Irish Grassland Association

Members' Information Booklet November 2019 Issue No. 43

"To advance the knowledge of good grassland management in Irish farming"

CORPORATE MEMBERS 2019

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Corporate membership commences on the 1st January annually.
Standard membership is deducted from all IGA members via direct debit on an annual basis.

Contents

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Editorial

Matt O'Keeffe
Editor

This Winter edition of our Newsletter reflects on many of the key issues which are important to our members. In our Technical Focus we outline the practical implications of the new slurry spreading regulations. While these do not affect all farmers right now they will become the norm on all farms in the years ahead. The cost of implementing these regulations are significant and farmers need to be aware of the financial supports available to mitigate these costs.

Adequate insurance cover is a necessity on all farms. Where there are employees and family members assisting, farmers must ensure that all potential liabilities are reflected in the type and range of their insurance policies. It is too late when an accident or fatality occurs. The other side of this equation is to ensure that all practicable health and safety measures are in place on the farm. Our Health and Safety Focus explores best practices for both employees as well as contractors coming onto farms. We have responsibilities to ensure that those under our management have the training and competencies to do the work asked of them. We also have a duty of care to provide a safe environment to carry out that work.

The IGA Winter Newsletter contains a Farmer Focus where we can read about the farming experiences of two young people involved in cattle and dairy production. It is always enlightening and refreshing to reflect on the energy and enthusiasm as well as the professional approach of a younger generation of farmers. Our Farm Focus brings an update on the Parkinson farm which was featured in a previous Newsletter. We will continue to highlight the best examples of beef farming in our Newsletters, where high levels of technical expertise, coupled with excellent grassland management, can and will deliver positive results.

Long term leasing is now the preferred option for both leasers and lessees. Our Financial Focus outlines the advantages and potential problems which can arise. Planning and well-structured contracts are clearly of primary importance to ensure that a lease works well for all parties involved.

The Archive Committee of the IGA Council has been active in profiling all past president of the Association since it's foundation in 1946. We have featured some of them in previous Newsletters and will continue to do so in future issues. Finding information on Gerald O' Grady, (The O' Grady), IGA president in 1955/56 eluded us until now. With the assistance of David Thompson from Limerick we have been able to include a short biography in this Newsletter. Gerald was one of many Irish farmers and others over the years who freely contributed their time and expertise to the Irish Grassland Association to help promote Irish grass production and utilisation in this country. This is a small acknowledgement of their contributions.

The role of Irish grassland and our unique field boundaries are finally being promoted as integral aspects of the Irish environment, with a critical role to play in carbon sequestration and environmental enhancement. IGA President Paul Hyland highlights these facts in his comments in this Newsletter. The economic value of grass as a livestock feed source is well established. The potential of grass as a feed source for bio-methane production is now being explored. We should embrace this research. Our grasslands are still, on average, underutilised and we need to examine potential alternative opportunities for our grassland farmers. Bio-methane production may offer an additional economic outlet for our most important natural resource. Future Newsletters will help to inform on that potential

SUGGESTIONS & FEEDBACK PLEASE!

If you have any suggestions for the newsletter or any particular topics or features you would like us to include in our forthcoming issues of the newsletter please send via email to office@irishgrassland.ie We would love to hear from you!

The 2019 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association

Maura Callery
IGA Office Manager

The 2019 AGM of the Irish Grassland Association (IGA) took place in the Horse and Jockey Hotel on Thursday 12th September.

A synopsis of the year's activities was presented by the outgoing President Ciaran Lynch (Teagasc). The IGA welcomed the incoming President Paul Hyland, dairy farmer from Laois. Stan Lalor, Grassland Agro, was announced as the new IGA Vice President.

This current term, with strong leadership from the outgoing President Ciaran Lynch and tremendous teamwork from the IGA Council, led to another hugely successful year for the Irish Grassland Association. Ciaran Lynch thanked the outgoing council members Rosalyn Drew (Nitrofert) from Louth, Adam Woods (Irish Farmers Journal) from Cavan, Emer Kennedy (Teagasc) from Cork, Bernard Ging (Dairy farmer) from Laois, and Cathal McCormack (Alltech and Beef Farmer) from Roscommon on their outstanding contributions. Collectively they have given 34 years of un-shirked commitment to the IGA council.

Alan Kelly (UCD) from Westmeath and Laurence Sexton (dairy farmer) from Cork were deemed re-elected to council to serve a second term of three years. New faces to council that were deemed elected to serve one term of three years were Eddie Gavin (Beef and Sheep farmer) from Carlow, Mike Egan (Teagasc) from Roscommon and Matthew Halpin (beef farmer and Irish Farmers Journal) from Meath. Paul Hyland, newly elected President, then welcomed his chosen co-opted members to strengthen his council during his presidential term. Ed Payne (Dairy Farmer) from Galway, Niall Claffey (Beef Farmer and Agriland) from Westmeath and Vincent Griffith (Dairy Farmer and Aurivo) from Mayo will all serve one year and will be eligible for election next year.

The Irish Grassland Association (IGA) is one of Irish Agriculture's great national resources. Since its foundation in 1946 the IGA has played a unique and central role in the development of profitable systems of milk, beef and lamb production from Ireland's abundant grasslands. The Irish Grassland Association is a non-profit making organisation and is Ireland's leading forum for discussing the science and economics of dairy, beef and sheep grass-based production systems and for communicating this information to farmers. All of this would not be possible without our voluntary council who work tirelessly in the background. The council members include some of the most progressive dairy, beef and sheep producers, agricultural scientists, consultants and agri-business personnel.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the President and Council to thank everyone else involved in running our popular events, our host families and our sponsors. We would also like to thank you, our loyal farming and corporate members for coming to these events in such overwhelming numbers. We really look forward to meeting you all very soon again at the free members evening on the 7th January and the Dairy Conference on the 8th January (both in the Charleville Park Hotel).

Paul Hyland
President 2019-20
and Dairy Farmer

Stan Lalor
Vice-President 2019-20
Grassland Agro

Ciaran Lynch
Past President 2018-19
and Teagasc

Jan Jensma
Past President 2017-18
and YARA

Maura Callery
Office Manager

Alan Kelly
IGA Council Member
and UCD

Christy Watson
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

Eddie Connell
IGA Council Member
Sheep and Beef Farmer

Fiona McGovern
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

George Ramsbottom
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

Laurence Sexton
IGA Council Member
and Dairy Farmer

Matt O'Keeffe
IGA Council Member,
IFM and Dairy Farmer

Mary McEvoy
IGA Council Member
and Germinal Seeds

Noreen Lacey
IGA Council Member
and IFAC

Pat Donnellan
IGA Council Member
and ICBF

Ronan Delaney
IGA Council Member
Sheep and Beef Farmer

Bryan Hynes
IGA Council Member
and Dairy Farmer

Eddie Gavin
IGA Council Member and
Sheep and Beef Farmer

Stuart Childs
IGA Council Member and
Teagasc Dairy Specialist

Thomas O'Connor
IGA Council Member and
Beef Farmer

NEW
Ed Payne
IGA Council Member
and Dairy Farmer

NEW
Mike Egan
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

NEW
Matthew Halpin
IGA Council Member
Beef Farmer and Irish
Farmers Journal

NEW
Niall Claffey
IGA Council Member,
Beef Farmer and
Agriland Ireland

NEW
Vincent Griffith
IGA Council Member,
Dairy Farmer
and Aurivo Co Op

Irish Grassland Association

Retiring Council Members

Emer Kennedy
Teagasc

Rosalyn Drew
Nitrofert

Cathal McCormack
Beef Farmer and Alltech

Adam Woods
Beef Farmer and
Irish Farmers Journal

Bernard Ging
IGA Past President 16-17
Dairy Farmer

Welcome to our New President Paul Hyland

IGA President and Dairy Farmer

Paul Hyland describes his appointment as President of the Irish Grassland Association as "a huge honour". "This is especially the case when I look at the people who have held the presidency over the past seventy years and more. The broad spectrum of people involved in the Grassland Association means that we have access to opinion and expertise far beyond the farmgate. We have researchers, advisors, journalists and agri-industry as well as farmers. They park their personal agendas outside the door to work with the IGA in promoting the aims and aspirations of the Association. That's what make involvement with the IGA so special for me. What we try to do is deliver the latest information around grassland farming to our members. We have a large membership of farmers involved in sheep, cattle and dairy farming. It is hugely important that we remain relevant to them."

Based in Laois, Paul is in a dairy farm partnership with his brother, David: "I am married to Elaine and we have four children. We have a Friesian and crossbred herd comprising of 400 cows milked on two farms. All young stock are reared for sale or replacements on an outside farm. I've spent time working on high input farms in Holland and also worked on grass-based farms in New Zealand. The ending of quotas allowed us to expand our enterprise and provide the two incomes necessary for David and myself."

Paul emphasises the fact that Irish pastoral farming has entered a new era: "Farming now has to embrace the concept of sustainability and carbon-efficient food production. We have a big role to play in enhancing the environment and as grassland farmers we are in a very good position to do that. We have the potential to grow more grass than anywhere else in Europe. We do not get our due credit for the benefits that grassland farming delivers for the environment. I see a role for the Grassland Association in highlighting these realities."

The IGA organises a range of big profile events during the year. The new president highlights them: "Our next big outing is our annual dairy conference and members event. The free members evening runs on the 7th January and the Dairy Conference is on the 8th January (both in the Charleville Park Hotel).

The speakers will cover topics as diverse as clover inclusion in the sward to calf rearing and examining potential farming opportunities before investing. It includes practical as well as technical papers and is always very popular with farmers before they start the Spring calving season. Next Summer we run our beef conference and farm walk. Beef is under pressure right now and we will take a realistic view of the situation with speakers and topics reflecting the fact that cattle farming margins are not where they need to be. Plans are already being developed by our Sheep Committee for an event to be held next August. Our annual third level Student Conference was held last month in Kilkenny. It was a huge success with more than 400 students from across all of the agri-courses in our colleges, IT's and Universities in attendance."

Paul Hyland has ambitions for his year as President:

"With all of the despondency in beef farming the easiest thing for IGA to do is walk away. My goal is to provide the facts and the options to cattle farmers and discuss them openly. Cattle are an integral part of Irish farming and we need to reflect that in our work in the Irish Grassland Association. The second part of my agenda is to raise the profile of Irish farmers as protectors of the environment. Each of our farm walks will highlight that fact."

Welcome to our new council members

Ed Payne
IGA Council Member
and Dairy Farmer

Ed runs a dairy farm in the West of Ireland with his family, farm managers and team. Ed is married to Jennifer and they have two young boys, Ben and Aaron.

It is a large farm and is fragmented - spread across three counties and seven locations. Having started milking in 2011 and now milking over 500 cows on two platforms, Ed feels the business model of producing milk from grass, with a well-bred cow that will last in the system, has allowed for this expansion in cow numbers.

