Our stocking rate on the milking block is 4.33 cows/ha but in practice we only carry this from May to July. After this we dry off autumn calvers in July and August to help build up grass, and dry off spring calvers in October and November to extend the grazing season. We have liquid milk quota for all milk supplied over the winter which is crucial as this milk is much higher cost so you need to be getting the bonus on every litre."

While the stocking rate is high on the home farm, the Buckley's rent and lease another 74 ha for silage and young stock rearing so overall farm stocking rate is under 2 LU/ha. This land is in seven different blocks which are up to ten miles apart. It's a testament to John's motivation and ambition to succeed as a farmer that he is farming all these fragmented blocks in order to build up stock numbers. His long term goal is to take on some kind of second unit post 2015 and move all surplus stock to this unit. Animal health is an issue he doesn't want to compromise on and he feels buying stock poses too many risks to this. Sourcing a second unit is likely to prove challenging but John hopes the removal of quota and finalising of the CAP deal will open people's minds to new opportunities – "Be it leasing or partnership I am mad about dairy farming and hope to grow the business in some way in the near future", he said.

### Grass focus

As he has a challenging farm and runs a high stocking rate, grazing management is always on John's mind. The weather forecast is watched keenly and decisions made as a result – when wet weather is forecast wetter paddocks near grazing are grazed off so as to avoid possible poaching damage.

With such a high stocking rate there is never enough grass to meet demand in spring and autumn. During this time rotation planners dictate the area to be grazed per day and whatever shortage this leaves is plugged with feed. This means feeding over one tonne of meal per cow on average but John plans that if a second block comes available stocking rate will be dropped back to 110 cows (3.1 cows/ha) and, while producing less milk, the farm will be able to significantly cut costs and hopefully end up with similar levels of profit.

Grass is measured weekly from April to September. At peak stocking rate demand on the farm is nearly 80 kg DM/ha/day so very little surplus grass is taken from the grazing platform as bales. Such a high demand also means little opportunity to take ground out for reseeding although John believes it will help him grow more grass in other ways – 'no silage is cut here and frequent grazing means denser, more productive grass swards', he said.

All reseeding done recently has been on reclaimed ground – any land within walking distance of the parlour is extremely valuable to the Buckley's and 3 ha acres have been reclaimed in the last five years. Typical of many West Cork farms the Buckley's have essentially 'made land' via rock breaking, drainage and soil mixing. This is expensive work and can cost close to €5,000/acre but the objective is to grow the most grass possible from every square metre of land owned. Soil fertility is also very high on the farm (see Table 1) except for recently reclaimed ground – this is targeted with slurry to increase both nutrients and organic matter. Maintenance needs for phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) is met via five rounds of Pasture Sward (27-2.5-5) during the year. A solid grass focus has and will continue to deliver success for this ambitious West Cork young farmer.

Table 1. Per cent of the Buckley farm in each of the different soil indexes for phosphorus (P) and potassium (K).

Soil fertility status	P	K
Index 1	10%	5%
Index 2	20%	10%
Index 3	70%	85%
Index 4	0%	0%

### Farm Geography

#### ■ Soil Type:

- Shallow Blanket Peat 25%
- Degraded Brown Podzolic 25%
- Brown Podzolic and Gley 22%
- Peaty Gley 25%
- Bare Avonian Shale 3%

#### ■ Elevation:

- 250ft to 350ft above sea level

### Breeding Decisions

#### ■ Autumn Breeding

- Average EBI of bulls used:  
€221 EBI, €71 Milk, €107 Fertility

#### ■ Spring Breeding

- Average EBI of bulls used:  
€234 EBI, €68 Milk, €126 Fertility

### *Date for your Diary*

Irish Grassland Association  
**Dairy Conference**  
 Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014

in the

  
**Newpark Hotel**  
 KILKENNY ★★★★★

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More information available online shortly  
[www.irishgrassland.com](http://www.irishgrassland.com) and facebook