Ed completed a Nuffield Scholarship in 2018 during which time he studied how farmers and agriculture can become more competitive in the area of employment. The farm was the Regional Grass 10 winner in 2017. Ed has been fortunate enough to see many types of agriculture around the world and is excited to be part of the world largest and most exciting industry.

Mike Egan
IGA Council Member
and Teagasc

Mike is originally from a drystock farm in Co. Roscommon and is married to Martha.

He graduated in 2011 from UCD with an Honours B.Ag.Sc. (Animal and Crop Production). He started a PhD in Teagasc Moorepark in conjunction with UCD in 2011 investigating the effect of including white clover into intensively managed dairy production systems. Since 2015 he has been working as a Grassland Research Officer in Teagasc Moorepark where his main area of research has been optimising grassland management with a particular focus on optimising spring and autumn grazing management for intensive grassland farms.

Mike is also involved in the areas of dry cow feeding, grazing infrastructure and improving grass utilisation on Irish dairy farms. Mike is the facilitator of a young farmer discussion group based in Laois and is also a member of another discussion group based in the South.

Matthew Halpin
IGA Council Member
Beef Farmer and Irish
Farmers Journal

Matthew is currently working as a beef specialist with the Irish Farmers Journal. The main areas linked with his role include technical advice, live markets and grassland management, through the co-ordination of the Teagasc/Irish Farmers Journal BETTER farm beef challenge, daily MartBids reporting and the weekly Grass+ page. Matthew started with the Irish Farmers Journal in 2018 after successfully completing a four-year, Agricultural Science degree in University College Dublin.

Outside of his Journal role, Matthew is suckler farming in partnership with his father Tom in county Meath. The herd comprises 100, spring calving, continental-cross suckler cows. All progeny are taken to beef aside from replacement heifers – bulls under 16 months of age and heifers between 20 and 24 months. The Halpin family farm is well linked to the Irish Grassland Association having hosted the 2014 student conference beef farm walk and the 2017 beef conference farm walk.

Niall Claffey
IGA Council Member,
Beef Farmer and
Agriland Ireland

Niall is the beef specialist with AgriLand. The University College Dublin (UCD) graduate took up this post in September 2017. In this position, Niall covers technical and news content - at both a national and international level.

Hailing from an agricultural background, he is involved in the running of a suckler farm in Westmeath. He also sits on the management team of the Teagasc Green Acres Calf-to-Beef Programme.

Along with hands-on knowledge here in Ireland, Niall has significant experience in the international agricultural industry - in New Zealand, Australia, the UK and France. During his time in UCD, he travelled to New Zealand as part of his Professional Work Experience, gaining valuable knowledge on a dairy enterprise extending over 2,700ha. Upon finishing his degree in UCD, Niall travelled to Australia where he managed a large-scale beef enterprise. He also participated in sowing and harvesting for a season where he operated a wide range of machinery.

When Niall returned home, he took up a position with Liffey Meats, working at their Ballyjamesduff site and also in France.

Vincent Griffith
IGA Council Member,
Dairy Farmer
and Aurivo Co Op

Vincent manages the Aurivo Farm Profitability Programme. He has been working for Aurivo Co-op since 2014. Vincent spent the previous five years working in Teagasc Moorepark, where he completed his PhD in Grassland Science focusing on the comparison of mixtures and monoculture swards of perennial ryegrass. He then spent two years working on the Pasturebase Ireland grassland database.

Vincent is also dairy farming in Claremorris, county Mayo with his wife Aine. They are milking a spring calving, crossbred herd focused on maximising the use of grass.

IGA Lifetime Merit Award: 2019

Since its instigation in 2009 the Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award has recognised individuals who have contributed significantly during their career to the progress of grassland technology and grass-based farming systems.

Professor Pat Dillon was selected as a very worthy recipient of the 2019 Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award. An special evening event to honour Pat and to present the award was held on July 22nd in Athlone before the IGA Dairy Summer Tour.

There are very few people who have made the contribution to Irish dairy production that Professor Pat Dillon has during his career. Pat has devoted his career to research at Teagasc Moorepark, where he has helped to increase the understanding and knowledge of pasture-based systems. During this time, Pat has helped drive both the Irish dairy sector and grassland research to the fore internationally.

While it is now taken for granted that increasing the proportion of grazed grass in the dairy cow diet leads to the most profitable dairy production system, it was Pat's early pioneering work which established the practices which are now commonplace on farms throughout Ireland. Pat has also played a key role in establishing the ideal genetics of cows to suit our pasture-based system as well as researching and developing numerous other projects. Along with undertaking ground-breaking research Pat has been a fantastic mentor to the many researchers and students working at Teagasc. Given the big changes currently being experienced in Irish agriculture his input into the sector is now more important than ever, leading the Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Programme at Teagasc.

Career to Date

Prof. Pat Dillon completed a diploma in Dairy Husbandry in Clonakilty Agriculture College in 1977. Following this he completed a degree in Agricultural Science in UCD in 1986. In 1989 he completed his Masters in Dairying in UCC, followed by a PhD in 1993. His PhD focused on estimating cow dry matter intake using the n-alkane technique, a measurement which is now routinely used in animal experiments across Teagasc, and indeed further afield.

Prof. Pat Dillon is currently Head of the Teagasc Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Programme. Prior to this he was Head of Teagasc's Moorepark Dairy Production Research Centre in Fermoy, Co. Cork. He has led many large-scale research programmes over the last 25 years in different areas of research which include grazing management, animal nutrition, stocking rate and calving date, breed/strain comparisons, cow fertility, dairy cattle breeding and economic farm system modelling. Behind all of this work has been a focus on delivering profitable systems for the Irish dairy sector.

Pat provides a strong national leadership role to the Irish dairy industry, with considerable liaison with the industry and vision for the future. His work in dairy research is well recognised both at home and internationally. He is a regularly invited speaker at conferences in Ireland and across the globe including Europe, New Zealand, Australia and US. Domestically, Pat has been a prolific contributor and supporter of the Irish Grassland Association speaking at many conferences, dairy summer tours and other events over the years.

The Irish Grassland Association is delighted to acknowledge Pats ongoing contribution to the Irish Agri industry.

Nominations sought for the Irish Grassland Association Lifetime Merit Award 2020

Maura Callery, Irish Grassland Association Office Manager

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

We are now seeking nominations for the 2020 Lifetime Merit Award. If you would like to nominate a person for the award please email your nomination to office@irishgrassland.ie no later than 10th December 2019.

Lifetime Merit Award Recipients

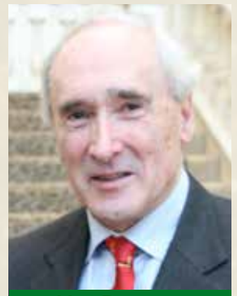

Paddy O'Keeffe
Award Winner 2009


Dr. Sean Flanagan
Award Winner 2010


Dr. Padraig O'Kiely
Award Winner 2011


Norman Bateman
Award Winner 2012


Dr Seamus Hanrahan
Award Winner 2013


Matt Dempsey
Award Winner 2014


John Shirley
Award Winner 2015


Noel Culleton
Award Winner 2016


Andrew Cromie
Award Winner 2017


Matt Ryan
Award Winner 2018


Pat Dillon
Award Winner 2019

IGA Student Conference and farm walk review

Niall Claffey
IGA Council Member,
Beef Farmer and
Agriland Ireland

Student Conference

The IGA Student Conference sponsored by FBD took place at Cillín Hill, in Co. Kilkenny, with hundreds of students from various colleges in attendance.

Dr. Mary McEvoy - IGA Council member - outlined how the Department of Agriculture's recommended list of grass seeds, showing the Pasture Profit Index (PPI) values can be used to assist in the decision making required around cultivar selection.

She also outlined this season's top performing cultivars for use in grazing and silage swards. Mary highlighted key factors to consider when choosing a grass-seed mixture, including sward density and dry matter productivity cultivars.

"Quality is also a hugely important trait; so too is palatability. Grass has to be palatable to the animal," she said. "Disease wasn't a problem 10-15 years ago, but it is becoming an increasing problem, so it's important to select for disease resistance."

Mary also noted the importance of persistency, as "what you sow today, you want to last for the next eight-to-10 years".

This was followed by Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme manager Alan Dillon. In the Green Acres programme, there are 13 demonstration farms across the country, each with an aim of achieving a net margin of €500/ha (excluding premia).

"All farmers are open to change, whether that be changing the type of system or a change in the type of calf they are buying," Alan said, "but the biggest change is grass. Most of the farmers need help improving their grassland management in terms of soil fertility, infrastructure and fertiliser."

He alluded to the importance of calf selection and rearing, animal health, financial management and farm planning.

IGA Council member Pat Donnellan explained how a bull's star rating on the €uro-star evaluation system can change.

"For example, if the calf's sire has 200 more calves and is found to be extremely hard calving, the calf can drop to a 3-star. However, if the calf is then genotyped, scored and weighed, this increases his index to a 5-star.

"The bull's own progeny will then affect his €uro-star rating over the following years."

Christy Watson, IGA beef committee chairman, then highlighted the difference in the bull progeny of high terminal index sires (4 and 5-star) and low terminal index sires (1 and 2-star).

Referring to research, he noted: "Overall these animals were killed three weeks earlier, ate less feed and produced a heavier carcass – a considerable financial advantage between the 4 and 5-star animals and the 1 and 2-star animals, bearing in mind that the purchase price was the same.

"The terminal index can show what can be achieved; it predicts profitability and that predication is available early on," Christy concluded.

In the afternoon the students visited the O'Keeffe dairy enterprise. The O'Keeffe farm is located in Churchclara, Co. Kilkenny. It is truly a family affair with brothers Matt and Philip, and Philip's son Bill - who is married with four young children - actively involved on the ever-expanding unit.

Bill, who leads the operation, completed one year at Kildalton Agricultural College, before spending a year or so working on various farms in New Zealand.

Reflecting on this experience, Bill noted: "Whether it's New Zealand or not - it's totally up to yourself, but it's great to see something different.

"Try and do something outside of farming as experience; some of the best farmers I know did something else before going home to farm."

Bill returned home in the early 2000s and, since then, cow numbers on the farm have grown to 300 in 2019.

British Friesian bloodlines were introduced in 2003 and pedigree status was achieved in 2006.

The total area farmed stretches to 200ha, with 80ha owned and 120ha leased; the milking platform extends to 100ha and carries a stocking rate of three cows/ha.

Any extra replacement heifers are sold off the farm, in batches of 40-50 some years. This number has now reduced to aid expansion on the farm.

In addition, since the herd was registered, pedigree Friesian bulls are also sold off the farm at 15 months-of-age.

This brings the overall stocking rate to 2.48LU/ha. With the 100ha milking platform stocked at three cows/ha, very little silage is harvested from this and surplus grass is baled; these are fed out should the need arise.

With so much happening on a daily basis, everybody involved including Bill, Philip, Matt, David and two part-time employees - Liam and Jimmy - play their part and, admittedly, Bill acknowledges that plenty of man hours are clocked up.

"When it comes to breeding, I step out of the parlour at that time of the year. I concentrate on heat detection exclusively for six weeks," Bill said, while noting a team of bulls are used after AI; beef bulls used include Aubrac and Aberdeen Angus in an effort to breed a calf that can have a sustainable future in the beef industry.

"Everybody mucks in and puts their shoulder to the wheel. It's a 'we' rather than 'I' farm here - the O'Keeffe family and the people that work with us," Bill outlined.

Herringbone vs. rotary?

After returning from New Zealand, Bill opted to build a 20-unit milking parlour in 2000, which is still tasked with milking the growing herd of British Friesian cows.

"I'd seen a good few parlours abroad, so they left the design to me; it's still there and we're happy with it," Bill added.

With more land coming on board - that will join up to land purchased by Philip and Matt in 1979 - and a target of 380 cows in 2020 and 420 cows in 2021, an upgrade to the existing parlour has been discussed and all options have been explored.

"We are prepared to go for a rotary, but we wouldn't be making the decision lightly and it would be as labour efficient as possible in terms of specifications."

Fertility and grass performance

In 2018, 530kg MS/cow was achieved on the farm. When it comes to breeding, the O'Keeffes breed from cows that have the ability to deliver good kilogrammes of milk solids.

Bill will calve down 200 cows in the first three weeks of calving - roughly 10 cows/day.

"If you calve a cow early, and you keep her milking, you will get good kilogrammes of solids," he explained.

However, what underpins the performance of the herd is fertility, coupled with a long lactation. Last year, the average lactation length in the herd was 310 days, so cows are achieving very close to their full potential.

Table 1. Fertility performance 2019

Calving interval: 362 days
Six-week calving rate: 87%
Empty rate: 8%
Calving season: 12 weeks and six days

While almost 90% is at optimum levels for phosphorus (P) and just under three quarters of the land base is at the optimum level for potassium (K). Grass is usually measured weekly on farm with feeding and fertiliser decisions made on the basis of grass availability and projected growth for the following week.

Some 15t DM/ha is expected to be grown on the farm in 2019 - up from 10t DM/ha grown in 2018, as a result of the severe drought which affected many parts of Ireland last year.

"We spent €140,000 more in 2018 on feed than we had in 2016 and 2017," Bill added.

"The advantage of a dry farm is a wet summer and the disadvantage of a dry farm is a dry summer."

L to R: Philip O' Keeffe host, Matt O' Keeffe host, Paul Hyland IGA President, Bill O' Keeffe host, Alan Kelly IGA and Billy Carrigan, neighbour and land Leaser.

Pre Conference Networking Evening 2020

Stan Lalor, IGA Council Member and Grassland Agro
Bryan Hynes, IGA Council Member and Dairy Farmer

At 8pm on the evening before the Dairy Conference (Tuesday 7th January), there is an exclusive opportunity for Irish Grassland Association members to meet at an evening gathering in advance of the Conference. Admission is free to all IGA members and a friend. The 2020 guest speakers are John Kelly Dairy Farmer, Ned English Potato and Cereal Grower and Pat O'Keeffe Pig / Dairy Farmer. They will be interviewed in a panel discussion with the theme: 'Dairying – future products and markets'. This discussion will be facilitated by Matt Dempsey, former Irish Farmers' Journal editor and IGA Lifetime Merit Award recipient.

John Kelly farms with his wife Caroline near Baltinglass in Co. Wicklow. Having converted from sheep into dairying in 2013, he now runs a 240 cow spring-calving grass based dairy herd. John is committed to striking a balance between his farm output, the environment and his work and family life balance.

Ned English is a potato and cereal grower based in Co. Cork. He is the founder of Castlecor Potato company. He has developed a very successful family business in growing and packing potatoes, and more recently, onions. Working in a highly open market, he is no stranger to developing a business in the midst of volatility.

Pat O'Keeffe is a pig farmer and is also involved with the family dairy farm near Mitchelstown in Co. Cork. Running a largescale pig operation incurring significant ongoing investment, he appreciates the value of being highly organised across the business in aspects of farm technical performance, labour, and financial management. He is also a former board member of Dairygold Co-op.

Any member who wishes to attend a pre-conference dinner at 6pm (prior to the free event above) can make a reservation with the Charleville Park Hotel on 063 33700. Special B&B rates are also available.

IGA Dairy Conference Preview

Stan Lalor, IGA Council Member and Grassland Agro
Bryan Hynes, IGA Council Member and Dairy Farmer

The 2020 Irish Grassland Association Annual Dairy Conference, sponsored by Yara, takes place on Wednesday 8th January 2020. Staying in the south west of the country, the Charleville Park Hotel once again plays host to this year's conference. As usual, an excellent line-up of topics and speakers has been arranged to make this a must-go event on the dairy farming calendar.

Developing your dairy business

2020 could be a year when milk prices fall below the levels of the previous 2-3 years. In this context, the first session of the conference will examine how to cope in this scenario from two fronts. Firstly, for existing operations, protecting the business bottom line through fully understanding of the real cost-base of the business is essential. Barry Murphy of FDC Group will address how and why break-even cost levels can vary between farms, and help understand how this should be evaluated within the business.

Secondly, opportunities continue to become available for expansion, whether due to: 1) opportunities for grazing platform extensions to neighbouring farms; 2) opportunities for second platforms on existing or new out-farms; or 3) opportunities for involvement in succession of existing dairy units. Patrick Gowing will highlight that while some opportunities may be positive, there are also times when it might be best to say "No". This paper will help when deciding on "Yes" or "No" when opportunities come along.

Efficiency opportunities with multiple benefits

The second session of the conference will look at options available within best practice to minimise the environmental footprint of dairy farming through efficiency opportunities. Two key pillars that are high on the sustainability agenda are the use of clover in pasture, and the efficiency of dairy cows.

Clover has been tried on many farms over the years, with mixed success. Fergal Coughlan of Teagasc will go through the lessons learned from research farms and on-farm studies and highlight the potential of clover and the latest thinking on its establishment, retention and management in swards.

The EBI is a tool to help select and breed increasingly productive, efficient and durable animals. However, in addition to improving these profitability drivers in the herd, the EBI is also delivering herds that are potentially more carbon efficient and sustainable. Donagh Berry from Teagasc will discuss how the EBI is achieving these multiple objectives, and how the EBI can be used as a positive message for what dairy farmers are doing to be more climate friendly.

Priorities for 2020

The afternoon session will focus on 3 important areas for 2020 in the context of potentially lower milk price, and the increasing pressures on-farm around calf management.

Doreen Corridan will discuss the options around optimising cow numbers, focussing on the marginal profitability of the weaker cows in the herd. Managing the overall team performance of the herd becomes more critical as milk price drops, so looking at the contribution of each player on the team becomes more important!

Grass is the cheapest feed, and high output generates revenue. Donal O'Reilly, a farmer from Watergrasshill in Cork, will go through how he continues to achieve consistently high milk solids output through grassland management, particularly in the spring period.

Management of calves from the dairy herd is an increasing challenge on many farms. Eamonn Duggan will discuss his calf management practices to show how calves can be reared to minimise the labour and cost, while not compromising on welfare and performance.

IGA Dairy Conference Speaker Biographies

BARRY MURPHY is the Deputy General Manager of FDC Group. After graduating from University College Cork (UCC) with a BComm, he began his career with FDC in 1997. As Deputy General Manager, Barry's role is to assist in the geographical and service expansion of the FDC Group aimed at a national outreach, as well as managing the day to day operations of the Group in the southern region.

PATRICK GOWING qualified in 2002 with a B.Agr.Sc from UCD. He joined Teagasc as a dairy advisor in Sligo/Leitrim in November 2007 and moved to the same role in Westmeath in 2010 until 2015. After the abolition of milk quotas he moved roles within Teagasc to head the dairy expansion service. He has worked closely with new entrants and expanding farmers over the last 4 years completing over 500 business plans.

FERGAL COUGHLAN began working in Teagasc Moorepark in 2008 and took up his current position as farm manager at Teagasc Clonakilty Agriculture College in 2013. His complex role involves running cutting edge research trials to help increase the efficiency of dairy production systems, including extensive trials on clover usage.

DONAGH BERRY is a statistical geneticist at Teagasc as well as director of the VistaMilk SFI Research Center. With the ICBF and Teagasc colleagues, Donagh is heavily involved in the development and deployment of the EBI and dairy-beef index as well as all the underlying mechanisms that make them possible such as development of new traits, genetic and genomic evaluations, economic values and value-creating decision support tools (e.g., sire advice, COW).

DOREEN CORRIDAN was reared on a dairy farm in North Kerry. She graduated from UCD with an MVB MRCVS in 1987, and received a PhD in cattle reproduction UCD in 1990. In 2016 she obtained a Certificate in Dairy Herd Health from UCD. Currently, Doreen is working with Munster Bovine in Mallow Co Cork where she works with and advises dairy and suckler farmers on genetics, animal breeding, and animal health issues.

DONAL O'REILLY has grown the family farm near Watergrasshill in Co. Cork from 60 cows up to 200 cows. Donal studied at Kildalton and completed a two year Dairy Diploma in Clonakilty before coming home to farm with his parents in 2002. They formed a formal Milk Production Partnership in 2009. In 2018 Donal completed a Business Strategy Diploma through Teagasc/UCD Smurfit School. He was a Teagasc Glanbia monitor farmer from 2015 to 2018. Donal is married to Muireann, and they have two young children.

Farming near Durrow, Co. Laois, **EAMONN AND MARGUERITE DUGGAN** farm 96 hectares of mostly free-draining land in three separate parcels. The 144 cows produce almost 500 kg milk solids on 800 kg of meals on the 36 hectare milking platform. The Duggans rear 90 replacement heifer calves annually selling 60 of them at 18 months of age. The principles of low cost, grass-based labour-efficient farming are applied to both the cow and heifer rearing enterprises.

Booking the Conference

Online booking is the quickest method to secure your tickets (and you will also avail of the best discounts available). The IGA website can be accessed at **www.irishgrassland.ie.** Alternatively you can post the completed Conference application form and your cheque to: IGA office, Cookstown, Kells Co. Meath.

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Breeding and maximum gain from grass are top priorities for Tipperary holding

Niall Claffey,
Irish Grassland Association
Council member and
AgriLand beef specialist

It has been seven years since Kerry native Jim Parkinson, and his wife Audrey, held the Irish Grassland Association Beef Conference farm walk on their unique farm just outside New Inn, Co. Tipperary.

It was also in 2012 when the World Cattle Breeding Championships were held in Ireland and, again, the Parkinsons' holding was selected to host an agricultural delegation with visitors from more than 50 countries.

"It was a busy year," explained Jim, "but I get a kick out of things like that," he added.

There is a reason why the Parkinsons' farm was selected to showcase Irish grass-based farming at a top level.

Jim purchased the farm, which was in tillage at the time, with his parents in 1982 before reseeding the entire grazing platform.