Justin McCarthy Chairman (Irish Farmers Journal) with the panel of speakers



Pat Weeks

## STUDENT CONFERENCE REVIEW

*Pat Weeks, retired IGA Council Member and Dairy Farmer*

On the 14th of October 260 third level students attended the IGA Student Conference in Clane, Co. Kildare. The conference was kindly sponsored by FBD. Eddie O'Donnell, President of the Irish Grassland Association, opened the conference. The morning session was held at the Westgrove Hotel where we had a presentation on Soil Fertility by Dr. Stan Lalor from Teagasc, Johnstown Castle, followed by a seminar chaired by Justin McCarthy, Editor of the Irish Farmers Journal, on "Pathways for Young Farmers". The panel speakers for the seminar were James Murphy, Jonathan Carson, Michael Bateman and Páidí Kelly. In the afternoon students had the choice of one of two farm walks - a dairy farm walk at Larry Martin's in Carbury or a beef farm walk at Heinz Eggert's in Clane.



Stan Lalor, Teagasc  
Johnstown Castle

Stan Lalor's paper covered the importance of soil fertility, how soil fertility has been declining in recent years, the importance of lime as well as P and K, and a comprehensive five point plan on how to identify and address soil fertility issues. He covered soil testing basics, why lime is needed, optimum P and K indices, advantages of slurry and when to use it, and finally Stan discussed the financial benefits of getting soil fertility correct.

In his introduction to the seminar on "Pathways for Young Farmers" Justin McCarthy contrasted what he saw on a recent trip to New Zealand where there is a vibrant industry with a clear career path for new entrants with here in Ireland where there is an ageing farming population, a lot of young new entrants about to finish education, and an uncertain and difficult path for new entrants to make it to farm management and ownership.



James Murphy,  
Dairy Farm  
Manager

James Murphy, a recent graduate from UCD, outlined how his time on placement while at college and a 7 month scholarship to New Zealand have helped him identify dairy farming as the career path he wanted to follow. James is now working as a farm manager in Co. Cork managing a 210 cow herd. His plan is to improve his technical knowledge, financial management and budgeting skills in the short term. James wants to progress to owning stock and having a stake in a dairy farm business in the future. His time in New Zealand highlighted to him the importance of having a plan and developing networking skills.

**We would like to thank our** **F|B|D**  
**sponsors FBD**



Jonathan Carson,  
Beef Farmer

Jonathan Carson is an organic beef farmer, recently married, from Downpatrick, Co. Down farming at home with his father. Jonathan has taken on more management of the farm as he has gained more experience. He acknowledged his father's willingness to guide him but also allow him make mistakes while learning as being key to building his confidence to take on more responsibility. Jonathan highlighted the importance of utilising all the available professional advice and networking available through discussion groups.



Michael Bateman, IGA Council  
Member and Dairy Farmer

Michael Bateman is a dairy farmer from Crookstown, Co. Cork. Michael has come from a family dairy farm working with his father and brothers to now milking 320 cows on a mixture of owned and leased land. Michael highlighted the importance of the family working together to achieve goals as being a key strength of his career progression. His parents involved the children in understanding the farm finances from an early age. Michael acknowledged that while the New Zealand career path had many steps on it, it was a small minority that progressed to the top, and clear goal setting and absolute commitment was required to make it.



Páidí Kelly, IGA Council  
Member and Irish  
Farmers Journal

Páidí Kelly, from a dairy farm near Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, is a recent graduate from UCD and is now working as a journalist for the Irish Farmers Journal. Páidí discussed the recent series of articles "Shared Passion" published in the Irish Farmers Journal that has featured different ways of collaborative farming between new entrants and older farm owners. He highlighted that new entrants, while expecting more involvement in decision making, must earn the trust of farm owner first by showing commitment and a desire to learn; education alone does not entitle you to move up the ladder. Páidí stressed the importance of being involved in discussion groups and continuing to learn from others on an on-going basis.

Justin McCarthy thanked the speakers, highlighting to the audience that to achieve our ambitious targets for 2020 that we need experience and youth, and he said that the students in the audience were well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that would be there in the years ahead.