With over 35 years' experience milking cows in both Kerry and Tipperary, Jim now runs a commercial and pedigree autumn-calving herd of Limousin cows, selling male progeny from the commercial herd as weanlings and finishing the heifers at 20-22 months.

Male progeny from the Limousin pedigree herd are sold as young bulls for breeding, while some heifers are kept as replacements, with surplus sold as breeding heifers direct off the farm.

Although a dairy operation took centre stage on the Tipperary holding for many years, the Limousin breed played an important role too in this enterprise.

All Friesian cows were bred to easy-calving Limousin sires, and the bulls and heifers were brought to beef. Jim sourced replacement heifers for the dairy operation from known sources in the form of calves, weanlings or in-calf heifers.

The decision to convert to a full suckler enterprise did not happen overnight and, while it was accelerated by the construction of the M8 motorway – which travelled through the grazing platform – the plan had been in place for several years.

Some of the Limousin-cross heifers that were bred from the dairy herd were kept, and this formed the basis of the 60-head commercial suckler herd that replaced the dairy herd in 2007.

Now, a total of 100 Limousin-cross and pedigree Limousin cows roam the paddocks, that are visible on both sides of the motorway.

Why Limousin?

For the Parkinsons, the Limousin breed has always had an important role to play. However, Jim acknowledges that cattle breeding in the main is of particular interest to him.

"The breeding side keeps me going; I have an interest in all breeds. Even if I went into a dairy farm, I'd still be looking at the cows," Jim said.

Yet, for Jim, the Limousin breed was a favourite from day one because of its easy-calving traits and the hardiness of the calves when they are born.

Over the last number of years, Jim has been placing a huge emphasis on easy-calving and culling vigorously for docility, admitting that it has made a "huge difference" to the herd.

Three pedigree stock bulls currently reside on the farm - Galbally Klogan and Galbally Liberal, both bulls have exceptional figures (see Figures 1 and 2 below); the third bull, Dromanig Ian, was purchased last year.

Star Rating (within Limousin breed)	Economic Indexes	€uro value	Index reliability	Star Rating (across all beef breeds)
★★★★★	Replacement (per daughter lactation)	€155	55% (Average)	★★★★★
★★★★★	Terminal	€155	66% (High)	★★★★★

Star Rating (within Limousin breed)	Key profit traits	Index value	Trait reliability	Star Rating (across all beef breeds)
	Expected progeny performance			
	Calving difficulty (% 3 & 4) Breed ave: 4.65%, All breeds ave: 4.49%	3.20%	74% (High)	
★★★★☆	Docility (1-5 scale) Breed ave: -0.06, All breeds ave: 0.01	-0.04 scale	72% (High)	★★☆☆☆
★★★★★	Carcass weight (kg) Breed ave: 23.63kg, All breeds ave: 16.19kg	31kg	71% (High)	★★★★★
★★★★☆	Carcass conformation (1-15 scale) Breed ave: 2.14, All breeds ave: 1.38	2.19 scale	65% (High)	★★★★★
	Expected daughter breeding performance			
	Daughter calving difficulty (% 3 & 4) Breed ave: 5.05%, All breeds ave: 5.79%	4.08%	47% (Average)	
★★★★★	Daughter milk (kg) Breed ave: -0.67kg, All breeds ave: 2.24kg	2.50kg	49% (Average)	★★★☆☆
★★☆☆☆	Daughter calving interval (days) Breed ave: 1.26 days, All breeds ave: -0.77 days	1.92days	48% (Average)	★☆☆☆☆

Figure 1. Galbally Klogan; 5-stars on the ICBF Terminal and Replacement Indexes

Star Rating (within Limousin breed)	Economic Indexes	€uro value	Index reliability	Star Rating (across all beef breeds)
★★★★★	Replacement (per daughter lactation)	€126	44% (Average)	★★★★★
★★★★★	Terminal	€163	49% (Average)	★★★★★

Star Rating (within Limousin breed)	Key profit traits	Index value	Trait reliability	Star Rating (across all beef breeds)
	Expected progeny performance			
	Calving difficulty (% 3 & 4) Breed ave: 4.65%, All breeds ave: 4.49%	3.30%	58% (Average)	
★★★★★	Docility (1-5 scale) Breed ave: -0.06, All breeds ave: 0.01	0.15 scale	56% (Average)	★★★★★
★★★★★	Carcass weight (kg) Breed ave: 23.63kg, All breeds ave: 16.19kg	32kg	52% (Average)	★★★★★
★★★★★	Carcass conformation (1-15 scale) Breed ave: 2.14, All breeds ave: 1.38	2.46 scale	45% (Average)	★★★★★
	Expected daughter breeding performance			
	Daughter calving difficulty (% 3 & 4) Breed ave: 5.05%, All breeds ave: 5.79%	5.93%	39% (Low)	
★★★★☆	Daughter milk (kg) Breed ave: -0.67kg, All breeds ave: 2.24kg	0.30kg	42% (Average)	★★☆☆☆
★☆☆☆☆	Daughter calving interval (days) Breed ave: 1.26 days, All breeds ave: -0.77 days	3.12days	39% (Low)	★☆☆☆☆

Figure 2. Galbally Liberal; 5-stars on the ICBF Terminal and Replacement Indexes

While Jim has help from Audrey and his daughters Alyssa and Estelle, stock bulls are used as a preference to AI from a labour perspective.

"It's a man-and-his-dog operation really," Jim joked.

Only bulls with good figures are used on the herd, with anything over 4.5% calving difficulty considered too high. In addition, over three quarters of the cows rate 4 and 5-star on the ICBF €uro-Star evaluation system.

Gaining the most from grass

The Parkinsons' enterprise is most definitely a grass-based operation, with Jim aiming to keep grazed grass in the animals' diet for as long as possible – keeping meal feeding to a minimum.

This is achieved through the use of a diverse paddock system, an excellent road network and good grassland management. Jim can tap into his dairy experience to ensure that good-quality grass is always ahead of his herd.

However, the farm is not 'winter proof' and so the herd has to be housed at some point over the winter months.

Jim aims to harvest excellent-quality grass silage, which is cut early in the year and this is substituted for grazed grass over this period. The best-quality silage was harvested on the farm in 2017 – testing at 79% dry matter digestibility (DMD).

While the M8 motorway splits the farm, underpasses – large enough for heavy machinery and trailers – make this process easier.

In addition to pit silage, surplus bales are also harvested from paddocks that have gone too strong for grazing. Heifers are finished off grass during their second grazing season.

Changes and current beef climate

In the years following 2012, Jim has aimed to run the farm as efficiently as possible.

Efforts were made to tighten up the breeding season which, in turn, reduced the length of the calving period on the farm.

"Whatever I do this year, I will try to do it that little bit better the following year," Jim said.

Jim participates in the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) and is also a participant in the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP); he firmly believes that the more information you can put together on your herd the better.

Jim normally aims to produce weanling bulls for the export market. However, this year, stronger weanling bulls were castrated and sold in an effort to deal with market uncertainty.

While Jim would prefer to sell these animals as bulls, it shows his ability to adapt and change in certain circumstances.

Enquiries for young Limousin breeding bulls from dairy farmers have also increased in recent times. This is a market that Jim hopes to explore more given the Limousin's easy-calving traits and the need for a better-quality calf coming from the dairy herd.

Additionally, as Jim is no stranger to a calf-to-beef system, this is something he would not rule out in the future, but noted that the quality of calves coming on stream would have to improve from a beef perspective.

Jim also recalled when he left dairy and embarked on his suckler farming journey.

"It was a better time in the beef game; prices were good," highlighting that there wasn't a huge difference in the income from dairying and the commercial and pedigree herd.

"Things are different now," he added.

A positive mindset is what's needed in this difficult period for suckler and beef farmers; that's what Jim tries to keep to the fore.

"I would hope that it would turn the corner and I'm going to stick with it for a few more years.

"I always watch things closely. And, I would always be inclined to go the opposite way. I study it, and I'd say everyone is going that way - I think I'll stay going this way," he concluded.

Jim Parkinson with some of his autumn-calving herd.

A Year in my Wellies

Jason Melbourne, Dairy Farmer, Co. Waterford

My name is Jason Melbourne. My farming career continues to evolve as manager of a 270 cow, high EBI crossbred herd on a farm near Mallow in county Cork. Down in Killavullen there's never a dull moment. With the Spring madness over its now time to put all our effort into getting ready for another busy year in 2020 all the while juggling some big, new and exciting adjustments to the farm.

New colleague

Since my last Year in my Wellies article my colleague Robert Larkin from County Tipperary has finished working with us on his placement from his Dairy Farm Management course in Moorepark to move on to a new adventure in New Zealand. Robert was undoubtedly a huge asset to our team here in Cork. As a consequence of Robert's departure, we have now welcomed a new member to the team. We were pleased to have secured Brendan Flynn to work on the farm with me full time.

Upskilling

With new help on the farm and life being a lot easier this time of year, this has given me the opportunity to spend some time working on the skills I need for both my present position on the farm and to help strengthen my future prospects. I decided to enrol on a four-day Dairy Business Brush Up course hosted by Lynaire Ryan. This course is mainly focused on accounts analysis and using benchmarks to identify where we are and where we want to be. I am currently half-way through the four days and have adopted a lot of useful skills and knowledge from Lynaire and the other attendees. The feedback I had gotten from other farmers who had attended this course had really encouraged me to take part and learn some new skills that I can use moving forward in my career. Aside from this I have also been attending a local Grass 10 Teagasc farm walk hosted by John Maher and John McCabe. Attending these walks helps me get a better understanding of how others manage their grass throughout the year and how this can be applied to the farm in Killavullen.

In-calf scan results

Moving on from that, it's time to see how the farm itself is shaping up. As discussed in my last article we had just scanned the cows to identify the in-calf rate of cows within the first 6 weeks of breeding. Since then we have done a final 12-week in-calf scan and came in with an empty rate of 15% after 12 weeks of breeding. This comes as a bit of a disappointment to us after being very successful in our 6-week scan coming in at 72% in calf as we had been hoping for an empty rate of 10%. However, from talking to other farmers across the country higher than normal empty rates are more common than usual. We are unable to pinpoint exactly what caused this high empty rate but we were able to identify that a lot of the late calving cows did not go back in calf this year. We will have a lot of early calving heifers and hopefully we will have at least 90% of the herd calved within the first 6 weeks next Spring. We also vaccinated the herd at the start of September against salmonella to help reduce the risk of abortions in the cows. We do this vaccination every 12 months.

Extended rotation

Aside from that, we have been building grass for the Autumn since the end of July and now, coming towards the end of September we are targeting a 40 day rotation to allow us to finish grazing by the second week of November and to have a closing average farm cover of 750 kg of dry matter per hectare. This will enable us to have enough grass next Spring to cover the high numbers of cows calved by mid-March due to the high 6-week calving rate we discussed earlier. Within the next week we will begin to strip-graze the fodder beet to help reduce the reliance on grass. We added the last cut of silage to the pit at the end of August and we are now confident that the quantity of our feedstocks will allow us to become fully self-sufficient in the Winter. We are also fully prepared for next year with our straw stacked in the shed waiting for use. We are grazing in 12-hour blocks so we can budget our grass and get better grazing utilisation of heavy covers. The last round of fertiliser spread across the farm was half a bag of urea to the acre to help keep grass growing into the Autumn.

With all this in mind our main aim for this time of year is mainly to ensure that we are as organised as possible for the year ahead and are on track to reach all our targets and aims by the end of the year.

A Year in my Wellies

Peter Doyle Teagasc Grange and University College Dublin

My name is Peter Doyle, a third year University College Dublin/Teagasc, Grange Walsh Fellowship PhD student investigating grass-fed beef production. At home I help my father Padraig Doyle run a spring and autumn suckler to beef herd and tillage farm in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. At home we breed all our own stock and finish all males as under 16-month old bulls and heifers at 22 to 24 months old. We also grow and store our own spring barley and fodder beet to have a controlled and reduced cost system.

Suckler herd – weanling, choosing the correct finishing system for the winter and reducing cost.

Weanling commenced the start of October and calves were gradually weaned over a 4-week period. No concentrates were fed to calves prior to weanling, as all progeny are finished on our farm, so there is no cost benefit to introduce concentrates this early in their lifetime. However, concentrates are introduced post weanling to replace the milk in the diet and to prevent any set-backs. We also generally purchase a small number of weanlings this time of the year. However due to the current economic outlook of beef prices, we have decided not to purchase weanlings this year.

Although we are facing both uncertain prices and markets at this moment, it is important at this time of the year to choose the correct finishing strategy based on feed costs, market, farm system and the type of animals to be finished on the farm. At home we have been finishing bulls for the past 15 years and find it the most profitable system considering the type of Limousins and Parthenaises that we breed, which are more suited for a bull than a steer system. Further, the opportunity to produce our own finishing diet reduces costs for this high input system. We find fodder beet to be a very cost-effective ingredient to accelerate growth and yields of fodder beet are extremely good this year. However, despite all of this, the bull market ahead is uncertain and farmers are not guaranteed to be able to sell bulls to factories next summer, which is worrying.

With regards to heifers, we previously finished half of the heifers at grass in the autumn at 20 months of age. However, we have recently begun to finish all heifers at 22 to 24 months old as it is more economical for us to push Limousin heifers to heavier carcass weights and sell when the price is generally more favourable post-Christmas. Considering we finish our heifers at a later stage indoors, it does not pay us to supplement yearling heifers at grass in the autumn as they will experience compensatory growth when they are housed for the 2nd winter on a silage, barley and fodder beet finishing diet and we do not want to deposit excess fat on them at a low body weight.

In an aim to reduce winter costs and save on silage, each year we sow fodder rape in our tillage fields post-harvest and graze the rape over the winter when ground conditions allow. However, rape establishment and potential yields are poor this year on our farm. Caution should be taken when grazing rape, as bloat and mineral deficiencies can occur in cattle very easily and the necessary steps need to be taken to prevent this. Autumn-calving cows and calves will graze fodder beet tops during the day but will also receive silage + beet in the shed by night to provide sufficient energy supply for optimum milk production and to retain a satisfactory BCS for breeding over the winter.

Autumn grass

Grass covers are monitored both in Meath as part of my PhD and at home in Wexford. Building covers for the autumn was easily achieved in Meath; however it was more difficult to build covers at home in Wexford due to a moisture deficit on our higher ground. As part of my PhD, steers are weighed every 2 weeks at grass. Results indicate that average daily gain

(ADG) is far lower this autumn than last year, despite the good grass growth and utilisation. However cattle had a compensatory growth potential last autumn after the drought during the summer. Further, the absence of clover in these paddocks can reduce cattle performance in the autumn. Paddocks are currently being closed off and it is expected that steers will be housed in early November in Meath.

Current PhD experience

The grass-fed beef market is gaining more interest as markets and consumers begin to seek true 100% grass-fed beef which is potentially linked to human health benefits and sustainability. I am now beginning the 3rd year of my PhD in Teagasc, Grange which looks at grass-fed beef production. The aim of the PhD is to:

(1) Produce beef within a system of production where lifetime diets are based on forage only (grazed pasture and grass silage).

(2) Compare animal and grass growth and output from different grazing systems.

(3) Compare meat quality of 'grass-fed beef' vs. 'concentrate-fed beef'.

With regard to current work on grazing systems, trial work is almost complete; which involves investigating the effects of pre-grazing herbage mass, post-grazing height and breed maturity on performance of suckler-bred steers during their second grazing season. A lot of information will become available to beef farmers on how these factors can affect animal and grass growth, grass quality, grazing rotations, stocking rates, amount of silage preserved, environmental benefits and subsequent finishing performance. I am lucky that the PhD is very broad and has given me a detailed insight and understanding of many key areas in the beef industry including detailed understanding of feed quality, digestion, animal growth, meat quality, grass growth, economics, precision agriculture and environmental issues. The PhD has already given me many opportunities including training courses abroad and speaking at international scientific conferences. I would recommend anyone to do a PhD if it is in an area that they are truly passionate about.

Benefits and costs of Low Emissions Slurry Spreaders

William Burchill, PhD.
Teagasc Moorepark Advisory,
Fermoy, Co. Cork

Introduction to the techniques

Low emissions slurry spreaders (LESS) have been available in Ireland for some time now but there has been a noticeable increase in usage in recent years stemming from new nitrates derogation rules and increased interest in the benefits of using LESS namely reduced grass contamination and improved slurry N values. Moving from using splash-plate to LESS techniques has been identified by Teagasc as one of the most practical and cost effective options to increase N use efficiency and reduce ammonia and greenhouse gas emissions from farms. LESS machines include dribble bars, trailing shoes and slurry injection systems. The key difference between the techniques is how they place the slurry in the field during spreading. The dribble bar places the slurry in narrow lines on top of the grass (Figure 1). The trailing shoe splits the grass and places the slurry directly on the soil surface. There are two different types of injector systems which places the slurry directly into the soil. One uses two discs which cuts a 'v'-shaped slot in the soil as can be seen in

Figure 1. *A newer version of the injector system uses a single disc to cut a straight line in the soil with a single disc.*

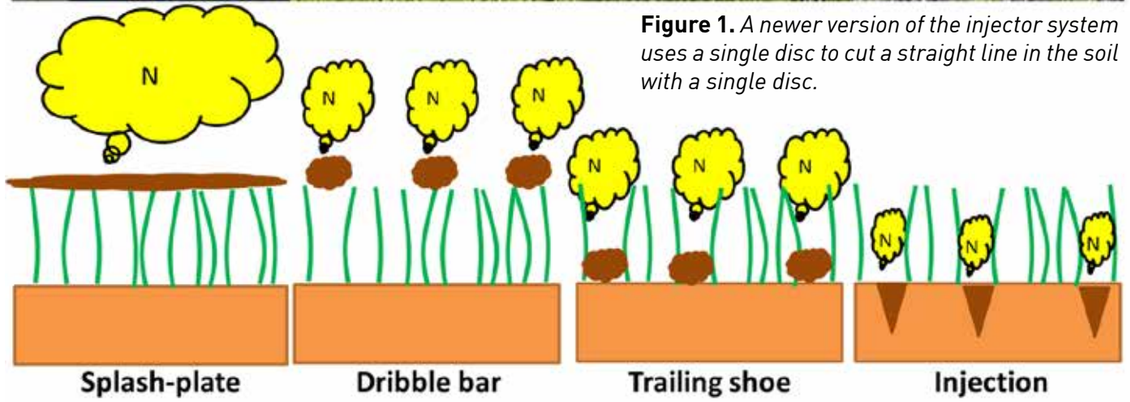


Figure 1. *Slurry spreading techniques and their placement of slurry within the field during slurry application.*

Nitrogen efficiency

LESS machines retain more of the N in slurry by placing the slurry in narrow lines (Figure 1). This reduces the exposure of the slurry to wind and sun (i.e. drying conditions) which reduced the amount on N in the slurry being lost as emissions. Trials conducted by Teagasc has investigated the N value in a 1,000 gals of cattle slurry depending on the technique used and timing of application (Table 1). Using either the trailing shoe or dribble bar improves the efficiency of N within slurry by around 3 units of N per 1,000 gal compared to using splash-plate. A dairy cow will produce at least 1,200 gal of slurry over a 16 week winter. A farm producing 150,000 gals slurry will benefit from an extra 250 units of N (0.92 tonnes of CAN) across the farm if all slurry is spread by trailing shoe or dribble bar instead of splash plate. The spring time is the best time to make use of this extra slurry N as this will maximise the N use efficiency of slurry. The general recommendation of spreading 23 units N/acre in the first round of fertiliser in late January or February can be replaced on a portion of the farm by applying 2,500 gal/acre of slurry with the dribble bar or trailing shoe i.e. 8.7 unit N/1,000 gal x 2,500 gal/acre = 21.75 units N/acre. This allows for a cost saving on purchased N fertiliser for the first round of fertiliser. It also allows for the shifting of fertiliser N applications to later in the spring where there is a higher grass growth response to N fertiliser.

Table 1. *Units of nitrogen/1,000 gals of slurry depending on the timing of slurry application and the application technique used.*

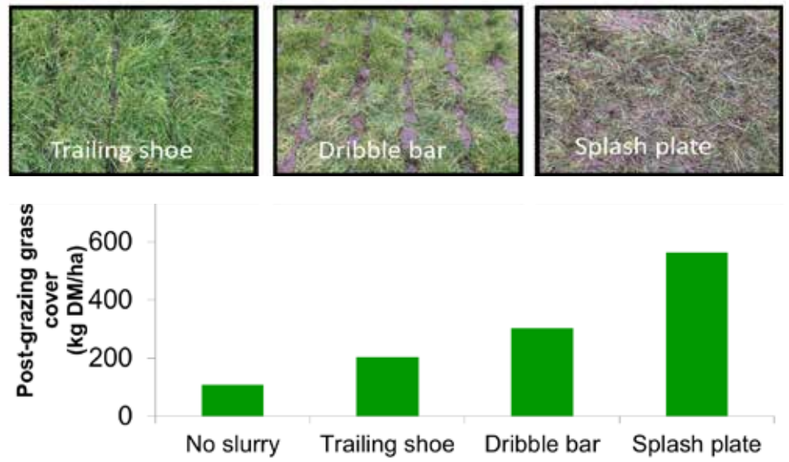
	Units N/1,000 gals cattle slurry		
	Splash-plate	**Dribble bar & trailing shoe**	**Injection system**
Spring	6.5	8.7	10.8
Summer	3.3	5.4	7.6

Grass contamination/grazing efficiency

The placement of slurry in barrow bands by LESS machines significantly reduces grass contamination with slurry compared to the splash-plate. This allows for a shorter interval between slurry spreading and grazing which is important during times of the year when grazing rotation lengths are short. Slurry can be applied to covers of up to 1,200 kg DM/ha, whereas with the splash-plate we are confined to the paddocks with low grass covers to avoid grass contamination. This allows for more targeted slurry spreading to paddocks that need the slurry nutrients the most e.g. silage ground and fields in index 1 and 2 for P or K, without being confined to paddocks with low grass covers or having to delay slurry application to a day when we are certain that rain will remove slurry contamination from the grass. The ability to spread slurry into higher grass covers also increases the area of the farm that can be spread with slurry in early spring when ground conditions allow. This has advantages in terms of increasing the amount of slurry that can be spread which can help to free up slurry storage during this period.