Pat Weeks closed the conference and thanked FBD for sponsoring the conference. He wished the students well in their careers and asked them to continue their education by reading the additional paper "Pathway for Progression" in the student booklet from Mark Townshend which outlines his 12 commandments for a successful career.

**In the afternoon the students split 50/50 by choice to go to the farm walks organised on a dairy and beef farm.**

*The dairy farm walk* was held on the farm of Larry Martin in Carbury. Larry is milking 100 cows. He recently purchased an additional 13 ha which will allow him to expand to 150 cows. Larry outlined his current farming system and what he hopes to have when he has completed his expansion. He discussed in detail the financial plan he put in place to secure finance from the bank for the land purchase, he highlighted the implications of not meeting his targets for grass production and cow production and how it would affect his ability to repay. Larry's take home messages were value your family support, believe in yourself, understand the finances and profit drivers of your business, and have a strong support team around you.

*The beef farm walk* was held near Clane where Heinz Eggert is the farm manager. The farm has been part of the "BETTER Farm Beef Programme" for the last 5 years. Heinz is managing 100 Limousin cross suckler cows and followers. He discussed grassland management and how he selects group sizes to suit breeding (40 cows to 1 bull) and field sizes (4 ha fields, 2 divides, 3 days per paddock, 7 paddocks per group == 21 day rotation). Heinz has a very compact breeding season of 10 weeks, spring calving only for ease of management and profit. Breed type has been 50:50 Limousin x Friesian but he is now changing over to ¾ bred Limousin with good ICBF figures for maternal and fertility traits. At the last stop there was a robust discussion on breed type with some students suggesting that Charolais would be a better sire for offspring. Heinz's closing comments on this was "arguing about breed type is like discussing tractors, there is no right answer, I would say to you choose the cow that suits your farm and your environment, and choose the bull that suits the market you are going to sell your offspring to, this is what we have done and it is working well"



Noreen Begley

# EVENT REVIEW—EXPANSION: THE OPTIONS AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

*Noreen Begley, Irish Grassland Association Regional Development Officer*

On the 10th of September the Irish Grassland Association in conjunction with IFAC Accountants held a very successful farm walk on the farm of Pat and Martin Kennedy in Toomevara, Co. Tipperary. Approximately 200 people attended the event. Delegates were welcomed to the event by Eddie O' Donnell, the Vice President of the Irish Grassland Association. Philip Donohue, a council member of the Irish Grassland Association, chaired the first two sessions of the farm walk. Martin outlined the farm background, stock numbers, fertility, milk production and grassland management. With three blocks of land being farmed, it was decided in 2006 to develop a Greenfield site on the biggest block of land. A 14 unit milking parlour was built; as well as a cubicle shed, calf pens and slurry storage. Roadways were also put in place. Martin is now milking 138 British Friesian cows.

The big question on Martin's mind now is whether he should expand the herd or stay the same. With Martin also being a full-time accountant with IFAC Accountants all the facts and figures needed for a good discussion were on hand for the third session.

The third session took place indoors with a presentation from Martin and Declan McEvoy, IFAC Accountants. Because Martin is an accountant with IFAC Accountants, this provided a unique opportunity for the audience to hear financial information in relation to expansion from a man who is looking at the business from both a farmer's and accountant's point of view. Instead of looking at projected outcomes from expansion, Martin decided to examine the tax that could be saved if expansion takes place. He looked at staying the same or expanding to 200 cows and compared the tax payable from both options and the profit available at the end of the day. One point that Martin made was that any farmer thinking of expanding should examine his tax structure and projected profits after tax with his financial adviser.

Figures were also shown in relation to the formation of a limited company and tax savings that could be made by converting Martin's farm to a limited company. All figures presented were specific to Martin's farm and the speakers therefore stressed that specific savings would need to be calculated on an individual farm basis.

With expansion being one of the buzz words in dairying at the moment, farmers need to examine all options, both financial and personal, before making decisions. With the abolition of milk quota in 2015, farmers will have the opportunity to expand. However, before expanding it is vital to consult with your local financial advisor or accountant to advise you on the best way to utilise your finances.

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