Recent demonstrations carried out by Teagasc has shown that cows prefer to graze pastures spread by either trailing shoe or dribble bar compared to splash-plate. For the demonstration, slurry was spread on three grass plots at a rate of 3,000 gal/acre using splash plate, dribble bar and trailing shoe on the 9th March 2018. Cows were given access to the three plots 21 days later for a 2 hour grazing period. The cows could move and selectively graze which ever plot they preferred. The cows grazed the most grass from the trailing shoe plots followed by the dribble bar and then the splash-plate (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Post-grazing grass covers on field plots spread with slurry using different slurry application methods. Grass cover was 1,200 kg DM/ha at time of slurry spreading and grazing occurred three weeks after slurry spreading. Insert pictures shows level of grass contamination at time of slurry spreading.*



TECHNICAL FOCUS

Costs

Buying a new machine

LESS machines are a significant capital cost for any individual farm. Estimates of the cost of the overall cost of buying either a 2,000 gal galvanised tanker fitted with a splash plate, dribble bar or trailing shoe or retro-fitting a dribble bar onto an existing tanker is shown in Table 2. The savings associated with (1) a TAMS grant of either 40% or 60%, (2) capital allowances tax saving (high tax rate) and (3) value of extra N from the LESS machines compared to a splash-plate were included for a ten year period. The initial cost of each option was taken as the average of three quotes from different manufacturers.

After taking into account the TAMS grant, capital allowance tax saving and value of extra N over a ten year period the cost of the new tanker with either a trailing shoe or dribble bar (€7,284 to €10,147) while significant was still lower than the cost of the new tanker with a splash-plate at €10,290 (See Table 2). The trade in value of an existing tanker and the fact that the new tankers will have varying trade in/residual value after the ten years must also be considered when assessing these figures. The extra N from using a LESS machine over a ten year period was worth €2,500 based on a 100 cow herd. These N saving will increase with higher cow numbers e.g. €5,000 for a 200 cow herd, however the associated higher work rate of the tanker would require more maintenance, repairs and running costs.

A machinery co-operative established among a group of farmers is one option which could be used to reduce the cost of purchasing a new LESS machine for individual farmers. In this model the LESS machine is purchased by the co-operative and hired out to the individual farmers in the group as needs be. Successful examples of this model are working within discussion groups. The ten year cost for retro-fitting a dribble bar to an existing tanker was substantially lower than buying the new tanker at €275 to €1,312 cost over a ten year period (Table 2). This maybe a more viable option for an individual farmer if their existing tanker is in good condition and suitable to be retro-fitted with a dribble bar i.e. sufficient size, placement of axil on the tanker chassis.

Table 2. *Comparison of the cost of buying a LESS machine after taking into account TAMS grant, capital allowance tax saving and value of extra N over a ten year period*

	No grant	40% TAMS grant			60% TAMS grant		
	Splash plate	**Dribble bar**	**Trailing shoe**	**Retro-fit dribble bar**	**Dribble bar**	**Trailing shoe**	**Retro-fit Dribble bar**
Cost including vat	€21,000	€35,500	€37,500	€12,000	€35,500	€37,500	€12,000
TAMS grant[1]	€0	-€10,028	-€11,689	-€4,224	-€15,042	-€17,533	-€6,336
Cost after TAMS grant	€21,000	€25,472	€25,811	€7,776	€20,458	€19,967	€5,664
Capital allowance tax saving over 8 years at high tax rate[2]	-€10,710	-€12,991	-€13,164	-€3,966	-€10,434	-€10,183	-€2,889
Cost after TAMS grant and tax saving	€10,290	€12,481	€12,647	€3,810	€10,025	€9,784	€2,775
Value of extra N in slurry over 10 years on 100 cow farm[3]	€0	-€2,500	-€2,500	-€2,500	-€2,500	-€2,500	-€2,500
Cost after TAMS grant, tax saving and N saving (10 years)	€10,290	€9,981	€10,147	€1,310	€7,525	€7,284	€275
Cost per year after TAMS grant, tax saving and N saving	€1,029	€998	€1,015	€131	€752	€728	€28

[1]TAMS reference costs for dribble bar, trailing shoe and retro-fit dribble bar for 2,000 gal tank and 7.5m applicator where: €25,069, €29,222 and €10,560, respectively.

[2] Capital allowance allowed on cost after TAMS grant at 12.5% annually and using 51% tax for the high tax bracket.

[3]Value of extra N saved in slurry from using a dribble bar or trailing shoe compared to a splash plate based on 100 cow farm. 3 units N/1,000 gals extra for dribble bar and trailing shoe. CAN = €300/tonne

Using the contractor

Depending on farm size and available labour the use of a contactor with a LESS machine maybe is another option for farms to avail of their benefits. The hourly rate for a trailing shoe is €85/hr v's Ð65/hr for a conventional splash plate (FCI, 2019). The extra cost per hour is small when the extra N value from the slurry when using trailing shoe is taken into account (Table 3).

Depending on the amount of loads spread per hour the extra N can cover anywhere from 42% to 83% of the extra €20/hour cost (Table 3). For a 100 cow farm spreading 150,000 gallons slurry per year the additional contractor cost minus the value of the extra slurry N ranges from €0.45 to €3.45 per cow per year depending on the amount of loads spread per hour. This would be a relatively small increase in the overall contractor costs of a spring calving dairy herd which stands at around €107 per cow on average based on 2018 profit monitor results (Teagasc, 2019).

Table 3. *Extra contractor cost and value of N saved when using a trailing shoe compared to a splash-plate depending on the number of 2,500 gal loads of slurry spread per hour.*

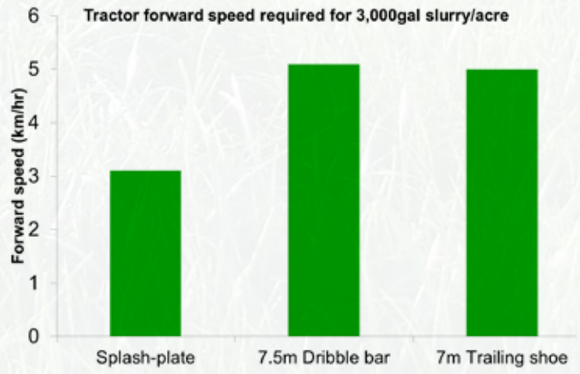
	2 × 2,500 gal loads/hour	**3 × 2,500 gal loads/hour**	**4 × 2,500 gal loads/hour**
Slurry spread per hour (Gallons)	5,000	7,500	10,000
Extra charge for trailing shoe €/hour	€20	€20	€20
Extra N units saved per hour	15	22.5	30
Extra N value €/hour	€8.33	€12.50	€16.67
Slurry spread on a 100 cow farm Gallons/year	150,000	150,000	150,000
Extra contractor charge for TS/year	€600	€405	€300
Extra N value € for TS/year	€255	€255	€255
Extra contractor cost minus N saving/year	€345	€150	€45
Extra contractor cost minus N saving/cow/year	€3.45	€1.5	€0.45

Other considerations

When making the choice to use the contractor or purchasing either of the LESS machine other considerations must be made including;

- **Tractor:** Size and horse power of current tractor. Dribble bars add 0.5 t and trailing shoes add 1 t to the weight of the tanker. The forward speed of the tractor must also increase to achieve similar application rates as with a splash plate (Figure 3). Will you need a bigger tractor?
- **Labour:** Labour must be considered when comparing buying a machine v's using a contractor. A value must be put on your own time. Is there sufficient labour on the farm to spread the slurry or should a contractor be used to spread the slurry to reduce labour, particularly in spring time?
- **Contractor:** What is the availability of LESS machines among contractors in your area?

Figure 3. *Forward speed needed to achieve an application rate of 3,000 gal slurry/acre depending on slurry application technique for a typical dairy cow slurry.*



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Long Term Leases

Aisling Meehan
Principal Solicitor
Aisling Meehan Agricultural Solicitors

Long term leasing of land has become very popular amongst landowners due to the favourable tax treatment associated with long term leasing. Not only does the landowner qualify for income tax exemptions on the rent and entitlements payment but they can also qualify for Agricultural Relief under gift/inheritance tax and Consanguinity Relief under stamp duty by leasing out their land as opposed to having to farm it themselves.

To qualify for the income tax exemption the lease has to be in writing and should also contain minimum terms. It should be stamped with Revenue which can be done online through ROS. The stamp duty liability was generally 1% of the average annual rent (including entitlements) however an exemption from stamp duty on long term leases introduced from 1 July 2018 means that most leases for a term of 6 years+ are exempt from stamp duty liability. A return should still be filed and the exemption claimed. The lease should also be registered with the Property Services Regulatory Authority within 30 days of having been executed.

While there are many potential benefits to be gained from leasing, there are also a number of challenges. Both parties enter into an arrangement which must be honoured regardless of changing circumstances.

Q What if the economics of farming change dramatically and the lease cost is no longer affordable? What are the legal obligations of the parties involved?

A. In a lease agreement, it is not open to either party to break the term of the lease during the currency of the lease unless there is provision for a break clause included in the terms of the lease. However, the parties to a lease should be wary of inserting provision for such a break clause as it could affect the availability of the income tax lease exemption, the terms of which provide that the lease must be for a definite term.

The lease can be terminated early if both parties to the lease agree. Generally provided a replacement tenant is found within a year of the early termination who will see out the term of the lease, prevents a clawback of any income tax relief claimed.

Q. What happens if the user, the lessee, walks away from the deal and does not pay?

A. He/she could be sued for the balance of rent due for the term of the lease. If the farmer fails to pay the rent 14 days after it becomes payable, the IFA master lease provides that the landowner can re-enter the land and the lease will finish but without prejudice to any rights or remedies which the landowner may have against the farmer. Legally, parties have a duty to mitigate their losses so the landowner should try to secure a replacement tenant for land.

Q. What happens if the lessee does not pay the agreed amount but continues to occupy the land or leave stock on it?

A. If the term of the lease has expired and the farmer will not vacate the land, the landowner can issue proceedings for ejectment for overholding pursuant to section 72 of Deasy's Act 1860. The relevant procedure in the Circuit Court is by way of Ejectment Civil Bill – overholding pursuant to Order 51 of the circuit court rules. If there is a valid and subsisting lease, in that case ejectment proceedings can be brought for non-payment of rent, pursuant to section 52 of Deasy's Act 1860. If the landowner accepts that the lease is valid, it is still possible to make a demand for possession and institute proceedings for forfeiture, eg where the tenant has been in breach of condition or covenant of the lease such as non-payment of rent.

Q. If farming profits were to improve substantially from the circumstances that applied at the time the lease was drawn up and the lessor wanted to withdraw from or renegotiate the lease, how is the lessee protected?

A. Most leases generally provide for a rent review clause. The IFA Master lease does not specify how often the rent is to be reviewed, that is a matter to be agreed between the parties. However, most parties agree a period of five years. The IFA Master lease provides that any increase in rent is a matter to be agreed between the farmer and the landowner. If they cannot agree, the matter is referred to an independent surveyor who will determine the rent due.

The IFA Master lease provides that the independent surveyor shall determine an annual rent which, in his opinion, will be based on the full open market rent of the farm let as a whole. No account will be taken of the fact that the farmer may have carried out improvements to the land or indeed let the land fall into bad condition or disrepair.

Q. Where a lease was drawn up with conditions that apply to, say, the non-use of the access to the lessor's yard or residence, how can such issues be resolved in the event of such a breach?

A If the lease provides for no access to the landowner's yard or residence entrance, then the farmer has no right to do so. It would generally be agreed at the outset of the lease, how the farmer was to gain access to the land and this would be incorporated into the written lease.

Most leases provide dispute resolution mechanisms and it depends on the terms of the lease as to how disputes will be resolved. For example, the IFA Master lease provides that any dispute under the lease shall be conclusively determined by an independent surveyor. The surveyor must have 10 years' post-qualification experience in the leasing of agricultural land.

The appointment of the surveyor to make a decision on the matter in dispute is a matter to be agreed between the landowner and the lessee. If they cannot agree, they can apply to the president of the Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland to appoint such a person. The IFA Master lease provides that the independent surveyor shall give notice in writing of their decision to both parties within 60 days of his appointment or such lesser period as agreed between the parties.

Disclaimer: The information in this article is intended as a general guide only. While every care is taken to ensure accuracy of information contained in this article, Aisling Meehan, Agricultural Solicitors does not accept responsibility for errors or omissions howsoever arising.

Protect yourself and your business - ensure you have adequate liability insurance in place

Ciaran Roche,
Risk Manager FBD Insurance

Stewart Gavin
Agri Underwriting Manager
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Previously, a primary concern for farmers was to attain cover in case they faced a financial loss as a result of a storm, fire or other unforeseen incident to a tractor, shed, house or car. Today, covering these risks to protect against financial loss remains just as important for farmers but there is a growing awareness of the importance of developing risks whereby an entire farm built up over generations could be lost as the sums involved in certain claims can be very significant. This is especially relevant considering the frequency and seriousness of accidents on Irish farms. While farming can be such a rewarding career, farms today are typically larger and busier places with less help than even just one generation ago - Farmers are typically working longer hours in a more highly pressurised environment with larger machinery, more aggressive animals and increasingly extreme weather events and is not for the faint hearted.

Farming is the most dangerous workplace and profession in Ireland today and is quite unique with high levels of family involvement in daily activities. The 2013 – 2018 Teagasc National Farm Survey (NFS) found that farm accidents have risen by 13% in the last 5 years and by 31% in the last ten years. The survey found that over the five-year period 2013-2018, 11% of farms has had a serious accident and in total 2,814 accidents occurred annually.

Protect yourself and your business
While farming is the sector with the highest number of fatal accidents most serious farm accidents involve livestock, farm vehicles and machinery, and farm building maintenance and construction work. Serious accidents always lead to heartache and pain but can also indirectly lead to financial ruin. That is why it is imperative that you not only farm safely, but that you also ensure that you have adequate insurance in place to protect yourself and your family from the financial consequences should the unforeseen occur.

Construction
Construction activities under-taken on farms have led to some of the most expensive liability claims. A recent review of claims data has highlighted that construction/ maintenance of farm building related claims feature regularly among the large, most costly claims that insurance companies deal with. 48% of the claims cost attributable to the largest public liability claims over the 5-year period 2014 – 2018 were construction & maintenance related. The traditional approach by insurers in relation to construction risk is to restrict cover or exclude this risk in its entirety. Farmers need to ensure that their policies fully cover construction risks before any work is undertaken.

The advice to all farmers is to 'Remember just because you may engage contractors who have their own insurances to do a job, their insurances may not protect your legal liability if you are drawn into a claim arising from an accident for which you as a farmer may be deemed responsible or partially responsible for. We would encourage farmers to engage a fully insured competent contractor to carry out works of this nature who are experts in this field. In addition, your insurance company can be asked to check contractor's insurance details for you.

Public liability
Public liability insurance indemnifies the insured in respect of their legal liabilities for loss or damage to a third party or to a third-party property which can be attributed to negligence in connection with the farm business. The policy can be extended for other occupations such as agricultural contracting.

Common claims include damage caused to third party property by livestock and accidents involving third parties, including contractors on the farm. farmers should ensure that the level of indemnity is adequate for all circumstances. We have seen circumstances where the farmer is liable for catastrophic personal injury to members of the public, for example if a serious car accident were to arise due to the escape of an animal onto the road. The costs of these claims are increasing, not only due to a general increase in the levels of compensation awarded in the courts, but also because of medical advances. While these are in general a very positive thing for society, they do mean a higher cost of care for people with catastrophic injuries. Farmers should have an insurance policy that has adequate indemnity to future-proof potential liability. Again, farmers should be proactive in checking their policies in this regard.

Employer's liability insurance
Employer's liability insurance will provide you with cover for any legal liability you may have in relation to a claim arising from an accidental bodily injury or disease to an employee which can be attributed to negligence in connection with the farm business. A policy should have adequate indemnity limits and also ensure that family members who have reached the age of 14 and voluntary helpers are covered. The most common claims involve livestock, slips, trips and falls and farm vehicles (including tracts & quads) and machinery.

Environmental liability cover
Everyone has a responsibility to take care of the environment with farmers in particular acting as custodians. The costs of an accidental pollution event fall on the landowner. Liability cover should include environmental liability. Check your policy to make sure that your insurance company includes cover for this liability. Many standard liability covers do not cover this contingency. It should include cover for gradual pollution, clean-up costs and specific remediation expenses as defined under the environmental liability regulations.

Legal Advice and Expenses
Farming has never stood still and as farms evolve, the legal and regulatory environment has become more complex. Farmers may find that they lack the experience to deal with an issue themselves or the resources to pay a legal expert to handle queries. At least one farm insurance company has developed a service which provides access to confidential telephone legal advice on a range of commercial and personal legal issues. In addition, specific cover can be tailored to provide legal advice and associated costs for employment disputes to support the many farmers now finding themselves in the role of employer. All associated costs should be covered under the policy. The advice, again, is that if farmers believe they may need these facilities in the future, they should ensure that their insurance policies cover these potentially significant costs.

Personal accident cover
Because farmers are self-employed it is vital they acquire Personal Accident cover, as this cover will provide an income in the event of them not being able to work on their farm as a result of an accident. Replacement labour on the farm is very expensive, so it is imperative that the farm gets adequate protection that will cover the cost of replacement labour. Personal Accident insurance covers you for bodily injury caused directly by accidental violent means, e.g. crash, machinery accident, falls. This cover operates 24 hours per day and is not restricted to accidents occurring on the farm. The policy can be extended to cover injury sustained during sporting activities. The benefits include total and partial weekly benefits for when you're out of work as a result of an accident and includes lump sum payments for death, loss of limbs, loss of sight and permanent total disablement from the pursuance of gainful employment.

What should you consider when choosing farm Insurance?
A serious farm accident can put your farm and family's livelihood at risk. We understand the income pressures currently being felt on farms but we urge you to take the time to understand, listen and query the level of protection offered.

Make sure you're getting advice from someone who knows and understands the risks that you're exposed to and that your insurer has a proven track record of paying claims associated with the farming enterprise. We would advise all farmers to ensure that the level of cover is adequate by your insurer and that there is no long list of mitigating factors to avoid paying a genuine claim.

Expectations of Contractor Employee Competency

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Contractors Ireland

Contractor activity on Irish farms peaks during silage season and increasingly now contractors are carrying out more work as labour availability on farms gets tighter. Contractors bring economies of scale in terms of the use of technology to Irish farms that would otherwise not be available to ensure accurate spreading of nutrients and plant protection products as well as new crop harvesting technologies to measure crop yields on the move. Teagasc research has shown that Irish farmers spend on average €4,585 per annum on contractor services, which gives this important and often hidden service sector to Irish agriculture, a massive annual value of more than €700 million. Contractor activity and importance has increased as dairy cow numbers have increased. Contractors now report up to 30% work by value on these farms, compared with 5 years ago.

Unique skillsets and technologies

Contractor operators bring unique skills along with modern machinery that incorporates the latest technology, when they arrive to work on Irish farms. There is a constant need to enhance the competency and skills of these machinery operators as the machine development progresses. The challenge for all contractors is to match the continuing investment in new and more efficient machine technology with the operator skills to optimise that new capacity.
This technology can only achieve its optimum if the machine operator has received regular training. Auto-steer tractor systems will save time and fuel in the right hands even for otherwise mundane jobs such as tedding and rowing grass ahead of a silage harvester or baler. For more precision and traceability issues they can bring greater savings for the farmer in terms of application losses and timeliness. They can also allow for safer and more sustainable machine operation.

Irish contractors don't underestimate the value of the technology; they embrace it. Irish contractors are a critical part of agriculture's value-chain (80% of regular farm work is carried out by contractors from our research).

As the current CAP proposal grants more responsibilities to Member States for achieving the new green environment goals, Member States should design their future national strategic plans so that EU farmers and forest growers, of all sizes, can access the precision technologies provided by rural, agricultural and forestry contractors.

Contractors believe that these targets could only be reached by the use of new precision technologies. Contractors in Europe under the umbrella of CEETTAR organisation and with the support of CEMA, the Agricultural Machinery Manufacturers Association, have jointly proposed that the CAP includes a new and innovative incentive in the form of a "smart technologies voucher" to be allocated to farmers and to be released by contractors. Providing indirect support to contractors through such vouchers will also entice young people to be part of a modern contractor business environment that is increasingly important in rural areas. Young farmers will not need thereby to increase their operating costs and they will be enabled to hire more skilled work. Benefits for the farmer will also include higher yield and lower input costs.

This article provides some advice and gives examples of how farmers and contractors can use their respective skills to work together to achieve machine efficiencies while keeping everyone on the farm healthy and safe. It is during the silage season that contractor activity in rural Ireland is at its most transparent. This is also the time for greatest efficiency as it is a higher power and fuel demanding job. It is also one that demands greater attention to detail to ensure safety for all involved. We have set out this guideline for contractors and their customers to follow.

What can contractors do to keep farmers healthy and safe?
Contractors must make sure:

- that any risks from their work that could affect the farmer, farm workers or other contractors on the farm are reasonably managed. If a risk can't be eliminated then it must be minimised, so far as is reasonably practicable.

What can farmers do to keep contractors healthy and safe?
Farmers must make sure:

- that any risks from farm work are reasonably managed (eliminated or minimised) to protect the health and safety of contractors.
- that risks from any previous work carried out on the farm (eg land drainage, levelling, spraying hazardous substances) are reasonably managed to protect the health and safety of contractors.
- that farm buildings and any area where work is being carried out is safe for everyone including contractors.
- that any risks from low overhead wires are made known to the contractor for the safety of operators.

How can farmers and contractors co-ordinate activities?

- Farmers and contractors must work together to meet their overlapping duties every time a contractor comes on farm.
- Having a face-to-face or over the phone meeting before work starts can help farmers and contractors to reach a common understanding and establish clear roles, responsibilities and actions. It will also prevent any gaps in managing health and safety risks

Checklist for farmers and contractors

Contractor

Possible questions I could ask
Have I:
communicated with the farmer about where I or my team will be going/working?
checked with the farmer if there is risk from farm work activity where I will be going/working?
discussed with the farmer: • what am I going to be doing? • what risks it poses to others? (including the farmer) • discussed how I am going to manage and communicate those risks?
been made aware of any relevant emergency procedures?
agreed with the farmer on appropriate time in/time out reporting?
made a back-up plan with the farmer if there's no phone coverage?
Also consider
letting the farmer know about any changes in the work practice that may create additional risks to other persons (including the farmer) on farm, for example, covering the Silage Pit.

Possible questions you could ask
Have I:
checked where the contractor will be going/working?
got their contact details?
told them about any expected or unexpected risks?
told them about other work activity on the farm that could pose a risk to them?
asked: • What they are going to be doing? • What risks that poses to others? • How we are going to manage and communicate those risks?
told them about: farm rules (eg speed limits, alcohol): any expectations of their behaviour on farm?
told them about any relevant emergency procedures?
determined appropriate time in/time out reporting?
made a back-up plan with the contractor if there's no phone coverage?
made a note of what I told them? (eg in the farm diary)
Also consider
printing and marking-up a farm map to show hazards, especially ESB Networks overhead lines.
Getting the contractor to call in at the farmhouse, or phone before starting work.
Helping them across rough/dangerous terrain using an appropriate vehicle.

What farmers need to know about Health & Safety & Employment law when employing labour

Jim Dockery
FRS Training Manager

Farming systems in Ireland in the current climate can only be effective when you have sufficient labour to carry out the tasks, especially when you are in a bigger scale operation.

With our economy in a reasonably healthy state compared to 2008- 2012 and unemployment at one of the lowest levels ever, sourcing labour can be difficult. Those that can afford to, will and are using technology to reduce the labour requirements where possible, by investment in automation and multi - use machines, but these farms are still in minority. For example, Herdwatch users report it saves them up to three hours per week.

Farmers need staff to be able to carry out several skills and tasks every day, they need to be experienced as the cost of employing staff is relatively high, they are very often operating very expensive equipment €100K-250K . This typically might be a 150 HP tractor, diet feeder, combine harvester, silage machinery, one pass tillage machinery and so on.

They may also be carrying out skills such as milking a very valuable herd of 100 plus pedigree or top EBI cows with years and years of genetics behind them.

So, what does a farmer need to know when hiring staff either full or part time on his farm?

Let's have a look at the list

Employment law

- **Employee Contracts**
- **Job description**
- **Working time act**
- **Holiday pay**
- **Bank Holidays**
- **Sick leave**
- **Payslip**
- **Time Sheets showing start time, finish time and breaks.**

Revenue compliance

- **Paye**
- **PRSI return**

Health & safety compliance

- **Induction**
- **Safety statement**
- **Risk assessment**
- **First aid**
- **Manual handling**
- **Specific skills training**
- **Machinery skills training**
- **Livestock training**
- **Refresher training**
- **Insurance cover**
- **Milking**

The first impression might be to say, well to hell with all that I don't have time for that, I'll contract someone instead and eliminate all the above!! You can hand over employment law responsibilities but not Health & Safety.

Agency Option

An alternative to direct employment is to employ staff through an agency. The agency will try and match the operator to the farmer requirements in the hope to find a suitable match, and for the most part it works very well but not in every case. It may be down to being unable to do the task or maybe even a personality clash.

The agency's local Manager deals with most or all the employment law areas mentioned above thus freeing up the farmers time. A fee is charged to the farmer to cover costs associated with employment of the operator. In this situation the contract is between the agency and the operator where the agency looks after all the employment law issues. The agency will set up a separate contract of work then with the farmer dealing with work conditions rates of pay etc

If a farmer chooses to use an agency, they will still need to adhere to all H&S requirements.

Taking on an employee on your farm - what are the key steps

Once a person is invited onto your premises or workplace or farm you are deemed responsible for the wellbeing of that person, anything that might cause them harm is your responsibility.

So how does one deal with this scenario?

1. **Job Description**
   Firstly try (if you can) to employ the right person, this will involve interviewing, contacting references, speaking to others and so on.

   This can only happen if you have a detailed job description written (most farmers don't have or have never seen one)

   The very fact that you took the time to jot down every possible task this person might be expected to do on the farm will urge you to think them out clearly, batch them into a sequence and re- assess does it actually require that person or can it be done by any other means.

2. **Induction**
   Once you agree to employ the person, day one of their work should start with a walk and talk attitude, this day will be a very important day for both the farmer and the new employee. It should be well planned out as you need to look carefully at jobs planned, discuss them talk about how you want them to be done what dangers or possible risk are involved. This is where you set out your stall on several grounds, time keeping , safety, quality of work etc it should be formal and informal, so have some important things documented, go through your risk assessment document.

State what PPE is to be used for what, when and where and who supplies it (normally the employer). Have it available, show how to fit it correctly, how to clean it and store it correctly.

Discuss smoking policy on the farm. Discuss meals arrangements and any house rules that may need to apply. . Facilities for having his/her meals on the farm and toilet/washing facilities availability.

I don't expect farmers to be qualified accountants and safety professionals, but cover what you can comfortably and use other services to cover what you can't such as your accountant on employment law section *Employee Contracts, Job description , Working time act, Holiday pay and Sick leave* etc.

Similarly, with safety, safety consultants and others can deliver a short induction on safety if required by farmers. The farmer should cover what you are comfortable with, you can use others to cover the more detailed aspects. In my view these two bigger areas could be covered in a morning (1-2 hours on each) using external personnel and your own input included

Remember this sets the groundwork for what might be a long career for both parties so it's important that everyone knows the full story as to what's expected by both sides. A good induction day well planned is a good start for the farmer and the employee.

3. **Health & Safety**
   It is important to brief all employees initially on H&S. We know from years of statistics that it a very high-risk occupation. There are such a variety of activities all going on in the same farmyard and fields very often controlled by weather and other environmental fixtures and deadlines. There is really no room for anyone working in these scenarios that is not highly trained , due to the high-risk element.

   The safety Health & Welfare at work act 2005 is the (Bible of H&S Law) it places a particular duty of care on two groups:

   - Duties of the employer
   - Duties of the employee

The 2006 general application Regulations is the next most important piece of legislation to be familiar with.

Then you have a whole platter of safety regulations and guidelines that will be relevant to you as a farmer, also an employer and you will need to be aware and comply with each of these(see a sample below)

- Manual handling regulations
- First aid regs.
- Noise regs.
- Construction regs
- Code of practice in roof work
- Code of practice for preventing injury and ill health in Agriculture
- Guidelines on young person's working in Agriculture

Full list available on **www.hsa.ie**

4. **Training is key**
   I suppose it's fair to say the law is there to protect us, but very often we don't use it to our advantage. All the above Regulations and Code of practices are very good if they are, let's say "done by the book" or complied with yet we see a low uptake in training at farm level generally.

When I say a low level of uptake that transpires into a low level of compliance because you will find in every regulation there is a reference to "training" on the job and for the job. When we read up on court case rulings (case law) they usually state where one party or the other did not comply with to the 2 sections of law "Duties of employees" and "Duties of employer"

Very often I hear the phrase used by farmers that "it's not Mandatory so therefore I don't need to worry" the difficulty with this is the judge usually interprets the law differently stating under the **duty of the employer** it **is** mandatory to train the employee. It doesn't specifically say "on the tractor" or "the Quad bike" but it's meant to include that item of plant, nevertheless.

We do not have specific "Agricultural" legislation in Ireland which is unusual compared to other EU countries, I think if we had it would clarify things a lot more as it would remove these grey areas from our legislation and it would further enhance current laws and be very clear for the farmer and employer as to what is required.

THE O'GRADY
President IGA 1955/56

Leut. Colonel Gerald Vigeors de Courcy 'The' O' Grady of Kilballyowen House, Bruff County Limerick was president of the Irish Grassland Association in 1955/56. Born on the 5th of September 1912 in Dublin, Gerald was brought up at his mother, Ester's, home at Bagenalstown, County Carlow. His father, Standish O' Grady, was in the Royal Army Medical Corps and died of the Spanish Flu in Malta in 1920. Gerald was educated in the UK before joining the British Army where he served for fifteen years. During this time he served as aide-de-camp to the Commander-in-chief in India from 1939 to 1940, before serving in England, France and Germany during WW2. Gerald was awarded the Military Cross for Bravery in 1945.

Gerald O' Grady was designated 'The O' Grady of Kilballyowen' in 1931 on the death of his cousin William de Reinzi O' Grady. In 1944 he took over ownership of the then 500-acre estate at Kilballyowen in Limerick. It had previously been managed by his aunt Evelyn O' Grady since the death of her husband, John O' Grady, William's brother. Dr. McLoughlin, a great judge of cattle by all accounts, was her agricultural adviser. The O' Gradys have held Kilballyowen Estate since the 1300's. The house was eventually demolished in 1967 as maintenance and upkeep costs became exorbitant.

After his army service, Gerald became a dairy and beef farmer of high repute, assuming a role as a Friesian Cattle Judge at both the RDS and Limerick shows. He was elected to become the Irish representative on the British Friesian Council from 1955 to 1957. In addition, Gerald was president of the Irish Grassland Association in 1955/56 and later became chairman of the Limerick branch of An Taisce and of the Limerick Show Society. He was also chairman of the Limerick Hounds at one time. The O' Grady was instrumental in the founding of Bruff Rugby club in 1970, providing the land required. There is a memorial plaque to himself and his wife, Mollie, at the entrance to Bruff Rugby Club.

Gerald 'The' O' Grady, organised the first international gathering of the O' Grady clan in 1991. It was held in East Clare from where the clan originated. Gerald died on the 7th of June 1993 at the age of 81.

(Compiled by David Thompson of Castlegarde, county Limerick, a close relative of Gerald O' Grady).

Irish Grassland Association

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7th January	Members Event
8th January	Dairy Conference
25th June	Beef Event
22nd July	Dairy Summer Tour
20th August	Sheep Event
7th October	Student Event

These events can sell out early so book online for best discounted rates

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